

## What is it that Flows Between Us?

### A Welcome to those who Come

Jaanu Naagar

One waits for every person who is about to come. The one who has come is not a guest, he is a friend. After some days, the friend can take on the role of a host. But some friends in our lives throw colour in such a way that one cannot avoid being smeared by it.

When they first come they are our friends, they join us in everything we do and become adept in our ways. With us, they meet and mingle with our people, making their acquaintance. They become a part not only of our lanes but also of our families, till they are seen doing small tasks even at our weddings.

We do not know then that they will change their colours like a chameleon. Slowly, they begin to reject us. We do understand what is happening, but are not able lay a finger on it, precisely. After all, they are our friends.

They come into our lives like a dream; a dream that stops somewhere to fulfil its own dream.

A dream came into our lives too. He kept spreading into everyone's hearts. He was a dream that could be seen in the day, and at night. It is easy to fall asleep, but hard to wake up. But one has to wake up sometime.

He came among us at a time when we were doing our daily work. We were afraid even to touch him, in case we injured him in any way. He would close his eyes and keep listening to us quietly. But some words would sting him like a mosquito. He would open his eyes suddenly and say, "Where did you get that mosquito from?" The mosquito would buzz for some time and then become silent. The dream would think about something and then make notes in his notebook.

This much is easy to bear, but a time comes when the dream leaves us while we are asleep. Then, we remember him in dreams. But when we turn over on our beds, we see that the place where he slept, next to us, is empty. That empty space opens our eyes completely. We experience an emptiness. His remembered voice creates a wound in our consciousness, a wound that cannot be healed by any doctor or ointment.

We walk through those lanes where we had walked with him once.

One day I was passing through a lane alone and a voice stopped me. I looked closely and saw it was the same lane that I would bring my friend to meet. I stopped and said, "Him? He has left us and gone somewhere far away.

"The lane said, "No, he was walking here yesterday."

I became quiet and said, "When will he come again?"

The lane said, "This is why I have stopped you, to ask you. If you get to know, tell me."

I thought, there is certainly some secret here. But who do I speak to about it? To myself? To strangers?

Some time later, some of my own people told me that my friend had sent a letter, saying he had seen my house from the bridge. That friend, with whom I had dreamt my dreams, had become a stranger.

One day I was wandering in the lane alone when the lane pointed and said, "There is your friend." He was wearing dark glasses, green trousers, a white checked shirt, and carried a green backpack. As soon as I saw him, I forgot all my hurt and embraced him. The rest of the day he wandered in the lanes with me.

Then came a turn where we both separated, without realizing it. Finding myself alone, I went home. One day again, that person whom I knew, entered my home, disturbing everything, and said, " Friends, what is going on here these days?" I said nothing is happening and gestured to him to sit down on a chair. With increasing caution he sat down on that chair which perhaps brought back memories.

What then? An air of questions and answers was created.

"Why do friends leave us?"

"Maybe he doesn't want you."

"So he doesn't love us?"

"Perhaps he has to fulfil some desire of his own."

"Why did he reject us in this way? Why did he write a letter showing he has forgotten us?"

"Perhaps he wants to leave his mark."

"Does he want to rise without having lived?"

"No. He probably wants to show his splendour."

"How do we recognise his splendour?"

"That is something you have to think about, whether he is diamond or gold."

A pigeon has brought this letter to you. You cannot ask any questions of it, but you can try and guess to whom this letter, without a name, without an address, has been written.

## Joy and Fire in the Veil

Yashoda Singh

Ninth of July, Monday. Walking through the lanes of Dakshinpuri I thought of a prank. I said to Shahana, “ I feel like covering my face and walking, in other words wear a veil, which women are often forced to do.” I arranged my dupatta in such a way as to form a long veil. Now no one could see my face but I could see everyone’s face very easily. Shahana was wearing pants and a tee shirt, and I was wearing stylish pyjamas with wide, embroidered flares at the bottom.

We were walking through the lanes, lost in our own world, and going towards the main street. Some women sitting in the lanes looked at me with great attention. They had never looked at me with so much attention before. I thought to myself, “Have I done something so new today?”

Talking to each other, we reached the bus stand. We boarded an RTV bus. My veil still remained as it was. I had not allowed my veil to slip up or down. We sat down on the long seat of the RTV bus. There were more men than women. I think there were only two women.

I became the center of attraction for everyone. No one could actually see my face, but sitting in the bus I could watch everyone very closely. In their eyes there came the enthusiasm of searching for something. Perhaps it was my face, which was lost behind my black cotton dupatta. All this would not have happened if I had got on the bus without a veil.

In front of me there were two men, perhaps twenty five or twenty six years old. They kept turning their heads and looking at me. They were also looking at my hands and feet, disturbed. There was a different kind of restlessness in them. But for me this was sheer fun, in which there was nothing other than enjoyment. And a new kind of happiness, which had filled me inside. We got off the bus at our stand, Pushpa Bhavan. The people in the bus still had their eyes on me. A few minutes later the bus continued on its way.

They had a desire to see something new.

When the bus had gone I removed my veil, looked at Shahana and started laughing. I said, “That was so much fun.”

There is a different pleasure in playing with strangers.

I thought, “The people sitting in the bus must have been thinking, ‘Is she married or not? She seems so modern yet why is she wearing a veil? She has

no bangles on her arms, no rings on her toes, then why a veil on her face? Does she have ugly marks on her face?”

I enjoyed myself today, because I did this without a thought, without a care. I only made others think. Through my being I raised questions in their minds, and left them to find answers. But, this is what I am thinking. Perhaps they gave it no thought at all.

I came home and drank cold water and thinking about all of this I kept smiling to myself. Seeing my smile, my sister, Lakshmi, said, “What happened? What world are you lost in?”

I told Lakshmi everything. I was sure she would laugh, but instead of laughing she looked at me attentively. Then she said, “For you it was a joke. But this joke could set fire to the homes of other people.”

I asked her, “Why?” I was upset by her words. She looked at me and said, “Every man on that bus may not have been unmarried. There will be some among them who are married. Some of their wives probably cover their face, and some must be arguing about having to cover their faces. The man who doesn’t like these arguments, won’t he say to his wife, ‘When a modern woman who goes out of the house can cover her face, why can’t you cover yours when you stay at home?’ And then won’t the wife say, ‘Do you ride on buses to go places or to look at other people’s wives?’ She will not move from her position in the argument, and he will not move from his. In this way, without actually being there, you will remain between them as a presence.”

I looked at her and said, “But why should this happen?” She picked up the glass and said, “But what if it does happen?”

She went to the next room and started washing the dishes.

## **The city and its Inner Landscapes**

Rakesh Khairalia

For some days now, there has been a restlessness in the city. Every day, carrying their own inner landscapes, people struggle against one another, present something to each other. Like the lines on our hands which are roads that cannot be erased; if you go along them you can look back, you can get some understanding of the place where you are now, but you cannot see even a sign of what lies ahead. There is an attraction which creates the feeling of being drawn ahead, as if much will happen, much is about to happen.

Time looks at everyone from different positions. Nothing is hidden from its gaze.

In this world, different people's complex, everyday thoughts on living or the ability to live are reflected in a mirror. What does that mirror say? The same place, the same time, the same hunger, the same thirst, the same hope—

If we come to an edge and look at these things then they look at us with a slanted gaze. Seen from above there appears to be great depth, from the front it seems to spread till eternity.

What was in Nangla, and what is, when we look at these, do we become like entangled threads? Or like a big waterfall which cuts its way through the mountains?

After experiencing so much in a life, what is a "normal life?" Who is "normal?" You, I or someone else?

Today there is anger in people's eyes, a rage in their hearts, a defeat on their foreheads. Those responsible for this are in front of us, but nothing is in our hands. What is this situation?

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