

these are all that she talks to me about, and I feel quite depressed. I wish she would show some concern, ask me how my day was and why I am late, tell me that I don't need to work so hard. One day I told her, "What's the use of all this gossiping? We should think about how to organize ourselves instead of talking about people behind their backs. Our daughters are getting older, and it won't be long before they'll get married. If you are out of the house all day..."

Immediately she retorted, "Your job ends at ten at night. What will we do at home all day?" I didn't say anything else to her.

The only time I see my daughters is at the dining table, where they are constantly talking about Indian film stars and latest movies. I try to participate in their conversations by asking them questions. "Okay, so tell me who this Amitabh is..."

"What! You don't know Amitabh?" Yasmin and Afroza look at each other and start laughing loudly.

"I don't have time to see these movies, do I?" I tell them and try to appear normal, but somewhere inside me I feel a dull pain.

"Well, if you buy a VCR, you won't be so ignorant about these things," Dilruba's mother says.

"Maybe you're right," I say as I pretend to concentrate on my food. I think to myself that actually all this hard work is for my family, and since they all want it...

Over the next couple of days, I talked to some of my colleagues and clients, and understood that

VCRs were not extremely expensive. I even contacted the owner of an electronics store in the stadium market, who I know through work. He sounded quite enthusiastic and assured me that if needed I could pay later.

I decided that I was going to buy a VCR soon. After all, along with sofa sets and TVs, this was also a status symbol for a family. I was quite excited about announcing it to my family at dinner, but first I inquired about how my daughters were doing at their studies. Dilruba's mother seemed agitated. "It's time we get tutors for them. Hamid saheb's children have tutors for almost all subjects."

"Really? You need so many tutors?"

"What do you mean, 'so many'?" Dilruba retorted.

"Okay, so find out about good tutors," I said. Towards the middle of the meal I decided to tell them about the VCR. "Dilruba's mother, I have decided to buy a VCR, soon. I am a little busy this week, since this is audit time, but by next week..."

The girls seemed a little excited, but Dilruba's mother went on, "The VCR is for the house. That doesn't take care of outside dangers! When the girls get up on rickshaws I am always worried that they will fall off. So many accidents in the streets these days..."

"Yes, that is true. But it's unsafe everywhere. What can be done?"

"Why!" Dilruba's mother almost shouted. "You

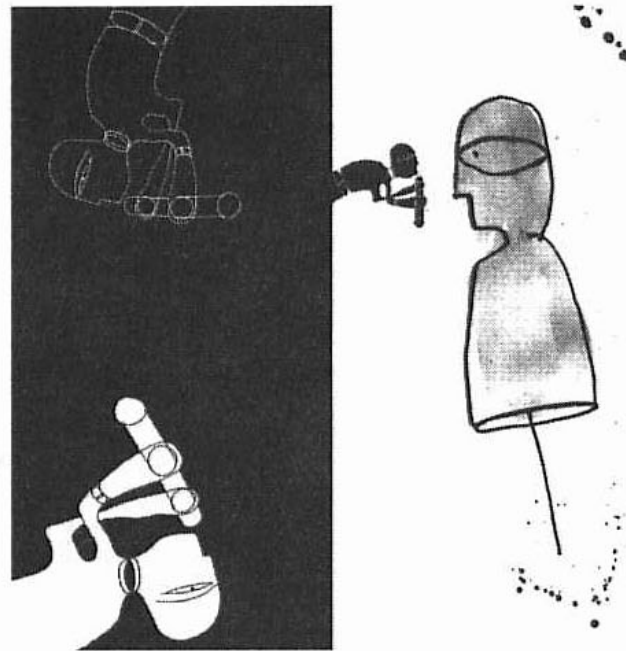
can at least buy a reconditioned car. We can also hire a driver. Our daughters can then travel in safety...after all they will be married off soon!"

I was dumbfounded. I was preparing to buy a VCR and here they were asking for a car! I had never thought about this before. While I bent my head and concentrated on my food, Somiruddin's words came to my mind, "This table is made of gold...you have to strike while the iron is hot. Opportunities don't come all the time..."

I had already made a lot, and if I can go on like this, I can make a lot more. But with our fortune, my family's demands and dissatisfactions are also increasing. How far will I have to go? Where will this journey end?

Other days, I am usually exhausted by this time, and I fall asleep immediately. But today I was sleepless. I thought about what I had wanted out of life. As I was dozing off, the answer came to my head. "Yes, I had wanted to see my daughters happy, as happy as they were when I had bought them that whole watermelon. If only I could see them that happy again..."

I was surrounded by darkness and everybody was sleeping. Dilruba's mother was snoring beside me. I was very thirsty, but in the darkness I couldn't figure out where the jug of water was, which would satisfy my thirst.



artwork by sabyasachi hazra

The Story Of Sharfuddin And His Powerful Relative

RASHIDA SULTANA

(Translated by Mamun Gaurob)

While stepping out of his home Sharfuddin noted that his wife's familiar appearance was different today - plumper, smoother and more doll-like. Sharfuddin's cousin was a major-general and in honour of his daughter's wedding ceremony, Sharfuddin's wife Liña Begum had gone to a beauty-parlour. The beautification process had put Sharfuddin back to the tune of Taka 1200, and the thought raised a thin pain inside him. The cold breeze of the winter evening picked at their bones. Sharfuddin's daughter Polly was shivering since she was not wearing a sweater or a shawl, fearing that it

would conceal her designer *kameez* embroidery. Sharfuddin's wife scolded her mildly, "You could have carried your sweater in your hands. Now you're going to freeze in the cold. All right, wear my wrap till we get to the house." A scooter was only available at the end of their lane, and when they got there on foot, leaving his family standing on the road, Sharfuddin went to the shop by the roadside to buy cigarettes. Four of five persons from the neighbourhood were sitting on stools in front of the shop busy chatting. He borrowed a light from the shopkeeper, lit his cigarette, blew out smoke and addressed Mr. Nasimul Islam, "Brother, today we're going to *Senakunjo* to attend the marriage ceremony of the

daughter of my own cousin, who is a major-general. Even ministers are going to come. You can't imagine how much trouble I had to face the whole week because of this marriage. My sister-in-law consults with me on every matter. These last few days I couldn't give any attention to my family. Shopping for household groceries, the children - your sister-in-law had to it all.'

"The marriage ceremonies of the sons and daughters of the elite are all held in *Senakunjo*," Hafiz, sitting near Mr. Nasim, said.

"Oh brother, you can't imagine what a luxurious place *Senakunjo* is, all that lighting dazzles the eyes," Sharfuddin said.