

CHAPTER – II
TRANSLATION OF
DUSHKAL -FAMINE

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FAMINE

I met uncle on road, met means just saw. He was passing by me but I called him. As soon as he heard my voice, he stopped and laughing in loud voice he said,

“Oh! Is it Shree? You will live long. I was just thinking about you.”

I don't know whether to live long life is a boon or curse. But a graduate person like me, who scribbles job applications, may think of it as a curse.

Due to my silence, he asked me in consoling voice, “Are you angry because I didn't recognize you? The cataract in my eyes has very much developed so I cannot see much clear these days.

To get communication on the right track, I asked, “Why were you thinking about me?” He took me aside the road and began to tell enthusiastically, “I have to go to Sarangpur on the behalf of the Famine Removal Committee and I want someone to give me company. I belong to Sarangpur, so the committee has foisted this task upon me.”

‘When your eyesight has become weak, why are you meddling unduly, I wished to say something like this- but then uncle would begin reminiscing about Gandhian days, Dasbabu's renunciation of advocacy of abundant profit, Motilal who was using clothes washed in Paris how turned his back to luxurious life and went to jail, How did Jayprakash Narayan dare to come out of jail during the movement of forty two, one and many like these. His memories were like line of ants. I used to like those memories. They were simply interesting. Many times I tempted to ask him if it really happened. I couldn't do so .Uncle was my father's childhood intimate friend.

Uncle asked me, “Within two to three days, I have to go to Sarangpur, will you come with me ?

Or do you need your mother's permission?”

I was also bored of burning daylight and I had read about famine.

Recently, I had gone to a speech of a Politician from Mumbai at Gandhi square. The politician narrated an incident about a farmer from Nagar district in his speech. He came across the farmer at Dadar station. The farmer owned nearly twenty five acre land, but due to famine it was not cultivated. He thought Mumbai offers lots of jobs to all so he went there. But he was not getting any job and not ready to beg. While talking with the politician he said, "I will try to seek job for some days. Otherwise Mumbai has large sea to commit suicide."

When I heard this account my mind was stunned for a moment like other people. I thought at least study kept me busy until BA, but now a days how to kill the time is really a question. So I decided to accompany uncle for some days and experience the world. I thought this will help me to forget the pains of my unemployability. So I consented to uncle.

When I went home. I told everything to mother during the supper. Angrily She exclaimed, "Instead of worrying about job why are you ...?" I interrupted her, "Mother, I will see if I can get a job there also..."

Pleased with my statement she said, "Our Pushpatai is at Sarangpur. Her husband is transferred there. Go, go. Go with your uncle. Her husband is really a well known person. He holds higher post in the factory. I think it will be better to go to Sarangpur with your uncle.

In a way Pushpatai was our relative, but there was no interaction with her for long time. But due to Pushpatai's husband's status in society, mother could never avoid temptation of expressing our relationship with them.

I went to Pushpatai's bungalow on the next day after the arrival at Sarangpur. I thought, as it was a leisure day, I could meet her, and see if she could recognize me. To be truthful, the hope of job that mother had lighted in my mind was again and again peeping in my mind. Pushpatai's husband may have contacts with many well known people. Probably, it may be my destiny to get a job at Sarangpur I thought. When I entered Pushpatai's bungalow, the

servant was telling something to Pushpatai and she was talking angrily with him. She came outside and looking at me exclaimed, "Aren't you Shree?"

I was surprised. I went forward and touched her feet. Pleased with my gesture she said "Why are you sitting there? Come inside. Where is your luggage?"

I told her about my visit with uncle. She said laughing sarcastically, "It seems you also want to be a patriot."

I didn't say anything. I was going to say that I was jobless but I thought it will not be right to discuss this matter today, as I was going to stay in the area for a fortnight.

I was expecting that she will offer me a cup of tea and say good bye but she took me in her bungalow and not only ordered servants to bring tea for me but served me sweet and fried rotics also.

It was a good delicacy but the thought of my visit with famine removal committee disturbed me, so that I couldn't enjoy it.

To break the silence, I asked, "Is it someone's birthday?"

Pushpatai smiled and nodded. I was willing to ask whose birthday it was. But I couldn't recall any of her child's name. She said, "You didn't ask me whose birthday is it? Today is birthday of Lucy's puppy. Earlier none of her puppies could survive. So I prayed God very intensely/with all my heart and this one survived. So we decided to celebrate its birthday every month. My husband loves it very much, like his daughter."

After finishing the delicacy, I was going to say goodbye. But she took me in another room and showed the puppy.

After a lot of adulation and exhibition of the puppy she said, "Come to stay with us, one day. My husband likes roses also. We have hundred varieties of rose in our garden. He likes western music also. You can get a chance to listen Spanish records too. Don't forget."

When I returned to our place, uncle was making a list of local wealthy and reputed persons in the village with the help of several local people. As

soon as he heard my voice, he said, "You have arrived at right time. You will live long. Your relative pushpatai seems a famous person. She is a member of womens' committee. This committee is made up of four to five groups of women. She is a chair person of that committee. If she wills, she could help us to collect donation from wealthy women, easily."

When uncle used the words 'your relative Pushpatai', all the people around him began to stare at me for a moment. For being her relative I felt proud, like my mother. And in that excitement I told uncle, "We can go to Pushpatai's house anytime. Tomorrow we will begin our work from her house". As we had decided, I went to Pushpatai's house with uncle, on the next day. Looking at me she smiled, but when she saw uncle with me she seemed irritated. But uncle could not notice her changed face due to weak eyesight. Uncle began his narration with great enthusiasm. He told her, about his social work, "I have been doing social work from Gandhian days. Now I cannot see properly but I have come here to collect funds ..." In this manner he gave a long introduction and finally suggested her that, being the chair person of women's committee she should help in this matter.

When uncle stopped talking, no one said anything for some two to three minutes. I felt awkward and I thought, Pushpatai might not liked my visit with uncle I was embarrassed. It seemed as if for some time, the wind aborted and then again began to blow. Pushpatai said to uncle in soft voice, "Your work is so great, but our committee is not financially that sound. Everything has become so expensive. And committee has already declared two programmes ,one is beauty contest for women in district and second/another is on the occasion of Anniversary of ?? group , we are going to invite a Swamiji, may be Bhagwan Yogesh or someone like him. In these days one needs peace and so such spiritual programs..."

Uncle could not help himself interrupting her talk, he said, "Due to famine, people are drudging everywhere leaving household, even women in the

condition of puerperal are toiling. People are worried about everyday's needs. Help them. So that women in your committee would get a piece of mind.

Pushpatai said angrily, "The people who complain due to famine are not always destitute. They have learnt to pretend. They come to bungalow, any time suitable or unsuitable, ring the bell and disturb our sleep. When I open the door, I find an old, man or woman. A young woman with a small baby in her lap. A small boy, and their leader- a man! They all begin their drama---

'For last two days we have not eaten anything, give us one or two kilo grain.' If I give a rupee, they arrogantly ask... "What is the one rupee worth for?"

Uncle became despondent from this fusillade. He was baffled, not knowing what to say. Then quickly Pushpatai, said in sweet voice, "Look, the Shree is with you. Tomorrow, I have meeting with board of director of our committee. In that meeting, I will discuss your topic, and convey you the message. Give your address, while going. Now I have to attend an engagement. - Oh, no! Yet I have to make up! "

Uncle folded his hand to say Namaskar to Pushpatai. He grabbed my hand and began to walk towards the door.

On the road uncle did not say a single word. It was not much hot, but though I was wearing shoes, it made me feel of burning. I thought I have committed a big mistake by taking uncle to Pushpatai's house on the basis of my relationship. I was also congealed.

When we came back from Pushpatai's house, we got a letter note for uncle by someone. I read it aloud for uncle, 'I understood that you have arrived at Sarangapur. I am very sick, so I can't come to visit you. We are childhood friends. Lying on the bed, I often remember old days. I live in Sarangwadi. This is small hamlet of farmers. The distance is not much. I am waiting for you eagerly.'

-Your childhood friend

Govind Palsule

Listening to the content, kaka got excited. He also remembered his childhood days. He said to me, "We will go to Gondya, tomorrow. Later we would not get the time. We are old people and life is uncertain. So, it is better to move earlier and remember, we will take our work with us. If I forgot tomorrow, you remind me and keep the receipt book with us."

Next morning, we reached Sarangwadi. Uncle's friend was really enfeebled by sickness. Though his voice has gone deep, while talking with uncle he gained it for some time. They had conversation for nearly one and half hour. Uncle told his friend that before leaving Sarangpur, he would come to meet his friend again and said good-bye.

In Sarangwadi, the villagers were mainly farmers. They were somehow fulfilling their needs. This year nothing was cultivated due to famine in their farms. It seemed the Goddess earth was angry with farmers. Merely all the farmers used to go to Sarangpur for work early in the morning and at the time of evening they return with whatever money they had earned. The people were very poor, their houses were broken. Women wore old clothes, but very few houses said no to donation, otherwise each house gave a few amount to fund. Some people suggested us, to go to Dhondiba Kadam, who lives in his farm house.

It was a noon time. The sun was getting hotter and hotter. Uncle was exhausted but he had determined to meet Dhondiba Kadam, before leaving Sarangwadi.

When we reached Dhondiba's farm, we were sweating extremely. We enquired for Dhondiba. He was not at home. When uncle asked, "When would he return?" a very old woman replied, "I don't know what to tell you, since last night he is not at home. Everybody in the house has gone out to search our-bull. Last night someone stole it. The bull costs eight hundred to one thousand. It was difficult for uncle to decide whether to stop there or return home. He expressed sympathy to the old woman for this theft. At that time, I saw four to

five people approaching towards the house. When they came nearer, the old women shouted, "Dhondib, did you find it?"

One of them, the person, whose face had the marks of serving land honestly, replied, "No mother, yet your Goddess has not blessed us."

When Dhondiba noticed us, he spread a coarse blanket on the ground to sit. In order to console him, uncle said, "Now days the acts of theft have increased very much. We have lost values in Gandhian days. Any thief"---

Dhondiba sighed and said, "Who knows? He may not be a thief. He might be a famine troubled person. Everybody wants to fill the bellies of hungry children. This hunger is really bad."

When we left Sarangwadi, the sun was really hot, but I felt as if cold breeze was soothing in my mind.