

Tales of the Hereafter

– Some of It Actually Happened –



– Gurdial Singh "Aarif" –

Edited by
Sukhpreet Bhatia

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EDITOR'S NOTE

These are tales I grew up on. We used to sleep on the open terrace of our house and every night my sleep was preceded by one such tale which my late father Prof. Gurdial Singh Aarif narrated to me and my sister for many years. These were an inherent part of his lived experience which spanned an antipodean duration from a time when he was born in a small village called Ballaggan in Pakistan and only one person in the whole village could boast of owning a bicycle and potatoes were the only vegetable they had heard of to a time when he had put in more than four decades of teaching, built a house in Chandigarh and had learnt the use of a computer himself.

He was a natural story-teller and his fertile imagination mesmerized me as a child, much like Haroun in Rushdie's 'The Sea of Stories' and I too wondered where the stories came from. He taught English all his life and was familiar with nearly eight languages including French and German, but found expression in Punjabi and Urdu close to his heart and roots. Composing Ghazals was his passion and couplets could be found composed on Electricity bills, Invitation cards and newspaper leaflets around our house and he loved to share them with me immediately, helping me understand the basics of composition to some extent and also creating in me an unflinching love of the form.

During his lifetime he published more than twenty books comprising anthologies of Ghazals and Nazams, Collections of Essays and Short stories in Urdu and Punjabi, some of which were published by the Sahitya Akademi. He was awarded the 'G. Gurmukh Singh Musafir Award' for Urdu poetry and the 'Sahir Ludhianvi' and 'Daag Dehvi' awards for Punjabi ghazals. He was on the National Panel of Translators of the Central Government and the Ambedkar Foundation and translated dozens of volumes of books. In his last years, he had undertaken the uphill task of translating the well-known English book 'Fifteen Poets' that contains poetry by great English poets into Urdu poetry. He could complete only six. Such was his penchant for creative expression, that even when he was hospitalized with his cardiac problem before his death and my sister and I were sitting next to his hospital bed, he was dictating poetry to us which we jotted down on his ECG covers. He surely had a premonition about his death because in spite of my dissuading him, he called his last poetry collection 'Shayad Makta Hove' (Maybe this is the Last Couplet)

It has been nearly eight years since I lost him but he lives on through me. These stories have already been published in Punjabi in an anthology titled 'Parde de Picche' by the Sahitya Akademi, Chandigarh. He had started compiling these stories in English but could not finish the process. I have edited them and taken many liberties with them. Papa, I hope I have your permission to do that.

With the grace of the Almighty, this is my tribute to the man who 'made' me, in every possible connotation of the word.

Sukhpreet Bhatia

I Yaa Allah

The gloom of the evening was spreading like a blanket of smoke enveloping everything. Except for the men on guard duty at a distance of about 100 yards, all the Singhs had gathered on a small flat ground outside a grove. When the message from the commander reached, eight of the Singhs, two carriers and six watchmen, had gone to fetch water from a stream flowing at a distance of about half a koh through the forest. The remaining about forty sikhs were seated there. Today a very serious problem was the subject of their discussion. For them it was a sort of *Sarbat Khalsa*. The stars were lavishing their light in the pitch dark but it was difficult to identify any face, though the participants were exchanging comments. Intermittently, the clang of the movement of some sword or spear could be heard. A torch, prepared by tying some rags at the end of a pole was burning at some distance but its tenebrous light was lending more mysteriousness than visibility. God knows whether this torch had been lighted to keep the moths and mosquitoes away from the assembly or to direct the watchmen.

At length, a Singh stood bolt upright, raised the slogan of victory and addressed the assembly. Those who were indulging in whispers became tight-lipped. This was Jathedar Kikkar Singh, their unanimously elected leader. He was a six feet tall young man, sure-shot, an agile warrior and an expert horse-rider. He could hold the reins of a galloping horse between his teeth and simultaneously wield two swords with his hands. The Jathedar started his speech, "You, Singhs of the Guru, "Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki fateh. You know that, today, our community kitchen is unprovided. We only had what we doled out last evening, a handful of parched grams to every Singh. That today I could not arrange even water to quench your thirst, I am outrageously conscious."

A voice was heard in the darkness as saying "Jathedarji, it was God's will; you are not at all to blame for it.

The Jathedar continued to speak, "We don't have even grain for the horses, but these creatures of the Almighty manage to live on blades of grass. Now we have only two alternatives available with us. Either we starve within the siege or we seize some rations by raiding Nawwab's stores. In this second line of action, some Singhs may have to lay down their lives."

"But, Jathedarji, won't it be better that we break the siege of the Mughals and return home. At least, we shall die among our kith and kin", a voice was heard out of the darkness. Identifying the speaker by his voice, the jathedar retorted, "Ujaggar Singh ji, we had left behind our kith and kin there and then when we set foot on this path. Now we will live or die here only. Individually many brethren have suggested to me to raid the ration store of the Nawwab, but I want to take this decision in the congregation. Besides I want to see the people who volunteer to execute the raid."

These words from the lips of the Jathedar led to an uproar in which only one utterance was distinct "I shall go". All the forty Singhs seemed to echo the same sentiment. At length this decision was left to the Jathedar and he selected four Singhs to accompany him on the raid. Four other Singhs were assigned the duty to remain on horse-backs, hidden in the forest near Samana and keep watch on the safety of the raiders.

At this time these Singhs were stationed amidst the forest at a distance of ten kohs from Samana. The Nawab of Samana was a righteous person. Had he so desired, he could have attacked the Singhs, but he had no bloodlust. He thought that starvation would compel the Sikhs to accept subjugation. Thus, in obedience to the orders of the Delhi Government he had deployed his troops around the forest. On the other hand, the Sikhs also were intent on emancipation. Earlier, the people of the neighbouring villages had been surreptitiously sending eatables to them. But now even those

people were left with nothing but foodgrains for their families. The Singhs did not take anything from them by force.

The next morning, Jathedar Kikkar Singh and his four companions rose, a bit earlier than usual and after finishing their routine meditation etc. set out in the dark to raid the ration store of the Nawab. The Jathedar thought that the time of changing the guard in the morning would be suitable for the raid. But the spies of the Nawab had already fore-warned him that the Sikhs, had run out of the rations and could invade anytime. The Nawab had alerted the watchmen and concealed a band of armed soldiers in the same building.

Jathedar Kikkar Singh and his companions forged ahead towards the ration store, while raising slogans of victory. The guards let the Sikhs enter and the other detachment from behind besieged them. Finding themselves surrounded, the Singhs drew their swords and fell upon the enemies. In the skirmish, many of the Nawab's soldiers were wounded and two of the Sikhs, also received injuries. Seeing reinforcement for their foes arriving, the Jathedar commanded his companions to break the siege and make for the forest. Jathedar himself and three of his associates managed to break the siege, but the horse of one of his companions Deedar Singh, was badly lacerated and fell down. He himself, too, failed to disentangle himself. Seeing him apprehended, the Jathedar ordered his other three mates to flee and himself turned his horse to go back and save Deedar Singh. He succeeded in seating him on his horse, but in the melee he himself fell down. Deedar Singh was able to free the horse from the siege and rather unwillingly made good his escape to the forest, but the Jathedar was captured by the Mughal soldiers.

By chance, on that day an influential official of the Delhi Government was on a visit to Samana. He ordered that the recalcitrant Jathedar be put to the sword and immediately after passing

the orders he left for Delhi. The Nawab had to carry out his wishes and call for Jalaluddin, the executioner, even though he did not wish to.

The executioner also did not want to come, because many years ago he had given up this work. Now he offered namaz five times a day and had become a follower of the mystic saint Hazrat Nooruddin. But he could not disobey the Nawab. In fact, Jalaluddin was the famous executioner of Samana, one of whose ancestors had, about a hundred years ago, martyred Guru Tegh Bahadur, submitting to Aurangzeb's command. He had heard from his father that this ancestor of theirs had not been able to sleep for many days after the execution and had made a will that none of his descendants would ever work as an executioner and shed the blood of any innocent being.

Reluctantly, Jalaluddin sharpened his battleaxe on the grindstone and presented himself in the Nawab's court. The Nawab was seated on his throne placed on a platform and was smoking his hubble-bubble, while some people of the town, desiring to see the fun had gathered around. In the meanwhile three of the Nawab's soldiers brought Kikkar Singh there. His hands were tied behind. At some distance from the Nawab's throne was lying the heavy trunk of a tree, on which the neck of Kikkar Singh was to be chopped off. Kikkar Singh was articulating lines from the holy scripture and there was no trace of fear on his face. Some courtier ordered the unleashing of Kikkar Singh's hands and he was asked to place his head on the trunk. Kikkar Singh said at a loud pitch "Thy Will Be Sweet", and placed his head on the wooden stump.

Jalaluddin advanced with his battleaxe in his hand. As he raised the weapon to hack Kikkar Singh's neck, some people turned their faces aside. But the next moment they got the surprise of their life. The battle-axe fell from Jalaluddin's hand and he whispered something into Kikkar Singh's ear, whereupon the latter pierced through the crowd and was off to the jungle like a shot. By the time the soldiers were free from wonder and able to pursue Kikkar Singh, he had gone more

than a hundred yards away. Then the armed soldiers chased him, but two of his companions on their horses had been watching all the activity from behind the trees. One of the riders seated Kikkar Singh on his horse and the three bolted to the forest.

Kikkar Singh made good his escape, but Jalaluddin was in hot waters. The soldiers arrested Jalaluddin and subjected him to inquiry and investigation. They wanted to know what he had whispered to Kikkar Singh. He admitted to having suggested to him to run away.

Then he swore in the name of God that when he had raised his battleaxe to remove Kikkar Singh's head, he had seen in his face a glimpse of his guide saint Hazrat Noouddin. "I felt as if I were beheading my teacher. That is why the battleaxe fell from my hand", he stated. But the officials of the Nawab were not prepared to believe him. They recommended to the Nawab that instead of Kikkar Singh Jalaluddin should be put to death.

The Nawab was in a strange predicament. He could not possibly believe that Jalaluddin had sold himself to the Sikhs and yet he was responsible for Kikkar Singh's fleeing away. The officials were constantly poisoning the Nawab's ears. At length, after a lot of deliberation he came to the conclusion that Jalaluddin deserved capital punishment even though he was proclaiming his innocence vehemently.

All the spectators were awaiting the Nawab's orders. But when he was about to pronounce his verdict, he could utter only "Yaa Allah" and fell down from his throne. All the courtiers were bewildered to see the plight of the Nawab. The soldiers hastily lifted and laid him on the throne. His turban was dusted and put beside. He was made to drink water and some water was sprinkled on his eyes. When he fully came to his senses, the Nawab said, "Initially I saw such a bright light that my eyes were bedazzled. Then I heard a voice saying "Save yourself from this sin". Thereafter

I felt as if I had been pushed down by somebody." Hearing this from the Nawab's lips, they released Jalaluddin.

Next day, early in the morning, the watchmen of the Singhs saw in the twilight that at some distance some horsemen had hastily unloaded something and sped away. The watchmen informed the Jathedar, who after dawn sent some men to investigate. They found a few sacks of foodgrains.

II Pride of Place

Shekhar was a devout son. He was the only son of his parents and earnestly believed that the offspring were always beholden to their parents. The ancient Indian saying that 'a father cannot attain salvation without having a son' seemed to him very meaningful. Unlike most modern sons, his duty extended far beyond his lighting the pyre in the last rites of his father, and he took it as his obligation to look after his parents in every way.

Shekhar's wife Sangeeta, too, was an impeccable daughter-in-law. Her own parents had passed away when she was yet a child. Her uncle and aunt, who had brought her up and arranged her marriage, were very caring and kind, yet she had missed her parents. After marriage, on meeting her in-laws, she had tasted what real parental affection was. She earnestly wished to soak herself in their love and to serve her new parents whole-heartedly.

But sadly, she did not get to serve her mother-in-law for long, as she left this world within a few months of her son's marriage. In fact, both Shekhar and Sangeeta felt the pangs of an unfulfilled wish that they could not be with her. However, Sangeeta's father-in-law Gian Chand gave them a fuller satisfaction of the desire to care. He lived for full twenty years after his son's marriage. Sangeeta prepared food for him with a special interest and he consumed it with satiation. After having become the centre of Sangeeta's attentions he had forgotten his late wife. Sangeeta took utmost care of his food, drink, rest and medicines and Shekhar considered it to be his foremost duty to attend to his father's well-being. With unswerving religiousness he daily got up early in the morning with his father, himself prepared tea for him and went out for a walk with him. During the walk, too, in deference to his father's old age he moved at a very slow step. Gian Chand felt proud of the pampering adulation of his daughter-in-law and son and this gratified his ego. Egocentricity was an important part of his nature. He never tired of praising his son and daughter-

in-law among his friends and neighbours, and felt beside himself at the regards received from them. At home, too, his conduct was like that of a king. At the dining table he occupied a chair reserved for him, and Shekhar offered him every dish before taking it himself. Gian Chand did shower blessings on his son and daughter-in-law, but he considered their obedience to be his right. He never realised that few people are fortunate enough to get such progeny.

Time moved on and Gian Chand's age advanced to augur his death. Shekhar especially arranged to fetch a walking-stick for him from Shimla, but even now his virtual support was Shekhar himself. Telephone numbers and addresses of many doctors besides those of heart and chest specialists were written in bold letters and placed near the telephone. After every three months he was taken for a complete medical check-up. Shekhar asked him every morning if he had slept soundly the previous night or if he was suffering from constipation or restlessness. When Gian Chand went to the toilet to ease himself, Shekhar would sit outside and wait. But despite so much of concern Gian Chand's health deteriorated day by day. At length a time came when he lost appetite for varied dishes prepared by Sangeeta and was unable even to go for a stroll. The neighbours thought that he had been crazed through overindulgence by his daughter-in-law and son. But the neighbours' comments affected neither the devotion of Shekhar and Sangeeta, nor the temperament of Gian Chand.

At last, on a doctor's suggestion, Gian Chand had to be admitted to a hospital. Shekhar got a loan from his provident fund on the pretext of getting his house repaired and renovated and got leave for a month sanctioned. Sangeeta daily prepared food and took it to the hospital. Rather, hospital became the new home for both the husband and the wife, because all their spare time began to be spent at the hospital, either inside the ward or outside it. However there appeared no change in Gian Chand's narcissistic attitude or his health. One day Sangeeta reached the hospital

with the food slightly late and Gian Chand was offended. He cheered up only when she said smilingly that she had not found a rickshaw on time.

After a few days, at the hospital itself Gian Chand's end came and he breathed his last leaving his son and daughter-in-law in tears. The twain knew and the people from the neighbourhood made them understand that death is inevitable and its time is fixed but they were inconsolable. For them it was an irreparable loss. When the last rites of Gian Chand's death were over, Shekhar got a large-sized photo of his father made and purchased a decorative plastic garland for it. Sangeeta placed this garlanded photograph in the middle of other family photographs on the mantelpiece in the drawing-room, and a few days passed in this manner. But their children, who both were deeply attached to their grandfather, came out sobbing whenever they went into the drawing room and saw Gian Chand's photograph. Though Shekhar and Sangeeta, themselves too, had been very fond of Gian Chand, Sangeeta did not like that the children should be affected in that manner and constantly reminded of that loss. She, therefore, in about a month after Gian Chand's death removed the garlanded photograph from the drawing room to the worship-room. When Shekhar inquired she told him the true reason.

Every morning, when Shekhar went to the meditation-room he paid obeisance to his father's picture also and felt that, to be the proper place for it. But if Gian Chand were asked, he would not approve of this change of place. When his photo adorned the drawing-room, every visitor took note of it. But now he was imprisoned in a secluded corner of the meditation-room, where his son and daughter-in-law did bow before his picture, but no other person ever cast a glance at it. As such, this change was a blow to his ego and his soul was disturbed even in the world of spirits. He had not expected his dutiful son and virtuous daughter-in-law to confine his

photograph to the obscurity of a small room. Even if it was in the form of a photograph, to be the focus of everyone's attention was his persistent desire.

One night Sangeeta was startled out of sleep with the sound of something that had fallen on the floor of the drawing room with a thud. Recovering her senses fully, she went to the drawing room and saw that her son Pappu's photograph had fallen from the mantelpiece. Luckily the glass of the frame had not been shattered. Sangeeta attributed it to a gust of fast wind that might have entered the room through a nearby window. But to her utter amazement, atmosphere outside was calm and there was not a whiff of wind. She conjectured that the photo had been dislodged by some mouse or lizard and went to sleep again. The next night, she heard an abstruse sound of footsteps, got up in a comatose state and went to the drawing room. The sound had scared her but on seeing Tyson, their Alsatian, growling and accompanying her she gathered her courage a little, though avoided waking Shekhar up. On reaching the drawing room, she saw an incandescent figure, leaving the room through a closed door and disappearing. Sangeeta's sleep deserted her completely at this sight. Yet she could not say with certainty whether it was a delusion or a reality.

From the next night onwards it became a routine with Sangeeta. Every day at midnight the sound of footfall would start her out of sleep but as she, led by the dog, approached the drawing room, the translucent apparition, would recede. Sangeeta was amazed and horrified but she could not unravel the mystery. At last she resolved that she would keep awake, and sitting in the kitchen she would watch the drawing-room. She wanted to see the image while arriving rather than while making an exit to be able to recognise it. One night she resolutely sat in the kitchen at eleven without telling Shekhar and waited impatiently for the figure to arrive. Exactly at 11.30 p.m. the image entered the room. It was not concrete like living men, but from its gait she at once identified that it was the image of her father-in-law, Gian Chand. Keeping her apprehension under control,

Sangeeta watched in speechless bewilderment as the spectre of Gian Chand scanned all the photographs on the mantelpiece, shook its hands in exasperation and vamoosed.

Thereafter sleep totally eluded Sangeeta. She had come to know that the spirit visiting them every night was that of her father-in-law, but she wanted to know why it was disgruntled. She cudged her brains but could not recall any transgression on her part or on that of her husband, which could have led to the disquietude of her father-in-law's spirit. Without revealing the real motive to Shekhar she made an offering at the temple and prayed for peace of her father-in-law's soul. She had a havan performed at home and distributed eatables and garments among the poor. Yet Gian Chand's phantom regularly came to the room at half-past eleven every night, examined the photographs and returned disappointed. Sangeeta lost her sleep and appetite Surprisingly. Shekhar sleeping on the contiguous cot neither heard the sound of any steps, nor was his sleep ever interrupted. Sangeeta concluded that either Gian Chand had greater expectations from her as compared to Shekhar or he specifically blamed her for removing his photograph from the mantelpiece.

Eventually, one day Sangeeta narrated to Shekhar her experience of many past nights. She also talked of her conjecture that Gian Chand's soul was distressed because of the shifting of his photograph from the drawing room. Shekhar initially found the tale incredible but was later convinced that the change of the place of the photograph might be the reason for the fretfulness of Gian Chand's soul. After mutual consultations, Shekhar and Sangeeta moved the photo from the meditation-room and replaced it among other family photographs. That night Gian Chand's phantom came and spent a little more time looking at the photographs and then returned. Thereafter, for a week both Sangeeta and Shekhar kept awake and sat in the kitchen upto 12.30 p.m. every night waiting for Gian Chand's apparition but it never came back.

III The Last Will and Testament

Girja Shankar wanted to make a will. His wife expired four years earlier. Both his daughters were married and were happy in their homes. He had made a joint-nomination in favour of both the daughters in respect of his bank deposits and other investments and was thus totally free of any worry on that account. But he was deeply attached with the house that he had got very fondly built. In spite of his religious and spiritual leanings, this house was his most cherished material possession in the world. Being familiar with the scriptures, he was cognizant that this world is transient, that all worldly relationships end with one's death and that the sense of ownership of property terminates with one's last breath. But he had not been able to overcome his tenderness for the house. He keenly wished that his name should continue to remain related to the house even after his death. He wanted to make a will that either of his two sons-in-law should reimburse half the price of the house to the other and should, himself with his family reside there. He thought that the market price of the house should be about fifty lakh rupees. Both his sons-in-law had prosperous businesses and either could easily afford to pay the other 25 lakh rupees. As such, it did not matter much to Girja Shankar as to which one of his daughters occupied his house. His only anxiety was that either his elder or his younger daughter, along with her family should live there and his connection with it should remain intact.

But unfortunately, Girja Shankar succumbed to his injuries in an accident and died rather suddenly and unexpectedly, as it usually happens. Every day he used to go out for a walk in the morning gloom. On the death's day, while crossing a roundabout he turned rather abruptly and a three-wheeler coming from behind hit him so hard that he breathed his last on the spot. A case was filed against the three-wheeler driver but just because Girja Shankar himself was at fault, his

daughters did not pursue the case and the driver was acquitted. This did not give Girja Shankar any chance to make a will.

After the last rites, the question of the distribution of property was natural. There was no difficulty with the investments and deposits. The money was withdrawn by submitting a copy of the death certificate and divided equally between the two sisters. Thereafter when it came to the house, it happened exactly as Girja Shankar had apprehended i.e. the two sons-in-law had an altercation over the ownership of the house. The two daughters wanted to preserve the memory of their revered father and either of them could live in the house along with her family and could, off and on, be visited by her sister. For this, either was ready to bear even a loss of four or five lakh rupees, but their husbands had a different attitude. Both the brothers-in-law were shrewd businessmen and each vied with the other to own this prized property in the hub of the city. Girja Shankar had always treated his sons-in-law as his sons and had never pointed out any misdemeanour on their part. Even now it was difficult to decide who out of the two was in the wrong, or possibly both were wrong. Both of them swore by the memory of Girja Shankar, but perhaps some self-interest was embedded in their subconscious mind. Otherwise love always needs sacrifice and true lovers are ever-ready to renounce and give.

Both the sons-in-law of Girja Shankar were keen to occupy the house, but they also desired that the house should be priced at the lowest, so that the occupier might be required to pay less as half of the price. Evidently, there was no likelihood of a compromise being arrived at. The younger son-in-law, who had always been very respectful towards the elder one, was now beginning to assert himself. At last they came down to exchange of heated words which was not expected. Their wives were feeling embarrassed, but were speechless out of deference for their husbands. In the

end when the two sons-in-law could not agree upon the price of the house, it was decided that it should be disposed of in the open market and whatever price it fetched should be divided equally.

Advertisements for the sale of the house were inserted in the newspapers, but the intending purchasers did not offer an adequate price agreeable to the two sons-in-law. The two agreed on at least not accepting the proffered price. Then they started deliberating on the local property dealers. One of the property dealers, Gian Chand had been a friend of Girja Shankar and was not even keen on taking his commission on the deal. He considered Girja Shankar's sons-in-law to be his own, but they did not want to sell the house through him, because he was an acquaintance. They thought of striking the deal through some other property dealer.

First of all, a renowned property dealer named Manohar Singh of Manohar Properties was contacted. In addition to arranging the sale of property, he himself, too, sometimes purchased it and disposed of it on getting a suitable buyer. After inspecting the premises he offered to purchase it for Rs 45 Lakhs. Both the sons-in-law regarded it as an appropriate offer. But in order to enhance the price they thought of further talking it over with him and offered him a cup of tea. He was about to take tea when the cup fell down from his hand, resulting in the breaking of the cup and spilling of tea on his garments. Manohar Singh felt that somebody had pushed him and struck the cup. Thoroughly rattled, he left the place without transacting the bargain, and could not sleep the whole night. It was beyond his comprehension as to who and why had pushed him.

The next day, another property dealer Brahm Parkash was requested to help in selling the house. He said, "I don't purchase the property myself. I do not have that kind of money. However, let me note down the area and other details of the house, I shall advertise in the newspapers and show the house to the potential purchasers. If it is sold through me, I shall charge one percent of the sale price as my commission. There are comparatively fewer customers for such big houses,

but I shall do my utmost to sell it." Girja Shankar's elder daughter started giving the details. When the property dealer had noted down the area of the house and the timber used, and lifted his head to enquire about the stone slabs fixed on the floor, he went through a curious experience. Opposite Brahm Parkash's seat there was a mirror in which he noticed the reflection of a lighted candle. At this time of the day when the room received adequate sunlight, nobody could have lit a candle for its reflection to be visible in the mirror. Totally flabbergasted, he looked to his right and left, but there was no candle in sight. Without showing his awe or saying anything to anybody he resumed noting down the details of the house. But in the meanwhile he felt that a light had left the mirror and entered his eyes, blinding his vision. He said to the members of Girja Shankar's family, "Something has got into my eye! I will come again tomorrow", and left the place. But he was sure that this experience was not natural or merely physical, though he could not account for it. The next day he remained confounded and never visited the house again,

After waiting for him for a couple of days they invited a third property dealer Dev Dutt Goyal, who examined the house fully and then offered Rupees 48 lakh as the price. The sons-in-law approved of this price and readily consented to the sale. All the details were worked out and the deal was struck. Goyal wanted a period of 15 days to pay the entire amount. It was decided that initially he would make an advance payment of fifty thousand rupees followed by the full price in fifteen days and the house would then be vacated and handed over. Putting down all these conditions, they prepared a receipt for fifty thousand rupees. But when Goyal was ascending up the staircase to have a complete look at the first floor, he slipped on a step and tripped hitting his head on the stair and fell unconscious. Water was sprinkled on his face and he came to, but nobody knew how he had fallen. On closer examination, oil was found to be spilt on that step. Before leaving, he only said, "I am not feeling well. I shall come some other time." Girja Shankar's

successors were somewhat dismayed. The elder son-in-law remarked, "Perhaps the time is not yet ripe to sell this house. Everyday something unpleasant and unusual happens". That very evening, a meeting of the Property Dealer Association was to be held. When the three dealers who had visited Girja Shankar's house exchanged notes about the house and their freakish experiences there, a rumour broke out in the locality that it was a haunted house.

Two days later, property dealer Gian Chand was sleeping on the first floor of his house. The door of the room was not bolted from inside. At about midnight he was awakened to hear the sound of somebody's steps over the staircase. He gave a call to his wife, "Amro, Is it you?" But there was no response. He got up and put on the light. But there was nobody in the room and the door downstairs was locked. To go to sleep again he put off the light and was yet rolling in bed when he saw a sketchy figure etching on the facing wall of his room and then taking the form of Girja Shankar. Gian Chand was horrified but kept lying in his bed. The image on the concrete addressed him and said, "Gian Chand, don't be afraid. It is I- Girja Shankar. My sons-in-law are bent upon disposing of my house. I can't say anything to my sons-in-law, but request you to intervene and stop this sale. Let either of them pay half the price of the house to the other and start residing there, so that my memory is perpetuated." After saying these words, the sketch disappeared from the room. That very night Girja Shankar appeared in the dream of his younger daughter and suggested that she should persuade her husband not to press his claim on the house and to accept half of its price. The younger daughter thought the dream to be the result of her having contemplated this problem for the whole day. Yet she was able to prevail upon her husband to withdraw in favour of his senior brother-in-law.

One of these days Gian Chand invited both daughters and sons-in-law of Girja Shankar to tea. During the tea he said to them. "I cannot be Girja Shankar, yet I should be delighted to be of

any service to you." Casually, the elder son-in-law made a mention of the house and the uncanny experiences of the property-dealers. Gian Chand said, "I too, have heard the strange gossip. Though I do not attach much importance to it, yet I think it advisable not to sell the house in the market. Now that the rumours are rife, nobody is going to pay you more than forty or forty two lakh rupees. And then if you sell through some agent, he too, will demand his commission. I think that forty eight lakh rupees offered by the last property-dealer is a reasonable price. Taking that as a hypothetical price you may draw lots to decide the owner who should pay half of this price to his brother-in-law. By the grace of God you both are well-off and neither will find it difficult to pay 24 lakh rupees." Then he recounted the visit of Girja Shankar's spirit. The two did not believe in spirits, but had grown comparatively sober after the spread of tales about the house and the experiences of the property dealers. Both, having accepted the suggestion, the elder one who was favoured by the draw of lots paid 24 lakh rupees to the younger one and occupied the house. Temporarily created bitterness was forgotten. Girja Shankar's name-plate remained at the gate and his spirit never afterwards disturbed anybody's sleep.

IV Concluding Chapter

Janab Jamal Ambalvi was my preceptor and mentor. He was not only a consummate litterateur and poet, but was also matchless in the knowledge of linguistics and prosody. It is through him that I got acquainted with metres and measures. When I presented a ghazal, many a times he put life into the couplet simply by changing a single word. I considered myself to be fortunate in bowing before him in tutelage. Though he had declared me accomplished in my skill and not requiring correction many years ago, yet I frequently went to him only to savour his company. I respected him from the core of my heart and took pride in serving him. Towards the end of his life, when he was under treatment at the PGI in Chandigarh, I often visited him and pressed his feet and spent unforgettable moments with him. His death was an irrevocable loss to the world of poetry and literature and to me. Even now when I am in doubt about the use of some word or phrase I reminisce about him for inspiration.

Once I, along with some students, went on an educational tour to South India and reached Kanyakumari. There, at some distance from the coast, a magnificent temple is built on a rock, as a memorial to Swami Vivekanand. A student Joginder Singh and I went to see the temple. The dual purpose of my trip to the sacred place was to enrich my knowledge of India's geographical treasures and also to pay a tribute of genuine devotion to Swami Vivekanand. A boat took us to the temple, at sunset, one day. When we entered the temple, the gloaming atmosphere there catalysed my spiritual proclivities. While Joginder was busy studying and clicking the style of architecture of the temple, I sat cross-legged. In a few minutes I felt that I had been transported to some other world and in that very state I found Jamal Sahib sitting before me. He had expired about a month earlier and had never since then appeared in my dream. Naturally, his appearance was a pleasant yet anomalous surprise for me as I remembered that he had expired.

Taking hold of my senses I said, "Sir, how have you taken the trouble of coming over here? Kindly command whatever you think me worthy of doing." Jamal Sahib said, "My son, I have especially come to see you. I wanted to see my novel published and lying on the shelves of the book-sellers but my corporal frame did not stand by me. Please do something about that. After considering all my apprentices I have selected you for the job. You know very well that all my offspring are devoid of literary inclination." I assumed that the master had completed the novel before his illness and demise and he was assigning me the responsibility of getting it published. I at once said "Sure, Sir, I shall try my best to get it published." I thought that it was a matter of eight to ten thousand rupees and would be arranged somehow. But he said, "My dear, its publishing has to be attended to later. Before that, it has to be completed. Its last chapter is yet to be written". "But, Sir, how can I conclude the job started by you? I don't consider myself capable of that. Secondly, you know that I am not able to write as my right hand has been useless for the last three years owing to a nerve disorder". On hearing this Jamal Sahib felt slightly offended. He said, "Have you no trust in me? When, once, I have said you shall do it, it has to be you. Write with the left hand. I have written with my left hand all my life." I was scared of my master's temper. I was conscious that I did not have physical or mental capability for this assignment but I said, "Yes, master, on reaching home this is the first job I will do."

Kanyakumari was the last place on our tour schedule. During the return journey I kept pondering over this strange meeting with my master and his unusual command. I could not be sure whether it had actually occurred or was a mere psychological delusion. It could be a fantasy because my mind was always overwhelmed by the beneficence of the master. But I clearly remembered every detail of the meeting with him and every word that he had said. However, I finished the journey in a state of uneasiness and reached home. I had a few days yet, before the

summer vacation would conclude and the college would reopen. The next morning, I visited master's home at Ambala. Recognising me, his son opened the master's room of study and I started looking for the manuscript of his novel. I examined all the papers lying on his table, but there was nothing except the letters from his friends and pupils. Then I rummaged all the drawers of his table, but they, too, contained only blank papers, some old file-covers and some new pens. The book-shelves had some dictionaries, diaries and anthologies of poetry and short stories by Janab Ambalvi and his pupils, but the manuscript of his novel was nowhere to be found. I was somewhat exasperated. Eventually, taking the meeting at Kanyakumari to be a delusion I returned home, but the feeling of not having been able to carry out the master's command, sharply pricked my conscience.

That restive night I could not sleep for some time due to uneasiness. I spent some time in meditation and prayer and went to sleep at last. Then, at about 12.30 a.m. I woke up to see the table-lamp on my study table turned on and some nebulous figure sitting in the chair with its back towards me. As I was rubbing my eyes in disbelief, I heard a voice, "My dear, get up and listen to me." I sat up straight in my bed. Even in that state of drowsiness I could recognize the voice of my venerable master who said, "I know you have been searching for the manuscript of my novel in my room and not finding it, have returned in dismay. Brother, it is lying under the pillow on the cot in that room. Bring it and start the work."

The following day, I again went to Ambala and got the manuscript from under the pillow in the master's room. With the permission of respectable Mataji (his wife) I brought it along. It was essential to read the entire manuscript before writing the last chapter. I finished the study in two days. The story was set in the post-independence struggle background. The hero and the heroine become refugees after the attainment of independence and meet each other in a

rehabilitation camp. They make a pledge to serve the society and promise to make every sacrifice to make India a country of the dreams of Gandhi and Nehru. After a passage of thirty years they meet at the Jalandhar railway station as per their agreement. Naturally they are disillusioned and speechless because corruption, bribery and nepotism are rampant in the country. In the manuscript the story runs up to this stage and had to be completed in the following one or two chapters. Though the most important element of the novel was its setting, yet from the point of view of the characters and incidents the conclusion of the story had to be provided. In my opinion the story could reach its culmination in two ways. Either the hero and heroine should sail with the current of the changed times and should renounce their high ideals following the contemporary role-models. In that case the novel would end as a comedy or a satire. Or the hero and heroine should stick to their values and sacrifice themselves while fighting against corruption and other social and political evils, and the story should end as a tragedy. I chose the second course, as I strongly believe in standing up for and tackling societal issues and these values were close to the late master's heart as well. It took me ten days to write the last portion of the novel and during this time, while the master graced me twice with his appearance, he also expressed satisfaction with the way the story had shaped up.

After completing the novel, I started running about for its publication. The first publisher who was contacted rejected the manuscript despite my master's standing and reputation as a writer. The second one demanded fifteen thousand rupees and the third one agreed to charge twelve thousand rupees and give two hundred copies of the book. He assured that the quality of paper and printing would be up to the mark. It was not easy for me even to arrange twelve thousand rupees. But another pupil of the master pitched in and the novel was finally published. When, after its publication the novel reached the book-sellers, the master came to me for the last time. This time I could not see him. But I did hear his voice and did feel the touch of his hand on my back, before

he went away blessing me. After that he never deigned to visit me. Perhaps he was coming for the fulfilment of his last desire. When he was about to depart for the last time, I dared to ask him, "Sir, how are you faring there? Please tell me something about the life there." He said, "I am quite enjoying myself. My last wish was the publication of my novel and that, too, has been accomplished through your co-operation." Thereafter when he was about to describe the life there, somebody seemed to have dragged him back and he could not utter a single word.

The Master's endowing me with a glimpse of himself or his appearing before me in form of light was astonishing, but the most amazing thing was that while I was writing the last pages of my Master's novel, as he had commanded, for ten days my left hand was working and moving naturally and facilely. Three years earlier my right hand contracted some neurological disability and thereafter I had not been able to write a single word with it. Whenever I felt inspired to write a ghazal or a verse, I memorized it and later on dictated it, With this purpose, in particular, I had taught Urdu to a young man. During this process much was lost and yet much survived, too. But the most extraordinary thing was that my left hand had started working to write the conclusion of the novel. Those days I was writing without any prior practice, as I had never done anything with the left hand. In those days I was writing unhindered but after completing my Master's novel, I could not use my left hand despite all my efforts. Undoubtedly, this capability was an endowment given for a limited period by the master. An English poet Alexander Pope has said in a verse that men, as compared to other animals have vaster knowledge, and the spirits are better informed as compared to homo-sapiens. But I can say, on the basis of my personal experience, that the souls can transmit some of their capabilities to human beings temporarily. However, God alone knows the working of His will. Man is perhaps a mere instrument for the accomplishment of God's will, as I was for that of my Master.

V What's in a Name

As the day dawned the whole village was ablaze with the news that Seth Ram Nath's daughter Kailasho had died. She was hardly eighteen years old and had not been suffering from any disease that could possibly have killed her. But death, as they say, keeps no calendar and can knock at a person's door, all of a sudden, out of the blue. It was reported that early in the morning she, along with her mother, had gone to the temple and on return had stumbled against the outer threshold of the house, fallen and died instantly. There lived in the village another Kailasho, who was the daughter of Labhu, the carpenter, and was this Kailasho's age-mate and friend. She suffered from tuberculosis and had been struggling between life and death for many days. The village is a small unit in the community life of man, where everybody knows everybody and where every piece of news, particularly a bad one, spreads like a wild fire. Obviously, those in the village who heard only the name of the deceased presumed that the daughter of Labhu the carpenter had died. In any case, whichever Kailasho may have died, all the people of the village got ready to join the funeral procession. It is a good practice, in villages that even arch enemies of a person come forward to join such an eventuality.

After the news spread in the village a bullock-cart was made to move through the streets of the village, in which some body put a piece of wood and another person cast a dung cake. All this was taken to the cremation ground. It did not at all mean that Seth Ram Nath was incapable of arranging the cremation of the dead body of his daughter. But it was a custom of the village that every family made a contribution to the final rites of a corpse. In other words it was a symbolic demonstration of the whole village's sharing Seth Ram Nath's grief. The dead body was carried to the cremation ground in a procession comprising practically the whole village. There was no priest in the cremation ground. But the priest of the temple and the granthi of the gurdwara were among

the mourners. All the participants in the funeral procession were lugubriously speechless. They had heart-felt sympathy for Seth Ram Nath, as Kailasho was his only child. In about ten minutes the procession reached the crematorium which was just a narrow flat field inside a grove.

The people assisted Seth Ram Nath's servant in raising the pyre. The Seth himself was sitting nearby on one side in a state of ghoulish morbidity. The dead body was placed on the pyre and before the heavy logs were put on it, both the Seth and his wife came forward for one last glimpse of their dead daughter's face. As the wailing mother lifted the shroud, she was petrified to sense some movement in it. Then a feeble voice was heard, "Lala, where am I?" Instantaneously after this, Kailasho moved a part of the shroud from her upper body and sat upright on the pyre. When she saw pieces of timber reared under her, she leaped down in fear. Many people who had joined the funeral procession took to their heels considering her to be a wraith. Some others took it for a miracle of nature and kept standing. A person said aloud, "Seth ji, congratulations! Kailasho is alive." Seth Ram Nath hastily advanced and happily embraced Kailasho. The Sethani also thanked God profusely and all the villagers started for her home. Those people who had run away in terror returned to join others. The mourning assembly had been changed into a bridal party. Can a person come to life again after being declared dead? The village had witnessed this incredible miracle for the first time. This news spread in the village at an even greater speed and the whole village was astounded.

When Labhu, the carpenter, had heard the news of the demise of Seth Ram Nath's daughter, he had left to join the funeral procession and attend the last rites, not caring for the critical condition of his own daughter. When the Seth's daughter came alive again, he quickly congratulated the Seth and left straight for home. But his son, who was coming towards him, met him half-way, and broke to him the shocking news that their Kailasho had breathed her last. The time of her death was

probably the same as that of the revival of Seth Ram Nath's daughter, Kailasho. The bullock cart was again circulated through the village and the villagers again reached the crematorium. It was a strange trick of fate that another Kailasho was laid on the pyre from which one Kailasho had just risen. Labhu had six children- four daughters and two sons and Kailasho was one of them. It was common in the villages to look upon a daughter as a burden on the family. Kailasho's parents also had a similar attitude towards her. If she had not been seriously ill, her parents would have been anxious about her marriage around that time. The people also said that Kailasho's disease was contagious and the other members of the family could also contract it. As such, although all the rites of mourning were performed over passing away of Kailasho, her death was more or less a relief for Labhu.

On the other hand, there was an atmosphere of glee and merriment at Seth Ram Nath's house. When those friends and relatives of the Seth who had not been able to reach their house, due to suddenness of Kailasho's death, came to know of her new lease of life, they were sending congratulatory messages. For five & six days Kailasho was looked after well. Then when elation and excitement subsided a little, Kailasho tried to recollect her entire experience. Her friends and parents also were curious to know how it all had come about.

One day Seth Ram Nath had closed his shop and was at home. The Sethani and a friend of Kailasho too were sitting beside. Kailasho also was comparatively free from tension caused by her death and revival. Kailasho's friend initiated the subject and said, "Kailasho, now perhaps you can tell us what you went through during those few hours that you remained separated from us". The Sethani continued, "The physician had declared you dead at 8 a.m. and you had called from the pyre at about 1.00 p.m. In this manner you had remained isolated for about five hours. How was that time spent?" Kailasho strained her memory to construct the sequence of events and then said,

“Bebe, the atmosphere was somewhat strange. Time did not exist there. Or perhaps it did not move with the same speed as it does here. I somehow felt that all the events were taking place simultaneously and there was no alignment among them.” The Sethani interrupted to ask, “Still, you must remember something about what happened.” Kailasho replied, “I have a rather hazy memory that initially I got out of this earthy body via the head. Kailasho that came out had very small limbs and size i.e. my body must be about six inches tall and two inches broad, though my sensibility was that of a grown-up girl and not that of a small baby. I had once seen a mirror at an exhibition, which presented a dwarfish reflection of the on-looker. My image was much smaller than even that. After coming out, my body took on the same length and breadth as I have at present. Only, my frame was not concrete like this body. The marvelous thing was that my garments also were shrinking or distending as per the needs of the body. When I looked to my right and left I found myself being invigilated upon by two giant-sized, dark-complexioned and horned beings. They had large moustaches and a dreadful look. They were making me fly along with them though neither my body nor theirs had any wings.”

Seth Ram Nath emerging out of the ocean of his thoughts questioned, "But in what direction were they taking you, upwards, downwards, right or left?" Kailasho reflected a little and then answered," Perhaps there were no directions either at that place. I had this much of consciousness that I was flying with them. But I was not aware in which direction we were moving. In fact in this world our brain and manner of thinking are constrained from the beginning by certain paradigms of education and training. For example we are taught that a circle has a circumference. We cannot imagine a circle that has no circumference or an area that has no boundaries. But there, everything is boundless. I cannot even say with certainty whether that place was in form of a circle or a triangle or any other shape."

Now, gradually, Kailasho was beginning to remember everything. She went on describing, "While going, we had moved through a very narrow and dark passage. But as we flew farther, I was getting more and more oblivious of this world, its society, its relationships and its friendships. All mankind, all creatures and the entire existence seemed remote and similar to me. After a short while, in a state of obfuscation I was escorted to a place where I could see nothing but could hear the sounds. I was made to stand there and I heard two persons conversing in a strange tongue. I could not comprehend their language but I could feel the soothing quality of their voice. I can't even say whether those voices were male or female. Then somebody talked to me in my tongue and asked the names of my village and my district. Then they also questioned me on my name and my father's name. Thereafter I heard a sound as if somebody were turning the leaves of a big book. Subsequently, that voice addressed those horned persons. It rebuked them in the same dulcet tone. They were told that there were two girls named Kailasho in the same village and that they had been told to bring the daughter of Labhu the carpenter, who had completed the count of her allotted breaths. By mistake, they had taken me, the other Kailasho, the daughter of Seth Ram Nath, who was yet to live for many years. They were told that the body of Seth Ram Nath's daughter was about to be burnt. They were instructed to revive this Kailasho at once and bring the other one."

Kailasho further elaborated, "In that world every action is accomplished with the speed of thought. As such, those horned persons made me fly back along with them and all the previous actions took place in the reverse order. That is to say, I was transformed into a diminutive of myself and pushed into the earthy body through the head. Consequently, my five physical senses and worldly consciousness dawned on me. When I had called Lala from the pyre, it was a second birth for me and a new beginning of the consciousness that I was somehow related to Lala. When I opened my eyes on this world for the second time or gained adult consciousness after an interval

of a few hours, that was, perhaps the time of the death of my friend, the other Kailasho, whom those horned persons took away, instead of me. One thing is obvious from this episode that an error is possible even in that eternal world. However, I regret only that I could not see the face of the rectifier of that mistake though I did hear his voice."

VI Inspection

Those days Mrs. Gulati was teaching the Teachers Training Class at the Girls Industrial School. Earlier this class existed at Shimla alone, but the government had started this class at four other schools in the state under the extension plan and her appointment at Ambala had been made as a part of this extension. But at the end of the very first year, the result of her class was hundred percent and the individual performance of her students outdid that of any other student at any other school. Consequently she began regarding herself as an efficient teacher, and the Inspectress publicly told her Principal that she would take Mrs. Gulati with her to the headquarters. During those very days an Assistant Inspectress at the headquarters had retired. In routine this vacancy was to be filled on the recommendation of the Public Service Commission. But to avoid any loss of students' time, the government assigned to her extra duty, besides her teaching work to assist the Inspectress, which included the inspection of some schools as well.

Initially, the Inspectress took her along for the inspection of a local private school and explained to her the entire job. After a few days she decided on a two-day inspection of the Shimla school and got the requisite tour programme sanctioned for the purpose. She was keen to see Shimla, but she had been told also that it had not been possible to inspect that school the previous year as well. At Shimla she was made to stay at the guesthouse attached to the girls' hostel where she enjoyed a sound sleep due to the fatigue of the day. The next morning when she reached the school, all the members of the staff were looking at her in astonishment. She carefully checked her dress and inquisitively looked back at them to know why all the people were staring at her in that manner. Finally, the office clerk who had come there on transfer from Ambala a few weeks earlier said to her, "Madam, you slept well at night, I hope." Replying in the affirmative she asked, "But why are all of you looking at me in such amazement?" Then she informed her that the spirit of the

former principal daily visited the room where she had been made to lodge. Mrs. Gulati had known the former principal Mrs. Malhotra, as she had come to Ambala to conduct the examination the previous year. She had also read in the newspaper the tidings of her death. Accompanied by another teacher, she had gone out for a stroll and entered a tunnel. In the meanwhile, a goods train laden with iron beams had followed them into the tunnel. To save themselves the two women had tried to budge towards the wall of the tunnel. Yet the beams had struck them and they had died.

Mrs. Gulati was obviously offended with the present principal for making her sleep there. But she said nothing and ignored the matter by saying that she did not believe in spirits and shades. But she was constantly pricked by the fact that the present Principal, having known that the place was haunted, had yet deliberately made her stay there. In fact the Principal felt somewhat jealous of her. She was senior to her in service and had expected that she would be given the temporary charge of assisting the Inspectress till the Service Commission selected and recommended a permanent hand. But unfortunately she was only a matriculate and as compared to her Mrs. Gulati was a graduate. The department considered her better-suited for the additional work and issued the orders. But she herself had no hand in that decision. Nor had she made any effort to get orders in her favour. The Principal however, did not believe it and presumed that she had got it done by exerting some pressure and had been, thus, instrumental in meting injustice to her.

That day Mrs. Gulati remained quite occupied in the inspection work. She checked every teacher's teaching work and noted how far she had finished the syllabus. Thereafter she carefully examined the school accounts. Somebody had complained against the Principal that she had misappropriated funds while purchasing material for the school. She examined all the bills and receipts but could not find anything irregular or illegal on scrutinising the cash book and the files. The heavy load of the office work and mental tension had exhausted her a good deal. Yet, she went

for a stroll for two hours after the school time. During those two days she wanted to see the most of Shimla and its surroundings. A few teachers, with whom she had grown familiar, came along for company and guidance. In appearance Shimla and its environments were no different from other hill stations. Still, Shimla had a unique flavor befitting the epithet 'queen of hills'. While walking back, she purchased some wooden play-things for the children and other gifts from the Lakkar Bazar and in the evening, returned to the guest house slightly late and dead tired. That night some teachers requested her to stay with them at home but she insisted on continuing at the guesthouse. She had, firstly, declared that she did not believe in spirits and shades and secondly she considered it against rules to accept personal hospitality of any employee of the school.

After taking dinner at the school guesthouse, she lay in bed, but despite extreme exhaustion she was not able to sleep. More than the fear of the spirit, the attitude of the Principal was making her uneasy. She had not done or said anything that might be construed as against her interest or on the basis of which she should feel offended with her. But she regarded her as her enemy. She was lost in these thoughts and did not know when sleep overwhelmed her.

It must be about 2 O' clock when Mrs. Gulati was awakened by some weird noise. She felt that somebody had violently knocked at the panel of the window of the room and was startled out of sleep. The watchman, however, had later told her in the morning that he had heard no sound. After hearing the sound of knocking, when she opened her eyes she saw a string of smoke entering the room. Gradually the dimly visible smoke took the form of a human figure which advanced towards and stopped near her bed. She too sat upright and it did not take her long to realise that the figure standing near her was that of Mrs, Malhotra. Being a person of deep religious faith and having been acquainted with the background because of the conversation during the day, she was neither surprised nor terrified to see the image of Mrs. Malhotra. The image broke the ice, "Sheela,

last night, too, I had come here, but thinking that the journey must have tired you I did not deem it proper to awaken you. In fact, even after my death I have not been able to terminate my attachment for the school I come here every night, and evading the watchman's notice I take a round of not only this room but the entire school". She wanted to thank her, but could not speak, even though she was free from fear and astonishment. With a gesture of the hand she asked her to sit down.

The shade of Mrs, Malhotra further said, "I hope the school is doing well". Mrs. Gulati nodded to reply in the affirmative, and her face showed signs of gratification. She continued to say," Tonight I have come to see you with a purpose, I want to warn you that Mrs, Khanna, the present principal of the school is not a straight person. When I saw you for the first time, I felt that you were simple and innocent. The inspectress Miss Dubey also trusts her completely. But she does not deserve that. When she talks, every word that she utters is soaked in a disarming smile. Every listener considers her to be compassion and sincerity incarnate. But her sympathy and her smile are not deeper than her lipstick. They are a mere adornment and a part of her style. I could bewilder her by frightening her. But that would entail loss to the institution. Now at least she is attending to the needs of the school and it is functioning normally, I can even tell you about the file that will throw light on her black deeds. But when your report reaches the directorate, she will certainly be caught and that will bring disgrace to the school which I do not want. I just want to caution you that Mrs. Khanna is writing to the department against you and this inspection. Therefore, don't do anything that may be deemed against rules. Also remain careful while conversing in the presence of Shanta and Gobindi the two teachers whom the principal has set after you." Mrs. Gulati wanted to acknowledge her indebtedness to her for giving this information, but before she could do that, the figure disappeared from the room and she went to sleep again.

The next morning she got up completely fresh, without a vestige of fatigue on her. While taking tea she recalled the nocturnal meeting and felt thankful to Mrs. Malhotra in her heart of hearts. During the day she inspected, the games etc. of the students, which she happened to like. The basket-ball team of the school was very good. She selected two teams from the school and organised a friendly match between them. She also inspected the girl guides and their first-aid training. Every wing of the school was functioning admirably, and she wrote an excellent report about the school. She praised the working of Mrs. Khanna despite Mrs. Malhotra's warning. She sent that report to the headquarters and prepared to leave for Ambala. When she reached the railway station to catch the train, she was slightly surprised to see Mrs. Khanna and other members of the staff gathered there to bid her farewell. Mrs. Khanna smilingly presented a bouquet to her and wished her 'a happy journey'. When the train steamed off, all the teachers waved their hands to say good-bye to her. Inwardly she, too, was very happy over this new experience except that she was not able to understand the attitude of Mrs. Khanna in the light of the information supplied by Mrs. Malhotra.

She reached Ambala and got busy in her teaching work. After a few days, her Principal received a letter. On reading the inspection report Miss Dubey had highly appreciated Mrs. Gulati's work and recommended to the government that she should be permanently taken for inspection work, and a copy of her letter had been endorsed to the Principal of Mrs. Gulati's school. She in turn, called and congratulated her. That very day she was sitting in the staff-room and, unwittingly, happened to overhear a conversation between two teachers. As they made a mention of Shimla school, naturally, she was all ears. On listening carefully she learnt that Mrs. Khanna, the Principal of Shimla school had expired and that her dead body had been found on the brink of a road in heavy snowfall. In fact, two days after Mrs. Gulati left Shimla, the city had had a massive

snowfall, resulting in a heavy reduction in the traffic. But not caring for inclement weather, Mrs, Khanna with a parasol in hand had come out of the house. In this weather a careless slip of a foot had perhaps led to her fall and instantaneous death. At a short distance from her dead body was lying the unfolded umbrella. Besides, an envelope from Mrs. Khanna addressed to the Director Industrial Training, Punjab, was also found there.

VII The Voice-over

People referred to Gian Singh as Giani Gian Singh from the very beginning because he talked of spirituality and mysticism. He spent a lot of his time in recitation of Guru Granth Sahib and took resort to it before initiating any urgent deed. Nature had endowed him with a very melodious voice and before leaving for working in the fields every day he sang the holy hymns at the Gurudwara which helped him to memorise a lot of the Gurus' verses.

The personal life of Giani Gian Singh was far from enviable but by nature, he was a contented sort of a person. He was satisfied with every situation and was ever grateful to God. His wife Mrs. Balwant Kaur respected him greatly and loved him deeply. After their marriage, when Balwant was about to give birth to their first baby, there was some problem during the delivery and she had to be taken to the city hospital. The doctors told Giani Gian Singh that she could not conceive again due to a tumour in her stomach. The doctors operated upon her and extracted the tumour but she could never be pregnant after that. Gian Singh and Balwant Kaur never complained against that and began to bring up their lovely daughter Tript Kaur with love and fondness. Besides formal education, Gian Singh himself taught her music. She learnt how to play upon harmonium and tabla and began to participate in the Gurudwara programmes at a very tender age. There was no other expert of classical music in the village. But the priest of the Gurudwara, who was also a musician imparted to her instruction in classical music. He was of the view that Tript's voice modulation and understanding of music were better than those of her father. Giani Gian Singh was proud of his daughter and hoped that one day she would bring credit to him.

But fate had other designs. Tript suffered from common fever for three or four days that proved fatal. For Gian Singh and Balwant Kaur, Tript's death was an unbearable loss. The entire village was filled with deep commiseration for them, but the people's sympathy was no consolation

for their illimitable grief. Gian Singh was heart-broken and shattered. To forget his anguish or to sublimate it, he started spending his time in the company of the priest at the Gurudwara. The priest himself was in pain at Tript's untimely demise because for him also she was a promising pupil. But death is an inevitable reality. He then, bestowed all his knowledge of music on Gian Singh who became an adept musician in a few months. The priest himself felt that Gian Singh could easily replace him at the village Gurudwara. Gian Singh assigned the job of looking after his land, its sowing and harvesting, to his brothers, and he, along with the priest, found a tabla player and formed a band of musicians. The priest turned out to be a sincere friend. It was on his suggestion that Gian Singh took recourse to the holy verses and now he was happy that Gian Singh was able to divert his attention in this direction. The priest recognised him to be the leader of the group, although after paying the tabla-player, they divided the entire income equally between them. Their fame spread far and wide and in about five to six years they began to be invited by the organizers of religious celebrations and congregations such as Gurburabs, bhogs and Akhand Paths not only in the nearby villages but also to the big cities in the country.

It was now approximately ten years since Tript died. Still, Giani Gian Singh had not been able to forget her. On some pretext or the other he daily remembered her. She had expired at the age of ten. Now the beard of Giani Gian Singh had turned completely grey. He looked a venerable senior and his group was counted among the topmost Raagis of the Panjab. Once, the administrative committee of a well-known Gurudwara at Bombay invited his group to the celebration of a gurburab. They had been booked for a week. Therefore they reached there a few days ahead of the actual anniversary and sang the holy hymns in the morning as well as the evening daily. One day, after the singing session, Gian Singh saw a girl who very much resembled Tript. But he did not attach more importance to it than to a mere coincidence of life and ignored it.

Nevertheless, the thought of the possibility that after her death, Tript might have been reborn somewhere lingered in his mind.

On the evening of the actual anniversary, Gian Singh's group had finished singing hymns as per the scheduled and published programme. They had been given a room for their stay on the second floor of the Gurudwara. They were relaxing there after dinner. The programme of the gurpurab was continuing and was audible in their room. The compere of the programme announced that a small girl named Daljit Kaur would sing a hymn. He already knew her, perhaps, because he said, "This young girl is the recipient of limitless grace of God. Not only has Nature bestowed upon her a mellifluous voice and flexibility of throat, but also at a tender age of ten years she has grasped and can sing hymns in classical ragas. On hearing about the girl's age and her expertise in music, Gian Singh could not quell his curiosity. And when the girl started singing, even the voice seemed to him somewhat familiar. He could not help recalling that at this age, Tript too, had a similar melodiousness in her voice and in this very way she could captivate the audience by singing a hymn. Gian Singh tied his turban, came down and sat near the stage in the hall. Seeing the girl, Gian Singh was greatly amazed. Her looks and style of singing the hymn were just like those of Tript. Just like Tript, she had the mark of a boil on the forehead and like her again she sang with closed eyes. Pleased with the hymn sung by her many people rewarded her with money. Gian Singh gave her in prize whatever he could muster up in his pockets. On the conclusion of the hymn, he especially came to the dais and praised the girl. He told the congregation that even the trained musicians fumbled while performing in the classical raga, so deftly used by the young girl. But she had performed flawlessly.

When Daljit was free from the programme, Gian Singh affectionately stroked her head and showered blessings on her. Also, he noted down her residential address and met her parents. The

people usually presumed that the veteran musician's interest in Daljit was due to her euphonious voice and knowledge of music but he had something else on his mind. Gian Singh was now convinced that his daughter Tript had taken her second birth as Daljit. Daljit's parents invited Gian Singh to tea at 11 a.m., the next day, but the latter kept thinking about Tript and Daljit for the whole of the night and could not sleep. The next morning, after the singing of hymns at the gurdwara, Giani Gian Singh left his two companions in the room and himself reached Daljit's home. No sooner did he enter the house, than Daljit embraced him, and said, "I was your daughter Tript in my last incarnation. I had lived with you upto the age of 10 years at village Shergarh of Phagwara district and I remember all the details of my past life. But I could not place you at once, because I have met you in my present life after a lapse of ten years and secondly because then, you were not such a great musician. At that time your beard was not flowing and white as now and you used to tie it by applying hair-fixer. How is Mummy faring? I think I shall recognise her at first sight. Giani Gian Singh corroborated that in Tript's life he used to tie his beard.

Daljit's parents confirmed that earlier also, she used to say that in her last incarnation she was the daughter of a peasant in a village in Phagwara district. "But we ignored her statements as mere childish prattle". Gian Singh enquired about Daljit's date of birth and it was exactly the day when Tript had expired. Then he desired to know about the mark on Daljit's forehead and he was informed by her parents that it was a prenatal mark. Gian Singh remembered that Tript had had an abscess on her forehead in her infancy and it had left a scar behind. With this, Gian Singh as well as Daljit's parents were certain that Daljit in her last incarnation was none else than Tript. Daljit expressed a desire to see the house of her previous life and meet her old Mummy. Gian Singh keenly wished to take his daughter along but it was not possible. He also knew full well that as soon as he went home and told Balwant Kaur about Tript's second incarnation she would like to

see her without the least delay. It was decided that Daljit and her parents would visit Gian Singh at Shergarh within ten days, so that Daljit and her mother from last life could meet each other.

As promised, Daljit and her parents came to Phagwara a week later. To reach the village Shergarh, they had to travel by a local bus. They had come to the Punjab for the first time, and had no idea of this part of the country. But surprisingly and fortunately Daljit remembered everything. She guided her parents and escorted them right upto the house in the village Shergarh. She told them about all those spots, where she used to play in her childhood in her past incarnation. Balwant Kaur and Daljit recognised each other instantly. At first sight of Daljit, Balwant Kaur's dried up maternity flowed uncontrollably. She took her in her arms and began to cry while kissing her on the head and forehead. But in her heart of hearts, this unfortunate mother was greatly pleased that she had been able to meet Tript, even if it was in the latter's second life. The news of Tript's arrival, in form of Daljit, spread in the entire village like a wild fire. Many elderly men and women of the village came to see Tript and she also recognised them. For the villagers the reincarnation of Tript was unbelievable. Daljit enquired about Shanti Madam, the school teacher of her former life and was disappointed to learn that she had been transferred.

In three days Daljit and her parents got ready to return. Giani Gian Singh was scheduled to go somewhere for hymn-singing and Daljit's present father also had not attended to his shop for many days. Balwant Kaur gave many garments and ornaments to her last daughter whom she wanted to retain. She felt, her going away now, to be a relived shock and loss. But Gian Singh explained to her that the human beings, perform in the world, the role assigned to them and that their connection with Tript was confined to her previous life. At length, Gian Singh and Balwant Kaur bade farewell to Daljit in tears. This was, however, obvious that in future Daljit would enjoy

the affection of two mothers and two fathers and that after a few years all will join to make arrangements for her marriage. Also, nobody was left with a doubt that reincarnation is possible.

VIII Well-lit Home

Bhagwan Singh had retired from a prestigious job at Lahore and was getting a respectable pension. Before retirement he had got built a splendid house in Choburji. Both his daughters had been married into well-to-do families and they were happy in their homes. His two sons jointly traded in surgical instruments and had a flourishing business.

When, on the partition of the country, the family came to India, Bhagwan Singh used his influence and got a decent house allotted at Jalandhar in lieu of his house at Lahore. His sons, pre-empting the migration, had earlier hired a shop in Bazaar Sheikhan at Jalandhar and had shifted their business there, even before they moved residence to this side of the country. Now, both of them had two children each, a daughter and a son. Their business was in the ascendant and they had provided all the modern comforts and amenities at home. As Bhagwan Singh grew old, he tended towards religion and spirituality. His time left after meditation and reading scriptures, he spent playing with his grandchildren and sometimes he went to his sons' shop to pass time. Since the previous year, however, he had grown busier, as he had been elected President of the Rotary Club.

But Bhagwan Singh was prone to anxiety. He did not know why he was ill at ease but felt that peace eluded his mind. He started complaining of black-outs and bouts of darkness enveloping his eyes. His caring sons insisted on medical examination. A few blood and neurological tests revealed that everything about his health was in perfect order for his age. Inwardly understanding it to be a sort of spiritual vacuum he became a member of the State Library and went through all the books on religion and spirituality that were available in the English section, there. Thinking that he had selfishly spent all his life for himself and his near and dear ones and filled with philanthropic altruism, he started spending every Saturday at the Home for the Blind. Though the

Presidency of the Rotary Club also was a sort of social outreach activity, his troubled soul also derived gratification out of distributing food items and garments among the poor. He felt momentarily relieved that he had done something practically to alleviate the suffering of people. The solace did not last long, however.

He was a graduate of old times and could read and understand Arabic and Persian as well. He again studied Hazrat Saadi's; Gulistan and skimmed through the poetry of Hafiz Sheerazi, Attaar and other Muslim mystics. He especially went to Aligarh and talked to some experts on the Muslim code of conduct. On Sundays he visited the church and listened to sermons by the priests. Rather, he got permission to participate in the meetings reserved for Christian priests. He had already read the Bible, but now he again studied the Old Testament and the New Testament more carefully. Having lived all his life in Lahore, he was completely ignorant of Hindi and Sanskrit and so he purchased an English translation of the Bhagwat Gita and studied it end to end. If ever he came to know of the visit of some knowledgeable Vedanti at the Rama Krishna Mission, he made it a point to go there and listen to his lecture. On the suggestion of a Sikh saint visiting the local gurdwara, he started reciting Sukhmani Sahib every morning. He had learnt the Gurmukhi script at home only, but he had cultivated a deep faith in the Adi Granth. On numerous occasions, he would get up in the middle of the night, open the Guru Granth Sahib and start reading. But despite all this, he felt an acute lack of equanimity. He stopped going to the shop, and spent most of his time in meditation of the religions texts. His attachment for 'this-worldly' bonds and belongings began to be mitigated. As he onerously tried to comprehend life and its purpose, more questions raised their heads but he got fewer answers. And this lack of clarity added to his discomfort.

At length, the situation came to such a pass that Bhagwan Singh started roving throughout the day and returning home rather late at night. Often, he would spend even the night at some temple or gurdwara. He came home for food at odd hours. His sons and other relatives started thinking that age had debilitated his mental balance. The people in the neighborhood were even suspecting that he was probably possessed by some evil spirit. But when somebody talked to him, his statements about life, death and God were found not only amusing, but amazing also. Nobody could get the upper hand of Bhagwan Singh in logic and argument. The sole reason for his want of placidity was that he wanted to know the real meaning of life and nobody was able to clearly tell him that.

Bhagwan Singh delved deep into the scriptures of all religions and attempted to decipher the philosophy of life and death, creation and annihilation, beginning and eternity and reward and punishment elucidated therein. But he could get light nowhere. Then he started visiting the hermitages of saints and seers. He paid obeisance at the mausoleums of recluses and anchorites and desired illumination from the keepers, but all in vain. He went to many hermits and served them, but in most cases their cells turned out to be professional centres where innocent followers were befooled and money was extorted on unfounded promises. Some saints were sincerely doing the work of propagating religion but instead of acquainting their followers with the true spirit of religion, they were misleading them into a labyrinth of senseless rites. Consequently their devotees were becoming narrow-minded fanatics instead of learning religious righteousness. Very few among those saints were truly chaste beings such as were serving the society by teaching the all-inclusive religious essence. Bhagwan Singh tried to get guidance from many seers and supposed clairvoyants, but nobody could quench his thirst. Neither was he enlightened about the purpose of life, nor did his darkness desert him.

At last, roaming in a state of extreme uneasiness and despondence, Bhagwan Singh reached Haridwar. There he took lodgings in an inn and started looking for some mentor. He was told that there were a number of 'sidhh-babas' there, who had become unconcerned with the world, and having renounced their relatives, home and property, were wandering in search of the Almighty. Some of them had, perhaps, attained a measure of success. Bhagwan Singh started observation instead of discussion. This place also was predominated by commercialism. He came across certain recluses here, who had thoroughly reflected on the worldly life and abandoned it, and were wandering bare-bodied. But they too, were searchers like Bhagwan Singh. They themselves wanted light but were yet to set foot on the right path. At last he met a seemingly informed soul that was, yet like him, roaming in quest. He did not claim any success, but Bhagwan Singh felt that he had found some instructor to guide him on the right path. After many days' pursuit the hermit gave some clue. He told Bhagwan Singh that human character had some frailties overpowering which is the purpose of life. "As we go on controlling those weaknesses, we move nearer and nearer our destination", he said. He further dilated that the only way to attain peace of mind was to get rid of ego and personal desires. On Bhagwan Singh's persistence in his queries he informed him that his preceptor lived near Gangotri. He always remained silent and spent all his time in meditating on God.

Bhagwan Singh felt that this preceptor could show his restive soul, the path to eternal tranquility. He wished to go to Gangotri to see him. He followed the hermit for many days and exchanged views with him. At last, the hermit wrote a letter to his mentor and gave it to Bhagwan Singh. In it, he requested his preceptor that he might properly test Bhagwan Singh and accept him as his pupil, if deemed fit. He also wrote that if possible, he might break his silence and talk to him so that he could get answers to his queries and attain equanimity under his guidance. Bhagwan got

the letter and prepared to leave for Gangotri, He purchased two blankets and some dry fruit for the guru ji and apprehending the site of his cave, he set out. The bus plied upto a place at a distance of about five miles from the cave. From there, Bhagwan Singh engaged a coolie and got his luggage carried to the cave. On seeing the letter from his disciple the guru ji broke his vow of muteness and began to talk to Bhagwan Singh. They kept conversing till late at night Bhagwan Singh told the guruji his problem of lack of peace of mind and the latter advised him to shed his ego and to control his senses. At night, Bhagwan Singh's grandchildren came to him in a dream and in their innocent way requested him to return home.

Early next morning, when Bhagwan Singh went out to defecate, he noticed that the adjoining cave also was occupied by a hermit in meditation. The two hermits had bounded their respective courtyards by placing huge stones in straight lines in front of their caves. On his return, Bhagwan Singh crossed the courtyard of the neighboring hermit. And to his utter surprise, that hermit suddenly left his meditation, came out and began to shower invectives on Bhagwan Singh. He shouted, "You brought blankets and dry fruit for the dissembler in the next cave and how dare you pass through my courtyard?" When he called his neighbour a hypocrite, he also came out of his cave and the two started quarrelling with each other. Bhagwan Singh folded his hands and sent both the hermits into their dark caves. But he himself became numb and dumb. He was, however, astonished to see the surroundings. He sensed a ray of light surrounding him. There was nothing but snow in sight everywhere around. Not even a blade of grass was growing in the soil. Still, these two hermits who had left all relationships behind and were sitting here speechless were cherishing so deep an attachment for this barren land and materialistic possessions.

When Bhagwan Singh came inside the cave the guru ji was offended because he had not stood by him in his dispute with the other hermit. Bhagwan Singh told him that he had not felt any

anger. He also informed him that at Jalandhar also, his kin had called him demented and that the people in the neighbourhood had stated that he was under the influence of some evil spirit. "But hearing all this", he continued, "I had kept cool and quiet". When guru ji heard this he fell at Bhagwan Singh's feet and said, "You are a truly blessed one! This means that you can exercise complete control over yourself. Our knowledge is only theoretical, while you can practically renounce the world. You are indeed fit to be my teacher." The next day, Bhagwan Singh woke up with an invigorated and enlightened soul. He brought a coolie from a village, a mile away in the hills, to carry his luggage. He informed the guruji that he was returning to his home in Jalandhar.

IX To See or Not To See

The jesters in Shakespeare's plays, who are called 'fools', often talk sense. It is critically established about them that their humour is based on truth and incorporates realities of life. Perhaps this can be said about common lunatics also, that their senselessness sometimes contains a lot of sense. Prof. Verma, who was the Head of the Department of Psychology at the Maulana Azad University, was studying the different states of human psyche of the mentally deranged, under a project allotted by the University Grants Commission. He was researching as to what was the basis of the unconsciousness or semi-consciousness of their utterances and actions.

With the purpose of this study he reached Asylum for the Mentally Challenged at Agra, during his Summer Vacation and talked to the director about his motive. With the latter's permission he started observing the conduct of the lunatics staying in the asylum. He happened to see patients of several types of mental ailments, there. Usually, some sort of shock or severe injury had disturbed the balance of their minds as, for instance, the infidelity of the beloved, huge loss in trade, the death of a dear one or a blow to self-respect. But they were in different states or at different stages of mania. Some of them considered it below their dignity even to drape their bodies, but some others got a transient fit of madness some times and otherwise led life like a normal person. When they were under the fit, even the hospital staff was not safe. Prof. K.L. Kapoor, the well-known psychiatrist has justifiably said that when a mad person is under an attack of madness, the mad person himself is not so much in danger as are the people around. You never know when and whom he might hit and hurt. That is why, many with severe disorders, were earlier shackled with iron chains or are put under sedation.

At a few yards from the building of the asylum a canal was flowing, but water in it being shallow it did not pose the danger of anyone drowning in it. Usually, convalescent inmates of the

asylum were sent to bathe there in the charge of a supervisor whom they addressed as Master ji. One day a supervisor had taken six or seven of them for a bath at the canal. While bathing, one of them had a strange brain-wave and suggested to his companions to drown the Master ji. The supervisor on whom all the lunatics pounced at once, did not lose his presence of mind and said, "Don't all of you, together, drown me; let the one who comes to me, first of all, after touching the bank of the canal, drown me." The lunatics rushed to the bank to touch it, while the supervisor caught hold of the staff, of which they were mortally afraid.

The hospital sheltered some such persons also as were not really insane. Their relatives had, due to some dispute over property or some other difference, got a fake certificate issued by some doctor and got them admitted to the asylum. But among them there were some who were truly unhinged, and mentioned their status according to their unfulfilled desires. Someone called himself an Army General, someone a doctor and another regarded himself as Akbar the Great. There was a woman who considered herself the topmost servant of India and the modern Queen of Jhansi. The person who appeared the most amusing to Prof. Verma called himself Khudavand Kareem. It was known about him that he had been a professor of Philosophy at some college. Once, over an argument with a student, his Principal had insulted him publicly and he had lost his mental balance.

Today, Prof. Verma is not among us and he had not been able to complete his project. But he was a close friend of mine and I was on visiting terms with him. I put on his tape recorder and the tape contained his conversation with the lunatics. His most intriguing interview was that with Khudavand Kareem. Khudavand Kareem was, no doubt, demented but his severe fits of madness were rare. When he was not under a fit, he talked very sensibly.

After introducing himself, Prof. Verma said, "Khudavand, I have come to your court to get answers to some questions which have been troubling me. Khudavand Kareem said with full self-confidence and nonchalance, "Yes, ask." Prof. Verma asked him which religion he followed or preferred. Khudavnad Kareem replied that he was a follower of no religion though he regarded every religion with respect Prof. Verma said, "When you say that you regard all religions with respect does it not lead to clash of faiths?" Khudavand replied that he did not like words like clash, violence or confrontation. "When I perceive a danger of confrontation or find the atmosphere to be oppressive I change my faith, just as the political leaders change their party to adapt themselves to the changed wind. However, showing regard to all religions creates the spirit of latitudinarianism rather than confrontation." The next question of Prof. Verma was, "Since the inception of civilization so many seers and prophets have landed on the earth. But none has been able to reform man permanently. What is the reason?" Khudavand replied, "This has been the malaise of all religions that their founders appeared in the mortal form of man and returned after spending their limited time and giving their instructions. But soon after they had departed, the people forgot the spirit of their teachings and got enmeshed in rites and modes of meditation. This is nothing but illusion."

In the meanwhile, as per the voice heard from the tape, Khudavand raised a slogan at a loud pitch, "Bare you come and bare you return. Well done! You are only my incarnation. Tear off the remaining garments as well." Perhaps some barmy one, tearing his clothes had passed from there and the attention of Khudavand had been diverted towards his semi-nude body.

"What is the difference between reality and illusion?" Prof. Verma had been inspired to ask this question perhaps by the word illusion used towards the end of the last answer. Khudavand replied coolly, "Illusion is the deception of our eyes and is transient. Just as there is concrete and

permanent reality behind the shadow, our visible life is a mirage; and I have intentionally created this mirage. As such, you are an illusion and I am reality."

"When we apply attributes like transient and permanent to a thing, it is obvious that we think of its visible existence. Is time a reality or an illusion?" Prof. Verma asked, "For you time is a reality, but in fact it is an illusion. You have no power over time, but it is the seventh dimension of existence, in addition to forward, backward, right, left, upward and downward and is a part of creation. When the athletes participate in a race, the person who makes them run starts the time of the race by pressing the button of the stop-watch. In the same way when I cause the creation, I create time also. I put characteristics like egoism, attachment to the worldly existence and fear of mortality in all the living organisms. In fact these are weaknesses. Man lives his life presuming that his self and environment are real. But he himself as well as his environment is an illusion created by me. Your visible existence is transient whereas attributes like transient do not apply to me. You are the creation of time whereas I am the embodiment of eternity. This is the difference between Kaal and Akaal," Khudavand set out in detail.

"The organisms and persons come to the world and depart after spending their allotted time. Is ordered arrangement of elements alone, their life and does death imply only disintegration of those parts?" asked Prof. Verma. "Arrangement of elements can lead to formation of an image, but the completion of a creature needs the entrance of a soul into it. Similarly when the soul flies out of the body, death takes place. The elements remain in the same ordered arrangement but the organised body is reduced to a corpse," Khudavnad replied. Prof. Verma desired to know how Khudavand was related to the creation or existence. In response, Khudavand said, "I am not only related to the creation, I myself appear in various forms. When I appear in form of finite shapes, I am an illusion, otherwise I am infinite. Perhaps, it is not possible for you to appreciate infinity as

you have always seen things limited by their boundaries. When some people get so elevated spiritually that they become aware of their reality, they raise the slogan of 'I am God.' This slogan may seem strange and inexplicable to the people of the world. But there is nothing contradictory about it for the man who knows himself and knows me. A person who has known me in infinite state will not compare me to any other form which he has seen. My form is like neither that of man nor that of any other being because these organisms are finite while I am infinite. In my infinite condition I am shapeless, bodiless and colourless. At present when we two are in human form and talking together, we are mortal and a part of an illusion that all creation is."

"Then what is the purpose of this creation?" inquired Prof. Verma. Hearing this question Khudavand was somewhat enraged. He said, "Look, now you have started asking questions like professors. This is a question which I shall not be able to answer or I might say that my answer will be beyond your comprehension. Perhaps it is enough for you to know that it is my sweet will and it is my system. I don't want to say anything more than this."

Prof. Verma may have asked more questions. But unfortunately that tape was finished and no other tape has been found. The next day, after observing and examining the psychotic cases, Prof Verma was returning home. En route his car was involved in an accident in which he was seriously injured. The following day he expired in the hospital. From the answers given by Khudavand Kareem, it is difficult to judge whether some mad man was speaking in a fit of lunacy or a sensible philosopher was answering queries or some other power was communicating through him like the masters in Brian Weiss's Many Masters Many Lives. If Prof. Verma had lived longer, he would have analysed the answers of Khudavand Kareem, and would have explained and commented upon his words. But this was not to be. Still, after hearing the tape I was feeling myself

wiser. In the hospital in a state of unconsciousness Prof. Verma said twice "Nothing but illusion."

But Mrs. Verma took it for only delirium of an ailing man.

X A Memorable Conference

Acme Company had been in a crisis for the last three months. The revenue or finance department had reported that the company had been running in a loss and the price of the shares of the company had been constantly falling. The company manufactured refrigerators, coolers, washing machines and television sets and according to the retailers the goods were accumulating in the stores. The people were not taking interest in the articles prepared by them. It is true that there was neck to neck competition among various manufacturing brands but the administration thought that in spite of this hard contest they should be able to grab a share out of the sales. The success or failure of the articles prepared by a firm depends upon the performance of its three separate departments. The first is the production department which purchases the raw material and sees to the minimizing of wastage or pilfering of raw material during production. It also ascertains that the finished products coming out of the factories should be impressive in looks and efficient in performance. The second is the department of finance which fixes the prices of manufactured goods and arranges money by offering the shares or raising a bank loan. It also decides how much is to be spent on advertisement or publicity, how much commission is to be paid to the retailers or wholesalers, how to split a firm into two to save income tax, how to transfer capital from one company to another etc. The third and perhaps the most important department is that of sale or marketing which organizes surveys on booms and slumps of the market, studies demand and consumption and gathers feedback from the customers. They provide such training to the representatives of the company as enables them to persuade and convince the potential customer to purchase the article, while conversing with him. An actor in a film had spoken a pithy and realistic sentence when he said, “What use is the skill of a salesman, who does not deal out a comb to a bald person”.

These three departments should take pains and work loyally not only separately, but also their mutual co-operation is of utmost importance. The tragedy was that Acme Company had failed to pinpoint the department that was weak and responsible for loss and was thus unable to warn the officers of any department. I was, in those days, the senior-most Deputy Manager of Acme Company. Since I held a degree in production engineering, I had been supervising the company's factories. But on the basis of my additional qualification of M.B.A., I had also been given the duty of the selection, promotion etc. of the employees of the company, though when I was selected the senior Deputy Manager of the company, my experience in marketing also was kept in view. At present I was the most influential officer in the company and even the M.D. sought my advice in important matters. When he discussed with me the problems of the company, I honestly spoke out my conscience and said that our marketing department needed some improvement. The person in charge of marketing was not considered very intelligent and I knew that the M.D. would not pass on my words to him.

About a month earlier, I had been offered the post of M.D. by NICE, a rival Company. Besides enhancement of salary, there were better amenities like official accommodation and a chauffeur-driven car. I, therefore, put in my papers. One reason for my leaving the company was, that I knew its inner run-down condition and I did not want that its crisis should affect me too. Nor could I tolerate that it should go insolvent in my presence.

Since it had been in the air that I was leaving the company, Shri Ram Nath in-charge of marketing started taking a keen interest in the affairs of the company. If any individual could gain by my going away, it was Ram Nath because after me he could be the senior most Deputy Manager and could be placed in the next higher scale of pay. Not only I, but the other employees of the company carried no good impression of Ram Nath's capability. Everybody thought that he was in

the Company not on the basis of his ability but recommendation. So much so, that in his absence, he was called the “son-in-law of the company.” But after the knowledge of my resignation he started displaying his ability. With the M.D.'s permission he was going on tours more than necessary. He was meeting the retailers everywhere and was getting the lists of the people who had purchased articles manufactured by Acme. He was meeting them and gathering their impressions. He was inspecting the after-sales-customer-service centres opened in the big cities and tabulating their performance. In short, Ram Nath was anxious at all times to increase the sale of the company's goods. In addition to working hard in the field, he left no stone unturned in flattering the M.D. in the office. Although the M.D. was very clever and well understood the conduct of men like Ram Nath, the latter did not want to miss this chance of promotion.

Ram Nath's extra touring, exhibition of his ability, his new-found interest in the Company's affairs and his sycophancy did not decrease the M.D.'s worry about the financial health of the company. At his own level, he was preoccupied in deliberations for overcoming the financial crisis of the company. He did not want to hide anything from the higher officers and wanted to know everybody's views to tackle the difficulty. He wanted an Open Discussion, since he was one of such officers as have the guts to hear the criticism of their own conduct. At length, he organized at Delhi a conference to which all officers working in three departments not only at the Headquarters but also at the Regional Offices were invited. The usual procedure of the Company's conferences had been that one officer would read a paper and initiate the discussion. The others would ask questions and the paper-reader would give answers. The M.D. maintained the same style in this conference also. The M.D. asked Ram Nath to present a paper on marketing with a view to having a correct assessment of his ability. The papers were to be read on the mode of production and finance as well, but that responsibility had been assigned to other officers. I was to

be relieved from the Company in a few days, but the M.D. got a special invitation sent to me and asked me to make my participation certain and bring forth if I had any constructive suggestion. All other officers as well as I had little hope of Ram Nath. Still, his self-confidence was praiseworthy, since he had collected the requisite information during the past one month.

At last, thirteenth September i.e. the day of the Conference arrived. In spite of the grim scenario, there was a gala atmosphere in the guest-house of the company. At the time of breakfast, the officers hailing from different places were getting the pleasure of meeting one another. But Ram Nath was not in sight anywhere. The M.D. told the delegates that Ram Nath was not feeling well and that his wife had requested him on phone to grant medical leave to him. On getting this information, the officers started making comments. One said, "I already knew that he would let down the management at the eleventh hour." Another remarked, "I knew in advance that he would have nothing to say." Another delegate opined that they were not at all worse off by his not coming. The M.D. was worried about how to pass time, but he was sure that Ram Nath would not have been able to say anything new on marketing. He intentionally delayed the start of the conference by half an hour and persuaded three or four officers to sing a song each at the end. But in the meanwhile Ram Nath made his appearance, much to the M.D.'s relief. He, with a portfolio in hand, made a hasty entry. We thought that having been late he was walking briskly. But he was also looking smarter than before. Anyway the M.D. announced that the conference would commence at the scheduled time, with the paper presentation by Ram Nath.

The conference punctually started with Ram Nath's paper, and he exceeded the time reserved for him by a few minutes. He spoke with admirable self-assurance and the thoughts contained in his paper were new, logical and incontrovertible. All his statements were based on data collected and therefore there was no scope for discounting them. Ram Nath's view was that

there should be 10% decrease in the expenditure incurred on publicity and advertisement and the money thus saved should be utilized to reduce the prices of articles in comparison with other manufacturers. He also suggested that the subsequent advertisements should highlight the fact of reduction in prices. The most original proposal which Ram Nath made was that the company should have some sort of liaison with the salesmen or sales-girls of the retailers and if possible it should have some control over their enrolment and promotion. When Ram Nath concluded his paper, very few questions were asked, but he silenced his critics with his replies. When he descended the stage, he received a hearty ovation in the hall. The performance of Ram Nath who had been considered worthless and a backdoor entrant amazed one and all. I, too, cheered him and even the M.D. was impressed. In the evening, everybody got free and went home. The M.D. and I were local, and late at night the M.D. praised Ram Nath on phone.

In the mornings, I am used to taking a cup of tea and reading the newspaper after returning from a walk. When in the evening I fail to listen to the news on the T.V., the morning paper does spring some surprising national or international news. The paper next morning, however, brought a personal surprise, through tidings that were difficult to believe and were against all earlier experience. As usual, I was sitting in the lawn sipping tea and reading the newspaper. Usually, I see the headlines and then finally skip to the page of obituaries. But this morning, first of all I opened the paper at the business page. There was report on the Conference of the Acme Company and Ram Nath's paper had been admired. I read the entire report with curiosity and delight. But I got the shock of my life when I glanced at the page of obituaries. There appeared a photograph of Ram Nath along with the news piece that Ram Nath, a Deputy Manager in the Acme Company had succumbed to a heart attack at 11.00 a.m. on 13th September, and that his dead body would be carried to the Cremation Ground at 11.00 a.m. on 14th September. The time of Ram Nath's

demise as published in the paper was exactly the time when he had entered the conference hall to read his paper.

On the 14th September the M.D. closed the office and we, all joined his funeral procession. In a few days all the rites pertaining to his death were solemnized. But the people, neither at home nor in the office were able to explain this duplicate of Ram Nath who had attended the Conference, read a paper in his place and earned everyone's applause. Now I am not on the Staff of the Acme Company but till date I have not been able to solve that inscrutable mystery.

XI The Great Jinnee's Vengeance

Unstinting belief in the existence of the spirits, the gnomes, the fairies and the jinns was an inherent part of the faith of the credulous villagers. Those people thought that these creatures were made of fire or light, were more knowledgeable than the human beings and were capable of doing almost anything. Some people opined that these were the unholy spirits of such people as had taken their own lives by committing suicide. This also was believed that, many a times due to pre-mature death, some spirits kept wandering in the atmosphere and by entering the bodies of innocent persons, possessed their hearts and minds. It usually happened when some man or woman crossed the path of these spirits at ungodly hours or indulged in some unholy act like defecation or urination at a haunted place.

When somebody is under the influence of some spirit, or some other soul occupies his mortal frame, his conduct is unusual and he seems to suffer from a disease impossible to diagnose. The villagers had such curious beliefs. Yet, they also knew such professionals as could perceive the presence of such spirits and could rid the affected person from their clutches.

Barkat Maseeh, who belonged to a family of sweepers, was one such victim. From his looks he seemed to be ailing, but nobody had been able to diagnose his malady. His face was pale and he always complained of decrepitude. He did his job of scavenging in the village but he always felt listless. The village physician felt his pulse and administered some purgatives as well. But after a fortnight he

too, expressed his inability to accurately diagnose the disease. His home-mates took him to the hospital at the tehsil headquarters, where he was subjected to a detailed examination. There was inadequacy of blood in his body but his blood pressure was normal. In view of his age, he was underweight and his relatives stated that he was shedding weight by the day. The doctors however, could not pin-point his disorder. At last Barkat Maseeh was discharged with only a direction to take a better diet. The doctors did not acknowledge the influence of the spirits.

Among the villagers also, there were some people, who regarded faith in spirits as a mere superstition and denied their existence. One day there was an argument between those who believed in spirits and those who denied their actuality. Nathu Ram, one such person, who disputed their being, was challenged to pitch a peg on the bank of a stream flowing at a distance of about 200 yards from the village graveyard, at 10 pm. In fact the rural folk were convinced that in the evenings when the village women retreated after washing their linen at the stream, the phantoms and she-demons came to the landing place to play and dance. That person accepted the challenge, went to strike the peg at the bank of the stream and did not return till the morning. His people, at home, had felt worried on account of his not returning, but nobody had dared to go to the stream at night-time. At length, in the morning the people went to see how he had fared and found him dead there. This bolstered the faith of the believers. But in reality he had not been killed by any ghosts. While he was striking the

peg, the end of his muffler had got entangled in it. After finishing the job when he was about to leave, he found himself held up and died of shock and fear.

In the same way the Maulvi of the village mosque did not believe in spirits. He publicly claimed that it was the infidels who were indulging in false propaganda. One day, he was making a similar declaration when, a piece of stone came flying and landed on his bald head causing a stream of blood to ooze out. In a few days, his wound healed, but neither the Maulvi Sahib nor anybody else could tell for certain whether the missile had been hurled by some infidel or caused by some supernatural force.

Observing the deteriorating health of Barkat Maseeh, the villagers suggested to his kin to consult some exorcist. In another village, at about fifteen miles from there, lived a well-known exorcist, Pandit Bhim Sen. He was called and on seeing him, Barkat Maseeh got a fit and started eerily rotating his head in unconsciousness. Pandit Bhim Sen declared that Barkat Maseeh was under the influence of a great jinnee, the king of phantoms, and that he would be required to make a lot of efforts to exorcise him. The wages that he demanded to drive him out, Barkat Maseeh's people could not afford to pay. At last, on the intervention of the villagers and out of pity at Maseeh's condition, Pandit ji reduced his honorarium a little and agreed to rid him of the jinnee.

One room of Barkat Maseeh's house was cleaned and plastered with cow-dung and he was seated on a white sheet. In front of him a quilt was spread and covered with a white sheet and thus space was provided for Pandit Bhim Sen

and his companion. Pandit ji brought a freshly baked new pitcher, which was set on the floor in front of him. A bronze plate was placed upside down on the pitcher and to tinkle it Pandit ji brought out two twigs from his pocket. His accompanist, who was in reality his pupil, had a small drum to play on. Many people of the village — men, women and children had assembled in the room to see the miraculous departure of the Great Jinnee. To the accompaniment of instrumental music, Pandit ji recited these lines:

"O Phantom, what is your food, what is your drink?

From where do you come, and of departing what do you think?

As long as Pandit ji was singing, Barkat Maseeh rotated his head, when the former ceased singing, the latter also became motionless. Pandit ji asked the jinee why he had entered the body of Barkat Maseeh and when and how he would free him, but there was no reply. In this way three days elapsed. At last Pandit ji threatened that if he did not speak up, he would thrash him with a whip. Hearing this threat, the jinee started responding. He intimated that he had been holding his court under a plum tree outside the village and Barkat Maseeh had emptied a basket of excreta there. That is why he had caught hold of him and was determined never to leave him. On the fourth day, in the first session the Panditji started whipping the jinee and he shrieked through Barkat Maseeh. He cried, "Don't beat me, I shall free him". But when the session concluded, Barkat Maseeh fell down half-dead. Before the beginning of the next session, a person arrived from Pandit ji's village with a message that his son had caught high fever.

Pandit ji guessed that some of the jinnee's subordinates had attacked his family. Handing over Barkat Maseeh to his companion, Pandit ji left. He instructed Basanta to continue the sessions without the drum. In the following session the jinnee declared that he would never leave Barkat Maseeh since Pandit Bhim Sen was gone to his village.

In the absence of Panditji, Basanta continued to hold the sessions. During the first session he thrashed Barkat Maseeh mercilessly and by the time the session ended he) was completely weary. He got up from the place and whispered something in Basanta's ear. In the second session Basanta did not bash him. He simply talked and Barkat Maseeh kept responding. The jinnee committed, through the lips of Barkat Maseeh, that he would abandon the body of Barkat Maseeh and depart. The next day during the first session Basanta said to the jinnee, "If you are the king of jinns, bring and display some food from paradise. Thereupon Barkat Maseeh put his right hand inside his shirt and flung out a bunch of something like tiny white pearls. The on-lookers were taken by surprise, but Chowdhary Bhagwan Singh who was present among the spectators took off his shoe and therewith gave two blows each to Basanta and Barkat Maseeh on the head. The two ran about, in the room, for dear life. He told all present what he had thrown out and what looked like tiny white pearls were actually the seeds of unripe papaya. "I have been wondering, since the morning, as to who pilfered the unripe fruit from my garden", he said. The session broke up and the on-lookers left among peals of laughter. The following day Pandit Bhim Sen also returned. When he came to know of the whole episode he harshly

reprimanded Basanta. He informed the people that Basanta had done all this at the instance of the jinnee.

Pandit ji began to flog the jinnee mercilessly and two days of lashing brought him to his knees. "Leave me alone; I shall break with this body," he pleaded. On Pandit ji's asking, the jinnee told him that he would like to eat the cooked meat of a full white cock and one big bowl of cooked rice before leaving. These things were got cooked before the next session and Barkat Maseeh gulped them in everybody's presence. Then Pandit ji ordered the jinnee to go and asked how he would indicate his departure to them. The jinnee replied that he would split the roof or the wall and leave. The Panditji convinced him that cracking of roof or the wall would entail loss to the poor house-owners. The jinnee, then, suggested that the door of the room be bolted from inside and the movement of the bolt would mark his going away. The events took place in the same sequence. They bolted the door from within. As everybody watched, the bolt came down and the jinnee left after giving his departing signal. At that time, Barkat Maseeh fell down unconscious and thereafter he slowly but steadily recuperated.

Barkat Maseeh's people were very grateful to Pandit Bhim Sen. Every pooranmashi they visited Panditji's village and touched his feet. When they went there for the third pooranmashi after Barkat Maseeh's treatment they were told that Pandit ji had expired. On their demanding the details of his death, they were informed, "One day Pandit ji was coming after defecation. The well was at some distance and the water in the channel made out of it, was flowing in the other direction. Pandit ji was going towards that, when enroute somebody attacked

and killed him. His dead body was recovered from the well after some time. His throat bore the finger-marks, but who had taken his life has not been known for certain".

XII A Bizarre Encounter

His name was Dharam Chand, but the village-folk called him Dhamma. For clarity of identity somebody called him Dhamma Kumhar (potter) while some others referred to him as Dhamma ghamiar. For a long time Dhamma wondered whether it is correct to call him Kumhar or ghamiar. He was completely illiterate and knew next to nothing about the formation of words. Eventually, a young man in the village who worked at the Punjab University, Lahore on the formation and evolution of words enlightened him. The young man, whose name was Jaswant Singh told him that the base of this word was the ancient Indian word Kumbhkaar and that he should be called Kumhar and not Ghamiar. Thereafter, if somebody called him Ghamiar, he, at once corrected him. Some people also called him Dhamma, the lamteeng (tall one), because he had developed, at the age of 15 years, a height of 5 feet 11 inches which was somewhat rare.

To get married at a young age was not unusual in this village. Dhamma also got married at an age of fifteen years. His wife was of a short stature. Therefore, many fun-loving young lads of his village used to say, in his absence, that a bell had been tied around the neck of a camel. But Dhamma was very happy because his wife was pretty and aroused envy or jealousy in many a mind in the village. But misfortune or good fortune was that Dhamma became the father of six children- four sons and two daughters—before he was thirty. It was getting very difficult for Dhamma to provide food and clothing for one wife and six children. While he felt pleased to see the lovely countenances of his young ones, their up-bringing was becoming a tough challenge for him.

Dhamma was always anxious to enhance his income: First of all, he tried his luck in his ancestral occupation of pottery, but he failed. Sitting on the wheel if he attended to his feet, the pot above would turn ill-shaped, and if he directed his attention towards the pot, his foot as well as the wheel would move very slowly. Three years earlier, nature too had let him down. After filling the pots in the oven he had hardly set it on fire when it rained torrentially, the oven was filled with water and the pots dissolved into a heap of mud. During the past two or three years, the tendency of the farmers to use steel pots or buckets, instead of earthen pots, to draw water from the wells had reduced the demand for earthen pots and had broken Dhamma's back, resulting in his giving up his ancestral occupation. Then he joined the tutelage of a tailor, but he found it hard to thread the needle. Perhaps his eye-sight was weak. Then, to Dhamma's good fortune, somebody set up a brick-kiln in the village and he started the work of carrying bricks. He already had two donkeys which he used to carry mud. He purchased three more donkeys and started working at the kiln. But his daily earnings were still inadequate. He carried bricks from dawn to dusk but earned hardly enough to provide the essentials to his family.

There was no mechanical means of carriage in the village. Some farmers owned bullock-carts. Whenever they needed bricks they loaded them in their carts and carried them to the building site. But those who did not have their own bullock-carts depended upon the kiln-proprietor to carry the bricks. The potters with their donkeys were engaged for this delivery -on-the-site. The potters got double-sacks prepared for the purpose and a potter with five donkeys like Dhamma could deliver 200 bricks in one round. The heat in the month of June was very severe. While one could work in the morning and the evening, none dared come out of the house at noon. First, one could be stricken by hot wind and secondly the people believed that at noon time goblins and phantoms came out to play and sometimes they crossed one's path. Dhamma did come home for

lunch, but like other people he could not linger for a siesta. The problem of providing the necessaries to his family stared him in the face. He wanted to put in the hardest work and to earn maximum money. Every day he gave some fodder and water to his donkeys at noon and returned to carry bricks from the kiln even in the sweltering afternoon.

One day, it was very hot at noon and Dhamma really wanted to relax at home. His donkeys also needed some rest in all probability. Perhaps that is why they sat near the manger rather listlessly. Still, with a heavy heart Dhamma set out to carry the bricks. He loaded bricks on the donkeys and they started. Now they had become so familiar with the passage that even if Dhamma did not drive them with a staff, they would reach the destination. Dhamma stopped short to quench his thirst at the water pump near the kiln. But after drinking water when he realised that the donkeys had gone away, he started running to catch up with them. The kiln was at some distance from the village and there was a short cut through a graveyard. Following the short-cut when Dhamma reached the graveyard, he felt that some boys were blocking his way. Except a loin-cloth, the bodies of the boys were bare. To look at, they appeared to be grown-up, though they were very short-sized. Every boy's head was close-cropped except a tuft of long hair at the centre. Dhamma was surprised to see them, but he tried to side-step. The next moment, however, he found himself surrounded by them. They all started raining slaps on his face. Dhamma was mortified with fear and folded his hands before the boys. Thereupon one of the boys commanded others to stop beating. He was perhaps their leader. Addressing Dhamma, then, he said, "Do you think this land belongs to your father? This is the time for us to sing and dance. You have interrupted our merry-making which we shall never tolerate. If you again traverse this spot at noon time, we shall kill one of your donkeys or take your own life." Then in an instant, the boys vanished from Dhamma's

view. He reached his destination in a state of semi-consciousness, unloaded the bricks and directly came home.

Reaching home, Dhamma faintly fell on his bed and his donkeys went towards the manger, of their own. His wife, Basanti was surprised and disconcerted to see him returning home at this time and falling on the bed in that manner. When she asked him the reason, he described his entire strange meeting in broken words and her astonishment was increased further. Though spirits and phantoms were a usual topic of the village life, Basanti's reaction was that of surprise. She stroked her husband's brow and found him running high temperature. The news, that Dhamma had been slapped by the goblins, spread in the whole village like a wild fire. The Panches of the village visited Dhamma, but he was lying unconscious. They instructed Basanti to wrap his body well and left. The village physician was called in. He felt Dhamma's pulse and examined his eyes. His diagnosis was, "He has been stricken by hot wind which has caused high temperature. The fever has gone to his head and resulted in delirium. He has not been thrashed by any goblins or gnomes, but it is not unnatural to suffer from such delusions in this state." He gave an ointment to be applied on the forehead and gave a white powdery substance to be dissolved in water and administered to Dhamma when he came to his senses.

In three days, Dhamma came to himself. To bring him to his usual self he had to be served the dissolved powder twice a day. But when he remembered his accidental encounter with the goblins he would start screaming and become delirious temporarily or get a fit of unconsciousness. The village physician visited him every morning but he told Basanti that the stroke of the hot wind had rendered his right ear completely deaf. Dhamma had one day told that a goblin had slapped him hard on the ear and he had felt acute pain. His eyesight which had been already weak was further weakened. The physician had informed that the medicines would not be able to undo the

damage done to his body. He still described Dhamma's malady as dementia caused by hot wind, as he did not believe in the existence of spirits and shades. For the most of the villagers ghosts and gnome were a reality, but nobody had had such an experience. Dhamma's income was suddenly and miserably reduced and all Basanti's savings were consumed by Dhamma's treatment. She wanted to put Dhamma on a special diet for his recuperation and nobody in the village sold milk. Earlier Basanti latched butter-milk from some body's house through one of her children. Now the same people off and on, sent milk for Dhamma. But for the sake of regularity Basanti had to request a farmer to supply half a seer of milk daily. And who could refuse Basanti in that situation?

In about a month Dhamma recovered to his normal self. His donkeys had put on fat by idle consumption of fodder. He too had regained his health and began carrying bricks from the kiln. But working hard, as previously, was now beyond him. He did not like to send his beautiful wife and his youthful eldest daughter to the kiln; otherwise he could have taken some assistance from them in his occupation. Still both Dhamma and Basanti felt that his income was not sufficient to run the household, and she had to change the style of her life. She started the work of washing the linen and cleaning the utensils in some affluent houses of the village. Even after giving birth to six children Basanti had a body which was brawny and attractive, in addition to her fair colour. Dhamma did not approve of her going to people's houses, but there was no other alternative. Wherever Basanti went she took her daughter along to help her. This way the income of the house increased and they were able to make both their ends meet comfortably.

Dhamma was going to the kiln to carry bricks in the mornings and the evenings. His income was much lesser, but he willingly accepted the physician's suggestion that the body should be put to only as much work as it can accomplish comfortably. But the fear of the spirits and the shock of the encounter with the goblins got permanently embedded in his mind. Now he never passed

through the graveyard even though the other route was longer. Also he never brought his donkeys out at noon time so that the rejoicing of the phantoms might never be interrupted.

XIII God-Particle

Ranjit Singh had been working as a Ground Engineer at NASA in America. He was a scientist of old times. In America, people were paid better for their efforts. But more than that Ranjit Singh had the satisfaction that his fondness for research was being gratified. While pursuing his research, he had seen indications and come to believe that Mars or some other planet was surely inhabited by some creatures that were ahead of the Homosapiens of this earth in Science and Technology. But this belief of his was based on guesses and conjectures. He had no proof to justify it.

In due course, Ranjit Singh had retired and had decided to live in India post-retirement. He somehow, did not approve of the American family life and also apprehended that living with his sons, he might not be able to freely pursue his passion for research. And he could continue to get his pension in India as well. On his retirement in America, he purchased a powerful telescope and some other machines and instruments, and came, along with his wife, to his ancestral village, at a distance of ten miles from Bikaner, in India. While migrating to America, he had disposed of his land here, but he still owned a small house in the village. In addition, he purchased a small tract of land near the village and set up his telescope there. He wanted to observe the sky in all seasons and at all times and therefore, except the time spent on meeting the natural needs, he passed every moment behind his telescope or camera. His wife, Jaswant Kaur, frequently complained that he came home for food alone.

One day, Ranjit Singh was sitting behind his telescope. It was winter season and there was yet some time for the evening to descend. The sun seemed to have got wearied of spreading light and warmth through its rays. All of a sudden, Ranjit Singh noticed some object in his telescope, moving towards him. Ranjit Singh took it to be some artificial satellite passing this way. But then, in a few moments, accompanied with thunderous rumbling, he perceived a strangely shaped plane, landing at some distance from him. There was no aerodrome there, nor any other arrangement for the landing or taking-off of planes. Yet the plane had landed very smoothly and peacefully. Seemingly, the occupants of the UFO, two creatures emerging from the flying object, had been subjected to some jerk or jolt. Curiously, a flash of lightning had been seen and a reverberating sound had been heard in the sky before the plane landed. In confusion, Ranjit Singh looked up but the sky was clear. The two creatures which advanced towards Ranjit Singh did not appear to be men, but their arms and legs had some resemblance with human limbs. Their skin had a greenish tinge. They had a single big eye with a huge fold of skin over it for an eyelid, in the centre of the forehead. Their heads were unusually large and the arms and legs were short in comparison. As they advanced scrambling, they looked frightening.

At some distance from Ranjit Singh they pitched something which looked like an LED, with its screen bisected. One part of the screen showed some writing in English which was meant for Ranjit Singh. The other part displayed some words and figures in an unknown language which he could not understand. Ranjit Singh was surprised to see that in one portion of the screen, instructions

were being issued to him. This machine could perhaps read the minds of the people. Ranjit Singh was ordered to uplift his arms and move towards them. Seeing their shape, gait and instruments Ranjit Singh was so deeply flummoxed that he could not think of any way-out except carrying out their commands. The two pilots of the plane pushed him towards it, put a small quantity of a powder into the engine and made the strange object take-off into space.

Ranjit Singh was befuddled. His ideas, born out of his bewilderment, were being transcribed on the screen and his unknown victors were reading them attentively. One of them put a button on his gown to his mouth and said something to somebody which his captive could not understand. After a short and smooth flight, the plane landed. Ranjit Singh felt that the plane had flown at a very great speed and had reached its destination in no time. He was taken out of the flying object. There, everybody looked exactly like his conquerors and every building was circular in form. Those people seemed much advanced in scientific and technical know-how. In the twinkling of an eye they could change the shape of an object and similarly they could vanish and reappear in a trice. Ranjit Singh thought that he was feeling thirsty. His abductors knew this from the screen and gave him a capsule which quenched his thirst. In the same way, he was given another capsule to satisfy his hunger. Thereafter he was left to relax and he went to sleep.

When he woke up, Ranjit Singh found himself sitting in a chair. He was given another capsule which cut off his power of speech. The screen fixed before him started displaying in English, instructions for him, which he could easily

comprehend. He was informed that they had abducted him so that he might be enlightened a little. The directions further said, "We do not want you to answer any of our queries as we are fully familiar with your world and the progress made by it. We are aware that the scientists of your world are making relentless efforts to reach us, but we possess such machines as will make all their attempts futile. It will take them some hundreds of years of your time to reach us at the current speed of your planes; otherwise also your planes are not yet so advanced as to reach us".

Reading the information on the screen, Ranjit Singh could only nod in the affirmative or the negative. Display on the screen continued, "We are not averse to friendship or co-operation in research with your scientists. In fact, they can learn much from our scientists who are also prepared to guide them. But there is a basic difference of attitude between them. Here, there is no regional or national science; nor is there any secrecy about its research. In your world, Russian science is divergent from American science, and the French and the British would like to pursue their own course of development in science in utmost secrecy. Again, in our world advancement in science is not divorced from religion and morality. All scientific progress is for the welfare of the people. For instance, in your world, augmentation of speed is considered a great scientific achievement; whether it is the speed of the railway engine or a pilotless plane or that of a bullet or a missile. Quite differently, in our world, the value of increase in the speed of anything depends upon the sole criterion of its beneficence to life. On account of total transparency, no such invention or innovation takes place

here, as is harmful to the people. Wars or discord of any kind is passé. Every scientist considers himself to be the server of life and all his research and every invention of his are in the direction of improvement of life."

Ranjit Singh was constantly watching the screen. However, he did not have the heart to ask any question about what he read. Also, he was devoid of power of speech at the moment. But the writing on the screen was adding to his knowledge. The screen further revealed, "In our world, Physics and Psychology move hand in hand. For instance our planes can fly with the speed of thought and can reach anywhere in space. Similarly, we have machines which record all the activities of the mind. In our world, nobody can conceal what goes on in his mind. Nor can he tell a lie. Whatever he thinks the machine can observe and record. That is why nobody commits a crime here, and if at all anybody does so, he cannot hide it. In your world, Psychology lags much behind Physics. On the one side, your scientists have set foot on the moon and sent artificial satellites to other planets but on the other side the masses still think at the level of a bullock-cart. The problems of race, language, region and religion predominate in their minds even now. If we so desire, we can conquer your world in a few moments. But, we do not wish to overwhelm any person or place. We live in complete external and internal peace. Our people have learnt to get the better of our mental infirmities like lust, greed or pride. Only one thing that we have not been able to control, despite all efforts, is death. In spite of all our advancement in Physical Sciences, we have come to believe collectively that our birth, life and death are controlled and directed by some Almighty, before whose potent will, all

scientific accomplishments are meaningless and that in scientific research too, we are only playing the role assigned by him. We can only attain the level of knowledge, which that power allows us to reach.”

Thereafter, the screen was automatically switched off and Ranjit Singh got a fit of unconsciousness. In spite of trying very hard, he could not keep his eyes open. After a short while, when he came to himself, he found himself sitting listlessly, near his telescope. The gloom of the evening had descended on all sides. He cast a glance in the direction of the stars that were beginning to appear on the firmament and then, set out homewards. The whole night, he kept ruminating over his strange and unusual experience. The next morning, when he talked to Jaswant Kaur about it, she broke into laughter. She said, "This has resulted from your sitting behind the telescope all the time; overwork has taken its toll upon the balance of your mind." When this incredible tale was repeated before the villagers, they were far from prepared to believe it. They described it as delusion or hallucination. But Ranjit Singh was certain that his experience was real. He spent some time in perplexity. After a few days spent in contemplation, he purchased an air ticket and sent Jaswant Kaur to stay with their sons. He himself got a kamandal and a few essential articles of luggage and left for Rishikesh, leaving behind his telescope.

XIV We Swim or Sink Together

Meeka and Jeeto belonged to the same village. Though their real names were Amrik Singh and Surjit Kaur, they were known as such in the village. A youthful boy and a girl were considered brother and sister in the villages, and from this point of view their mutual love was unusual. But they were age-mates, young and liked each other. And this was sufficient justification for their mutual attraction and romance. Every evening, they met at the gurudwara or on the bank of the village stream, and met without any rhyme or reason. It was a burning topic in the village as well and it was with considerable efforts of the two families concerned, that this love-affair was excluded from the agenda of the village Panchayat. In particular, elderly men and women of the village were shocked to hear about the meetings of Meeka and Jeeto because their love was a revolt against the tradition which had been held very dear by them, all these years.

Both Meeka and Jeeto hailed from reputed land-holding families of the village, which had revengefulness as an important part of their conduct. For them, committing a murder for the prestige of the family was a routine act. The parents of both Meeka and Jeeto were against their intermixing and tried to dissuade them from getting romantically involved, separately as well as jointly. But their offspring were adamant on it and were openly defiant of their parents' dictate. The two families passed some time in severe tension. Jeeto's parents were particularly agitated. They could hardly tolerate that a girl from their family should have an open love affair with a young man of the village. Thank God, the sub-caste of the two was not the same which would have worsened the situation. Meeka was a Ghumman while Jeeto's parents were Cheemas; otherwise when does cupid care for caste and creed? The two lovebirds neither heeded the rebukes of their

parents, nor showed any regard for the villagers' sense of honour and kept meeting regularly. They took a pledge to live and die together and to carry on with their love upto the last breath.

Then, one day, Meeka suddenly vanished from the village. When he did not return for three days, it was natural for Jeeto to feel uneasy. The village also, was rife with rumours. Most of the people thought that Meeka had sacrificed his love in face of his parents' displeasure and he had either committed suicide or gone to some far-away place to wait for better times. But some people also believed that Jeeto's brothers had murdered him and buried his dead body somewhere. Meeka's parents reported at the police station about his being untraceable, but did not name anybody as a suspect for some possible foul play. The police spent some days moving about and investigating. But they could not find Meeka's dead body or any other clue and at last filed the case as "unsolved". Jeeto kept crying in separation for a few days and then was silenced in helplessness and patience. She suspected her brothers of having killed Meeka, but what could she say to anybody without evidence? However, Jeeto informed her parents that she would never marry. She had already earned a bad name in the neighbouring villages and no young man there was prepared to marry her. Her brothers tried three or four times to find a match for her but when Jeeto rejected every proposal, they surrendered in helplessness. Jeeto now attended to the household chores and spent the rest of the time either reciting the scriptures or sleeping. She slept in the hope that during a dream she might meet Meeka and know the secret of his disappearance. She never left her home except for visiting the gurdwara and this way three years passed since Meeka had vanished. One night, Meeka appeared to her in a dream saying that they would love each other through life after life and that he would keep visiting her. Jeeto was now convinced that Meeka had died or had been killed.

In the summer Jeeto used to sleep for a siesta in the closet at the back of the house, and since her childhood she had been in the habit of dangling her right leg from the cot. Once it was the day of the full-moon. In the morning Jeeto went to the gurdwara. Having returned from there she did some work in the kitchen and after taking her lunch, she went to sleep in the closet as usual. When she woke up she felt like scratching her right foot. While trying to relieve the itching, she noticed a small white blister which caused no pain or burning sensation. At night the blister automatically dried up without leaving even a scar. Jeeto and her relatives forgot the blister taking it for the result of some injury or shoe-bite. But on the next full-moon day all this happened again. In the afternoon, Jeeto was lying in her bed in the closet in a state of semi-sleepiness. As per her habit, her right leg was suspended down when she saw an almost three foot long brownish snake creeping fast towards her. In perplexity she drew up her leg because she had heard that a snake never climbed a cot. But this snake did climb the cot. It opened its mouth and despite Jeeto's effort to escape it, it licked her foot, which was accompanied by the sound of kissing. Jeeto kept her nerves and she was sure that the snake had not bitten her, though she would not have grieved if the snake had bitten her. Without Meeka, this existence was not welcome to her. Then recalling Meeka she also remembered that some lovers visited their beloveds in form of snakes, after their death. When the snake was slithering away after kissing her foot Jeeto suddenly called Meeka by name. Thereupon the snake turned, looked back, made a gesture like paying obeisance and left. Jeeto was convinced that it was none but Meeka who came to her in the form of a snake every full-moon day. The snake's caress caused a white blister, but today it seemed agreeable to her. She did not want that the blister should dry up as before, as it symbolised her meeting with Meeka. She did not talk about this strange experience to anybody at home but she began to wait impatiently for the next full-moon day.

The snake kept visiting her with regularity on every full-moon day. Now even in wakefulness Jeeto suspended her foot before it and it kept licking and caressing her foot for a pretty long time. Now the blister caused was bigger than before, but Jeeto was not at all worried on this account. When six or seven full-moon days came and went and Jeeto continued to have a similar blister on the foot, one full-moon day her brother fetched the village physician. Initially, Jeeto's people not only attached no importance to her disease, but also prayed for her death, as they had suffered a lot of defamation on her account. But now, her parents and brothers thought of letting her live as she was taking care of all the household chores. Now they wanted to have the blister caused on her foot every full-moon day properly diagnosed and treated. The physician who was actually a descendant of nomadic snake charmers was now practicing medicine in the village, preferring a settled life. He was particularly known for the treatment of snakebite and as soon as he saw the blister he declared that it had been caused by the oral froth or exhalation of a snake. He added, "This blister is not fatal, but one thing is certain that a snake comes here every full-moon day."

Jeeto's brothers decided that on the ensuing day of the full-moon they, with sticks in hands, would lie in wait and kill the snake as it appeared. When Jeeto came to know about the decision, she felt worried about the security of the snake, but she had no means to debar or forewarn it. As such when the full-moon day arrived, her heart beat fast. As desired by her brothers, she lay on the cot in the closet, but she could not stop her brothers from lying in ambush. She said only, "The snake is the creation of God; it comes and goes, but does not bite. Why do you want to kill it?" But her saying so did not affect her brothers' resolve and they, with sticks in hands, lay in wait for the snake. The snake came in at the fixed time and was attacked by the two brothers. The snake tried very hard to slink away, but was badly hedged in and beaten to death. As Jeeto saw it losing

its life, her eyes were tear-filled. She wanted to embrace the dead snake but was afraid of her brothers. The villagers were already excited with the news that a snake was coming to Jeeto every full-moon day. Now they were coming to see its dead body. They did not know the secret of Jeeto's love but while they appreciated the snake's regularity, they also admired the boldness of Jeeto's brothers. At length, a pit was dug outside the village and the dead body of the snake was interred. The villagers believed that a kite could eat a living or dead snake, but later if its stools were consumed by a dog, the latter went mad.

The villagers and Jeeto's brothers forgot the snake and its death in a few months. But Jeeto who firmly believed that the snake was none else than Meeka could not forget the tragedy. Now she was convinced that her own brothers had murdered Meeka. She became peevish; her complexion grew paler and in a few months; she began to look like an old hag. In her heart of hearts, she began to hate her brothers for depriving her twice of her love and she lost all interest in the household jobs. After doing a little work she felt tired, grew weaker and weaker as the days passed but, the village physician failed to diagnose her ailment. None in the village knew her affliction and she began to suffer from fever. In the beginning for a few days the medication by the village physician brought down the temperature. But then the fever raged continuously, the physician declared it to be typhoid and in a few days Jeeto passed away. Her family observed all the rites pertaining to her death, but nobody knew that the two lovers' pledge to swim or sink together had been fulfilled. Next morning, the body of Jeeto's eldest brother, which had turned completely blue, was found near their field.

XV A Bowl of Water

Dhani Ram and I worked in the same branch of Railway Headquarters. He had been in this branch for a number of years and had worked on every seat. On the contrary, I had come to this branch recently on my transfer from Ferozepur and many a time I had to consult him or some other clerk regarding my work. In fact, while working at Ferozepur, I had passed my B.A. examination and I had applied to the Department for my transfer to Delhi where I wanted to join the Camp College, working in the evening, for my MA. Immediately, on my arrival at Delhi I joined the Camp College and now my M. A. Final Examination was at hand. The Superintendent of the branch, Pandit Ram Dass who in his absence was called Haram (illegitimate) Dass, was a matriculate of old times and did not like the employment of young graduate clerks. He particularly disapproved of anybody's improving his qualifications during service. Though with the coming of more highly-educated persons, there was a possibility of betterment in the work and environment of the office, yet he discouraged instead of appreciating the young people, educated or studying like me in a college. As such, when I applied for leave for my impending examination, the Pandit flared up. He returned my application with the remark, "Who will do his work in his absence?" The Head Clerk of the section wanted to help me but he did not know what to write back. I, too, was baffled as to whom to request to volunteer for this responsibility. I was not yet very old in the branch. At length, Dhani Ram, even without my asking for it, wrote that he would look after my work in my absence and my leave was sanctioned. This was the beginning of our friendship and mutual regard.

I came back into my office after the examination. I liked Dhani Ram the most for company and friendship. He himself was B.A. Honours and his wife too was an educated person. My liking for him perhaps included a feeling of gratitude also. Anyway, not only did we grow fond of each

other in the office, but also became close friends outside. At that time I was unmarried and yet Dhani Ram frequently invited me to tea or dinner at home. In contrast, many other colleagues wanted to visit his house and Dhani Ram got rid of them on some pretext or the other. In fact, his wife Shyama whom I addressed as 'Bharjai ji' was very pretty. Their elder son was studying in class 8, but Bharjai ji looked unmarried. Her complexion was fair, size was tall, and her hair when let loose reached her waist. Her body was firm and compact like those of unmarried girls even after bearing two children and was extremely attractive. And, therefore, both the office clerks' being keen to visit Dhani Ram's house and his trying to avoid them were simply natural action and reaction.

Shyama Bharjai ji was not only a pretty woman and the dear wife of Dhani Ram but also a successful and popular teacher. She taught Mathematics to the ninth and tenth classes at a high school and the girls and the boys in her classes were fond of her. I believe and have a solid reason to believe that she was intelligent and at home in her subject. Those days I used to help and guide my younger brother who was a student of the eighth class and even though I had studied Mathematics upto the tenth class only he regarded me as his model in this subject. He often used to tell the other students. "My brother is in no way lesser than Shakuntla Devi. Many sums which Masterji solves by taking 'x' as hypothesis, he solves without putting them down." But on two occasions, it so happened that I had to take the help of Shyama Bharjai ji in solving the sums given by my brother. Since then I have surrendered to her as an expert and an able pedagogue of Mathematics.

After taking my M.A. examination, I used to get novels issued from the Modern Library to pass time. Those days, I was reading a short story collection named "The Unseen World". It contained a story with this title, and seven or eight other stories concerned with the world of spirits.

During the reading of this book, once when I visited Dhani Ram's house, I casually asked, "Do you believe in the existence of spirits?" Hearing my question, both Dhani Ram and Shyama Bharjai ji who also was sitting beside broke into laughter. Seeing them laugh I felt somewhat embarrassed and realizing my bewilderment Dhani Ram said, "Harbans dear, we not only believe in spirits, we have also suffered them for a long time." I expressed a desire to know the details, and both the husband and the wife were willing to let me know everything, but for some time kept saying "You tell-you tell" in Lakhnavi fashion. At last Dhani Ram started recounting, but before starting the story he sent the two children out to play, since he did not want to narrate the anecdote in their presence.

Dhani Ram started speaking somewhat seriously, "It happened about ten years ago. Those days Shyama used to teach in the school at Majidpur, a village in the suburbs of Delhi. In the month of May, in the hot afternoon when she pedaled her cycle back home, her face grew redder. I seldom saw her, because I used to be in the office at that time. But I pitied her. I did not want her to serve like this, but our economic circumstances obliged us to continue with this job. On her way from the school to home there was a desolate place. One day, she put her cycle next to a tree there, looked around and sat down to relieve herself. The same day, on reaching home, she fell ill. Thereafter, she grew weaker every day, went off colour and started getting a fit of faintness every Friday. As I learnt later, she recited Kalma every morning and kept a fast every day during the month of Ramzan. Her pronunciation of Arabic waxed excellent, though, surprisingly, she had never studied that language. On the day of Id-ul-fitr when a Muslim friend of mine came to give us raw material for pudding, she started discussing history of Islam with him. Her knowledge of Islamic religion and history amazed my friend as well as me. That evening on my asking, Shyama burst into tears. She

said that every Friday when she became unconscious, an old Muslim gentleman met her and that she could not disobey him. She further said that if she did not do his bidding, he would kill her. One day I took Shyama to the gurdwara. I thought that even if religion did not benefit in any other way, at least through auto-suggestion it made a patient psychologically stronger and better-equipped to overcome the malady. There, Shyama demanded Prasad from the priest before ardas. Later at home on my asking she replied that she had done so on Baba ji's command (She always referred to the imagined Muslim old gentleman as Baba ji). She reported about his saying that she should take the prasad immediately and that otherwise it would be finished. Anyway, with the passage of time both Shyama's ailment and my worry increased. The frequency of her fits as well as the Muslim complexion of her conduct was multiplied.

I was feeling bewildered, but had no faith in the existence of spirits. I took Shyama to many doctors but, they all described her disease as hysteria. Usually their advice was, "Keep the patient happy; the disease will be cured with the passage of time. Administer some somnolent pill before the time of the fainting fit. During those very days Dr. Sharma, a psychiatrist, had come as the new director of the Railway Medical Services on transfer from somewhere. I took an appointment and took Shyama to him. He examined Shyama carefully and said, "Look here, brother, she has no mental or physical disease; at least I, as a doctor, am unable to diagnose her ailment. Only give her healthful diet". That Dr. Sharma's reply had dismayed me, he noticed in my face. When we turned to go, he beckoned me and said, "Listen to me for a minute before you leave". I left Shyama outside and went to Dr. Sharma. He said, "I should not say it as a doctor, but seeing you, I have not been able to help it. At Ambala there is a Pandit who knows everything about spirits and shades; better consult him also. Earlier I, too, had no faith in ghosts and goblins but after my brother's involvement in an incident I am convinced of their existence. I myself took him to Pandit Devi

Dutt at Ambala. If you like, I can give you his address". I took the address, but could not decide for three days whether to go to him or not, since I had no belief in the existence of spirits. Eventually, I took two days' leave prefixing Sunday, got a railway pass for free travel and reached Ambala along with Shyama who was hesitant to accompany me. Panditji resided at Sadar Bazar in Ambala Cantt. He grew serious on seeing Shyama but said nothing to me. After some time he said, "Tomorrow at 7 O' clock in the morning, bring her after bath. Do you have some arrangement for stay?" I replied in the affirmative and took leave of him.

We stayed for the night at the Railway Guest House at the station. The next morning after ablutions, we reached Pandit ji's residence at 7 O' clock. Pandit ji spread a mat, at one end of which Shyama was seated. At the other end a bowl of water was placed and near it a little boy from the neighbourhood was made to sit with instructions that he should go on reporting whatever he saw in the bowl. Pandit ji himself sat on a wooden stool at some distance and recited mantras. I was sitting in a chair and watching. When Pandit ji had recited mantras for half an hour, the boy watching the bowl reported that he saw in the water the reflection of a bearded old man. The amusing thing was that the looks and dress of the old man as described by the boy coincided with what Shyama had told me and of which I had not talked to anybody here. About half an hour later, the boy intimated that the old man was fleeing. As soon as the boy reported the disappearance of the Baba, Shyama fell down unconscious. Pandit ji, continued to recite mantras for an hour and Shyama sat up conscious. Pandit ji declared her fit and said that we could go. He gave us a charmed amulet to tie on Shyama's right arm and we returned. After that, Shyama has been well and now if somebody reminds her of that time, she also joins others in laughing heartily.