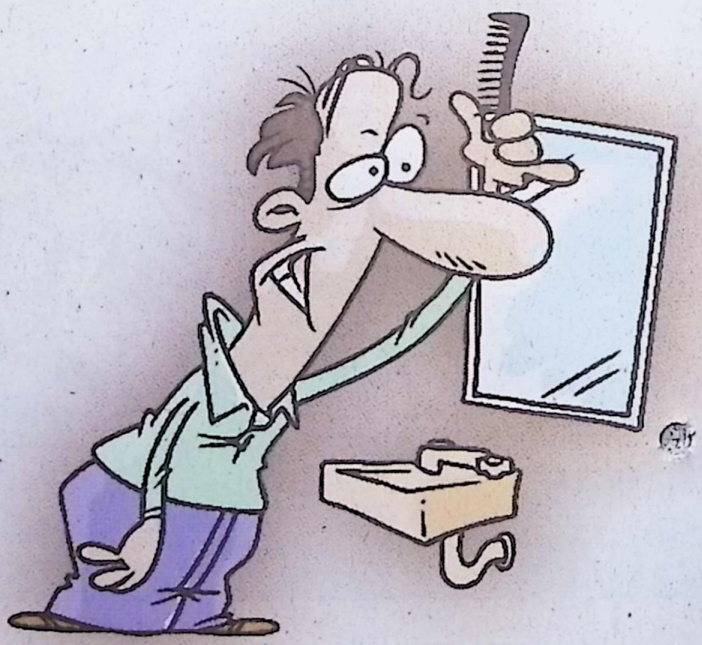
Of Departed Hair and Living Combs

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There are wondrous things we come across in life, thoughts that we sometimes need to share with others. Has it ever occurred to you that the comb is a most significant appendage to life, to people who value the hair on their heads? There used to be a time when people of my generation were absolutely carried away by the likes of Dilip Kumar, Mohammad Ali, Dev Anand and Waheed Murad and, to a certain extent, Nadeem. These men, if you must know, were thespians of repute in their time. And they had an abundance of hair we envied.

But, of course, we too had a lot of hair in our youth. There was a profusion of it, so much so that the neighbourhood barber had a good time of it almost every week. Our fathers, irritated at the sight of all that hair falling across our foreheads, marched us off to the barber's and snip snip snip went the man's scissors. None of us liked that autocracy. We were mad at our fathers and secretly planned to wait in an alley for that barber in the dead of night and give him a lesson he would remember for the rest of his life. That didn't happen, of course.

Ah, those were good times. We observed our movie heroes, as we called them, and tried copying the way they wore their hair. And then we did what romantic young men always do at that age. We biked all the way to the nearest girls' school or women's college (depending on our age) and simply stood there, hoping that those beautiful people going in or coming out through the gates would notice us and admire our handsome features. And some features they were! One in our group had a beautiful tummy, almost in the shape of a football. Another was proud of his muscles, even though he didn't have any idea of where to make use of them. A third one kept humming the latest movie songs as he leaned on his bike. And yours truly was a truly thin, almost emaciated creature who tried to be a cross between a good student and a passionate poet. It was, now that we look back at the past, a society of perfect, incorrigible fools.

And all of us stood there, for weeks and months together. None of those girls and women, depending on the age we were in at the time, took any notice of us. Indeed, some even laughed in a way that sounded more like scorn than admiration. They smirked. But all that was long ago. These days, much or all of that hair that was our pride is