

THE LIMERENCE OF GHATS



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

MONICA MARGARET GOMES

Two days ago, in his text, my nephew mentioned the names of the *ghats*, the launches of my village that used to touch during their journeys, and continued it till the 80s. Nostalgia embraced me right at that moment, and I rushed back to my childhood. A six-hour journey, yet hardly boring, as it glided its Alice across the Ichamati. Only this time, the *shushuks* (river dolphins), not the rabbit, guided her to the wonderland.

Every now and then, their black shiny bodies jumped out of the water, which was really spectacular. As I stood on the deck and watched this show, all seemed so unreal. With dreamy eyes, I would wait for the sight of the *ghats*. 17 *ghats* with 17 interesting names.

Each one had a distinct scenery with a warm, natural atmosphere, and as I heard a name, I could picture it

instantly. Some *ghats* had trees or bamboo bushes lined up on the edges, while some were only muddy or grassy land. People would wait eagerly for the vessels to arrive. With different purposes, some got on, and some got off. The *ghats* were 30 to 45 minutes or an hour away from each other.

Sometimes I would run to my *ma* or *baba* to ask for the names of the *ghat* the launch had just touched and the one coming next. My heart would jump with excitement at the thought of nearing our destination. At every *ghat*, vendors along with people boarded with their fish and veggies. *Jhal moori*, peanuts, boiled eggs, and a farrago of local sweets and biscuits were also there in the baskets hanging from the necks of their sellers.

My taste buds eagerly awaited munching on these all through the journey. Though I was not allowed to have outside food on a launch journey, my parents never

stopped me from having it. Maybe they wanted me to enjoy the journey wholeheartedly. The vendors got off at the *ghats* connected to the *bazars* to sell their field-fresh veggies and freshwater fish. All these seemed so magical, as if a jukebox had sprung open. Meeting relatives who boarded from various *ghats* added extra spice to my happiness. They seemed to be people from another world. They would invite us to visit their houses during our stay, and before getting off the vessel, they reminded us of our promise once again. My joys knew no bounds, as I imagined myself visiting village after village, spreading my wings and relishing each second. Breathless with contentment, I waited for the last one, our destination, to appear. And as I set my feet on the dry grassy land with a pounding heart, the wet air of the *ghat* would whisper into my ear, "It's time to write your fairytale."

At each *ghat*, boatmen would eagerly wait for passengers to hire them. We always took the boats my grandma used to send for us. I still remember one of the boatmen's names. It was "Wahid" who used to take us to the village most of the time.

There was another *ghat* called "Baloogonda", but the route to it was different. Till the 70s, people used this route to reach their villages. From that *ghat*, horses were the only means of transportation. As our launch neared the *ghat*, with my siblings, I would stand on the deck looking for horses with eyes wide open. The sight of the horses of different colours and sizes standing on the *ghat* with their guards assured us of the comfort of homecoming.

When I jumped out of the launch and landed on the sandy earth, excitement nearly killed me. Then we would start choosing horses and plead with our father to hire the ones we wanted to ride. But most of the time, our grandma sent her known horse guides for us. There were three or four of them. Among the guides, I can recall only one name, "Gobindo".

The *ghats*, each a storyteller, offered us a promise to take us to our destination. We didn't have much then, but we had a natural, stress-free childhood, which was vibrant in every way, teaching us simplicity.

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Names written on lists

TASFIAH LIAKAT

My father used to tell me
Remember that you are human
Even as the world tries its best to erase you
With rote headlines, indifference, and silence
So, I write my name in fading ink
Everywhere I can reach
On cracked walls, broken doors, inside my wrists
If—no, when—I disappear
Someone would know I was here
My hands are busy counting the dead
Yet I still dream of a place
Where the sky is never angry
And bread is always soft
A world where names are not written on lists
Nor mispronounced in the news

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