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“Qanūn kī Bastī”¹

Sheen Muzaffarpuri
Introduced and translated by
Syed Kashif

Introduction:

Born in the year 1920 in a small village called Bath Asli in District Sitamarhi (earlier Muzaffarpur), Bihar, Sheen Muzaffarpuri, (Wali-ur Rahman Shaida), was a renowned Urdu fiction writer. He has written about three hundred short stories, two novellas and four novels. After obtaining primary education in his village, he went to Kolkata for further studies. He received his secondary education in Kolkata’s popular Madrasa Aalia and thereafter passed his matriculation with distinction from University of Calcutta in the year 1937 (Muzaffarpuri 8). He could not continue his studies because of financial constraints. He worked as clerk. At the same time, he started writing.

His first short fiction *Berozgārī* was published in Kolkata’s weekly newspaper *Hind* in 1938. From then onwards, he kept writing regularly. In those days, his stories were published in various magazines, journals and newspapers; and among them the popular ones are *Bīswiñ Sadi* (Lahore), *Khaiyyām Weekly* (Lahore) *Mast Qalandar*, *Hasīn Dunyā*, *Nirālī Dunya*, and *Shamā*, among others. (Raza 37). Initially, his fictions were published mostly in film magazines or non-literary magazines, and therefore literary critics disregarded him or refused to accept him as a ‘standard’ fiction writer of Urdu literature; and many even accused him

¹ “Land of the Law” has been translated from “Qanūn kī Bastī” from the anthology *Hamāre Pasandīda Afsāne* edited by Ather Pervez, Educational Publishing House, Aligarh, 1997, pp. 301-313.

of obscenity. However, by 1940 or 1941 he was undoubtedly a recognized writer, and in later years of his career, he began to be recognized and acclaimed by well-known critics of Urdu literature.

In August 1945, Muzaffarpuri began his career as a journalist with the weekly *Naqqāsh*, Kolkata. thereafter, having resigned from the editorship of *Naqqāsh*, in February 1946 he moved to Delhi. He had an offer from Khaleq Dehlvi to work with his popular film magazine called *Mahnāmā Artist*. Sheen Muzaffarpuri worked in *Mahnāmā Artist* for a few months and thereafter he joined *Film Light* of Khan Eisa Ghaznavi, editor and owner of the magazine (Muzaffarpuri 9, 20, 21). This was the time when Urdu and Urdu magazines had a large readership. During this time, however, among the popular Urdu magazines published from Delhi alone, most of them were film or half-literary magazines—such as *Shamā*, *Film Light*, *Artist*, *Kāmyāb*, *Kahkashān*, *Khātoon-e-Mashriq* etc. In his autobiography *Raqs-e-Bismil*, Muzaffarpuri writes that *Mahnāmā Sāqī* was probably the only magazine which was purely literary (Muzaffarpuri 15).

His residence in Delhi from 1946-1947, and then in Pakistan from August 1947 to December 1948 is significant in many ways.

While in Delhi he established himself as a seasoned writer. Besides being active in film journalism he had been writing fiction regularly. His first book *Awāragard kay Khutūt*, a collection of short stories, was published during this time; i.e. in 1946. In subsequent years, Khusheter Grami (Editor of *Bīswiñ Sadī*, Lahore/Delhi) published his anthology *Dukhtī Rageñ* (1949) and Hafiz Yusuf Dehlvi (Editor of *Shamā*, Delhi) published his *Kadwe Ghūnt* (1949) (Muzaffarpuri 19, Raza 75). Although, Sheen Muzaffarpuri was known for his short stories, but he had also authored four novels—*Hazār Rāteñ* (1955), *Chānd ka Dāgh* (1956), *Khotā Sikka* (1961), *Garam Rākh* (unpublished) (Raza 107).

His journey to Pakistan and his stay in Pakistan is the phase—August 1947 to December 1948—of his life which left a considerable impact on him and his writings. Caught in the midst of communal riots in Delhi during the partition of India in 1947, Sheen Muzaffarpuri had to migrate—reluctantly—to Pakistan like thousands of Muslims in Delhi. Before boarding the train leading to Pakistan on 18th September 1947, Sheen, like thousands of Muslims in Delhi, had taken refuge in the Purana Quila. The sufferings Sheen and thousands of Muslims had undergone during their

one-month-stay in Purana Quila of Delhi have been recorded by Sheen during his stay in Karachi in 1948. He has included these in his autobiography *Raqs-e-Bismil* (dance of the enemy). The ordeals Muslim migrants of Delhi went through soon after they had reached Pakistan has also been recorded by Muzaffarpuri in a series of essays “Jo Mujh Pe Biti” (What I Went Through) published in *Kārwāñ*, a daily newspaper of Kolkata in September 1949, while he was associated with it. He has included these essays in his autobiography *Raqs-e-Bismil* as well.

During his stay in Pakistan, Sheen Muzaffarpuri remained impatient and restless. He had not wanted to go to Pakistan at all; however, circumstances forced him to leave. In his autobiography, he has written, “For crores of Indian Muslims migrated; this political and geographical revolution proved to be a curse of some *faqīr*” (Muzaffarpuri 120). At one place he also says, “I was not ready for my future there, my roots were in India and I was so emotionally attached to my soil that I could not imagine leaving my nation” (Muzaffarpuri 189). Initially, he stayed in Lahore till June 1948 and thereafter he went to Karachi. Khaleq Dehlvi, who had migrated from Delhi and settled in Karachi, had written several letters to him and asked him to join him there. Khaleq Dehlvi who had also called him from Kolkata to work with his magazine *Artist* in Delhi, before partition. Khaleq Dehlvi had thought of starting a magazine *Mizrāb* and he wanted to publish it under the editorship of Sheen Muzaffarpuri. Three issues were published i.e., in August 1948, September 1948 and December 1948 in his editorship. Thereafter, Muzaffarpuri returned to India. During his stay in Lahore, he wrote nothing. His days in Lahore were miserable. In Karachi, he wrote several short stories—mostly on the issue of partition and communal frenzy. A few of his fictions which he wrote in Karachi and which became popular are “Zahr” (published in *Payām-e-Sahar* of Karachi), “Dastak” (published in *Bīswīñ Sadī*, Delhi. *Bīswīñ Sadī*, was now being published from Delhi; his owner Khushter Grami, (Lala Ram Rakha Mal), had migrated from Lahore to Delhi), “Kūñwārī Maryam”, Ek Ajnabī Lahore Meñ” etc.

On his return to India, he got work in Kolkata in several newspapers and magazines including *Kārwāñ*, *Angārah*, *Asr-e-Jadīd*, *Roznāmā Hind*. But again, circumstances made him leave Kolkata; he was forced to move from one place to another. He worked in different cities including Delhi, Kanpur, Kolkata and Patna with different magazines and newspapers. His last endeavour was with the Bihar Urdu Academy, Patna where he worked as editor of its popular magazine *Zabān-o-Adab* and retired in 1983.

Following his, he wrote independently till he was in good health. He died in the year 1996 in his native village Bath Asli, Sitamarhi.

Sheen Muzaffarpuri started writing fiction at a time that was a significant phase in fiction writing in Bihar. Several great writers like Mohsin Azimabadi, Sohail Azimabadi, Akhtar Aurenvi, Shakila Akhtar were writing during his time. Sheen Muzaffarpuri also succeeded in registering his presence. As early as 1946 his first book *Awārāgard ke Khutūt* was published; and thereafter he never stopped. The Progressive Movement was at its peak when Sheen Muzaffarpuri started writing. However, it is significant to note that he did not confine himself to any movement or any faction. At many places he has claimed himself to be a “khud rau pauda” (a plant that nurtures itself) (Raza 76). He also wrote on a variety of issues. However, in initial days, most of his stories revolved around the subject of romance and sexuality, and because of this for quite a long time he was disregarded and critics hesitated to call him a ‘standard’ fiction writer. But as time passed, his subjects expanded. He wrote about gender, family, society, politics, partition, psychology and war. “Qanūn kī Bastī” belongs to his collection *Halālā* (1976); it is one of his acclaimed short stories. Ather Pervez (Department of Urdu, AMU) has also included this story in his anthology *Hamāre Pasandīda Afsāne* (Educational Publishing House, Aligarh 1997). In the introduction of his anthology, he observes that he considers the short stories in his collection a foundation whereupon modern short stories are being written in Urdu (15).

In “Qanūn kī Bastī” Sheen Muzaffarpuri has very brilliantly highlighted the failure or malfunction of the modern nation-state. He has also exposed the evils of civilized society. It is significant to note that the age we are living in is that of modern nation-state which came into existence largely on the basis of philosophies of liberty and equality. In accordance with the theory propounded by John Lock, people have surrendered their natural rights to the state so that it can protect them in times of danger and ensure that their natural rights—liberty and equality—are preserved. However, Muzaffarpuri’s story highlights that the modern nation-state has largely failed in discharging its duty. Capitalism has overwhelmed the state and resultantly people have been rendered powerless at the mercy of powerful.

It is also noteworthy that the society we live in is considered a civilized society. People have framed laws to govern society and its

individuals. However, as Muzaffarpuri has unveiled the other side of civilized society where people care for neither human life, nor the law.

Sher Khan, the protagonist of “Qanūn kī Bastī” (“Land of the Law”), is a dacoit who lives in the jungle, but agrees to settle in ‘civilized society’—a land of law—for the sake of his wife and child. But soon he finds that in the land of law, law itself is a sham. Civilized society is a masquerade; bribery is demanded and given openly; corruption is rampant. The first shock he gets in the land of law is when he has to pay five thousand rupees as security to the owner of the house, he takes on rent. Thereafter, he has to pay five hundred rupees to the manager of the company as bribery for a job. Then, his son gets ill after eating adulterated food. Moreover, he dies because of the improper treatment at the hospital. And then, he loses his wife too. Perturbed, Sher Khan eventually rejects the “land of the law” and leaves for the jungle. This is a powerful comment on present day “civilized society.”

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Land of the Law

The story about Sher Singh’s becoming a dacoit is rather short. His father made arms for a gang of dacoits. During those days, he was merely a sixteen-seventeen-year-old boy. Back then, his name was not Sher Singh. By the time he turned twenty or twenty-one, he was a tall and well-built young man, a cleverer craftsman than his father. He was much smarter at manufacturing arms. With time, he developed close friendships with the dacoits, and finally, they trapped him into joining their gang. Soon, he too began conducting robberies. He was very young, but he was smart, fearless and brave. So, he automatically gained the upper hand among his colleagues. Impressed with his performance, in just three to four years, the sardār declared him his successor. And, then, when the sardār was killed in a confrontation, all his colleagues readily accepted

him as their leader. After this, he renamed himself Sher Singh—a name he believed would be awe-inspiring for everyone.

It was fourteen to fifteen years since he joined the gang of robbers. He had become such a powerful and dreadful dacoit that people would tremble at the mere mention of his name. He was well-known—infamously—for several horrifying scandals. He had changed his *adda* or den several times. Many times, he had narrowly escaped being arrested by the police. Twice he was injured severely. The first time, he was injured so grievously that his colleagues believed him to be dead. But every time he got injured, he emerged even more hard-hearted and horrific after his recovery. The government announced a reward of ten thousand rupees on his head for anyone who caught him dead or alive. But for everyone, life was dearer than ten thousand rupees. Sher Singh was living a happy and lavish life. In his leisure, he would hang out, drink and gamble with his colleagues. When free, he loved to fix his arms or clean them and also manufacture new ones. At times, some of his colleagues would secretly slip into the villages. There, they would have fun and gather information about their next target.

But a time came when he lost interest in repeating the same old escapades again and again. He wanted something else. What was that? He did not know. He did not know exactly what he wanted. He had developed a sense of loneliness. A feeling of restlessness had engulfed him. Then, one day, all of a sudden, a revelation occurred to him. He now realized what more he wanted in his life.

One night, Sher Singh raided the haveli of a wealthy moneylender of a big qasba. The heavy iron safe was kept in the room of moneylender’s son, who had got married recently. While a few of Sher Singh’s men stood vigil outside, two barged into the haveli and broke open the safe. Sher Singh stood in position with the revolver in his hand beside his two men who were breaking the safe. In a state of panic, the moneylender’s son hid under the bed with a bed-sheet wrapped around him. His newly-wedded wife rushed in a corner of the room. Standing there in trepidation, she was shivering incessantly, in her silk petticoat around her waist—and nothing else—She was trying to hide herself. Her dishevelled hair helped her veil herself. Sher Singh had his eyes fixed on her continuously. She crouched in embarrassment, and soon, unable to bear the petrifying gaze of Sher Singh, she swooned and collapsed. As she fell to the ground, Sher Singh’s eyes glued to her, began to feel that he too would faint and fall to the

ground. However, he quickly controlled himself, swiftly pulled the bed-sheet and covered her with it. However, the excitement and turmoil that had been ignited within him did not die down; it remained resolute.

Having beheld this woman, he soon realized what he needed—his life’s desire. Having carried out the theft successfully, when he reached his adda safely, he regretted not having carried her away too. She had awakened a strong desire within him. For several days he could think only about her. He was clueless as to why he had not thought about a woman before. He had seen a woman only in the role of mother or sister. When a girl in his village had looked at him with playful eyes and naughty smiles, he had hardly understood her, for before he could understand that smile and gaze, he had already become a dreaded thief, who made the jungles and mountains his hideouts. He had never given any woman a thought, but now having seen this beautiful woman, he was reminded of the village girl who stared at him long ago, with a twinkling smile on her face.

Time passed and one day, Sher Singh picked up a woman from somewhere. Although she was a beautiful woman, she was rebellious and bitter. She yelled at Sher Singh. She showered abuses at him with abandon and even slapped him several times. Once she had begun thundering, she could go on for hours together. Sher Singh felt like he had been whipped; rage would well up inside him. He wanted to rein in the woman; and finally, feeling fed-up, he wanted to hold her by the neck and throw her down the deep gorge. However, with time, he not only got used to her, but also got addicted to her bitter words and stinging abuses; then, he began enjoying them. He thought it was better to settle down with this woman than to take the risk of bringing in a well-bred young woman to the adda. But this rebellious woman was not willing to settle down with him. Though under strict vigil, and quite helpless, she was looking for an opportune moment to make her escape.

After about three weeks, she softened, only enough to tell her name, though. She was Champa. Two to three more days passed, and she told Sher Singh a little about herself. Her story was not long. She had been married to a man who was a shirker, a good for nothing. She did not like him; they fought day and night. They hurled abuses at each other. Many times, she beat him. Once, only after a year of their marriage, they had had a huge fight and she beat him so much that he ran away from his own house. Since then, for six years, she had been living by herself, labouring

in the fields. Many times, she thought about marrying a second time but no one was willing to marry to her, thanks to the terror she commanded.

Sher Singh knew the story of her life from here on. One day, two miles away from the village, in the weekly market, he had come across Champa; she was buying essentials. He found on her countenance, the same smile, and the same naughtiness which he had once seen on the village girl. He fell in love. That night, Sher Singh was to carry out a robbery at the house of the village Mahajan, and so, he along with one of his men had arrived at the village in disguise, in advance. The rest of his colleagues were to slip into the village in the dark of the night with their arms and ammunition. After Sher Singh saw Champa, he postponed his programme of conducting the robbery. He thought he could carry out the robbery another time, but how would he find this woman again, if he let her go? So, he decided to complete this task first. Champa got late buying the essentials. Evening had descended, it was dark all around. Between the village and market, there lay a thick orchard across a large stretch. All Sher Singh wanted to find out was, the village to which she belonged. As it happened, luck was on his side. It was getting dark when Champa walked back through the orchard. There was silence all around. Sher Singh found his opportunity—he thought it would be foolish to miss it. He ambushed her from behind. His colleague blindfolded her in a fraction of moment and tied up her hands. They hid her in a faraway corner of the orchard—in the darkest part. After sometime, when the darkness grew thicker, they carried the woman and began walking towards the desolate fields which led to the forest and the mountain. The forest was at least five miles away. She was a healthy and heavy woman. Sher Singh and his colleague, could not, between themselves, carry her for more than a mile. Thereafter, they dragged and pushed her along. In the middle of night, half way down their journey, they removed her blindfold and untied her hands. As soon as she found herself free, she struck hard at Sher Singh, bruising his face and ears. But Sher Singh did not react; he suppressed his anger; trounced his temper. He kept dragging her, and, finally arrived at his adda.

Ten to fifteen days passed. Champa understood that it was not possible to get out of the clutches of these robbers. So, she gradually began giving in. She also started liking Sher Singh—little by little. Although he was a dreaded dacoit, when in front of her he always looked frightened. Champa wished for a husband like him. Time flew. Champa accepted Sher Singh, for he was a man as strong as her. But Sher Singh’s colleagues were unable to accept Champa. A woman joining their group was

considered a bad omen by all Sher Singh’s colleagues. For them, a woman not only stood for the softness of a man’s heart but was also a scar on his courage and bravery. Moreover, Champa reprimanded them every now and then. Therefore, they did not like her at all. They made many efforts to convince Sher Singh to throw her, the bad omen, out. But by now Champa had camped in so strongly in Sher Singh’s heart that it was impossible to throw her out. One year passed.

One day, Sher Singh said to her: “Champa Rani, I want you to support me in my work at times. You will learn everything soon with a bit of training. If a woman as pompous as you become dacoit . . .”

Before Sher Singh could complete his sentence, Champa yelled at him, “Stop this nonsense. It is more than enough that I have accepted a dacoit like you as my husband. I can be your wife, but I cannot become your partner in your crimes — your disgusting profession. I will cut off your tongue if you say anything like this again.”

Sher Singh could not utter a word.

Champa muttered to herself: “God knows what my destiny is. Even my womb is not pure anymore.”

Sher Singh could not understand what she meant. He kept staring at Champa. Again, she screamed: “Why are you staring at me like an owl? I am pregnant. Now you will realize the hard facts of life. Now you will get a taste of your own medicine. You wanted a wife, didn’t you?”

“Oh my God, what is this?” A shiver ran down Sher Singh’s spine. His face turned pale in panic. He experienced both, fear and happiness at one and the same time. He was perplexed. This woman had entered his life, and held him on a chain. He shuddered to think of yet another shackle, a baby. “How will I remain dacoit, then? Should I strangle Champa and throw her in the deep chasm together with the baby? Or should I go back to the “Land of the Law” with both of them?” He felt as if a hole has been struck in the boat of his life.

As two or three months passed, his colleagues got to know about Champa’s pregnancy. They were very upset. One day, all of them assembled and questioned Sher Singh, “Sardār, you need to visit the city

and throw away this curse which you are nurturing. This home and family thing does not suit to us. We are dacoits.”

Sher Singh knew that what they were saying was correct. But he also knew that he could not leave Champa. When Champa got to know that his colleagues were pressurizing Sher Singh to abandon her, one night, while she was pressing his legs she threatened him: “Listen Sher Singh, if you leave me, I will kill you. I am not your mistress. You cannot throw me out like a fly that has fallen in milk. I have accepted you as my husband, from the bottom of my heart. I allowed you to touch me, only after you swore and ensured me that we would live and die together.”

It was true. Sher Singh had nothing to say. It had impossible for him to think of living without her. He was impatient to see his child who was growing in Champa’s womb. He consoled her, but remained lost in thought: “Don’t worry, Champa! I remember everything. I will not cheat on you. You are the only woman in my life.”

“But I cannot live with my child among dacoits. I will not even let the shadow of dacoits touch my child.”

Sher Singh remained quiet. And, then, one day, all of a sudden, Sher Singh told his colleagues: “I am going to the city to settle this woman. I will go to some faraway place. I may be late returning. I cannot escape my destiny. I must face it.”

His colleagues looked at him in wonder. But Sher Singh did not wait. He set out for the city with Champa.

For three days, he travelled before he reached a faraway the city. He had inquired about dharamshala at the station and found a rented accommodation in less than a week. The rent was only fifty rupees per month, but he had to pay five thousand rupees as security. He found it unjustifiable. For several days he wondered what these five thousand rupees were for. Did it not mean that one who owns a house can extort money—as much as he wants—from a person who is helpless? Did it not mean that the powerful can snatch anything away from the powerless? Was this not robbery then? He got very angry with Champa. “Is this your land of the law, your land of humanity?”

Champa was indeed very embarrassed. The very first experience was quite dreadful. Pained from within, Sher Singh handed over the remaining amount of money to Champa and said: “I am leaving. I will keep visiting you from time to time. My colleagues will also visit in between. I will look after you.”

Champa began to cry. She held on to his legs tightly with her arms and beseeched, “No, I will not let you go. You cannot go away leaving me behind.” Champa looked him in his eyes and said, “I don’t want anything. We will work hard together. Both of us will live and die together.” Sher Singh surrendered, and they began a new life.

Sher Singh ran from pillar to post, and in the end succeeded in finding a job in an iron factory. He kept thinking for days—he would work and he would be paid for that; but why did the officer take five hundred rupees from him for giving him work? What was that for? He felt both, astonished and troubled.

Champa had entered the ninth month of her pregnancy; therefore, she stayed indoors. But Sher Singh did not like his new life. His developed liver trouble; he remained sick with either loose motions or constipation. Body aches, headaches and anxiety kept him crabby all the time. His face turned pale. He lost weight. All this happened because of poor quality food he ate. Every food item was impure and adulterated—milk, ghee, oil, flour, spices – anything and everything. Even rotten food items would sell in the market. But nothing cost less. There would be two different prices for the same item— the government’s price and the market price. Shopkeepers would not sell things on the government’s price. And, everybody did not have the money to buy things at the market rate. Although people had work and had money, they were in distress. Although people looked happy, they were living in grief. Sher Singh came to know that to curb every illegal activity, there was a law and there was a system. But why was this anarchy? He then got to make out that who is powerful can throw dust in the eyes of the law; and those who possess money can buy the one who implements the law. The poor and weak keep whirling between power and wealth. Plunder is rampant. Loot is prevalent. Everyone is conspiring against each other. Law is a sham; society is a masquerade; government is a cover. Is this not theft—and nothing else? When someone happens to loot someone without a sham, without a masquerade and without a cover? Sher Singh could make out that in order to keep the civilized loot on, the same people who are

supposed to curb bribery —from the highest to the lowest ranks—take bribes. So in this world, a cat is deputed to guard milk, a thief is appointed to protect treasury— that too on a huge salary.

Sher Singh felt suffocated in the land of law where civility was artificial. While Sher Singh lived in the jungles and mountains and Champa chided him, he believed he was a culprit and hated himself. But after shifting to the city, such thoughts began fading away. Now he began counter-attacking Champa. Every day, something or other would happen, and Sher Singh would find an opportunity to look Champa in the eye and lash out at her: “What law do you live by? Where is your civic society? Where are those brave men who announced a ten thousand rupees bounty on Sher Singh? Where are all those people who have issued licenses to lakhs of thieves of the city but want to kill one Sher Singh who lives in the jungle?”

Champa was not wise enough, or perhaps, she did not know how to respond to such questions, or put across arguments in defence of herself. Anyway, what reply could she make? A problem which exists like the light of the day cannot be resolved with an answer. Gradually Sher Singh got used to such things, as crores of people of the society were already accustomed to it—who were desperate to see Sher Singh of the jungle killed, but were unable to do anything about the city’s innumerable Sher Singhs. Some sane and sensible people raise slogans and talk about revolution, but all this is limited either to the newspapers or to the slogans alone. Like the poor and powerless, the revolution too would spin and perish between the tussle of power and wealth.

In these circumstances, Champa gave birth to a child. She was no longer a strong woman now. Two rumours were doing the rounds about Sher Singh. One that he had died. Another, that he has been killed at the hands of his companions because of a woman. These were published in the newspapers too. Nobody could recognize Sher Singh. He had never been photographed in all his life. Nobody could dare to take his photograph. People only imagined in their minds, how Sher Singh looked —a man with a large and dreadful face.

Sher Singh was now in Champa’s custody. He found himself double-chained when his child was born, and he did not like the city at all — the world away from his jungles and mountains. A thief who once robbed others with impunity was now the victim of innumerable thieves who

thrived all around him. His house built on a land of ten to fifteen yards now became the only space in which he found succour. His little home—with Champa and his child— was the only place which was a heaven to him, and all around him was hell.

Three years passed. Nothing changed. Bhim Singh, Sher Singh and Champa’s child, a three-year-old baby boy, looked big enough to be five years old. He was handsome and sturdy. They both loved him immensely. Champa would say: “I will make him a police officer.” Sher Singh would reply: “What a pity! How can you think like this? I will make him a minister, before whom all the license holding thieves of the country will bow in salutation.”

But Bhim Singh became neither a police officer nor a minister. Alas! He died as he turned three-and-half-years old. Sher Singh knew Bhim Singh had been killed by the world of law. With him, a few other people had also been killed. Some had escaped the murder marginally. Bhim Singh had purchased some sweet from a sweetmeat shop of the neighbourhood; and as soon as he ate it, he fell sick. When his condition deteriorated, he was rushed to the hospital. He was diagnosed with food poisoning. When investigated, it was found out that the oil in which shopkeeper had made the sweet was adulterated. The doctors asked Sher Singh to purchase two injections—both were very costly. But they proved to be ineffective; in fact, they proved to be harmful. It was found out that one of the injections was counterfeit, and the other had already expired. Then, on third day, Sher Singh, his pistol tucked in his waist and blanket slung over his shoulder, remarked: “Champa, I am leaving. You enjoy the land of law, the society of serenity. I am done with everything.”

But Champa blocked his way, and yelled at him, “Where are you going?”

“I am going back to...”

“Shoot me before you leave.”

“I will take you back too. First let me see my world and come back.”

“But...but...what about your second child?”

“What!”

Sher Singh was stunned. He gathered some courage and said to Champa: “But it is months away.”

“No, it is not far away. Only two or two-and-a-half months more.” Champa moved ahead and took down the blanket from his shoulder.

“I see.” Sher Singh took a long breath and put down his pistol.

Two months, later, one day, when Sher Singh returned from work in the evening, he found Champa in labour. She had been struggling since the afternoon. Because the factory was far away from the city, no one could inform Sher Singh. No one in the neighbourhood had the good sense to make a telephone call to Sher Singh either. As soon as Champa saw Sher Singh, she burst into tears and screamed, “Take me to the hospital. Hurry! Hurry up! I’m dying. I will die”.

On seeing Champa’s condition Sher Singh got nervous. She was so serious that she could not be taken to hospital. He was clueless what to do. Nothing could be done at home either. He rushed to the neighbourhood doctor. On learning about the patient’s condition, the doctor said: “Nothing can be done at home, take her to the hospital quickly.”

The doctor called the hospital to send an ambulance. An hour passed; the ambulance did not come. Champa’s condition deteriorated. A moment came when Sher Singh, perturbed and restless, lost his temper. He took out his pistol and thought he would kill either Champa or himself. But he stopped. The doctor called the hospital repeatedly, and every time he got the same reply: “We are sending the ambulance in a moment.” The ambulance did not come. The doctor administered an injection and Sher Singh somehow managed to take Champa to the hospital, on a cycle rickshaw.

But there was no doctor qualified enough to treat a patient like Champa. It took half an hour to take Champa to the maternity ward. But no doctor was available over there. Sher Singh ran from pillar to post to call a doctor. The doctor was busy chitchatting and laughing with his colleagues. Every time Sher Singh went to him, he returned: “You go, I’m coming.” And, when the midwife came and said to the doctor: “Case is serious doctor, come fast”, the doctor replied: “Okay, I will come in a moment, let me finish my tea. In the meantime, you get things ready.”

After one hour, when the doctor arrived, he checked Champa and then turned around to address Sher Singh: “Sorry! the patient is dead.”

Sher Singh was stunned. He was numb. He had thought Champa had fainted in pain.

The nurse covered her body with a sheet. The doctor turned to leave. But Sher Singh roared: “Doctor!” Startled, the doctor turned around. Sher Singh growled: “But I brought her alive one-and-a-half hour earlier!”

Everyone looked at Sher Singh in awe. And, in the meanwhile, out of the blue, two bullets were fired one after another, on the doctor’s chest. There was chaos and commotion all around. And in the midst of it all, Sher Singh ran away.