

TICKLISH STORIES



P.N. Razdan (Mahanori)

TICKLISH STORIES

BY

Shri (Late) P.N. Razdan (Mahanori)

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1.0 FOREWORD

I was pleasantly surprised as well as honored to receive a letter from Razdan Sahib recently along with manuscript of his latest book. It brought memories of my years in C.M.S. School, Srinagar - that magnificent building on the banks of the Jehlum and some wonderful teachers, none more than him. I remember the classroom where he taught us sciences, as also the attached laboratory, where we conducted experiments under his guidance. Like so much else in Kashmir that school building has probably been destroyed in recent years. It was a wonderful school which gave education to generations of Kashmir is. I have no doubt that they all remember Razdan Sahib as a gentle but firm, upright and ever helpful teacher. He has used his vast experience and knowledge in new pursuits of writing books and running magazines. I am proud to have been his student.

This collection of 21 short stories brings to the fore complexities of human relationship and unpredictability of human psyche we experience in family life, but with a genial coating that is supposed to tickle rather than shock. Hence the title "Ticklish Stories". The writer brings to bear upon these stories his rich experience of life, his sensitivity to the significance of what most of us dismiss as ordinary and the faculty of keen observation of human nature. Themes are varied, but all are what anyone encounters without really experiencing with vision that is clouded by prejudices, pride, likes and dislikes.

Twin Scientist vividly portrays the pangs of suffering a person feels on getting lesser attention than his more successful sibling. Daddy's Distress and its sequel Daddy's Coronation dwell on the distress a man feels over the fall in his fortunes and resultant neglect by children who shared happier days with him. Breaking the Horse takes one to the world of intrigues common to the life of professional rivalry anywhere. In fact, the writer returns to the theme again and again as a teacher, Prithive, who unmistakably has an autobiographical touch.

The most notable aspect of these is a nostalgic feel for the old-world charm. So a person still yearns to join a Hindu-wedding feast in Kashmir as a Duda (uninvited guest) despite fortunes smiling on him through the material success of his doctor son.

The language may not be a purist's delight, but it has simplicity and flavor of its own. Moreover, some of these may not strictly meet the criteria of short stories propounded by critics as the loving teacher in the writer gets the better of story writer in him, and he gushes forth in an essay-like monologue, but then every art form is an evolving one and everyone seeking self-expression has the artistic freedom to choose the form that suits him best. I have enjoyed these and hope others will like them too.

M.K. Razdan

Editor-in-Chief

Press Trust of India (PTI)

2.0 DEDICATION

To all the story writers, ancient and modern, in general and those of India in particular with specific mention of the J & K scribes of all languages. And to my late parents, Smt. Zai-Mali and Shri Sri Razdan/Raina.



3.0 PREFACE

Encouraged by the favor of approval by way of recognition of merit of some of my own books on Education, dramas and general literature, by the student community as also the elite; I have ventured forth to put in black and white many of my life experiences together with some of the anecdotes related to me by my brother-in-law Late Sh. P.N. Kaul, my uncle late Shri Hari Ram Raina and a colleague late Shri Sundri kaul, in story form enlivened by pleasant and painful touches of fiction, curt humor and satire.

Plain narrations, conflicting psyches, clashes of self-interest fool-hardiness of conceit and egoism, heights of human attachments, potential confusion and chaos inheriting all misunderstandings and mischief as against the wisdom of sincerity of purpose and fearless frankness; and above all illiterate's intelligence versus the experts stark-ignorance are some of the problems highlighted in these twenty-one odd stories.

How far I have succeeded to tickle the souls of the readers into innate reflexes is for them to judge. To conclude I must express my thankful gratitude to:-

(a) Prof. Nilamber Dev Sharma, Ex-Secretary, J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages; Ex-President Dogri Sanstha and above all a perfect gentleman of parts, scribe of eminence, for his courtesy and kindness of agreeing to write an introduction to the book.

In his unusual shrewdness as a seasoned commentator, Professor sahib seems to have deliberately avoided to dilate on the essential norms of short-story writing as reflected in the coherence of narration in the contents of the M.S. He leaves it to the discerning readers to freely pass their mature judgments thereon. Yet he does not consider it proper to conceal the fact that he found the stories:

- i. Interesting to read.
- ii. The language used in narration both plain and lucid and above all
- iii. That he found the stories are true to life and yet quite different from the common rut.

"Brevity is the soul of wit", they say. Sticking to this maxim, most probably professor sahib uses just a couple of sentences to express his relevant impression about the book.

To conclude, I would like to share my joy of adventure and exploration of new terrain-rough and rocky, plain but frightfully desolate and free from disturbing buzz and noise of overpopulated cities to built up airy castles in a calm atmosphere of tranquility. In this connection, I would like to pin my instinctive urge of swimming against the current like a living fish that jumps up into fresh air and dives back with a splash against the flow of fresher water. The irresistible attractive spectacle cannot but capture the observing pedestrian attention and enthral him to stay back and get absorbed in watching the phenomenon for a while.

The congenial effectiveness or otherwise of my 6 / *AMB. G. K/.K-3* humble attempt is left for the grudging judgment of the concerned readers. (b) I feel it my duty to express my

gratitude to the Hon'ble Chairman and respected members of the Decision-making body together with the concerned staff of J& K Academy of Art, Culture and languages, Lal Mandi, Srinagar for the favor they have done me by approving the M.S. with a sanction of subsidy for its publication. (c) To my talented son, Roshan Lal Razdan for doing all the auxiliary work of rewriting the M. S. for typing, correction and coalition of type script with the MS. (d) To my daughter-in-law Shmt. Santosh Razdan and Ashim Khuda, for coalition work of the Photostat copies of some stories with the MS and making the necessary corrections thereof. My thanks are also due to Bansi Lal Kaul, seasoned Addt. Secretary (rtd.), P.N. Raina reputed educationist, Saurabh, Neena ji, and Surbhi Kauchru, Deepu and Rajaji for further help in this direction and of final proofreading and correction(s). To Shri A.N. Raina, Sh. Devendhar Vidyarthi, Sh. Rajinder Kumar, Sh. R.L. Bhat for typing this MS. Last but not the least, my thanks are due to Mis Samkaleen Prakashan.

Hope the book will be as well received as its predecessors on different subjects such as (i) Education (ii) One-Act plays (iii) J & K Literature (iv) Text books for middle, high and higher secondary Schools of the State (v) and now the present "Ticklish stories."

Prithvi Nath Razdan

Foot Note: My first of the five books written within the first two years after migration in March 1990 entitled "Gems of Kashmiri Literature and Kashmiriyat" is a full fledged complete book in itself on its own right.

It is not the first volume of a bigger book, as misunderstood by some of the elite. The misunderstanding caused by the inclusion of the Roman Numeral "I" after its subtitle "The trio-of Saint Poets" simply indicates that it is the first Publication (AMB, G, KI.K-3) Published after migration. It is hoped that this will diffuse off the mist that had enveloped the book.

P. N. Razdan (Mehnoori)

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Last year, I received a letter written by Sh. P.N. Razdan (Mahanori) from Jammu. It was delivered to me at my home address after it had been posted a couple of months earlier. Sh. Razdan had addressed me as the president, Dogra Sabha. I had ceased to be the president of Dogri Sanstha. The letter form Dogra Sudar Sabha was redirected to Dogri Sanstha which was subsequently redirected to my place at Malhotra street.

Sh. Razdan had mentioned in his letter that he had written a number of short-stories in English and wanted to publish them in a book form; he wanted me to write an Introduction to the proposed book.

To my shame, I must admit that in spite of my best efforts I could not conjure up Sh. Razdan's face nor could recollect who he was, but since he had written to me, he must be knowing me rather well. The letter created mixed feelings in me:

I felt happy and even grateful to Sh. Razdan that he considered me suitable for writing an Introduction to his book. At the same time, I was filled with diffidence; I had not been writing in English for quite some time, and therefore, did not feel quite competent to undertake the job. But I did not reply to Sh. Razdan as some months had elapsed since he wrote me the letter and he might have drawn his conclusion from this long silence. But another Post Card from Sh. Razdan jolted me. He had given his telephone number on the post Card. I rang him and requested him to ask some one more competent to write an introduction to his book. I also told him that I was busy in making arrangements for the marriage of my younger son and soon after I would be undergoing an operation of hernia. He agreed to wait till I was free from both these jobs.

I was impressed by Sh. Razdan's graciousness and in deference to his age and insistence; I agreed to do the job. About a month back, Shri Razdan came to our place with the type script of his collection. It was then that I could really know something about him.

I formed Shri Razdan's acquaintance in 1968. I had gone to Srinagar in connection with Durbar move: I happened to be the secretary J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages those days. Sh. Razdan Mahanori who was a teacher and a free-lance journalist, used to come to the Academy office sometimes in connection with the publication of his M S. He had submitted his MS for grant of subsidy.

I did not go to Srinagar after 1971, as I sought pre-mature retirement from my service in January-February 1972. With that, my casual meetings with Sh. Razdan also came to an end.

Self-expression is the basic urge in all human beings; only the mode and the medium may

differ in each case. Some may express themselves through literature while some may do so by painting or plastic arts; others may employ the medium of music dance or theatre etc.

Sh. Razdan has chosen the medium of literature; he has been writing essays and one-act plays and even some journalistic pieces for some newspapers. This is his first venture in the field of short story.

Ticklish Stories contains twenty-one short stories. They deal with topics ranging from the domestic (Background Story of my One-Act-Play under the same caption).

Sh. Razdan's approach is not that of a surgeon who performs surgery without involving his emotions in any way. Sh. Razdan's approach is more humane and warm, even personal. Structurally, they do not have the finesse of some of the modern writers; they do not dazzle by their technical virtuosity. His style is unembellished, simple and direct, Sh. Razdan has been a teacher and they say 'once a teacher, always a teacher'.

We can see the teacher in these stories, who believes not only in entertaining his readers but instructing them as well. The role of elderly people in keeping the families together, the head-strong nature of younger members in the family who want to manage their affairs in their own way, the feelings of a woman torn between her love for her husband and her children, the instinct for self-preservation, which impels even the most selfless and loving mother to give priority to her own safety over the safety of her only daughter. The frictions causing unpleasantness in a family, the rivalries of persons who work in educational institutions all these are depicted in a simple, matter-of-fact manner. There is an old world charm in some of these stories and those among us who love the home-ground wheat flour better than the food articles from a bakery or a fast food joint would certainly find these short-stories a change from the modern day routine- a change which is, in some ways, quite interesting and refreshing.

Nilamber Dev Sharma

159 Malhotra Street

Old Hospital Road Jammu

5.0 TWIN SCIENTISTS

(Background Story of my One-Act-Play under the same caption)

Jagan and Prem are the twin sons of a business magnate Prakash. Jagan grows up to be a prodigy while Prem only as his loving brother and imitator. He never misses imitating whatever Jagan does.

Jagan invariably always tops the list of successful candidates in classes including higher public examinations till he completes his post-graduate course. Prem too passes the post-graduate course in science subject but invariably with marginal marks. After weighing the pros and cons of the achievements of his twin sons, Prakash has made up his mind to see Jagan start doing research work in any field of science of his choice, for he is sure of Jagan's ability to make his mark anywhere especially in the academic field. And for Prem, he has chosen the post of general managership of the vast business he has so ably established.

On the other hand, their mother Preeti, finds it hard to reconcile with the objective of her husband Prakash's sagacious decision taken for the betterment and prosperity of their twin sons. For, her comparatively longer contact with her children has led her to the belief that Jagan and Prem were inseparable. So, she feels it desirable to let them continue working together in the field of their choice as usual.

The issue becomes contentious and controversial as continued bed-room discussion between husband and wife go on endlessly night after night. Naturally heat is generated at times during the course of these discussions. So, voices are raised during such periods on both sides. The twins sleeping in the adjacent room generally cannot escape overhearing the loud words spoken by them. They too spend sleepless nights in weaving these overheard tit-bits into complete sentences and paragraphs. This leads them to fully understand the working of the minds of their parents about their future course of action. They in-turn discuss their own future and the line of action to be adopted. They decide to stick to their guns and do whatever they feel is good for them together. Days pass by and weeks lapse into the past. One day the family feels relaxed at tea-time in their usual free talk. This grows into free joking, riddles and dancing chagrin.

Handing over the telegram to her, he holds back the other telegram and waits to receive a reward. The sister is overjoyed and becomes hilarious. She jumps and shouts, "Hurrah my brother, Jagan has passed his post graduate examination with flying colors. He has broken all the university records." She rushes to Jagan and embraces him shouting, "Good luck my brother." The joy of the family knows no bounds. They jump and dance and surround Jagan with greeting words in chorus. In this melee they lose sight of Prem who sits sullen and silent bemoaning his fate for he has failed in the exams.

There is knocking at the door which remains unheard due to the merriments inside. This

knocking grows louder. One of the sisters somehow hears the knocking, rises up shouting, "Who is there knocking at the door?" Sister opens the door only to be congratulated by the postman saying that, "Here is the telegram saying that Jagan has topped the list of successful candidates in the post-graduate examination. He has broken all the up to date records."

In utter frustration like a roaring lion, he rises up shouting. "Make merry mother, make merry. Make merry as much as you can for your son, Jagan has beaten the university records. Make merry and let me go to hell." so saying he rushes to a secluded corner of the drawing room, sinks and swoons as he falls on the floor. Seeing this Jagan, his twin brother, pushing aside the revelers, rushes to bring round his brother, and nurse him in this unconscious state. His mother and the whole family follow him and are able to bring him back to consciousness.

The post-man, seeing the consequences of his withholding the second telegram have caused trembles, shouts, "Here is the second telegram, sister saying that Prem too has secured marginal marks for success." The sister rushes to him, snatches the telegram and joyfully runs in to declare Prem's success. Mother and Jagan both are able to console Prem and assure him that his and Jagan's intimate company will not be interfered with.

Prakash too is made to endorse his wife's assurance to himself. "Let me bring a test tube, collect the tears and find their composition as Jagan did before." He goes to the laboratory and comes back with a test tube, collects the tears and keeps it safely aside. Mourning cries, weeping, wailing, and breast-beating go on endlessly.

The nearby rill flows down roaring but Prakash feels that his plans are shattered and his ambitions for the betterment of Jagan, prosperity of Prem, progress of well established business and the integrity of the family have received a severe jolt. His shock is too deep for him to come out of it.

Once when Jagan and Prem are busy working in laboratory they hear painful panicky cries of

'Fire ... Fire ... Help ... Ho ... Help ... Help ... Help ... Help ... Help. He

.... Burning dying Help Help".

Looking through the window they find the neighboring house ablaze. They rush out to help. Jagan holding the test tube in his hand. They go in to help bring out the victim trapped inside. They bring out the inmates one by one. Tears rolling down the cheeks of one of the victims in the suffocating smoke flow down and get collected in Jagan's test tube. In the meanwhile, helps from all sides, fire-brigade and red cross overtake the charge. Jagan and Prem return to their laboratory. Jagan analyses the tears and tabulates the composition.

In course of time one day, Prakash sinks down and meets the end of his life. He dies of heart failure when Jagan and Prem are away working in their laboratory, just at a stone's throw from the house, while they are busy at work, Jagan somehow hears the weeping, wailing and mourning cries emanating from their home. They rush back home in panic.

While nursing their mother, Prem sees big drops of tears of grief roll down the cheeks of his mother. He says to himself, "Let me bring a test tube, collect the tears and find their composition as Jagan did before."

He goes to the laboratory and comes back with a test tube, collects the tears and keeps it safely aside. Mourning cries, weeping, wailing and breast beating go endlessly.

In abject helplessness and grief, Jagan and Prem sit in a corner weeping and wailing. During the course of heavy sobs and weeping they burst out into a pathetic song of helplessness and frustration.

To The Moon

Come Come by the mountain side,

With thy silvery colors,

O, come and lead me up to the top,

With thy shining face.

So desperate, so lonely am I,

At this fearful site,

That I so badly need your light,

At such a frightful sight.

Foot Notes:

i. Twin scientists is the background story of my one act play with the same caption. This play was staged in the C.M.S. Tyndale Biscoe school (the Hadoo School) in aid of world war second, nineteen hundred forty four along with Principal KWS Jardine's play "The tower that touched the sky." A sum of Rs. 400/- raised in one show was paid to the Indian red cross. Needless to point out that a full cinema hall could be booked for half that amount those days for a similar show.

ii. The Hindi version of this play formed one chapter of my book "**vaigyanic abhinai**" published by T.C.E. Journals and publications Ltd. Lucknow in 1948-49 and the original English version formed the concluding chapter entitled "Whither Education" in 1962, published by Mahanoor Publication Srinagar.

iii. Kashmiri version of the same play was included in the school magazine "Poshnool" (1976-77). That magazine and "**vaigyanic abhinai**" both, were later reviewed and included in the 1st catalogue of Juvenile Literature published by Unesco, New Delhi.

6.0 DADDY'S DISTRESS

Raja Hakim was a renowned Aurvedic-cum-unani physician of the time, about six decades ago. He had established his flourishing business in a big clinic in the ground floor of his residential house. Raja Hakim was a handsome, well built, young man of catching courtesy and winning demeanour. The fame of his quick healing methods of treatment, of all sorts of ailments, spread far and wide in no time. And soon, his clinic became a beehive of suppliant patients. Naturally, he remained always busy all the time. So, he was left with only brief breaks for meals in between.

As a result, he could spare but little time to spend with his family, comprising a good number of children that he had. The brunt of upbringing well educated offspring fell to the care of his spouse, Rani Hakim, who proved to be a versatile lady. Rani Hakim husbanded his earnings well. She saw to it that all their children grew up to the mark and were well settled in life. High ambitions took the promising children to far off places to settle there on good jobs and business as per their own leanings. Only the eldest son, Ravinder remained with his parents at home. He was employed in the same city at a high post.

In the meanwhile Ravinder had his own children. His mother, Rani Hakim had now to take the double charge of her overworked husband, children and grand children. Her daughter-in-law, Reeta herself was in service and could only partially help her mother in-law in their family affairs. Indomitable spirit and dedication to domestic matters kept Rani Hakim going smoothly with the ordeals facing her from time to time. An atmosphere of perfect harmony and peace prevailed all through. Old customs, rituals and festivals as well as oriental, Kashmiri-type relationship were imperceptibly adjusted according to the semi-modern concepts of civilizations. The family unit improved its image and established its place of honor in the developing Kashmiri Pandit society. Slowly and steadily the ongoing rush of work in the clinic started to tell upon Raja Hakim's own health. He began showing signs of tiresomeness. He began to complain of fatigue.

"To hell with all this strenuous work; din and noise that pesters me all along," would automatically pour out of his mouth.

"But no, how can I give up this lucrative business? How can I maintain my family? what will sustain me and my wife's life?" he will mutter within himself off and on. Every time he rose bravely to the occasion, girdled up his loins and resumed his work at the clinic.

And as Raja and Rani Hakim grow older and weaker month after month and year after year, deep wrinkles are drawn across their, otherwise, plane ruddy cheeks. Their hair changed color from jet black to gray. The wrinkles on their cheeks sink deeper and deeper into groove-like furrows.

"O, for a brief period of relaxation, at least after lunch!" he whispers to Rani Hakim off and

on. "Yes dear, I too feel tired and tardy now. But, I am concerned at your plight. I simply can't bear seeing you so exhausted after clinical work". She replies. But, the family chores and the clinical work continue going side by side with groaning whispers of helplessness in the matter. "O what is that thing called, 'rest' which we shall never enjoy?" they now begin to think aloud every moment they meet each other. And yet they carry on and on.

Ravinder Hakim and Reeta Hakim often over hear these loud thoughts of restlessness both individually as well as collectively. They simply meet and discuss, meet and discuss. But every time they don't come to any concrete conclusion.

The hither to welcome mobility and tumult of brisk public dealings lose their vigour fell. The domestic expenditure increases with the increase in family strength and, increasing demands of higher education of growing grand children.

Ravinder Hakim and Reeta Hakim reach the age of superannuating. They are about to retire soon. Dreadful shadows of darkness and gloom spread over the otherwise prosperous family. They are enveloped in an atmosphere of helplessness.

Worried about the future of their children, Ravinder Hakim and Reeta Hakim meet in their bed room at night and ruminate over and, discuss the situation calmly once again.

"I have enough leisure time before and after my official duties. What do you think, if I lend a helping hand to my dear father in my spare time? After all the whole income from the clinic goes to replenish our domestic expenditure. This goes a long way to feed and maintain not only my age in parents but also us and our children", Ravinder Hakim argues with his wife, Reeta Hakim.

"Yes, my dearest, you are perfectly right. But, will your daddy agree to it? How are we going to convince him of our earnest desire and ability to render him all possible help. We have not retired yet." asked Reeta.

"Dear Reetaji, don't we both hear them complaining aloud about their tiresome feelings resulting from over work and aging?", replies Ravinder Hakim.

"Yes Swani, let us go to them together to offer our services and full cooperation both in domestic and clinical. work." suggests Reetaji.

With the cooperation of Rani Hakim, they are able to convince Raja Hakim and obtain his agreement in the matter.

Ravinder Hakim resumes dispensing work along with the permanent incumbent and learned the art of dispensing work. Besides himself being a senior accountant in Government service, he becomes an adept in maintaining the accounts of the clinic, side by side managing to sit by his father picking up a thorough knowledge of diagnosis of diseases and their treatment

from him. In course of time he proves to be an asset to his father who now gets more spare time to spend in the Company of Rani Hakim, both freely chatting and relaxing together. But, deteriorating health seeps Rani Hakim's health and compels her retain only financial control while transferring the management of household affairs to Reeta Hakim, her daughter-in-law. The arrangement continues working smoothly till Rani Hakim's depressing ailment compels her to hand over the financial control too to Rita Hakim's care.

Raja Hakim's relaxation time is now channeled towards nursing his ailing wife. The few left over grand children keep the old couple company in the mornings and evenings while they remain away at school during day time. And, by and by, in due course, alas! the hands that had always remained downwards with their palms facing the earth, were destined to turn upside down with their palms now facing the skies.

Raja Hakim and Rani Hakim who, all through their life-span, so far were in the habit of spending enough money to meet household expenditure, on education of their children and grand children and maintenance of high status and standard of living in a cultured society. They were also lavishly offering financial assistance to social organizations and the poor. They had now, slowly and steadily begun to feel the pinch of need awaiting to receive something or the other from somewhere from their off-springs. This served as a portent to have to await facing the wrath of misfortune steeping like running floods, from underneath bushes and heaps of bran.

7.0 BREAKING THE HORSE

Sharda, Shiva, Madhu, Sham and Prithve are Head master assistants and Hostel Superintendent of a famous institution in Anti-town about 55 kms from the capital city respectively. The first three form the loyalist group with the majority of the other teachers; the fourth assistant is the leader of the rebel group, the so-called individual as per Pt. Nehru's term. It goes to their credit that both the rival groups hold the interest of the institution and students at heart. They are as enthusiastic as anyone could ever be. Despite their petty rivalries and internal bickering, they are cordial, cooperative and unblemishingly faithful as far as the functioning, progress and good name of the institution are concerned. They stand perfectly united by strong bonds of common interest but are imperceptible rivals in self-interest. However their rivalry may not be justified on the basis of human covetousness on the part of assistants to dislodge and occupy the headmaster's chair after his retirement or by intrigue.

Two most influential leaders of city school staff visited their counterparts of the institution in Anti-town. One of them was sent to Prithve to win him over to their side to serve as a tool for their ulterior motives. They wanted to use him as a tale bearer to the supreme authority of all the schools against the loyalist group.

Prithve gives a blunt rebuff to him. The crestfallen mediator returns. But it takes no time for him to reconcile and forget the affair.

On receiving the information, the leader of the loyalist group wrongly presumes Prithve's affinity towards them. They too try to rope him into their group with the same type of ulterior motive. The identical rebuttal by Prithve gives them a jolt and causes a dent in their leaders mind. Cynically, he shows no signs of ill-will towards Prithve, though the volcano in him erupts from the underground of his brain sometime later.

During Prithve's four day sojourn in the capital city prior to taking extra vacation classes for the tenth class, Shiva intriguingly instigates the hostel cook, to enjoy the interval at home during the formers absence. The trick works.

Despite the scarcity of transport facilities those days, Prithve manages to arrive just in time to take his period. But, as soon as he steps into the classroom, there arises a loud grin-n in chorus in protest as the class stands up. Prithve pockets the impertinence as he smells the rat at the same time. He conducts his teaching work unmoved by emotional reaction.

Later, in the hostel, the hostellers approach him with a serious complaint. Displaying their dirty hands, they complain "Sir, we had to spend all the time making purchases and cooking our food. We couldn't do justice to our daily home task. Our teachers reprimanded us".

"Why? What is the matter? You had the hostel cook at your service," replied Prithve.

"No Sir, the hostel cook has arrived only a few minutes before you arrived here. Shiva had

told us that you had sanctioned leave in his favor for these days", they replied.

Suspecting mischievous retribution, Prithve takes prompt disciplinary action and tactfully quells the revolt. Imperceptible and subtle underground support by Sham justifies Prithve's prompt action.

The atmosphere clears up in Prithve's favor and Shiva's dismay. Thus did Sham settle his scores with senior most claimant for head master's post of the institution due to secret intrigue to Prithve's advantage.

In the meanwhile the institution is astir and agog with whispering rumor. "He is a fanatic Christian from Britain," a ruthless proselytizes. Our colleagues in city institutions have rightly grown panicky and skeptical. They shudder and play hide and seek, as far as possible, when tyranteal visits any of-the cluster of our institutions in the city. They are too frightened to control their nerves". Say some of the vociferous members. Thus the (baseless!) rumor takes wind, vitiating the atmosphere. The staff becomes nervous.

"What then? How does it affect us here? What has he to do with our institution at this distant place" ? enquires Prithve of his hostel colleagues, Pt. Ji and Shiva.

"Fundamentalism and conversions are contagious. They spread like wild fire. Who knows, what is in store for us. ? they say.

"Never mind. Be self confident and fearless. Have faith in God. Leave everything else to Him", advises Prithve.

Time passes by. The vigorous impact of the rumor dies out. The institution settles down to normal functioning. The usual calm prevails.

Loud " Thuck--- Thuck---- Girrr ----Girrr---- ---" noise of a running motor cycle suddenly disturbs the calm one day. A sturdy young man of forty, wearing goggles directly drives fast into the very institutional premises. Sensational whispers instantly diffuse into the busy classrooms. Everybody stands alert in surprise.

"Where is Sharda, your boss"? He enquires of a staff member on duty.

A peon guides him into the Headmaster's room. There, the two stay for long, discussing something. Tea is served to them. The visitor dressed in sports gear leaves back after a couple of hours.

A few weeks after, the same visitor comes again to takeover charge, as the new headmaster from him. Thereafter, he attends the institution in time daily and leaves back to the city on his motor-bicycle.

One day, he calls Prithve to his office and tells him that he intended staying in the newly built house for hostel inside, the institutional premises and to share their food in the hostel,

situated at a stone's throw from it. The date of stay is fixed a couple of weeks hence.

In the evening, Prithve discusses the fixture with the other two Co-staff hostellers, his predecessor and Pt. Ji. The menu and the pros and cons of the proposed stay are thoroughly discussed.

"Furrows of the field of proselization are beaten, the grounds smoothed, just to sow the seeds. The rumors have proved true", warns Pt. Ji. He pleads for his departure from the hostel, or else, for permission to dine with boys on the pretext of supervision.

"Why do you want to separate from us"? asks Prithve. "I simply don't relish the idea of inter dining. I feel embarrassed. Bavington is unpredictable. He is a veritable fanatic, as everybody knows. Who knows, he may deliberately pollute our dishes"? Comes the reply.

"I very much appreciate your feelings and apprehensions, a pious Hindu as you are. I too am a Hindu though a liberal one. Rest assured, that I will not spare any pains to see that your piety remains intact, come what may, in our company with our British boss", replies Prithve "You, yourself will know about the desired arrangements, a day before the fixed date".

Four, small and five-inch high, individual tables are made to order with provision for the accommodation of a tumbler of water, a couple or two of cups for vegetable preparations and the rice plate. On the appointed time Bavington arrives for dinner and takes his seat facing Prithve, Shiva and Pt. Ji. In comes the hostel-cook with a jug of water and a "chilamchi" (receptacle) Hands are to be washed before partaking of food. He begins from Bavington.

"Why? What for have I to wash my hands? Aren't they cleaner than those of yours" ? He asks. Sir, as already desired by your good self that you wanted to dine as Kashmiris do, we haven't made any provision for knives and forks," replies Prithve misunderstanding that the boss wanted to dine in his own western style.

"Surely, I have, but just look that my hands are quite clean for the purpose," Says Bavington. "Sir, your hands may be clean for all purposes but dining," says Prithve.

"How do you say that? Came the next query. "If you have no objection, sir, I will prove it just here and now", replies Prithve.

Wresting the jug from the cook, Prithve asks Bavington to wash his hands over the "Chilamchi." Prithve gently pours a little quantity of water. Bavington is surprised to see dirty droplets of water trickling down. "Yes, you are right, Prithve. I must act on your bidding and wash my hands", he admits the factual position. Hands are washed and dinner served on brand new dining tables. Suddenly in a peculiar voice Bavington asks in surprise, "what the devil are you acting? What's that compressed morsel you have kept outside your

plate?" Prithve and Pt. Ji are benumbed as they recollect the rumor and feel that the ruthless fanatic has begun to show his teeth. Instantly Prithve pleads, "Sir, you are aware of the salary we get. We can't spare anything for alms giving not help the poor and needy as enjoined upon us by the Christian gospel too. But we can easily lay by a morsel from our own dish for birds and dogs, Hence the action. "Certainly, I agree with you. Don't you share their feelings, Mr. Shiva?" Bavington adds, as the former had. .nor done so.

Strangely enough the next day Shiva only did so but not the other two, followed by all hereafter.

8.0 SHE IS THE APPLE OF MY EYE

Overpowering self preservation

"Rosy, my baby girl, is beautiful. She's lovely and charming I simply can't but gaze at her whenever free. I hold her on my chest as often as I can. She feeds at my breasts. She sends a pleasant thrill through the whole fabric of my body whenever she wears a gleeful smile expressive of satisfaction and comfort on her calm face and yawn soon after," say, Taja, her youthful mother. Rosy is her first child after her marriage.

Taja brooks a lapse in looking after her first born. She is only too fond of carrying the baby with her, in her lap, wherever she goes. Taja is extra-ordinarily anxious to keep near the baby and to keep her comfortable all the time. Rosy is thus brought up like a princess. For, she is the only child of her parents for a couple of decades or more.

And so, as Rosy grows, both mother and child become, as if they are each other's shadows. For they often seem to sit, stand and move about to work together even to the borders of exaggeration limits. Even as Rosy grows to her teenage, Taja is invariably found grasping her hand while shopping or visiting her relatives.

Once, it so happens that the whole township is agog with whisperings, gossip and subdued emotions. A man is killed here and woman saved there. An enemy is trolled and another gunned down. A youth is hanged and a suspect drowned. Tension and fear grips the entire township. And yet, the unsuspecting peaceful and peace loving dreamers still continue to be oblivious of the gravity of the situation and remain stubborn in their fatalistic, attitude. They continue moving about as freely as in normal times ever before. Some of them still seem to believe in the age-old conviction of self-deceptive safety-zone, they still stick to the old strategy of "YEATTI YOUR RAETSER" (Everything will be normal from this movement onwards and, we are safe at least for the time being). Trash! his false rumor. This replica of Khabri

Zena karol. It's a long, long time now since I salute my parents tethered as I 'am to the peg of household chores, service of my aged in-laws, looking after our live-stock, orchards and kitchen garden, my dear husband being away in connection with his service. So many times have my brother and sister come and requested me to accompany them to my parental home, in down town, to console my old parents who had been craving for my darshans for long. Bed ridden, as they are? They are unable to move to ours. How cruel on my part to disappoint them on one pretext or the other, "Have I, my husband and my in-laws grown so callous towards my parents?" says she to herself.

She becomes self-remorseful, her sentiments receive a jolt and her emotions run high.

"My heart beats violently, I become dizzy, my head reels with pressure. What can I do? She

broods over and reports her helpless condition to her in-laws, who in turn send word to their son.

Sad and sullen, Taja sits in a lonely corner, sobbing. Her sub-conscious agony of long separation from parents burst out in tears that roll down her cheeks. Her daughter Rosy is askance and stunned, wetting of her eyes, instantly become contagious. The reel of the replica of KHABRI-ZENA KADAL.

Unwinds itself like a flash in Taja's mind. The impact of the running film is so deep and permanent that, even in her semiconscious state, he repeats the whole episode of that mischievous replica of

KHABRI-ZENA KADAL VERBATIM THUS.

"Once a clever young man thought of playing mischief for fun with people, of Srinager. He gathers a group of his like minded friends and revealed his plan to them. The plan is approved and the line of action is unanimously agreed to.

The homogenous group scattered in a crowded corner of the city. One of the youths shouted from a distant, hiding place, "Gayee ho ! Gayee ho ! (It's gone. It's gone). The cries echoed from another distant corner and were followed by others running towards the crowds and rushing onwards. The yells are reinforced by multitudes of hoarse ones. Then rise up counter queries of, "What is gone? What's gone..... "

The excitement gathered momentum and the full throated cries. "It's gone. It's gone, "and" What is gone? Where? Where? alternate and jar the listeners. But mob psychology and mob behavior rope them into their onward movement when some other groups shout. "Zena Kadala! Zena Kadal ! At Zena Kadal Bridge, at Zena Kadal Bridge)".

The excited crowds rush with the mobs and assemble at Zena Kadal. " Gaye ho! Gayae ho ! what's gone? what is gone? ----only to be told that a sputum has floated under the bridge. What a cruel joke!"

"Damn this hot rumor" of tension and violence. I am not one be cowed down by such false hoods. Taja shouts out, as she rises up she turns defiant, and dressing herself, clinches her daughters hand and leaves by Matador to downtown, ten miles away. All along the way she cannot. help seeing groups of bewildered youth gossiping and the pedestrians running more hastily than usual. But the gravity of the situation dawns upon Taja on reaching the busiest market usually bustling with throngs of people doing brisk business. She's awe-stricken finding shopkeepers downing the shutter's of their shops and feeling home-wards for life and the few anxious pedestrians double marching onwards. Taja too follows suit till she finds refuge in her parental home. Touched to the quick, on finding her parents gazing expectantly towards the door, Taja enters exasperated and panting for breath. Sips of fresh cold water revives her and her daughter a little and they are found gently embracing her

ailing parents sobbing which turns contagious, engulfing all, parents, children and grandchildren. The high-pitched feelings and emotions soon have cathartic effect and the babbling of toddlers breathe the balm.

Refreshments and hot tea come handy but the anxious looks of all are centered in Taja's return home. Shaken by her travel experiences. Taja is careful enough to leave just in time to reach home well before dusk. So, with wet eyes and imperceptible sobbing, Taja clinches Rosy's hand, embraces her parents and takes leave. Her brother, accompanies her and sees her off at the bus stand. The matador speeds on through the street. But alas! Suddenly stops halfway through across a bridge and asks the passengers to alight and fend for themselves himself avoiding the whole danger zone.

This has further aggravating effect on Taja's terror stricken brain.

Unwillingly, the passengers step out and plod on in panic along the deserted road towards the venue of the rumor around the otherwise busy chowk where all sorts of vehicles are usually available.

Taja and Rosy move on sluggishly at first but somehow their calf-muscles get tickled by reflex action. They consciously or sub-consciously speed up and catch up with the advancing pedestrians.

Taja and Rosy feel being trapped there as so some other too did! They move helter-skelter to seek shelter. Shelter where there was none. They play hide and seek to avoid being caught in the melee.

An isolated, fast running truck strays that way all of a sudden. A trembling, panic-stricken group of anxious people, lying in wait on the spot including Taja, rush to and push one another into it as it stops a few seconds and instantly speeds on.

Unfortunately Rosy misses the grip of her mother's hand. And she is left behind alone to her own fate! Deserted in this way, Rosy weeps and wails, cries and yells in distress, She frisks away hither and thither, like a freshly born calf to seek shelter in the mare's protective cover.

Similarly stranded, a well meaning man touched by her loud sobs is closely watching her panicky movements in an atmosphere of intense tension due to desertion at the hands of her, otherwise, inseparable mother.

Imperceptibly and unknowingly after long-hours, there stops an isolated maruti car near the well-meaning man. The driver opens the door and shows him in hastily. The well-meaning man pulls in the panicky, girl, before hastily boarding it.

And the car driver loses no time to speed on. Where?

Nobody knows!

May be back to her village at home, miles away on the same road.....

9.0 DADDY'S CORONATION

As an affectionate, obedient, respectful and cultured daughter-in-law of the rarest of the rare qualities in domains of the negative chaotic in-law tussles, Reeta Rani has made it a matter of principle to consult with her mother-in-law in all affairs of domestic management and financial controls prior to their execution in practice.

Reeta Rani does this not because she is not capable of doing so quite independently with all the life long experience she has already gained at the hands of elders, but 'with a view to keeping the old couple in good humor and giving them a sense of sustained involvement in the affairs of the family unit.

Ravinder Hakim, on his part, spends good time with parents at breakfast after the morning bath and prayers. He touches their feet seeking their blessings before starting his clinical work. So do, the grand children spend free time before and after schooling, games and home task with their grand parents. Nothing is left for the old couple to complain of.

How one would wish everything continued "All-Well" on the Western front!

The twelfth standard results are out. In the meanwhile Grand children have passed with credit. They have fared better than their brothers and cousins. And so, are ensured of admissions in the best professional colleges of the top most universities of the country.

These grand children lose no time in settling the wheels of the prerequisite processes rolling. But no, they stop in the way brooding "What will happen to our decrepit grand parents after we leave for professional trainings? Who will keep them company in the mornings and evenings and keep them busy in cordial conversations in our absence? Won't it over burden our parents after we are gone, if they take our charge too when we leave home?"

Pondering over the problem and after weighing the pros and cons of the matter, they decide to renovate grand pa and grand ma's sitting-cum-bed room before they leave. Up-to-date sanitary fitted room with modern heating and cooling arrangements, cozy beds, up-to-date seating arrangement is built up. Adequately provided with all the necessary material, and paraphernalia in a mini-store for self-help is kept ready for them. The grand children see to it that their grandees are seated on an elevated gorgeously decorated seat with beautiful, bulky pillow to lean on and the side-pillow to rest their arms on in an elaborate, oriental style. Thus they see to it that the grand parents are enthroned, granddaddy as the king of the royal house and grand ma as his queen.

Thus is the granddaddy coroneted. Completing all these arrangements, the grand children leave with full blessings of the grand parents. They move off to their respective universities. Their load of work with grand parents is shared by Ravinder Hakim and Reeta Hakim. Things go on smoothly as usual as if nothing-extra ordinary had happened.

Ravinder Hakim having already retired, Reeta Hakim follows suit after a year or so causing a fifty percent yawning reduction of ensured monthly salaries. To add salt to the fresh wounds, there is great hike in University dues and hostel charges causing greater pressure on the domestic exchequer. Worst still, the hither-to regular monthly financial assistance for the

grand parents from their rich offspring has also stopped forthcoming for quite sometime for some reason or the other.

This is too much for a hitherto fore one of the richest families rolling in wealth and used to lavish spending not only in the house but also giving financial aid to several organizations and helping the poor.

Ravinder Hakim and his wife are bewildered and puzzled for they had never so far faced such calamity due to paucity of funds. They could not help putting much more attention, to their clinic work. Lesser attention to older parents was' a natural consequence. But still the two and their old parents could meet only at tea and lunchtime. Raja Hakim often now couldn't but complain of lack of attention, paucity of pocket money and stark lack of supply of their necessities even for self-help. Their otherwise affectionate children were incapable of explaining the situation.

At last one fine sunny day, after lunchtime, Raja Hakim girded up his loins, put up his clothes and stepped out of the house to fend for himself and earn a living for his wife and for his own person.

The news spread like wild fire and engulfed the whole city like the bush fires of Australia. People all around were stunned and taken aback only to burst forth.

"What a strange sort of bolt from the blue has befallen this genius, socially, helpful family of a royal nature?"

Foot Note: Read story No.9 entitled Daddy's nightmare.

10.0 THE IN-LAW TUSSLE

Kumar and Kamla, husband and wife, hail from a middle class family of Karnahpuri, Kumar has taken service in the government of the time as a Clerk under a Tehsildar who incidentally, happens to be a landlord possessing a vast tract of fruit garden. Kumar also helps his boss in horticultural work. He is quite efficient in office work and very knowledgeable about horticultural science. Naturally his boss is satisfied with his work both in his office as well as in fruit growing business.

Kamla is equally intelligent and proficient in her domestic chores. She is a typical Kashmiri Pandit woman. She does not spare any pains in keeping her better half comfortably happy and at ease at home. As soon as Kumar returns home after strenuous official and extra official work at the Tehsildar's gardens, she washes his feet and legs with warm saltish water. This is followed by welcome beverages, hot tea and fruits of different kinds. This done, Kumar relaxes on a warm bed in winter and under a gently rotating fan in summer. This done, the whole family of husband & wife, sons, daughters' sit together for dinner before going to bed. Similar comforts in the morning before official attendance are their daily routine. The couple really considers itself as the two halves of the same body. No wonder, therefore, that the couple's emotions, thoughts, and feelings are alike. They marry off their daughters in different villages and are left with only one son, Keshew. Paradoxically, at the same time, Kamla is cringing in so far as the certain percentage of savings is a must for her, come what may.

One fine morning, on a holiday, while sitting in their lawns, Kamla says, "Dear Swamiji, Kanwah Krishen of Magampuri is a Dy. Commissioner and a wealthy landowner. He has a beautiful, grown up, healthy girl quite suitable for our dear Keshew. He has requested for a "Techni" of Keshew for his girl. Should we supply one to his middleman who may be coming again for it tomorrow? "Kamla dear, I cannot aspire for any better choice than yours. Do please entertain well, the go-between and supply him this 'Techni'. Do not forget urging him for an early response."

Teknies are tallied, horoscopes exchanged and betrothal ceremony performed followed by a pompous marriage ceremony after the girl and Keshew approved each other.

Time passes by, Keshew and his wife Koshaliya bear two sons and a daughter, and their children grow up bright, quick witted and intelligent. Meanwhile Koshaliya's three brothers and three sisters get married and bear children in turns. Family relationship grow and frequent visits and return visits also become the order of the day.

Kumar dies and Kamla, deprived of his pay incomes, is left alone to look after the family with the help of her son, Keshew.

Kumar and Kamla used to regularly lay by a certain percentage of their total income

against the rainy day. Kamla in her discretion and consultation with her son, Keshew, discards the concept of percentage but insists on depositing the previously fixed total amount in lump sum. The arrangement continues for a couple of years or so. Since the family is deprived of a substantial amount of money earned by Kumar, the spending capacity of Koshaliya decreases. The constraints are more pinching to Koshaliya when visited by her own kith and kin. She feels embarrassed and let down in their presence. She pleads with her mother-in-law about it time and again, But to no purpose. Kamla's reply would invariably be, "Dear Koshaliya, we have three children to bring up, educate and settle in life. Unless we look ahead and provide for it now, how can we meet the huge expenditure at the proper time?"

Koshaliya appeals and entreats her, only to reduce a small percentage of their savings to provide for their better living and entertainment of guests saying, "Mother Kamlaji, I request for only a very small reduction in savings and its adjustment towards the domestic expenditure. This will enable us to kill two birds with one stone. It will prove a little more nutritious food to us and at the same time to maintain our status in society together with the provision for the upkeep, education and settlement of our children in life."

But the miserly, cringing mother-in-law, Kamla is too shrewd to agree. She replied, "Dear Koshaliyaji, life is mercilessly harsh. It has many facets. We must always be prepared to face it boldly. Our present day savings alone will enable us to do so bravely. Do please compromise with lesser spending.

Koshaliya reconciles herself with prevailing conditions for sometime. But, in spite of her endurance, her embarrassment and humiliation shadow her all through and all over. Its intensity enhances on her visits and return visits to or by relatives. The contrast of entertainments hurts her ego. The simmering antagonism comes to fore front every time.

At last, Koshaliya reveals her just to her spouse, like his parents, Keshew considers Koshaliya as his better half-- two halves of the same body as per the Hindu tradition. Taking advantage of Keshew's deep love for her, KoshaIiya says, "Dear Swamij , you and children often complain of improper nourishment. You often show signs of passitude and tiresomeness, as do our children and even our mother, Kamlaji too. We are glad you are getting' a huge sum of money as bonus and simultaneous grade promotion. "

"Yes dear, that is true. I shall get it shortly in a couple of month's time, "replies Keshew.

"My dear, I have a suggestion to make. Will you accept it ? May I express my desire?" says Koshaliya. "Yes dear, do please say what you want to say, what makes you think, I will not accept it?" replies Keshew. " O, my dear Swamiji, I expected your reply. Let us add a bigger drawing room to our house worthy of our new status. At the same time let our monthly savings remain at the present level as desired by mother Kamlaji.And ----- And ", mutters back Koshaliya.

"Yes dear, why do you stop? utter what you want to say. I heartily accept your first proposal and will certainly agree to your second one also," replies Keshew.

"My darling, how I love you' you know how we are honorably treated and entertained' by our relatives, kith and kin whenever we visit them. " Says Koshaliya.

"Yes darling, I do. What makes you say so?" replies Keshew.

"Since the death of our father dear, Pt. Kumar Sahib, our hands were tight. We have been compelled to curtail our expenditure and observe austerity and restraint in entertainments of any sort. I would earnestly request you to allow your increments for better food and reciprocity of entertainments according to our Status". Suggests Koshaliya.

"All right my darling, let it be as you desire," replies Keshew.

Keshew in turn also consults with his mother and brings her round to the decisions already taken.

The previous glamour returns to the family now. There is resumed the earlier hustle and bustle due to visiting guests as before:

All such entertainments are held in the new drawing room. After sometime, the grandma, Kamla begins to feel embarrassed in the new situation. She often grins within herself, "I have now become redundant and a non entity in my own home. She thinks."

She adjusts herself perfectly, often retiring to her bed-cum-sitting room in the second storey of her house This she gradually and imperceptibly hangs into her permanent habitat. She keeps herself engaged in knitting and sewing clothes. She is provided with her own sanitary arrangements. Also, she comes down to the ground floor at meals and teatime only, (four times a day). Such a voluntary confinement accelerates her ageing process and she becomes weaker and weaker to move about. As an obedient and affectionate daughter-in-law, Koshaliya serves her (Kamla) well and feeds her as usual in her sitting-cum-bed room.

Foot Note: Read also Story no. 18 entitled 'Shock Treatment'.

11.0 THE BROKEN PEN

The bell rang. The boys came running, as usual to the science room and took their seats. But some seats were still vacant. The teacher stepped out to the adjacent verandah. He saw a group of sad boys grimly gossiping and just unusually plodding on.

"You lazy boys run. Don't waste our time!" shouted the teacher in high pitch.

The group alerted, ran and took their seats, still gossiping in grim whispers.

A grief-stricken, gentle boy, holding two broken parts of a pen in his hands visibly sobbed from within.

Observing him sigh, the parent in the teacher was moved to pity. Addressing the boy caressingly in gentle tones, he said, "Yes, Bubloo stand up. Tell me the cause of your sadness, my boy."

Bubloo sobbed and babbled in undertones. The teacher couldn't make out what the boy meant to say. He patted him and again asked him the cause of his sadness.

The boy again sobbed and muttered something unintelligible. The reasons were obvious: - For. Rs. 5/- was quite a very large sum for the cost of a fountain pens those days and ----- . The value of a rupee those days was dozens of times more than that of the present coin of the same denomination, as far as its purchasing power was concerned.

Bubloo's costly pen was broken. Hence his bemoaning demeanour. His in ability to talk freely was natural for a shy, gentle boy like Bubloo.

Addressing a boy sitting next to Babloo, the teacher said. "Yes. Aziz, do you want to say anything about the matter? Stand-up please. Relate what you know about the affair."

Sir, Roshanlal borrowed Babloo's pen and he.....and he.... he he-e, and he e-e-e- broke it." came the reply (in stammering words) in reply. Pointing to another class-mate of Bubloo, the teacher said, "Prem. you stand up and narrate what the matter is all about,"

Sir. It is true that Roshanlal borrowed the pen from Bubloo and when he began to write with it the pen broke into two parts. I simply do not know, how.

"Yes Sir, that is true, that is true" endorsed those who sat round Bubloo, in the chorus.

Stand up Roshan. Did you break Bubloo's pen'? Why do you play pranks that are harmful to others?

Roshanlal stood up mum, hanging his head in shame.

This was enough for the teacher to convince him of Roshan's guilt. "Roshan you must buy a new pen to replace Babloo's broken one. I must see him write with it in the class-room tomorrow. Do you understand? Use your pocket money and get help from your mother and sisters. I bare no money to spare for such pranks.

Be careful not to enter the class-room unless you have replaced Bubloo's broken pen with a new one. Sit down", was the order.

The teacher resumed his teaching work.

The next day Babloo was seen in a happy mood, writing with a new pen.

Days passed by weeks followed. Long after, one day, the class found the teacher in a happy mood and good humor, as he occasionally used to be.

There was heard a dim sound "Sir" from a corner of the classroom followed by repetitions of the same sound, punctuated by regular pauses.

Some perplexing puzzle was simmering for the teacher to face. "Yes Mr. Wani. What is simmering in your mind? Please vomit it out," said the teacher to him.

No reply came forth.

"You Brij Nath don't be afraid. Be free to say what you want to say," He said. Brij Nath stood up mum.

From the middle of the classroom stood up a bold student saying, "Sir, they say that they have at last found for once at last, the teacher being certainly unjust."

"May be in adversity, not deliberately though"" retorted the teacher. Adding, "What's it all about? I must know it at least.

"Sir, you punished Roshanlal for no fault of his that day. Babloo's pen had already cracked between the nib-holder and the stem. It was there only by a pin-size connection when Roshan borrowed it from Babloo. No sooner did Roshan begin writing with it than it broke into two", he said.

"Is it so, Babloo?" the teacher asked.

"Yes Sir, it was cracked By implications it meant that the boys wanted the teacher to rescind his previous order.

"The order has been issued and implemented. The question of rescinding the order simply does not arise. The pen belongs to Babloo! It is his now and will continue to remain as such", confirmed the teacher categorically.

12.0 THE DUDDA

Once a married Dudda was blessed with a son who turned out to be prodigy. Prem was the son of Prasad the Dudda. Prem was admitted in a Govt. Primary School popularly known as Jabri School under the compulsory mass Education scheme in the Dorga regime. The schooling there was free. Books as well as stationery & other paraphernalia were also provided free of cost there.

Prem showed his merit as a very laborious and intelligent boy throughout his educational career and completed his professional courses in medicine with merit at Govt. expense. As a doctor too, he was very successful and earned tons of money and wide spread fame. Soon, he became a venerable member of society. In spite of his unhindered progress, he turned out to be a very obedient, meek and courteous personality. He respected his parents ever more and more. He always made sure that they were well dressed in fine, costly costumes. He generally utilized his leisure time in the service of his parents, keeping them busy in conversation and in indoor games as all faithful and loving sons do.

Once, on a festive occasion. Prem arranged a grand a feast at his palatial mansion. He invited all his relatives, friends and colleagues. M.P's., M.L.As, Potmttes, landlords as well as Jagirdars and other elite also graced the occasion.

Elegantly dressed with a huge, snow-white turban crowning his head. Prasad was the Chief host-cum-guest.

A gorgeously designed, big pillow was kept behind him to rest his back on. Arm-rests, arranged on both side, were equally comfortable for him. All such arrangements were made perfectly in oriental style.

The guests sat on his sides, and in front in parallel rows beside the parallel patches plastered with a paste of brown earth. Jugs of water came in and the guests were helped to wash their hands in portable basins.

Dish after dish was served. The delicious dishes diffused their fragrance far and near. This attracted more Duddas to take their seats near the entrance of the well-decorated hall.

There arose a din of spontaneous appreciation:

"Ah, what a number of dishes after dish is served!

' Yes, what a sweet fragrance has filled the air!

'O, would that the supply of sweet dishes were never to end!

'Yes, I am sure, I can never forget such an exalted last in my lifetime! And so on and so forth came the appreciative comments front all quarters.

Prasad Ram had been specially served with the host and biggest 'Kansidish' carefully filled with all delicacies. Prem Nath was busy going round and entertaining the guests this provided opportunity to Prasad to quickly rise up in response to his irresistible, second

nature. He rushed swiftly and took his habitual seat amidst his old colleagues and friends there."

"What is the matter?" they asked one another. The servers stood motionless in amazement "Hush! Hush'..." came the low whispers. A grim atmosphere of dreadful silence followed. Everybody turned his eyes towards Prasad Ram.

Prem Nath was stunned and dumb founded. He stood like a lifeless statue wondering what had happened. "Didn't I well entertain my dear old father? Wasn't he supplied every dish he wanted? Did my father find any lacuna in our service program'? Didn't he get all the attention due to him as the Chief Guest?" There arose a volley of similar doubts in Prem Nath's mind that bewildered him.

At last Prem Nath gathered himself up, went to his father and meekly asked him the reason in a weak, trembling voice "My dear father, what is the matter'? Did you want anything more? Was I slack in serving and entertaining you? If so, I beg to be pardoned?"

"No my dearest boy, I was honored and served well beyond my expectations don't you worry on that score, the apple of my eye." replied Prasad Ram.

"Then what was the reason of leaving your place of honor?" asked Prem Nath.

"My dear son, there is something beyond your comprehension. It is my second nature, which was not satisfied. I received all the attention that I needed and you could provide." replied Prasad.

Butbut....but. I missed that sweet. long- wooden-spoon blow by the head cook, on my shoulders.

And this...this...and this I used to receive at the hands of annoyed head cooks as the sweetest, most cherished last morsel of the feast. This it what, in the language of our clan, what is known as the most tasty morsel of such delicious dishes of a dinner party in Kashmiri we call it as " Meutt Puot Meund"" of the meal.

The tastiest past massal of food the sweet dish at the end of a feast. I waited for and cherished before stepping away form such Parhes.

Not long ago, as is well known, India generally and Kashmir is particular as other parts of the wide world, were enveloped in an atmosphere of ignorance, poverty and unemployment. Lack of scientific, and numerological knowledge and technological know how stood in the way of socio-economic progress and development. The supply of metallic utensils, plates & tumblers etc. was rare. Rental shops, as we find these days, were totally non-existent. Crude pottery was in popular use for domestic purposes, small and big feasts during those days. Potters did big business then.

Hindu-marriage feasts in Kashmir have, always been and still continue to be an open affair. Anybody, whether invited or not, can come and partake of the feast together with all other guests.

Only a couple of decades or before independence (1947) in the recent past, no tables were laid nor carpets and white sheets spread in well decorated dining halls, as we do today.

Big halls, on such occasions those days, were arranged in compounds as enclosures with **Tajeeras. Shamianas** as fencing and roofing's respectively. Or alternatively in self-owned or borrowed halls in big mansions. Dining tables constituted long rectangular, parallel. mud-plastered patches on the plane, round, locally known as **Dajees**, and the process of plastering with brown earth as **Liwun** as a mark of sanitation or cleanliness to be exact. The seats alongside these plastered patches consisted of long narrow grass mats, known as **Patjis** in Kashmir or, folded blankets etc.

The Uninvited guests, called **Dudda** generally took their seats near the entrances, though no body dare object to their sitting anywhere else in the hall. Meals were served in big or small earthenware plates. The former are locally known as **Tabohis** and the latter **Takus**. (This phenomenon was the result of object Poverty.)

Two or three such food-filled plates would be served whenever demanded by any guest. Such demands were generally made by the **Duddas** or uninvited guests! These uninvited guests generally participated in feasts with the intention of eating to their will and also at the same time, taking back home one or two food plates full to the brim for their families- And since, on the asking by the distributors what for the **Dudda** demanded a second plate, the latter generally named his mother as the reason. This second plate came to be known as **Moji Quit Tok**. Hence was born the undesirable saying about an extra demand by any recipient of an undue favor: "Aukh Dudda tea bayae Moji quit Tok." 'This when freely interpreted means: "Being an uninvited guest how dare you demand extra favor ". The reason, for a Dudda's sitting near the entrance, was to make good for exit unnoticed without disturbing, the others or attracting undesirable attention.

Often times, when pestered with persistent extra demands of filling up more and more delicacies into a Duddas plates; the head cook, getting annoyed would usually give a blow or two on his shoulders with his long wooden spoon to silence him.

The repetition of such blows during, feast after feast, in course of time, became the cherished ending of a feast for a Dudda. It became the sweetest last morsel of a meal or put mound for such habitual uninvited guest. Happily prosperity and use of stainless steel plates instead of earthenware happened in the discernible extinction of the race of Dudda's!

13.0 DADDY'S NIGHTMARE

Ravinder Hakim's ego is crudely shaken at the odd behavior of his father. He begs pardon of him and assures him of all possible personal service and attention. But to no purpose. Raja Hakim is adamant and refuses to yield.

Thus humiliated, Ravinder Hakim calls his brothers from far off places to help resolve the crisis. All the brothers rush to the spot in no time. They fall at the feet of their protesting father. They weep and wail. They appeal and entreat him to free them of the curse. At last, with the help of their kith and kin, they are able to bring him round to change his mind.

Elaborate foolproof arrangements are made to make him comfortable in every way. They make sure that Raja Hakim no longer refuses to take their substantial contributions as doles but as money sent with affection and love by his sons for their dear old daddy. All the sons of Raja Hakim remain at home, for a couple of months. So as to shower their love on him and bring their domestic affairs back of rails, they arrange picnic parties to almost all the beauty spots in the paradise valley. They do not leave any stone unturned to make him happy and comfortable in every way till they make sure that their dear old father's mood has been restored and that, he evinces the same interests in the welfare of his children and grand children as hither-to before. The family becomes as happy as usual. Love, faith and mutual good-will as well as happy healthy life return. Every member is blithe and mirthful. Daddy is fully satisfied. What is more, he makes his satisfaction known in clear terms.

Feeling convinced, Raja Hakim gladly permits them to go and attend their duties with his sincere blessings. Raja Hakim's progeny were wise enough not to entertain the entreaties and plea to depart and attend to their duties elsewhere in the country. They rightly thought that it would create a sudden gap between the long periods and that it would be difficult for him to find himself caught in a minuscule family of three members only.

They left in batches after small intervals to avoid Raja Hakim's suffering from sudden seclusion. The happy memories of his trips and merriments lasted long for quite a good time. He often told nostalgic tales to all his friends and relatives who paid him occasional visits. Such a habitual narration of telling tales became a sort of long poem of Ancient Mariner's of mirthful situations. Time passed by comfortably for Raja Hakim for long in such pleasantries. .

At last, in one long dreary winter night Raja Hakim slept a deep sleep, snoring and dreaming, about a Video film slowly and steadily, like a growing but Raja Hakim underwent Kaya Kalp (Rejuvenation) and opened out into fragrant smiling red rose that reflected in the ruddy cheeks of his children and grand children who rushed in from the remotest corners of the country to shower their love and affection on their protesting father and grandpa in grief.

Raja Hakims tenure as a head parent had been extended indefinitely and the small family of three, as it had been, had swelled into a veritable tiny-tot-cum-school-cum college in the wise guidance of young parents under his mature stewardship. The chagrin childish pranks, youthful activities and the vigorous activities that followed invigorated his pleasant participation in the family affairs. Naturally, as time heals the wounds, such a warmth of

hustle and bristle rein fused in Raja Hakim, the young spirit of youth combined with the parental love and concern for the welfare of his offspring". Trips to beauty spots, tourist resorts, trekking and mountain climbing and pilgrimages to holy places were re-enacted had in his mind the more film of his trips, pilgrimages, the aerial surveys of green Valleys lakes and rivers, pastures and glaciers, was released in his pleasant dreams. The aerial flights over snowy pinnacles were especially enjoyable and exhilarating. He felt as if his mother had come to life to rock his moving cradle. He flew and flew in a plane and then all by himself using his arms as rudders to keep in right direction.

The loud snoring sounds during his deep, Kumbkaran's slumber vibrating in unison with roaring of his plane and in that ecstasy he enjoyed to emplane in a luxury helicopter. The helicopter quickly moved through and over tiers after tiers of rolling clouds that formed a cushioning comfortable slide over them. The helicopter re-resumed its flight over the snowy girdle that guarded the beautiful valley. In this ecstatic dream, all of a sudden a crane hit the helicopter and the pilot. The helicopter crashed against the pinnacles causing and splitting the helicopter into pieces that scattered all over the green valley. Raja Hakim was terrified. He roared like a wounded lion and jumped out of his bed crying and shouting, "The plane has crashed and the inmates blown into pieces. How is it I am alive? Am I not wounded and bleeding?"

Ravinder Hakim and Rita Hakim were frightened as they heard the cries. They rushed in weeping and wailing and shivering in panic. The neighbor hood could not but be agog with wilderment and rushing in to see as to what had happened in that dark dreary mid-night.

Daddy had a nightmare!

14.0 RISE AND FALL

The renowned potentates, Radha Krishen and Radha Rani were residents of the famous township of Tralpora. Radha Krishen was a powerful Jagirdar and a wealthy land-lord. He wielded wide influence and popular regard and was looked at with mixed feelings of respectful awe, love and affection for all his good qualities: precise sense of fairness, pragmatic approach to socio-economic and political problems. In his private capacity as such, he solved people's individual and group problems sagaciously and impartially. He applied his keen sense of justice without favor for any and malice for none. What is more, his judgments were universally acknowledged as fair and just. He was known as the grand old god man of the area.

His wife, Radha Rani, was well versed in ancient Sanskrit lore, the Vedas and jurisprudence.

They bore many children and brought them up as talented youths. Their eldest daughter, Reeta Rani was simply a genius, obedient, well versed in domestic chores, knowledgeable, socially amicable and culturally refined. She was handsome, well built and robust in health.

Besides her own academic achievements, she had imbibed the very spirit and good qualities of her parents.

When alone in their bedroom at night once Radha Rani reminded her husband: "Dear Swamiji," Reeta is growing fast, beyond her age. I am worried about her. She is mature enough now for marriage. You had told that you had asked some go-betweens to bring some **Taknees** for her. "Yes dear, she is growing too fast for her age, you know, I quite share your worries. I have met Rahman Bhat too in this connection. He stay be bringing some Taknees some day". (A teknee is the basis on which a horoscope is prepared.)

One fine springtime afternoon at tea-time, the family was in a relaxed mood after tea, chatting leisurely at random.

"Pandith Sahib. Pandith Sahib," they hear along with knocking at the door.

"Who is it calling? who is knocking at the door?"

"It is I. It is me." Comes back the reply.

"Reeta, just see who is knocking at the door", says Radha Krishen to his daughter.

Reeta looks out of the window and says aloud, "Who are you, sir? What do you want?"

"I am Rehman Bhat, the go-between. I want to see Pt. Radha Krishen or his wife. Are they in?" he says. Hearing this, Radha Krishen shows him in. Reeta slips away and returns to her room.

A semi-old well built, well dressed Rehman Bhat comes in and takes his seat saying, "Namaskar Pandith Sahib. Namaskar Bhabi ji".

"Salam, Rehman Bhai. Sahib, Salam. How is it that your visits are few and far between:-" Radha Krishen and Radha Rani greet him.

Rehman Bhat Places a dozen Taknees before them, giving verbal details about each candidate, his parentage and family connections-as per custom. Fuller descriptive details are given about one in whom Radha Krishen evinces more interest. Rehman Bhat continues saying, "Ram Narayan of Gerupora is a renowned leader, landlord and rich horticulturist, master of lakhs. Though not as talented and refined as you are yet, he is the strongest and the most respected person of the district. His son. Romesh is a well qualified, robust young man with handsome looks. He is really a match for any accomplished princess like Reetaji Rani".

After a thorough scrutiny of the descriptive details and comparison of the two concerned horoscopes, preparations for the betrothal ceremony are made in agreement with Ram Narayan. Pomp and show marks customary betrothal ceremony which impresses the expectant crowds of both the districts of the State.

Romesh in princely marriage attire rides a mighty grand-looking well decorated white horse. A long leather-cheated sword haves from the belt over his long-robe on the left hand side. He leads the rivelous processionists and other steed-riders to the accompaniment of beating of drums and pipe-music oil the way.

Rare reception and dinner delicate entertain the guests. The night -long marriage ceremony concludes towards the early morning after the couple take the customary seven rounds around the sacred fire and subsequent rituals according, to the prevalent Kashmiri Pandit tradition.

The profusely garlanded groom riding on a stout white steed stands guard behind the bride's pearl-bedecked palanquin carried by four giant looking bearers.

In keeping with prestigious traditions of Tralpora Radha Krishen supplies swift horses to guests of the marriage party. A huge regiment of riders and ravenous back home.

Crowds as well as dancers precede and follow the bride and the groom

All these glamorous functions and mirthful demonstrations reinforce Reeta Rani's fame as sagacious rich lady of parts. On this background with the passage of time women folk of her neighborhood and gradually becomes more and more popular. Sooner than later. She wields unprecedented influences all around the vast area of her new home which, brings more glory to her royal heritage, academic achievements, knowledge, sociability and refined culture. Such qualities of her head and heart, combined with her selflessness and ability to settle disputes and intricate problems of life, pay her good dividends. This is enough to fascinate the masses towards her.

By and by, Reeta established her position as the wisest and most pragmatic social worker, supreme guide friend and philosopher- for the hitherto pugnacious populace. Naturally the populace rush to her for the settlement of their controversial disputes as well as for the solutions of their long - standing problems - domestic, group or socio-economic. Her decisions are final and accepted as such by the disputants. Everybody finds her sitting on judgment with out favor for any and malice for none again, the litigants, both the winners as well as losers acknowledge that justice is and has been done. Disputes, taking decades in

Courts and bleeding the litigants white, are settled in no time by her and, all that costs nothing to the contestants.

Life is harsh. It blows hot and cold together. It is hard and soft both. Nature is unpredictable, treacherous and stern.

And, as unfortunately happens many times, Reeta Rani hears a controversial case as usual in a big room at her residence. The statements made by the disputants seem to be equally plausible with a very narrow margin of 45% to 55% in favor of one disputant. Reeta in her sharp sense of justice delivers her judgment in favor of the latter.

Her judgment comes as a bolt from the blue to the former. His native instinct of pugnacity disturbs his calm. He could not but react to the declaration of judgment. Like a flash of lightning, he grinders aloud in protest. Brewing stir of controversy became contagious. It flooded the parties in subdued grins on the one hand and, approvals on the other, producing a whirl wind of appreciation and depreciation in whispers at the same time.

"What an unusual judgment is it this time? Such an odd judgment is not worthy of Reeta Rani. Is it?" say some. The affected employees of deserted courts fanned the fire.

"What a sharp mind, Reeta Rani has: Her quickness of wits enables her to pick up even a sticking pin from a heap of ashes". Counter the others.

The adversely affected employees of the deserted court fan the fire further, more vociferously. Reetaji is puzzled at the above. She does not understand what it is all about. She is startled and stunned. In a grim mood, she retires to her parlor. She is in a brooding state of mind.

And as the accident soon gets wind and spreads over the whole area, Reeta Rani's ego receives a grievous shock. She can no longer bear such insinuations and derogatory remarks: "Why?... Why? Why all this simmering gossip? Am I wrong in judgment in this case? No certainly not. I am perfectly right as usual in this case too. After all, I had no axe to grind in the matter". She mutters with herself. After a pause, she bursts out saying, "My judgment is precisely correct to the point. I am flawlessly right. Let them say, what they say But... But... but, I must leave this place for good now". She thinks aloud".

Early the next morning, Reeta Rani, taking leave of her family members, hastily returns to her parental home much to the dismay and display of all her in-laws, husband children and people at large.

Day in and day out, week by week and month after month, elders and elite, educated and uneducated, common folk, wailing and weeping women including the opponents go to apologies to her for their folly and thoughtlessness. The accuracy of judgment had dawned upon all by now as the disgruntled employees of deserted courts could no longer convince the masses of the work he said Reeta fans had lost the wind with which they had been fanning the fire.

The family members as well as people actually weep and wail, appeal, and entreat Reeta Rani to return to Gerupora once again. But no, Reeta Rani was already top shocked return back. Her ego was too seriously hurt to think of returning.

Foot Note: Read also Story no. 16 entitled "Crest Fallen."

15.0 RIVALRY AND REBUFF

Thinking that he had already started well by spreading the net of patronization over Prithve, Sharda began pondering over how fresher strategy of winning over the favors of the new boss, may be, perhaps by using Prithve also as a tool. It took him sometime keeping a close watch on the activities and movements of his friends, adversaries, the British boss and Prithve alike. This afforded an opportunity to plan and execute his plans.

Time ticks off. One fine summer day Sharda invited the new British boss to a reception dinner in his honor at his home along with Prithve and his hostel colleagues. A few minutes earlier, the British boss and hostel staff left the hostel premises for the venue of reception which happened to be at a stone's throw from there.

On reaching Mr. Sharda's residence they were led into a spacious hall where quite a good number of respectable towns folk. VIPs were already seated according to the Kashmiri style in that dinner hall. The party was guided to take their assigned seats. Self introductions by the guests over, followed by general discussions and free chats over a pre-dinner cup of tea, ranging from the history and geography of the town to the progress of allies in world-war II.

Dinner sheets were spread. Thalties (plates) were ready to be placed in front of each one of the guests. The chief guest of honor seemed to smell the rat. He shouted out, "Mr. Sharda haven't we to wash our hands before we begin eating our food? Have the hon'ble guests already done so? Please show me where to wash my hand. My hostel boss will not permit me to eat food without cleaning my hands before hand!"

Thalties were quickly removed. Hands washed and thalties replaced. A beeline of service-boys began their job of distributing the delicious preparations. Meals were heftily devoured. Appreciative remarks passed. Dinner was over, followed by Kashmiri Kahva. The guests began trickling out. The assembly dispersed, some hissing, some talking in low tones while others talking aloud.

"Prithve seems to be quick-witted intelligent and a brave man of integrity". Say some.

"The principal must be really true and tolerant Christian and a democrat", remarked others.

And yet others sadly expressed their forebodings about Prithve's hard times ahead.

"It seems that the chief guest has inadvertently sown seeds of thorns for Prithve!" and so on and so forth.

Mr. Sharda accompanied the chief guest and party back to the hostel.

A few days later, a staff meeting was held in the assembly hall of the institution. The agenda of the meeting having been discussed threadbare one by one; the assembly felt itself relaxed to engage themselves in free-informal talks before dispersal.

"Do you know what I have done in the hostel? I have raised it by four inches above the ground level." Said the Principal.

"How did you do so, sir?" asked a member surprisingly. "You know that the hostel staff used to dine on dirty chadars before I had become a hosteller. Now we dine on 4" high wooden chowkies (small individual tables)" replied he.

This provided Mr. Sharda an opportunity to strike the nail on the head.

Being quick-witted and clever, retorted he, "This is sheer degradation and against the principles and traditions of the school. This is a fundamentalist way of eroding cosmopolitanism. Couldn't they have built a common dining table for the purpose?"

A hush of silence was followed by gazing eyes some with raised eyebrows, some with pity on Prithve, while others casting angry looks on Mr. Sharda!.

The boss who had by now openly displayed some regard for Prithve felt embarrassed. He looked down with a sense of self-introspection regarding his judgment of Prithve seriously.

In low tones verging on whispers he said to Prithve, Mr. Prithve you have belied my faith in you. What reply have you to give to "Mr. Sharda's remarks?"

"Sir, before my reply to Mr. Sharda's remarks, may I need to assure you that I'm a firm believer in and upholder of school principles and of its honor and torchbearer of its traditions to the very core of my heart. As regards Mr. Sharda's remarks, may I just remind your good self about the small, cell-like space which your honor knows, we use as our office, our drawing-cum-bedroom as well as our dining room-cum-store room all in one. Mr. Sharda, more than anybody else has had very intimate knowledge of this fact. It's incomprehensible how my venerable friend and honored colleague has knowingly chosen to make such a derogatory remark in the very face of the glaring facts.

Besides, being a widely respected, socially popular and highly knowledgeable and intelligent person, who can believe that he doesn't know the small amount we spent on these small chokies. As a chief guiding figure of the school programs, he certainly knows how many times more expenditure for a common cosmopolitan type of a dining table would cost, not to speak of the additions of chairs as also the store where to keep them", meekly replied Prithve.

"Yes, Mr. Sharda, my science master can never be wrong": retorted the Principal quite satisfactorily.

16.0 MINI MARCO POLO

Rahman Waggai is a well built, red haired, tall young man of over fifty and odd years. He is honest, business-like, and truthful man of pragmatic religion. His brotherly affection and cordial social contacts and harmonious behavior has endeared him to all his kith & kin, friends and relatives alike.

His cordiality with Suriya often makes him pay a welcome visit to Suriya's house whenever he comes on his own business to Srinagar and stays there for a night or so, once to pay whatever he himself thinks is due to the landlord. His rural affinity with Suriya's in laws makes him a guest of honor for several days with the latter on the sacred festival of yearly Shiv Ratri.

His taste for cooked fish makes him stay on with him until the fish is exhausted and it certainly lasts for several days, for the family too cooks good amount of it on the happy occasion.

Once Rahman Waggai seems like breeding a complaint against Suriya. He says, "Dear Pandith Sahib, may I know if you won't feel hurt what I say....." ?

"What has made you entertain such ideas, brother? Aren't you as good a member of our family as any other member is ? Don't you feel treated as such within your own right? Have you any apprehensions on that score?" retorts Suriya.

"No Pandith Sahib, no certainly not! I am as comfortable here as I am at home. Your rural warmth washes off all the coldness of the city atmosphere for me in this house" responds Rahman Waggai obligingly.

"Then what makes you feel like complaining, Waggai Sahib?"

"My complaint is genuine and born of lack of reciprocity, dear brother," replies Rahman Waggai.

"I haven't understood what you say nor do I comprehend what you mean by the word reciprocity, Waggai Sahib? Have we been slack anywhere in responding to your needs or looking after your comforts?" asked Suriya.

"Kindly don't misunderstand me," brother. I feel quite at home with you all. But my complaint is quite genuine.

Its I who has always and without fail visited and stayed with you whenever I came to the city in connection with my own business still you have never given me an opportunity to reciprocate the affection you besto won me.

More so, you enjoy your summer months at different places away from the din and noise, dust and dirt of Srinagar and yet not at ours. Narapora is situated, as you know, just at the foot of a cool pine forest spread over the rising plateau. It could easily form your base camp for one of your treks and tours to Yusmarg, Nila Nag, Shajimar, Hali village and Hemal spring, Shupiyan and Nagabal, Aharbal and so on so forth. Wouldn't you like to give us the

pleasure of your company there and carrying both your treks tours at the same time? Pray do consider the proposal" replies Rehman Waggai.

"It is a marvelous idea, Waggai Sahib. But what about the utensils we require? We usually do not carry any except a tea kettle, a stove along with sugar, cakes and spices only" asks Suriya.

"Never mind if there are no Pandits living there, I can supply you a fresh collection of them to serve your purpose. That's my responsibility Razdan Sahib" assures Waggai Sahib.

"All right, I welcome your kind gesture this summer" agrees Suriya.

Fifteenth July approaches. Suriya and his family members start guarding up their loins, and set on a trekking tour straight to Narapora Rakh. The party was well received and supplied with clean beddings and fresh earthen cooking kettles and fresh fire-containers of Kashmiri Kangrees for use as plates for eating food and replacing them every time, for they cannot be used a second time as they become impure for the purpose.

Rice was purchased from neighboring village. Maize-flour and vegetables etc are supplied by the host who directed party to a small spring nearby the then only source of water of the village. Mid-day tea was followed by dinner cooked in the fresh earthen kettles.

Fresh earthen containers of live char-coal of Kangries of which there were plenty in store of the host were used as eating plates, fresher ones by each member at each meal time. This only because when food eaten from the earthen pot renders it unhygienic and hence unfit for use a second time.

The used earthen containers of live charcoal were washed soon after use at meal time and depositing them in another rack for the purpose of insulating them by wicker work and shaped into Kangries for sale by the host later on.

On exhausting the whole store of fresh earthenware thus, the holiday tourists set foot on their trekking six to seven miles every day to the dismay of Waggai sahib and his so loving family members and the guests alike. For every one had enjoyed the joy and merriment, common food and took immense pleasure of sharing farm work in the fields and walnut plantations. All their time had passed on merrily also on their side trips alike.

Soon after their last trek mentioned above from Shupyen to Pulwama, holiday makers walked on to . Avantipora across the bridge over river Jehlum. Then to a tiny hamlet near the village Geru and thence to Navdal rills beautifully strewn on sides with beautiful little pebbles on one side of Tral village and back. The party was preparing for a re-cross by boat at Letapora to Kakapora for two or more additional onward marches to explore other areas of scenic beauty.

But alas! The only daughter-in-law weepingly protested: we have already had enough trekking by now. I feel listless and exhausted. Besides, I have not seen my parents, brothers and sisters for long. I yearn to see them. Kindly let us return home now."

The leader of the tourists, Suriya, was faced with a complex problem here. On the one hand he wouldn't like to allow any deviation from, or laxity to disrupt his scheduled itinerary and

on the other he couldn't take lightly his daughter-in-laws piteous appeal and frustrate her desire and sentiments.

The sword of ultimate decision fell on the robust youth Preetam who was bubbling with unabated spirit of adventure and wanted to share the joy of further adventure and exploration.

Offering a few chips while addressing his son Suriya said, "Dear Preetam, you accompany your sister-in law back home." Preetams face fell and spirits dampened. He was gloomy and dismayed and yet, he couldn't but obey with a heavy heart. It was now his turn to be alone at home.

It was Preetam's ill-fated imprisonment in his desolate deserted home despite electrification. He cursed the time of restlessness that passed by sluggishly for him. For seconds seemed to pass by in hours. He would sit on the windowsills, brooding and anxious to see his parents back home!

Frailty, thy name is Time!

Fie on thee! Fie thee!

Fie ! Fie! Fie!

17.0 THE ROYAL DUDDA

Bhola Nath, his wife and parents sit to discuss matters pertaining to the pre-marriage ceremony feast. In honor of their son, which falls due only a couple of months or so. The arrangement of the feast is fixed for the day of *Mehindirat*, a couple of days before the ceremony.

The list of guests is arrived at as follows:

Family members and collaterals 50

Maternal Parents and their relatives 50

Family relatives and friends etc. 200

Miscellaneous invitees. 100

Total. 400

The estimates of the feast Menu stands as:

Vegetarian: Potatoes 2 quintals with matching quantities of cheese, Lotus roots, vegetables, for as many as for twenty different preparations.

Non- Vegetarian: A quintal of mutton etc. All preparations are made and invitation cards distributed.

The family elders and the head cook sit together in a meeting a day or two before *Mehindirat* and settle about the exact quantities of *Palav*, Dama-alloos, Red cheese and Roganjosh pieces to determine the number of guests for whom the food and *Palav* have to be cooked and Damalloos, Red cheese and Roganjosh pieces are to be provided for the members of the vegetarian and the non-vegetarian dishes arrived at in each case is 150 and 250 respectively.

Grand father of Bhola Nath who is quite experienced and mature in respect of Pandit marriages and marriage feasts says, "Ashpuzji (Head-cookji), let the Damalloos Red Cheese, Roganjosh pieces be fifty more in each case and one Degchi (big kettle) more of *Palav*. So please prepare 200 Damalloos, 200 Pieces of Red cheese, Five Kettles of *Palav* and three hundred pieces of Roganjosh so ,that we may not feel embarrassed in case the number of guests exceeds the number we have provided for Gulaba, an accounts officer of the gazzetted rank in the A.G.'s office is busy at his table at the head of a group of his assistants:

Soon after they relax for a while on solving a knotty problem that has caused them headache for days on end and heave a sigh of relief, one of his assistants in jubilant mood interrupts saying: -

Bhola Nath's son is to be married on October 4. They have arranged for a pre-marriage feast on Oct .2 on the occasion of *Mehndirat* ceremony. Their closest women folk have been invited for dinner and the others for lunch on Oct. 2 the next day. " Yes sir, I have also precise information about the feast," says his head assistant Gulam Din.

"It is expected to be a grand feast as many VIP's too have been invited" says another clerk, Ramo.

In a mood of hilariousness. Gulaboo interjects," What a relief after great exhaustion all these days!

October 2 is a gazzetted holiday. We'll all certainly participate in the feast whether invited or not. We'll go there together from my home at 2 P.M. when most of the invitees are expected to have already left, to get better attention from the hosts.

Do you agree?

"Certainly sir, we will accompany you." came the reply in chorus. Gulaba is an expert accounts officer. He is capable of detecting the most intricately hidden friends and locating even a tiny pin from a heap of dust so to say. Even so, he is not destructively critical as auditors generally are, but a fearlessly constructive commentator for improvement as an unparallel honest sentinel of government accounts Hence the wide respect he enjoy and the halo his office has developed around themselves.

Gulaba and party arrive at the feast exactly at 2P.M. when only a few top VIPs are there.

The party is well received and take their seats at a prominent place. Everybody comes to greet them with salutations and prenamas.

Lunch over, pleasantries are exchanged among the VIP's hosts and Gulaba's officials freely.

At the end Gulaba in jubilant tone says," Gentlemen, Do you know? I' am not a DUDDA. My men aren't Duddas either.

We are certainly invited not only by Pt. Bhola Nath but also by his beloved parents too. Isn't it so, my colleagues?" "Certainly sir, certainly it is true, we are genuine invitees"

They respond in confirmation.

Bhola Nath sweats profusely in at his lapse of not having invited a generously honest auditor like Gulabo and his assistants.

Deeply moved by the profusion of droplets of sweat rolling down the cheeks of Bhola Nath in self-abasement, Gulabo turns towards him saying. "Never mind dear, Bhola Nath. I was simply joking. Why do you take it so seriously? Be assured, we certainly are not Duddas but very honored guests. We had been duly invited not only by you but also so cordially by your good and gracious parents, though you seem and feel like not having done so.

Haven't you included us in your miscellaneous list of invitees and made additional provisions of 50 Damaloos, 50 pieces of red cheese and 50 pieces of Roganjosh with proportionate additions of other items of your menu of the feast?

Hearty thanks for the sumptuous feast and warm reception.

18.0 FACING THE CHALLENGE

Prithve had the good fortune of taking charge of a well equipped science Department of a famous High School in anti Town, at a distance of about 50-60 kms from the capital city. And so was Gobind to take over as headmaster from his European predecessor Bavington. The former was a neo-convert; a devout service deliverer and an expert sermon conductor, one surpassed the other in social adjustments, sympathy and rational attitudes.

Prithve's predecessor, a pushing young man of ideas, had gone for professional training. He, it was, who had ploughed the hard field of the Department and established a comfortable atmosphere of scientific learning in the School for Prithve to develop further.

Likewise Prithve, though novice, a fresher from a degree college, was a sportsman with a brilliant record of aquatics and boating, being the only man living, who had the honor of having swum across the biggest, fresh water lake in Asia, the Wular Lake.

As such, it took him no time to further add to the popularity and fame of the school, extending his activities in different fields. He organized minor and major games for the elite of the town and boys, inside the school premises, Veterinary Hospital grounds and school play ground as also, two-boat regattas in river Jehlum, at a distance.

He invited prominent academicians, doctors and eminent leaders of the town to address the boys and participate in the Annual Functions of the science union. Equanimity and compassion were Gobind's traits. Unfortunately, fate had played foul with him. He had lost his wife early leaving a good number of children to his care.

His youngest son seemed to have been pampered over too much. So, he had become a spoilt child. As Govind took over, he got him admitted in a class in the middle department. In classrooms, the boy would occupy a whole bench and would not allow any other boy to sit on it and two other benches on either side of his bench.

Prithve would not brook this nonsense. He treated him at par with others. No doubt it took Prithve a long time to break the, so far, unbroken horse of the boy, though none else dared touch him. Good intentioned Prithve could foresee the mis-understanding it would cause. But, he simply couldn't resist the dictates of his 'teacher's conscience,' inside, more so, as he was fully aware of the noble nature of his boss, because of his close association with him in hostel.

"Sir, when are we going to hold the Annual Function of our science union? May we suggest that this is the right time to hold it. Sir, you well remember that there was a 'heavy snow fall, just on the very day we held our annual function last winter. None of the dignitaries could attend. . Only our overall Principal and his European family could honor the function," said a delegation of science boys to Prithve.

"Yes, I remember the cold and wet weather which hampered our proceedings. I quite agree with you. The current month is more suitable. I will consult the headmaster and let you know the decision taken," replied he.

The date was fixed. The staff unanimously accepted Gobind's suggestion to invite all neo-converts/staff of city schools to lunch, after the function.

The Drawing Master, a fresher convert, Mustafa was a socially cordial gentleman with a restless, flimsical temperament that is associated with the youth of his age.

The fixed date drew near. The school was astir with brisk activity. Appropriate arrangements were made to celebrate the function. The premises gleamed with the glamour of elegant decorations. The lunchroom was floored with cotton carpets. Long, snow-white sheets were spread for lunch with woolen blankets underneath them. Some of the staff member's along with Mustafa and a few students helped in making these arrangements.

The well attended function, held in the school hall, was over by 12.30 p.m. and the audience dispersed. During the interval between the lunch and the conclusion of the function, Mustafa, in the presence of the staff, jocularly held out a veiled threat to Prithve about his overt and covert involvement in respecting the sentiments of some of his Hindu colleagues. This, he remarked, promoted sectarianism and was against the ideals, the school stood for. The cult of internationalism, he thought, was thus thrown to the winds.

"I will certainly expose your nefarious ways, he warned."

" All right you can do whatever you like, I don't care. I know my job very well", retorted Prithve.

The guests sat along the white sheets, Lunch was served. The meat preparations were very much relished by the hungry guests. And, as the well-known Kashmiri saying goes, "The tasteful tongues automatically tossed against the palates producing a chorus of Tabla music in appreciation of the delicious dishes".

But alas! All too suddenly, as the guests were engaged in praising the unusually tasty delicacies in whispers and casting appreciative glances at Prithve. Mustafa rolled up a large portion of the white sheets, like an excited Madman, exposing the woolen blankets beneath.

A loud outburst of injured feelings in a choked, hoarse voice spurted out of his wide, yawning mouth gnashing his sharp teeth.

Pointing to the exposed portions of the woolen blankets, he roared like a wounded lion", here is fundamental Hinduism in action. Are we here to promote sectarianism or good ideals of internationalism? I venture to ask Prithve".

Eyebrows were raised. Happy faces turned morose, pulpy faces fell. Ruddy cheeks turned pale. Feeble bodies trembled. Smooth/sparkling foreheads developed deep wrinkles.

Emotion of disgust and anger were writ large on the otherwise happy composed and calm looks of the neo-converts. They gazed fiercely at Prithve and shot out arrows of hatred at him. The helpless staff, including Gobind, hung their heads in shame.

The ruddy cheeks of the principal grew ruddier. His eyebrows rose higher. They were forced to leave room for the fiery eyeballs to bulge out of their sockets. He cast a threatening glance on Prithve. He blushed and roared, blushed and roared. His wits were out of control, his otherwise, calm and composed demeanor was on Prithve". Was this the purpose of your

invitation to us? You have humiliated us. You have cut the very roots of the ideals, our schools work on and, stand for. How sad and shameful on your part! "He insinuated Prithve in angry tone.

The reason for pouring out his invectives on Prithve alone and not on Govind also was obvious. "Excuse me, sir excuse me, " said Prithve.

The Principal sat mum as his grief and anguish had overwhelmed him with gloom.

Prithve continued, "Sir, all our meat preparations as well as the parountas..... multi-layered loaves of bread have been cooked through the medium of pure, Kashmiri ghee. The plates are of stainless steel. Had we not spread woolen blankets as insulators underneath the white sheets, not only would the heat have radiated out but also conducted away. The contents inside would have lost heat quickly. The ghee would have solidified and the dishes denuded of their flavor. This has been the logic and the scientific reason behind the use of blankets. Whether we are right or not, is for your good self to evaluate and judge.

Gobind, who was gloomily brooding so far, rose up, as if from slumber and, in his usual forceful voice, said. "Hon'ble Principal, respected guests and colleagues, having worked with Prithve for a year now. I have closely watched his cordial dealings with all his popularity among boys and parents alike. I have no hesitation in certifying, that he is a man of integrity and enthusiasm. Above all he is duty bound and faithful. He works with sincerity of purpose. The well-meaning, elaborate arrangements made must need be appreciated rather than condemned. The unfortunate misunderstanding I hope must have been cleared up and tempers cooled down".

The Principal recouped, stood up and said, "Dear headmaster, well meaning Prithve and colleagues, I feel relieved and happy to say that we really were impressed by the success of the function. To add to our happiness, we were enlivened by the tasty dishes, which have left an indelible imprint on our plates. Your warmth of spontaneous love has impressed us much more than we expected. It really was a welcome treat!

May I quote a world famous art critic on being asked by newsmen if he, had noticed any defect in that marvel of marvels,' The Taj' , he remarked, "The only defect of the Taj is that it has no defect"

Foot Note: In this true to life story, the behavior of the Principal to lunch was deliberately introduced to give it a touch of fiction.

19.0 YES, NO, MAY BE SO

This is a factual story of one of the most alert and physically the strongest school boy-swimmers and boaters who spurned the idea of learning to jump into the river Jehlum by stages before attempting to jump from the highest tower of the massive school building till one got control over one's nerves for other competitors as the last Jumper.

During the interval of turn-by-turn jumping, he is scared and frightened by conflicting thoughts and the horrendous sight of the vast expanse of an abysmal void visible from the top of the tower. His whole body trembles, Quite stealthily, he runs down stairs only to be trapped by curious', prying eyes of his class and school mates in the big hall like class-room of his, the site of the 40ft high jumping pad.

His ego is on trial. The sentiment of self-regard compels him to take his position on the jumping pad in a horizontal row of a group of four jumpers each. But his nerves fail him. His legs tremble, his feet refuse to move an inch.

The ordeal comes, "Are you ready Jump."

The rest follows in the text of the story.

I AM BRAVE

Throngs of curious people have assembled along the river banks, on barges and doonga-roofs and, on the II and III bridges on the Jehlum river, flanking on either side of our palatial building, to witness and watch something happening.

It is Thursday, the weekly, regatta seasonal, Visitor's day for tourists from European countries. Quite a variety of gala dressed ladies and smart-looking gentlemen, wearing goggles and cameras, grace the school and get entertained on these days.

Brief recreation period, physical drill, gymnastics, boxing, tumbling, horse acrobats, high and board jump, pole-vault, ladder climbing, pole-sliding, single sticks and what- not, are over.

The school children rush to occupy their seats in different verandas, windowsills, roofs etc. facing the river

Pt. Shanker Koul takes his position on the high, bund-wall of the temple compound, across the river with a megaphone in hand.

All preparations for diving from 10ft. jumping from 20', 30' and 50 ft. into the river are in full swing.

Novices have to begin from the beginning till they become fearless to jump from the topmost stage. (50ft high).

"I am one of the strongest swimmers and topmost. Boaters, I have swum across the biggest fresh-water *Wular Lake* in Asia and also, several times from Nishat bridge across the Dal

Lake, through the then fast flowing Dal gate, down river Jehlum the III bridge (F.K) in Srinagar, a distance of about twelve miles or more.

I am a robust, stout youngster. I am brave and quite muscular, Am not I? Yes, I am! I must jump from the topmost stage. Haven't I climbed up giant walnut trees with one end of the sleeves of my long pheran close knotted? Haven't I crawled on its branches, picked up walnut, and stored them in the sleeves. Haven't I come down them with sleeve and almost pheranful loads of walnuts hanging own and swinging on my neck?

What more courage and boldness is needed for the topmost jump? I am quite brave and surely equal to the task, I am brave! I boosted myself with My ego blurs my vision and, my pride blunts my imagination joining the competitors, I quietly undressed myself. A long rope with a cork-stuck, cap of cane on one end is supplied to all the competitors of the topmost two stages. The free end of the rope is tied to the waist of each one as a precautionary measure for rescue work in case of mishap.

The bird rooms with a sky like domed-ceiling, painted by my father in my presence, as a little child of four or five queue is the venue for forming a queue of topmost jumpers.

I took my position in the queue near the entrance door. Clearance of the first three stages took some time.

During the intervening period an imperceptible wave of fear began to seep into my, otherwise very strong, nerves.

My mind refused to concentrate on the task ahead. I wandered into other realms of thought, real or imaginary and into the dangers involved.

"I am a brave boy! Why should fear penetrate into my very nerves? Why should it shake up my bold nature? Yes, certainly, I am a stout, bold, lad! but... but... but... If I were really so brave, as I think, I am, why should I have shirked sliding down, the sliding poles which all other boys do? I have had slid down them only rarely except, climbing them half way and then sliding down for the fun of it all.

Despite this however, I am certainly a brave, robust lad and very bold at that. I must jump the topmost stage, here and now". I said to myself.

The first boy in the queue is asked to climb to the projecting roof, walk up to its very edge and to stand there to await the orders. A flash of fright grips, my mind! What would happen if he stumbles over the hot iron roof?" I argue with myself. "If a projecting nail pricked into his foot, he is bound to roll and slip down, the slippery blood! He will certain by have a serious fall down fifty feet." I thought to myself The more I ruminare and ponder over it, the more nervous and panicky, I become.

Come the order; "Are you ready?...jump" from across the river.

The boy jumps and the second boy take his turn. I tremble near the door I look southwards and am over-awed by the sight of a long stretch of a gorge-like ravine up to the very Raj-Gharh palace of Maharajah Hari Singh. I certainly could not stand the frightful sight.

Stealthily I whisked off down stairs. But alas! I was trapped there too in our big classroom amongst dozens of classmates and other spectators. No longer could I escape jumping. For, it meant loss of face and a severe jolt to my pride. I was on trial!

Joining one of two groups of four jumpers, I stood on the jumping plank still trembling. "Are you ready? jump" came the order from the famous, lion of a headmaster Pt. Shanker Koul.

Three of the group jumped all right. But my legs failed me at this critical moment! They refused to budge an inch! I felt, as if I was hooked to the jumping pad! I sweated and was embarrassed. My very soul was shaken!

But no, I dare not "bear, ever being called a *Brave Coward!* Physically well built, I was veritable a symbol of strength and bravery.

"Am I not the only, non-boatman, teen-ager over to have taken his parents in a boat for an outing from Habba Kadal to the Dal lake? Haven't I steered ferry boats, carrying pilgrims from Soura Ghat, across the Anchar lake, up the Sind river to Ganderbal. Haven't I steered even big doongas, leaving the boatman free to tow them up the river Jehlum, back to Srinagar, from Tulamela Shrine with our family? All these factual experiences of mine flash-film through my mind almost in an instant. For, my honor was at stake!

Instantaneously, I made up my mind not to retreat a second time on the same day. I gathered up my nerves. Slowly and steadily I moved my body forwards, till the vertical line through my C.G. fell outside my feet and I fell down and down into the river below. A big splash of water was produced making a deep depression with high ripples circling off. I went deeper and deeper into water, comfortably and pleasantly as I did in air. My breath stopped during the process till I was pushed up again by force of buoyancy. What an enjoyable experience it was after all!

Thunderous cheers awaited to greet us when we buoyed up and swam ashore triumphantly. I stutted along with pride and gusto as nobody seemed to have noticed my miserable plight on either of the two occasions during the episode.

I am brave ! I am bold !

Am I not? Yes, No, may be so !

Am I not brave?

Yes.

Am I really brave?

No.

Don't I look brave?

Maybe so!

Foot Note: Pheron is a long robe worn by Kashmiris.

20.0 CREST FALLEN

Time is a great healer. Public memory is short, Wounds of unwelcome separation on both sides went into oblivion. The time passed by. Nothing more happened.

In the meanwhile Reeta's parents died, She missed her filial love too. She felt nostalgic. She craved for her own husband, children and the hustle and bustle of her public life. She pined for all her pets, orchards and what not. She often dreamt of the pleasant all-busy life, she had lived at her own home.

But...How dare she go back? Nobody had approached her for the purpose any longer, for years. She was forlorn and helpless. She kept on yearning and always remained in a pensive mood. Suddenly one day, Reeta Rani caught sight of some quadrupeds at a distance. She gazed and gazed intently as they strayed, by chance, towards her. Slowly and steadily, Reeta Rani recognised her pets, the milky cow and the goat, she had tamed so fondly. She could not resist rushing out and fondling them affectionately as before, as soon as they strayed into the compound.

For the animals too, it did not take long to recognize their old mistress. They lowed and bleated, jumped and danced around her. Their hilarious lowing and bleating were notes of joyous signs from their very hearts in her company. Reeta became quite emotional and almost hysterical in ecstasy in their midst. She felt their mute expressions of mirthfulness as appeals, entreaties and beckoning to her to return back home.

May be her reckonings and interpretations were correct for her surprise-return was as sudden and spontaneous as her tumultuous reception and welcome-ovation back home later.

And, as evening approached nearer and the strayed animals started moving homewards, Reeta un-wittingly caught hold of their tails and plodded on behind and, along with them humming musically in tune with their home-returning calls: and saying:

"May dear, dear pets, words fail me to express how I had been yearning and pining for you all, My kith and kin, my friends and good neighbors: I simply can't, decline your so affectionate offer. I am too glad to accompany you back home to Gerupora".

Engrossed, as she is in her own thoughts, while accompanying her pets, she is startled and taken a back on hearing loud cry of joy. "There.... There... my friends our cows and goats are coming. Suddenly raising his hands, a villager in search of the strayed animals, cries aloud, "Who is there catching hold of the tails of our cows and goats"? .

"Ah ha ! It is Reeta ji, our grand lady", retorts another peasant.

"Really? Is she Reetaji" asked and elderly lady.

A tumult of joyous reception arose when men, women and children, boisterous ovation. Cries of mirthfulness rented the air.

"Welcome, grand-lady, welcome. Hearty greetings on your happy return. Greetings from our very hearts and souls."

They shouted in unison as they encircled and danced around her and took home in a mirthful procession. Reeta Rani loses no time in setting her own house in order placing it on wheels again, and in enjoying her life amidst her family members and others.

And, sooner than later, she finds herself as busy as ever before in solving people's problem, setting their disputes and being amidst the hustle and bustle, she had missed and aspired for long years in isolation.

21.0 PSYCHIC-CLASH

Once upon a time in early summer holidays, Suriya and Prakash along with two of their kith and kin Pruznaw and Dina went for a couple of days outing to their hill side land. There they camped in the open on a vast, desolate plateau along with a group of village friends from the out of sight villages down below and flanking the Kareva (Plateau).

On the southern side, the plateau was crowned with snowy mountains slopping down through crimson-blue rocks underneath pinewoods embroidered with sapphire margins of flowery meadows. It commanded a marvelous view of rural Kashmir down below in the distance.

There being no source of water on the plateau, utensils etc had to be cleaned on a tiny little far off spring down below. The two adolescents were assigned the job and the village friends supplied the fuel. Suriya and Prakash cooked the rice and vegetables the party had carried with them.

The sky was clear and starry. The moon shone bright and shed its soft, silvery beams of light calmly to help them share the dinner with the merry group of their village friends. Folksongs and folklore and local folk dances and Banda-Pather Banda-Pather is a form of local drama of Kashmir entertained the party throughout the welcome moonlit night studded with scintillating stars. Breakfast, lunch, dinner became a routine matter and moonlight merriments too as expected.

While Suriya and Prakash remained busy with their own business and local strolls, the two adolescents Pruznaw and Dina went down and up to the other plateau to their maize fields. There they busied themselves in picking up apples and walnuts, gorging out the Kernels from the latter and ate them with relish with self baked maize from the fields.

Sitting at ease and enjoying eating the fruits of their hard work. Pruznaw and Dina scanned the various aspects of scenic beauty of the terrain that surrounded them each according to his own appreciative capacity. While doing so they were attracted by the sight of silver crown rising like that of the colorful crest over a heoposh's head and shining like the spread out feather's of a peacock amongst the crimson blue background of giant rocks walled below by needle green pine woods that guarded the riot of colors of the waving flowers tossing their heads in the pleasant breeze blowing from the whistling woods over velvety glens of emerald green, The charming panorama that used diffused its perfumed fragrance all around.

As the fragrant air entered the nostrils of the robust youths, they were charmed and bewitched. They felt as if they were beckoned on for a welcome visit and adventure. They couldn't resist the temptation and prepared to respond positively the next day.

The collegian Praznaw collected some walnuts and ruddy cheeked white apples to be presented to his old school teacher and Principal en route at Gogji Pather where he and his father had gone on summer holiday to live in two single storey simple huts on one side of Nilnag facing the woods across the lake.

Soon after breakfast and lunch early the very next morning they set on to their trekking journey for purposes of exploration in the hither to unknown terrain for them.

On reaching Nilnag, Praznaw entered the compound keeping Dina outside with the said load of fruits till he could obtain his old teachers consent to accept the respectful present. There he saw his old teacher and his wife sitting on the verandah of a small single story hut engaged in pleasantries.

Praznaw walked around and took his first step to enter without seeking permission according to the British custom and style of etiquette. No sooner did he so than he was harshly shouted out.

Praznaw was stunned and remained immovable for a few moments.

Regaining his wits, Praznaw retraced his steps and came out crest fallen still ruminating over what had happened. On his way out in the compound, he encountered the Principal Father and son occupying two humble huts, one behind the other on the slope of the plateau overlooking the lake and pine forest across on the opposite side-as said above. The principal affectionately reciprocated Praznaw's shaky greetings and asked how he happened to pass that way.

"Hello my boy! How do you do? What brings you here this way?"

Praznaw in an uncertain low tone, replied.

"Sir, How do you do? My cousin and I had planned a trek this way from our land, a few miles away. I had thought of paying my respects to my old teacher, Mr. Eric and make, a regardful present of sweet apples and walnuts to him.. ... "

C.E. Tyndale Biscoe was happy to know this and jokingly asked.

"Where is your cousin?"

Praznaw, "Sir, he is waiting outside with the load of the said present."

"And, is there nothing for me?" retorted the Principal jokingly.

Already perturbed and puzzled, Praznaw stood mum like a statue. He fumbled and failed to respond to the kind query saying goodbye quite curtly he departed out still emanating over the surprisingly wild behavior of liberal teacher.

"Has the seclusion in the wilderness of the wild disturbed his mind? Has the darkness of the forest darkened his vision? Or has he lost his power of recognition or has loneliness given rise to suspicious mind in him?"

Praznaw's return back continued lurking in his mind and haunting him on the return trek.

What a clash of psyches and conflicting attitudes!

22.0 SHOCK TREATMENT

"When the cat is away mice play," so goes the saying.

"Mother Kamla being away resting in her private room in the second storey of the house, I faced no inhibitions or obstructions on her account nor have I any phobia of her presence on the scene of reciprocal visits, of my maternal kith and kin and my friends. My meticulously thought out plan has succeeded well. I feel free as a lark to dance, play or sing in merriment in the joyous company of my guests, like Words worth's Myriads of Daffodils that strewed the greens and tossed their heads while dancing in breeze.

Feeling free as a lark I soar high singing and singing while soaring like shalley's sky lark surcharged with music."

One day jubilant entertainments are held in the new drawing room. After sometime, the grandma, Kamla begins to feel embarrassed in the new situation. She often grins within herself, "I have now begun to become redundant, a non-entity in my own home," she starts thinking.

She adjusts herself by often retiring to her bed-cum-sitting room, in the second storey of her house. This, she gradually and imperceptibly changes into her permanent habitat. She keeps herself engaged in knitting and sewing clothes. She is provided with her own sanitary arrangements. Also, she comes down to the ground floor at meals and tea time only. (four times a day). Such a voluntary confinement accelerates her ageing process and she becomes weaker and weaker to move about.

As an obedient and affectionate daughter-in-law, Koshaliya serves her (Kamla) well and feeds her as usual now in her sitting-cum-bed room.

And, as time passes by, relationships widen due to fresh marriages of their kith and kin, Koshaliya remains busier ever after, at least for a couple of years or two. She finds herself over exhausted at the end of each day.

"I thought, I was as clever as I was brisk and nimble in the prime of my youth. But alas! Sooner than later, grim thoughts of waning strength and slackening of movement began seeping into my mind. I begin to realize that my self imposed plan had 'turned counter productive. My additional load of work in serving food and drink to Kamlaji in her room entailed many up and down trips. I have been feeling exhausted and panting for breath in the middle of the stiff staircase while carrying food and drink and bringing down metallic utensils for a wash besides having to make many more rounds in her service. My calf muscles seem to be laboured and beleaguered many hues and my knees seemed to refuse bending to take an upward step. So many times, I have had to take help of side-walls to struggle going up and reaching Kamlaji.

Cursed be the moment the plan was put into practice not only to the deprivation of the vigor of my youth but also to the deterioration of Kamala's comparatively the then better health".

Koshaliya often ponders over the plan and sometimes is heard cursing herself aloud.

Despite the comforts provided to her, Kamlaji also feels disgruntled for an isolated life she's forced into having to the detriment of her health.

Koshaliya's husband is sensitive enough to watch the sluggish movements and listlessness due to his wife's overwork. One day he says to her, "My darling, dear Koshaliya, I have been watching you for long now. Something seems to have sucked out all your youthful vigor, agility and smartness. Where is the pinkish glow on your ruddy cheeks gone? It seems to have been bleached yielding place to ghastly parlor. I can't bear this plight of yours.

Aren't you feeling weak, anemic and famished? Do you need any thing to keep yourself trim again? Pray tell me what is ailing you. I will do everything to keep you up and doing, happy and healthy.

Koshaliya was so far hesitant to reveal her woes to Keshew and feeling shy to speak the plain truth, relates what is wrong with her in fumbling words, thus:

"Dear Swamiji, you see how exhausted I feel at the end of each day. You too remain too busy in your official and horticultural work of the Tehsildar," says Koshaliya to her husband, Keshew.

"True my darling, true. But what is the remedy?" he asks.

"May I make a suggestion? Let us purchase some earthen plates, cups and tumblers from a potter's mill." Koshaliya suggests.

"What then? How will it solve the problem of our fatigue, my dear ?" replies Keshew.

"I as well as you know our mother, Kamlaji is a saint. She has grown more saintly than before, now. If we use these earthen plates to serve her food and tea, she can easily throw them out of the window after use each time. This will relieve me of more than half of my labor in her service. Won't it?" says Koshaliya.

"Certainly darling. Certainly. You begin the process from tomorrow and I will convince my mother about," replies Keshew.

The process begins. Their two sons and daughter, Krishen, Kewal and Kunti by now are school going, teenaged, Intelligent children. On observing this for several days, the three children hold a secret conference together. They argue, "We have grown up under the close supervision and care of our dear parents. We have picked up the art of domestic chores, gardening, work at our lawns and even reading and writing by imitating them. Now they have provided us another opportunity to imitate them. But fashions are fast changing. Suppose there are no potter's mills by the time our parents, dear Keshew ji and dearer Koshaliya Ji get old, what can we do ? Wherefrom can we procure earthen plates, cups and tumblers for them to eat and drink from?"

They hit upon a plan during the same conference.

"Let us fix turns and stealthily collect the plates, cups and the tumblers thrown out after every meal and tea time by our grand mother," suggests Krishna.

"Yes, let us begin from our eldest brother. Let him collect these articles, wash them clean and store them in the attic," suggest Kewal and Kunti.

The plan is meticulously executed. The plates, cups and tumblers get elegantly piled and exhibited on one side of the attic for a couple of years or so.

By chance, Keshew steps into the attic after sometime. He is surprised to see piles of artistically placed plates etc. there. On going out, he says to himself.

"After all my wife is farsighted and has received perfect training at my parents' hands. She must be preparing for the *sacred thread ceremony* of our children", he thinks. So, after coming down, he behaves as if he hasn't observed anything extra-ordinary in the attic.

Time passes by. Once Koshaliya runs after a cat with a long rod in hand. The cat had drunk and spilled her bucketful of milk. She follows the cat to the attic. As soon as her eyes catch sight of the well exhibited earthenware pottery, she frets and fumes. "How is it that my dear Keshewji has bought the Pottery for the *sacred thread ceremony*" without even consulting me in the matter? Doesn't he know that fashions are changing fast? And, this pottery may soon get substituted by stainless steel utensils, plates and cups etc?" She says to herself. Despite her simmering anger, she controls herself and keeps mum.

Once, on a happy occasion, tables for tea are laid in the lawns of the house shaded by umbrellas.

In the middle of the merry gossip, din and chatter at that party, Koshaliya, losing her control, suddenly bursts out aloud. "Who, the devil, has dared to store piles over piles of earthenware plates, cups and tumblers in the attic?"

She repeats the same, in fumbling voice several times.

The gay participating guests and others are stunned. All eyes turn towards Koshaliya. There is a hush of silence. Keshew is dumb founded. The children tremble and sink in their seats. The guests look puzzled at this sudden outburst.

The trembling children mutter. "Mummy, Daddy We.... We.....We." They try to speak but can't face their stunned parents.

One of the guests says, "Yes, dear Krishna, Kewal and Kunti tell me what you have to say, please tell me what you want to say".

The children, turning their backs towards their parents say, "Dear auntyji, you know we have learnt everything even reading and writing by obediently imitating Papa and Mummy all through our life time. You also know that fashions are changing fast. Who knows, when our Papa and mummy grow old, there may not exist any potter's mills? then"? "Yes dear children, all this is true. But how does that matter to you?" asks she.

"Pappa and Mummy have been feeding our grand ma in earthen plates and pottery for years now, Grand Mother throws these, each time, out of the window after use we collected them washed and stored them safely in the attic. After all, wherefrom else could we get them when our Mummy and daddy grew old? Haven't we done the right thing anutiji? They replied candidly.

Hush. Hush Hush .Hush .h... h... h... "was the reflexive response, in whispers, from all mouths: Keshew and Koshaliya were dumb founded sweating and sunken in self contempt and deep contemplation.

23.0 GRANDMA'S SHIVRATRI

In their forties, Man Mohan and Mohini, husband and wife, belong to the upper middle class of society. They live a comfortable life with all the modern amenities that such a family can afford to possess. They have to support a large family comprising widowed mother, brothers, sisters and four children. The mother is a strict follower of religious functions, rituals and traditions.

The prize winning harvest season of mowing plentiful field's of food crops and picking fruits of different tastes from bowl-like bented branches and twig of trees in horticulture gardens has given a boost to mobile hawkers and fruit shop exhibiting fruits of differing fragrance and variegated hues, some red, some yellow and juicy, some even green and sweet. Crowds of prospective consumers briskly hustle through the busy markets. The manually moved *Raidas* fan out and make brisk business in towns.

The poplar trees rise to the skies to receive more heat and light. They turn golden yellow from below upwards with green crested tops, The chinars are ablaze as their leaves turn red. Shrawan purnima and Lord Krishna's birthday are performed with religious fervor followed by dark fortnight of annual shardas of dead and diwali. The drizzle of a few withering leaves turns to a regular rainfall of red and brownish profusion of falling foliage.

The spectacle is superbly scenic. Nature is at its very best for many naturalists, artists and poets. The dry autumn air becomes denser and colder day by day. The fields are denuded of their verdure and golden crops and gardens shorn of not only tasty pears and ruddy umbro apples but also their apparel of beautiful green leaves.

Kartik is over and yields place to Manjihore, the first month of winter. The atmosphere begins to become colder and foggy. The earth is covered with dazzling white crystals of frost. Tiny little snow-flakes, begins floating about in the air, heralding the pre-heavy winter showfall "Be prepared" bugle. Woollen clothes replace the cottons of summer, Pherons, long robes and Kangries ascend the seasonal throne of winter. The exuberance of larger snow-flakes forming thick layers of snowy carpets on the surface of the' earth catches the eyes as supreme beauty to be enjoyed.

Ushers in the mid-winter month of Poh, the season of children's thistle, adventures of snow-fighting rolling and raising show pillars, carving snow-men, skating on slippery ice-pools and puddles and so on and so forth. At dusk time little children often sit comfortably on window sills watching flocks of crows flying by overhead, They address them in songs thus

Cav Bata covo, Khetserie Kavov

Yapaere yeto

Doona Ditto, Tsotta Khetto

"O, ye brother crow, come this way,

Drop a walnut and eat a bread."

More often than not they hear mother's calls from inside, "come children come. Hot beans and sheer-chain are ready. Come in and share these with us all.

Poh in Kashmir is a month of feasts and festivals especially for Kashmiri Pandits which in reality are symbolic incentives of the need of good diet and proper nourishment to withstand the severity of the biting cold of winter. As the revered seasoned mistress of the house grandma is invariably the chief organizer of such functions especially "Shivratri", the most important religious function of Kashmiri Pandits.

As an expert in ancient lore, grandma often sits at ease and tells her large family how in the remote past rich people from the plains flock into Kashmir to escape the blazing heat of the summers in their habitats outside. The locals had to escape to the jungles and spend their summers roaming in mountain sides. The stories included the' descriptions of saints, and sages, Rishis and Yakshas as well as inroads and raids of Bhombas, Khukhas, Kazaks and so on.

She would often repeat mythological stories and historic anecdotes tracing the origins and sustained development of religious rites and rituals, festivals and religious functions including the outstanding position Shiv Ratri holds as the most important religious festival of Kashmiri Pandits. Snowfall, she tells them during Krishna Pakhsh (dark fortnight) of the month of Phagun especially the 13th day is a good omen for us. To bring out the importance of snowfall on Shiv Ratri, she generally quotes historical anecdote thus:

"Once upon a time an Afgan Governor of the valley compelled our community to perform Shiv Ratri in the mid-summer month of 'Har' instead of the concluding winter month of Phagun. They did so.

Lo and behold! There was a heavy snowfall that month resulting in the whole-sale destruction of growing crops causing famine, starvation and death.

The ruthless governor was unnerved by the impinging impact of slighting slogans against him by one and all everywhere.

Wuch Toun Ye Jabba Jandha

Harus Ti Karun as Wundah !

(Look at this Jabba Jandha

even the hot month of' Har' has turned into icy winter)

The jubilation of the family knows no bounds at the abundance of snowflakes that fall from the cloudy skies. The children sing in chorus for its continuous fall till the auspicious occasion of holy Shiv Ratri thus:

"Sheena Peto Peto

Mama Yeto Yeto

Heyruth tam !"

Fall, O Ye, snowflakes fall

come, O, m-uncle, come to stay

Till Shiv Ratri

The months of Poh and Magh pass into oblivion with all their concomitant, fun and frolic frost-bites and Kangri patches and burns on naked legs.

Ushers in, the dawn of Shiv Ratri fortnight on the first day of Phagun Krishna Paksh. Normal rites and rituals are performed as per the usual schedule from the first to the twelfth day.

The thirteenth day sunrise begins with ablutions, bathing and cleansings, kitchen arrangements and pujas. The actual puja begins at 3PM or 4PM and is completed by eight or nine in the evening. Much more work has to be done before dinner time.

Feeling exhausted by the day long stress and strain of incessant hard-work, grandma retires for rest in her bedroom during the interval. No sooner does she slip into her bed than she is found caught in deep slumber snoring aloud. But her roaring snores are drowned in the din and noise of her son and grand children who too find themselves engaged in playing different games cowries in the meanwhile.

Kitchen work being over, dinner chadhars are spread and dinnertime announced. The hungry members in their zest for flavour, rush to pounce upon their plates as a flock of starving birds in a freezing winter crowd round handfuls of grains to peck as many grains on they on they ern in quick in succession. Demands and counter demands for different dishes by different members continue browng the "Ghoor-r---" roars of snoring nostrils emanating from the nose of slumbering grandma.

Dinner's devoured up, the ladies too now join in cowrie playing. The din of merriment, protests and counter protests as well as argumentations become louder.

Pangs of hunger in the pit of grandma's stomach become more acute and painful. Her sleep gets disturbed. She wakes up and moves out to the lobby to ascertain if dinner time has come. Entering the lobby, she's surprised to find her son, his wife, children, grand children and all engaged in after dinner cowrie playing at leisure. She smells the rat with disgust and sits silent, sad and sullen at her normal place of honor as the usual head of the family, brooding all by herself.

The game is over. It's time to go to bed. Goories are set aside. Members of the family start moving towards their respective bedrooms. The last outgoing member at the rear casts a backward glance into the lobby. He is surprised and pained to notice his grandma sitting sad in an isolated corner wearing a pale, wrathful and wrinkled face watching the movements of her off-spring who had callously ignored her presence altogether. Moved with pity, the grandchild, trembling with self-remorse, cannot help yelling and weeping, with tears gushing down his cheeks.

"Ah ma! Mummy, Daddy, brothers and sisters. Ah me! Fie on us all that our helpless and famished grandmother has been ignored at dinner time.

Fie! Fie !"

The cries of shame get contagious and the whole house echoes with the prickly, painful tumult of hue and cry.

Mummy, Daddy and all rush in panic, fall at Grandma's feet weeping apologetically and entreating her to have her dinner.

Sags Grandma, "Dear children and grandchildren. Pray de not weep or feel panicky. Grandma's satisfied when her off-springs have had their fill. My hunger subsides when your hunger is satiated. Don't you get disturbed on that." So saying, the famished grandma heaves a deep sigh and falls down unconscious.

24.0 CONQUERING DEATH

Prakash attends his official duties up to 2 PM and then goes home to have tea. Leaving home, he walks the whole distance of four or five miles up to Gagribal lake. There he participates in weekly aquatics and boating races of different kinds for a couple of hours or so.

Thereafter he walks back home in the evening quite exhausted.

At home, he falters and trembles while undressing himself. The loss of strength is so extreme that he feels as if he was collapsing.

Just at the moment, he knocks at the floor of his bed room with his feeble fist to call his wife who is working in the kitchen just below at the time.

In a faint, almost inaudible voice he says, "My darling, kindly spread the bed on the cot for me to slip into it. I feel, I can't even sit much less to stand. I have lost all strength and am unable to move."

Prakash is helped to slip into his bed.

After a while his son arrives and his children gather around in panic.

In fainter voice almost verging into whisper he says, "Can you call in a doctor, at this late hour? I feel, I am dying."

Visibly a cold shiver grips his son Ram, and family members, shrieks of grief overtakes them. They simply can't locate any doctor whom they could call in at that late hour. With a slight movement of finger-tips, Prakash calls Ram to his bedside, He whispers to him.

"I saw my pet old boy, our roadside neighbour, Dr. Amar Nath Safaya, superintendent of AIIMS, Delhi coming home yesterday. Please call him in. I think he will oblige. Ram rushes in panic and calls him in. Prakash is, thoroughly examined and prescription written. Ram accompanies Dr. Safaya to purchase the prescribed medicine. No fees are accepted by the kind Doctor Sahib.

In the meanwhile Prakash requisitions a hot cup of kalwa (Kashmiri tea) with milk and slips a cup or two. The beverage works and Prakash gains back his strength to the surprise of all.

Ram manages to get the prescribed medicine.

The night passed by in vigorous youthful activity and the usual scribing (writing) in seclusion to meet the demands of educational media of the sub-continent amidst the soothing solace of silence of the moonlit starry night. Prakash delved deep into the depths of contemplation until the pleasant, early morning breeze seemed to rock his cradle to the accompaniment of chirping lullabies of swallows and the sweet symphony of orioles, thrushes and koels which lulled him to sleep?

He found himself alone in his bed room forlorn in an absolutely dreadful atmosphere of silence of the grave surrounded by deserted dwellings of school going children, employees

and businessmen who had already locked their houses and gone away to attend to their respective duties.

His life seemed too slipful of his veins and his pulse rate slowed down. He appeared to be moving gradually towards his collapse. He was utterly perturbed in mind and reeled at the horrible sight of a movie film that seemed to unroll itself quickly before his very eyes. He visualised the frightfully woeful scene in which the dead bodies of the parents of a friend of his were disrespectfully carried down to the ground floor of the house by grief stricken kith and kin. He could not but ponder aloud:

" I feel listless and lifeless. I think I am collapsing. I may die any moment. My death knell has been rung. I am ready to embrace death. But----- my unfortunate wife is alone, working in the kitchen just below. Poor woman what will she do ? May be she -----.

Unwittingly Prakash finds himself moving on all fours like a quadruped. He feels like moving down to the ground floor of the house and there to lie down to breathe his last alongside the expected patch to be plastered with brown earth and spread over with a bed of grass for the purpose of final rites prior to cremation. He crawls down stairs with the help of sidewalls.

The moment he enters the door of the dining room he finds his wife just putting the first morsel of her lunch into her mouth while sitting on the sill of the kitchen door and talking to a lonely lady who happened to have strayed that way.

Prakash was stunned and remained motionless for a moment. A flash of lightning shook his nerves and he burst into thinking:

"Poor lady! She will sling off her plate of food, weep and wail and beat her breast if I lay down and die immediately. She will starve today, tomorrow and days after. May be she --- Let me wait for a while sitting at the stipulated place and pose to be improving and gaining strength."

He moves on quickly and sits there as per his mental plan. He waits there to respond to the invitation extended to him by the angel of death.

Expectantly, he awaits to avail of the first opportunity to greet the angel and enter the realms of the void.

Prakash's pulse begins to become feebler and feebler, moment after moment. He struggles to lie down.

Prakash's wife, Prabha finished eating plate of food and went into the Kitchen to attend to her work. The stray woman took her seat facing inwards. Both continued gossiping at the same time.

This provided an opportunity to Prakash to stretch down himself on the flooring upwards.

His fingers gripped the radial artery to monitor his own failing pulse.

The spurting movement of the artery was very faint. It became fainter and fainter till it stopped quite suddenly Prakash fainted but his right hand moved to his left on his breasts nipple fathoming the heart beat. The all too slow a heart beat too failed to tickle his touch-corpules at his finger tips. Prakash closed his eyes probably fearing the consternation it

would cause by open eyes of a corpse might frighten the mourners especially the children. Prakash lay prostrate in submission. The only vibrations that echoed from the cognitive corners and conative recesses of his brain were the words:

Substitute the High seep of then prayer gon at the end (Om Nama, Shivai, Om Nama, Shivai. Om Nama, Shivai) (Shivai Nama Om, Shivai Nama Om, Shivai Nama Om) (Nama Shivai, Jai shiv jai Sakti)

The spurting of heart apparently ceased. The feeble up and down movement of his ribs revealed to him that he was on the point of exhaling his last breath of life like the concluding flicker of a fully consumed candle.

Prakash felt rocketed up into the dark skies and down. In the meanwhile a flash of sparks like lightning passed through his mind, revealing to him the writing on the wall:

"No thoroughfare,

Tress passers will be prosecuted."

Obviously the god of death *Mahakal* was crude enough to reject his plea and refuse him entry into his private domain. Somehow in his unconscious and sub-conscious state Prakash found himself placed in a sitting posture. Instantly he struggled to move at a snail's pace on all fours like a fully famished reptile as if moving to the altar of death and crawled upstairs with the support of sidewalls. The process was punctuated by step by step rest to stabilize his gasping breath till he enters his bedroom. There he is pushed by some super-natural power.

Prakash seems to have slipped into his sick bed.

25.0 PRICKLY THISTLE

Soon after dedicated teaching work and physical exercises, Prakash retires to his room to relax for a while? Soon he finds himself glued to pen and paper. For he never wastes his time in idleness in his youthful days but always busies himself in extra official work, physical activity or writing work with dedicated devotion as scribing has become a passion with him. Tired after half days work one day, he prefers to relax in his retiring room but the reflexes of writing finds him deep in contemplation.

Just at the same moment enters an accountant, an old student of his, accompanied by a robust young chap of fourteen or fifteen years age.

"Master ji, Namaskar, excuse me for the interruption," says the accountant.

In response, Prakash looks up and replies, "Namaskar, accountant sahib Namaskar. It's alright. Please take your seat. What makes you to come and do me the rare honor of a visit for the first time?"

"Thank you sir, This boy is my nephew. His matric examination in theory ended. He needs your expert guidance for practical work. Would it be possible for you to oblige, busy at work as you are?"

"Don't you worry. Don't worry. I'll do all I can to guide him." replies Prakash.

"Thank you so much, sir. Thank you. I'll tell you his tale sometime after wards. Namaskar". Saying this, the two visitors leave.

Long after, the accountant pays a second visit to him. Exchanging usual greetings the two sit together for a while and engage in a cordial chat.

In the middle of the discussion, Prakash interrupts and asks, "Accountant Sahib, what was the tale you wanted to tell me about your nephew, the other day?"

The accountant narrates the tale thus:

"My sister was in labor pain when she came to ours at the time of his expected birth. She stayed with us for several days and behaved as if the time of her delivery had not arrived.

But one day at mid-night she felt restless and cried in labor pain. Her painful screams penetrated our bedrooms and the whole family was agog. We rushed to her room and were alert and agile to nurse and help relieve her pain. She delivered. But alas! The newborn neither cried nor displayed any sign of life. This was sister's first delivery.

Thinking that she had polluted her bed with excretion, she stood up quickly but suddenly fell down unconscious, luckily not on the new born.

An atmosphere of gloom and panic enveloped the attendants. Breast-beating, weeping, and wailing followed. Chaos resulted in helter-skelter movements and groping in the dark. In such a panicky atmosphere, no body knew what to do.

The clock ticked off time. Hours rolled by. It was early dawn. The birds chirped. One of the attendants slipped away and called in a nurse.

Slowly, steadily and cautiously, the nurse started the needful cleansing work. It took her an hour or so to complete the process. It was now time for her to begin nursing and trying to restore my sister's consciousness, which took her another couple of hours or so.

Subsequently, the nurse diverted her attention to the newborn which was dumped as a dead mass of flesh in a nearby basin. She held it in her hands, shook it, held it by the legs suspended it and shook it again. She tried her best to bring it to life.

Nothing materialized. There was no response, no sign of life. But the undeterred nurse * persisted. She pondered over the problem. She asked for a garlic or an onion bulb. The demand was met as the market was nearby. The expert nurse crushed the bulb near the nostrils of the dead mass of flesh.

Lo and behold, sneeze after sneeze thundered out as the vapors that diffused irritated the olfactory nerve endings inside. The baby began to breathe and cry to the joyous surprise of all.

The robust tall boy is that baby whom you guided for the ensuing practical examination. He is my nephew."

Palour began to tinge Prakash's ruddy cheek imperceptibly all along the narration of the gripping tale. His face fell and wrinkles of grief appeared on his broad forehead. He looked blank and aghast as if prickly thistle bullets were shot at him in dozens.

Apprehending something wrong had been said and fearing he had hurt Prakash's feelings somehow, the accountant, in a low faltering but sympathetic voice asked him, "What has happened, Pandit sahib? You have turned pale and wear a grief stricken look? Why are you silent? Have I injured your feelings in any way?"

Prakash heaves a deep, cold sigh and tears roll down his cheeks. He bursts into subdued sobs and says, "No dear accountant sahib, you have not injured my feelings in any way. You have simply opened my eyes to our unbaked knowledge and inexperience, sadly enough after the event and that the heinous crime that has been committed in my budding youth. It was early dawn. My life-partner had felt the need of going to latrine half-an-hour earlier than usual, but contrary to her expectations it proved to be the call of a different nature. She rushed out, lay down and delivered.

The cat was out of the bag, concealed secret came to light. But alas! the fruit of labor was mum and lifeless. It revealed no discernable traces of living.

The birds chirped outside and the eldest, experienced sister-in-law, came rushing into the room to see what all this chagrin was all about. Every effort was made to check-up the newborn for signs of life. The consensus of all those, who had arrived there by now declared it dead.

Wrapped in a sheet of cloth, I carried it to the cremation ground under the guide nee of an elderly uncle. There I dipped it in the nearby stream for a pre-burial wash. A brisk effervescence profuse of air bubbles followed, hissing out from underneath. A lot of these

bubbles were seen sticking to its chest and head after bringing it out. These remained there for a few seconds. The cue remained un-understood. Hence ignored.

Ah me! The baby was buried in a small grave!!!

THIS IS LIFE. FACE IT WITH COURAGE,

KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM AND FORTITUDE

* *Foot Note:* An object lesson for parents, prospective parents, Nurses and Nurse trainees etc.