

EDITOR'S
NOTE

"We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him." — Chinua Achebe.

Or, so the story is supposed to go.

But if ever there has been a time when we realise that kinsmen can do more than scratch, it is today...as it has been for the last 50 some days. They can wound and behead – like we read in the extract of Mir Mosharraf Hossain's *Bishad Sindhu*. They can promise to help but cause more hindrance – as seen in Marzia Rahman's short fiction. At least though, we have Farah Ghuznavi's sound advice to help us control our creative powers from going astray. Let us start from there. To summarize with the same Achebe: "If you don't like my story, write your own."

MUNIZE MANZUR

BISHAD SINDHU

(BOOK II CHAPTER 4)

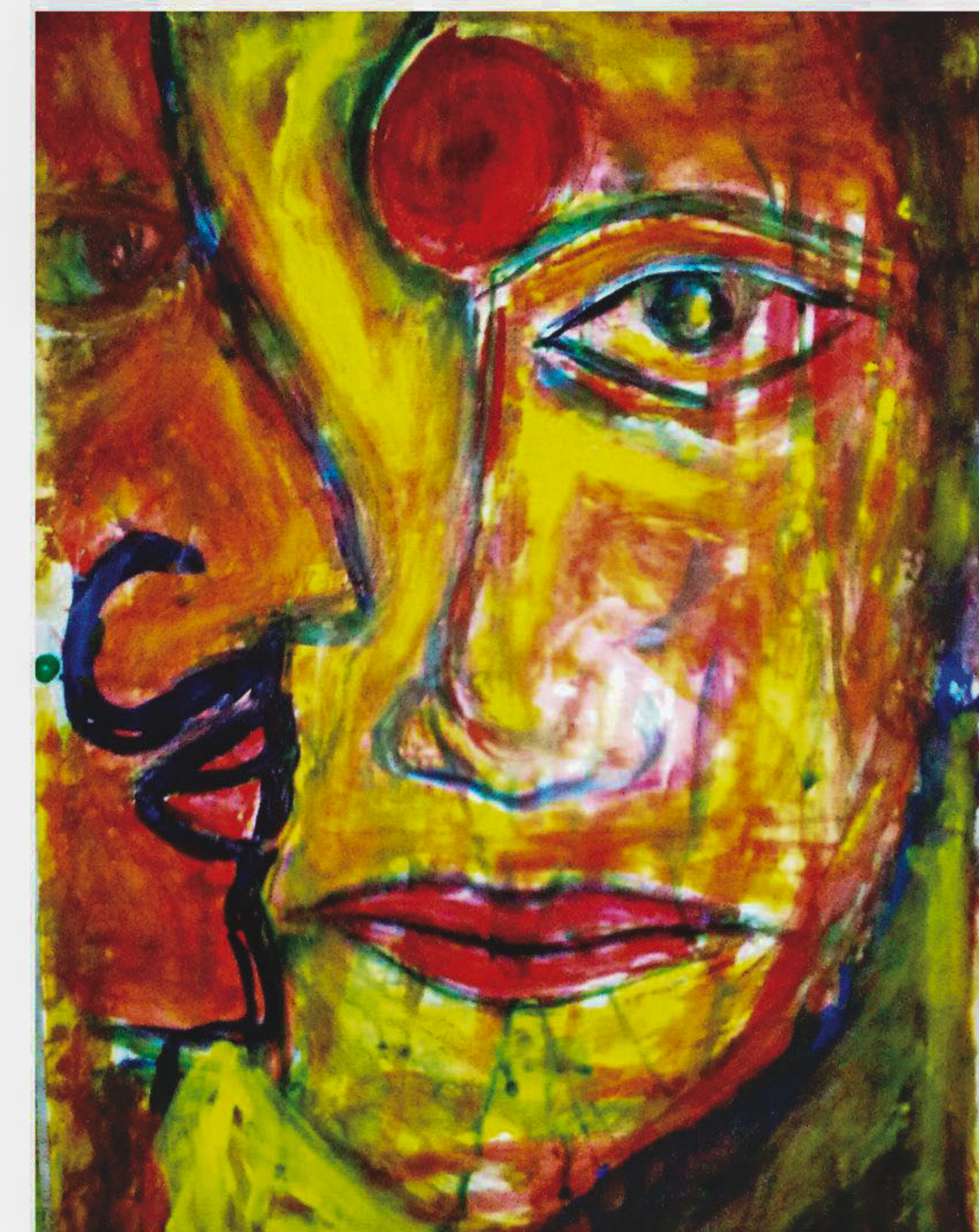
Mir Mosharraf Hossain
Translated by Fakrul Alam

Who was this champion whose bodiless head lay sprawling on the sand; whose body had been pierced by hundreds of holes because of the very sharp arrows that had penetrated it, but the hero whose back showed not even one wound, whose chest showed that he had taken all assaults frontally, who could this brave champion be? His protective garment, waistband, spear, skin, steed, battle dress, equipment—all signified his heroic status, and yet he was so young—how well-built was this youth! Alas! Alas! Could you be Abdul Wahab? O my hero! What has happened to your head? Are you that very Abdul Wahab? The very same man who had pleaded to his old mother so that he could glimpse his beloved wife's face only once, the hero who had followed his mother's wishes and had been satisfied to view only the shape of his beloved's beautiful eyes, had listened to the call to arms and had ended up taking the lives of innumerable infidels—are you that very same Abdul Wahab?

Who was that at the feet of this mighty hero? Those very large eyes were cast upwards as if they were beholding Abdul Wahab in the battle regalia of the champion. A teardrop in the eyes—could it be that it was for a drop of water that Wahab's bride had sacrificed herself at the feet of her spouse?

Who was it that had wounded the heart of the woman so? Who could have done violence with a heart made out of flint stone and who could have hurt such a tender person so? Oh you infidels! Because you were warring with Hussein you thought that slaying a woman would be no crime! Is that what the code of a hero or the rules of warfare, or the principles that is supposed to inspire a champion teach you? The hand that is raised to wound a woman's body is not the hand fit to be that of a true hero; that chest is not to be counted as the chest of a hero—it can only be that of a fiend inhabiting a human body!

Where was that lion-hearted youth, the one who was the pride of all heroes, the one who was to be the King of Medina? Where was the one who had amazed even mighty ones with his horsemanship, his skills in archery, his dexterity in wielding his sword, his ability to direct his sword unerringly—where was that mighty champion? Where was that warrior of such indomitable energy? Where was the



groom who had been only recently wedded? Here was the wedding dress he had on. Here were all the accessories of marriage he was supposed to have put on. Was he the one who had on a garland on his neck because he had wed Sakhina? Was this Kasem then? Alas! Alas! Was there supposed

to be no limit to such endless bloodshed?

Sakhina had revealed herself to be a consort worthy of a hero when she had smeared blood on all parts of her body and even on the dress she had on, and yet the blood seemed to be still streaming from the body of the hero and was

still visible everywhere—on his sword, on the dress, and on the body of the fallen hero. His case for carrying arrows and his spear lay beside his body. Who was this regal woman next to him then? Who could this young bride of such delicate features and build be? It is as if her eyes had finally shut as she

raised them up to land on Kasem's face; was it a deliberate or unconscious action on her part that she would place her left hand on Kasem's bosom? Who could you be, so emblematic of the virtuous wife? What is that on your right hand? What could this be—a sharp weapon made of steel in the hand of such a being? And what is at the tip of that weapon? Good grief! What a moving spectacle! You must have clasped that weapon tight in your hand and guided it into your bosom! And was that you Sakhina who did such a deed? Why else would one suffer so? To have committed suicide because of the pain caused by separation from one's spouse! No—no—O brave consort; should it be that a brave daughter and spouse can give her life up at the sorrow of separation or death thus? What folly! If so, why is it that her countenance still had the trace of a smile? How could it be that it still retained a glow, as if a light was still being emitted from it like that of a candle that is still flickering? I can comprehend the pain of separation caused or understand the anguish induced by parting from the beloved who had been pierced by the sharpest of weapon, but this body had already been daubed by the blood dripping from the loved one. You did not have to take recourse to a dagger to reduce the weight of sorrow caused by the death of your spouse thus. But all praise to you, O widow! You are one whose example must be extolled! Sakhina, you are someone whose action is writ large for the world; what you have done has no parallel anywhere. What sweet words had you uttered as you drove the dagger into your chest? Let the world behold your deeds fully! Let the women of the world view your action in admiration. So much love, such feelings, such sympathy for Kasem, who was born of the same blood and to whom you had been wed, to whom you had been married off in the briefest of ceremonies in the most unprecedented of circumstances. And to have the heart swell with love for your spouse in the briefest of instance, and to have said to him to preserve the vows of fidelity to him completely unprompted—"I will give up all for your sake Kasem—everything!" And what you had done after uttering these immortal and priceless words had induced compassion even in the heartless Marwan, not to mention the countless others

who were witness to the scene. All praise to you Sakhina! A thousand thanks to you for what you were able to do!

And who is there in this part of Karbala's vast expanse? What priceless jewel lies here so? God, what is it that you cannot do? Could you have bestowed such looks on one that handsome so that in the end it would all be wasted? That unsurpassable broad shoulders, that immense chest, such wide eyes, such wonderful eyebrows, and only the hint of a mustache? Alas, alas, O Almighty God! To have made one so handsome and to have grudged him life? Is that why at this tender age Ali Akbar lay lifeless forever?

Why was the pair of statues lying thus? Why were these two soft, doll-like, now blood-smeared bodies lying sprawled on the dust thus? I can see that it was Yezid who was responsible for this state of things. That heartless, bloody-minded beast! Did you smash the two dear doll-like beings that Hussein loved to play with too? Alas! Alas! This is that Ferat River; its swift-flowing current took away all the dead bodies thrown into it. The river appears stained in blood here and there; in some places it appears bloodier than others; while in some places the blue waters of the river have merged with the crimson stain of blood to create a color expressive of unique sorrow. It is as if grief for Hussein is being emblemized by every wave of the Ferat in all kinds of distinctive shades of crimson.

A sound and then these words: "This is my cummerbund, this my helmet; here is my sword—why are they strewn here thus?" Another voice and these words now: "All of these were Hussein's!"

"He was a mighty being—Medina's king." Why were all these things lying under a tree of this expanse then? Whose blood-stained dagger was this? Why were his armor, clothes, helmet and scabbard scattered thus? What could have led to this scene? Was this a sign of self-immolation or some kind of aberration in his being? Has the world been able to grasp the significance of the hands positioned so as if he had some kind of advice to give to it, though one hand had been sliced partially? Who was it that injured the left hand thus? Was his severed head facing his homeland of Medina though it had been decapitated? Alas, homeland!

Q&A WITH FARAH GHUZNAVI:

The Writer's Wilderness Survival Kit

QTN: I feel like as I progress with writing a story, I lose the pace and the interest. As a result, the conclusion of my story/article seems rash and out of place. Do you have any suggestions on how I can control this?

ANS: The process of writing is profoundly individual, and sometimes even the way in which the same writer writes two of his or her own stories can vary considerably. So there is really no right or wrong way of doing things. But one way of getting the best out of your writing is to understand what kind of writer you are.

For example, some people like to plan what they are going to write and how they will do that well ahead of the time when they actually sit down to write. Others prefer to work spontaneously and see where the process takes them. And while it's hard to know without actually seeing you in action, it sounds to me as if you have been following the latter path. Perhaps it's time to find out whether that is in fact the best method for you.

Think through the plot of the

story from beginning to end, and then consider making a few notes about what you have come up with. Check the logic of your story by drawing a brief outline for yourself, with a timeline for events and a sequence for how the story will develop. Examine whether the story logic stands up to scrutiny i.e. would the initial instances that you are setting up cause the chain of events to unfold in the way that you have outlined? This is a good way to see if the conclusion really makes sense, given what takes place in the story.

If developing the basic outline of your story helps you to verify the logic and address any inconsistencies, you may then wish to add further details to various aspects of the outline. This can be very helpful in the actual writing process, by reminding you of what you wanted to address, and keeping you on track so that you don't go off at a tangent and run out of ideas. The detailed outline can also help prevent you from losing interest, because it reminds you of what you actually want to say with this story, why you are in fact

writing it at all.

You may find in the course of putting the story on the page that new ideas will emerge, so adjust the outline if you need to. Work with concentration, and get the first draft done as quickly as possible, while everything is still clear in your mind. Leave it for a day or two before you revisit it. Looking at it afresh will make it easier to see where the flaws in the story lie, and how to improve the flow of the writing.

Your first draft is just that: a beginning. Repeated revisions are part of getting a story to the point at which it reads easily. However painful you find the prospect of revision, it's an essential part of the process. By playing around with some of these suggestions and assessing the extent to which you find any of them helpful, I believe you will be closer to identifying the writing process that works best for you.

Queries on writing may be sent to Farah Ghuznavi at DSLitEditor@gmail.com

THE COMMON PEOPLE

Marzia Rahman

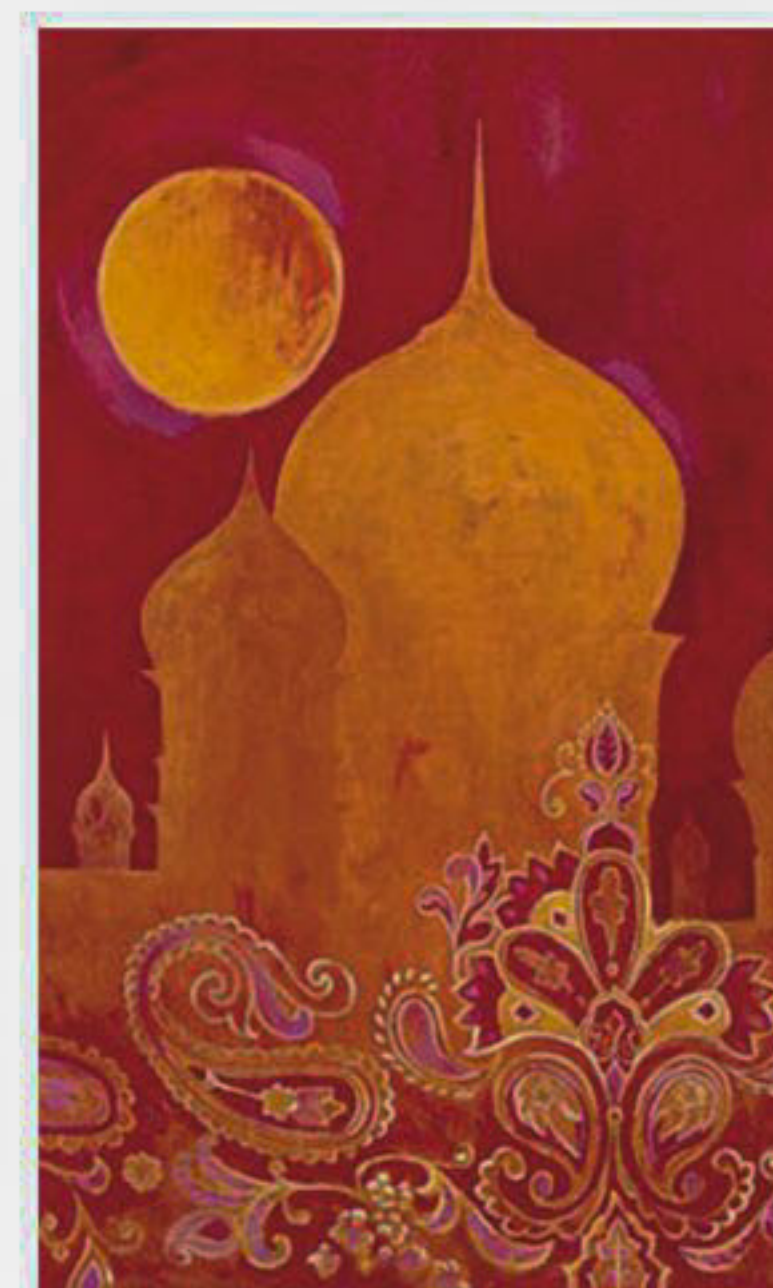
Once upon a time there was a green, fertile land ruled by a Queen who loved nothing more than dressing herself up and collecting gold. Though the common people were poor and the Queen was a bit greedy, still they were happy.

All was going well until one day a learned group of people visited the Queen in her court. They told the Queen that they would introduce a new rule which would turn their land into a rich one. In this new system the land would be run for the people, by the people and of the people. The common people were astonished. They had never heard of such a system. The Queen didn't agree at first but when the group promised to give her a room full of new clothes and a garden full of gold, she happily relented.

The learned group started ruling the land from the court and the first thing they did was to banish the common people.

The common people asked: "Isn't this new system answerable to us?" The learned group told them to go away and leave them in peace so that they could establish the new system 'of the people, by the people and for the people.'

One year passed. Nothing much had changed except the poor became



poorer and the rich became richer. The common people went to see the Queen and told her their woes. She too felt disillusioned by the new system. So the Queen now asked the learned group to leave. But the learned group refused to yield as they had become infected with the madness of power.

The Queen said: "Leave at once or I

will destroy you."

The learned group challenged her. "Let's see who destroys whom!"

The common people begged. "Do what you will but spare us."

No one listened to them. The people of the learned group began to kill the common people, destroy their harvest, burn their houses. Soon the green, fertile land turned into a wasteland "where the centre could not hold...where mere anarchy was loosed upon the world". The common people went to and fro between the Queen and the learned group but both parties refuse to listen to their plight.

Why should they? The common people were illiterate. What would they understand?

While the land burned, Queen counted her gold and made plans to secure her kingdom. The learned group planted devices to destroy everything in order to snatch power. The common people screamed in utter anguish: "How much more must we lose before we get back our right to live?"

Then one day the common people decide to stand up, to shout, to demand their right to live. They began to march to the court holding an enormous green canvas centred with a red circle; the word 'Peace' inscribed on it.