



FICTION

# Colour, or a Lack Thereof

QAZI MUSTABEEN NOOR

On a lazy weekend midday, Baba should be fast asleep- preferably and effectively. There would be no going out otherwise.

We had been in preparation days ahead of the actual adventure, me not so much as her. On this fateful day while the scorching sun burns all and drenches all, we hurry and scurry past all prying eyes to do what needs to be done. I told her to wear her second-best saree for the occasion. The second-best, as her most exclusive, statement-making piece in the wardrobe might bring back excruciating memories. I whisper at her a time-check and a sharp warning, "Hurry up! We have 15 minutes, might as well be dead otherwise!" Craning my neck, I keep a watchful eye on the ticking clock in the hallway.

She emerges not in the second, but in the third-best saree she has. I mouth a 'why' at her, to which her voice trails off somewhere I can't ever be. "It's not appropriate, you see, a girl like me. Wearing colours like that..." There is no room for an uneasy quiet between the two of us, so I begin to brave a second question at her, "What's the harm? It's not like he's..."

The rest becomes muffled, we need to keep it quiet, hush-hush. For now, for ever, forever. She wipes the sweat off of my forehead with her neatly folded handkerchief, explaining further, "Not dead, I know. But as good as that, don't you think?" One look at me, and she has read my mind.

I carry my heels tenderly, for the convenience of tiptoeing past the



sleeping tiger. In an easy chair, Baba's form lies in a deep slumber, the newspaper shrouding his face and the upper half of his body. The headlines say something about the impending budget, the impending cricket match, and the impending doom. The world ends, they suppose, in 2012.

When did the world end for us, though?

Was it at, what Asif bhai called, the 'body turmeric' ceremony? Unlike today, she was radiant and ravishing, perhaps truly happy, beaming at those of us who were younger. She wore colour with the pride she was entitled to, was still entitled to, at that point of time. We remember cutting up purple patterned paper in triangles, tracing them out, attaching them

to an overhead string. A flock of

happy triangles concealed a bit of the gloomy sky for us that day.

She is, and always has been, all about colour. She was a zesty lemon-yellow that day, yet berry-purple is her first love. The colour of berries, jaam, especially. Before any of this had unfurled, she had once schooled me and my friends on the origin of sarees, of celebrations, of traditions.

"Why is that weave called Jamdani? It's because the original sarees used to be the colour of jaam, dyed with the purple jaam juice we like so much. And listen, I'm not the type to wear a designer blouse with a Jamdani saree. The saree is the star, not the blouse, so a single-coloured, plain blouse is best. Otherwise, it's an insult to the weave."

Her second-best is hence, a

purple Jamdani, a deep blackened purple. The blackened saree has scared her now, or perhaps, it's the fear of the people who decree this no-colour policy. They made her transition from warm-yellow to rustic-red to wraith-white.

I had ensured beforehand that the rickshaw remains at the ready. Taking advantage of the tiger's latency, I whisk her away on wheels, straight to the house where silvery dreams materialize. On rickshaw, the distance is a mere fifteen minutes. The matinee show starts exactly in twenty.

As the screen is alight and the hall abuzz, I cast a sideways glance at Apa.

A handkerchief has come out. A white handkerchief, catching her

I carry my heels tenderly, for the convenience of tiptoeing past the sleeping tiger. In an easy chair, Baba's form lies in a deep slumber, the newspaper

happy tears, for a change.

Qazi Mustabeen Noor is an aspiring writer and an English Literature major from North South University.



POETRY

# The Paradox of Reality

MAHMUDA AKTAR MONISHA

I woke to the sound of a storm--  
The Wind howled like a wounded animal,  
Violating the trees. The leaves danced in a manic rhythm,  
Branches swished to a primal beat: the mighty thunder.

As I rubbed my sleepy eyes, thunder growled  
And it all stopped.  
For a moment, just a moment  
I could hear it. I could hear the heartbeat  
Of the universe - lub dub... lub dub  
Everything else faded into nothingness.  
There was no reality, no virtual reality or anything

No worries, no pain, no rush.  
It was a moment that stretched into infinity...  
And as the heartbeat continued to drum away,  
I realised it was coming from me.  
This ludicrous loud noise, earth shattering piece of serenity--

Was mine! It was my heart beating.  
From the adrenaline maybe, who knows.  
But all I knew is this:

I am the universe, the universe is me.  
This storm, is also a part of me.  
The trees that ramble like frightened birds--  
That's me as well. It's all connected, you see.  
That dream you have while you sleep,  
Leaving you tired when you wake up,  
And you sigh 'what a dream'  
And go back to your usual mundane life;  
What if I told you that's another reality  
A reality lacking colour, of course.  
And when you rise, you dream in colours!  
All very confusing you see!  
So I decided to go back to sleep  
As the storm continued outside my window  
I closed the curtains and closed my eyes.  
Or should I say 'I woke up'  
In a colourless reality.

Monisha is a third year student doing her BBA in Accounting. She loves writing, travelling, practicing martial arts and petting cute dogs.

A translation of Syed Shamsul Haq's "Shikar"

# Prey

TRANSLATED BY JACKIE KABIR

There was a deafening noise!  
As soon as the bullets were fired from my rifle, I saw two birds flying away in the sky, dazzling in afternoon sunlight. And the third one fell down like a shooting star under the very tree they were sitting on. But I could barely see it because the bushes there walled off the view.

My chaprasi rushed off with a canvas bag and a knife in his hand.

How I love hunting in this mufassil town! Whenever I get some free time during my official tours, I go out hunting. My chaprasi can cook meat really well. Over all, it's been a good life.

The cartridge came out as I bend the rifle; I put a new one. My eyes scanned the trees around, shifting from one branch to another. One had to squint even though the sun was soft. Sometimes the birds could really hide themselves among the leaves so well that they couldn't be spotted.

But my chaprasi was taking too long. Meanwhile, I couldn't find another bird to aim at. I was still looking around from tree to tree, branch to branch. I was getting annoyed too. I was sure he sat down for a puff after bagging the bird! "I must give him a good



couldn't find the bird anywhere. I was furious. He had become so indolent. Once I get back to town, I must fine him a couple of times, otherwise he won't work seriously. My wife is right in saying that I give too much leverage to my attendants. Swearing under my breath, I said, "Let's go and look for the bird."

I walked ahead, he trailed behind me. The tree where the pigeon was sitting was hardly thirty yards away. I scolded him all the way as I shoved the bushes with the butt of my rifle to make our way.

When we reached the spot, there was no sign of any bird. I couldn't even spot a single feather or a drop of blood anywhere. Did the wounded bird drag itself away somewhere? I thought to myself. I strained up my ears in vain to listen to it chirping. I could hear nothing. It made me even more desperate.

There was a fresh twig lying around. Picking it up, I started hitting on the tall grasses and small shrubs. Still there was no sign of the bird.

My annoyance was taken over by

surprise and I was overwhelmed. At least fifty yards of empty space under the tree lay clear, let alone a wounded bird, even a coin could be easily spotted here. It seemed as if the bird had vanished into the thin air like magic. How could it disappear so easily? Did I imagine that a bird fell from the tree?

My chaprasi said, he, too saw the bird falling down from the tree after it was shot. I grew increasingly annoyed. I had a feeling that he was trying to appease me. I told him to keep his mouth shut and left the place.

Upon returning to the spot I shot the bird from, I found a young boy standing by the canal with the shell of my cartridge. He had nothing but an oversized shirt on him, which perhaps belonged to someone older and was handed over to him after it was torn. The boy had a round face and stared at me with fear in his eyes as if a single glance of mine would kill him.

The chaprasi made a terrified sound. I turned back and saw the boy had a patch of blood on the left side of his shirt. At that moment, it felt as though someone had trailed a knife, a cold one,

on my back. It seemed the bullet had been fired at his chest where a clot of blood congealed. I stared at him without any expression. I could barely see or hear anything. All I could make out was a patch of blood and some meaningless buzz in my ears, like a boatman calling out from far away oh ho ho....

The boy made an attempt to run but my servant got hold of him. My bewilderment gave way to anger. I shouted out, "Beat him up till he hands the bird over."

The bird was found. The boy had hidden it under a chunk of soil near the canal. Now it all became clear to me: the boy had picked the bird as soon as it was hit and tried to flee, pressing it to his chest. But then he got scared hearing our voices and failed to run away.

My chaprasi smacked his head and drove him away. I looked at the sky, the sun was no longer there, in fact it was nowhere to be seen. Dusk was dawning on us. Wiping his eyes with his shirt sleeve, the boy disappeared through the fields shrouded in fog.

The chaprasi cooked an excellent dish

that night. By this time, I'd forgotten about fining him, rather I might have given him some money to send home if he asked then.

He made my bed. Yawning, I fell asleep as soon as I laid down on the white bedcover with blue flowers on it. The boy entered my room. I watched him intently. His face was dark, sad and vague, and there was fear in his eyes--swaying like a wet marble. He didn't have any pants on, just an oversized shirt. It seemed he was no longer scared of me. He was walking towards me, coming closer and closer, a few steps more and he'd be within my reach, almost near my lap.

I let out a cry. There was fresh blood stain on the left side of his shirt. He didn't come any closer, nor did he move away. I was awakened by my chaprasi who peeped inside the net. He had the lantern in his hand. I didn't recognize who he was.

The next day, I went back to the city and gave up the license of my rifle.

Jackie Kabir is a writer and translator based in Dhaka.

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The boy had hidden it under a chunk of soil near the canal. Now it all became clear to me: the boy had picked the bird as soon as it was hit and tried to flee pressing it to his chest. But then he

scolding!" I thought to myself. The sunlight was fading, and I was eager to use my rifle once or twice more at least! I spotted the bird I hunted just before it fell, it was a beautiful green pigeon.

He returned at last, saying he