

The Fact

-Nader Mohyuddin

Above the din and clamor of Calcutta's crowded streets, a cloudy haze lay sleepily over much of the city. Below, in a protected compound of bamboo furnishings, solid-wood walls, and dotting servants, the pleasant aroma of brewing tea from Darjeeling fills the kitchen. It hangs in the heavy summer air, nimbly whisked by jute fans to corridors lined with elephant tusks and tiger pelts. The tea is finally ready, news made known by its faint shriek of steam. Apa drains the delicate pot and pours the brew into an ornate kettle, set to be carted down the hall to the salon. Deep wrinkles on her sweaty hands reflect decades of domestic service. Elsewhere on the viceroy's premises, a Bengali man with fair skin and starched clothes wipes the lenses of his round, gold eyeglasses with a cotton cloth. He gently places them back on his face and takes a deep breath. The day is long from over. Abu Talib Mahmoud produces a primitive stethoscope from his coat pocket and places its disc at the viceroy's bare chest. Through the open window, the racket of rusty rickshaws, street merchants, peddlers, cows and the idle homeless are heard, though the sight of the commotion lay hidden behind the compound's formidable walls. With the instrument's buds placed firmly in his ears, Dr. Mahmoud is removed from the busy environs through the pane. For a brief instant, before attending to the man's pulse, the quiet physician from Comilla enjoys this calm moment, a brief sanctuary from the tumult of city life. He closes his eyes. He hears the blood flowing through the Englishman's arteries but the rush is the gentle roar of the Gumti River. He takes a breath and finds the fragrant tea wafting from the kettle and cosy, only now the tea is of a rougher blend from his mother's kitchen. Eyes shut and ears plugged, a brief second spans a childhood of innocence, a lifetime of experience.

Despite multiple degrees and professional success, Dr. Mahmoud is homesick.

Open eyes and alert ears reveal a world far removed from the pastoral peace of rural Bengal. A life of service for the English, caring for the highest ruler in the land, is his world now—has been his world for some time. While the daily check-up is a mundane task, he has never fully acclimated to the hustle of life in the second largest city on Earth. He checks the chronically ill viceroy's vital signs and records them in a leather-bound ledger.

"How am I looking? Say, look at me when I speak to you!" the viceroy bellows. He coughs, hacking. Dr. Mahmoud is not flustered, nor embarrassed.

"Quite well. Your lungs look to be clearing rapidly. Take more honey with your tea," he replies. A lifetime under British imperial rule has softened the sharp edge of the viceroy's rude demeanor.

"Tell the cooks. It's not my concern," the viceroy dismisses. He sighs. "I've company coming within the hour. Go ahead and clean up." The doctor removes the plugs from his ears and places the instrument in its foam case. He places the case and his ledger in his khaki canvas bag and buckles it shut. The doctor makes his way down the marble steps, gliding his hand along the banister, the tips of his fingers enjoying the grains of the black polished oak. The afternoon sun hangs high overhead, piercing the cloudy haze and toasting the earth below. The rays peek through open windows and give the gallery an airy feel, belying the sweltering heat that suffocates every pore.

He finds his way to his living quarters on the viceroy's compound where Begum is attending to the laundry. Adil, fixed firmly in the awkward years of early adolescence, has just returned from school, his books still bound with belt.

"Abu, how was school?" Begum asks of her son.
"Boring. I'm going out to play football," he replies, mumbling.

The doctor gazes happily at his son, thinking of his own days with soccer in Comilla.

"What are you looking at, father?" Adil says shortly.

"Nothing, son. Go along, have a good time." He approaches his son and places his hand on the young boy's shoulder. "Don't worry about your studies for right now."

"Yes sir. Not a problem." Adil hurries off to his room to change out of his uniform while the doctor sits himself on a plush sofa. He reaches for a copy of an English newspaper, detailing the latest of the crown's infringements upon Bengali rights, but he stops short of picking it up. He thinks of the ideas of freedom and equality espoused by those abroad in America and wonders if such thoughts can be realized from abstraction.

"Maybe someday," he mutters to himself. Begum looks up from the laundry, confused.

Maybe someday.

Sounds of the Seasons

- Bushra Rahman

The sound of rushing water fills the air,
As spring rolls in, fresh and fair.

After a cold and frigid time,
Enjoying spring's warmth is no crime.

Summer comes in, slow and steady,
For this season, everyone's ready.
Birds sing happily in the leafy trees,
As the branches tremble in the soothing breeze.

Flowers bloom under the beautiful sky,
It's crisp and blue as the wind blows by.
Pleasant warmth and fireflies,
And bright stars twinkle in the clear night sky.

Fall soon comes, and then goes,
Pretty soon, it starts to snow.
Big white flakes float gently down,
Spreading a white blanket all over town.

The air feels all crisp and clean,
The sun comes through the clouds in a silvery sheen.

The year's first rainfall freshens the earth,
As the animals on this planet give new birth.

বাবা কে

-শম্পা নাসরীণ

বাবা তু মি চলে গেছ দিয়ে গেছ অসীম শূন্যতা,
পৃথিবীকে ভালবাসতে শেখা তোমারই জন্যতা।
ভোরের শিশিরে স্নাত ঘামে মিশে আছো তু মি-
নক্ষত্রে ভরা কালো রাতের অসীম সৌন্দর্যে ঠেঁয়ে ভেসে ওঠো তু মি।

তোমাকে খুঁজে পাই
শৈশবের গন্ধে ভরা নবামের উৎসব মুখের দিনে।
কুয়াশার চাদরে মোড়া রক্তিম সূর্যে ঝরে
ডাঙ্কল, বক বা ধানশালিখের কিচিরের মুছনায়ে
আকাশে শরতের শুভ্র মেঘের খেলায়
কিংবা কাশফুলের ডগায় শীতের আগমনী হাওয়ায়।

প্রকৃতির প্রতিটি আনাচে কানাচে বড় একাত্ম হয়ে আছো তু মি।
কত যুগ পার হয় তু মনেই
তবুও তু মি আছো আমার সন্তার গহনে।
আমার আলস্যে ভরা দুপুরে শোনা
রবিঠাকুর বা ডিএল রায়ের গানে-
অথবা সুকান্ত কিংবা শক্তির কবিতার অতলাতে,
আমার বেহাগ বা বৃন্দাবনী সারঙ্গের সনু বারীও অন্ত রাতে।

আমার আমি পৌঁছানো হতোনা কখনই
যদি না প্রেরণায় উজ্জীবিত করতে তু মি।
তু মি চলে গেলে দিয়ে গেলে
সত্য সূন্দরের বীজমন্ত্র -
তাই তো কষ্টের কঁটাভরা পথে
কিংবা জীবনের যে কোন অসংলগ্ন তায় ও
নিভিক পায়ে চলি-
কেননা নিশ্চিত জানি
আকাশের ওই উজ্জ্বল ধ্রুবতারার
সে আর কেউ নয়
সে আমার বাবা-
এখনও প্রতিনিয়ত পথ দেখায় আমায়।
নিয়ে যাবে আমার অভীষ্ট গন্তব্যে।