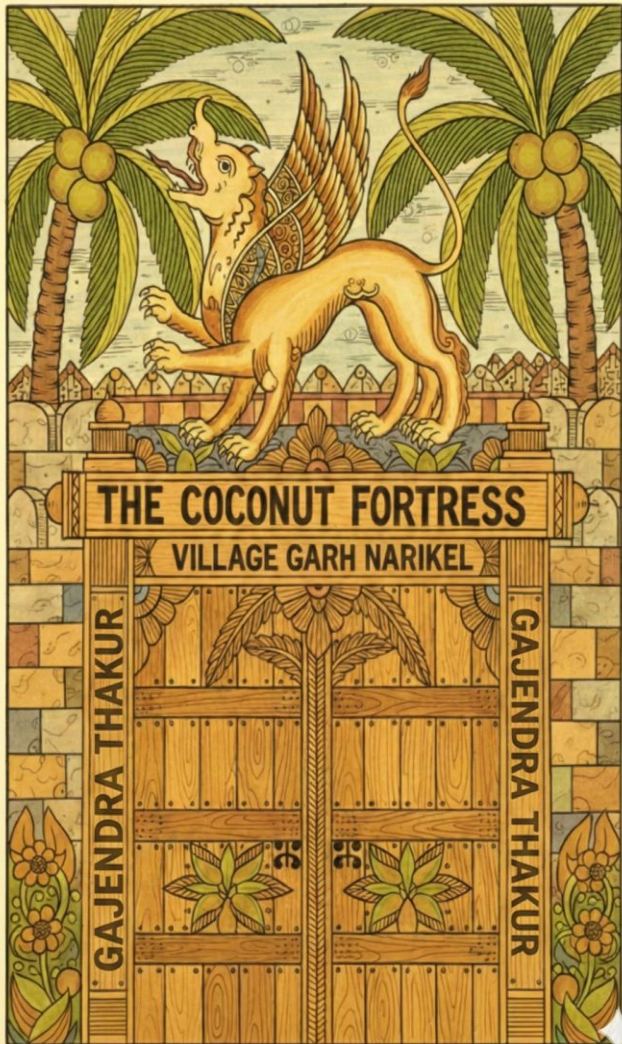




The Coconut Fortress

Village Garh Narikel

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**English Translation: Gajendra
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2026; The Coconut Fortress: Village Garh Narikel [“Garh Narikel” Maithili Novel by Gajendra Thakur, translated into English by the author himself]

ISBN:978-93-5810-064-8

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Garh Narikel

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First Wave: The Home of the Buffalo Herder Brahmins

First Petal: The Circular Gait of Life

How can one describe it? It is like the steady, circular gait of an ox yoked to an oil press! Before dawn, before the sun even rises, life wakes up and stands ready.

There is so much work to be done in a household. So much work just to keep life moving. Life begins before daybreak. Everyone knows what they have to do; it starts directly, without stopping, without hesitation. With what agility life moves! No concern is forgotten, no task is left behind. Yet, how can anyone call this swift life a slow-moving one, a stagnant life? How can they compare it to the gait of an ox yoked to an oil press!

"Brother, won't you carry me on your shoulders and give me a tour?"

Mukhdev never had any trouble carrying Mamtod on his shoulders while doing any task, neither during work nor during play. The time for play was also clearly defined. Learning a skill was their education, and in between came the games and the running around. And oh, the skills! From industrial labor to making mats, tying knots, splitting bamboo, swimming in the pond, catching fish, snails, and crabs, and crafting drums. There was no rush in learning these skills. Everyone knew what a child of a certain age was capable of.

The children of the neighborhood would gather—sometimes playing at being bride and groom, sometimes as brother and sister. Mamtod had two brothers, Dayaram and Mukhdev. But while some other little girl in the neighborhood might occasionally claim Dayaram as her brother, in Mamtod's world, it was always Mukhdev.

"Brother, you won't forget me, will you? When a sister-in-law comes home, you won't forget me, right?"

"Will Brother forget me?" Mamtod would even ask her parents. Someone had told her that once a sister-in-law arrived at the house, her brother would forget her.

"Will you rely on a sister-in-law? You will get married yourself and go to your own home," her mother would tell her.

"No, I won't get married. I will stay with Mother and Father my whole life."

To a child, parents are the most beloved. And the parents would say, "Fine, stay with us." But Mamtod felt they said it only to humor her. In the middle of the night, she would wake them up, make them promise again, and only then sleep peacefully.

Mother-Father, Uncle-Aunt, Maternal Uncle-Aunt, Paternal and Maternal cousins. The people of the village, society.

"How beautifully life is passing, a self-reliant life. We don't stretch our hands before anyone, nor do we have any unnecessary concerns with others. Whatever concern we have with society is merely that of a stoic—without emotion. In our tradition, if there is

work, we do it; we provide the drums, we play the pipes. It is one-sided; that's the end of it. There is no deep emotional connection. What ritual happens in my house, how a wedding is conducted—others have no need or involvement in it. No message, no information. They don't come seeking or asking. Later, if we meet, they might ask if everything went well. But I hear that if someone creates trouble, four people stand up against injustice. It was never a one-sided story in Garh Narikel. So I hear."

I heard Father and Mother say—how beautifully life is passing. They have a use for our work, but we have no use for theirs.

Mother's maternal home, the homes of her sisters' in-laws, the homes of Father's sisters' in-laws—besides Garh Narikel, these few other villages entered Mukhdev's life. Mukhdev's neighborhood lived a self-reliant life, independent of the other quarters of Garh Narikel. Yet Mukhdev's quarter was connected to specific quarters of those other villages. To an outsider, it seemed self-sufficient, but nothing was ever truly one-sided in Garh Narikel. During floods or droughts, the entire village became one. The

self-reliant culture of Mukhdev's quarter seemed different from other quarters of the same village, but it felt identical to those specific quarters in Mother's and Father's relatives' villages. The same work, the same talk.

Their own world...

People absorbed in their own world. "How beautifully life passes, a self-reliant life. If your concern with me is only for work, then I have no concern with you at all. Go on..."

An empire of earth... Polished houses and courtyards, the courtyard plastered with cow dung and the entrance with smooth clay.

Houses were thatched with straw in this neighborhood and the other, and covered with leaves in this neighborhood and the other. Only a few wealthy houses were thatched with *Khadd* grass.

"How beautiful this house looks, Mother, thatched with grass."

"Nonsense, only from the outside. Snakes rustle inside that grass roof. They stay so

hidden you won't even notice. And this grass, this straw... it is all just a form of earth. Come, let me show you."

Mother would take Mukhdev to the backyard. Where water leaked from the roof, Father would pull out the old straw and put in new. The old straw was piled in the back.

"Look, the straw on top is straw, but the straw at the bottom, touching the ground, has become earth. Slowly, all this straw will become earth. The grass will also become earth."

An empire of earth. The vessels, the stove, the walls of the house—all were made of earth. And now this straw and hay were also earth!

The *Rasanchowki*, the *Pipahi*. The drums, the *Mridang*. The sandals, the shoes. The *Gorochan*.

If you don't smell the scent of leather, how can a leather object be made?

"There is no real difference between human skin and animal hide. Don't you see human skin when there is a wound, how it starts to

smell? Humans are animals too. While there is life, a scratch on the skin hurts. Life ends and... the skin, the grass, the straw—it all becomes earth. If you keep it near the earth, it becomes earth. If you dry it, it will last a few more days after death."

Everything is subject to the Empire of Earth.

And in this very Empire of Earth, Mukhdev Ram knelt and stood up. He could see an invisible wall of earth between his quarter and the next. And beyond that was also the empire of earth. Yes, that earth was of two kinds: coarse and smooth. On this side, there was harmony between the coarse and smooth earth—inside the house, in the courtyard, and outside in the walls and shrines. But beyond that invisible wall, the coarse and smooth earth sometimes seemed divided between poverty-destitution and the wealthy-elite.

Fences began to appear in the orchards. The embankments of the ponds were already enclosed; now the ditches were being fenced off too.

The Empire of Earth began to seem more vast, fenced and divided. Denser. But an

empire with a shrinking area.

An empire.

The orchards that seemed infinite when going toward the pond began to shrink toward the earthen walls.

The pond had always been out of reach for washing or bathing. Arrangements were made to clean one side of a ditch for bathing and another for other needs. Now even that began to press against the earthen wall.

The earthen wall did not seem so frightening.

Every morning was the same. The trees, the livestock, the aquatic creatures, and the people of Mukhdev's village, Garh Narikel, were all colorful. Mukhdev's companions were like buried wooden figurines. In the ritual of the pond, a man was like a stump of wood fixed in a corner.

People say—is this all there is? The answer comes—this is not all; half of it is buried in the ground.

Mukhdev's house sat by the side of a narrow single-track path. But why a single track?

The road was wide, but as people walked, they created a single track in the middle. Sometimes, these tracks were the deep ruts on both sides of the road made by bullock carts, where rainwater collected. And splashing through that water, Mukhdev would travel between Garh Narikel and Sahebganj.

Life moved along with Dayaram and Mamtod.

The dark, dense atmosphere of the bamboo groves seemed to seep inside the very house. This darkness became a veil for the house and the neighborhood. Within this darkness, Mukhdev's life was safe with Dayaram and Mamtod.

But the lack of people was filled by the diversity of trees, paddy, fish, birds, and livestock. Mukhdev, Dayaram, and Mamtod were closer to these than to humans. Play, songs, rituals—everything was as diverse as the customs. They knew everyone so closely and deeply. Color, time, quality.

The thatch, the straw, the grass, and the earth.

In Garh Narikel, the circle of the oil-press ox keeps moving forward. The wheel begins to turn and keeps turning. From morning to evening, the ox of the oil press does not stay in one place; it moves forward like the ox of a bullock cart. By the time evening falls, the fields, the straw, the bamboo, the earth, and the water of the ponds have shifted and grown. The Garh Narikel you saw in the morning does not remain the same by evening. The village canals and ponds increase their will to live. This village is never at rest. Whatever the problem—be it in the fields, the backyard, or the river—the people breathe life into them like a lesson well-learned.

Dayaram, Mamtod, and Mukhdev also increase their skills by evening.

Second Petal: The Ponds and the Spirits

Trees and ponds all around. In the village, one... two... three... and one more—four ponds.

Actually, there are three more ponds. To the north of the northern pond is the great **Dakahi Pond**. People say a dacoit dug this pond in a single night. But if you ask for proof, you'll find none except that dawn broke while he was digging, and for that reason, the dacoit couldn't finish the central ritual pole. In his hurry, that dacoit—or call him a demon—left behind one of his sandals

by the pond's edge. It stayed there for a long time, but then it was washed away in a flood. So even that one piece of evidence did not survive. Because this pond is far from the village, it has no connection to the Chhath festival to this day. However, it is still used for initiation rituals. There are many kinds of fish in this pond. There is no lack of fish. No one ever felt the need to release fish fry into Dakahi Pond. There is an annual fishing event, and everyone in every neighborhood—except the southern quarter (Garh Aradne)—gets their share of the catch.

To the south of the southern quarter is **Buchiya Pond.**

It is far from the village but has a central pole. At the time of installing this wooden pole, Piar Bachcha's great-great-grandfather had organized a massive event. Because it is far from the settlement and situated among fields, people rarely come here to bathe. Fishing happens here too, but only for the southern neighborhood. This pond has another specialty. During Durga Puja, when the Goddess returns from her parents' home to her in-laws on the tenth day—also called *Jatra*—her idol is immersed in this very

pond. The men do not, but the women wail loudly at the immersion. Who cares about this neighborhood; the Goddess isn't even made in this village. She is made in the neighboring Garh Toli. The people of this village are all stubborn. Until the sixth day, the Goddess is kept covered; only the sculptor can look upon her, for if he doesn't see her, how will he create her? If anyone else looks, they will go blind. Yes, after the *Belnoti* ritual on the sixth day, the veil is removed, and people can see her. The fair also begins that day. If Durga were made in this village, many people would go blind before the sixth day. And is the neighboring village any less stubborn? But in the name of worship, everything becomes organized. The name says "Garh Toli" (a quarter), but it is a village. Just like this village, a village of buffalo herder Brahmins. There is a constant competition between the two villages as to who is more stubborn. If you go through Garh Toli, the boys sitting on the porches by the embankment will surely taunt you. But the troublemaking boys of this village will deliberately go that way. Yes, for decent people, it is considered better to go by the way of Buchiya Pond, even if the road is a bit

out of the way.

There is another pond in the village. But sooner or later, there is always talk of building two embankments on both sides of the village to control the Kamala-Balan and Kosi rivers. To the west of the village, running north to south, there will be one wall, then the Balan river (brother of Queen Kamala), then Queen Kamala herself, and then another wall to the west. **Balli Pond** falls between the embankments. How the government will fill this pond is unknown. This pond is connected to the Balan by a canal; when the river rises, people open the mouth of the canal, and the pond fills with the silted water from the top of the stream. Since sand stays at the bottom of the stream, it doesn't enter. Anyway, the Balan brings less sand and more silt. Irrigation is done from that pond. In the month of Baisakh, around the time of the solstice, the villagers form a group to clean and desilt all the ponds. And then there is the fair on the full moon of Paush. Fish and fox-nuts (*makhana*) are plentiful.

At the very entrance of the village are two traditional wells. Because some people

developed goiters from the well water, people mock Garh Narikel as "the village of goiters" or "the village of thick brains."

Next to the river and the massive Balli Pond was a football playground—the vast **Ramana**. Through the landlord's deeds, this Ramana passed into Piar Bachcha's fields; that is, it was annexed. The big landlord, Barbaria Roy, had also insisted that a farmer's land should be consolidated in one place. Surju Bhai's field, enriched with cow dung, was also merged into Piar Bachcha's land in that process.

Between the Kamala and Balan rivers is **Bauachaur**, meant for the grazing of the buffalo herders' livestock. The buffalo herders come here, play, and swim in the Kamala. Sometimes they let themselves drift with the current without resistance; other times they swim against the flow. They are the graduates of Bauachaur.

In the middle of the streams is the **Guary Toli**.

In the **Kunjara Toli** is Mohammad Shamshul. On the embankment. He keeps

telling stories...

Dilrinagar. There was a Syed there. He had a wife and several sons. They were warriors.

The war of **Noonjagarh.** But this time the Syed and all his sons were killed. However, his widow was pregnant. After some time, a child was born. He was named Meera.

He too was a warrior, but his mother did not like this. He was married at a young age, thinking his mind would turn away from war. But...

His mother and wife tried hard to persuade him, but Meera went alone to Noonjagarh, took revenge for his father and brothers, and returned to Dilrinagar.

Due to the influence of his soul, there was peace in Dilrinagar for a long time even after his death.

On the embankment itself are Baudha Malik and four other houses of **Doms.** These two neighborhoods also fall within the village boundaries. The Doms call themselves Malik or Sopach. Baudha Malik tells a story...

Four Brahmins were going to the pond to bathe when they saw a dead cow. Who would lift the dead cow? The burden was given to the youngest brother, and when he returned, he was outcasted from the caste.

The work of every caste is required in festivals, celebrations, and rituals.

The Bakkho who dances in the courtyard for alms,

The Pamariya who plays and dances for alms,

The midwife who cuts the umbilical cord for alms,

The barber's wife who paints the feet for alms,

The washerman who dissolves the stains for alms.

The work of every caste is required in festivals and rituals.

Even the Dom's work is required during festivals.

From making baskets to winnowing fans and hand-fans, it is the Dom's work. And for the feast of guests and wedding parties, the slaughter of goats is the work of **Mian-toli**. The head of the goat is taken by the committee during the sacrifice of Durga Puja. Zainul Mian, who slaughters the goat, does it the *halal* way. The neck remains half-hanging, but he turns it into gold and takes the neck and the hide. Then, those among the buffalo herder Brahmins who perform *Bhajans* and *Ashtajam* rituals buy drums made from that very hide. When they return to Garh Narikel carrying the *Daha* (procession), the scene is wonderful. The *Jharni* dance is performed with bamboo sticks.

Listening to the *Marsiya* (elegy), the men begin to wail loudly, just as the women wail on the day of the Goddess's immersion.

"On these ten days, the Syed cut the bamboo, alas, alas..."

"That same bamboo became a memory, alas, alas..."

All the people of Garh Narikel are singers

and storytellers. Keep listening...

When the spirit possesses them, Meera Saheb arrives and grants boons.

"How many times will you tell the same story?"

"Just keep listening... this is Garh Narikel. Every time you hear it, it will sound new."

In Dilri Nagar lived Harphul Syed.

"Don't they call Delhi 'Dilri Nagar'?"

"How should I know?"

Harphul's wife was Atam.

Harphul died in the war of Noonjagarh; Atam remained the guardian of the fort.

A child was born, who was named Meera.

Atam had Meera married as a child, but sooner or later, Meera heard the news of the Noonjagarh war and his father Harphul's death. He attacked Noonjagarh, defeated it, and returned to Dilrinagar.

"The drums roll and the war-drums speak, O

brother..."

"The sound of the war-drum cannot even be described..."

"Swords flash like lightning..."

Then there is another quarter.

Leather-workers (Charmakar), Mukhdev Ram and Dayaram Ram. Earlier this quarter was outside the village, beyond the bamboo groves. But now everyone has cut down the bamboo, and the settlement has expanded right up to the leather-workers' quarter. Foundation trenches and brick kilns are always being dug nearby. Their cooperation is expected in everything from providing drums to playing the pipes. Until they remove a dead animal, the household remains in a state of ritual impurity (*chutka*). Mukhdev is the companion of Jageshwar Jha.

Lala Maharaj, the folk deity of the leather-workers. He used to bring fish caught from the marshes. Everyone has a right to the fish in the marsh. Anyone can catch fish there. But Sonayamani claimed that only she could catch fish from the marsh. Lala Maharaj was

strong; he did not accept this. One day he was returning with fish when Sonayamani found out. In those days, there were tigers in this region. Sonayamani also kept several tigers. She sent a tiger to kill Lala Maharaj. But Lala Maharaj killed it with his staff. Sonayamani grew furious and prayed to the Goddess Gahil. Goddess Gahil sent a tigress and killed Lala Maharaj.

"The Mother circles the arrow of the sacrifice..."

"Alas, no one searches for Lala now..."

"Who shall we ask, who shall we tell..."

Lala Maharaj's friend, Nath Mishra, stopped giving milk to Lala Maharaj's parents.

"He began to scold and shout..."

"Does the Mother not understand Mishra?"

"It is by his grace that you are Nath Mishra..."

"A body like a washerman's plank..."

"Mishra, your thighs are like banana

trunks..."

Lala Maharaj's soul grew angry and killed Nath Mishra, and also killed Sonayamani and her family. Later, Lala Maharaj was appeased with rituals and worship, and only then did he become peaceful.

All the people of Garh Narikel are singers and storytellers. Keep listening...

Mansaram Chamar and **Chechhanmal Dom**. Both were brave; Mansaram was the general of the King of Morang, and Chechhanmal was the general of the King of Sirirajkhand.

The King of Morang knew that no one could defeat Chechhanmal, the general of Sirirajkhand, not even Mansaram.

The King of Morang summoned Chechhanmal to his court and tempted him. But he did not agree. Betray Sirirajkhand? Never.

The King of Morang had him tied up. But Chechhanmal broke all the bonds at once.

The King of Morang grew frightened again,

thinking that where there is a general like Chechhanmal, the army must be just as strong. He abandoned the idea of attacking Sirirajkhand.

"Nothing will happen, Mansaram, even if my head is severed..."

"I will not let you cross into my kingdom..."

"If you take even one step forward, I will take your head with my blade..."

Keep listening to the stories of Garh Narikel... multiple versions of the same story. Wherever the brides came from, they brought the stories of those places with them.

Lukesari was the daughter of a leather-worker. She observed the Ekadashi fast to obtain Chechhanmal as her husband. But she had a dream that Chechhan had become a monk. When Chechhan met Lukesari, he accepted her as a goddess, took teachings from her, and made her a deity. Lukesari became a goddess.

Then the **Dhanuk Toli**. Bhagvandaat Mandal and Adhiklal Mandal—Dhanuks. Earlier

these people used to carry the palanquins, but later the people of the Dusadh Toli also started carrying them. Farming is the old profession of the Dhanuk and Dusadh quarters. Earlier they only worked for wages; now they do sharecropping. Raising goats and selling them for sacrifice during Durga Puja is also a part of the livestock rearing of these two quarters.

In any month of the year, you can see a woman from any neighborhood breaking a dark earthen pot during a quarrel with the buffalo herder Brahmins, because they say these people are shameless, and for this reason, they spit behind them at birth so they won't feel shame.

In Garh Narikel, if a person who is harmful to society dies, no mourning is observed; instead, the women break earthen pots and throw them onto the embankment.

Even with only three houses, **Dhobiyatoli** has become a neighborhood. Clothes from as far as Jhanjharpur's Marwaris are cleaned here. The buffalo herder Brahmins who go to wedding parties dressed in crisp bell-bottoms—do they wear their own clothes?

No, those are borrowed expensive clothes of the Marwaris. The washerman brother gives these clothes to them on rent for two days. Korail, Budhan, and Domi Safi are the washermen. Domi Safi is now Domi Das because he follows the Kabirpanthi sect. When the Guru arrives, the "Saraswati" (speech) of Domi Das falters.

He has a vast store of Maithili Kabir-vachan.

"First I was with the Primal Man, then I was a maiden..."

"I met a brother and was married to him..."

"With whom did I revel, with whom did I dwell..."

"With five I reveled, with twenty-five I dwelt..."

"In the form of a serpent I dwelt in the city, I bit all four Vedas..."

"Kabir says, this mind charms everyone, only a saint crosses over..."

Domi Das organizes a gathering of saints in Garh Narikel once a year. He travels all year

round. Everywhere—Kabir Dharmasthan, Duhbi, Nepal; Sahajyoga Satsang Kendra, Madhubani; Kabir Math, Samastipur; Kabir Ashram, Muzaffarpur—he has missed no place. His presence is mandatory in the programs of various Guru-seats to appoint a head of the monastery.

The memory of all the people of Garh Narikel is very sharp. Ask one thing and then keep listening...

Nauatoli also consists of three houses. Jayram Thakur, Lakshmi Thakur, and Male Thakur—barbers. Very talkative.

Joginder Thakur belongs to the most prosperous family of the carpenters/blacksmiths of Garh Narikel. Joginder Thakur is the *Chharidar* (assistant to the leader). But when the *Mainjan* (leader) or his minister comes to a feast, it seems the speech of Joginder Babu falters, and he only says "yes" to everything, whether good or nonsensical.

Joginder has three children—Bihari, Arjun, and Shivnarayan. Everyone is involved in the wood business, but Bihari also does

ironwork, and Arjun has become a cycle mechanic, doing everything from small repairs to fixing punctures. Shivnarayan has invented several games for children, from balls to wooden wheels rolled with iron wires. People say—look at him, change the notion that only education leads to a job. Look at Shivnarayan. What things he thinks of, what he makes from waste wood. But no one has the skill of Bihari's hands; in saw-cutting, straight-cutting, and cross-cutting, he is ahead of Shivnarayan. Shivnarayan invents something, and then seeing him, Bihari makes it better than him. Now, will the inventor get a copyright for anything in the village? Shivnarayan's saw and adze get blunt on hardwood, but Bihari somehow manages. He even makes things from scrap wood and sells them at fairs. To saw a plank, if a large saw isn't available, he cuts it with a small one. Bihari has no equal in separating the useful part of the wood with a chisel.

To give an offering to the Goddess in a thick cotton cloth, Jagdish Mail of the **Patwa** community is sought; the weavers are very industrious.

Bhola Pandit, the potter, has arrangements for everything from earthen pots to clay birds for children. He has no equal in clay work.

Basu Chaupal, a Khatbe. He carries palanquins, carries fish, and even becomes a bearer. He has also started selling fish.

Chalittar Sahu and **Laddulal Sahu**, confectioners, set up shops during Durga Puja. They have also started taking contracts for preparing vegetables for events.

Shivnarayan Mahto (Suri), Lakshmi Das (Tatma), Lal Kumar Rai (Kurmi).

Bhola Paswan and **Mukesh Paswan**—Dusadhs. Relatives of the lower lineage of Gena Hazari. That same Gena Hazari who saw a cow giving milk onto a stalk of Kush grass in Kusheshwarsthan and started digging that place. The Mahadev (lingam) kept going deeper, then he found it. This Mahadev, established by Sita's son Kush (Lava's brother), was found by Gena Hazari.

Now listen to the story... there is a story for everything in Garh Narikel... not just a story, but history...

In **Puhpinagar**, Kirti Paswan found a child in a plowed field. He was named Jyoti.

"He was found in a plowed field, that's why."

He raised him.

Jyoti's friend was Hariya. They stayed together. One day when Hariya went with Jyoti to graze pigs, Jyoti started dancing. The heavens shook. Kalidas met Jyoti and gave him many powers, telling him to spread religion and truth. Jyoti started preaching in Puhpinagar. He would give children lumps of earth, and those lumps would turn into *Shankarchood* laddoos.

"May the innocent child Jyoti live, become immortal in the world..."

"The Giver, Dharmaraj, will fulfill whatever you desire, child..."

Amrita's son Kalidas went to meet Jyoti in the guise of a Brahmin, but for some reason, Jyoti did not meet him. Kalidas cursed him, and Jyoti developed leprosy. Kalidas then came disguised as an astrologer and told Jyoti to stay in the forest for twelve years,

hungry and thirsty. Jyoti was finally successful.

Satyanarayan Kamat, a Keot, stayed at the farm of the Darbhanga landlord.

Ramdev Bhandari, a sub-caste of Keot, managed the kitchen of the Darbhanga landlord.

Satyanarayan Kamat was also a *Mahout* (elephant rider) for Barbaria Roy. No one in the region could equal him in making an elephant's *howdah*. He had practiced the elephant-related vocabulary—*Agatt*, *Pichu*, *Thait*, *Mail Biri*—so much that he used them even in other contexts.

Kapileshwar Raut and Ramavtar Raut, **Barais**. The ancestral profession of betel leaves.

Fisherman Jibach Mukhia. Fishing in Dakahi Pond happens once a year; the fishermen cast large nets for fifteen days to a month. The fisherman's neighborhood gathers.

A village of outside fishermen settles by the pond for a month. Earlier this annual fishing

lasted over a month, but now it's stretched to twenty days. Then the fisherman leader declares—that the fish are exhausted. Now if we fish, not a single big fish will come in the large net. If we use small nets, all the small fish will die, and then we'll have to release fish fry next year. During those fifteen-twenty days, there is a festive atmosphere in the village. This also serves as an occasion to clean the pond. Fishing happens from four in the morning until noon. And then by afternoon, every quarter—except the southern one—is given its share of the catch. Everyone takes their share back to their neighborhood. There, the families of the neighborhood divide their share. Sometimes there are disputes over the valuation of the catch. In life, they might not talk to a widowed aunt, they might have suppressed her wish to give something from her share to her daughter at the time of her death, and they might have taken the thumb impression of the poor widow on stamp papers. They might not remember her at other times, but while taking the share of Dakahi Pond, everyone suddenly remembers their widowed aunt. Protests are voiced, and except for the wrestler (whom they fondly

call *Khalifa*), no one else gets such a share—even if that widow of the *Khalifa's* courtyard died twenty years ago. There is another specialty of Dakahi Pond. Fish and turtles grow there naturally. There are many types of aquatic plants and snails by the pond side. The lotus roots are food for the children of the buffalo herder Brahmins. The fishermen who row boats in the Kamala take grain in return from the villagers. From outsiders, yes, they take money to cross the river.

Listen to the story...

Dulara Dayal, a fisherman from Bharaura. From Gonu Jha's village.

Now that Gonu Jha is mentioned, let's have a story of that Great Scholar and Master of Wit, Gonu Jha...

A terrible drought fell upon the Kingdom of Mithila. The King had drums beaten, announcing a reward for anyone who could find a solution.

A massive "Baba" with ten—or even more—tilak marks on his forehead came to the King's court, claiming he had performed penance in the Himalayas for a hundred

years and could bring rain through a ritual. By evening, he was given a place and materials. Gonu Jha had gone somewhere as a guest. When he returned in the evening and heard everything from his wife, he was astonished and set out to see the Baba.

Meanwhile, before dawn, word spread that another Baba with twenty—or even more—tilak marks had also arrived.

When the ten-mark Baba met him, Gonu said:

"If you are the Ten-mark Baba, I am the Sri Sri 108 Twenty-mark Baba. Tell me, by what method will you bring rain?"

"I have a bamboo staff with which I will poke the clouds, and it will rain."

"Where do you keep such a long staff?"

"In the mouth of a fake saint like you!"

Now that ten-mark Baba made an excuse to go to the toilet and fled.

"Hey! Take your sandals and water-pot!"

But he ran, and the people chased him and tried to pull his beard. But the beard was fake and came off. The fraud escaped. Then Gону Jha also removed his fake mustache and beard and appeared in his true form. The King honored his cleverness.

Now the story... of Dulara Dayal fisherman of Bharaura. From that same village of Gону Jha.

Now hear the real story...

Son of Dukharan Sahni. As a child, he was married to Dhaniya Marauti, daughter of Bahura Godhin of Bakhari. But something happened that all the wedding guests were locked in the bride's "jail," and Dukharan fled back to the village with his son. Dulara Dayal was expert in singing and dancing, so people called him *Natua* Dayal. When he grew up, he asked his father why his *Gauna* (ceremony to bring the bride home) hadn't happened. When he found out everything, he set out for Bakhari. He met his wife at a well on the outskirts of Bakhari. After many obstacles, he brought his wife home.

Bichkun Saday, a Musahar. The trenches

near Dakahi Pond, and the marshy land. The Musahars dig out aquatic roots and eat them. During a famine, when all ponds and trenches dry up, this Dakahi Pond never dries.

Radhamohan Roy (Bhumihar). Dukhan Mahto (Koiri). Ashok Thakur (Goldsmith). Ramchandra Sav, Bauku Sav, and Kari Sav (Teli).

The mango orchards of the village, several of them. The *Barka Kalam*. The new orchard of Khadhori. The orchard by the Bhorha side. Orchards on the embankments of ponds.

The villagers are experts at growing trees from discarded mango pits and creating new varieties.

Kalapahad, Harimohan, Mallika, Surjapuri, Fazli, Chauria, Bombai, Doma Bombai, Sobja, Nazra Bombai, Negra Bombai, Dashahari, Krishnabhog, Jardalu, Gulabkhas, Kalkatiya, Sajmaniya, Sapeta (Safeda), Kathmaha, Sattuaha, Bhont, Baramasiya (fruiting all twelve months), Bakhua, Kulhariya, Kerba, Parodiya, Sinuriya, Ghibaha, Bhadaiya, Sonaha,

Khirmohan, Rair (very sweet), Kariamamma (sturdy in looks and eating), Laruba, Dhumnaha (large but prone to rotting), Bhogha, Kapuriya, Sakchuniya, Rohiniya (the first to ripen in Mithila), Mishribhog, Mohanbhog, Khatha, Ras-ha, Alhua, Guladiya, Supariya, Barbariya, Kasturiya, Dibraha, Anandi, Durgiday, Darima, Mirchaiya, Banshiya, Moharthakur, Jalamadai, Sipiya.

Discard a *Bombai* pit and a *Tipiya* will grow. A grafted (*Kalmi*) tree doesn't grow from a discarded pit; it has to be made. *Kalmi* has more pulp and is heavy; local varieties have more juice and are easily digestible, though a bit tart. That's why local mangoes are used for pickles.

Guests are served *Bombai* in the early season and *Sapeta* in the late season; these two are considered the best. *Kalkatiya* is used for pickles and dried mango. People get tired of cauliflower and pointed gourd eventually, but never of mangoes. Every mango has a different taste.

There was a field in Khadhori too. But someone planted a new orchard there, and

the shade stunted the paddy in the neighboring field. So, grumbling at the crossroads, the other person also planted an orchard.

There is also a **Jamboni** (blackberry grove). Large trees, dense groves, and slender ones. And small *Gul-jamun*.

Peepal trees are spread everywhere from the village deity's shrine to the school campus. The roots are here, the branches everywhere. Cactus, *Pakari* trees, *Bel* trees, and tamarind trees are also scattered about.

By the embankments are wild betel-nut trees, thickets of *Sahar* twigs, bamboo groves, and many flowers and thorns. The "Touch-me-not" plant is in every orchard. Watchmen sleep on beds under the wide mango trees. There is only one Banyan tree, by the side of the road near Mian-toli.

Various greens: *Ghauka*, *Laufa*, *pumpkin vines*, *Raja-rani*, *Gamhari*, *Madua*, *Chin*, *Bathua*, *Tilkor leaves and fruit*, *Makhana*, *Harsingar flowers*, *Poro*, *Arikonch*, *Yam (Ol)*, *Land-lotus*, *Bhent*, *Karonda fruit for pickles*, *castor*, *Aparajita flowers*, *pineapple*,

Hurhur, custard apple, Shama Tulsi, Jalebi fruit, Paddy, Keora, Sama, Kodo, Oats, Soa, Kurthi, Moong, Urid, Dates, reeds, Amla, Betel, Matar, Gulaunch, Gulmohar, Rajnigandha, Nooni green, Thadhiya green, Guava, Pomegranate, Pirar, Bandhani, Radish, Sarpagandha, Rose, Sugarcane, Ashok, Til, Agasti, Kaun, Brinjal, Potato, Barley, Palaki green, Amra, Kadam, Chiraita, Taggar, Marigold, Tamarind, Arjun, Kanail, Water-chestnut, Pointed gourd, Methi, Wheat, Patera, Keraiya, Bora, Maize, Ginger, Jujube, Motha, Shisham, Datura, Carrot, Bamboo, Beans, Kush grass, Eucalyptus, Jamun, Gul-jamun, Kattha, Bada, Gullar, Dummar, Peepal, Fennel, Gandharaj, Sahor, Muralimanohar, Bang, Phalsa, Sunflower, Ramtoro (ladyfinger), Hibiscus, Barley, Gokulkant, Sweet potato, Karmi green, Juhi, Jasmine, Kund, Beli, Sajmani, Khesari, Mehendi, Masuri, Linseed, Jhinguni, Ghera, Tomato, Mango, Neem, Peppermint, Champa, Lajauni, Bhalsari, Sandhya, Tuti, Kamini, Babool, Catechu, Chirchiri, Bel, Malt, Siris, Onion, Garlic, Aloe vera, Thadhiya, Ol, Chorkanti, Oats, Sharifa, Kadam, Groundnut, Kathari Champa, Jackfruit, Barhar, Janer,

Kamarkha, Bamboo, Jhati, Mahua, Kachnar, Pumpkin, Beetroot, Ghapsari, Simmar, Palm, Turnip, Rainchi, Mustard, Palash, Rahar, Akon, Barseem, Sarvajaya, Bhang, Chilli, Kusum, Amaltas, Amar-latti, Bathua green, Jatadhari, Chrysanthemum, Almond, Watermelon, Tabh-lemon, Kagzi-lemon, Jamiri-lemon, Aparajita, Coconut, Jute, Coriander, Shon, Cucumber, Kadima, Ammadi, Turmeric, Doob grass, Dudhi-banana (beautiful to look at), Marichman-banana, Gauriya-banana (very sweet), Bagnan-banana (large and thick but not as tasty), Bhosa-banana, Lotus, Litchi, Kanail, Tobacco, Singerhar, Bhent, Tulsi.

If a buffalo doesn't conceive on time, she is fed cabbage leaves to induce heat. Reeds are used for mats and fences; betel vines climb on reeds.

In Garh Narikel, there are more varieties of trees, fruits, grains, and vegetables than there are human castes.

Vegetables grow in abundance: *Ridge gourd, Beans, Brinjal, Drumstick, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Turnip, Radish, Carrot, Tomato, Aradneba, Potato, Yam, Taro, Tekna,*

Chatail, Kaita, Bitter gourd, Karaunda, Kadima, Pumpkin, Banana, Lotus stem, Jackfruit, Khajba Jackfruit, Khamharu, Barhar, Pointed gourd, Sajmain. The flowers of the Sponge gourd are used for fritters.

More types of greens: *Bhatpurain, Kataiya, Pekcha, Patua, Sirhonchi, Thadhiya, Genhari (white and red), Cholai, Poro, Tori, Alhua, Bathua, Kadima, Matar, Almond, Dumpha, Khesari, Paal, Raincha, Phutia, Noni, Bardanoni, Laph-pha, Palaki, Radish. Lal-thadhiya, Jhalla, Lauha, Cholai, Palanki, Kusum, Methi, Sua, Arda Patua, Ghauka, Sarhanchi, Karmi, Arikonchan, Arua, Aurbi, Tilkor, Cabbage, Mustard, Tori, Almond, Kerao, Masoor, Khesari, Tin-patti, Akta, Misia, Pumpkin, Jhalari, Kesi Jhalla, Penchi, Raja Rani.*

Greens of Drumstick, Potato, and Radish. Wild Palaki.

In the month of Chaitra, tender Neem leaves are used with Brinjal.

Among lentils: *Kurthi, Masuri, Kherhi, Rahar, Rahariya, Kalay, Khesari, Matar, Almond, Tebkha, Kelai, Rajma, Masoor,*

Kerao, Meth, Boda, Akta, Misia, Bhatpurani, Ramjhumni, Beans.

The rich eat *Rahar* dal, while the poor eat *Rahariya* dal.

Dabra, Dasariya, Malida, Belore—these are types of paddy that do not rot even when submerged in water.

Bori is a climbing paddy; its vine floats on the water, and plants sprout from every node. Ten plants are enough to fill a whole *kattha* of land.

Sorna, Sugva, Ranga, Dasahariya, Chananchur, Kariakamore, Mansuri, Hapsa (fragrant), Rajni, Painjhali, Singra, Karravati, Gulanki, Jasua, Chautis, Chhattis, Nazir, Jalli, Dhusri, Pakhari, Picchari, Kajragaur—all these types of rice used to grow in the marshes. At the time of planting, there was no water, but later the marsh would be waist-deep or knee-deep. It's a slightly coarse rice, isn't it?

The rice grown in the low-lying "Chapi" land of Garh Narikel includes *Sung-ha Satra, Singra, Belore, Desaria White, Desaria*

Black, Gola, Keshauni Gola, Malida, Gahuma, Picchhari, Pakhari, Sattokhari, Parbapankhi, Tatto, Kas-ham, Umatt. Rice grown in medium fields includes *Satariya, Ramdulari, Harinakel, Dhusri, Bakkai, Sehmana, Basmati, Tulsibhog, Naniya, Nazir, Kanzir, Kariakamore, Sita, Pankaj, Jaya, Chananchur, Khemti, Ulank, Panjhali, Tulsi-phool, Ammaghaur.*

Upland rice varieties are *Jasba, Kamalkathi, Dudhraj, Bhalsari, Mansuri, Bhola Mansuri, Kankshi-mansuri*; these produce a good crop even with less water.

Paddy is ready in Agahan.

Everyone works hard to harvest the rice.

People save seeds for the next sowing.

Seedlings are prepared by scattering seeds in a nursery.

Planting (*Ropni*) begins on the day of **Aradra** festival.

Yogurt, stale rice, jaggery-sugar, and kohl are mixed and placed in three or five heaps on a Colocasia leaf in the field. If the Brahmin

farmer has three *Pravaras*, the farmer and the laborer say "Three Gav, Three Paan" and place three heaps. If he has five *Pravaras*, they say "Five Gav, Five Paan" and place five heaps. Reciting these words, the laborer plants the seedlings pulled from the nursery into the field.

"I sowed the seeds in Jeth, they sprouted in Ashadh..."

"I planted them in Shravan, they grew stalks in Bhadra..."

"Flowers bloomed in Ashwin, fruit came in Kartik..."

"Harvested in Agahan, threshing was done..."

"Stored in the granary, we shall pound it and eat..."

People heave a sigh of relief when half the sowing is done.

The *Bhadai* crop is sown by broadcasting; the villagers are experts in this method of scattering rice.

There are several types of *Bhadai*: *Lakkhi*, *Jalli*, *Jhar-ha*, *Bacchia*, *Rangba*, *Gamhari White*, *Gamhari Black*.

This is ready in Bhadra.

Chilli seedlings, nursery.

Banana plantations.

Among fruits: *Litchi*, *Banana*, *Jackfruit*, *Guava*, *Mahu*, *Jalebi fruit*, *Buniya*, *Jujube*, *Anta*, *Sharifa*, *Sapota*, *Barhar*, *Jam*, *Mulberry*, *Pomegranate*, *Coconut*, *Tabh-lemon*, *Bel*, *Kadam* trees are everywhere. Bananas of many kinds: *Marichman*, *Gauriya*, *Malbhog*, *Jhurkutiya*, *Dudhi*, *Banshibat*, *Anupan*, *Dudhmungar*, *Batisa*, *Malbhog*, *Singapuri*, *Bagnan*, *Barhari*, *Chiniya*, *Malbhog*, *Kapuriya*.

Forests of *Kaas*, *Pater*, *Jhaua*. Reeds (*Khagra*).

Pea dal, Mustard, Tori, Rainchi, and Castor oil. You will see plenty of Til trees; they are used for rafters and as fuel for parching grain. Dried mango branches are used for fires. Celery plants are used for digestive issues.

Nigella seeds increase a cow's milk, and that of women too. *Sua*, *Ajwain*, *Nigella* are used in spices. *Mothi*, *Mohali-fennel*, *Coriander*, *Peppermint*, *Garlic*, *Onion*, and *Methi* plants. *Kagzi* and *Jamiri* lemons. Tamarind.

Birds like *Kachbachiya*, *Wak*, *Chuiya*, *Pihua*, *Hasuvadagain*, *Tiddha*, *Quail*, *Phuddi*, *Banchar*, *Crane*, *Hardi*, *Lalbongi*, *Tittiri*, *Chaucha*, *Chakor*, *Chakva*, *Neelkanth*, *Dhanchoha*, *Kar-kaua*, *Panidummi*, *Silli*, *Hans*, *Phulchobhi*, *Paruki*, *Lalsar*, *Gagan*, *Hen (Cock)*, *Cheha*, *Woodpecker*, *Muzeliya*, *Bat*, *Dakhar*, *Owl*, *Chilhoriya*, *Vulture*, *Egret*, *Hawk*, *Bageri*, *Bagra*, *Papiha*, *Nightingale*, *Parrot*, *Pigeon*, *Duck*, *Peacock*, *Maina*, *Crow*, *Cuckoo*.

Insects: *Ankhphora* (that hits the eye), *Butterfly* (two-winged, colorful, without tail), *Tukili* (four-winged, with tail), *Hanuman ji's horse* (Green grasshopper). There is another one like a British machine; it seems the British made the JCB machine after looking at it.

Rabbits, Deer, Blue bulls, turtles, conches, civets, foxes, and porcupines are also plenty.

The meat of snails is eaten as curry, or made into a soup. The water left in a vessel after five-seven hours is fed to children for respiratory issues; it cools the stomach.

Fish of many kinds: *Rekha, Tengra, Kapti, Kaua, Garai, Garchunni, Gaincha, Chenga, Singhi, Dera, Kotra, Latta, Kanti, Reba, Chahi, Chinma, Darhi, Saurath, Kabai, Singhi, Mangur, Patoriya, Belauna, Buari, Baami, Gagar, Bhunna, Ichna, Pothi, Rittha, Bhaura, Bhuhla, Rauh, Bhakur, Nain, Grass-carp, Silver-carp, Phokcha, Baddo.*

Chichor, a species of useless grass that grows in Garh Narikel, very tall. Aquatic *Kesaur*. *Jatadhari* flowers. Turmeric plants. *Agia Grah* plant; its branch is tied to the arm to ward off the evil eye.

Bread of many kinds: *Madua, Rice, Khuddi, Barley, Almond, Khesari, Kaun, Chin, Maize, Bajra, Janer, Alhua, Akta, Misia, Masuri, Phakua, Kherhi, Gura, Water-chestnut, Makhana, Bhent*. Some wealthy people grow wheat in a small area and make *Sohari* bread.

The same thing appears again and again...

Don't interrupt... the people of this village speak in a rhythm... the same thing comes multiple times, but so many new things enter that rhythm.

Games of many kinds: Sanskrit *Atkan-Matkan* and *Kabaddi*. *Champa-champa* played with Kanail fruit. *Kariya-Jhummar*, *Sama-chakeva*, *Chugla's dhoti tearing*. Let's play *Jharni*. Let's go play *Bansi*. *Amman Chhoo*, *Chait Kabaddi*. *Hathiyasur* of Bhagvat-leela, *Ujji-Ujji*, *Lal-chharhi*. *Jhijhiya*, *Jat-Jatin*, *Jharni*, *Huriyaha-Huriyahi*, *Hura-Huri*, *Chutiya*, *Koily-race*, *Chor-police*, *Hukka-loli*, *Kansupti*, *Singipatahi*, *Jhijhir-kona*...

Jhijhir kona, which corner? Donkey-rolling, *Chausa*, *Satghariya*, *Dolpatta*, *Hathi-chukka*, *Gudi Kabaddi*, *Ghora Kabaddi*, *Gambling*, *Cowrie-cowrie*, *Kit-kit* (*Hopscotch*), *Skipping*, *Gharba-duarba*, *Kho-kho* (this is the local Kho-kho, not Bombay's), *Chor-sipahi*, *Hide and seek*, *Gulli-danta*, *Pingla*, *Lathmar*, *Jat-Jatin*, *Sona-dubbi*, *Wrestling*, *Pachisi*, *Ghas-ghas*, *Pachgotba*, *Pitto*, *Ghoghorani*, *Blind man's buff*, *Dolls*, *Madua-Madua-ini*, *Madua-heap*,

Banar-phaan, Maldari, Football, Chess, Cards, Antakshari, Pithiathok, Gobarkanna, Jhilam-jhar, Solhgotia, Jhilhari, Chuli-chuli, Dhengapani, Chikka Kabaddi, Akro-makro, Marbles.

My goodness...

Garh Narikel has many types of chutneys and mashes (*sanna*). *Raw guava, Arikonch, Yam, Garlic, Onion, Tamarind, Kadam, Methi, Coriander, Peppermint, Til, Linseed, Amadi, Tomato, Kutrum, Amla, Mango pieces, Mustard, Poppy seeds, Chathail, Pirar, Brinjal, Ridge gourd, Jhumni, Ramjhumni, Bitter gourd, Potato mash (chokha), Pointed gourd, Kurli, Radish, Greens, Banana mash, Barhar, Karona, Amrora, Amra, Ginger, Mulberry, Mango blossoms, Whey soup, Sharifa, Khamharua, Penchi, Aurbi, Coconut with salt-chilli, Fish mash, Crab mash, Snail mash, Jackfruit fiber mash, Poro, Jackfruit seed mash.*

In oils: *Mustard, Tori, Sunflower, Rainchi, Tor, Castor, Kusum, Radish, Til, Soybean, Coconut, Groundnut, Mahu, Kataiya, Linseed.*

Fields and lands are of many kinds. The land between the two streams is called "the land on that side." Sandy fields and silty ones. Kamala brings sand and Balan brings silt. Pointed gourd, watermelon, muskmelon, and sweet potato farming. If you want to buy the cheapest land, come here. But after a flood, the face and shape of the field's boundaries change. If the area of a field shrinks after a flood, don't worry. In the next flood, Queen Kamala might increase its area. Farming of paddy also happens, but it's a gamble. Some years, even after planting three times, it gets washed away; other years, Queen Kamala fills the field with so much silt that it produces more than the two maunds per kattha you imagined.

If you want to buy slightly expensive land, buy the one near the turning, or with a *Gamhari* tree, or under a *Dummar* tree. Here people buy land more for living than for farming.

The land near Dakahi Pond is called *Barhmotar*. It must have been given as a gift (*Brahmottar*) by a King long ago. I hear good farming used to happen there, but nowadays

it stays waterlogged. The broadcast-sowing of rice in the region happens in this marsh.

The sound of mourning when a buffalo dies is heard every month or two. And magic spells—worshipped flowers thrown at someone's door at night—are seen for a month or two every year. But people have now understood that this is just the mischief of some boys.

Surrounding this village, which is based on agriculture-fisheries-livestock and dominated by buffalo herder Brahmins, are villages of educated people, not-so-educated people, and quiet people. But there is also a village of thieves there. Genuine thieves of money and goods. But stealing in Garh Narikel is not easy.

Other villages have all kinds of thieves—literary, moral, intellectual, and promotional.

The thieves of the neighboring village don't have the courage to steal from any house in Garh Narikel. In this village, when a marriage happens, all the troubled land disputes get resolved. After establishing a marriage alliance in this village, a person

becomes strong. Calls for help (*haseri*) from here go far and wide. From settling relatives' land disputes to other times, the help goes out. The land that costs a thousand rupees per kattha in this village costs only a hundred rupees in the neighboring **Banraha** village. Upland land is cheap in the village because it can't be irrigated with rainwater. The people of Banraha grow *Jasba*, *Kamalkathi*, *Dudhraj*, *Bhalsari*, *Mansuri*, *Bhola Mansuri*, *Kankshi-mansuri* rice, and maize, kurthi, rahar, madua, kodo, kherhi, and mustard.

"Banraha"... don't you see, that village's orchards are full of monkeys, and the people also look like yellow monkeys!

Backyards will be found behind every house in Garh Narikel—brinjal, lemon, greens, radish, all these are found in the backyards, along with many kinds of medicinal herbs.

So far, Durga Puja has not started in this village. It has started in the quiet village and the monkey village, but here? If we want, why wouldn't it happen? We performed Ram-leela for a month, didn't we? Forget it, it became messy near the embankment. It's better Durga Puja doesn't happen. One thing

is the trouble of bringing daughters and sisters home, and second, the harmony we live in will be destroyed by party-politics.

A Brahmin of this village can clear bags of grass with a scythe in half a mile in one breath. The Brahmins of this village keep the best breeds of buffaloes. If a young bull from this village is even touched in another village, a call for help goes out; otherwise, an outsider might unknowingly raise a stick against a bull from this village.

There is no lack of artists in Garh Narikel. **Zangal Ram** the *Khurdak* player, **Jitan Ram** the *Cornet* player. *Bhagait* singer **Rooplal Yadav**, storytellers **Chut-haru Yadav** and **Tahal Mukhia**. **Khushilal Sahu** has opened a dance company, with **Phusan Yadav** as manager. Better than the dance companies of Simraha-Saptari or Simraha-Supaul. Plays like *Alha Rudal*, *Sati Lachhiya*, *Sheet Vasant*, *Gugli Ghatma*, *Raja Kunwar Vrijbhan*, *Phool of the Dust*, *Sultana Daku*, *Raja Harishchandra*, *Raja Nal*, *Raja Salhesh*, *The Fragile Thread*, *Blind Law*, *Loha Singh*, *Mother's Heart*, *Bangles and Vermilion*, *King of the Jungle*, *Destruction of the Lineage*, *Husband Abroad (Bidesiya)*, *Lorik-*

Maniyar, Father's Murder, Son-in-law's Killing, Nishad-Vadh, Gopi-chan, Shankar-Shosila, Uttim-chan, Beautiful Flower of the Beautiful Forest, Vijay Singh, Wilderness King, Raas Leela, Runa-Jhuna, Kabir Leela, Kaliyug Love, and many more legends. **Guneshwar Ram** the drummer, **Sukdev Safi** the *Khaujri* player. **Khattar Mallik** plays the *Ghunamuna* (Sarangi); he plays it many times better than the Doms of his maternal village Kamrail. **Asharfi Mandal** the cymbal player. **Chedi Mandal** the wood-cymbal player. **Gulab Paswan** and **Jhotan Mandal** the flute players. For the horse-dance and peacock-dance, there are **Mahadev Baniya, Dasai Thakur, Durgilal Thakur, and Ghuran Pandit**. **Arjun Mandal** plays the *Jhunjhunna* (manjira). **Ramjani Paswan** plays the *Jhalad*, **Malbhogi Das** plays the *Jaltarang*, **Bhaylal Das** the *Kathtarang*, **Chhotkani Das** the *Mridang*, **Dukharan Yadav** the *Been*, **Gangay Sahu** the *Tanpura*. *Tarsa* is played in Hura-huri and Daha by **Kallar Mallik** and **Mohammad Azam**. **Baccha Mandal** plays the *Jhalad*. **Sitaram Ram** becomes the clown. The drum-heater is usually the clown too; **Satan Mukhia** plays the drum and

Jhotan Mandal heats the drum and acts as the clown. The small drum has a thin tone. The large drum has a deep sound; when it is struck, know that the dance has begun. **Domi Das** plays the *Gumgumiyān* and the *Baba's horn*. The *Singhariya-dhudhu* is very large—one has to spit after playing it, it takes so much breath. The Banjo. Dancer (**Raghunath Saday**), female character (**Ashok Singh**). Male character, acting, singer, hero, drummer. **Dubbi Mukhia** on Organ, **Sunar Chaupal** on Naal, **Phusan Ram** on Cornet, **Asharfi Gosai** on Nagara, **Hiyalal** on Dholak, **Jhadilal Saday** on Mridang. *Alha/Mahrai*. *Jogira*, *Prabhati* singer **Lelhu Das**. *Jharni*—**Mohammad Akuf**. **Khattar Mandal** on Naal. Drum-set and Harmonium—well, everyone in Garh Narikel plays them. **Chunai Ram** on Drum/Dhol/Tabla. No one plays the *Dampha* during Holi like **Beeku Ram**.

Bhagait singer **Bichkun Saday**—the *Bhagait* party of Rasuar is nothing compared to him; he sings *Bhagait* and also plays the *Khajuri*.

The mat-makers of Deep village have taught the craft of making *Motha* mats to some

people here.

The *Aripan* (floor art) and Mithila painting of the woman from **Sahebganj** and **Balat**, and the folk songs of the women from **Belmohan** and **Belahi**. **Machdhi-wali** in sewing and embroidery. Making earthen bowls and thousands of clay Mahadevs is child's play for the girls and women here. You will find thousands of clay Mahadevs immersed in the backyards everywhere. From plastering the courtyard and grinding grain to planting and irrigating, the women of Garh Narikel are not behind. Be it the story of *Saptadora* or *Madhushravani*, the women here can tell all the stories in one breath, and when the daughters here marry into other villages, they spread these virtues there too.

The village is **Garh Narikel**, the village of the **buffalo herder** Brahmins.

Second Wave: Tying the East and the West

First Petal: The Midnight Echo

"What are you tying?"

"The East and the West (*Purba-Pachba*)."

They say the country has become free.
Mukhdev Ram shifts his weight, cracking his
joints. Free. Outside the jail, children from

some government school are singing praises of Mahatma Gandhi and Jamahirlal Nehru in the dead of night.

The newspapers had already fixed the dates. August 14th for Pakistan's independence, and midnight for Jamahirlal to hoist the flag and declare India's freedom. It felt like a partition in a household—how can two brothers celebrate a birthday on the same day? The younger brother celebrates a day early! Everything was done through a compromise. Mountbatten would remain until the Constitution was ready, but in Pakistan, Jinnah would be Governor-General. The younger brother wanted to appear more revolutionary, unwilling to let a foreigner stay on.

Everything was a deal. It was like someone saying, "Go, you are free," and throwing away an old drum. They took what they wanted and left the rest to be "independent."

Nehru's speech begins. The jailer's radio crackles: *"...Tryst with destiny... after centuries of sleep and struggle..."*

Destiny. Fate. That is exactly what

Jageshwar used to oppose. And sleep mixed with struggle? Jamahirlal was surely waxing poetic.

He continues: *"The new history we start to build with our lives and work... others will write it."*

Nehru speaks well, Mukhdev admits.

"...I remember the countless freedom fighters who gave their lives without praise or reward... Jai Hind!"

Mukhdev snaps out of his thoughts. At the same hour he sat in a cell, Jayramdas Daulatram took the oath as Governor of Bihar. On August 15th, Daulatram remembered the students martyred in the August Revolution and laid the foundation for a memorial. Yet Mukhdev, a hero of that same revolution, remains locked in a cage! Even the Muslim League joined the celebrations.

Mukhdev went to jail for the struggle, but the new government has forgotten him. He asks around: "What is happening in free India?" He hears that no one listens to Gandhi anymore. Hindu-Muslim politics has turned

into a fight between Hindi and Urdu. Has the Constitution been made? Probably not, which is why the new government still uses the old British laws to keep him imprisoned. Mukhdev sits alongside common thieves—the saint and the sinner eating from the same pot.

Days pass. He hears Gandhi has been killed. He hears the refugee crisis is so massive the government has abandoned all other work.

Behind these high walls, a whole civilization exists. Outsiders think these walls block the sun and the wind, but inside, people still feel the chill of winter and the heat of summer. They think people leave jail exactly as they entered, but here, hearts break and bodies fall ill. They think no one laughs here, but people laugh through their groans, sometimes forgetting their misery entirely.

The jail staff have grown fond of Mukhdev. Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati are always eager for his songs and stories. There is another prisoner, Raghuvaran, who listens silently, never smiling, never interrupting. Mukhdev has turned this Patna jail into a

Mithila Pathshala (a school of Mithila culture).

He thinks back to 1942. He and Jageshwar Jha were arrested from their village. That year was the year of the August Revolution and also the year they established the wells of Garh Narikel. The Communist Party had opposed the Quit India Movement, but Jageshwar didn't care for their stance—and if Jageshwar didn't care, neither did Mukhdev. Jageshwar was a different kind of comrade.

He remembers the comrades from across the region—Kunjan, Chethru, Musai, Dhinaï, Bhattu, Pichkun, and others. They traveled everywhere—Patna, Purnia, Aligarh, Munger. Mukhdev laughs, remembering how the Maithil Brahmins who migrated changed their titles—becoming "Ojha" in Malda or "Sharma" in Aligarh to fit in.

He recalls the struggle against the Zamindars (landlords) who acted as British agents, collecting "Chowkidari tax" like Aurangzeb collected "Jizya." He remembers the religious monopolies—how the upper castes seized control of the Kabir monasteries in Rosera, and how Krishna Karikh Das, a man

of lower caste, rebelled to form his own sect. Jageshwar used to say, "What is fate? Nothing but laziness. What is caste? Just a division of work."

Second Petal: Memories of Mud and Fire

Mukhdev's eyes mist over. He remembers the defiance. "If you won't let us use 'Om' in the mantras, take them! No one will hire you as a priest anyway." People realized that if a Brahmin didn't perform the ritual, the world didn't end.

Raghuvaran is starting to speak now. A comrade comes to visit him. Raghuvaran is beginning to understand the exploitation—how the Raj Darbhanga and Surya Pura landlords tried to trick peasants into signing away their rights. Jageshwar had started the land-return movement just before the '42 revolution broke out.

Was it the revolution that sent them to jail, or was it because they refused to pay Piar Bachcha's tax for the wells? They had gunpowder, collected from everywhere. They blew up the Jatmalpur bridge, cut the telegraph wires at Pandaul, and blew up the

Phulparas police station.

The British interrogated them: "Where did the powder come from? Who are your accomplices, Jageshwar?" But neither Jageshwar nor Mukhdev uttered a name. The jailer, a mad Englishman, would drag them to the torture room every few minutes. They knew when the boots clicked, the skin would be flayed.

"This one is the real villain," the Englishman said, pointing at Jageshwar. That day, the guards beat them mercilessly. Mukhdev was dragged out of the torture room, but Jageshwar remained. Mukhdev waited, hoping... he is still waiting. He still feels as if Jageshwar is coming around the corner.

But they killed him. Poor Jageshwar—no siblings, no children. He had only just married Kusumavati. Jageshwar died of torture in this very Bankipur jail. And what of "Ghenghi" (Kusumavati)?

"Ghenghi? Who is Ghenghi, Mukhdev?" Rudramati interrupts.

"That's what we called Kusumavati,"

Mukhdev replies with a sad smile.

He quickly pivots to a happier memory to mask the pain. He starts the story of Mauna Panchami—the birthday of Bishahara, the Mother of Snakes, celebrated in the month of Shravan.

"Birthday?" Daulat Jahan asks, amused.

"What do you think of Mukhdev?" Haldhar jokes. "He's been in a British jail... no, a free Indian jail now."

Mukhdev tells of the *Madhushravani* festival, where newlyweds worship the serpent gods. He remembers tying the *Purba-Pachba* for Jageshwar's wedding. The rituals were simple—earth-digging, water-pouring. He recalls the songs of the *Sohars* and the mockery between sisters-in-law.

He remembers the story of Bihula and Lakshmindar. How Lakshmindar was bitten by a snake in the bridal chamber, and how Bihula took his corpse on a raft down the Ganga, eventually reaching the court of Indra to win back his life. In stories, everyone comes back to life. But Jageshwar will not.

He remembers the village feasts—the sight of Jageshwar serving food with such abundance. He remembers the "parallel worlds" of the village—how death was treated as a grand event for some, but for others, it was as common as a fallen tree or a dead fish.

He remembers the morning light, digging the earth with Jageshwar. Back then, he realized the difference—Jageshwar was the "giver" and Mukhdev was the "seeker." But as children, they forgot the gap. They would cross over to the orchards, watching the heat waves dance in the afternoon sun. He used to think it was magic or a witch's work, but now he knows it was just the hot air rising.

Third Wave: The Visionary and the Famine

First Petal: The Curse of the "All- Gifted"

*Many resolved to fast for Hari / While
dreams of rice haunted many.*

Jageshwar is gone. He was "All-Gifted" (Sarvaguni), yet he was murdered. Otherwise, he would have lived a long life. Why are the virtuous made short-lived? Is it to prevent change?

Mukhdev recalls the thousand snakes of Sage Kashyapa—roughly the number of leaders our country has today. Sage Kashyapa created the mantras to neutralize venom; he created Bishahara, also known as Manasa. She married an old sage, and from them, the son Astika was born. It was Astika who saved the snakes from being burnt alive in King Janamejaya's serpent-sacrifice.

Bishahara is worshipped on the branch of the *Pasijh* tree. That tree is strange—if you pour its sap into a pond, every fish dies. Yet, if you heat its leaves and place them on a chest, it cures the most stubborn cough. Where will the new "Kings" be worshipped now?

The Goddess told King Shrutakirti: "If you want an All-Gifted son, he will live only sixteen years. If you want a fool, he will live a long life. You can choose only one." Shrutakirti chose the All-Gifted son and named him Chirayu (Long-Lived). What irony—to name the short-lived "Long-Lived"!

Jageshwar is gone. He was All-Gifted!

Second Petal: The Ritual of the "Ghari"

In Jageshwar's house, they celebrated the *Ghari* festival. Offerings were made to the Goddess, and the consecrated food never left the room. People whispered: "The Ghari festival in a Brahmin's house? That is a ritual for the lower castes!" But in Jageshwar's

home, this had continued for generations. The room was called the "Room of the Goddess," but the seat belonged to Lord Dharmaraj.

The festival happens on the first Wednesday after the *Madhushravani* in the month of Shravan. Everything is new—new pots, a new stove. They cook rice pudding (*kheer*), stuffed puris, and *Motichoor* laddoos. The village of Garh Narikel is the dwelling of the Fourteen Deities. After the worship, children eat the offerings, and the remains are buried deep in the earth within the room. In the courtyard, they dig the soil to worship *Balapir* with incense and lamps.

Balapir, Bishahara, Kali, Durga—the seven sisters of the Goddess. The songs of Bhairav and Hanuman echo. भूष झा and Suresh Jha, the devotees (*Bhagatas*), carry baskets of rice and flowers to guide the spirit. When the spirit possesses the devotee, people ask for cures for their suffering children.

Third Petal: The River and the Famine

The poor used to leave Mithila then, and they leave Mithila now. Wherever they go, they speak Maithili, and Maithili words blend into the local tongues. The river flows like a

blend, too.

In Purnia, the Kosi once flowed to meet the Brahmaputra. Their combined surge carved the Padma channel from the Ganga; otherwise, only the Hooghly existed. Did the Kosi really meet the Brahmaputra? Who knows? But it flowed east of Purnia. Feroz Shah Tughlaq tried to cross it near Kursela while returning from Bengal. On the other side stood the army of Haji Shamsuddin (founder of Hajipur and Samastipur). Feroz couldn't cross; he had to travel north to the foothills where the river falls from the mountains. Hearing that Feroz had finally crossed, Shamsuddin's army fled. Later, Todar Mal saw only water in the region of Khagaria and, unable to measure it, exempted the land from taxes.

But now, there is no one left to exempt us. The journeys of Jageshwar and Mukhdev ended in 1942. After the floods comes the famine. Mukhdev recites the poem of the great famine of 1873-74 (Vikram Samvat 1281) written by Phuturi Lal:

*"Listen to the description of the year '81 /
Famine fell in all four directions..."*

*The rains were treacherous this year / How
can I describe the plight?*

*The rich are joyful, hoarding heaps of grain
/ Laughing as they hide their silver, while the
price of a Seer rises...*

*Some resolved to fast for Hari / While dreams
of rice haunted many."*

The poem describes how ornaments—necklaces, nose-rings, bracelets—were sold for a pittance just to buy a handful of grain. Even the bronze vessels and plates were pawned. Finally, the "Company" (the British) brought grain on ships to save Mithila from drowning in hunger. Huge granaries were set up in Hajipur, Patna, and Madhuban. The King of Darbhanga, Lakshmishwar Singh, sent thousands of bullock carts to distribute grain.

Fourth Petal: The Cutting of the

Embankment

"Do they all sing like this in your village?" Rudramati asks.

"The people of Garh Narikel are famous for their songs and stories," Mukhdev replies.

Rudramati imagines the village. Piar Bachcha, the local landlord, had a small embankment. Usually, the floodwaters would pass without much harm. But Piar Bachcha decided to strengthen his "Zamindari embankment."

Jageshwar, Mukhdev, and the others—the "young boys" (*Chhabra*) as the landlord called them—warned that this time the flood was different. If the embankment didn't have an outlet, it would burst right in front of the settlement, destroying the entire village. They proposed a controlled breach. But the landlord Piar Bachcha, hiding behind his high walls, refused to listen.

A meeting was held in the village. It was decided: Jageshwar and Jibach Mukhia, the

two best swimmers, would cut the embankment! The news spread through the village like wildfire, but no one told Piar Bachcha.

That night, they stayed at Mukhdev's house. Ramdev Bhandari brought two large bamboo baskets (*tokna*). Joginder Thakur brought two small, specially designed spades. Mukhdev cut two holes in the baskets so the swimmers could see through them while wearing them over their heads.

At dawn, they set out. Jageshwar and Jibach jumped into the roaring water, wearing the baskets as camouflage. Mukhdev walked along the embankment to the designated spot. The water was surging, threatening to swallow everything.

Suddenly, the villagers saw two baskets floating in the water. They couldn't recognize the men beneath them. With a few sharp strokes of the spades, the embankment was breached. The water rushed out through Piar Bachcha's fields, saving the village from a "water-burial" (*jal-samadhi*).

Piar Bachcha was fuming, but seeing the

overwhelming support of the village for Jageshwar, he couldn't make an accusation. Later, with the help of the villagers, Jageshwar dug a large canal to channel future floodwaters safely into the ponds and ditches.

That year, there was no famine in Garh Narikel. Mukhdev didn't have to recite the famine poem that year.

In the jail cell, **Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati**—along with the silent **Raghuvaran**—breathe a sigh of relief.

The country is free, and now a Constitution will be made. Then, that "Destiny" will be implemented. The rule will be of the jail, but the management will be that of a guesthouse (*Dharamshala*)!

"Let it come..."

Fourth Wave: Nectar with Indra in Vishwakarma's Orchard

First Petal

Independence has been found—meaning nectar has been found. But where is it kept?

Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, Rudramati, and Raghuvaran—at the Bankipur Camp Jail in Patna. Where is this nectar kept? In the jail of Independence? In an orchard? In whose orchard?

Due to sin, the earth sank to the netherworld;
when it rose through prayer, it
wobbled. Does fall come from sin? To me, it
feels the opposite. Because in this void,
which way is down and which is up?
Spherical...

Vishnu became a tortoise and went below,
yet the earth still floated on the water.
Bringing clay from under Agastya's thigh
and using it as a binder, the earth was
stabilized. Lord Varaha struck the earth from
the north with his head to fix it.

Then came the churning of the ocean. The
serpent Vasuki was wrapped around Mount
Mandar and lowered into the sea. The
demons held the head and the gods held the
tail, beginning the churning with Mandar as
the staff. From the friction, the trees on
Mount Mandar caught fire. Indra brought
rain, and only then was the fire extinguished.

The salty ocean water turned into milk and ghee. Lakshmi, wine, and the horse Uchaishrava emerged from the churning; the Moon took them. Dhanvantari emerged with the nectar; the poison that came out was taken by Mahadev in his throat. Gauri, Bishara, snakes, wasps, and ants helped extract the poison from Mahadev's body.

The struggle for nectar... it keeps happening. Otherwise, would there be a struggle for poison? ...Vishnu became Mohini and gave nectar to all the gods. The demon Rahu changed his guise, wanting to drink the nectar... But the Moon and the Sun recognized him, and his neck was severed. Yet, because the nectar had touched him, he did not die...

The remaining nectar was given to Indra in Vishwakarma's orchard. The serpent Vasuki received a boon that his mother's curse would not affect him, and his family's lives were saved by Astika, his nephew, during Janamejaya's sacrifice.

Second Petal

Mukhdev Ram and Dayaram Ram. The mango orchard, the scraper to clear leaves, the scraper to collect dung.

Mukhdev Ram remembers picking up a mango during the mango season. The guard of the Baharvaya landlord was snatching it away. Just then, Mukhdev heard Jageshwar's voice from afar—"Mukhdev,

bite into the mango... bite it." Mukhdev bit into it. But the guard still didn't give him the mango. He said, "What if you've defiled it with your bite? Why should I give it to you?" And he threw the mango into a pit right in front of Mukhdev and Jageshwar.

Later, Jageshwar took Mukhdev to his own orchard, seated him on a platform, and placed a whole basket of mangoes before him. But Mukhdev remained heavy-hearted. Why was Jageshwar not ready to accept that there was a difference between him and Mukhdev Ram? The forest surrounding the house, beyond which the village lay—the forest the villagers were afraid to enter, which belonged to Mukhdev's ancestors—had now become the orchard of the Baharvaya.

Dayaram Ram and Mukhdev Ram. Society has fixed their work. Providing the drums, playing the pipe. As they grew up, they learned to cover the drums. They would skin dead livestock. Dayaram and Mukhdev would carry even the heaviest carcasses on a stretcher to the skinning ground. But none could match Dayaram in scraping hide with a knife.

A saint from a distant ashram used to come secretly at night to take the *gorochana* (bovine gallstone) extracted from a cow's navel. We hear that in that ashram, all diseases are treated with *gorochana*. No one could make the leather pads for both sides of the mridanga drum better than Mukhdev. But in making the *madal* drum, Dayaram was ahead; the *tunmuniya* mridanga was essentially a *madal*.

Mukhdev, Dayaram, and daughter Mamtod—children of Parmeshwar Ram and Sahebganjwalan. Khadmas, Paush, Chait, and Bhadava—it feels as if all work is stopped. Without rain in the Rohini Nakshatra, farming does not begin; once it rains, it starts. This stay in jail is like a Khadmas. All work is at a standstill. In the village, Khadmas had never truly arrived.

The women sing *Lagni* while grinding grain. And people sing *Biraha* for the hunger of the stomach and the pain of the heart. In which month was the Biraha born, O companion? / In which month was the Chhathihar ritual? / In which month did the lover take his steps? / In which month did the news spread? *In the*

*month of Aghun, the lover, Biraha was born /
 In the month of Paush was the Chhathihar /
 In the month of Magh, the lover took his steps
 / In the month of Phalgun, the news spread.*

Jageshwar never left Mukhdev out of festivals and rituals. In the month of Baisakh, the Jurshital festival occurs; on that day, puri, dalpuri, and badi (lentil dumplings) were made. Sahebganjwalan would make the badi stew at night. The elders bless the younger ones with water to cool them. The women sprinkle water on the path; there is a saying that doing this increases a brother's lifespan. And a sister's lifespan...

Everyone eats stale rice and badi on water-lily leaves. Sahebganjwalan brings water-weeds from the pond and places them with the stale rice, badi, and sattu on the thresholds and plastered stoves, which was called "cooling." Dayaram, Mukhdev, and Jageshwar, along with other children, make bamboo water-guns and play in the ponds and wells, getting wet and soaking others.

They throw mud, clay, and dust on each other; the wells are dredged, and Dayaram, Mukhdev, and Jageshwar tie old, torn baskets

and pouches onto their friends, turning them into "Mithila's Mahadev." They go from porch to porch drinking bhang. Jokes and banter fly. Everyone sings the *Nachari* of Mahadev accompanied by drums and cymbals—everyone, meaning...

Mukhdev, Jageshwar, Dayaram, Adhiklal Mandal, Mohammad Shamsul, Bichkun Saday, Ramchandra Sav, Jibach Mukhia, Radhamohan Rai, Ashok Thakur, Baudha Malik, Dukhan Mahto, Kapileshwar Raut, Satyanarayan Kamat, Ramdev Bhandari, Bhola Paswan, Lakshmi Das, Lal Kumar Rai, Shiv Narayan Mahto, Chalittar Sahu, Basu Chaupal, Satyanarayan Yadav, Jagdish Maile, Bhola Pandit, Budhan Safi, Jayram Thakur, Joginder Thakur, Daroga Singh, Sarpanch Mandal, Parsadi Jha, Phukki Jha, Sitaram Chaudhary, Bisheshwar Paswan, Saruf Lal, Mahender Ram, Jainul Mian, Sido Murmu, Umesh Rajak, Bhup Yadav.

Jurshital is also called Chandal Sankranti. Its morning marks the Mithila New Year. The New Year involves the "Chandal touch," play, and "Goddess's blessing"—meaning

the drinking of wine. Eating stale rice is like drinking wine, but placing it on a water-lily leaf destroys the harmful effects.

*Bhola rides the bull, the heart trembles /
What are the earrings, what the garland,
what the sixteen ornaments, the heart
trembles / The earrings are snakes, the
garland is snakes, the sixteen ornaments are
snakes, the heart trembles / For whom did
Maina enter the temple and bolt the
thunderous door, the heart trembles / For
Gauri, Maina entered the temple and bolt the
thunderous door, the heart trembles.*

After that, everyone bathes, prays, and heads home. One more thing—curd, the identity of Mithila, is also eaten. Wherever a Maithil lives, they celebrate this festival. This is the identity of Mithila society. In this Bankipur Camp Jail in Patna, Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Bhatt Bhushan, and Raghuvaran have become the "Mithila Mahadevs."

The second day. Early in the morning, everyone douses the paths inside the jail with

water; every mother, father, grandfather, and grandmother cools the children with water. Stale rice and badi are eaten on water-lily leaves. Ghananand and Haldhar have brought the leaves. After that, they go to the trees inside the jail and offer badi, puri, and rice to them as well. Everyone joins in throwing mud and clay at each other.

Then, turning into Mahadev and Parvati, high on bhang and datura and laden with torn baskets and sacks, they go to the porches of the Jailer and the jail doctor, joking, beating drums, and singing Mahadev's *Nachari*. After roaming the "jail-village" with great fanfare, they bathe in the pond's ditch in the evening and return to their jail cells—their homes.

The welfare of nature alongside humanity—the elders pour water on the heads of the young, wishing for their happiness and prosperity; there is also a tradition of watering the trees. For one day, lighting the stove is forbidden. The women of the house pour water on the road; this brings happiness and prosperity to the home! On the festival

day, stale food is offered to God. By not lighting stoves in such large numbers for one day, the environment is freed from smoke, and fuel consumption is reduced.

Daulat Jahan had soaked the badi during the night. Rudramati brought water-weeds from the pond and, mixing them with stale rice, badi, and sattu, "cooled" every corner of the jail. After that, they all ate the stale rice, badi, puri, and dalpuri.

In the month of Baisakh, whether it is early mangoes or seasonal ones, there is no taste in anything. The same people who sang *Chaitavar* seem changed. Neither joy nor sorrow. Merit is accumulated in this month. Therefore, do not apply oil, and do not sleep during the day. Where do poor people get oil anyway? And this hair that gets tangled from the jail comb—if one wants to untangle it without oil, will it untangle?

The Rabi crop of Chait-Baisakh!!! Baisakh!! Bhadaiya!! If everything becomes Aghani, will the work go on? *The days of the Chait-Baisakh Rabi crop have arrived / The barley and peas of the Rabi crop have been cut / The mother-in-law and sister-in-law say, "Grind*

the barley" / Bake thick rotis that we shall all eat together.

Dayaram, Mukhdev, and Jageshwar... were singing *Lagni*... in the field... farming Jageshwar's field... How cruel you became, you completely forgot me / O Rama, will my life pass like this? / The day became unfamiliar, the night became a mountain / O Rama, will the Sun never rise for me? / Magh passed, Phalgun came, the mangoes blossomed / O Rama, will the cooing cuckoo weep like this? / Born in sorrow, died in tears / O Rama, will my eyes never dry?

Dayaram, Mukhdev, and Jageshwar. Sahebganjwalan had saved the life of Jageshwar's mother. In the labor room... There are hardly any doctors or fears in the village. No woman in Jageshwar's courtyard had the skill to deliver the child. The baby's feet were down and the head was up. Jageshwar's father had gone to call Sahebganjwalan. Sahebganjwalan invoked Goddess Hulhuli and set out, with Parmeshwar Ram accompanying her. The labor room was partitioned with a sari... Lest both the bride and the baby be lost... but

Sahebganjwalan saved them both... both the mother and the child.

Jageshwar was told this story by his mother, and Mukhdev by Sahebganjwalan. That is why Jageshwar respected Sahebganjwalan so much... and would give his life for Mukhdev. When Mukhdev met Jageshwar at that feast, Jageshwar didn't even know this; children are only told these things when necessary.

Rudramati is from Bengal. From the Chunuri caste, who make lime by burning shells. In Bengal, it is not the leather-worker but the Hadhi caste that assists in childbirth. Everyone does farming now.

In Jeth I sowed the seed, in Ashadh it was born / In Sawan I did the planting, in Bhadava it grew / In Ashin the paddy blossomed, in Kartik it bore fruit / In Aghun the paddy was cut and the threshing was done / Threshing done and the granary filled, I shall pound it and eat.

In the afternoon and at sunset, the men sleep, but the grain-husking in the *dheki* continues. Beaten rice continues to be pounded in the

mortar. Thump-thump, bang-bang, the frog goes go-go / The little one rolled on the ground, take him in your lap, friend / The mallet goes khat-khat, the pestle speaks dham-dham / Who will go to sleep with the brother? The sister-in-law says, "I will, I will."

Mukhdev and Dayaram's sister, Mamtod, was just like Rudramati... everyone called her "Mamtodiya." The mother came from Sahebganj to Garh Narikel, and Mamtod went from Garh Narikel to Sahebganj. *Udasi* songs were sung when the son-in-law departed.

The "filling the house" ritual happened... in the shrine room, a mat was spread and betel leaves with stalks, paddy, fox nuts, durva grass, and silver coins were placed in the groom's hand, while he held the bride's hand from behind... "I fill the mother-in-law and father-in-law's house, I go to fill my mother and father's house..." *Udasi* songs rise from behind... Why did you fall in love, O ascetic? / You are leaving love behind / The betel in your hand became a dream, O ascetic / I cannot live without you / Your courtyard

is like a desert, O ascetic / The house feels
dark even in the day / Even the bed feels like
thorns, O ascetic / The pillow does not soothe
me.

Jageshwar had vermilion dissolved in a plate;
the bride's hand was dipped in the dissolved
vermilion and an imprint was made on the
back of the groom's stole. The bride's face
was shown to the groom. Curd, rice, *bagiya*
dumplings... At most, there was salt and oil
on *madua* bread, or sometimes *Bhadaiya*
rice.

But O, Jageshwar... and he used to say...
"Mukhdev, your mother is the savior of my
life, the savior of my mother's life... what
favor? None... this is my debt." Piar Bachcha
would laugh—"Just watch now... Jageshwar
and his father are putting these people on
their heads, just watch now..." Pound,
pound, O friends / The new rice has come,
when shall we enjoy it? / Pound, pound, O
friends / Pound the beaten rice, pound the
rice, make the dumplings / Soft rice cakes
will be made, the bed will creak / Pound,
pound, O friends / Take the mallet, take the
pestle, tie the knot / Pound wide, wide beaten
rice, fan the winnowing basket / Pound,

pound, O friends / The guest will come, will
 show affection, will take you in his lap / The
 sister-in-law's heart will be cooled, pound,
 friends / Pound, pound, O friends.

Jageshwar's "Sahebganj-sister" had become
 Mukhdev's mother. Thus, Mamtod became
 Jageshwar's cousin. Parmeshwar,
 Sahebganjwala, Mamtod, Mukhdev, and
 Dayaram—all worked in the fields together.
 Jageshwar would bring water to the
 fields. How beautifully life was moving. No
 one had any trouble except for Piar Bachcha.

And Piar Bachcha was always surrounded by
 his henchmen. "Break his hand, break his leg,
 smash his head." This kind of talk was
 always happening in Piar Bachcha's
 court. Yes, Ba Jha was the name of that
 henchman. He was always lurking around
 the fields. Whenever he saw
 Sahebganjwala or Mamtod alone, he would
 say all sorts of things. He wasn't even from
 this village. Ba Jha was an outside
 henchman. Sahebganjwala and Mamtod
 wouldn't tell anyone anything—not
 Parmeshwar, Mukhdev, or Dayaram, and not
 even Jageshwar.

But Ba Jha's fate—or ill-fate. One day Jageshwar caught him. "Ba Jha, how did you dare speak to my sister and my elder sister in this way?" "Your sister and elder sister? Since when did Mamtodiya become your sister and Sahebganjwala your elder sister? Are you playing some game behind this fence?" "Ba Jha..."

Mukhdev sits up. It feels as if Jageshwar's wrap-around cloth had cut Ba Jha's neck in one strike and the fountain of his blood had sprayed onto Mukhdev's face that day; that same sensation. Mukhdev and Jageshwar buried Ba Jha's corpse in that very field. No one found out anything. Piar Bachcha kept searching for Ba Jha for a few days. He had taken some money in advance. It seemed his intentions had turned bad. He had fled the village... no one knew which village he was from; seeing him strong, he had been kept as a henchman.

Piar Bachcha had a slight suspicion of Jageshwar, but he didn't ask. He feared his own disgrace. The other henchmen who used to say, "Break his hand, break his leg, smash his head," also began to live in fear. They didn't know what mantra Piar Bachcha and

Jageshwar knew. Everyone has to die one day. When Ba Jha disappeared, the villagers sighed in relief. When his feet fell on the ground, the earth would shake. He had beaten Harishchandra to death. If he was gone, it was for the better. Now the other henchmen have also become well-behaved. And have they really become well-behaved? Whoever found these henchmen would give them a piece of their mind. Within a few days, everything became quiet.

And meanwhile, Mamtod's wedding also happened in a great hurry. Mamtod went to Sahebganj. Ghenghi had wept so much, and went away weeping. If I had known Sita would go to her in-laws, I would have planted betel-nut trees / In the shade, in the shade, Sita would go to her in-laws, a cool breeze would touch her / Lifting her head, Sita looked in all directions, her father's kingdom was left behind / Four palanquin-bearers, the fifth a companion, the sixth her own brother / Return, return, O brother, return; your mother must be weeping for you / Tell mother she should become as stone; I too shall sit here, heart-broken.

Mamtodiya's mother—why did she hurry for no reason? A mother's heart. She sent her daughter to her maternal home. Bokkho-Gokkho, likely from Ghanshyampur, had come on the wedding day; they had put on quite a show. These Gokkhos don't let the Nat performers of Brahmpur get even a single hand in.

Mukhdev begins to wipe his mouth, as if he were wiping away the stickiness of Ba Jha's blood. What is there to drink? The whole world. What is there that you will take? *In Paush, burn dung-cakes and warm yourself / In Magh, Khesari greens, sir / In Phalgun, for them, bean skins and monkeys / In Chait, Khesari dal, sir / In Baisakh, keep the raw mangoes safely / In Jeth, Kherhi rice, sir / In Ashadh, eat by squeezing the mud / In Sawan, jackfruit bulbs, sir / In Bhadava, for them, seeds and fibers / In Ashin, Madua bread, sir / In Kartik, spend sorrow and joy together / In Aghun, rice at both sunset and sunrise, sir.*

Starting from Paush and ending on Aghun. Rice at both sunset and sunrise. Nectar, Indra's nectar, Vishwakarma in the orchard... what secret is in this? I am in the orchard, but I won't drink nectar? What if I drink

nectar? If I drink nectar, the need for struggle will end; I will be certain that no matter how much killing and violence there is, I will still live. Then life will become hell, won't it? In that sense, drinking this nectar wasn't a good thing. But I am the one in the orchard of nectar and yet I won't drink it—then how is that significant? Nectar is good in that sense.

Fifth Wave: Bo-Bo

This Mukharam is also a great chatterbox... a storyteller who extracts lessons for human welfare from every tale.

Listen further... God wished to create the universe. Mukharam will likely tell the story of the "Thousand-Headed One" now.... God wished to create the universe, so He took the forms of Vishnu, then Shiva, and then Brahma. Then came the gods, sages, the

woman Shatarupa, and Svayambhuva Manu. From His right eye, He created Atri; from His shoulder, Marichi; and from His right side, Daksha Prajapati. From Marichi came Kashyapa, and from Atri came the Moon. Manu had sons named Priyavrata and Uttanapada, and daughters named Akriti, Devahuti, and Prasuti. Prasuti married Daksha Prajapati, and they had sixty daughters. Of the sixty, eight married Dharma, eleven married Kashyapa, twenty-seven married the Moon, and one, named Sati, married Mahadev.

Of the Moon's twenty-seven wives, he loved Rohini the most. Consequently, the twenty-six sisters complained to their father, Daksha, and the Moon's body began to wane. When the Moon went to Mahadev, Mahadev placed him upon his own forehead. Daksha grew hostile toward Mahadev; he organized a grand sacrifice (*yajna*) but did not invite Shankar. Sati insisted on going to her father's home, so Shiva sent her with Virabhadra. Sati went, but seeing the insult to her husband, she leaped into the sacrificial fire-pit. Witnessing this, Virabhadra severed

Daksha's head. Seeing Mahadev's rage, the gods prayed to him. Mahadev then placed the head of a goat sacrificed in the ritual onto Daksha's torso. Daksha came back to life, but he could only make the sound "Bo-Bo". Seeing this, Mahadev was pleased. Since that day, the sound "Bo" is uttered at the end of Mahadev's worship.

So it is... Mukhdev didn't even tell the story of the Thousand-Headed One. He also said "Bo-Bo," seemingly to please us. Yet, what radiance there is on Mukhdev's forehead, what grace in his eyes—it is as if he carries the Moon upon his head. Men fight amongst themselves, and women leap into the fire-pit!.

Buddhism spread in Mithila; there was a Maithil Buddhist nun named Sumangalamata. Was the nun a maiden?. Well, she wouldn't be married, or how could she be called a nun?. Oh, let the story continue... Sumangalamata says, "Grant me liberation from the back-breaking work of

the kitchen, from the pangs of hunger, from the clattering of vessels, and from that treacherous man who creates a thunderous storm". Then another Maithil nun, Mukta, says, "Grant me liberation from the mortar and pestle, from the master, and from my rival husband". If she is a maiden, where did the treacherous and rival husband come from?. Can one not write about others? Let him speak....

All the women worked hard, without any restriction. It wasn't as if women were afraid of men. In the mango orchards, on the paths and riverbanks, in the courtyards and backyards—women met each other everywhere. There was the potter's wife from Belahi, Satyanarayan Yadav's wife from Majhari, Basu Chaupal's wife from Ramkhetari, Chalittar Sahu's wife from Lakshminia, Shivnarayan Mahto's wife from Nirmali, Lakshmi Das's wife from Sonvarsha, Lal Kumar Rai's wife from Sukhet, Bhola Paswan's wife from Belmohan, Satyanarayan Kamat's wife from Kadmaha, Ramdev Bhandari's wife from Dharmadiha, Kapileshwar Raut's wife from

Meters, Baudha Malik's wife from Behat, Dukhan Mahto's wife from Dhepura, Radhamohan Rai's wife from Mohli, Ashok Thakur's wife from Jagdar, Ramchandra Sav's wife from Kothia, Jibach Mukhia's wife from Tamuria, Bichkun Saday's wife from Jethiyahi, Mohammad Shamsul's wife from Machdhi, Bhagwandutt Mandal's wife from Balat, Korail Safi's wife from Ganj, Jayram Thakur's wife from Chanaura, Parmeshwar Ram's wife from Sahebganj, and Joginder Thakur's wife from Navani. And Mamtod would have become "Garh Narikel-wali".

Nag Panchami falls on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Shravan. On that day, every wife plasters her house and courtyard beautifully with smooth clay. They plaster the courtyard with cow dung. They draw lines with cow dung around every room, which is called a "protective circle" (*ghera*). After that, the wives and daughters together bring smooth clay and build small mounds (*thumha*) in the courtyard. They apply vermilion and rice-paste to them, dry

them, and keep them safely in the house. This clay has its own special significance. In the evening, the wives parch paddy to make *lava*, mix it with soil from a rat's hole, and scatter it in the house and courtyard. This is also considered a form of deity worship. It also marks a suspicious arrival. On Nag Panchami, neem leaves are tied to stalks of Kush grass and tucked into the thatch of the roof. There is a tradition of eating neem leaves, lemon juice, and a buttermilk-rice dish (*ghorjaur*). On the new moon of Bhadava, the men go to the fields in the morning with iron sickles, uproot Kush grass, and return with it hanging from both ends of a pole on their shoulders. That Kush grass is also dried and kept; it is very useful.

It was the day of Nag Panchami.... Ashok Thakur's wife from Jagdar was a healer; she could neutralize the venom of any snake. If even a common water snake bit someone, she would certainly cure it. Mohammad Shamsul's wife from Machdhi had been pleading with her for a long time to learn the snake mantras. Kapileshwar Raut's wife from Meters had been bitten by a snake. It

was Nag Panchami... as soon as the mantra was recited, the pain vanished.

*Four snake women, twelve-spotted snakes,
Ani Mani Khapdi Teni... Ajan Bhajan the
form, Doma Doma the stars... Aniya Laru,
Painiya Laru, fill the raw clay with gold...
Neutralize twenty with a staff, the conch-
spotted, the moon-witted... Let the hand go,
let the venom return, let the path lead to
Mount Sumeru... The weaver is your
daughter-in-law, one-one, seventy-one, nine,
ten, eighteen quarters... Which corner?
Khatira Matira, the enemy's thorn from the
press... Named son, coat and shoes, their
nine sons shall die... Burn Lanka, burn, burn,
the frog's son is the right morsel... The frog's
son is Garuda's form, the blue-necked one
weeps for Hasan and Husain... Return the
venomous one, there Garuda spreads his
hand... There the snake is not venomous,
Brahma Brahma Brahma... A sixteen-cubit
Krait, let the hand go and strike the venom...
See the Atania, the Metania staff... The
hearing Krait and the other snakes... The
mongoose strikes, brother, your venom is but*

a rice-field... Arrival and departure are your burden, rise again and go home... Garuda is your husband, not a single wing shall he spread... The woman examines the Kush, naming every pond... Golden flowers bloom, there she was seen and born... Break the Kush and divide it, cut it into three pieces... You are the lioness's son, mount the lion and strike the wound... Your mother, the tigress, gave birth, let all four snakes be non-venomous... This is the oath of Lord Mahadev, Gaura and Parvati... The oath of Kamakhya, Kamaruch, and Naina Jogin.

When a common water snake strikes, it hurts intensely. After seeing this, Mohammad Shamsul's wife from Machdhi began her entreaties and learned the snake mantras. What harmony there was among the women of the village! It isn't so among the men. Look at the harmony among the women during Chhath.

*In the early morning, daughter of the Dom...
Daughter Dhaniya, bring the bamboo*

*basket... It is time for the offering (Aragh)...
Daughter, bring the yellow-colored
winnowing fan... The sun-charioteer has
stood tall.*

*In the early morning, daughter of the
merchant... Merchant daughter, bring the
new betel nuts... It is time for the offering...*

*In the early morning, daughter of the
gardener... Gardener daughter, bring the
multi-colored garland... It is time for the
offering...*

*In the early morning, Brahmin woman...
Brahmin woman, bring the yellow sacred
thread... It is time for the offering.*

Mohammad Shamshul's wife from Machdhi has her mother's home in Islampur. In Machdhi and Deep, there are mostly Kunjras, with some weavers (*Jolha*), cotton-carders

(*Dhuniya*), and barbers (*Hajam*); these are called *Ajalb*, consider them like the *Solkanh* of the Hindus. There are also some "untouchable" Muslims called *Arzal*. But in Islampur, all kinds of Muslims live. If Brahmins, Rajputs, and Bhumihars became Muslims, they must have been made *Ashraf*—along with Sayyids and Pathans, these Sheikhs too, perhaps. Rajput Daroga Singh from Neaur near Kunauli was telling this to Shamshul Mian, so the Machdhi woman understood all this.

Women can call men "Bo-Bo"! But in Jageshwar's Garh Narikel, the conduct of the women was first and foremost worthy of emulation. Ghananand, Haldhar, None, and Bhatt Bhushan found today's story very good, but Rudramati and Daulat Jahan found it deeply insightful. Raghuvaran was busy noting something in his notebook. But after today's story, Mukhdev began to remember his forest-dwelling companions. The residents of Garh Narikel, shrouded by the forest, were indeed forest-dwellers, where so many types of snakes and cultures were spread. Victory to Mahadev... Bam-Bam-

Bam-Bam-Bru....

**Sixth Wave: The Sentinel of Memory and
the Empty-Handed Brother**

First Petal

"Even empty-handed my brother should have come, he should have sat with me...

Climbing the porch, my dear...

I would have worn my own sari and would have said that he brought it; I would have taken his name..."

Mukhdev's stories continue. The audience—or call them the listeners—stay with their ears pressed close.

There was a King who had two daughters: Kumarvrata and Pativrata. Kumarvrata lived in a hut in the Nandanvan forest, while Pativrata married and went to her in-laws. Once, a crow defecated on a Yogi's head; in a rage, he cursed it and burnt it to ashes. Later, a fire broke out in the Nandanvan forest. Pativrata, in her effort to save her sister Kumarvrata's hut, placed a protective circle of Tulsi around it, which caused a delay in giving alms to the Yogi.

When the Yogi grew angry, Pativrata

explained the reason for her delay. The Yogi went into the forest and saw the entire woods ablaze, yet Kumarvrata's hut remained untouched. He revealed this mystery to Kumarvrata, who then decided that she, too, would marry and become a devoted wife (*Pativrata*). In the morning, she saw a leper and married him.

Her husband asked her to take him on a pilgrimage. She set out, carrying him in a basket (*pathiya*). Along the way, while putting the basket down, it accidentally struck a sage hanging on a stake (*shuli*). The sage cursed her, saying her husband would die at dawn. Upon hearing this, the poor woman began to worship the Sun; through her devotion, her husband died but then rose again, returning this time free of all disease.

She wasn't the only devoted wife; they were all devoted wives. Meanwhile, the male "Mahatmas" were all quick-tempered, handing out curses at every turn.

Mukhdev remembers the song his mother and Mamtod used to sing:

"Time and again, I implore you, O Lord of the

*Day / O Father, do not give me a woman's
birth / If you must give a woman's birth, O
Lord / Father, do not give me deep sensitivity
/ If you give sensitivity, O Lord / Father, do
not give an unloving husband / If you give an
unloving husband, O Lord / Father, do not
leave my womb barren."*

Second Petal

Mukhram had set out to meet Mamtod, and Jageshwar was with him. A child had been born—twins—a son and a daughter. The distance was so great that...

Parmeshwar Ram was married in Sahebganj. Sahebganj was the maternal home of Mamtod, Dayaram, and Mukhdev. In Mukhdev Ram, the songs began to resonate, and the songs he heard began to pour from his mouth:

"The celebration rings in Nanda's courtyard / The dancer performs, the midwife dances, the little sister-in-law dances in the courtyard / Why do you dance, sister-in-law? Your brother is away in Patna / Let the celebration ring in Nanda's courtyard / My brother stays in Patna; from there he will bring pearl bangles / My brother shall live, my nephew shall live, the heart's desire is fulfilled / Let the celebration ring in Nanda's courtyard..."

It was Mamtod's birth. The midwife from

Deep village had raised a great stir. Another midwife grew jealous, but so what? The way they sang and danced with the small drum (*dubki*) was a wonder. The bards and genealogists had arrived from Brahmipur. The *Pamariya* dancers were Muslim, and the *Maharaj-jis* were Hindu. Muslim *Nat* performers had come from near Benipatti—who knows from where else.

There was the story of two *Nat* sisters, Hirni and Birni, and the wrestler Mohana Para; they had vowed to marry whoever could subdue Mohana. In Delhi, Ujjain Singh fought Mohana Para for two days; he fought on but eventually lost and died. Ujjain Singh's disciple, Poshan Singh, finally subdued Mohana Para and married Hirni and Birni, and both sisters bore sons.

Sometimes, when Mamtod started crying, she wouldn't stop. She was very prone to the "evil eye" (*najar-gujar*). Mukhdev still remembers the mantras to ward off the evil eye—mantras that blended Hindu and Muslim faith:

*"Om Namo Bismillah, Rahim Rahman /
From Ghazni set out Mohammad Pir, he rode*

forth / He eats a seer and a quarter of rations, he raids eighty miles away / White horse, white reins, upon it rides Mohammad Pir / Nine hundred soldiers march in front, nine hundred soldiers march behind / Move, move, O Brave, there is none like you / Seize my enemy and bring him / Bone by bone, skin by skin, from head to toe, from every pore, seize him and bring him / Silarjinh Pir is the master / Beating, thrashing, breaking, smashing / Handcuffs on hands, chains on feet / With arms tied behind the back / Come riding on the silk-cotton tree / Play, eat, and be happy."

A smile touches Mukhdev's face as he utters:
"Om Namō Bismillah, Rahim Rahman..."

"Like a peg, like a nail, like a washerman's plank / Like a potter's wheel." Mamtod used to get these oil-spells, and maybe I did too, Mother.

"Yes, why wouldn't you have?" Mother would say. Mukhdev, however, was never bothered by the evil eye.

Then there was the *Pachanya* from Pahaddi with the decorated sacred bull (*Basaha*). The

bull would be adorned with small cowrie shells. For six months, these people would go about seeking alms with the bull. The *Rahaur-Rathaur* people also survived on alms. They would even apply the "Five-deity" protection (*paach*) to children...

"Little Shitala Mother; young in age / Carrying a basket, Mother went to pluck flowers / While plucking flowers, Mother's body was drenched in sweat / The vermilion on Mother's forehead was washed by sweat."

And then Mamtod was struck by the "Five-deity" sickness. While playing with Mamtod, Mukhdev would become the Royal Constable (*Kotwal*).

Mukhdev: (Grunting) *Hoon, Anh, Hoon-Hoon...*

Mamtod: *Who is grunting in my backyard?*

Mukhdev: *The Royal Constable...*

Mamtod: *What does he demand?*

Mukhdev: *Non-parboiled rice, a new lid; it's the King's daughter's wedding, he demands a jackfruit.*

Even now, it feels raw.

Mukhdev: (Grunting) *Hoon, Anh, Hoon-Hoon...*

Mamtod: *Who is grunting in my backyard?*

A laugh and tears come together to Mukhdev's eyes. Rudramati brings him water.

"Jhijhir-kona, Jhijhir-kona, which corner? This corner, no, that corner..."

Third Petal

The road to Sahebganj. Me and Mukhdev.

Who knows who Piar Bachcha's informant was. Piar Bachcha, with a smile, had raised a storm of fences and partitions in the village. Jageshwar knew all the paths. Reaching Maniharighat required enduring the shivers

of fear. Hosting the comrades, we crossed the Ganges and moved forward, but the police had already reached Sahebganj.

Who knows who the traitor was. A traitor from within the house. Piar...

"Run, Mukhdev!"

Where can the caged parrot run, Jageshwar?

If the police had been in uniform, Jageshwar would never have let them win. But we thought they were relatives coming to welcome us.

They didn't even take us to a nearby jail; they charged us as "Big Terrorists."

Sent to Patna jail under heavy security...

...Left to the custody of Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati.

Mamtod must still be watching the path.

Who knows what Piar Bachcha told the village.

What must Mamtod be thinking...

"Even empty-handed my brother should have come, he should have sat with me / Climbing the porch, my dear / I would have worn my own sari and would have said that he brought it / I would have taken his name..."

**Seventh Wave: The Humming Loom and
the Deepening Dread**

First Petal

*Dhun-dhun, dhun-dhun sings the spinning
wheel,*

Fear strikes in the heat of the fray...

Daksha was reborn as the Himalayas. In this birth, he had five daughters: Uma, Parvati, Ganga, Gauri, and Sandhya. Uma, the daughter of Himalaya and Maina, set out to perform penance to attain Mahadev; her mother tried to stop her, but she succeeded in winning Mahadev as her groom. The second daughter, Parvati, one day went to the Golden Peak, mounted the sacred bull, and rode away with Mahadev. The third daughter was Ganga. One day, Mahadev arrived in the guise of a beggar, hid Ganga in his matted hair, and departed. The sacred bull...

Mukhdev begins something new...

Mamtod's birth took place in a Dalit family of Mithila—a family Dalit in both economic and social terms. Garh Narikel was home to all kinds of people, but those who were economically deprived were in the majority. Except for a few houses, almost everyone was poor, yet socially, there were deep

trenches of "high" and "low." Among the women, however, this was less pronounced; social harmony was greater among them.

When Mamtod was in the womb, the woman from Sahebganj (Mukhdev's mother) ate and drank well, but she never stopped her industrious work. Parmeshwar, however, would not let her do heavy labor. Mamtod's birth helped distance the family from the rigid social order; people became absorbed in their own lives. In that society, there were the sacred bull-keepers of Pahaddi, the bards of Brahmpur, the *Pamariya* dancers of Deep, the *Nat* performers of Benipatti, and the *Gokko* bards of Ghanshyampur.

What is education? The education that Mother and society were giving Mamtod—could that ever be taught in a school? It wasn't that Mother didn't occasionally give Mamtod a slap, but it was done gently. It had no real effect on her. However, if Mother ever stopped speaking to Mamtod, or if Mamtod stopped speaking to Mother, the way they would trail behind each other was a sight to behold, for me and for Father as well.

For a month and a half, Mamtod neither

smiled when called nor paid attention to anything. But at six weeks, she began to laugh. My heart found peace, but Mother said, "This happens with every child." By three months, her smile turned into a full-throated laugh. A little later, before she was even a year old, she learned to distinguish between her own people and strangers.

There... she has moved away from God; she has started putting her big toe in her mouth.

After five or six years, she began doing all her work herself. She talked a great deal and learned all the songs.

Yet, if ever a girl or boy said something sharp to her and Mother didn't listen to her complaint, she would grind her teeth in her sleep that night. Mother would say the girl had worms in her stomach. The poor thing had to eat many bitter neem leaves as a remedy.

Second Petal

Jageshwar had brought a piece of Khadi and asked for some bags to be made. Mother said, "We don't know how to make bags," but Jageshwar insisted, "Mamtod will make them, do not worry."

And Mamtod did make them.

Khadi cloth, the hide of a small lamb, cotton, a honeycomb, and a small wooden board. Mamtod had watched Kuredi extract honey from a hive while reciting a mantra:

"Bind the knot, bind the joint, bind your own body / Bind the body of the True Guru, the great illusion of the sun."

The honeycomb is a world of its own; today, it was put to work.

And upon those bags, they created various types of carvings.

Lakhni from Dharmadiha, Phudo from

Meters, Sukan from Behat, Phulo from Dhepura, Somni from Mohli, Marni from Jagdar, Bhulli from Kothia, Bhuri from Tamuria, Bhurkuri from Jethiyahi, Kalkusari from Machdhi, Ghuttari from Balat, Munesari from Ganj, Lukhiya from Chanaura, and Kusuma from Navani.

The carvings these girls collectively did on the Khadi and leather bags were marvelous. Jageshwar distributed all those bags among the Comrades. And then, a spinning wheel (*Charkha*) arrived in our house. Not just our house—it arrived in the homes of all of Mamtod's friends. Soon, people in Garh Narikel began wearing clothes of many colors. Jageshwar used to say we should learn from the Banjaras; they wander from village to village, yet look at the vibrant colors they wear.

Dhun-dhun, dhun-dhun sings the spinning wheel, fear strikes in the fray

Dhak-dhak, dhak-dhak beats the chest, fear strikes in the fray

Soft and smooth the cotton feels, the heart leaps in joy

*Winter passed, summer passed, Bhado and
Sawan passed away*

*Still the heartless one hasn't come, the soul
sobs in pain*

*Dhun-dhun, dhun-dhun sings the spinning
wheel, fear strikes in the fray...*

Why does the "dhun-dhun" of this spinning wheel create fear in the ears after the country's independence?

But after the incident with Ba Jha, a strange kind of fear had entered her.

She used to be afraid before, too. I was as well—of this life, of this death.

Mother used to tell her that in her next life, she would be born as a princess. But was she not a princess in this life? She had brothers like Mukhdev and Dayaram, and a father like Parmeshwar.

"And a mother like you."

Mamtod would laugh while saying this. But after the Ba Jha incident...

Earlier, whenever there was talk of marriage, she would say, "I won't marry; I will stay with my parents and brothers my whole life." But after the incident with Ba Jha, she didn't say a word. It was as if this village had become a wilderness to her, a place she simply wanted to leave behind.

In the jail of this country—whether truly independent or not—Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, Rudramati, and Raghuvaran are stunned into silence upon hearing the questions of Mukhdev Ram, the freedom fighter.

Eighth Wave: The Departure and the Sacred Fire

First Petal

*How shall the daughter live today without
her mother?*

*Every moment, she wakes with a start and
cries...*

Bravo, Mukhram of Mithila! Another story
begins...

King Sagara's wife was Shaibya, and they had a son named Asamanjasa. Asamanjasa... yes, the one of uncertainty. His second wife, Vaidarbhi, had no children. She performed penance for a hundred years for Mahadev, and eventually, a mass of flesh was born to her. Mahadev arrived, cut that mass into sixty thousand pieces, placed them in pots, and covered them. In time, these became sixty thousand sons.

When King Sagara attempted his hundredth *Ashvamedha* sacrifice, Indra became fearful that Sagara would usurp his throne. Indra stole the sacrificial horse and hid it in Sage Kapila's ashram. All sixty thousand sons rushed at Kapila while he was deep in meditation. When he opened his wrathful eyes, they were all burnt to ashes. To bring the Ganga down from heaven to liberate them, Asamanjasa, then his son Dilipa, and then his grandson Anshuman all died performing penance.

Finally, Bhagiratha, Anshuman's son, pleased Vishnu with his penance and received permission to lead the Ganga to the mortal world. Mahadev went to the Himalayas and caught the descending Ganga

in his matted hair to break her fall. But as she moved forward, she began to wash away Sage Jahnu's hut. In anger, Sage Jahnu drank the entire Ganga. Later, he released her, and since then, she became known as his daughter, Jahnvi. Finally, the Ganga fell into the deep trench dug by Sagara's sons—which became the Ocean (*Sagara*)—and thus they found salvation.

Salvation... It was on the banks of the Ganga that the British police caught Jageshwar and Mukhdev and gave them "salvation." Mukhdev did not find ultimate peace, but in this Bankipur Camp Jail on the banks of the Ganga, Jageshwar certainly found his salvation.

Second Petal

The village is filled with all kinds of priests. Bindeshwar Thakur is a barber, but he also conducts weddings for the Keots and Dhanuks. Ramavtar Raut is a Barai, yet he serves as the priest for the Chamars, Tatmas, and Dhanuks; he performs Satyanarayan Puja, Saraswati Puja, house-warming rituals,

and funeral rites. Ghuran Ram serves the Musahars and Chamars; because the Brahmin priests would only recite "Namo" instead of "Om" for them, Jageshwar and Mukhdev encouraged Ghuran Ram to become a priest himself. He now conducts weddings and finds auspicious dates, though for funeral rites, Lakshmi Ram and Kona Ram from nearby villages are called.

Mamtod's wedding priest was the same, and the barber was Lakshmi Thakur. A barber has to work harder, but in the distribution of offerings, the barber gets six annas while the priest takes ten. They even argued about this in the middle of the rituals.

The day before the wedding is *Kumram*. For the *Matikor* ritual, Mamtod and four other women brought soil from the field to fill the wedding canopy (*marba*). From that soil, the stove was made to parch the paddy. On the day of *Kumram*, ancestors are invoked and their permission is sought to prevent any obstacles. The drums and pipes play loudly. The singers are given oil and vermilion. The "Bilauki" ritual signifies the society's cooperation in the event.

On the night before the wedding, bamboo slivers, reeds, and banana leaves are placed before the family deity—this is the *Purba-Pachba*. It is tied to end the evil eye and to ensure Mamtod's lineage grows strong like bamboo and reeds.

Third Petal

Today is the wedding day. The songs of Tirhut and Batgavani echo from house to house, in the shrine, and during the hair-combing and water-filling rituals. There are songs for the paths, for Sawan and Bhadava, for the rituals, and for the seasons—Malshri, Pawas, Jhoolan, Ras, Gwalari, Jhoomar, and Kajari.

On the wedding day, the *Naghar* (sacred pot) is filled and kept in the *Kobhar* (bridal chamber). Under the shade, vermilion and rice-paste are applied, floor paintings (*aripan*) are drawn, and the bride and groom are seated. Before the crow caws, the songs of the Goddess, the family deity, and the "Brahmin" (village deity) are sung. Five married women apply the *Madhukhar*, and the water of the *Naghar* is poured and washed. Everything is "Shubhe he Shubhe" (auspicious).

Mamtod's hands helped tie the wedding canopy, five hands wide and seven hands long; there wasn't enough room in the courtyard for a larger one. The woman from Sahebganj is plastering this canopy; it must be plastered seven times by evening.

The groom and the wedding party arrive. The gardener is paid for the crown (*maur*), which is then welcomed with water. A clay horse is kept at the *Brahmasthan*. The groom's party prays to Barham Baba, the protector of the village. The groom is always accompanied by the *Lokaniya* (best man) to prevent any practical jokes or mishaps.

The priests write the names of the ancestors on mango leaves. At the courtyard entrance, the groom is "tested" through rituals, and everyone passes. In a clay vessel, a lamp shaped like a tortoise (*Kachhap*) flickers; its long life is a wish for Mamtod and her husband. The groom circles the canopy three times. Jageshwar then takes five handfuls of grain from both sides and places them in the mortar. Eight people, including the groom, stand with pestles and betel nuts. The barber ties them together with a yellow thread, and they thrice pound the grain.

The rituals continue: the exchange of yogurt and rice on mango leaves, the tying of the wedding bracelets (*kangan*), and the seating of the groom facing East and Parmeshwar facing West. Parmeshwar washes the

groom's feet—first the right, then the left. The *Sammar* songs for Sita, Gauri, and Rukmini are sung. Offerings of grass, rice, and sandalwood are made. The groom performs the *Achaman* (ritual sipping of water) with precise finger movements.

Then comes the *Madhuparka*—a mixture of yogurt, honey, and ghee. The groom mixes it with his ring finger, offers it to the directions, and touches his senses. Finally, the priest conducts the *Homa* (fire sacrifice). The ground is swept with Kush grass and plastered with cow dung. The fire is brought in a bronze vessel. Mamtod is brought from the *Kobhar* room, where the walls are painted with parrots and *Naina Jogin* figures. Riddles (*Phakada*) are recited at each of the four corners, mocking the groom and his relatives in good humor:

"I am a woman of Bengal... I sailed a boat without a river... I made the groom dance on the roof..."

Mamtod is seated on the canopy. She is given a Khadi sari and blouse. Parmeshwar gives the groom a pair of dhotis. The "Birth-Knot" is tied with grain, turmeric, and silver coins.

Under the canopy, Parmeshwar performs the *Kanyadaan* (giving away the daughter), placing Mamtod's hand in the groom's.

Then, they circle the fire four times, with Mamtod in front and the groom behind. They scatter parched rice (*lava*) into the flames. Mamtod steps on a stone (*Chandrauta*), and the groom pledges to protect her. The priest continues the offerings of ghee into the fire. Mamtod takes seven steps on seven circular floor paintings. The groom points out the Pole Star to Mamtod, promising constancy.

Finally, the *Sindurdan*—the application of vermilion. Standing behind Mamtod, the groom uses a mix of vermilion, medicinal leaves, and gold to mark her parting from bottom to top. He then covers her head with a veil. He does this three times. Tears roll down the eyes of the woman from Sahebganj.

The feast begins. Songs of mockery (*Garari*) and protection (*Jog*) are sung. The next day, the couple applies turmeric paste and performs *Surya Namaskar*. Mamtod leaves her home, then returns briefly, and finally departs for Sahebganj. The "Second

Departure" (*Dviragaman*) is completed simultaneously.

As she leaves, the song of Sita's departure plays:

"With great care, Sita ji was raised, yet the scion of Raghu takes her away..."

"In which color is the palanquin, in which color the veil? Thirty-two bearers have arrived..."

Mamtod has gone. The village messengers return with news that all is well. Mother finally breathes a sigh of relief. This story of Mukhdev's, told at the request of Daulat Jahan and Rudramati, leaves everyone in the jail with moist eyes. But Mukhdev's own eyes are staring into a void.

**Ninth Wave: Faces Like the Moon and
the School of Awakening**

First Petal

*Face like the moon, eyes like the lotus, brows
like Kamadeva's bow...*

*Lips like the ripened Tilkor fruit, nose like a
parrot's beak, speech like the cuckoo...*

Another story begins...

After the death of Sati, Mahadev withdrew into a state of deep detachment. During this time, the demon Tarakasura pleased Brahma and obtained a boon: he could only be killed by a son of Mahadev. Confident of his safety, he drove the gods out of heaven. The gods prayed to Mahamaya Durga, and she was born in the house of the Himalayas. Because of her fair and radiant complexion, she was named Gauri.

One day, Narada visited the Himalayas, read Gauri's palm, and prophesied that she would marry Mahadev. The Himalayas sent Gauri, along with two companions, to serve Mahadev. Meanwhile, the gods sent Kamadeva (the god of love) along with his friend Vasanta (Spring) and his wife Rati.

"Vasanta is a season, isn't it?"

"Yes, but this is a story, just keep listening..."

When Gauri arrived, Kamadeva fired his arrow of desire. Mahadev opened his eyes and saw Gauri. Gauri performed her worship. Seeing her, Mahadev showered her with metaphors: *Face like the moon, eyes like the lotus, brows like Kamadeva's bow, lips like the ripened Tilkor fruit, nose like a parrot's beak, speech like the cuckoo.*

But just then, Mahadev spotted Kamadeva hiding in the thicket. In a rage, he opened his third eye, and Kamadeva was burnt to ashes. Rati fell unconscious in grief. Seeing her lamentation, the gods explained that this was all orchestrated for the slaying of Tarakasura. Mahadev told Rati to go to the demon Shambara by the sea. Krishna's son, Pradyumna, would be kidnapped by that demon, and when Pradyumna grew up, he would kill Shambara, marry Rati, and take her to Dwarka. That Pradyumna would be the reincarnation of Kamadeva.

Gauri was terrified by the sight of Kamadeva's burning. Narada advised her to perform penance. Gauri cast off her fine silks, donned a deerskin and bark garments, and went with her companions to the Gauri-

shikhar peak. Witnessing her severe penance, the sages and Narada approached Mahadev. To test her, Mahadev went to the peak in disguise and insulted himself. Gauri grew furious in defense of Shiva; satisfied, Mahadev revealed his true form and agreed to the marriage.

Second Petal

Victory to the Generous Giver (*Audhardani*)!
Hunger and thirst.

Arrangements for thirst were made in Garh Narikel, and there was never a lack of work to provide for food. But does "farming" alone count as work? There is a conflict—the conflict between high and low, between "big" work and "small" work. People said that touching a Dusadh was like touching a bone. How could that be? The neighborhood labeled Jageshwar "mad" because he challenged these lines.

Is farming "noble" while working with hide is "low"? What of the bags made by Mamtod and her friends—blending Khadi and leather—that were given to the freedom fighters? How can a blacksmith make a plow or a sickle without the forge? These thoughts churned in the *Thair* of the youths. The *Thair* was the name of a thirst for change. Mukhdev, Dukhan Mahto, Basu Chaupal, Jageshwar, and Jibach Mukhia would discuss these problems. They sought solutions and acted upon them.

Piar Bachcha would call meetings. If his vision had been right, he would have supported their work. He, too, worried about "problems," but our *solutions* were his *problems*! This was the difference in perspective. Jageshwar was the preserver of village culture; Piar Bachcha was the preserver of an opportunistic, neighborhood-level convenience. Why did the landlord favor him? Because he had the power of money and henchmen. Our thoughts led to creation; theirs led to destruction. Why did conflict persist even when work was divided by caste? What pressure was on Piar Bachcha? And why did Jageshwar feel a different pressure—a resistant, conscious pressure? Jageshwar was a man of his word; he went to the communal grounds, cared for the people, and didn't just think—he lived by the conclusions of his thoughts.

And he would say to Ghenghi (Kusumavati):
"Your face is like the moon, your eyes like the lotus, your brows like Kamadeva's bow..."
 and she would blush.

Third Petal

Then Kusumavati's school began. In a village where few men were educated and only Brahmins and Bhumihars went to the schoolmaster, the little girls of the village—from every caste—began coming to Kusumavati.

Lakhni from Dharmadiha, Phudo from Meters, Sukan from Behat, Phulo from Dhepura, Somni from Mohli, Marni from Jagdar, Bhulli from Kothia, Bhuri from Tamuria, Bhurkuri from Jethiyahi, Kalkusari from Machdhi, Ghuttari from Balat, Munesari from Ganj, Lukhiya from Chanaura, and Kusuma from Navani. And Mamtod, of course, was always there.

Phudo was named so because she began to hop (*phudakna*) at nine months; Sukan was originally named Suman, but the village

accent changed it. A child needs the encouragement of parents, teachers, and society—not just ancestral blood. The Khadi bags these girls made brought fame to the village and opened the doors of education for them.

The specialty of these children was that they were always creating something in their homes, always learning. Every girl began to showcase her own specialty, teaching and learning from one another. Through games like *Kit-Kit*, they learned about geometry—triangles and quadrilaterals—without even realizing it.

Lakhni taught how to cook healthy meals with minimal oil using wild greens like *Tilkor*.

Phudo specialized in the cultivation and preservation of betel leaves.

Sugan excelled in *Siki* grass weaving and bamboo crafts.

Phulo showed how to grow diverse vegetables in tiny backyards.

Somni was a master of Kabir's verses.

Marni knew jewelry design and how to test the purity of gold.

Bhulli knew how to extract oil from various types of seeds.

Bhuri specialized in raising fish in small ditches and ponds.

Bhurkuri experimented with wild aquatic plants like *Bhent*.

Kalkusari (Shamshul's wife) knew how to preserve vegetables in the cold for fifteen days.

Ghuttari knew how to sustain a livelihood on just a fraction of an acre.

Munesari taught how to turn raw cloth into finished garments.

Lukhiya was a local healer, knowing how to treat wounds.

Kusuma knew the art of painting wooden toys.

Mamtod understood the diverse uses of leather.

In a short time, they all became experts. Jageshwar taught them arithmetic and told stories to fight superstition. The dolls they made from old rags were amazing—calm dolls, warrior dolls, housewives, doctors, engineers, forest-dwellers... every kind of woman was represented in their play.

Why did no "genetic" barrier stop them? The speech of these girls, whom the village mocked as "chatterboxes" (*Kachbachiya*), rose like the song of a cuckoo. Wherever they go, they will light up those homes.

How Ghenghi must be now...

Raghuvaran deeply admires Mukhdev's philosophical style. He hums a Tamil song, a song for children.

Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati realize it is getting late. It was difficult to get Raghuvaran to speak, and when he did, it became a song. But time is running out. Perhaps some other time...

**Tenth Wave: The Face of the Guardian
and the Song of Resistance**

First Petal

*Why, O dear Lala-ji, has your face grown
pale?*

*Why does your heart feel so heavy with
sorrow?*

In Kashi, the seven sages, Vashistha, and his wife Arundhati arrived. Mahadev sent them to the Himalayas with the proposal. Joyful tears fell from the eyes of Himalaya and Maina. The match was fixed. Narada summoned the gods. On the fourth day, the wedding procession set out.

Seeing the King of the Gandharvas, Maina asked Narada who he was; he replied that he was merely the singer of the gods. Then came Dharmaraj and Indra. Narada introduced them all. Maina marveled, thinking, "If these subjects are so beautiful, how magnificent must Mahadev be!" Reading her thoughts, Mahadev played a prank. He appeared with his horde of ghosts and ghouls; seeing them, Maina fainted in terror.

When she regained consciousness, she reprimanded Narada and Gauri and refused the marriage. Then, Mahadev revealed his majestic, divine form, leaving Maina spellbound. The rituals—*Parichhan*,

Athongar, and the recitation of genealogies—began. The *Kanyadaan* (giving away of the bride) was completed, clearing the path for the slaying of the demon Tarakasura.

The *Parichhan* and *Athongar*... all these are purely Maithil traditions!

Listen on, it is a story...

The daughter and son-in-law were sent off with sixty loads of gifts. Once the bride and groom were settled, the weight of the burden vanished. Once, Mahadev summoned his sister, Ashavari. Her heels were badly cracked; she hid Gauri inside one of those cracks.

"Hey, how is that possible?"

"Keep listening, it's a story..."

Gauri cried out, but no one could hear her. When Mahadev made inquiries, Ashavari shook her feet, and Gauri tumbled out. Later, Gauri cooked fish for her sister-in-law, but Ashavari ate every single one. Exasperated, Gauri bid her sister-in-law farewell. When

Gauri went to fetch Ganga water, the East wind (*Purba*) and West wind (*Pachba*) began to blow fiercely together.

"Wait, the *Purba-Pachba* are tied during weddings..."

"Listen... it's a story..."

Gauri folded her hands and asked the winds to stop their mocking play. Gauri then asked Mahadev to mark the heads of unfaithful women with a horn and give thieves a tail. Mahadev said, "So be it." When Gauri went to buy fish, Mahadev disguised himself as a fisherman. He refused to sell her fish unless she engaged in playful banter. To get the fish for Mahadev's meal, she complied, but when she sat down to serve him, a horn grew on her own head. The next day, Mahadev hurried her to cook; in her haste, she needed to relieve herself and hid the waste under a basket. When Mahadev returned and asked, she hid the truth out of shame, and thus she grew a tail. Gauri then begged for these marks of the unfaithful and the thief to be erased. From that day, the marks vanished.

All the marks vanished. Now, distinguishing

between the good and the bad has become a difficult task.

Second Petal

Why, O dear Lala, has your face grown pale?

*Why does your heart feel so heavy with
sorrow?*

Lalban Baba, the folk deity of the leather-workers (*Charmakars*). He fought a tigress—not with weapons, but with his bare hands. How could he lift a weapon against a female?

*Without betel leaf, Mother, the face has
grown pale,*

*Without hemp, the heart feels heavy with
sorrow.*

*Lala offered the hemp and placed the betel in
his mouth,*

And set out for the hunt in the deep forest.

He kills neither the deer nor the partridge; he selectively kills the peacocks (*Majur*). The peacock-hen of the forest wails for her mate;

her youth is robbed, her vermilion lost. The Kosi River kills the peacock, and so does Lalban Baba. Yet, there are no peacocks left in Mithila. Perhaps they existed before, and everyone hunted them to extinction. Even the tigers are gone. Did Lalban Baba fight the tigress just to save the buffaloes? How could he use a weapon against a female tigress? He fought as he did and was killed. So much thought for an enemy? So much compassion? But no compassion for the peacock? My Lala went only to display his strength!

Third Petal

Raghuvaran... the Gandharva King... the singer of the gods... will he sing today?

"No, this song is not for today, and you wouldn't understand it anyway; it is in Tamil."

"Then provide us with the commentary and explanation..."

"Very well. This is a children's song by Subramania Bharati."

Run and play, child—you must not grow weary or idle.

Play together in a group—never scold or insult another child.

Like a tiny sparrow, wander and fly free,

*Look at the colorful birds around you and let
your heart rejoice.*

*Rise early and study—then sing songs that
gladden the soul.*

*Play throughout the evening—make these
good things your habit.*

*If you see those who do wicked deeds—you
must not be afraid.*

*Strike them down, uproot them, and spit in
their faces, my child.*

This Raghuvaran sounds just like Jageshwar.

*Do not fear those who do wicked deeds.
Strike them down and uproot them.*

Jageshwar felt the same—or even greater—
hatred for those who did wrong and broke
society. But how did the wicked ones move
forward? It was because of the British rule...
but now the foreigners are gone. And yet,
these "local foreigners" remain!

Eleventh Wave: The Earthly Mortar and the Parallel World

First Petal: Divine Seed and Human Will

*Stems as thick as the mortar, heads as heavy
as the pestle,*

A full Seer's weight, a full Seer's weight...

The gods raised an outcry, fearing that a child born from the union of Mahadev and Gauri would destroy the earth. Consequently, Mahadev's seed fell upon the ground. Gauri

cursed the gods, decreeing that henceforth they would never bear children through physical union. The seed's heat was unbearable for the Earth and the Fire; finally, it was placed in a forest of reeds. There, a child with six heads was born, raised by the *Krttikas*, and named Kartikeya.

Later, in Kailash, Gauri and Mahadev were together when Vishnu arrived as a wandering ascetic, claiming his life was at risk from hunger. A portion of seed fell upon the bedding, and Ganesh was born. When Gauri asked Shani to look upon the child, his gaze caused Ganesh's head to sever. Vishnu replaced it with an elephant's head and revived him. Ganesh married Pushti, and Kartikeya was made commander of the divine army. He eventually slew Tarakasura and restored Indra's kingdom.

"Ah... so Shiva became the Destroyer. The progeny of the gods would have destroyed the universe, but now they are cursed. From now on, whatever is to be done, must be done by humans."

This is exactly what Jageshwar used to say: *Whatever is to be done, must be done by*

humans. One should do what is necessary for oneself and not rely on others.

Second Petal: The Rituals of the Soil

Here, something else unfolds. It is the night of *Kojagaram* on the full moon of Ashwin. One plays *Pachisi* and *Chaupar* all night; it is said Lakshmi is pleased by those who stay awake. Then comes *Diyabati* on Kartik Amavasya. In the morning, women beat winnowing baskets (*sup*) to drive out poverty: "Let wealth and grain enter the house, let sorrow and poverty depart!"

The festival of *Pakheb* (or *Sukurtiya*) follows—the festival of the cattle. Wrestling

matches are held at the communal grounds. The day after Diwali, the farmer serves his oxen with great devotion. They take the cattle to the pond and scrub them clean. They oil the horns and adorn them with new ropes and bells called *Gardam*. The cattle are fed black pepper and medicinal herbs, crushed in a mortar and pestle and mixed with water. Afterward, they are fed betel leaves—a sign of auspiciousness in Mithila. Red hand-prints are stamped onto their bodies.

Farmers go to their fields and proclaim: *"In that field, there is confusion; in my field, there is only pure rice, a Seer's weight!"* For fifteen days, they do not yoke the oxen, out of respect for the ancestors. They do not cut trees.

In Kartik, girls create ten clay mounds, applying vermilion and sticking pumpkin flowers on them. These will later light the fire for the New Grain (*Navann*) festival. Men go to the fields with sickles and grass, shouting on the ridges:

"Stems as thick as the mortar, heads as heavy as the pestle, a Seer's weight, a Seer's weight!"

On *Devautthan Ekadashi*, the gods are "woken up" with the recitation of the *Sahasrashirsha*. Elaborate floor paintings (*aripan*) are made, depicting the house, the kitchen, and all farming tools. For the poor, this is *Harivasar*—the days when there is no grain in the house, so they fast by necessity.

On the full moon of Kartik, the *Sama* dolls are immersed into the plowed fields. The characters of the festival—the brothers, the dog, the crow-snitch—all return to the earth.

"Sama-chake, Sama-chake, come hither... sit in the plowed field... break the clods of earth and eat..."

Third Petal: The Origin of the Outcastes

In Agahan, the *Navann* festival is held. The taste of new flattened rice with yogurt and jaggery is unmatched. For every task, people look to the "Proverbs of Dak" for guidance:

*Betel on Sunday, mirror on Monday,
coriander on Tuesday... eat jaggery on
Wednesday... eat yogurt on Friday, ginger on
Saturday—then return home.*

There is a legend about the origin of the leather-workers (*Charmakar*). Four Brahmin brothers were told to remove a dead animal. The youngest used his sacred thread as a rope. The brothers outcasted him, and he became the first Chamar. The Doms have a similar story—the youngest brother was tasked with removing a dead cow from a pond.

"Whatever is to be done, must be done by humans." Garh Narikel had become a republic of its own.

Fourth Petal: The Parallel World

Sugan, the daughter of the woman from

Behat, was getting married. The rituals began. In the neighborhood of Baudha Malik, a parallel world exists. The rest of the village only remembers this neighborhood when they need baskets or winnowing fans. Yet here, too, there is marriage, birth, and death. Jageshwar broke these parallel lines, opening paths where people and songs began to flow between these worlds.

The story of this neighborhood... **Shyam Singh**. At the wedding of Baudha Malik's daughter, the party arrived. Shyam Singh, a powerful wrestler from Singhiya, carried a staff weighing eighty-four maunds. He once got into a dispute with Vanshidhar Brahmin. Feeling the urge for hemp, he snatched embers from a blacksmith's forge when refused fire due to his caste.

A legendary battle took place. Because Durga was with Vanshidhar, he won. But Shyam Singh's son, Balaram, challenged Vanshidhar again and defeated him. The wedding of Sukan continues. The ballad of Soman is being sung.

Mukhdev shouts: "He Soman-ji! You finished the story too quickly! The marriage

was fixed by measuring the bride and groom with a staff—let it be so!"

Soman: "The frost is falling, and you give me nothing but empty words..."

Mukhdev: "I was quiet so as not to disturb your art. We will provide plenty."

In the *Sopach* (Dom) neighborhood, no meeting happens without a pot of liquor. A betel shop nearby stays open late. The shopkeeper tosses the leaves into their cloths without touching them to maintain "purity." In the surrounding villages, the washermen, Doms, and leather-workers have their own priests. In Garh Narikel, almost every caste now has a non-Brahmin priest.

The story of **Chhechan Maharaj**, the folk deity of the Doms, is sung. He was powerful and married Panma after defeating a legendary hog. But Chhechan was executed by Krishnaram, the deity of the Yadavas, for cutting bamboo from his groves. Krishnaram arrived on his golden elephant, *Subaran*, and placed a heavy blade on Chhechan's neck while he slept.

Fifth Petal: The Echo in the Cell

The wedding of Sukan is over. The next day, the "Feast of Equality" (*Sabhaiti Bhoj*) begins. The daughter departs. The feast starts with people washing their feet in a mortar. Mukhdev insisted on this feast. A grand meal of pork is served.

"After death, it is the Dom's fire that brings salvation. Without him, how can one cross over?"

"And the salvation of those still living? Mukhdev, who saves the living? Who comes to see you after you are dead?"

Mukhdev's voice began to circle and echo within the prison cell. Today, **Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati** all had to hear it. It reached every one of them. Only **Raghuvaran** did not hear this voice.

"Come now," Mukhdev said, "today's story is over."

Twelfth Wave: The Brahmin's Infatuation and the Serpent Daughter

First Petal: The Birth of Lily

The Brahmin boy was smitten, O Lord...

When he began to ask the Brahmin...

Of her caste and her dwelling, O Lord...

Mahadev secretly took away Sandhya, the youngest daughter of Himalaya and Gauri's younger sister, to marry her. Gauri wept profusely; she was drenched in sweat and anxiety. She gathered the dirt from her own body, fashioned a snake out of it, and left it

on the path.

When Mahadev returned with Sandhya, he breathed life into that snake. He told Gauri, "This snake, Lily, is your daughter, and I have brought Sandhya only to play with her." Gauri burst into a fit of laughter.

Among the hundred sons of King Nahar and Queen Tanti, the eldest son, Barasi, went to work for Mahadev. Mahadev instructed him to bathe Lily in the Pool of Dharma and dip her thumb in the Pool of Grace (*Sohag*). However, he did the opposite. Because she was immersed in the Pool of Grace, her charm grew immense. But since only her thumb touched the Pool of Dharma, she possessed only a fraction of righteousness. She expressed her desire to marry Barasi, and thus they were wed.

Second Petal: The Parallel Worlds

Mukhdev Ram's neighborhood—the quarter of the leather-workers (*Charmakars*).

There was very little social interaction between the people of this neighborhood and the rest of the village. Yet, why were their songs, their culture, and their rituals for birth, death, and marriage exactly the same? Did the rest of the village imitate them, or did they imitate the rest of the village? Or perhaps their roots were one and the same? Perhaps outsiders came and pushed these people across the bamboo groves, or perhaps the outsiders sent some of their own to this

neighborhood to settle as a form of social engineering...

In Nauhatta, there were two friends: Mansaram and Lalmain Baba. They used to graze buffaloes together. At that time, Nauhatta was a vast jungle. One day, a tigress surrounded Lalmain's buffalo. Lalmain fought the tigress to save the beast, but he did not use his full strength against a female creature and was killed. As he lay dying, he asked Mansaram to ensure his funeral rites were performed properly. However, Mansaram told no one in the village. This enraged Lalmain Baba's spirit; he struck Mansaram dead. Eventually, the villagers performed Lalmain's rites, and he was accepted as a *Bhagta* (spirit-deity). Even now, he enters the bodies of devotees to fulfill their vows.

Lalmain was a leather-worker and Mansaram was a Brahmin. People worship both today, offering goat sacrifices, liquor, hemp, and betel leaves. Lalmain accepts the hemp, but Mansaram does not.

Raktamala, Lukesari, Jalpa, and Goraiya are the household deities of the leather-workers.

"Don't Jalpa and Lukesari seem like remnants of Buddhism?" Mukhdev used to ask.

Who knows. Perhaps when Buddhism vanished, the sacred thread of the leather-worker turned into the *Amar-latti* (immortal vine).

Third Petal: The Song of Lukesari

Seeing Lukesari's beauty,

The Brahmin boy was smitten, O Lord...

He took her away toward the Brahmin's land,

O Sita, no more...

He took her toward the Brahmin's land.

Seeing Lukesari's beauty,

The Brahmin boy was smitten, O Lord.

When the Brahmin began to ask,

Of her caste and her dwelling...

"What is your caste, O girl?"

"I am of a lowly caste," she said.

"My parents named me Lukha..."

"What is your caste, O Brahmin?"

"O Brahmin, among all girls, I am yours,"

"But my heart weeps for the babe in my lap..."

"You are of a tender age, O Goddess Lukha,"

"You are so young; who gave you,"

"This babe in your lap?"

"I went to Janakpur, O Brahmin,"

"I worshipped Sri Janaki, O Brahmin,"

"And she gave me this babe in my lap..."

In every village, the wife of a leather-worker guides the women of the household; people call her the *Chamain* or the midwife (*Dagrin*). Now that modern hospitals have opened and nurses have come from Kerala, the people call them *Chamain* too!

"Come, come, Midwife, I bow to you / The labor pain has vanished, I hold the child in my arms."

Fourth Petal: The Art and the Scholar

Manual labor has no prestige in our society.

Raghuvaran tells a story. The family of Thomas Bata had been leather-workers for generations. During the First World War, the demand for soldiers' boots was so high that they became great industrialists. In Batanagar, Bengal, many leather-workers found employment. There are Czech leather-workers in the Bata company as well, but there, they are not considered "low" or "bad." Bata uses the art and the leather of the people here. Experts once came from the Czech Republic to teach the locals how to tan leather, but instead of teaching, they ended up learning from the local artisans.

Consider Udayan, the father of Navy-Nyaya (New Logic), and later Gangesha, the author of *Tattvachintamani*. It is said Gangesha married a woman from the leather-worker community. The philosopher Vardhamana was the son of Gangesha and his leather-worker wife. Udayan had driven the Buddhists out of Mithila by defeating them in debate.

Did the Buddhists leave, and the leather-worker artisans became "low caste" as a result?

And Gangesha marrying a leather-worker woman! What mystery lies within this?

Jageshwar would have known this secret.

"But I didn't have this wisdom at that time. I just did whatever he told me to do."

Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati fall into deep thought along with Raghuvaran. Even Raghuvaran has never read of this.

Thirteenth Wave: The Pierced Stone and the Musahar Brothers

First Petal: The King's Daughter and the Unblinking Gods

*I shall nose-ring you with a Kush grass
blade, O Dhamin serpent,*

Even you, the mistress of the water...

Piercing through a stone of eighty maunds,

I shall emerge outside...

There was a King with four queens. From his youngest queen, a daughter was born—**Sukanya**. One day, while walking with her father, Sukanya saw an anthill. Within it, two objects glittered like jewels. Curious, she poked them with a sharp twig. Suddenly, blood spurted out and a harrowing scream filled the air.

A sage had been performing deep penance inside that mound, and Sukanya had accidentally blinded him. To seek forgiveness, the King offered Sukanya to the sage in service, eventually marrying her to the elderly hermit with a heavy heart. Later, the divine Ashwini Kumar twins met Sukanya and asked her to bring her husband for a bath in the Ganga. When the three emerged from the water, three identical, handsome young men stood before her. Sukanya was baffled—how could she recognize her husband? Then she noticed that the eyelids of the two gods never blinked. By this sign, she identified her husband. The King, overjoyed, threw a feast. Though the other gods were reluctant to sit in the same row as the Ashwini Kumars, the King insisted they all eat together as equals.

Second Petal: The Legend of Dina-Bhadri

Musahars...

Genghis Khan was a Buddhist? Could these people be his descendants?

In Jogiyanagar, in the Mithilanchal of Nepal, lived two brothers—**Dina and Bhadri**. They were Musahars who farmed with spades weighing five maunds each, capable of tilling an entire acre in a single day.

In the neighboring village of Janjar lived a cruel landlord named Kanak Singh and his wife, Budhni. Hearing of the brothers' prowess, Kanak Singh tried to force them into labor. Dina and Bhadri, well aware of his atrocities against workers, beat the landlord until he fled. Budhni, seeking revenge, performed severe penance to the deity **Salhesh**. Salhesh appeared and, bound by his word, had to grant her wish: the lives of Dina

and Bhadri.

That night, Salhesh appeared in the brothers' dreams, luring them to the Kataiya forest for a hunt. Dina, Bhadri, their uncle Bahuran, and their friend Jitan Yadav set out on a pitch-black moonless night. Budhni was waiting in the forest with Salhesh. She commanded Salhesh to call forth his bloodthirsty tiger. Dina fought the beast in a wrestling match and killed it. Then Budhni called for a shapeshifting tigress. Though Salhesh admired Dina's bravery, he was helpless. The tigress, disguised as a sparrow (*Bagra*), struck Dina with a venomous claw, killing him. Bhadri rushed to his brother's side only to be killed by the same treacherous bird.

The spirits of Dina and Bhadri entered the bodies of two men to inform their uncle and Jitan. Their mother, **Nirso**, had no money for the funeral rites. The brothers appeared in her dream and told her to weigh the pulse (*Tur*) kept in the house against the merchant's goods. The merchant laughed, but no matter how much weight he put on the scales, the side with the pulse—where Dina and Bhadri

sat invisibly—would not rise. Humbled, the merchant provided everything for the feast. The brothers then went to Morang, where they slew a hundred and fifty wicked men, including the tyrant Joravar Singh and the witch Budhni, ensuring the upliftment of the Musahar people.

Salhesh declared: *"Wherever I am worshipped, you shall be worshipped as well."* Since then, the shrines of Salhesh and Dina-Bhadri have stood together.

Third Petal: The Changing Musahar Quarter

Musahars...

Are they the descendants of Genghis Khan? But the Khan's people were fair, and these people are dark.

Bichkun Saday. Whether it is a rat's hole, aquatic roots, lotus seeds, or fish caught in the mud—everything is flavorful and nourishing to them. This is why everyone in the Musahar settlement is lean and hardy. No one mocks anyone else's labor. They are the

children of Shabari, keepers of the "Lakshman medicine." The elders say there are two types: the *Tebaita*, who wander like nomads, and the *Jholaita*, who have lived in the same village for generations.

Bhurkuri, the daughter of the woman from Jethiyahi.

Bichkun Saday, Pakhu, and Jagtu were experts at tilling the soil. Their houses were made of mud and thatch, with walls reinforced by banana stalks. In Jethiyahi, the British had settled the *Tebaita* Musahars. Bichkun, from Garh Narikel, had married into that village. While the Musahars of Garh Narikel no longer catch rats, those in Jethiyahi still do.

There is a myth: when Brahma created the Musahar and gave him a horse to ride, the Musahar wondered where to put his feet. He poked a hole through the horse's belly to rest his legs. Enraged, Brahma cursed him to spend his life digging holes and looking into them, making rat-catching his livelihood.

Pakhu and Jagtu Saday still arrange laborers for Radhamohan Roy and Piar Bachcha.

Pakhu is a *Bhagait* singer; after drinking toddy, he worships the Tiger-Goddess and sings the ballad of Dina-Bhadri:

"To the west of the village, they dug a new pond / In that pond, O Dhamin serpent, they planted lotuses... / Do not enter there, or Dina Ram will seize you / Do not enter there, or Bhadri will seize you... / I shall nose-ring you with a Kush grass blade, O mistress of the water... / Piercing through a stone of eighty maunds, I shall emerge outside..."

However, **Bichkun Saday** had become a companion to **Jageshwar**. He had started farming his own land and kept his house polished and clean. Bhurkuri began studying in the school run by **Ghenghi** and Jageshwar. Bichkun encouraged the people of Jethiyahi to move beyond mere wage labor. Bhurkuri taught the women everything from beekeeping to tailoring. Who says a Musahar's daughter finds no happiness at her parents' or in-laws' home? Look at the woman from Jethiyahi and Bhurkuri. In the Musahar quarter, the world seemed to be changing.

Jageshwar used to say there is a deeper

mystery here. Udayan defeated the Buddhists in debate. Gangesha married a leather-worker. Udayan offered the sacred clay to the Lord in Puri, and Dina-Bhadri also offered clay to the Lord in Puri. There is a secret hidden in these connections.

Mukhdev wonders what the fate of the Musahar settlement will be. His heart aches not for Pakhu or Jagtu, but for **Bichkun Saday, Jethiyahi-wali, and Bhurkuri.**

**Fourteenth Wave: The Spade of Brahma
and the Path of Vishnu**

First Petal: The Serpent's Protection

*The spade given by Brahma / The path
cleared by Vishnu...*

A Brahmin woman had seven sons. The youngest daughter-in-law came from a poor family and was despised by her in-laws. When she became pregnant, she expressed a desire to eat *kheer-puri* to her husband. He said, "Mother, I am going to the fields; send my afternoon meal of *kheer-puri* with my wife." Suspecting the husband would share the delicacy with his wife, the mother-in-law wrote a mark on the daughter-in-law's tongue, telling her it must remain intact when she returned.

At the field, the husband offered her half, but she showed him her marked tongue. He then placed the *kheer-puri* in the hollow of a Peepal tree and told her to return after showing her tongue to his mother. While she was away, the pregnant wife of the serpent king Basuki, who lived in that hollow, ate all the food.

Later, the serpent gave birth to two sons, Bal and Basant. One day, when cowherds tried to kill them, the youngest daughter-in-law saved them. In gratitude, Bal and Basant offered her a boon. She asked for a brother's home to rely on. Disguised as men, they arrived to take her to her "maternal home." They took her into their serpent burrow, which led to a magnificent palace. Basukini welcomed her but warned that she must light the evening lamp on the hood of the serpent king Basuki. When she did, the King grew furious and wanted to bite her, but his wife restrained him. Before she left, Basukini taught her a protective mantra to recite before sleep:

*"Lamp and lamp-stand, pearls and rubies fill
the vessel..."*

*May the Nag and Nagin thrive, may the five
Bishahara sisters thrive...*

*Brother Bal and Basant thrive, Aunt
Ashavari thrive...*

*Sleep to the sound of traveler's footsteps,
wake to the sound of bronze...*

In the morning, eat milk and rice in a golden bowl...

The spade given by Brahma, the path cleared by Vishnu...

Flee, O insects and pests, for along that path comes

The Lord Mahadev, riding upon the majesty of Garuda.

Astika, Astika, Astika."

Because of this mantra, Basuki could never bite her. On the fourth day, he bit the cruel mother-in-law instead and filled the daughter-in-law's house with gold and silver.

Second Petal: The Origins of the Land

Bhumihars...

When Buddhist monasteries held vast lands, those Brahmins who had turned to Buddhism returned to their fold after the religion declined. The orthodox Brahmins then called them "Bhumihars" (land-owners) or "Pashchima." They consider themselves Brahmins—not those who take alms, but those who give alms. While the Mongol-featured Musahars turned to rat-catching after Buddhism faded, these people became farmers of the monastery lands.

Did any become Jains? Mahavira wandered extensively through Mithila. Today, none remain here. Outside Mithila, Jains are primarily of the Vaishya (merchant) caste.

Third Petal: The Thief and the Unblinking Eyes

In Magadha, during the reign of King Bimbisara, there was a terror named **Rauhineya**, son of the thief Lauhkhur. His father's dying wish was that he must never listen to the sermons of Mahavira Swami—if a sermon began, he was to plug his ears. Rauhineya robbed the rich to feed the poor, and thus the villagers shielded him. He once kidnapped Madanvati, the daughter-in-law of a great merchant, and later stole away a groom laden with jewels by creating a distraction with a cloth snake.

Minister Abhaykumar vowed to catch him in five days. Rauhineya, feeling emboldened, decided to rob the royal palace. On his way, he passed a garden where Mahavira was preaching. He plugged his ears, but a thorn pierced his foot. As he paused to pull it out, a few words reached his ears: *"The gods never sweat. The flowers in their garlands*

never wither. Their feet never touch the ground, and their eyelids never blink."

"Mukhdev! That story about the gods' unblinking eyes was also in the Madhushravani tales!" someone exclaimed.

Rauhineya reached the palace but was caught by Abhaykumar's trap. To avoid execution, he claimed to be a simple farmer named Durga from Shali village. The villagers, loving their "Robin Hood," vouched for him. To force a confession, Abhaykumar drugged him with wine. Rauhineya woke up in a palace filled with celestial dancers (*apsaras*) who claimed he was in Heaven and that Indra was coming to consecrate him as a god—but first, he had to confess his earthly sins.

Rauhineya almost confessed, but then he noticed the "divine beings" were sweating, their flowers were wilting, their feet touched the floor, and their eyes were blinking. Realizing it was a ruse, he praised his own "virtues" instead. Eventually, the King granted him amnesty (*abhaydan*) if he spoke the truth. Rauhineya revealed his hidden treasure and captives but refused to keep any of the wealth. He declared that if hearing just

one sentence of Mahavira could save his life, he would dedicate the rest of it to his teachings.

Fourth Petal: The Philosophy of Videha

Mahavira spent six rainy-season retreats (*Vassavasa*) in Videha and twelve in Vaishali.

"Vassavasa?" **Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati** asked in unison.

Only **Raghuvaran** knew. It was the three-month stay during the rains when monks remained in one place.

Buddha never spent a single retreat in Videha. He was a staunch opponent of the Varna system, whereas Mahavira acknowledged the three-fold order of

Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya. This is why Maithil scholars like Udayanacharya opposed Buddhism with far more ruthlessness than they ever opposed Jainism. Mahavira was the 24th Tirthankara, born in Vaishali to Queen Trishala; he was called the "Prince of Videha."

Opposition to rituals began in the Upanishads, especially the Mundaka. But when knowledge was restricted to a few and required decades of study, how could common people resist rituals? Yet, in Videha, the rebellion never stopped. Janaka was a revolutionary, as were Buddha and Mahavira. This is why the sage Manu, in his anger, called the people of Videha "Vratyas" (outcasts).

When the Buddhist Sangha insulted Maithils in Harihar Kshetra, they sought help from the Parmar King Vikramaditya, who defeated the Buddhists and established his rule. The Gandhavariya Rajputs of Mithila claim descent from him, though they also trace their lineage to Malladev, son of Nanyadev.

Ultimately, Mithila respected both Buddha and Mahavira. While Buddha was opposed

fiercely, once the Sangha was defeated, he was accepted as the ninth avatar of Vishnu. The Mahayana branch was influenced by the Gita, and from Mahayana, Tantra spread through Mithila—visible today in the folds of the *Paag* (turban) and the designs of *Aripan*.

Udayan and Gangesha founded Navy-Nyaya, but the Jains had already contributed to the science of Logic long before.

Raghuvaran rarely speaks, but when he does, he speaks with the weight of history.

Fifteenth Wave: The Dust of the Soles and the Folk Drama

First Petal: The Curse of the Hundred and One

*Ornaments are but dust beneath the feet, O
Jata...*

Stay at home, O Jata, before my very eyes...

The hundred and one daughters of King Madhastha were married to the hundred and one sons of King Nahar. The eldest brother, Barasi, married the eldest daughter, Gosauni. During the wedding, Lily, the daughter of Mahadev, accidentally fell from Barasi's turban (*Paag*). She began picking up and eating the parched rice (*lava*) scattered for the ritual.

Madhastah, Gosauni's father, pronounced a curse: Barasi would survive only if he ate a betel leaf at every step and spoke to his wife at every mile; otherwise, he would perish. Barasi, however, remained devoted to Lily. At her in-laws' home, Gosauni shared her grief with her brother-in-law, Chanai. Chanai made a plan: he arranged resting places every five miles where Gosauni, in disguise, could stay with Barasi. To prove her presence, she buried dice pieces at each stop.

After five such rests, when they returned, Gosauni gave birth to five sons: Odhu, Kachhu, Mahanag, Shrinag, and Nagnashri. Lily spitefully claimed they were Chanai's children. To prove her purity, Barasi gave Lily fine rice and lentils to cook, while giving Gosauni iron rice and stone lentils. Lily failed to cook the fine grain, but Gosauni successfully cooked the iron and stone. Witnessing this triumph of her virtue, Gosauni's body burst with pride and glory.

"Burst with glory..."

"Yes, it is a story..."

Second Petal: The Theater of the Rains

King Shiva Singh (1412–1446) was a great ruler of Mithila. The legendary poet Vidyapati flourished during his reign, and both the King and Queen Lakhima held him in high regard. During that time, there was a great musician named Jayat (or Jat). King Shiva Singh asked Jayat to set the songs of Vidyapati—son of Mahesh Thakur of Bisphi—to specific ragas. This same Jayat created the *Jat-Jatin* folk drama and played the role of Jat himself.

Performed by women on moonlit nights during the months of Shravan and Bhadrapada, this drama is a ritual to appease Lord Indra. If the rains fail, women catch a frog and pound it in a mortar (*ukkharhi*). In the play, 'Jat' wears male attire and 'Jatin' wears a printed sari.

In the first Shravan after marriage, Jatin yearns to visit her maternal home, but the river is flooded. She pleads with her mother to send her younger brother to fetch her, fearing her in-laws will refuse to let her go. Denied the trip, she asks her husband for permission to participate in the *Jat-Jatin*

dance. When he refuses her the *Jhummar* dance, she makes an excuse about being sweaty and pulls away.

Jat and Jatin stand in the center while their companions debate:

"Come, let us play Jhummar!"

"Upon which leaf shall we stand?"

"The leaf of the lotus!"

Marriage is arranged between them, but Jat is stubborn; he demands Jatin walk as gracefully as an ear of paddy swaying in the wind. After some mock resistance, she agrees, and they marry. At dawn, Jatin asks to be let go to sweep the courtyard, but Jat says his mother and sister will handle it. As days pass, Jatin demands jewelry, threatening to leave for the goldsmith's house. She makes him spend so much that Jat has to sell his elephant, leaving him with nothing but the animal's iron chain.

Jat leaves for Morang to earn a living. A goldsmith tries to tempt Jatin with jewels, but she remains faithful, praising Jat's beauty. When Jat returns, a petty quarrel breaks out

over a kitchen tong (*chhaunki*). Offended, Jatin leaves the house. Jat searches for her in various disguises—a cowherd, a peddler. Meanwhile, his house falls into neglect, covered in cobwebs and weeds. Finally, Jatin returns to him.

The ritual ends with women burying a frog in a pit and pounding it. They then throw the dead frog at the doorstep of the most quarrelsome woman in the village. It is believed that the more she curses them upon finding it in the morning, the heavier the rains will fall.

*Go to the right, O Jatin, to lands near and far
/ I shall bring you jewels as a gift...*

*Jewels, O Jata, are but dust beneath my feet
/ Stay at home, O Jata, before my very eyes...*

*Go to the right, O Jatin... I shall bring you a
sari...*

*A sari, O Jata, is but dust beneath my feet /
Stay at home, O Jata, before my very eyes...*

Third Petal: The Thieves of Light

Ghenghi knows that her "Jata" (Jageshwar) has gone to a "faraway land" from which he will never return.

Vardhamana, the son of Gangesha Upadhyaya, used to call false witnesses and malicious tantriks "Thieves of Light" (*Prakash Taskar*), harmful to society. But Piar Bachcha... he wants only submissiveness, domestic servitude, and cheap labor.

Everyone pretends to be a landlord now—big, medium, and small. In the *Jonkahi* Pond, the big landlord might swallow the small one, but they never release the common man from the cycles of forced labor and low wages. When it comes to exploitation, the big and small landlords unite. They have even sided with the British. And when Jageshwar opposes them, these "Thieves of Light" turn against him.

**Sixteenth Wave: The Kick to the Chest,
Hair in Hand, and the Digging of the Co-
wife's Pond**

The horoscope of King Shrikar's daughter bore a grim prediction: **A kick to the chest, hair held in the hand, and digging two and a half baskets of earth in a co-wife's pond.** After the King's death, her brother Chandrakar built a secluded underground chamber in the forest and kept the princess

there with a maid for her protection. In that forest, she met King Suvarna. As they prepared to depart together, the princess, remembering the tradition of eating grain and wearing clothes sent from the husband's home for the **Madhushravani** festival, requested that these two items be sent to her without fail.

Upon returning to his kingdom, the King commissioned a weaver for the garments, but his elder queen overheard the order. She spitefully commanded the weaver to embroider the words "**Kick to the Chest**" and "**Hair in Hand**" onto the cloth. When the King entrusted a crow to deliver the gift, the bird stopped to feast on a banquet along the way and forgot its mission. The King, too, became entirely forgetful. On the day of Madhushravani, the princess worshipped Goddess Gauri with white sandalwood and flowers, vowing: "May I become mute the day I meet the King again."

When Chandrakar discovered the princess had married, he stopped sending her allowance. Destitute, the princess and her maid began digging earth in a pond being commissioned by Suvarna's elder queen.

One day, Suvarna saw them, and the memories rushed back to him. He brought her to the palace, but the princess remained silent. When the maid explained the entire ordeal, the King realized it was the crow's fault. During the next Madhushravani, the Queen worshipped Gauri with red sandalwood; the princess's voice returned, and they lived in happiness.

On that same day, Lord Ganesha said to Mother Gauri, "Today I shall churn and distribute the Essence of Grace (**Sohag**).\" Using wealth, grain, a wooden vessel, and twigs of Neem, Bel, and Mango, he churned the grace and shared it with all.

Mukhdev's stories flow on. Prison is like sleep. In sleep, all worries, anxieties, joys, and celebrations vanish. Upon waking, they confront you again. The emotions of prison are like the dreams within that sleep.

Jageshwar used to speak of so many things... He said the Aryans came to Mithila from the west, but portions of the Vedas existed here even before their arrival. This is why many words and pronunciations in Maithili exist in Vedic Sanskrit but are absent from Classical

Sanskrit. Concepts like **Avidya** (ignorance), the law of **Karma**, the cycle of birth and rebirth, and **Moksha** (liberation) were gifts from the non-Aryans to the Aryans. Thus, the Upanishads focus on the path to liberation rather than the path to heaven.

How is liberation attained? Through sacrifice? No, it is attained through knowledge, reflection, and meditation. Under the protection of King Janaka, Yajnavalkya composed the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* in the non-Aryan regions of Tirhut. Vachaspati Mishra, interpreting the 57th verse of the *Sankhyakarika*, asks: "Can we say that just as unconscious milk nourishes a calf, the movement of unconscious Nature (**Prakriti**) leads the soul to the knowledge of liberation?"

If God is perfect in Himself, for what purpose would He create the universe? If He creates for the sake of the soul, the soul is only bound *after* creation; before creation, the question of bondage does not exist. Then why speak of 'mercy' toward the soul? Therefore, creation is by Nature, and the soul attains liberation through its own effort. Dissolution occurs through discernment. Thus,

Vachaspati's interpretation is one of atheism, not theism.

If God participates in the movement of Nature, it would be a conscious process with a purpose, and God has no needs to fulfill. Gautama of Mithila, the author of the *Nyaya Sutras*, discusses attaining the supreme good through the knowledge of sixteen categories, but nowhere does he mention that liberation is possible only through God. The *Vaisheshika Sutras* state that the Vedas were composed by wise men, not by God. Kumarila Bhatta argues that any reliable discussion of God prior to creation is impossible.

Witches and sorcerers, tenants and land-tax...

God, liberation...

Nature...

A roaring sound. Two streams are merging. Their noise creates a turbulence in the heart. Mukhdev has entered a whirlpool of thoughts. In the dead of the night, Mukhdev wants to use kohl as ink and write something...

Seventeenth Wave

A barren cow, a bullock gives birth,

In a single drop, behold the ocean
contained...

A wooden swing. Decorate the swing with
silk cords, caps, and sheets, and let everyone
sing:

*Upon the branch of the Kadamba tree hangs
the swing, Krishna Murari is swinging From
what wood is this swing carved, from what
fiber are the cords made? Krishna Murari
swings upon it, with him his beloved Radha
The swing is of sandalwood, the cords of silk
Krishna Murari swings upon it, with him his
beloved Radha Radha swings, and Radhika
takes her turn to swing him Krishna Murari
swings upon it, with him his beloved Radha*

Wah...

The low bridge, the swing, the swing of the British...

The low-lying bridge (**Lachka**) of Jatmalpur was blown up.

Mukhdev had set out in the early morning. Mukhdev reached Dhanesar's farmstead.

Lachka. The specialty of this low bridge is that during floods and rains, the water flows over the top of the bridge. If you think about it, it isn't really a bridge in the sense that there is empty space below for water to flow through.

The poor do not even have the strength to swat away a fly, so wretched is their condition. The poor of society, if they unite, can raise a storm. But they love their society, their country.

At Dhanesar's farm, several people were sitting with Jageshwar: Kunjan of Madhepur, Chethru of Tarsarai, Musai of Baheri, Dhinaï of Biroul, Bhattu of Dalsinghsarai, Pichkun of Tajpur, Chutharu of Benipatti; and Ghonghai of Mehath and Dhanesar. And along with them were Jageshwar's

comrades—four of them. Discussion took place on how to place the bombs to break the bridge, and how to transport the bombs to their destination. Discussion was held on how everyone would emerge safely after the bomb explosion.

Jatmalpur Lachka...

"But the breaking of the bridge will also cause inconvenience to the people," Mukhdev had asked.

One of the comrades sitting with Jageshwar had answered: "Look, what is our primary objective?"

And that same comrade gave the answer too: "Our primary objective is the end of British rule and the landlord system. As much as these bridges and roads provide convenience to the people, they are more helpful in maintaining the status quo of that landlord and British administration's system."

"Status quo means staying exactly as you are, which means zero change,"—this had come out of Mukhdev's mouth.

The first team was formed by Kunjan,

Chethru, Musai, and the first comrade; the second team was formed by Dhinaï, Bhattu, Pichkun, and the second comrade; the third team was formed by Chutharu, Ghonghai, Dhanesar, and the third comrade; and the fourth team was formed by Mukhdev, Jageshwar, and the fourth comrade.

They were to set out in the night the following day. Balesari nails, gunpowder, and what not. There was a distinct fragrance...

The four comrades and Jageshwar were focused, making box after box of explosives.

Someone brought food; Dhanesar brought the food inside from the outside.

Then at night, everyone had to exit by different routes on bullock carts.

Dhanesar's farm was not very far from Jatmalpur.

All four teams had arrived, but our team and the team of Kunjan, Chethru, Musai, and the first comrade were to carry out the attack. Two teams would remain resting. If we were

caught, the British government would think the matter was settled. And then those two teams, waiting a little, would attack and break the bridge. And if there were many wounded in the first two teams, those two teams roaming nearby would come forward; if only one or two were wounded, those two teams would not come forward.

Ghonghai of Mehath began the story:

In the *Satya Yuga*, according to tradition, King Kedar, upon reaching old age, gave the responsibility of the kingdom to his son and went to the forest for penance. Kedar had only one daughter, Vrinda. She performed severe penance on the banks of the Yamuna all her life. At last, God appeared and told her to ask for a boon.

Vrinda said, "You become my husband." That forest where Vrinda performed penance became famous by the name Vrindavan. On the lower southern bank of the Yamuna river, the city of Madhupuri was established. Shatrughna killed that demon and conquered Madhupur, meaning Mathura.

A little mist fell, and after that, Pichkun of

Tajpur along with Bhattu of Dalsinghsarai said:

"The Surjapuri people in India live village by village in places like Kishanganj and Purnia in Bihar; this language is spoken by the Rajbanshi Mahadalit caste. In Kishanganj, among Muslims, the master caste is called Khotta and the servant caste is called Kulhiya. The Kulhiya caste also speaks the Surjapuri language. The Rajbanshis and other castes living near the Kulhiyas speak Surjapuri. This language is a mixture of Maithili and Bengali. Some people also call the Bengali spoken outside Cooch Behar in Bengal and the Rajbanshi language of Nepal 'Surjapuri.' Some are of the opinion that Surjapuri emerged as a result of the mixture of the language of the people of Bangladesh with the regional language. In Purnia and Kishanganj, in the same village, Kulhiyas and Rajbanshis speak Surjapuri, Santhals speak Santhali, and Banjaras speak the Banjara language, while all the rest speak Maithili."

Looking toward Mukhdev, Jageshwar says:

"The marriage of the daughter of Chandra

Pati, son of Duve Sut, son of Surapati of the Khandebala lineage, was with the Koch Rajvanshi King of Assam; the daughter's name was Sohaago."

Pichkun of Tajpur speaks again:

"If these areas are taken into the state, then they will have to be given a guarantee for the development of their language. Has the thinking of the new country-state movement activists reached this far?"

Jageshwar says, "Friend, this chronicle of various castes, people, and clans is very old." He continues:

"Did Vedic Sanskrit come out of Prakrit, or Prakrit out of Vedic Sanskrit? The folk narratives in the Vedas under the name *Narashansi* prove exactly this—that both ran parallel for a long time. This parallel tradition influenced both. Now look at the Rigveda—what does the use of *Dulabh* for *Durlabh* (Rigveda 4.9.8) prove? What does *Pascha* for *Paschaat* (Atharvaveda 10.4.10) prove in the Atharvaveda? What does *Pratisanhay* for *Pratisandhay* prove in the Gopatha Brahmana (Gopatha Brahmana

2.4)? And in those times, Vedic and Classical Sanskrit were not called Sanskrit, but rather *Chhandas* (Yaska and Panini call Vedic Sanskrit *Chhandas*) and *Bhasha* (Panini calls Classical Sanskrit *Bhasha*). And what we call Prakrit today was understood in that form after Pali (in relation to literary writing). In the *Bharata Natyashastra*, seven Prakrits are discussed, and Vararuchi discusses four.

Although the words of Mahavira were given in Ardhamagadhi Prakrit and the words of Buddha in Magadhi Prakrit, both were fundamentally the people's languages.

But when people from different regions joined, Buddha told everyone to learn the Buddha's words in the language of their own region: *Anujanami Bhikkhave, Sakayaniruttiya Buddhavacanam Pariyapunitam*—meaning, 'O Monks, I give permission to learn the Buddha's words in your own respective languages.' And in the Buddha's words, the primary element remained the people's language, Magadhi, but elements of other languages were also mixed; and that language became **Pali**. However, the fundamental point is that not

all Prakrit words have a Sanskrit form."

It is time to leave.

Struggle, people's struggle.

The poor do not even have the strength to swat away a fly; their condition is that wretched. The poor of society, if they unite, can raise a storm. But they love their society, their country. This struggle is to save the dignity of the people.

A little while after Kunjan, Chethru, Musai, and the comrade went out, Jageshwar, Mukhdev, and the comrade went out. Carrying the boxes in bags, carrying blankets on their shoulders, and taking spades and crowbars in sacks, everyone set out. Jageshwar started a **Nirgun**:

*The tiger's cub is carried away by a cat, O
Father, no one believes it The earth rains
while the sun bathes, water from the eaves
reaches the ridgepole The traveler walks but
the road is tired, the sleeper is below while
the bed is on top The boat sinks while the iron
floats, the tiny fish leaps to eat the crane The
old woman burns while the dung-cake feels
the heat, the cooked chef eats the kitchen A*

barren cow, a bullock gives birth, in a single drop, behold the ocean contained Kabir says, listen O seekers, rare is the one who understands this meaning On one side of the bridge, Mukhdev, and on the other side, Chethru, began digging trenches. Kunjan spread a blanket on one side of the bridge and Musai spread a blanket on the other side and sat on the road, and they began making and opening a slide-trap.

Jageshwar, along with the two comrades, dug trenches on both sides in the middle of the bridge and exploded gunpowder and bombs in them, then came to both sides of the bridge in turns. The section of the bridge on Mukhdev's side also broke.

But Chethru... his foot became entangled in some vine.

Jageshwar tells him to run, but he falls and...

The **Balesari nails** have drenched Chethru's body in blood. Darkness is spread all around. There is no movement of people.

Somehow, lifting Chethru, they bring him to Dhanesar's farmstead.

The thumping of his chest has not stopped.

Eighteenth Wave

*I will strike you, O Cuckoo, I will pierce both
your eyes*

*Hearing your call, my beloved went abroad /
Hearing only your call...*

Chethru was kept at Dhanesar's farmstead.

Dhanesar went out with the comrades. Then, shortly before dawn, Dhanesar returned with a local healer (*Vaidya*). The comrades had not yet returned.

Musai, Jageshwar, and Mukhdev cleaned Chethru by soaking rags in lukewarm water. However, their attempts to pull out the embedded nails failed; he would groan in pain. In the farmstead, there was an *Agarmastak* plant—small and thick-leaved, filled with sap. Mukhdev had heard that applying its juice to a cut stops the bleeding. Mukhdev plucked the leaves, extracted the juice, and let it drip over the nails. The bleeding seemed to have stopped.

Musai tells a story...

Parvati asks Shiva about the ritual to obtain a husband like Shiva himself...

...and He replies that upon the Himavan mountain, you performed penance for twelve years, hanging upside down and consuming only smoke, sitting in water during the month of Magh, in the rain during Shravan, and amidst the five fires during the midday heat of Baisakh. However, your father told Narada that he would marry Parvati to Vishnu.

Hearing this, you began to weep at your friend's house, vowing, "I shall make only

Shiva my husband," and you went with your friend to a cave on the banks of the Ganga. There, in the month of Bhadrapada, you worshipped my image made of sand, and then I came and granted the boon to be your husband.

Wah...

Chethru asks for water...

Then he speaks again...

Chethru wants to say something more about nationality and its various types—it is in his mind... the poor do not even have the strength to swat away a fly, so wretched is their condition. The poor of society, if they unite, can raise a storm. But they love their society, their country.

But the healer arrives...

Chethru of Tarsarai. The bomb exploded and he was wounded.

He was brought to Dhanesar's farmstead.

The healer ground some things and fed them to him.

The healer used to say: *A real son does not die; real gold does not burn.*

Where will Mukhdev go after being released from jail?

Will he learn Tantra-mantra to bring those people back to life? Nonsense...

He has engaged in so much debate with Jageshwar and the comrades that he has understood the inner secrets of these Tantras and mantras. But if he cannot bring them back to life, at least their ideas can live.

The daughter of Bahura Godhin.

She too was a Tantrik.

Bahura was from the Kewati community on the banks of the Kamala-Balan, a resident of Bakhari, Begusarai.

She used to stammer; she learned magic from Kamru.

Dulara Dayal was the prince of Bharaura in the Kingdom of Mithila; his name was Natua Dayal.

Because he learned dance from Bahura,
everyone named him *Natua* (the dancer).

Natua Dayal's guru was Mangal.

A perfected soul (*Siddha*).

He used to hang his loincloth in the sky
without a peg and take it down when dry.

Bahura could drive trees; anyone she
quarreled with, she would turn into a parrot
and keep as a pet.

She lived by the Kamala and used to chant—

*An altar of lotus, dwell therein, O Mother
Kamala...*

Bahura had learned magic by sacrificing her
husband.

However, she could not reject the Prince's
marriage proposal. When the wedding party
reached the door, an argument broke out, and
she turned them all into ducks.

Minister Mallak lost the sight in one eye.

Oh, the tragedy.

The merchant Jai Singh was infatuated with

Bahura's daughter.

It was his conspiracy. Oh, the tragedy.

The Prince went to his Guru and received the command: "Go to Kamakhya to learn the six dances and magic."

In the Chandika temple, he learned the six dances from a Yogini and was commanded to learn one limb of the six dances from Bhuvan Mohini of Saraiya village.

The presiding deity of that village was Vageshwari.

Human sacrifices were offered there.
Demons came there.

The Prince learned the *Siddha* dance, the *Anahad*, and the *Ajna Chakra*.

The Guru whispered into the Prince's ear the mantra that cuts through black magic.

The Prince arrived at the Kamala-Balan.

Bahura dried up the water of the stream.

The King found out through a spy and brought Bahura, but she placed the blame on

the Prince. A ritual was performed, yet water did not return to the Kamala; had Natua sent all the water to the underworld?

Natua was captured and brought forth. Through his dance, he made the Kamala overflow. But he asked that Bahura be forgiven.

Bahura said, "Now you have become worthy of my daughter."

"Come with the wedding party."

Natua arrived with the wedding party.

Three betel leaves were presented: one for the water of the Kamala, the second to forgive Bahura.

And the third to marry her daughter.

Natua picked up all three leaves, and the music and singing began.

Natua felt thirsty; he sent his disciple Jhilmil to the well.

The rope fell short. Natua went himself; the rope grew long.

Phulmati was there; she was pleased with her husband's talent.

Bahura healed Mallak's eye.

Natua reached the banks of the Kamala with his bride, but oh, the tragedy.

A disciple, enraged by Bahura, stabbed Natua with a knife.

But Natua had offered a silken cloth to Mother Kamala.

The stream of the Kamala was drenched in blood.

But the sorceress of Kamakhya came and brought Natua back to life.

She offered the enemy as a sacrifice to the Kamala.

And Chethru was sacrificed... after three days...

And Jageshwar died in jail...

The healer used to say: *A real son does not die; real gold does not burn.*

The sacrifice of Chethru and Jageshwar has been made; the British have been sent away from the country with honor. Mountbatten has become the Governor-General. The new kings of the country have kept Mukhdev in jail. Mukhdev has found his labor's worth. Whose sacrifice will be offered?

There is a quarrel among themselves; the cucumber has three slices, but from the top, it looks like one.

Mukhdev remembers the song sung while grinding the stone mill:

Behind the house stands a Neem tree

Beneath its shade, a cuckoo calls at midnight

Beneath that very shade

Other days the cuckoo calls at dawn's first light

But today the cuckoo calls at midnight

On this very day

I will strike you, O Cuckoo, I will pierce both your eyes

Hearing your call, my beloved went abroad

Hearing only your call

Sitting in a tree in Vrindavan

Whose flute is calling?

Whose is calling?

*Perform, O sister-in-law, all sixteen
adornments*

*In Vrindavan, it is my brother's flute that
calls*

It is my brother's that calls

*I will give you, O sister-in-law, a necklace for
your throat*

It was you who spoke the secret of the heart

You who spoke the secret of the heart

Nineteenth Wave

*We were sleeping together, O Sugna, upon
the same bed*

*In a dream I saw, O Sugna, the swan has been
stolen away...*

Mukhdev and Jageshwar of Garh Narikel,
Kunjan of Madhepur, Musai of Baheri,
Dhinai of Biroul, Bhattu of Dalsinghsarai,
Pichkun of Tajpur, Chutharu of Benipatti,
and Ghonghai of Mehath and Dhanesar.

Chethru of Tarsarai was gone...

A few days later, two comrades came to
Mukhdev and Jageshwar.

Together, they all cut the telegraph wires at Pandalul.

The bridges at Nautal and Dhanhar were also blown up with gunpowder. Kunjan of Madhepur was sacrificed while blowing up the Nautal bridge, and Musai of Baheri while blowing up the Dhanhar bridge.

The sub-inspector of Phulparas police station was blown up. Dhinaï of Biroul was killed in the firing that broke out from the station.

Mukhdev and Jageshwar survived.

Was there some flaw that these two did not die?

And Mukhdev's story begins...

Grieved by false accusations, Krishna worshipped Ganesha and the Moon. To relieve the burden of the Earth, Balaram, Krishna, and Kamalanabh were born. Krishna slew Kansa. However, seeing the threat of attack from Kansa's father-in-law Jarasandha, he came to Dwarka with fifty-six crore Yaduvanshis and sixteen thousand eight women.

Santrajit worshipped the Sun on the shores of Dwarka and obtained the **Syamantaka gem**, which produced eight *bhar* of gold every day. He gave it to his brother Prasen. Both Santrajit and Prasen were children of King Ugra. One day, while Krishna and Prasen went to the forest to hunt, a lion killed Prasen and took the gem. Then Jambavan the bear killed the lion and gave the gem to his son to play with. When Krishna returned alone, everyone accused him of murdering Prasen out of greed for the gem.

Krishna then took everyone to the forest; they saw the dead lion and Prasen, and saw the gem hanging on the swing of Jambavan's son, Sukumar. Jambavan's daughter told Krishna to flee with the gem, but Krishna blew his conch and fought a war in the cave. After seven days, the residents of Dwarka returned, performing Krishna's last rites believing him dead. But on the 21st day, Jambavan admitted defeat, married his daughter to Krishna, and gave the gem as a gift. Krishna gave that gem back to Santrajit. Distressed by his false accusations, Santrajit married his daughter to Krishna and offered the gem, but Krishna did not accept it.

Later, while Krishna and Balaram were away, Shatadhanva killed Santrajit, took the gem, gave it to Akrur Yadav, and fled. At Satyabhama's urging, Krishna and Balaram pursued him; Krishna killed him but the gem was not found. Hearing this, Balaram suspected Krishna was being deceitful; Krishna returned to Dwarka while Balaram went to Vidarbha. Akrur went on a pilgrimage, and wearing the gem, began worshipping the Sun in Kashi. Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh performed the worship of the eight *Siddhis* of the Lord of Obstacles (Ganesha). When Ganesha was returning, the Moon saw his elephant head and large belly and laughed. For his pride in his beauty, Ganesha cursed the Moon: anyone who looks upon him on a certain day would face false stigma.

Wah...

But no one had even made such an accusation, so why was Jageshwar feeling so grieved?

"This is the result of loving the society of the poor—that one is destroyed, sacrificed in the movement. His children are left destitute,"

Jageshwar says.

"But the children of the poor are destitute anyway, Jageshwar, whether the father is there or not," Mukhdev had replied.

And Jageshwar had merely laughed...

And when the Englishman and his Indian soldiers asked Jageshwar about the gunpowder and the comrades, he gave no answer. *You found your chance to die, you wretch; whether others understand or not, I understood you, Jageshwar...*

Hearing Mukhdev's voice, **Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, Rudramati, and Raghuvaran** are all deeply pained.

We were sleeping together, O Sugna, upon the same bed

In a dream I saw, O Sugna, the swan has been stolen away

Had I known this, O Sugna, that the swan would be stolen

I would have tied it tight, O Sugna, with silken cords

*The silken cords, O Sugna, would tear and
break apart*

*I would have tied it tight, O Sugna, with the
cords of love*

*The marketplace is set in the cities of Body
and Illusion*

*Think and understand well, O friend, before
you strike a deal*

Twentieth Wave

O Mother, protect the honor of this plea...

*Jagdamba, your servant stands with folded
hands...*

The real name of Ghonghai of Mehath was Parshuram.

Parshuram and Dhanesar's sister used to go to Jhanjharpur to study under Mallik-ji, and for this, they were outcasted by the wealthy elite. Parshuram's sister's education was obstructed. However, Dhaneshar-ji, who was somewhat older, remained stubborn and stood his ground. He was eventually arrested by the British police; Raghuvaran informs Mukhdev that the very same "Piar Bachcha" who had him arrested is now receiving a freedom fighter's pension. In 1942, Dhaneshar-ji had driven the British police out of the Jhanjharpur station and appointed Phekan Munshi as the Station House Officer.

I heard that Piar Bachcha became an M.L.A. in 1952. The M.L.A. Saheb had refused to sign the scholarship form for a student from a neighboring village named Kripanand; nevertheless, through public donations, Kripanand secured admission into Engineering at M.I.T. Muzaffarpur with Roll No. 1 and the highest marks. Once, Dhaneshar-ji, Parshuram-ji, and Kripanand

had all gone to eat at Gopesh-ji's place because Gopesh-ji had been outcasted—ostracized under the leadership of Piar Bachcha and the village wealthy because he had eaten an egg.

Raghuvaran keeps providing new information to Mukhdev. He doesn't know why, but every Independence Day these discussions begin, and Mukhdev remembers everything.

Then the story begins...

To Yudhishtira, who had lost everything in gambling, Krishna suggested a ritual (*vrat*) in the forest and told him a story. In the *Satya Yuga*, a Brahmin named Sumant married Diksha, the daughter of Bhrigu. However, after the birth of a daughter, Shila, Diksha passed away. Sumant then married Karkasha, who began to torment Shila. Later, Shila was married to Kaundinya. One day, on the occasion of Anant Chaturdashi, as the two were walking along the banks of the Yamuna, some women tied the "Anant thread" on Shila's arm, which brought prosperity to their household. Despite having rubies and wealth at home, the husband, seeing the

thread one day, broke it and threw it into the fire. Shila retrieved the scorched thread and placed it in milk. Disasters began to strike, and seeing poverty enter the home, Kaundinya went to the forest. There, Lord Anant took him to Vishnu, who told him to observe the Anant ritual for fourteen years.

Disaster has already begun for Ghenghi.

And when will Mukhdev Ram's ritual end?

Or will the ritual begin now?

The ritual will begin on the day he is released from jail.

But when will that day come?

When will that day come when food and drink will grow on trees, and no one will be jealous of another? Ghenghi used to tell stories and riddles to her village disciples...

Who would come to hear Ghenghi's stories now?

Piar Bachcha has become an M.L.A.

The country has become independent.

The freedom fighter is locked in a jail.

Bankipur Camp Jail.

And in Garh Narikel, the devotee (*Bhagta*) is crying out for Mukhdev and Jageshwar, says Raghuvaran. But Jageshwar is gone. Yet the people of Garh Narikel do not know this:

From the wild forest, Mother, I cut the reed grass

O Mother, I cut the reed grass...

Mother, I cut the bamboo from the grove

Jagdamba, with devotion I built a palace...

I bow to your feet, I fall at your feet, Mother Jagdamba

Today, Mother, come to your shrine...

Mother, protect the honor of your devotee

Jagdamba, with folded hands, I fall at your feet...

Just as a child plays in the Mother's lap

In Mother Bhavani's lap...

Mother, let us play likewise in this world

Jagdamba, come now to your shrine...

*I know not your name, Mother, I understand
not your status*

O Mother, I understand not your status...

*Mother, dwell within the throat of your
servant*

Jagdamba, protect our honor now...

*I bow to your feet, I fall at your feet, Primal
Jvalamukhi*

Mother, Primal Jvalamukhi...

Mother, protect the honor of this plea

*Jagdamba, your servant stands with folded
hands...*

Twenty-First Wave

The cow lows and piteously calls for its calf...

Among the Brahmins, there is Piar Bachcha and his son Indrakant Mishra. In the Southern quarter dwell the Mishras, while the remaining quarters are home to the Jhas.

Raman Kishore Jha and Aruna Jha.

On the day of Sukhrati, if you were to witness the game of Hura-huri played by these buffalo-herder Brahmins, you would be left stunned—the sight of a buffalo, intoxicated with bhang, chasing a pig purchased from Baudha Malik.

There was once a Jageshwar Jha, who desired freedom—both for the country and its people. Mukhdev Ram was his companion. But due to Piar Bachcha's

betrayal, the British captured him and threw him into jail, where they killed him.

Arrogance and dark times are spreading through the world of men...

In the village of Garh Narikel, there are other castes besides the Brahmins.

Between the two embankments, upon the high ridge, lies the **Guartoli** (the herders' quarter). Even during floods, that neighborhood does not submerge. People travel by boat. Satyanarayan Yadav keeps account of every ridge and measure of the fields on this side.

During weddings and initiation ceremonies at the home of a Yadav, this song is sung:

The foolish Brahmin came to our courtyard
to lick honey,

We gave him rice, we gave him lentils, he
filled his courtyard,

Yet for a pinch of salt, he makes a fuss,

The foolish Brahmin came to our courtyard
to lick honey.

We gave him a dhoti, we gave him a waist-cloth, he filled his courtyard,

Yet for a single towel, he makes a fuss,

The foolish Brahmin came to our courtyard to lick honey.

We gave him gold, we gave him silver, he filled his courtyard,

Yet for a single copper coin, he makes a fuss,

The foolish Brahmin came to our courtyard to lick honey.

Satyanarayan Yadav, once called Raut and Guar, is now a "Yadav." This is a Brahmin village—let them mock if they wish. From the dairy trade to farming and the earth-filling of the village roads, all work is in his hands.

The Yadavs worship Kalidas.

Kalidas is the folk deity of Mithila, a man-god...

Kalidas. He was of Mithila. An orphaned infant found in the Kamaldah lake, seen and

brought home by Amrita.

She raised him. But he grew up to be a total fool.

In every region, such stories are found regarding scholars. Varadaraja, the disciple of Bhattoji Dikshita who composed great Sanskrit grammars like Laghu Siddhanta Kaumudi, was also considered a fool, a "king of oxen." But seeing the marks made by a rope on the stone of a well through repeated friction, he decided that he too would practice his studies repeatedly; he did so and became a scholar.

A similar story is told about **Gangesha Upadhyaya**, who was also from Mithila.

But he came after Kalidas.

No, not that Kalidas; this is a different one.

This Kalidas was also cutting the very branch he was sitting on. Subay Singh, the King of Tirhut, had a daughter named Bahura...

"Wait, Bahura Godhin of Bakhari... whose daughter was married to Dulara Dayal, the villager of Gону Jha?"

No, this is a different Bahura. King Subay Singh's daughter Bahura was a great scholar. But the Brahmins and Barbers of the royal court were resentful of her, so they chose this foolish boy, and Amrita's son was married to Bahura. However, the wife soon recognized her husband's ignorance and rebuked him harshly.

Now the husband's self-respect was awakened, and he left home to gain knowledge, reaching a school (chaupar).

The Guru sent him to worship the Goddess of **Uchchaith**, and the Goddess, pleased with his devotion, granted him a boon. He "swallowed" all the books in the school and became a great scholar. The Guru was pleased and named him "Kalidas" after the famous poet. Kalidas, the son of Amrita from the Guartoli.

Kalidas used to travel even to the realm of Indra.

The gods asked him to bring five lotus flowers from the lake of the Serpent King.

The Serpent King bit Kalidas and he died.

But the gods revived him, and he reached
Indra's realm with the lotuses.

The gods then sent him back to the world of
men to spread religion and truth.

For the sake of milk, the calf lows, O friend;
for the calf, the cow piteously calls.

For the sake of the lake, the swan calls, O
friend; for its mate, the peacock calls.

For the sake of the tree, the black cuckoo
calls, O friend; for her son, the helpless
woman calls.

Now, Kalidas has begun to possess the
bodies of the folk-priests (Bhagta) of
Mithila.

Satyanarayan Yadav used to live in the
Southern quarter, but he has now settled in
the Guartoli, having grown tired of Piar
Bachcha's oppression. Piar Bachcha
suspected that Satyanarayan Yadav was a
companion of Jageshwar and Mukhdev.

But this proved convenient for Satyanarayan.
His house is now near the Bauachauri
grazing lands, making it easier to graze his

livestock.

Raghuvaran's comrades have brought news.

The new Constitution has been implemented. Elections were held in Bihar; votes were cast. Everyone is busy looking for their own advantage. Some joined this party, some that; Socialists became Communists, Communists became Congressmen, and Congressmen became Socialists.

Next time, Radhamohan Rai will stand from the Socialist Party and Piar Bachcha from the Congress.

Satyanarayan Yadav, however, has emerged as a power.

"Those who gave their lives for the country, like Jageshwar and Mukhdev, are locked in jail, and those who did nothing—those who had them captured—are now people's representatives!! If such people become representatives of an independent nation, what will become of the country? And the right to vote will now be given to men and women, small and large alike. Now numerical strength will become important.

The time has come for us to understand the value of our rights. If we use them well, only then will their value be understood; otherwise, this right to vote will be meaningless," Satyanarayan Yadav is saying.

"The country has become independent, and now it will become a Republic. The new Constitution will be implemented. How will the voting happen, sir..."

"Does it mean if we say 'let this man be the landlord,' he will become the landlord, and if that new landlord doesn't work well, we will choose a different landlord in the next election?"

Yes, after being elected, they all become "landlords"; only then can they fight the old landlords and suppress them.

But what if Piar Bachcha wins? Then a landlord has simply become a landlord again! And next time...

Radhamohan Roy has had wells dug, and Jawaharlal and Mahatma Gandhi have driven the British from the country—or perhaps they fled on their own through some compromise.

I hear that men and women, poor and rich, were all asked for their opinion. The opinion on who would speak for them in this election. Who would be their representative, the "landlord" of their region. But the landlords became the landlords!

Piar Bachcha is not pleased with Satyanarayan Yadav's address to the people. Radhamohan Roy is raising the matter of Jageshwar and Mukhdev Ram here and there. Radhamohan has visited Satyanarayan Yadav's porch several times.

The henchmen who had gone quiet after Ba Jha's death are returning to their old ways.

Piar Bachcha is calling the struggle of Mukhdev and Jageshwar a lie, and he calls Satyanarayan Yadav a companion of those two liars. The independent Government of India has accepted Piar Bachcha as a freedom fighter and is giving him a freedom fighter's pension.

Many rumors are flying regarding Mukhdev and Jageshwar. Some say the two vanished from Bankipur jail and flew away toward the land of the foreigners. But Satyanarayan

Yadav calls all this talk mere rumor.

The two will return; Garh Narikel is waiting for them.

Let's see what happens next...

The comrade tells Raghuvaran, and the comrade tells Mukhdev...

Twenty-Second Wave: Neither Plough nor Ox, Yet the Drum Beats On

Radhamohan Roy had a well dug in every single quarter of the village. Upon the day appointed by the astrologer, the people of every neighborhood gathered, armed with spades and crowbars. The crowds witnessed the masonry work of Domi Mian and Lakshmi Tatma. The villagers were there, but it was the "art" and the gunpowder of Jageshwar and Mukhdev Ram that blasted through the earth to create such massive excavations.

Poor Jageshwar... he was killed in the feud between Piar Bachcha and Radhamohan Roy. It was this Piar Bachcha who had him caught by the police. Piar Bachcha has long-standing connections with the police sub-inspectors; how could he tolerate Radhamohan Roy gaining all the glory? When water began to flow from those wells,

the people became prosperous and started living with dignity—naturally, Radhamohan Roy was praised, and that was the root of it.

"Where did the gunpowder come from?" the British-era Indian sub-inspector used to ask.

Whether Mukhdev Ram will ever return or not, who knows!...

The people have resolved that they will never let these wells, including their circular stone platforms and rims, fall into ruin. A great movement had taken place in the village—a movement for water, a well for every quarter!

The Banjaras had come from Sukhet and sang their song:

"Deep is the well, deep the step-well, of pure water...

My brother goes thirsty, the mother holds the vessel,

My father goes thirsty, the disciple holds the cup, of pure water..."

These Banjaras provided immense help in digging the well for Bodha Malik's quarter. Five Banjaras marked the spot with

handprints, and the digging began with pickaxes and crowbars. They started building a staircase along the walls, spiraling downward. As the excavation grew deep, people would descend those stairs to dig even further. The walls were trimmed to make them perfectly circular. When they struck deep, massive slabs of rock appeared—and that is when the gunpowder of Mukhdev Ram and Jageshwar Jha came to use.

The water from the well in Bodha Malik's quarter turned out to be the sweetest of all... Mukhdev used to say...

Hirni and Birni were two sisters, both dancers. They wanted to turn Posan Singh into a performer like them. The two sisters had a massive buffalo, terrifying to behold. They challenged Posan Singh: if he could tame and ring the nose of that buffalo, the sisters would become his servants; if not, Posan Singh would have to become a dancer. Posan Singh tamed the beast.

The elders and common folk of all castes in Garh Narikel village generally lived in harmony, but for some reason, Piar Bachcha

grew resentful of this. Mukhdev and Jageshwar have vanished to who-knows-where. Piar Bachcha is nervous. He doesn't know from where these two might suddenly reappear. It has been fifteen years, after all. He just wants this M.L.A. election to be over somehow. In the name of Jawaharlal and Mahatma Gandhi, Piar Bachcha is sure to win, and his henchmen are always ready for any "work." And then there are the factors of caste and religion—the Muslim vote is there, the Brahmins will eventually vote for him out of exhaustion, and the votes of the Dalits and women will simply be "stamped" (captured).

But what if Mukhdev and Jageshwar appear in the middle of it all? If they don't, then after winning, Piar Bachcha will surely go to Patna to take his oath and try to find out in the jail exactly what happened there.

"What is this 'oath' (sappat), anyway?"

"Friend, when these new leaders win and become the new landlords, they play at taking an oath—an oath that they will do good work and do no harm to anyone..."

"And will taking this oath forgive the old sins?"

"Friend, why wouldn't you know that? This world..."

Whatever will happen, whatever has happened, is all just guesswork. What Piar Bachcha did, what Mukhdev and Jageshwar did—it never spread. If it had spread, would Jawaharlal have let Piar Bachcha stand from his party? Piar Bachcha wears khadi, a cap, and a waistcoat. He gives grand speeches. But what will happen in this newly independent country? What future awaits us?

How can one say... if Jageshwar were here, he would have told us...

Piar Bachcha says, "Forget everything. People defame me for no reason. If I win this time, I will find out in Patna what happened to Jageshwar and Mukhdev. They probably aren't alive, but I will find out the details."

Yet, outside of Garh Narikel, Piar Bachcha does not even utter the names of Mukhdev and Jageshwar.

Ghenghi should receive a pension as the widow of a freedom fighter...

To this, Piar Bachcha says that it must first be seen for what crime the foreigners (British) imprisoned them. After all, people, the written word is what counts, no matter what you say out loud. And without a death certificate, nothing can happen. "But stay calm, everything will be done... let this election finish first..."

"Radhamohan Roy's thinking is limited; it is confined only to Garh Narikel. What did he do outside the village?" Piar Bachcha shouts in his speeches outside the village. He tells people to rise above the village and the region. But he doesn't tell them to rise above the country.

There is a possibility the country will move forward, but only if Piar Bachcha wins. "You may have a grudge against Piar Bachcha, but will you cut off Jawaharlal's hand for that? What can Jawaharlal do with a severed hand!!"

Radhamohan Roy is faltering. "Granted, this Congress brought independence—though it

didn't—does that mean the rule should be given to them continuously? Did they free the country out of greed for power? The Socialist goal is the only future for the country. The Socialist goal is Socialist thinking. Wells for society, water for society, society working together."

Piar Bachcha mocks, "Listen to that! Now will the water from Radhamohan Roy's well even go down your throats? Let the government return. The government will sink such borings that fountains of water will burst forth. The government will build such embankments that the Kosi and Kamala will become the handmaidens of man. and the government will not brag about the work it does. Work for the sake of work—even the Lord says so in the Bhagavad Gita. Gandhi Baba says the same. Sister Ghenghi's livelihood comes from Gandhi's spinning wheel, brothers. These Socialists think only of making the rich poor; friend, if you make the poor rich, then people will call you a master (Kalami)..."

"Hey brothers! The spinning wheel doesn't belong to Gandhi. It has been in Maithil

society since forever; is the ritual of Charkhakatti performed during initiation ceremonies or not? These Congressmen cultivate only one crop, and that is the crop of lies."

But if even the corpses of Jageshwar and Mukhdev were to return to the village, they would be paraded through the village and the region, and the true face of the Congressmen would be revealed—the ones who announced the ticket for a man like Piar Bachcha.

Radhamohan Roy has started visiting Satyanarayan Yadav's place frequently, but Piar Bachcha mocks them both: "Neither plough nor ox, yet the drum beats on..." (Empty vessels make the most noise).

Campaigns, loudspeakers, leaders, vehicles. People started seeing small airplanes in the sky again. No, these are not German airplanes. These are the airplanes of the leaders of our own country...

The people forgot...

The people did not forget...

The people did not forget Mukhdev and Jageshwar, and yet they did forget, and that is why Piar Bachcha won the election for the first time...

Let's see what happens next...

The comrade tells Raghuvaran, and the comrade tells Mukhdev...

Twenty-Third Wave: The Traveler and the Distance

*Seven-five houses he adorned for her, But the
beloved went abroad, and the distance grew.*

The country became independent and the Constitution was drafted. But it was implemented on **January 26, 1950**. Everyone said—the rule of the jail and the management of the guesthouse will change; let January 26 come. That day held significance because a political party had declared the goal of "Complete Independence" (*Purna Swaraj*) on that date years ago, and the flag had been hoisted then. August 15 had no such prior historical weight; it was merely the decision of the British, and in the rush to take power, who

waits for an auspicious or historic day?

None told Mukhdev Ram that once the Constitution was implemented, the Indian government would have to release him. How could the new laws of an independent India consider a freedom fighter a terrorist?

Ghananand told Mukhdev Ram that the government might not release him just yet, as true freedom would only be felt after the Constitution was implemented. "There is so much violence and chaos outside right now that it is better to stay inside the jail," he said. But he believed that after the Constitution was implemented, the country would see real development.

Alongside **Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati**, Mukhdev Ram began to see the sun of independent India from Bankipur Jail. And **Raghuvaran** too. He was a prisoner, a prisoner of the freedom struggle. The nights of independent India, the moon of independent India—nothing changed. Yes, a local jailer had replaced the British one, but everything else remained the same.

Then came the clamor of January 26, 1950. Outside the jail, the praises of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were sung again; it sounded like schoolchildren from a government school.

"Yes, now the real play begins," Haldhar said. He informed them that **Vinoba Bhave** had started the **Bhoodan Movement** (Land Gift Movement)—meaning everyone would voluntarily donate their land. Bhatt Bhushan added that **Jayaprakash Narayan** had also joined this movement. Daulat Jahan shared news: "On April 18, 1951, in the village of Pochampally, Andhra Pradesh, the first land donation took place."

Raghuvaran, the prisoner who usually stayed silent, was the one who had given this information to Daulat Jahan. First months passed, then years, and now six years had gone by since the "Constitutional Independence," yet Mukhdev Ram remained in jail. He was spending his time in the Bankipur, Patna jail of independent India. Raghuvaran had begun to open up more than the others, and he had especially opened up to Mukhdev. He had heard Mukhdev's stories and riddles extensively. He too told

stories and riddles to Mukhdev. He gained information from Mukhdev and gave information to him in return.

The History of Indigo and the Soil

Indigo farming existed even before the British arrived; the people here did it themselves. Later, Grand, the Collector of Tirhut, introduced the European method of indigo farming; earlier, this was done using local methods. The first British indigo factory was previously located in Singhiya and Lalganj near Hajipur. In the Tirhut collectorship, there were twelve Europeans, ten of whom farmed indigo, though none were employees of the British East India Company. Men like James Gentle, John Miller, and Francis Rose started this. Francis Rose forcibly began indigo farming in Rajvallabh's estate in Tirhut. In 1793, Judge Neave of Tirhut was forced to order Donbal French and Thomas Park to leave Tirhut.

Tirhut meant the region of Maithili speakers. At that time, the administration referred to the regions of Darbhanga and

Muzaffarpur districts as the Tirhut region. Thomas Park had settled in Saraiya and Singhiya without any license. James Arnold of Dholi was also ordered by a judge to respect the conduct of local people and not act against it, because James Arnold had beaten a Brahmin—no matter how much you beat others...

The early indigo factories were in Sarai (William Oukhi Hunter), Athar (James Gentle), Shahpur (Richardson Purvis), Kanti (Alexander Namel), Dayoria (Finch), and Banara (Lewis Kick and Schumann). Some other factories were in Daudpur, Dholi, and Motipur. The number of indigo factories kept increasing. People abandoned the sugar business and turned to indigo farming. The factories at Dalsinghsarai, Tiwara, and Jitwarpur were the oldest, and the largest indigo trade in Tirhut happened in **Pandaul**. The Bihar Indigo Planters' Association was headquartered in Muzaffarpur and had government recognition.

Munger, Bhagalpur, Purnia, Begusarai, Saharsa, Katihar—the whole place was filled with indigo factories. Manjhaul, Begusarai, Bhagwanpur, Begamsarai, Daulatpur; in

Saharsa: Chapram, Singheshwar, Patharghat, Raghopur; Purnia, Katihar, Pratapganj, Bhavraha (meaning Bhaur), Muhammadpur, Belsar, Pipraghat, Dalsinghsarai, Jitwarpur, Tiwara, Kamtaul, Chitwara, Pupri, Shahpurundi... the whole place.

The indigo planters of Tirhut had also formed a European military unit. During the 1857 revolt, they had applied for the right to form a military organization, which they later received; they formed the 'Suba Bihar Mounted Rifles,' which later became the 'Bihar Light Horse' and even later the 'Auxiliary Force.'

Raghuvaran said, "With the invention of a cheap synthetic indigo in Germany, the price of indigo dropped from 250 to 150 rupees per maund. Yes, and after that, instead of indigo, tobacco and sugarcane farming started again. In 1914, due to the World War, indigo stopped coming from Germany, and then indigo farming started once more, but it ended within a few days."

Clay statues of the Mauryan era are found in Purnia, Saharsa, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur, Begusarai, Hajipur,

Muzaffarpur, and Vaishali. Then, Firoz Tughlaq of the Tughlaq dynasty of Delhi went toward Bengal via Gorakhpur, Kharosa, and Tirhut; he crossed the Kosi river near Rajviraj. He went by the village of Piruzgarh. Those who traded descended near Rajviraj. Before him, Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq had come to Mithila and defeated Harsinghdev.

Yes, the same Harsinghdev who tried to dam the Kosi. His minister, Veereshwar, could not finish that 'Veer Bandh' embankment. This invasion happened in the middle of it. The city of Birpur is named after Veereshwar. These very Banjaras used to provide food and water to Tughlaq's army, earning some money. On their bullock carts, these traders began the business of food and water.

But how did they then become 'Gidarmara' (jackal-hunters)? How did they start begging? What kind of sounds did they start making to lure wild animals to them so they could hunt them? Yet their women still wear bodices and skirts adorned with glass-work, like queens. In the Kosi-Kamala region, the British destroyed their trade, but the Banjara language is still spoken.

Traditions and the Politics of Water

Mithila came before the people again during British times for its **Kokti** cotton. Madhubani, famous for Kokti, became the headquarters of the All India Khadi Office; it became the axis of the Swadeshi movement.

"The *Sabha-gachhi* (groom markets) for Brahmin grooms were held in Saurath, Partapur, Sukhsena, etc., and for Kayastha grooms in Madhubani and Jagatpur. In other castes, marriage was not a problem," Mukhdev says.

Raghuvaran did not know this.

Sabha-gachhi—yes, the bride's side used to find a boy from there. The grooms would be ready, adorned with sandalwood marks and kohl. The bride's side, matchmakers, and groom's side all in one place, once a year.

Sangram Dev's Jayanagar. In a copper plate inscription, there was an arrangement for giving donations to Kolancha Brahmins; at that time, the *Panji* system (genealogical

records) had not started and Maithil Brahmins were not yet formed. The *Sabha-gachhi* must have also started after that. In Mithila, the 'pure' Shudra is called *Solkanh* and the 'impure' Shudra is called *Achhop*.

Mukhdev Ram... his mind is racing. *Kolancha Brahmin... Maithil Brahmin... Solkanh... Achhop...* Yes, and the politics of floods and embankments also started in Mithila. The Mayor Bandh between Parihar and Bajpatti-Sitamarhi. And the King's Bandh and canal in Benipatti. *Ahar* and *Pyne* irrigation...

There is the Anderson Bandh named after the European indigo planter Anderson of Shivnagar, and the Kerapatti Bandh named after Croft. The European indigo planters started the embankments and canals. Later, they went to build embankments but "forgot" to build the outlets (*baaha*); they didn't forget, they just saw these outlets as a waste of time and space. This meant the exit for water was closed. It meant movement was closed.

Movement of everything was closed. Movement of thoughts, movement of

discourse... all closed. People inside the embankments want to breach them, but those outside do not, because of this drainage problem.

Dhanjaiya, Parmane, Ghordah, Panchi, Khadag, Tiljuga, Khanro, Balan, Bhutahi Balan, Bihul, Gahuma, Supen, Kamala, Jibach, Gandak, Budhi Gandak, Bagmati, Dharaura, Adhwara, Dhokri-Dhokra, Ganga, Son, Kosi, Mechi, Kankai, Panar, Mahananda, Parman, Karan Dighi, Barsoi, Barari, Kodha, Kadwa, Manihari, Katihar, Mahananda, Kari Kosi, Saura, Ganga, Barandi, Kareh, Sugarbe. My goodness. Mukhdev Ram remembers the names of so many streams.

The Bagmati stream used to make wood sprout, but one of its streams became poisonous in the 1934 earthquake. It became the 'end' for humans; it became the *Manusmara* (the killer of men). *Manusmara*—the old stream of the Bagmati. Its quality changed after the 1934 earthquake and it became the *Manusmara*. If one had to choose between Bagmati's silt and fertilizer, people used to bring Bagmati's silt. But that

became poisonous. However, I hear the water of the Purnia region became good after this earthquake.

The stream was bound by a large embankment; irrigation was done, then we broke the embankment. Then it was bound by a small embankment. Again we irrigated and again broke it to move forward. If the floodwater stops coming, the strength of the land will vanish.

Hardi, Kantawa, Rato, Mada, Jamune, Shikao, Khirroi, Soili, Jamura, Budhnad of the Adhwara group, and the old stream of the Bagmati valley, Kola Dhara, and Lakhandei. Which village in these areas has Mukhdev Ram missed? When the water of the Bagmati roars and merges with other roaring streams, what then? The Adhwara group is a tributary of the Bagmati. Taking its stream, the Darbhanga Bagmati joins the middle Bagmati and becomes the Kareh; near Hayaghat and further at Khormar Ghat, it joins the Kosi. Mukhdev Ram knows a great many things.

The Release

One day, Piar Bachcha came to the jail to find out the state of things.

"Mukhdev," he said, "I know you won't be in jail much longer. But you know what happened to Jageshwar. You go back to the village and tell everyone yourself. But now your and Jageshwar's antics of breaking embankments won't work anymore. People wanted a big embankment, and it's being built. A very large one. The Kamala and Kosi will become handmaidens, Mukhdev. You stay quietly in the village... but you won't find the peace in the village that you have here. So stay a few more days. The election is next year, in 1957. Stay at least until then."

"What is Piar Bachcha saying? He'll make the Kosi and Kamala handmaidens? He'll make them handmaidens by walling them in with a big embankment? He knows nothing, Raghuvaran. He knows nothing at all. Raghuvaran, it is getting late. It has become very late in this jail. I hope nothing goes wrong, Raghuvaran. It is necessary to get out of here now," Mukhdev says to Raghuvaran.

In a few days, Raghuvaran was released from jail, and Mukhdev Ram was left alone. Then, a human rights committee from the Communist Party visited the jail. Among them was **Sri Raghuvaran**, the Communist leader who had just been released from jail a few days prior! He had been listening to all the conversations between the jail staff and Mukhdev Ram, yet he said nothing. He had identified Mukhdev Ram. He had identified that this singer would do something in the Communist movement. And so, he came with the human rights committee to have Mukhdev released.

Now, who is a thief or a pickpocket and who is a freedom fighter—how could one tell? In the eyes of the British, everyone was a terrorist. Even the thieves and scoundrels called themselves freedom fighters. But Mukhdev Ram had the company of **Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati**. The jailer also helped him.

And Mukhdev was released.

Six years after Constitutional Independence was achieved, the man who brought

independence to India was released from the jail of independent India.

Mukhdev said goodbye to **Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati**. Joy and parting... this was not just a jail... Mukhdev Ram had turned the jail of independent India into a school. Ghananand, Haldhar, None, Daulat Jahan, Bhatt Bhushan, and Rudramati—they were all his disciples. Even the thieves and scoundrels became independent and were leaving the jail. But when leaving, they all promised Mukhdev that they would now walk the path of honest labor. Mukhdev neither laughs nor is he unhappy.

"Bankipur Camp Jail," Rudramati said, "the world outside is very bad. The water you drank here, Mukhdev, was pure water—Ganga water. You told us so many stories and songs, Mukhdev. I too remember a song... of your Vidyapati:

*Great pleasure I found on your banks,
Leaving you, tears flow from my eyes. With
folded hands, I bow to your pure waves, May
I see you again, O holy Ganga. Know one*

fault of mine, O Mother; That my feet touched your water. What use are prayers, penance, or meditation? Life became successful with a single bath. Vidyapati says, I plead with you, At the end, do not forget me. "Yes, Rudramati," Mukhdev said. "I have seen the world outside. And now, without Jageshwar... but much work remains. My youth is almost spent. I hear 'great, good things' are coming to the village. The world outside is good, Rudramati, very good. The breeze, flowers, leaves, trees, fields, ponds... and Ghenghi..."

Which song of Vidyapati would Ghenghi be singing? Mukhdev thought. He was leaving Jageshwar, Ghenghi's beloved, on the banks of the Ganga. The foreigners had burnt him and scattered his ashes in the river. The Ganga became pure by receiving those ashes... the remains. The Ganga became pure by receiving the remains of a worshipper of freedom.

Which song would Ghenghi sing?...

It is fitting that the thief of my heart dwells here, While the old maid keeps watch. (My state is right for that thief called Cupid. The

old maid is keeping watch.) Twelve years were the limit, And four years have passed since he left. (I was in my twelfth year when he left, and now four years have passed.) The traveler is ashamed to ask for shelter, For mother-in-law and sister-in-law are not with me. (Mother-in-law and sister-in-law are not with me, and the traveler is also ashamed to ask for a place to stay.) Seven-five houses he adorned for her, But the beloved went abroad, and the distance grew. (He adorned the house for Cupid and went abroad, and a distance came between us.) Living in the neighborhood felt like a hundred leagues, Every relative went here and there. (Living near neighbors felt like being a hundred leagues away, all relatives went to different places.) Hide in the joints of darkness, The neighbor woman puts up a fence. (The crowd of people vanished in the darkness, the neighbor woman closed the gate.) My heart flees moment by moment, How long will I hide the departure, Cupid wakes. (My heart is fleeing moment by moment. Cupid is waking, how long will I hide the departure.)

I understand perfectly now. You are emphasizing the literal, biting satire of the folk-verse: comparing the grand promises of the new political era to a house built by a "grandson of a mint plant"—implying something flimsy, common, and sharp-scented.

Twenty-Fourth Wave

Castor stalks for rafters, reeds for a wick,

*What kind of house have you thatched, O
grandson of a mint plant?*

Raghuvaran's comrades take Mukhdev and depart. Piar Bachcha finds out, but only two days later. He sends word to the village: Jageshwar is dead, killed by the foreigners—the same foreigners the Congress has driven away. He claims it was with great difficulty that he secured Mukhdev's release. After all, the accusations against him were grave, but wouldn't Piar Bachcha do at least this much for a fellow villager?

The people look toward the path with hope, but Mukhdev does not arrive in Garh Narikel. Raghuvaran's comrades are working in and around the village. They have

complete information about the region—what the people are saying, what they are doing.

What were the people saying?

The British soldiers took Jageshwar and Mukhdev. Piar Bachcha had them caught. Why did he have them caught? Because the villagers got wells? Or because the credit for it went to Radhamohan Roy? Or because Piar Bachcha considered the use of gunpowder wrong, as he claims? He says that while this gunpowder seems good today, tomorrow it will be used to blow up cattle instead of just cutting horns, and dacoity will begin. He says Jageshwar and Mukhdev are no freedom fighters; they are terrorists. He claims Radhamohan Roy wants to equal his great-great-grandfather. He resents the prestige they gained from the ritual pole in Buchiya Pond. "Wells... hmph... and this Mukhdev Ram, he lives in my quarter, gets a share of the fish from Buchiya Pond, and yet sides with that terrorist Jageshwar Jha."

Misfortune fell upon Mukhdev's brother, Dayaram. On one side was the grief for his brother, and on the other were Piar Bachcha's

nonsensical instructions and oppression. But there are no words for Ghenghi's grief. Her maternal relatives wanted to take her away, but she refused. The British had taken him. But what if he broke out of that jail and came back to find no one at home? Piar Bachcha became grand in his own mind.

Radhamohan Roy is reading aloud Congress Bulletin Number Three.

September 20, 1942. Non-violence is our weapon! Gandhi ji's final message: Do or Die. The British army has equipment to cross a thirty-two-foot trench—so dig forty-foot trenches so they cannot pass. Everyone is requested to strike, but the Dom-Malik community is requested not to strike. Whether the rulers are foreign or local, what difference does it make to the Dom-Malik?

There are Congress Khadi storehouses in Bahera, Begusarai, Bettiah, Bhagalpur, Darbhanga, Deoghar, Dholi, Goraul, Madhubani, Muzaffarpur, Pandaul, and Samastipur. Radhamohan Roy says Congress did this work for widows. He arranges for Kusumavati to spin thread on a spinning wheel so her mind remains occupied. Every

month, the Khadi storehouse people will come and give her cotton. There is no lack of fields. If she gives the land on sharecropping, her life will pass well.

Radhamohan Roy is worried about what will happen to the people of the Southern quarter. Patwa Jagdish Mail, potter Bhola Pandit, Satyanarayan Yadav, Basu Chaupal, Chalittar Sahu, Laddulal Sahu, and Dayaram—all are caught in Piar Bachcha's grip. For a few days, Jageshwar and Mukhdev's companions kept returning. They would come at night and ask Dayaram and Kusumavati for news. But gradually, they too vanished. Perhaps they were killed or locked in some jail. Meanwhile, the British were at war with the German army. The villagers started seeing small airplanes in the sky.

Piar Bachcha secretly joined the Socialist Party because Radhamohan Roy was in the Congress Party. A year passed. Kusumavati made a Khadi flag—a tricolor. She hoisted it in front of Dayaram's house and her own. Both Radhamohan Roy and Piar Bachcha opposed it. "No, this shouldn't be done." Satyanarayan Kamat is a local, but he is a watchman; what if he tells the sub-inspector?

"It's a matter of women," they say. Poor Kusumavati—who knows if Jageshwar and Mukhdev are even alive.

The government announced it would buy sugarcane at the rate of twelve annas per maund. The rate was low. Piar Bachcha was farming sugarcane extensively. But the Congress urged farmers to stop sugarcane cultivation. Radhamohan Roy campaigned heavily for this. Piar Bachcha grumbled that Radhamohan must have passed this proposal himself. "He spends so much time in Patna these days. If he goes there so often, why doesn't he find out the condition of Mukhdev and Jageshwar in Bankipur jail? He just defames me for nothing."

Domi Mian was in the Bihar Provincial Muslim League committee. He went to Karachi. "The country must be divided into two." After returning from Karachi, the Bihar Muslim League was in high spirits. Domi Mian reads old issues of the League newspaper *New Life* with great focus. On February 4, 1944, Domi Mian celebrated Urdu Day; Jainul opposed it. "Why divide the country over this fight between Urdu and

Hindustani? Why cause harm to Maithili?"

Radhamohan Roy is busy celebrating various "Days"—today it is this Congress day, tomorrow it is that.

The Kosi stream keeps changing its course; Anugrah Narayan Singh expressed concern. Congress would do something to fight cholera and malaria. People don't want to wear Khadi; they need to be made to understand. Piar Bachcha remained in the Socialist Party secretly. On April 12, 1946, the British lifted the ban on the Socialist Party, and Jayaprakash Narayan was released. Only then did Piar Bachcha openly declare himself a Socialist.

However, the Bihar Muslim League proposed separating Purnia, southern Bhagalpur, southern Munger, Jehanabad, and Nawada from Bihar to form a Muslim Pakistan or a Muslim state. Seeing this in New Life, Domi Mian ran to the League's convention in Kishanganj and met Raja Gazanfar Ali. "What is this? What kind of Pakistan will be formed that doesn't include Garh Narikel?" He wanted Domi Mian's quarter in Garh Narikel to be made into a "mini-Pakistan." But even Raja Gazanfar Ali

did not know the true shape of the future Pakistan.

Days passed, and it became clear that "mini-Pakistans" would not be formed. Domi Mian and Lakshmi Tatma, the masons of Garh Narikel's wells... Domi Mian goes to a camp in Patna. A camp for Muslims has been set up. Not everyone can go to Pakistan; they would get stuck on the way. They have taken refuge in the camp. There are rumors that Hindus are being killed in Noakhali and revenge will be taken in Bihar. The Muslims of Bihar had shouted the loudest for Pakistan, yet no part of Bihar was actually included in Pakistan.

Major General Shahnawaz of the Azad Hind Fauj is working on rehabilitation in Patna. Domi Mian sets out for Pakistan with his wife and children. He asks Jainul and others in the quarter to come along. "Pakistan will be heaven." But no one is ready. "Here, everything is familiar; who knows what it will be like there?" For Kusumavati, what meaning does independence have? And Dayaram stays busy with his work.

To Domi Mian, the independent country is

not here; it is to the East, where the sun rises hours earlier. Jainul says evening must also fall earlier there, but Domi doesn't listen. Somehow, he crosses the Ganga and reaches Patna. But why would any Bihar Muslim League person be found there? Those with money had made their own arrangements to cross the border. Various rumors spread along the way—of killings, of massacres... Two soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj find Domi Mian and take him to the camp.

Every person in the camp has a different story. In Garh Narikel, everyone is dancing to their own rhythm. Everyone interprets independence differently. But Lakshmi Tatma—his friend Domi Mian left without even asking him. "He must have gone to Patna." His wife asks, "How so?"

"He was reading New Life and saying the Bihar Muslim League would arrange everything from Patna. I don't know what ghost possessed him. Education brings more trouble. Someone at a convention told him that since he knows English and is a mason, he'll be made a Collector when Pakistan is formed. And now the fool has set out to become a Collector in that Pakistan."

Lakshmi Tatma sets out for Patna. Everywhere on the road, there is talk of Pakistan and camps. He finds Domi Mian in the camp. After hearing all sorts of news, Domi Mian remembers Garh Narikel and its people. The plastering of the wells, the water of Bodha Malik's well, and the song of the Banjaras... Ro To To...

Domi Mian's wife and four children are startled by the unfamiliar faces. Seeing Lakshmi Tatma, they are relieved. They wanted to return but were too ashamed to show their faces. Now that Lakshmi has arrived, he will handle everything. Lakshmi Tatma brings Domi Mian back. The Bihar Muslim League decides to participate in India's independence celebrations. Domi Mian doesn't even want to hear the name of the Muslim League anymore.

Mukhdev is listening to all these things.

"And how did Radhamohan Roy become a Socialist and Piar Bachcha a Congressman?"

"Piar Bachcha had some connection. He got a ticket from Delhi or Patna. A Congress ticket... And when Piar Bachcha moved from

Socialist to Congress, how could
Radhamohan stay in the Congress? So he
became a Socialist."

And Satyanarayan Yadav...

The Communist organization is weak, but it
isn't dead. Let's see what happens...

With castor stalks for rafters and reeds for a
wick,

What kind of house have you thatched, O
grandson of a mint plant?

Garh Narikel...

Independent India...

Twenty-Fifth Wave: A Mile for Every Hour Seated

Oh, Mukhdev! The Communist Party secured his release. Raghuvaran took him to the office of the Communist Party of India in Madurai. They spoke of the Madurai session that had taken place in 1953. Madurai was Raghuvaran's home. The Communist Party of India used to believe that India was not truly independent, but at that conference, the party acknowledged that India was following an independent foreign policy.

But now it is 1956. A massive crowd has gathered in front of Raghuvaran's house in Madurai. Great leaders are present, and speeches are underway.

Then came Mukhdev Ram's turn. The time to speak. "Speak, Mukhdev... on freedom... on human rights."

"Speak! Speak!"

"Shall I speak by singing?"

"Yes, speak by singing."

The Chairman of the Politburo gave the word, and Mukhdev Ram began:

In the courtyard of Gango Devi stands a hibiscus tree,

Laden with fruit and flowers it stands...

A King-parrot came and perched upon the hibiscus tree,

Perched there, the parrot made a mess of the branches and leaves.

The parrot picks and eats the finest of the flowers,

And shreds the branches and the leaves.

Where has he gone? What has become of the village hunter?

Strike the parrot! Let the arrow fly from the bow!

One hunter struck from the house, then a second,

At the third arrow, the parrot flies away.

The mistress of the house emerged:

Do not strike the little parrot,

Let the parrot stay, he is like a younger brother.

Give the hunter a pair of mangoes instead,

For the parrot, with his listening ears, is but a little brother.

The Chairman of the Politburo understood nothing of the lyrics. Raghuvaran and the comrades who knew Maithili explained the meaning to him. The Chairman realized that Mukhdev Ram was speaking of social harmony; he called for an interpreter to confirm the meaning, and then, right there on the stage, he embraced Mukhdev Ram.

"What is your name?"

"Mukhdev."

But the people heard it as "Mohan." And so, Mukhdev's name became **Mohan Gabaiyya** (Mohan the Singer).

Mohan Gabaiyya returned to the village. He was filled with zeal. People stared at him with wide eyes. The jails of independent India were worse than the jails of the British.

"But where is India truly free? My party does not consider India independent."

"Mukhdev... No, my name is now Mohana... Mohan Gabaiyya."

And Mohana Gabaiyya began to raise his voice in song, in the village and all around the region. People said, "He sang well before, but after returning from jail, he is incomparable! Lord Krishna himself dwells in his voice." The resonance of his song traveled far. Away from his doorstep, Mohan Gabaiyya began attending meetings and assemblies, at conferences of the Communist Party of India.

Meanwhile, in Nirmali and Ghoghardiha, activists of the **Bharat Sevak Samaj** began

holding conferences, as Satyanarayan Yadav reported.

Floods, development...

But floodwaters bring silt. They bring fish into the marshes.

Rajendra Prasad was not initially in favor of embankments; Anugrah Narayan Singh also opposed damming the rivers. Then, suddenly, they along with Gulzarilal Nanda, Lalit Narayan Mishra, and the activists of the Bharat Sevak Samaj all came out in favor of embankments!

"These activists of the Bharat Sevak Samaj claim they will end stagnation," Satyanarayan Yadav said. "These ponds, canals, fish, fox-nuts, marshes, and ditches—these are what have held back the floods for a thousand years. The British built an embankment on the Damodar River, saw the destruction it caused, and tore it down. They never dammed another stream."

Yes, the white men of the indigo factories built small embankments. There were the reservoirs and channels of R.S. Kings.

Embankments and canals.

In 1954, the Kamala and Balan merged near Pipraghat, becoming a single stream known as the **Kamala-Balan**.

"An embankment will be built," Satyanarayan Yadav said. "Now let's see how they build it. On the Kamala, on the Balan, or on the Kamala-Balan!"

Twelve years passed in jail.

A mile for every hour seated...

Look at Ghenghi, how is she?

She is just the same. She has grown wise with age. She has understood that Jageshwar will never return. She has understood that Piar Bachcha did not help Mukhdev.

Time has stood still.

A mile for every hour seated...

Yet, the spinning wheel keeps turning.

Jageshwar and Kusumavati are silent.

Independence is silent.

A mile for every hour seated...

Let us see what happens next...

**Twenty-Sixth Wave: The Grief of Mother
Kosi**

*"You gave such pain, O Mother Kosi, you
gave such pain!"*

Climbing the ridge, the farmer weeps."

Satyanarayan Yadav is speaking openly about the lies of Piar Bachcha. Mukhdev is listening. Patwa Jagdish Mail is listening with sharp ears to every word.

Jagdish Mail's son, Mahesh. Jagdish Mail stays immersed in himself throughout the day, stepping into the pit-loom (khaddha) to weave cloth, merging the warp (tani) and the woof (bharni), and winding the woven fabric onto the cloth-beam (petlarda). The fluff of carded cotton (bang) lies scattered here and there all around Jagdish Mail's house. Jagdish Mail is famous for the cloth woven from Bhadaiya Kokti (natural brown cotton). Buy a garment of Bhadaiya Kokti woven by Jagdish Mail once, and you shall wear it for a lifetime. Jagdish and Mahesh also operate the pit-loom, the Kisan charkha, and the Amar charkha. However, Jagdish's thread does not get entangled; it is perfectly smooth. But in the joints of Mahesh's thread, many

knots are found. Based on the needs of the rich and the poor, dhotis and sarees of two-and-a-half cubits width are found in small and large sizes. Thus, for the wealthy, a ten-cubit dhoti, but for the poor man, a seven-cubit dhoti. Similarly, Jagdish Mail makes sarees according to the status of the rich and poor. For the ladies of grand houses, twenty cubits, while for the poor woman, nine cubits. Yes, but Jagdish Mail never made a saree smaller than nine cubits or a dhoti smaller than seven cubits.

But these Khadi-Bhandar people are no longer serving from the heart as they did before. They have kept a vast number of middlemen, and they are luring Jagdish Mail's son away to take a job somewhere.

After the country became independent, the elder Roy (Barabariya Roy) tried many times to ensure his rent collection continued in Garh Narikel. For a year or two, it even continued. He would arrive with elephants and set up camp. "But the people were troubled just trying to feed those elephants," says Satyanarayan Yadav. But one year they came and set up camp in the Southern quarter

of Garh Narikel. Piar Bachcha's son, Dhirendra. He was small then, learning yoga and mystic chants, maybe ten or twelve years old. He did something or other to the elephant, and that elephant went mad. A panic broke out in Barabariya Roy's tent. And over here, the boys from the orchard began pelting clods of earth. After that, Barabariya Roy never returned. So says Satyanarayan Yadav.

Patwa Jagdish Mail lives in that very Southern quarter. Barabariya Roy's nephew... Barabariya Roy's nephew was trying to win over Mahesh. He would even try to convince Jagdish: "Will you keep Mahesh yoked to this same work? The poor boy's life will end stepping into and out of the loom-pit." Mahesh, too, was listening to everything with sharp ears. But the Khadi-Bhandar people were doing good work, and Barabariya Roy's nephew also seemed like a good person. After all, the headquarters of some All India Khadi center was located in Madhubani.

But gradually, when Jagdish occasionally began sending Mahesh to the Khadi-Bhandar to deliver sarees and dhotis or to collect

payments, Mahesh began to see other things and objects there. Sometimes he would see an exhibition, sometimes something else—new objects of a new era. The foreigners (Phirangi) would be dazzled seeing the prints of Mithila folk art. Nonsense, their eyes aren't dazzled by seeing those prints; these foreigners hardly have the capacity to look at such bright light. Belonging to cold regions, they have a habit of squinting their eyes every minute.

Barabariya Roy's nephew praised Mahesh so much, so very much, that a foreigner became determined to visit his village to learn the work from him or to observe it. Now Barabariya Roy's nephew began to regret it, thinking he had praised him so much for nothing. As soon as the foreigner arrived in the village, Jagdish's ears stood alert. But that foreigner appeared to be some kind of artist. Whatever he saw in the village, whatever he heard, he went on writing it down and making photos. Sketching this and that on paper with a pencil. He would step into the loom-pit and watch the merging of the warp and woof to weave cloth; the respect he gave Jagdish, no one had ever

given him until today. He began calling Jagdish and Mahesh "Vishwakarma"—his pronunciation was something like Bhishvakarama—but after listening to him repeatedly, everyone now began to understand the pronunciation of his language.

That foreigner ran some institution in Italy, and a branch of that Italian institution was also in Delhi. That foreigner wanted to take both Mahesh and Jagdish to Delhi and give both of them the management of affairs there. Jagdish was overwhelmed by the respect given by that foreigner. He was not in favor of sending Mahesh out of the village, but it was not possible for him to refuse the foreigner's words. Now, on the contrary, Mahesh was not ready to go to Delhi. How could he leave his father? Mahesh felt that his father was ready to send him to Delhi for Mahesh's future or in return for that foreigner's favor, not of his own will. But what could he do? Barabariya Roy's nephew came and tried to convince Jagdish to send Mahesh nearby to Darbhanga or Madhubani, but not to Delhi. But Jagdish said that now he had given his word, and "weren't you the one

saying why I don't let Mahesh go out? And out is out, whether it be Darbhanga-Madhubani or Delhi."

The foreigner was some artist, a connoisseur of art. He goes to Bhola Pandit in the Southern quarter of Garh Narikel. How the potter's wheel spins—it doesn't just spin, it flows. Bhola Pandit creates based on the principle of the cycle. He fashions clay idols and a vast number of vessels. The Brahma of the Earth, Bhola Pandit, bakes the objects in the kiln (jhonkua) and creates the items. From matkur, chhanch, kaurna, kastara to athra and the spice-mortar (lagjodi). Labni, rijham, sobarna, bharuka, phucchi, telhanda, khola, sirhar, purhar, laghar, the pots for the married woman (ahibatak patil), lamp-stands (diyathi), and the bridal baskets (baurki)—each one better than the last. With Bhola Pandit's touch, no vessel will flake from salt-petre nor will it sound hollow.

In the cowshed of Satyanarayan Yadav of the Southern quarter of Garh Narikel, that foreigner watches the entire play from milking the cows to keeping the milk in the pots (kudhiya). People take milk according

to their needs—the quarter-measure phucchi, the three-quarter tinpai, and the seer-measure chapai—and that foreigner is writing down the entire description. From the carrying of loads and the uncovering of fish by Basu Chaupal, the laborer of the Southern quarter of Garh Narikel, to becoming a palanquin-bearer and performing as Ravana in the seasonal Ramleela—the foreigner writes the whole story...

Chalittar Sahu and Laddulal Sahu, the confectioners of the Southern quarter of Garh Narikel. From selling sweets on a winnowing fan (tarauni) to the entire process of removing the foamy scum while heating the syrup. In kneading the dough with oil for shortening (moyen) to dipping it in syrup and glazing it, there is no match for Chalittar. If the syrup becomes too hard, the sweet becomes like a stone; this happens often with Laddulal. But Laddulal sells more of the five-sweets mixture (panchmer). However, there is no match for the rose-flavored rewri that Chalittar makes by mixing sesame into sugar balls (sirni). They dig into the earth to make the sunken stove (bhamkaula chulhi) and stack the fuel in layers.

Mukhdev Ram, meaning Mohan Gabaiyya, of the Southern quarter of Garh Narikel. From hanging the hides of dead animals on a pole to bring them to the tanning yard, Mukhdev brings the animals, then flays the skin. He scrapes the hide with a knife. He keeps wax in the tijman, meaning the horn of a goat.

The foreigner tells Mohan Gabaiyya—that some Vedic sacrificial rites were performed wearing shoes made of pigskin. That foreigner also meets Mohan Gabaiyya of the Southern quarter of Garh Narikel! Mohan Gabaiyya sings not old songs, but songs he has composed himself.

The shop of Shivnarayan Suri of Garh Narikel; the warehouse of the Kalwar Sitaram Chaudhary and Shivnath; the carding and spinning work of Lakshmi Das; the watchmanship of Satyanarayan Kiot; the kitchen of Ramdev Bhandari; the betel-vine orchard (bareb) of Kapileshwar Raut and Ramavatar Raut; the pigs of Baudha Malik; the small vegetable garden of Dukhan Mahto; the vegetable business of Mohammad Shamshul; the minor jewelry

work of Ashok Thakur; the oil-mill (kolhu) of Ramchandra Sav and Bauku Sav; the wading into the floodwaters by Jibach Mukhiya against the rising tides; the survival of Musahar Bichkun Saday by eating leftovers; the agricultural miracles of Bhagvandatt Mandal and Adhiklal Mandal; the bundles hanging on the shoulders of Korail, Budhan, and Domi Safi as they stand on the washing-stones (latmara) to beat the clothes against the wooden plank; the removal of bad blood with the nail-cutter (naharni) by Jairam, Lakshmi, and Male Thakur; the ploughing of Joginder Thakur; the foreigner took all the information. He also writes the songs and stories of Mohan Gabaiyya of the Southern quarter of Garh Narikel...

On the banks of the Kosi, Ranu Sardar is walking with his eighty-maund spade whose handle is eighty-two maunds. Ranu Sardar is walking ahead and making a path for the Kosi. In the village, the harvesting season begins, and in the fields, the seeds are sown.

"Dharampur was submerged, Mother Kosi, the fields were drowned

You marched toward the shrine of
Singheshwar.

You gave such pain, O Mother Kosi, you
gave such pain!

Climbing the ridge, the farmer weeps.

I will offer you a pet lamb now, Mother,

In the month of Agahan, the house will be
filled with milk.

Forgive us, forgive us, Mother Kosi, we
plead with you."

Will the Bharat Sevak Samaj end the
stagnation? All the leaders and engineers
were making a great ruckus. There is some
laboratory in Pune. Does it know
everything—how much water will come,
how much silt will come? Will the
government link all the streams of India? But
the government has no money. In the Saptari
district of Nepal, too, there has been a lot of
damage. A dam will be built in the
Himalayas, then there will be even more
trouble. From Nepal toward the East and
West of the Kosi, embankments were built

starting from Nepal into India. But somewhere or other this ended; what of the area after that? And what of the condition of the area between the two embankments? With the construction of the Bhimnagar barrage in India, the blueprint for the Eastern Kosi canal was made, and with the barrage near Birpur in Nepal, the Western Kosi canal. In Nepal, too, the land of many villages was taken. The Indian government fixed a higher price for the land there, but for Indrakant Mishra's land, the price was fixed lower. And Indrakant Mishra believes this is the doing of Radhamohan Roy.

The government of the Congress M.L.A., meaning Piar Bachcha. No matter, this Radhamohan Roy and Satyanarayan Yadav are using the stories of Mukhdev and Jageshwar against him. After all, this Radhamohan is a Congressman himself. Who will oppose? The Pune laboratory stands ready with answers for everything!

But does the Pune laboratory have more knowledge than the knowledge of Mohan Gabaiyya? A boat of Jamun wood is the best. Boats of Shisham or Jalebi wood are also good. When it rains in the Hathiya

constellation, the floods come; when it rains in Ardra, the 'Kalkatiya' mangoes ripen. The Chahti (shifting silt islands) are created by the soil brought by the Balan, like an iceberg; sometimes they stick to a submerged tree, sometimes they stay just like that, sometimes they are seen, sometimes not. A fast-flowing stream collides with this and gains even more speed. When a boat is not found, a raft (ber) is made by tying bamboos, and a geruliya by tying banana trunks to cross the stream.

"Friend, this water of the Balan is muddy; it has rained up above.

The color of the Balan's water is saffron-ochre, so the snow is melting, friend."

In the bright fortnight of the months of Shravan-Bhadrapada, people playing the jhillari (water-splashing) on the boat...

"I will cut the reed, I will tie the raft,

I will go to my mother's house riding upon it.

The boatman rowed once, he rowed twice,

At the third stroke I sank, O brother... O

sister.

If Father hears, O boatman, he will roll on the earth,

If Brother hears, O boatman, he will cast aside his nets and bamboo,

If Mother hears, O boatman, she will drown in the Kosi,

If Sister-in-law hears, O boatman, she will laugh with a full mouth."

Now life is playing the jhillari. Sita arrives, wanting to cross the Kamala stream. But the boatman says he wants a reward, and what reward—Sita's sister-in-law. Sita says, "I gave her, enjoy her for ages." Did Sita have a sister-in-law, friend? Friend, Mithila is the maternal home of Mother Sita. Won't a boatman engage in even this much humor and joking? The Kamala-worship of the boatmen and fishers (Godhi-Malah). The ritual lamp (dhuja) in the courtyard. The spirit of Kamala possessing the body. A betel leaf on the wooden seat (piri). In Mithila, everyone lives together in harmony.

Then why is there this saying, friend?

"Brothers, relatives, and buffalo horns—split as soon as they are born."

And why is there this saying too?

"A rival and pigeon-pea lentils—the more they dissolve, the better."

Friend, could the British have caught Jageshwar and me? It was because of our own people, wasn't it? But only a few such people exist, don't they, in all times and in all places.

The Congress will not give Piar Bachcha a ticket in the 1957 election. The government was sorry for keeping Mukhdev in jail for so many days; it had apologized. The Congress Chief Minister had said so in the newspaper.

Not Piar Bachcha's elder son Indrakant Mishra, but Piar Bachcha's younger son Dhirendra is sensitive. He was the one who had driven away Barabariya Roy's elephant. Dhirendra feels for society. But the people of his house call him a fool.—So says Satyanarayan Yadav.

**Twenty-Seventh Wave: The Dancer and
the Forest of Sandalwood**

*The dancers came from North and South, O
my soul,*

*And sat beneath the shade of the sandalwood
tree, O my soul...*

The havoc of the Kosi... yes, by the time Mukhdev was released from jail, the talk of damming the Kosi had already begun. Was it the havoc caused by the streams, or the havoc of the impending embankment? A year before the Palghat session, all the crops had been destroyed. The grain and water of the entire region were gone.

In 1956, the Palghat session of the Communist Party of India took place. A great debate ensued. The Communist Party had become a party of Indian democracy; what difference then remained between it and other parties? Its ideology had become the same. But the debate took a turn when Mukhdev Ram's song of harmony did its work. The party finally accepted that India had become independent in 1947. Ten years after August 15, 1947, the party acknowledged that India had indeed been

free for a decade!

Mohan Gabaiyya—ah, what a man!

The Return and the Election

Mohan Gabaiyya returned to the village. The Congress did not give Piar Bachcha a ticket for the 1957 Bihar Legislative Assembly election. Radhamohan Roy returned to the Congress, and Piar Bachcha retired from politics. Satyanarayan Yadav stood for the election on a Socialist Party ticket—and he won.

In 1958, Mohan Gabaiyya went to Amritsar. The Communist Party session was peaceful; the party chose the parliamentary path to socialism. Let us see what happens next. On his way back, Raghuvaran and Mohan Gabaiyya met many people on trains and buses.

"Fill the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, and the Shudra with light, and fill me with that same light. It is in the Yajurveda," someone said.

"But surely there are descriptions of the people's culture as well?" Mohan Gabaiyya

asked.

"In the Rigveda, there are descriptions of songs, musical instruments, and the art of dance. There is a description of the dust rising from collective dancing. Folk dance is mentioned. In the Soma-sacrifice called Mahavrata, there were three to six female dancers in a group. According to the Shankhayana Brahmana of the Rigveda, three arts—song, instrument, and dance—are mentioned. It says that at weddings, four to eight married women were given wine and encouraged to perform the Chaturvar dance. Vedic literature mentions the bride singing during the wedding rites. In the Aitareya Brahmana, dance, song, and music are counted as divine crafts (Deva-Shilpa) that refine the personality of the performer. The Atharvaveda describes a deity named Vasa dancing, related to the Rig, Sama, and Gatha."

"Gatha?"

"Yes, Gathas and Narashansis (folk narratives). Dance was used during Soma-drinking, and the Gandharvas participated. The Atharvaveda used the combined sound

of song, instrument, and dance. In the Vedic era, apart from Samavedic music, folk storytelling-music called Gatha and Narashansi was also used. In the Simantonayana rite, the husband encourages the veena player to sing songs related to Lord Soma. Seeing the golden glow of the rising Dawn, the Vedic sages felt the presence of an adorned Goddess."

"They were all performers—actors and dancers."

"Raghuvaran, is there any mention of drama in Vedic literature?"

"There is. In the Yajurveda, technical terms like Suta (narrator), Shailusha (actor), and Chitrakarini are used, suggesting the existence of a theatrical stage."

"I see. That makes it seem like the Vedas contained literature that was secular and useful for the common people."

"Yes, that was indeed the case."

"Then where did this fanaticism come from? Why did Piar Bachcha, Indrakant Mishra's father, keep insisting on 'Veda is proof

(Vedam Pramanam)? Whenever a point is raised—Vedam Pramanam!!"

"Maharshi Patanjali's scientific view on the meaning of mantras was: 'That which the word says is our proof.' How that later became 'only the Veda is proof—I do not know."

Raghuvaran fell silent and looked toward the sky. They were all performers.

"Raghuvaran, tell me this—why did everyone abandon the deprived? Jayaprakash Narayan became a companion to Birla, and Minoo Masani to Tata. Sri Krishna Singh became the 'King' of Bihar, and Achyut Patwardhan became the owner of a school in Banaras?"

They were all performers. Raghuvaran remained silent, staring at the sky.

"Yes, I saw the Parliament in Delhi; the Assembly in Patna doesn't even come close to it," said an M.L.A. on the train, released from jail on parole, speaking to some engineers.

"Raghuvaran-ji, the Earth not only rotates from West to East but also revolves around the Sun, which is why different constellations are seen in different seasons. we know this by looking at the sky. But how did the books turn shadows and eclipses into a game of pure and impure? What is the use of reading such books?"

"No use at all. Education was corrupted by certain fanatical elements."

The Banjaras and the Satar

At one station, some factory workers boarded.

"In the factory, there's a rule—take a machine to block the noise in your ears."

"Leader-ji, is it oil and carding?" Mohan interrupted.

"Not carding, friend, this is something fine. Everyone lives with dignity. None of them ever studied in a school with uniforms, yet they wear uniforms for their jobs."

"I see."

At another station, some nomads boarded.

"The Gidarmara have their own language. People call them Gidarmara or Magahiya Doms, but they call themselves **Banjara** and their language the Banjara language. Try calling them Gidarmara to their face, and they'll start a fight."

...Pure water, Ro To To...

Mohan remembered the song of the Banjaras of Sukhet, the one they sang during the inauguration of the wells in Garh Narikel. These nomads used to travel for trade (banijar). They had come from Sukhet to Garh Narikel.

The Marwaris of Jhanjharpur market speak to the Banjaras in their own tongue. Both communities came to Mithila from Rajasthan. How is it that the Marwaris became wealthy while the Banjaras became poor, abandoned their trade, and became jackal-hunters? The men are ordinary, but the women wear vibrant bodices, skirts, and jewelry. Just as the Marwaris speak their language and the Satars speak Santhali, these Banjaras speak their own tongue. But these Banjaras are different. Near Simra, in Sukhet, there is a settlement of large tents.

They build and they uproot.

When they traveled, they brought dogs, long-eared goats (Bagadi), roosters, horses, donkeys; large sickles and poles; bricks for stoves, and large pots. The rice-pudding (kheer) they made was extraordinary. The nomad women (Nattin) used to tattoo the women of Ghenghi's family. They would bind seven or nine needles together, mix breast milk with soot, and prick the skin. It was very painful. Singing the tattooing songs (Khodhpadni), they would begin the work:

The dancers came from North and South, O my soul,

And sat beneath the shade of the sandalwood tree, O my soul...

A cool breeze blows gently, O my soul,

The beautiful daughter-in-law emerged from the house, O my soul.

She bends and brushes her famous long hair, O my soul,

The dancer's gaze fell upon her face, O my soul.

"Mother-in-law sits at the door, O my soul,

Mother-in-law, give me the cowries for the
tattoo, O my soul."

"The master has come from ploughing the
field, O my soul,

He sits at the threshold, exhausted, O my
soul."

"Everyone sees their wife in the courtyard, O
my soul,

Where has my wife gone? O my soul."

"Your wife is tormented by the tattoo, O my
soul,

The dancer has gone to the land of Sirikiya,
O my soul."

"Grind, Mother, the shimmering sattv, O my
soul,

I will go in search of my beloved, O my
soul."

"One league the master went, two leagues he
went, O my soul,

At the third league was the dancer Sirikiya,
O my soul."

"Where did you go, why did you go, dancer?
O my soul,

Tattoo the beauty with care, O my soul."

"For the tattoo, Brother, what gift will you
give? O my soul,

I will give my younger sister-in-law for the
tattoo, O my soul."

Ah, they wouldn't finish the tattoo in just one
song. And so, the second song would begin:

The beautiful daughter-in-law was sweeping
the courtyard, O my soul,

The dancer's gaze fell upon her face, O my
soul.

"Where have you gone, Mother-in-law? O
my soul,

Mother-in-law, give me the cowries for the
tattoo, O my soul."

"I know nothing of the tattoo-cowries,
daughter-in-law, O my soul,

Ask your sisters-in-law, O my soul."

"Where have you gone, Sister-in-law? O my soul,

Give me the cowries for the tattoo, O my soul."

"I know nothing of the tattoo-cowries, Sister-in-law, O my soul,

Ask your elder brother-in-law, O my soul."

"How can I ask my elder brother-in-law? O my soul,

Where has my little sister-in-law gone? O my soul."

"Ask your younger brother for the cowries, O my soul."

"I know nothing of the tattoo-cowries, Sister-in-law, O my soul,

Ask your husband yourself, O my soul."

"How can I ask my husband? O my soul,

I too will go with the dancer, O my soul."

"Where have you gone, little brother-in-law?

O my soul,

Your heart too longs for the dancer's land, O my soul."

"I did not know, Sister-in-law, that you all were my enemies, O my soul."

"Where has my beloved gone? O my soul,

"Take, my beloved, the cowries for the tattoo, O my soul,

But do not go to the dancer's land, O my soul."

The Banjaras believe the world is governed by good and evil. They speak amongst themselves in Banjara, but with Mohan, they speak in Maithili. Mohan tries to speak their tongue, but they laugh at his pronunciation. Near Simra, their tent-settlement remains. In the cities, neighborhoods of the poor and beggars have formed; there is no caste in these quarters.

The **Satar** (Santals) live in Karhara and Tadhia, south of Madhepur. They are masters of the bow and arrow. How did the Santhals

or Satars come to Mithila? Listen to the story...

They live in houses with two-sided roofs called Bangla Oda and four-sided roofs called Chatom Oda. **Hihidi-Pipidi** is their place of origin and **Chai-Champa** is their birthplace. Once, some Santhal girls went to collect bamboo shoots; one of them was a maiden, and she gave birth to a boy there, covering him with leaves. King Kisku, out hunting, found the child and named him Madho Singh. When the boy grew up, who would marry him? Was he a Bitlaha (an outcast)? He declared—if no one gave him their daughter, he would take one himself. Out of fear, the Santhals fled in different directions. And so they came to Mithila. And when spring arrives, the men and women sing that same song:

Woman:

The rose has bloomed,

The Champa has bloomed,

The breeze is intoxicated,

But what fragrance have you breathed to be
so drunk?

Man:

The one in whose ocean of fragrance my life
is drowning,

My Queen of the Night asks—whose
fragrance is this?

My heart fears that after the dead of night,

Will I not wither away like the Queen of the
Night?

Woman:

Do not become mad with love,

For love is a bed of cactus.

**Twenty-Seventh Wave: The Hunger of
the Soil and the Siege of the River**

*Gold will be cut, the golden string will be
woven, and the net of songs will be cast, O
soul...*

The earth is cracked wide with deep fissures;

there is no hope of rain. Bichkun Saday, a Musahar from Garh Narikel, is in despair. As the ponds dry up and the ground turns into a thick, muddy slush, the Musahar community digs out the foul-smelling swamp-snails (bisadh) to survive. Even when all the other ponds and ditches dry up in a famine, this "haunted" (dakahi) pond never fails to yield. They say when India's female Prime Minister visited, people showed her how the Musahars survive the famine by digging for these snails.

Meanwhile, embankments were being built atop the streams, and a new face of flooding was emerging. Just three years ago...

Beyond the fields of Badka Kola, Dhurpar, Bhoraha, and Purnaha, some people have started carving steps into the slopes of the embankments to farm. The geography books describe "step-farming" only on mountains, yet here, on these artificial mountains built along the river, a similar agriculture has begun!

And now, this famine. Go ahead, build your embankments to stop the river in the rainy season—and then the rains themselves stop.

Last year, Jawaharlal's daughter went to America; they say over there, too, they have votes and choose a government just like here. But they say Russia is a very good country for the poor. Then why did Jawaharlal's daughter go to America? Well, she went to Russia too, shortly after returning from America. Later, she even opposed America for dropping bombs on Vietnam. America was furious with India's Vietnam policy and insulted the country by sending tiny shipments of grain. Thus, this famine arrived. Nonsense! Before that, there was a flood... even so, a flood is better than a famine, friend... yes, it feels that way now because there is a famine... when the flood comes, the famine will seem better.

Without water, the servant's face has
withered

Without sweetness, the body grows heavy

O Mother Kosi, with folded hands I plead

I will offer a sacrificial lamb to you

The time is dire, O Mother, hear our cry...

In this chaos, elections were held, and no political party could rule on its own strength. They formed a coalition government, and thus began the era of cheating in exams and dishonesty in administration.

1967: The Thirst of the Kamala

It has been three years now; the rain is almost non-existent. There is thunder and lightning, but it seems the clouds hold no water. On one side, farming is ruined; on the other, inflation is beyond words. In 1962, India lost to China, and in 1965, the victory over Pakistan was not decisive. But these three years... after the drowning of the flood comes the scorching of the sun.

Kamala, Kamala, we heard you were far away,

But entering the shrine, Kamala became close.

You gave grain, you gave wealth, much Lakshmi was given,

But without the Mother, it all feels empty.

Cuckoo, cuckoo, we heard you were far

away,

But entering the cowshed, the cuckoo
became famous.

Without a nephew, it all feels empty...

Bitai Thakur is getting married in the midst
of this famine. Oh friend... only the
goldsmiths are thriving. Everyone's jewelry
is in hock... But why hasn't the wedding
procession set out?... Friend, only when the
stars come out will the goldsmiths emerge;
you know the saying. Let us go, let us go.
Two evening meals have been arranged in
this famine. But the wedding is tomorrow—
why set out today? Friend, there's a relative's
gathering in the Kothia-Patti quarter...
Where?... At Raniganj Pahsara... they will
feed us well there. Yes, it seems so. The
bride's family looks prosperous.

Mother Kamala dwells very far away,

The scent of marigolds fills the air.

What shall I put in the basket? Jasmine and
Magnolia,

What shall I put in? The Hibiscus flower.

The earth is so cracked you cannot see the end of the fissures. Most of the wells have dried up. The village ponds have shrunk like the leaves of a touch-me-not plant. But in Pahsara, the scene is strange. There is talk of urea and fertilizer. What is this "tube-well," friend? Is it like a fountain-well?... No, they are talking about some "Green Revolution."... Friend, look at the green fish on the leaves—that must be the Green Revolution. ... No, they say they will dam the streams to stop the floods and sink tube-wells to irrigate when the rains fail. ... Nonsense! Where? Didn't you see the flood two years ago? Could the embankment hold Mother Kamala? ... Before, the flood used to spread out. .. Now, water stays trapped between the embankments; the gates are closed, and the ponds and gardens fill with water. When the water recedes, only the sand remains. This Pahsara used to be a wasteland of the Kosi, but now it's fine, while our own village has become the wasteland. ... Forget that, taste this greenery while it's before you.

The Embankments and the Politics of Praise

To the east of the Lakhandei, there is an

embankment; to the west, it is open. Some landlord built it long ago, or perhaps the people built it and the landlord took the credit. From 1960, people began adding earth to it, and in 1967, the government helped. British engineers were against large embankments, but after independence, Gulzarilal Nanda came to Ghoghardiha and set up a camp. Rajendra Prasad was also initially against these dams, but later he, too, began giving speeches in their favor.

Mohan's songs continue as the wedding feast at Raniganj Pahsara begins. There is Genhari greens and jackfruit fritters. And the debate continues. For the people of Raniganj Pahsara, life has become heaven. The Kosi floods have completely stopped. But further ahead, in the villages of the relatives, they were not so lucky. The Barsoi branch of the Mahananda could have been deepened and widened, but it wasn't.

Embankments were built along the Ganga, the Barandi, and the Kari Kosi. Local people are protesting to link the western embankment of the Kari Kosi with the Karhagola embankment. On the western

bank of the Mahananda, from Khaja Hat to Choukia Pahadpur, there was an embankment. To the east, from Bagdob to Delhi Diwanganj... along the Barsoi branch... north of the Ganga...

Gold will be cut, the golden string will be woven, and the net of songs will be cast.

The net is spread, and Mother Kamala has arrived.

The cowshed sounds with her tinkling bells.

Where has the greedy servant gone? The cowshed feels empty without him...

"The canals are not built according to the slope of the land. The mud embankments should be torn down, and the paved ones made fit for vehicles, with plenty of trees planted on both sides," says the local singer Chitan. Chitan's rhythm merges with Mohan Gabaiyya's...

In 1960, the embankment on the Kamala river from Jayanagar to Jhanjharpur was built, and with it, the destruction of the entire region began. By 1965, so much silt had filled the space between the embankments

that they had to be raised higher—and now the demand has started to tear them down! Mohan Gabaiyya provides this information.

The light flickers in the temple, behold the adornment of Kamala,

In her tresses, the oil shines, she has the right to the vermillion.

In the Mother's nose, the ring shines, she has the right to the earrings.

What happened to the area beyond Jhanjharpur? Because the embankment ended there, the water suddenly spread out, and the entire region became an island. The same will happen beyond Raniganj Pahsara. Just watch what happens next. It isn't just the Kosi embankment; all these will become walls of sand. Keep raising the embankment, and the sand will keep filling the space between them. And where will the embankment end? Will you take it all the way to the Ganga? Will you wall in the villages with ring-bunds? Then we've just circled back to the old, small embankments! Do you know what will happen to the villages trapped between the giant

embankments?

From the peaks of the mountains descended
Mother Kosi,

Setting her face toward the plains.

Ahead, the hero Koila cleared the way,

Behind, Mother Kosi came surging.

Mother Ganga wrote the letters of the shore,

And gave them into the hands of Kosi.

For seven days and nights, the rain fell,

The sandalwood tree was submerged.

Cutting the sandalwood, a raft was made,

And Mother Kosi rode upon it...

The Legend of Ranu Sardar and the Demon

Garh Narikel, too, is coming between the two
large embankments—or rather, four! East of
the Kamala and west of the Kosi?

Kamala asks, listen Sister Kosi,

What is Ranu Sardar like?

A man like a buffalo, Sister, with a body like
a thunderbolt,

His mustache is like the carrying-pole of a
palanquin...

Kosi asks, listen Sister Kamala,

What is the deity Koila like?

A man like a palm tree, Sister, with a body
like a thunderbolt,

His mustache is like a buzzing black bee...

Ranu Sardar is the folk deity of the Banter
caste, the lover of the Kosi. With his eighty-
maund spade, he clears the path for the river.
And then there is Rayya Ranpal, another
lover of the Kosi. Coming from the north, he
is mesmerized by her. Even Jhimla the
boatman and Baidla the cobbler want to
marry the Kosi.

I ask you, Baidla, what is your status?

That you too ask for my hand in marriage?

I too, O Kosi, am of the cobbler caste,

And I ask for your hand in marriage.

A demon was also infatuated with the Kosi. The Kosi was afraid, but she told the demon: "If you build an embankment on both sides of the Kosi from the Himalayas to the Ganga in a single night, and dig ponds along both sides, only then will I be yours." The demon began the work. After midnight, Kosi grew terrified that the demon would succeed. She went to Lord Mahadev. Mahadev turned into a rooster and crowed; the demon, thinking it was dawn, fled. The Kosi, in her joy, began to kill the peacocks, and she threw the demon's unfinished embankment into the "Peacock-hen Ditch" (Mayurni Khatta) near Supaul Shivanagar. The remaining peacocks promised to dance for her; Kosi revived them and watched their dance all night.

One league she went, Mother Kosi, two leagues she went,

At the third league, she hunted in the bamboo grove.

She does not kill the tiger, Mother Kosi, she does not kill the deer,

She picks and kills the laborers.

Seven hundred laborers she killed, Mother
Kosi,

Seven hundred women were made widows.

The women weep in the forest, "Mother Kosi
has stolen our vermillion,"

We did not play in your fields, we committed
no crime,

Forgive us, Mother Kosi, spare our husbands'
lives...

King Harsinghdev of Mithila tried to dam the
Kosi, but his minister Veereshwar could not
finish the "Veer Bandh" because Sultan
Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq of Delhi invaded.
Harsinghdev fled to the northern forests and
the work stopped. They say Kosi was the
daughter of the sage Devan; when a stray hair
fell into the ritual offerings, the sage cursed
her to flow as a river. Devan Dih was that
sage's hermitage. The Kosi obeys no
embankment; she is a maiden. People throw
vermillion at her, and she retreats in fear,
sparing the village from erosion.

The Famine and the Mughal

Embankment

After the flood comes this famine.

From which land did the Mughal come,

Who dammed the stream of Mother Kamala?

Such an embankment he built, that Mughal,

Not even a reed could pierce it.

Neither Hindu nor Turk could understand,

The Mughal forced everyone to labor.

King Shivsingh sat on his throne,

Even he was forced to carry the earth.

Mother Kamala wrote letters of grief,

Give me your hand, Sister Ganga.

Sister Ganga read the letter and the earth
grew wet,

Even I cannot break the Mughal's
embankment.

Mother Kamala wrote to Sister Kosi,

Sister Kosi read it and began to think,

Even I cannot break it.

Then a fish like a snake was born, Sister
Kamala,

It pierced the Mughal's embankment.

With a roar, Mother Kosi rushed in,

And the stream turned toward us.

King Shivsingh bows his head,

O Mother, your glory is infinite.

"Build an embankment like that demon's—
from the Himalayas to the Ganga!" The
rhythm of Chitan and Mohan Gabaiyya
continues...

After the flood, ten families from Garh
Narikel were given land for resettlement in
Nirmali-Lachminia. Not only was it ten
miles from their fields, but when they
arrived, they saw that the Nirmali College
stood there. The college had been opened on
land donated by Nandlal Baba. Oh, Nandlal
Baba! They protested at the resettlement
office. Then, the government acquired some
of Indrakant Mishra's land and settled them

there.

"This is the work of Satyanarayan Yadav, no one else," Indrakant Mishra says everywhere. "My father (Piar Bachcha) told Radhamohan Roy—if you fight amongst yourselves, this Satyanarayan Yadav will take the advantage," says Indrakant. The compensation the government gave was meager. Well, it is a matter of time.

Grief has spread through Piar Bachcha's house. When the waters of the Kosi and Kamala used to merge, the soil gained life and the fields flourished. Radhamohan Roy is twirling his mustache. Now Piar Bachcha will understand. The British government is gone; now the people will rule. He announces in the village: Today, Radhamohan Roy has taken revenge for Mukhdev and Jageshwar. Revenge against Piar Bachcha... yet he could not defeat Satyanarayan Yadav even with a Congress ticket.

Twenty-Ninth Wave: The Flight of Dhirendra and the Legend of Kamala

*The folk-priest said, "I shall bind the
heavens, I shall bind the underworld."*

*The daughter-in-law said, "First, why not
mend the broken corner of this house?"*

Mohan Gabaiyya travels extensively and returns to the village, sharing his stories. He speaks of the five-foot embankment on the right bank of the Bagmati, between Sormar Haat and Hayaghat. Previously, when the water rose too high, it would simply flow

over the top; but now, it has been raised, and the outlets have been dammed. The drainage of water has stopped. Only the sluice gates provide some temporary relief.

We are celebrating the founding anniversaries of these embankments like the ritual death anniversaries of Vidyapati. From the Mississippi embankments to the Budhi Gandak and the western embankment of the Kosi, there are burrows of rats, rabbits, moles, and shrews. The embankment watchman of the Water Resources Department used to plug these burrows every three kilometers, but he lost his job because the work has been handed over to the flood prevention squads. As the Adhwara and Dhaus streams silted up, the drainage from the Bagmati near Darbhanga was halted.

Meanwhile, Piar Bachcha's son, Dharendra Mishra, suddenly vanished from home one day. When he was in the village, he spent all his time with various sadhus and holy men. Away from the village of Garh Narikel, which is surrounded by ponds, there are large water channels at a slight distance. A folk-priest of Mother Kamala used to come there every year. He told Dharendra a story:

The Legend of Mother Kamala

Mother Kamala resided in the realm of Indra. That is why the descriptions of all other streams are found in history and the Puranas, but not the Kamala. She stayed in Indra's palace. By the time she arrived in Mithila, it was too late. Brahma had already entrusted the task of welcoming and worshipping every other stream to various Brahmins, and not a single Brahmin was left to perform her welcome rites.

However, the lives of the boatmen (Malahs) of Mithila became prosperous with the arrival of the Kamala. They caught and sold plenty of fish, developing a deep love for Mother Kamala. Then Brahma realized—why not give the responsibility of her worship to the boatmen? He told Kamala that in the village of Bharaura near Singhwara, a son would be born to Bisambhar Sardar and his wife, Queen Gajwanti. He would be named **Dulra Garbhi Dayal**, the Prince of Bharaura. He would be skilled in tantra and dance, and people would call him **Natua Dayal**. He would begin the ritual worship of the Kamala.

Natua Dayal married Phulmati Dhani, the daughter of Dukhaharan Sardar and the tantra-dance practitioner Bahura Godhin from Bakhari near Begusarai. Natua Dayal began the worship of the Kamala near the Tiljuga river. But some old rebellious disciples of Bahura Godhin killed Natua Dayal. However, a Yogini from Kamakhya brought him back to life. As the Kamala grew, the lives of the farmers and boatmen became prosperous.

But evil entered the mind of Ugla Baidla, a cobbler. He plotted to forcibly marry the Kamala. The boatmen prayed to Lord Shiva (Bhola Baba) to protect her chastity. By the blessing of Shiva, **Amar Singh** was born into a boatman family in the village of Shivra. As the Kamala grew, the boatman Koila-Bear—whose axe weighed eighty maunds and its handle eighty-four—carved out the path for the river with his spade.

Ugla Baidla vowed to bind the Kamala with an embankment. When the trapped water rose, he intended to pull her toward him, put vermilion in her hair, and marry her. Kamala told this to Koila-Bear, who cut through the mud embankment and cleared her path. But

Ugla Baidla, who traded in bones and hides, collected all the bones near Morang and built an embankment of bones to trap the river. Koila-Beer could not touch the impure bones, so he retreated.

Meanwhile, Amar Singh became King; he was a lifelong celibate (Bal-Brahmachari). He had a seven-story fort, and to its south, near a sandalwood tree, was an arena (Akhrāha) spanning seven leagues. Kamala went there and sat upon the sandalwood tree. Amar Singh felt a woman's presence near the arena, and being a celibate, he felt his strength diminishing. He grew enraged, vowing that if he found this woman, he would bury her eighty cubits deep with a single blow. But Kamala came down and pleaded with him, and Amar Singh swore an oath that he would protect her, or else fall into eighty leagues of hell.

Amar Singh was nine cubits tall and six cubits wide. He threw earth into the arena and killed Ugla Baidla. He also killed Ugla Baidla's wife, Gadhuari. But Ugla Baidla's newborn son was incredibly strong. Kamala shared a secret with Amar Singh, and only

then was he able to kill the infant. When Amar Singh moved toward the embankment and saw the wall of bones, he hesitated. Kamala then called for **Meeran Fakir**, who came and broke the embankment of bones.

There was no difference between the story Jibach Mukhiya told and this one. Jibach Mukhiya told these stories to Dhirendra while on the boat at the ferry-ghat. Dhirendra was a strange boy. He listened to these tales from the wandering ascetic, who also began teaching him yoga and the art of flying in the sky. Dhirendra was more interested in supernatural stories than in his studies. He wondered how, through yoga and meditation, he too could gain such powers. A folk-priest took up residence in the temple near the school, and instead of going to school, Dhirendra would stand at the temple door, practicing breath control until he was breathless. The priest told Dhirendra that in Rishikesh, there are great yogis who can stop their breath and fly, attaining all kinds of spiritual perfections (Siddhis) in an instant.

His mother would try to explain...

The priest said, "I shall bind the heavens, I

shall bind the underworld."

The daughter-in-law said, "First, why not mend the broken corner of this house?"

His father would only laugh...

But when he was about fifteen years old, or perhaps a little younger, the priest took Dharendra and left for Rishikesh. Everyone in the village assumed that Dharendra had run away with a yogi to learn tantra and mantra. For a few days, there was wailing in Indrakant Mishra's courtyard. Then, slowly, everyone forgot Dharendra.

Thirtieth Wave: The Fortress of the Papaya

*The dark fortnight of Bhadra is famous, and
the bright fortnight too,*

*The scorching sun is famous, and the stifling
humidity too...*

The zamindari embankment of Garh Narikel—and its Southern quarter, Garh Aradneba! The rest of the villagers now call the whole place Garh Narikel, but if you ask the old folk, they will tell you that the Southern quarter is truly **Garh Aradneba**.

The ring-bund remained incomplete; since when, no one knows. A "ring-bund" is a zamindari embankment built to encircle and protect a village. Embankments were built over the streams by the white indigo planters. Later, the local landlords bought the indigo cultivation from the Europeans. Garh Narikel has its own problems, but its Southern quarter, which people now call Garh Aradneba, has problems of its own.

In 1967, the Socialist leader Lohia passed away. Rajagopalachari, the first Indian Governor-General of India, also passed away; Indrakant Mishra had read his abridged version of the Mahabharata.

But this Arun Jha of the Garh Narikel quarter—who knows what has gotten into him? His father and grandfather failed to preserve their lands and property, and now he speaks of the "rights of the poor!"

"Friend, his grandfather had more land and wealth than mine, but his father squandered it all. Am I to be held responsible for that? Did Karl Marx tell his father to spend his days in a bhang-induced haze eating rohu fish heads?"

In Kadwa, Pranpur, Manihari, Azamnagar, and Amdabad, embankments were thrown up haphazardly to encircle the people and their settlements. To the east, an embankment on the Mahananda; to the west, one on the Kari Kosi. In 1975, the Belagachhi Jhoua embankment on the Mahananda was breached; the people cut through it to seek their own path to liberation.

The Mahananda stream was hemmed in everywhere—Kishanganj, Araria, Purnia, Katihar—one way or another. The Nagar, Sudhani, Kulik, and Devani rivers; the Kankar river in Katihar; the Jhoua branch of the Mahananda. In 1980, a barrage was built on the Mahakali river. Two canals were made; the one for India was **3.5 meters** deeper than the one built for Nepal.

In the Gandak barrage, too, the water levels were not kept stable. Nepal also unilaterally built the Karmahiya barrage on the Bagmati and the Godar barrage near Bandigram on the Kamala. Due to the Kamala barrage, there is a water shortage in the lower regions of Jayanagar. Because of the Karmahiya barrage, the construction of the barrage near Ramnagara-Gamhariya in India's Bagmati project could not be completed. Irrigation systems could not be established.

Days passed. Many rumors arose in the village. "Hey, some embankment will be built, it will stop the stream." A boy from the Brahmin quarter ran away from home and became a Mahatma; they say he sits in mid-air in the sky. They say he teaches yoga to the Prime Minister of India. Let us see what

happens next.

Lal Kumar Rai was the childhood friend of Dharendra Mishra. He met him in Delhi. Dharendra told him many things. They say he will find a solution for the village floods. Some people took this as the truth, while others called it a lie. As a few days passed, most people began to regard it as a falsehood.

Afterward, Radhamohan Roy also happened to meet him. He had gone with a poet to a poetry convention at Surajkund, near Delhi. He, too, said it was indeed Dharendra; he has grown a long beard. He has become a man of great influence. He teaches the science of yoga to leaders. By his appearance, he looks like a Tantrik. He will open some factory in the village; aircraft fuel will be manufactured in that factory. It was clear from the conversation that he still feels an attachment to the village.

Floods, famine. Toys, songs of parting
(**Samdaun**).

The dark fortnight of Bhadra is famous, and
the bright fortnight too,

The scorching sun is famous, and the stifling
humidity too...

Let us see what happens next...

Garh Narikel...

Garh Aradneba...

Garh Narikel

**Thirty-First Wave: The Sacrifice of the
Palace and the Bitter Sugar**

*It seems even the sugar is becoming less
sweet now...*

Dhirendra Mishra... the sacrifice of the
thousand-headed being (Sahasrashirsha
Purusha).

They say that in the beginning, no one in this

world used to die. Then Brahma, by his glory, created Death. Death was a woman of red and yellow hue, adorned with gold ornaments. But how could a woman kill? Brahma, however, entrusted her with the burden of ending life. She went to the banks of the Kosi and performed penance, trying to persuade Brahma to change his mind. But why would Brahma listen?

Dhirendra began to remember his village. Hearing the stories of the Kosi, he remembered the tales of the Kamala. He gave his word to Lal Mohan Rai that he would return to the village. Lal Mohan Rai told him that Dhirendra's mother was still alive. Everyone else had come to believe that Dhirendra was no longer in this world, but his mother refused to accept it.

Then came Dhirendra's arrival in the village. Dhirendra, who had been teaching yoga to the Prime Minister of the country. He had built a massive ashram in Delhi. He met his brother Indrakant Mishra and his mother. The entire village, friends and enemies alike, gathered at Indrakant Mishra's doorstep. Piar Bachcha has grown old and frail; he remains

inside the house.

Countless discussions took place—village development, factories, hospitals. But then, this flood. Why not encircle the village with a high embankment?

"Yes, what's the big deal?"

"Will the state Chief Minister agree? This Aruna Jha is very close to Sriprakash Jha, the Chief Minister."

"Why wouldn't he agree? When the Prime Minister of India is in our Dhirendra's grip, what is this womanish Chief Minister of the state!"

At this time, the Prime Minister of India is a woman. She comes to give speeches during elections, and revolution enters the bodies of the people.

"But this Aruna Jha. Aruna Jha is nothing. The real troublemakers are Radhamohan Roy, Satyanarayan Yadav, and that ghost of Jageshwar—Mukhdev..."

Dhirendra returns to Delhi. Who knows what orders came from there. The state

government immediately approved the plan and ordered the division to start work. B.D.O. Paramanand Paswan and the engineer Kripanand—the same one whose scholarship papers Piar Bachcha had refused to sign—arrived to survey the village. The order has come: whatever Dhirendra ji says, just keep doing it.

But just then, an incident occurred. The Prime Minister's son had come for some inauguration program. The local M.L.A. Satyanarayan Yadav met him and said that a vast amount of the villagers' land would be wasted for no reason in this project. The Prime Minister's son appointed two state ministers to investigate. However, those two ministers submitted a report against the state Chief Minister.

Work began after that. But Aruna Jha quarreled with the contractor and went to jail. Satyanarayan Yadav met Aruna Jha in jail. Satyanarayan Yadav had received orders from the police not to go near his village, Garh Narikel. So, after emerging from jail, the leadership fell into Aruna's hands. The editor of the Communist newspaper Lal Dhar

(Red Stream) arrived.

The work continued. Dharendra inspected the village from an airplane three times. He sent airplane tickets for Mukhdev and Aruna Jha. A magnificent ashram, just as Lal Babu Rai had described. But Mukhdev did not agree.

Dharendra Mishra's Southern quarter is Garh Aradneba (the Papaya Fort). Why would the Garh Narikel quarter listen to anyone? But they say, who will listen to their talk anyway?

Another meeting with the Prime Minister's son. The Prime Minister's son was troubled by Dharendra Mishra's interference; a rift developed. A court case was filed. The court stopped all the work. Dharendra, too, grew weary of the local politics. He was a renunciant anyway; he now renounced the work and the factories. His visits stopped. People began to forget him again.

It seems as if in the years of this independent country, there is only one month—the month of Magh.

Twenty-nine days of Magh have passed...

The charm has vanished from people's

speech.

It seems even the sugar is becoming less
sweet now.

Thirty-Second Wave: The Magic Document and the Rising Sun

*Scared of a crow by day, yet crossing the
river by night—*

The singer of Garh Narikel, Mohan Gabaiyya. The Great Singer.

When people from neighboring villages began to gather at the Gauri Shankar Sthan, the government finally built a dirt road. Laborers from nearby started working there for daily wages. Never before had anyone called them for work and paid them in cash on the spot. "Don't pick too many faults," people said, "or even what we're getting will stop."

Then, Barabariya Babu Saheb's elephant arrived. Panic spread. The responsibility of

feeding the elephant fell on the villagers. "Feeding an elephant isn't easy, friend!" Barabariya Babu's clerk took out his ledger of accounts. He claimed the people owed back-rent (*lagan*). "No, no," Mukhdev (Mohan Gabaiyya) intervened, "that era is gone. This is now a document of wages. We are workers now."

Mohan Gabaiyya wanted to say something more. He was right. An organization of the Jhas and Yadavs had already been formed; they had held a protest. Landlordism (*Zamindari*) was officially over. Yet, why did every protest and movement seem to fail? Dharendra had once fed that elephant something to make it go mad... but now, Dharendra was gone.

Mohan Gabaiyya stood up: "There is some magic in that document—we must take it; only then will we receive fair wages."

"Magic!!"

Mohan Gabaiyya began his tale. He spoke of the **Vanashapto**—the winged cow, the flying cow. It could fly from one place to another in an instant. It was benevolent, carrying lost

children home on its back.

"What is Mohan Gabaiyya starting now?"

"Will a village ever equal a city?"

"In the village, you see small airplanes; in the city, grand ones."

"Where will you find the Vanashapto or demons in the city?"

"I've seen demons with my own eyes, and witches riding trees!"

"Nonsense," Indrakant Babu said. "Engineers used to come in Jeeps with your father at two in the morning. Everyone heard the ghosts thumping their chests. Your father didn't tell you then, but he told them later. People used to die in heaps during the plague; those who died untimely deaths became ghosts. Now there are more doctors. Didn't you see? In 1994, hardly anyone died, but in 1966, so many perished."

In 1994, people fled from Surat. Rumor had it that America had released the plague bacteria. "Nonsense! Why would America do that?" "They say it's done to test some

medicine, God knows. It's likely a lie. Only demons remain in the forest now. The Vanashapto is no more."

What kind of protest had Mohan Gabaiyya started? The people of Garh Narikel were full of ideas.

The Changing Nation: Rumors and Realities

The question papers for the nation's highest civil services were leaked. "Only now do we find out; who knows what happened before? This whole 'interview' business is just a way to make the wrong look right."

Saddam Hussein of Iraq invaded Kuwait. The oil supply of the world was affected, but nothing happened to India. "Why? Because we'll just roast our grains on a wood fire. We don't need kerosene. People here have no use for oil; they'll just finish their cooking on wood before dusk." But because Kuwait had money, America sided with them. In 1990, CNN began reporting the attack.

Television channels became like phone booths—everyone got a platform, and that's how they made their money. India mortgaged its gold to England. "Will the situation improve? Gold is only sold when the house is in ruin. But the country's prestige increased; its honor remained." "Friend, in ninety out of a hundred houses, has anyone even seen gold?"

Then came the four-lane roads. "How did it happen, Auntie? In 1998, when Vajpayee ji was Prime Minister, a secretary drafted a speech for an auditorium event. It was plain. At his request, the mention of a road from Kashmir to Kanyakumari was added. Businessmen were thrilled; that evolved into the **Golden Quadrilateral** road project. This road in Forbesganj is part of that, Auntie."

People now have money to make phone calls; booths are opening in every village. A professor at Harvard University researched how Kerala's fishermen used mobile phones to increase their income while making fish cheaper. "Sam Pitroda was there, friend... our own Vishwakarma. He went to America, returned, and changed the country."

The tiny Maruti car arrived. Before, there were only the Ambassador and the Fiat. The Priya and Bajaj Chetak scooters. "Did you see? The schoolmaster's son's wedding was postponed. Now that the Hero Honda is here—and the Bullet, which goes 'bam-bam-bam-bam'—the master said the wedding won't happen without a Hero Honda. It was bought in 'black' from Darbhanga. Then the women of Kaithiniya showed their wit; they dipped the fish in Hero Honda exhaust and threw them back into the pond!"

Former cotton mill workers, now hawkers or cobblers, cursed Datta Samant. But the truth was different. Property prices in Bombay rose, so factory owners found it profitable to close the mills and start construction. "You can always open a factory in Tarapur; they just wanted an excuse to close the ones in Bombay."

In 1975, India reached outer space with **Aryabhata**. "The scientist Aryabhata lived fifteen hundred years ago, friend. Did you think India only produced theologians?" Mohan Gabaiyya spoke at length about the satellite. He lamented the sacrifice of the

Kosi embankment for the Bhakra-Nangal dam—"the temples of modern India." "They tricked everyone into building mud embankments on the Kosi. Oh, these deceitful leaders!"

1998 saw 'Operation Shakti'—the hydrogen bomb. In 1974, at the same spot, a nuclear test was done; they said "The Buddha Smiled." "Now, after Operation Shakti, has he burst out laughing?"

The two-story house of Baua Babu in Jhanjharpur was built on Harshad Mehta's money. Now, shares are on computers. No fear of losing them. "What is a 'share', Mohan?" "It's ownership; it means you own a piece of that company." "Ah, I understand now."

Vimal cloth was the craze. "Only Vimal." Sons-in-law wouldn't stop pestering their fathers-in-law. Jhanjharpur market is now flooded with fake Vimal cloth. Let the sons-in-law figure that out!

The Hijli Detention Camp in Kharagpur lay empty; an **IIT** opened there in 1950. In 1961, the first **IIM** opened in Calcutta—the

beginning of quality education outside the universities. "But our own landlords... oh! They feared if people became educated, who would serve them? So they never opened colleges or schools."

Government companies began to go private. Salaries stopped. When the private company La Farge bought Tata Cement, the employees were overjoyed. The daughter of the owner of Mahavir Dalda in Dalmianagar started a literary award... but the owner married again in hopes of a son, and the business collapsed in the family feud.

The Banjara and the Social Shift

The Banjara settlement near Simra in Sukhet used to appear and disappear. Now, they have settled permanently. Joganath Mandal, with the help of the administration, settled them there. Under the administration of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Dharendra Rai did a lot of work for their education. If Joganath Mandal and Dharendra Rai call out once, all the Banjaras gather.

...Pure water, Ro To To...

Rajjo Devi, a Banjara woman, caused a revolution by marrying into another caste. She now lives in Calcutta. The Banjaras, Magahiya Doms, and Gidarmara consider her a disgrace. "She cut the nose of the Banjaras! She is a stain upon us!" Among Banjaras, you don't even marry within the same 'mool' (lineage), let alone outside the community. They can identify each other's lineage just by the strings and beads hanging from their waistbands.

Lalit Babu did much work but was killed in 1974. Rumor has it the "Mustached Prime Minister" had him killed. In 1984, when that Prime Minister was assassinated, the people of Mithila distributed sweets and elected Lalit Babu's son in the M.P. elections.

In 1991, 68-year-old Aisha became literate, and Kerala became fully literate. "Mohan Gabaiyya doesn't just tell bad news; he mixes despair with hope."

The Tatas were counted as a traditional business family. But then Tata Steel bought Corus, a factory four times its size. In 2001,

the first Big Bazaar mall opened in Calcutta—all goods in one place. It didn't even feel like India.

The "Hindu rate of growth" was 3-4 percent. "What is this Hindu growth rate, friend? Low growth or growth without development?" Then came the 'tree-finance' companies. They promised to plant a tree in your name that would be worth ten million in twenty years. "Which tree was planted in which forest? No one knows, now that the companies have vanished."

1987 saw the **Bofors** scandal. Reports in *The Hindu* by Chitra Subramaniam and N. Ram. It felt like the first and last scandal in India. More was spent on the investigation than the amount of the scandal itself.

General Tikka Khan's atrocities began in East Pakistan. Indian Army Chief General **Sam Manekshaw's** speeches on the radio made the blood boil. India sank the PNS Khaibar and four other Pakistani ships in the West, and the PNS Ghazi in the Bay of Bengal. But Bangladesh was formed, and then the Chakma Hindus and Dalits were persecuted there. Pakistan became a

permanent enemy, and the Kashmir problem grew.

In the 1962 China war, only 2600 people died. "If more than 3000 don't die, how can you call it a war between two nations?" China attacked Ladakh in the West and Arunachal-Tawang in the East. India lost a war without even fighting it!

Emergency came to India. Trains ran on time. When power is taken away, people become secular and religious at once. After 21 months, Congress lost the election—the same election where, before **T.N. Seshan** became Election Commissioner, women and the deprived had never even cast a vote. He was the most effective commissioner India ever had.

In Naxalbari village, North Bengal, villagers killed a landlord and a police inspector. The police killed nine youths and two children. It was a demand for land for the laborers, and it spread across India and Nepal.

Babri Masjid, December 1992. People roamed villages with bricks, obsessed with tearing down the mosque to build the Ram

Lalla temple. "If only we had put this much zeal into ending untouchability, caste discrimination, and inequality!"

In 1999, writer Gita Hariharan won a case to give her child her own surname instead of the father's. In 1986, Shah Bano won her case but lost the battle. Arif Mohammad Khan resigned from the ministry, protesting the government's surrender to fanatical elements.

The Wisdom of Gauri Shankar Sthan

In 1998 and 1999, after Kargil, the ruling party stayed in power for five years. Thousands of soldiers died. "Is there any district whose people didn't die in that war? Yes, but to bring unity to the country, wars and sacrifices are needed occasionally. The sacrifice of people, the sacrifice of soldiers. If the country wins, the rulers benefit."

In Tamil Nadu, the Dravidian party won in 1967. Their leader Periyar saw independence as the transition from British rule to Brahmin and North Indian rule. In 1965, the anti-

Hindi movement began. And now... terrorism. It has become an 'ism' of its own. Unlike Naxalism, which wanted to change the Indian system, terrorism wanted to break it. In 1991, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in Sriperumbudur. "I was scared. Scared that there would be attacks against Sikhs again, like in 1984."

The **Mandal Commission** was formed, named after our own B.P. Mandal. Backwardness was determined on 11 criteria—social, educational, and economic. Castes with 50 percent or more points became 'Backward'. Rajput of Gujarat, Maratha of M.P., and the Brahmins of Assam became 'Backward'.

Cricket commentary began on the radio, and football vanished from India. Matches lasted five days with a rest day in between. People left their work to listen.

Bhopal, night of December 2, 1984. 25,000 people died. A poisonous gas tank burst. A foreign business of poison in a poor country. We need industry, but what kind?

Y2K—people thought all computers would

stop in the year 2000! Indian companies like Wipro, Infosys, and TCS grew immensely solving this problem. The Internet arrived in India via VSNL on August 15, 1995. It became a weapon for the deprived. The fortresses of the elites were broken, though access for the poor remains limited.

Rural employment programs began. Cash reached the hands of the people. Before, many died without ever seeing money. The Amul cooperative taught business to dairy farmers. Everything arrives late here.

The New Yorker magazine in 1997 featured Indian English writers like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh. It seemed English now belonged to India.

Yogis like Mahesh Yogi and Rajneesh reached the world. Srila Prabhupada started ISKCON. **Steve Jobs** came to India in search of peace, to an ashram in Haryana. But seeing the poverty and crowds, he returned to build Apple. He said the inventor of the lamp did more for the world than any 'Baba' or Karl Marx, for he saved thousands of miners' lives.

The athlete **Apu the Elephant** of the 1982 Asiad was a sensation, though animal rights groups stopped his performance. "Human rights are still lagging behind."

A.R. Rahman spread his music globally. Navodaya Vidyalayas opened, and the world saw the talent of poor children. In the 21st century, politicians don't just ask for votes on caste; they do work. Though many writers are still filled with casteism. "Some think 'Maithil' means only 'Maithil Brahmin'; I think we should use 'Maithili-speaking people' instead."

In our village, there was an old man. They say if he stood on a ridge and said, "What a fine crop of paddy," that paddy would instantly wither. Who knows if it's true? But with superstition, we need science. In tribal areas, doctors give Penicillin as a 'mantra', and people believe the mantra cured them.

It is like a snake going into its hole—only then does it straighten out. Lawsuits, courts, injustice in the halls of justice... people are ruined by legal cases.

The Gandhavariya clan worships the deity

Jibach. They are spread across many villages. 150 years ago, the Kosi flowed east of Purnia. Mithila produced sugarcane, tobacco, jute, and chilies. The Green Revolution arrived in stages—first in 1962-65, then in the 70s, and again in the 80s and 90s. It brought nitrogen-phosphorus fertilizers and Mexican seeds. But it also brought class polarization. The rich grew richer, and the rent for laborers rose. Pesticides entered the vegetables. Cancer and brain tumors increased.

Bhoodan and Naxalism ran side-by-side. Of the 300 million acres aimed for, Bhoodan only got 5 million. Most of it was barren land under litigation.

Technology came but stayed in the cities. Life expectancy rose, infant mortality fell. State reorganization happened in 1956. Hindi and English became official languages.

At **Gauri Shankar Sthan**, Pandit ji was talking to BDO **Paramanand Paswan**, an honest officer. They spoke of the engineer Kripanand, whom everyone calls mad because he doesn't take bribes. Thanks to Paramanand Paswan, Gauri Shankar Sthan is

the only place in Mithila that thrives without government aid. The priest told him that a cracked idol bled for a week until he massaged it with oil! Paramanand Paswan, a Dalit officer, did more for the site than anyone. He built three hundred ponds and five hundred wells, and a school where the Dalit children study.

Next to it was a Vedic school. Students learned the hand-gestures for the mantras and went to Germany. Both coexist on the same campus. **Ghenghi**, the widow of the freedom fighter Jageshwar who was killed in Bankipur jail, gave all her land for the school for Dalit children.

Mohan Gabaiyya stood up again: "There is some magic in that document—we must take it; only then will we receive fair wages."

Magic!!

A document of magic...

Scared of a crow by day, yet crossing the river by night.

Thirty-Third Wave: Starving in Agahan—What's Left to Fear?

When one is starved even in the harvest month of Agahan (such is the wretchedness of destiny), then there is nothing left to fear from fate.

Mohan Gabaiyya of Garh Narikel. The Great Singer.

Government programs always begin with a bit of a delay. When the people from the

neighboring villages began to gather at Gauri Shankar Sthan, the government finally constructed a dirt road, and local laborers from the surrounding area began working there for daily wages. And the wages were actually paid. However, no one knew exactly how much was due to them. The contractors would hurriedly stamp thumbprints for dozens of people at once on the wage sheets—dhai-dhai, one after another.

New government schemes have arrived. "Whatever you're getting is plenty," the middlemen say. Mohana—the Dalit singer—questions it. Why is there a difference in wage rates within a government scheme? "You won't get to see the papers," they tell him. "Why won't we?" Until today, no one had even been called for work or seen cash in hand like this. "If you pick too many faults, even what you're getting now will be shut down."

An organization of the Jhas and the Yadavs had formed; they held a protest. It failed. Every book and scroll contains some secret magic. Every document contains some magic. "There is some secret here. Magic!!" These are the words of Mohan Gabaiyya,

friend.

"Our rights—what are we receiving, or what should we receive? What is our due?" The talk of Mohan Gabaiyya has moved beyond "magic" now. To provide a means of livelihood and its security, Paramanand Paswan, the B.D.O. of Jhanjharpur, initiated a **Public Hearing** (Jan Sunvahi).

In the hearing, everyone would agree—the contractors, the middlemen. But later, the same old story would repeat. The excuses would begin:

"Today we need fewer hands."

"Today we don't need child laborers."

"Today we don't need women."

"Even among men, we need only a few today."

"This thithra (feeble one) is weak; we don't want him."

"That phulesara is strong but lazy; we don't want him either."

The work remains unfinished, yet they claim they don't need workers!

Paramanand Paswan called for another Public Hearing. All the leaders, contractors, and middlemen gathered—men of violence. "O Paramanand Paswan-ji, what have you said? Who will follow your words?" Oh, brother!!

But again, the same: the women, the weak, the children, the "lazy" ones were pushed aside. "Forget it; if we follow this Mohan Gabaiyya, we'll die of hunger." But Mohan Gabaiyya said there is magic in the papers!

Nabi Bakas and his mother arrived. Previously, they survived on cotton carding and weaving, but no longer. Now Nabi Bakas has become a mason. Both of them reached out to the singer...

But so what? Who can sing like Mohan Gabaiyya? The famous Mohana—the one with the pipe (pipahi) from the leather-workers' quarter. Instead of "the pipe-player," people now call him "the Singer." Oh, what a man! His father used to sing just like this. "The elders say so." Oh, what a

man!

This village, Garh Narikel... the houses look like pigsties. But there isn't a single sty that doesn't house some kind of artist. This is Mohan Gabaiyya.

When earth was being laid on the large embankments, the contractors were paying lower than the government-mandated wage. "Sign here. Thumbprint there." The thumbs of the laborers remained stained with ink. Give a print, give a print—three hundred prints on the wage sheet within an hour, all from the same thumb. Why the difference in rates? Mohan Gabaiyya raised a high note in protest.

"We have seen enough of these government 'courts' at Gauri Shankar Sthan."

The men with mustaches only know how to whisper and conspire. It was Mohan who raised the voice; did anyone even understand it clearly? Everyone thought it was just the singer's melody. But the power in that melody brought B.D.O. Paramanand Paswan to Garh Narikel.

"You won't get the papers," oh brother! The B.D.O. is ready, but the S.D.O. has caused a mess. The men with mustaches arrived with all sorts of flags—hunger strikes and protests. "Laborer, Farmer, Poor, Landless Struggle Organizations"—even the protest of the elder Barabariya Roy failed.

Mohan Gabaiyya rose up:

Instruments play at the grandfather's door,

The bridegroom descends...

Oh, Mukhdev!

The Mother's throne has trembled...

Nabi Bakas's mother arrived out of nowhere,
neither invited nor expected.

The mother weeps, the sister weeps,

The bride weeps,

Alas, alas!

The legs of the cot,

The Master goes to fight today, oh alas!

The nature of the tree weeps,

The cuckoo on the branch,

The peacock-hen cries out, oh alas!

Both brothers fight for her side, oh alas!...

The women of the village arrived... a chaotic
mix of songs began, a flurry of raw voices.
But where was the lie?

In the backyard, the Mother dwells,

Spreading out fine silk sarees,

The young groom went to buy those sarees,

Wearing them, she set out for her in-laws'
house.

Grandfather is proud, Grandmother is doting,

All night long...

I spent the whole day, Grandmother,

But at night, I left for my in-laws...

The bed is spread out...

"There is some magic in those documents."
What has Mohan Gabaiyya said now?
Whether there is magic in the paper or not,

there is great magic in these words. He isn't just saying it; he is sounding it. "We must take those documents; only then will we receive fair wages."

He began the songs of folk-magic—Kali, Bandi, Goraiya, Barham, and Bisahara.

Hunting in the bamboo grove...

One son went, O Bhairav, two leagues he went,

Whose hunt is it in the bamboo grove?

One league he went, friend, two leagues he went,

At the third, he hunted in the bamboo grove.

One forest was searched, O Bhairav, the third forest was searched,

The prey rose in the third forest.

The black dog, O Bisahar, has gone, searching the third forest.

The deer was killed, O Bhairav, even the partridge was not spared,

He picked and killed the peacocks.

Where has the peacock-hen of the forest
gone?

The vermilion has been stolen.

It is difficult to say when, while singing the
song of Goril, he will shift to the talk of
wages. And the talk will surely rise—the talk
of rights. B.D.O. Paramanand Paswan, oh
brother!

You are the son of a Brahmin woman, O child
Goraiya,

You go to study with your books.

Goril hid the books under the Jala tree,

And rushed into the confectioner's house.

He ate some sweets, scattered some, and sent
some to Lanka.

O child Goraiya, you rushed into the
milkmaid's house.

He drank some milk, spilled some, and sent
some to Lanka.

O child Goraiya, you rushed into the
carpenter's house.

He ate some betel, scattered some, and sent
some to Lanka.

O child Goraiya, you rushed into the Dom
woman's house.

Fine gifts you offered to yourself, the blind
and the lame you drove away.

O child Goraiya, you rushed into the
Brahmin's house.

Fine sacred threads you wore yourself, and
tangled the others.

The Brahmin's daughter weeps piteously, the
Brahmin master has given much grief.

Vidyapati says, listen, O Goril, you gained
fame by entering the shrine.

"Our rights. What are we receiving, or what
should we receive? What is our due?"

Paramanand Babu understood the matter.
"This cloud of the Ardra constellation will
not listen; it will keep raining." Arsi Prasad
Singh and Mohan Gabaiyya—some play is
about to happen. Over there, in the Musahar
quarter, the worship of Dina Bhadri Baba and
Salhesh Maharaj began. Then the songs of

Paramveer, Kali, Bhagwati, Kamala, and Gango started. Listen, those are worshipped inside; sing the songs for the outside!

Gango's spirit, the Public Hearing, and the wages!

In the courtyard of Gango Devi stands a hibiscus tree,

Laden with fruit and flowers it stands...

A King-parrot came and perched upon the hibiscus tree,

Perched there, the parrot made a mess of the branches and leaves.

The parrot picks and eats the finest of the flowers,

And shreds the branches and the leaves.

Where has he gone? What has become of the village hunter?

Strike the parrot! Let the arrow fly from the bow!

One hunter struck from the house, then a second,

At the third arrow, the parrot flies away.

The mistress of the house emerged:

Do not strike the little parrot,

Let the parrot stay, he is like a younger brother.

Give the hunter a pair of mangoes instead,

For the parrot, with his listening ears, is but a little brother.

The S.D.O. started the Public Hearing for the means of livelihood and security, seething with internal rage. The S.D.O. is an I.A.S. officer, but Paramanand Paswan, oh brother! The S.D.O. even told him, "Because you are a local, you do whatever you want; you incite whoever you want."

The Public Hearing began. Everyone started receiving their wages properly. And this happened when the Right to Information had not yet reached these people. The Right to Information arrived in 2005, but the Public Hearing that Mohan Gabaiyya had initiated was long before that. He had it started through the government officials themselves.

If this spirit existed in officials everywhere, what would be the problem? How many Mohan Gabaiyyas must have existed in different places, and Paramanand Paswans too, oh brother! And then in 2005, this evolved into the Right to Information.

What is needed? The whole world.

What is there to lose? Slavery, chains, the jail...

When starved in Agahan (the month of harvest and plenty), it means my destiny has reached the absolute bottom. At that point, there is nothing left to fear from fate.

Thirty-Fourth Wave

"I shall eat a seer of wheat all year round,

But I will not let my beloved go, O soul."

The First Petal

Garh Narikel.

Garh Narikel has settled within Kishangarh.

Kishangarh village. Situated right next to Vasant Kunj, a posh area of Delhi. The wealthy live in the Sectors, while the poor live in Kishangarh and Masoodpur. The residents of the Sectors have opened a charitable hospital in the community hall. If you give a Sector address, you have to pay a fee. On a village address, you don't have to pay a fee at all, and medicine is also provided for free.

Nearby is a mall. Of two kinds. One for ordinary people. And the other—DLF Emporio... on Nelson Mandela Marg in Vasant Kunj. Nelson Mandela, who fought against inequality and apartheid-untouchability. But in this Emporio mall built in his name, it is impossible to find any item for less than a hundred thousand rupees. The cheapest is a ladies' purse for a lakh. On Bangalore's Kasturba Gandhi Marg, there is a liquor factory, and on Mahatma Gandhi Marg, there are beer bars. Guides tell the

people—the husband makes the wine and the wife sells it, because of the beer bars situated on Mahatma Gandhi Marg. Such is the story of Nelson Mandela Road. But socialism exists here. If you have money, stay in the Sector; if not, stay in the village—both are side-by-side. The real estate brokers are the wealthiest people here. They print their business cards—calling themselves Real Estate Agents. Mehrauli village is also nearby. Fish, however, is found in both Kishangarh and Mehrauli. The people from our region have taught these people how to eat fish.

And in this Vasant Kunj, Mehrauli, Kishangarh and the surroundings, many families of Garh Narikel have arrived.

Among the Brahmins, Upendra, the son of Indrakant Mishra, is in Vasant Kunj.

Iqbal, the son of Mohammad Shamsul from the Kunjra quarter, is in Mehrauli.

Raja, the son of Bhagvandatt Mandal from the Dhanukh quarter, is in Kishangarh.

Sukhi Lal, the son of Adhiklal Mandal from

the Dhanuk caste, is a doctor; he lives in Vasant Kunj and works in several hospitals, such as Batra Hospital, Fortis, Rockland, and Apollo. But one day a week, he provides free treatment in the society's charitable hospital.

Lalan, the son of Domi Safi from the Dhobi quarter, irons clothes on a cart in Vasant Kunj. His wife Budhni also collects clothes from house to house and delivers them back after ironing. However, they stay in Vasant Kunj. They have rented a two-scooter garage from a resident; they work in one and live in the other.

Basant, the middle son of Jairam Thakur from the Nau-quarters (Barbers), has opened a salon under a tree in front of a sector in Vasant Kunj. He has placed one chair and hung a mirror. In the market in front, a haircut costs fifty rupees, but this open-air salon cuts hair for fifteen rupees. He lives, however, in Kishangarh. In between, the police troubled him, so he returned from the village after three months. Now, however, he has made an arrangement with the police.

Umesh, the son of Dayaram Ram, has also set up his stall next to that open-air salon,

though he lives in Kishangarh. Besides repairing slippers and shoes, he has also learned the skill of making duplicate keys. If there is a key, a duplicate costs fifteen rupees. If the key is lost, a duplicate costs a hundred rupees. And for going to the house, the fee is an additional two hundred rupees.

Namonarayan, the son of Joginder Thakur from the Barhi-Kamar (Carpenter-Blacksmith) quarter, works for Ansal Builders. He has bought a house in Kishangarh. But he remains unhappy seeing the environment there, because the environment there is worse than the village. He is looking for a place in an apartment. And for that, he is ready to go even as far as Ghaziabad.

Shrimant, the son of Baudha Mallik from the Dom quarter, has taken the maintenance contract for the sector. He has two hundred people with him who, along with picking up the garbage from the quarters every morning, go to clean the roads and parking lots early in the morning. Among them, some people, especially from Nepal, wipe the glass of people's cars for a monthly fee of two

hundred rupees, and there are also newspaper hawkers. They live in Kishangarh but in their own houses.

Lakhan, the son of Dulhan Mahto (Koiri caste), sells vegetables on a cart and lives in Kishangarh.

The son of Radhamohan Roy, a Bhumihaar, lives in Vasant Kunj; he is a consultant and gets admissions in donation-based medical and engineering colleges.

Mahanand, the son of the goldsmith Ashok Thakur, is a craftsman in a gold-silver shop and lives in Kishangarh.

Mohan, the son of Ramchandra Sav (Teli caste), works in a factory in Gurgaon and lives in Kishangarh.

Ravindra, the son of Jibach Mukhiya (Malah caste), sells fish in Kishangarh and also lives in Kishangarh.

Raghuvir, the son of Bichkun Saday (Musahar caste), has learned driving; he works as a driver for a businessman in Vasant Kunj and lives in Kishangarh.

Vasant Kunj, Mehrauli, and Kishangarh now appear to be a small-scale form of Garh Narikel village.

Bipin, the son of Satyanarayan Yadav, lives in a flat in Vasant Kunj. He has made a fortune in railway contracting. Satyanarayan Yadav comes to Delhi once a year. Bipin has told his father several times to stay here, saying his mother must also suffer in loneliness. But neither the mother nor Satyanarayan could stay in Delhi for more than a month. The son even says that Mother, even after Babu became an MLA, he is still stuck in the cowshed, the milk-pot, the small measures, and the seer-pots.

Among the Yadavs here, the thread ceremony (upnayan) does not happen separately as before. Here, the thread ceremony for the Yadavs now happens on the day of the wedding after inspection by the bride's side.

Bhola Paswan and Mukesh Paswan.

The grandfather of Mukesh Paswan's in-law Bindeshwar Paswan was an old resident of Garh Narikel. Bindeshwar Paswan's father had found a small job in Rosera. So he had

migrated there. The fathers of Bhola Paswan and Mukesh Paswan had come to Garh Narikel from Kusheshwarsthan. But both of them still go to Kusheshwar once a year for pilgrimage. As descendants of Gena Hazari, they are honored there with customary respect.

Mukesh Paswan's daughter Malti and son-in-law Mathuranand have taken a farmhouse near Vasant Kunj and live there. Mathuranand is a good writer of Maithili and is the Principal of the D.P.S. school in Vasant Kunj. Malti is a bank officer. Bhola Paswan and Mukesh Paswan continue to live in the village.

Two letters came from Garh Narikel to Kishangarh.

The grandfather of Mukesh Paswan's in-law Bindeshwar Paswan was an old resident of Garh Narikel. But from there, he had migrated to Rosera. His wife is very unhappy with her son settling in Delhi. And she also blames her in-law for it. Bindeshwar sends the letter written by his wife to his son through Mukesh. He does not trust the postal service. Many people from Garh Narikel live

in Delhi, so the letter will reach the son by hand; for that reason. The second letter was written by Satyanarayan Yadav's wife to her son Bipin. Palan, the son of Kapileshwar Raut (Barai caste), brought both letters from Garh Narikel to Kishangarh.

1

The First Letter

Blessings.

I am well here. I constantly pray to God for the well-being of you all. Further, the news is that you have completely forgotten to check on me. Leave aside the phone, even a conversation through letters takes months. At least once a month, if not every week, find time to talk to your mother. You write such thick books, but you have no leisure to talk to your mother. Didi has told me the stories and poems from your books. They seem very touching. But you have no curiosity toward your own mother, as to where she lives and how she is. Talk to your brother from time to time about how long I will stay and where. I will not be able to stay in the village anymore because there is no arrangement here and no

young man remains. You are the youngest among your siblings, but the burden of the household arrangements and management has been on you from the beginning. But you are not paying attention here. I really feel like talking to you on the phone. I also feel like talking to the children. Tell the children to talk to their grandmother every two or three days. I see the son-in-law talks to his mother every two or three days, so I also feel a longing—what kind of sons are mine that they never feel like talking to their mother? Everyone says, what do you lack? So I don't lack things, but I am hungry for the love of my children.

Daughter-in-law, you must have to do all the household work now. It must be very hard work, but still, keep me in mind. I remain very worried, so I had whatever came to mind written in the letter. Hungry for your love—your Mother.

2

The Second Letter

“Son,

-The buffalo is giving milk, but the people of

the quarter are burning with jealousy.”...

Bipin was still reading the letter when Palan, the son of Kapileshwar Raut, spoke up in the middle—

“Say, friend, if you have milk, why would the people of the quarter burn? And how does she know that, ask her.”

But look at the son—Bipin; he says further—

“Say, friend, that’s what I’m asking too. I have milk, so why do people burn?”

How much trust the son has in the mother!

Bipin says again—“That they burn in their hearts, we know all of it.”

There is much more talk in the letter.

“-The condition of my maternal home is very bad. The children of the elder brother are still fine, but the condition of the younger one is very depressed. He used to operate a crane in Midnapore. His mind got upset so he stayed in the village for six months. Then he went back, but his hands started trembling on the crane. He doesn't have the courage. The

children act like orphans. If any arrangement can be made, look into it. No, not for the brother. He is old now, it will be good for him to stay in the village. If an arrangement could be made for even one of his two sons. The elder sister-in-law didn't want to look after Mother before, and now it's fallen on the younger one's head. In the early evening, she used to give a quarter-share of the crop, that I knew, but in the mango season, even the younger one's children guard the grafted trees. But she gives a quarter-share of the mangoes too; the younger sister-in-law didn't take it even out of anger. I didn't say anything; everyone tells me that I take the younger one's side, that's why.

-When everyone comes to the village from Delhi, they talk about the prestige of your house; it feels good, but I also feel afraid that the evil eye might strike. All else is well. - Your Mother."

Mukesh Paswan's daughter Malti and son-in-law Mathuranand have taken a farmhouse near Vasant Kunj. Mathuranand is a good writer and is the Principal of the Vasant Kunj D.P.S. school. Malti is a bank officer. Mathuranand is the son of Bindeshwar

Paswan of Rosera.

Satyanarayan Yadav's son Bipin—Railway contractor. He also lives nearby; there is coming and going at the house.

Mathuranand receives his mother's letter.

With how much care a mother and father raise a son.

The son also remains good at studies.

He tries for a government job. He goes to Delhi for preparation and then after doing B.Ed., becomes a teacher in a public school.

His art of teaching is wonderful.

Over the subject of Biology—both Zoology and Botany—he has wonderful control. In that public school, on his recommendation, extra classes are taken for the medical exam.

A vast number of students pass the medical exam. Students from other schools go to other coaching institutes for medical. Their time is wasted. The result is disappointing, but the school of this Biology teacher moves ahead. A branch of that school opens in

Delhi's Vasant Kunj and the Biology teacher becomes the Principal of that school. The Principal's name is Mathuranand.

He was married into a good family. Staying with him, his wife also became a bank officer. But he becomes lost. He forgets the affection of his parents. Behind the competition, the competitor forgets his roots, and only then comes this letter. A mother's letter to her son.

What novel is this, what life? How many things have come to this city—cement, sand, and humans. Humans who work in factories. Humans who build roads, practice medicine, and teach in schools. Humans who commit dacoity, theft, and are engaged in prostitution. That woman on the ladder who took five hundred bricks from the ground to the roof four floors up—in fifty or sixty trips—he had asked her, where are you from?

She lives in Kishangarh, has one son five years old and another three years old. Another form of this city's economy is people throwing notes in beer bars—people throwing notes at dancers. The form of the brick-carrier makes Mathuranand bow in

respect. Manoranjan Jha has written on the brick-carrier, what a beautiful depiction, but what difference is there between this brick-carrier and this Mathuranand? Both came to Delhi for their employment. Both are making their living. But this brick-carrier woman. How much pride she lives with. She does not tolerate anyone's dominance. She lives with honor, respect, and prestige. But because of the social system, she cannot do any other work. Will her children drive a cart or become like Mathuranand? Surely they will become like Mathuranand... after all, what great people were Mathuranand's parents!

Mahesh, the son of Jagdish Mailak from the Patwa quarter, works in the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Chanakyapuri. A foreigner brought him to Delhi and got him a job here.

Naveen, the son of Bhola Pandit the potter, has displayed his artworks, his clay idols, modern flower pots, etc., in front of the Jain temple in Mehrauli. He lives nearby, in the Dudhwali Gali of Mehrauli. Bhola Pandit stays in the village. He once stayed in Delhi for a month and set Naveen's wheels in order. The wheel of the Brahma of this world turns

on the principle of the cycle, and by baking in the kiln, he creates clay idols. Yes, the Brahma of the other world breathes life into clay idols, but neither Bhola Pandit nor Naveen can do that. They make large pitchers, small pots, buttermilk jars, and shallow bowls. Large vats, storage jars for spices, small round pots, tiny cups, oil lamps, lids, ceremonial pots—all of it remains scattered in the house. But if even one item is moved here or there, Bhola Pandit scolds his wife in the kitchen.

But Bhola Pandit remains somewhat suspicious of Naveen. He is so careful, yet the idols turn out fragile. The vessels start becoming salty and begin to crumble.

Basu Chaupal is a Khatbe. He carries loads and fish. His son Surendra stays in the village. Basu Chaupal's build is very sturdy. He has a similarly formidable mustache. So all the nearby Ramlila troupes compete to take him for the role of Ravana.

Chalittar Sahu and Laddulal Sahu are confectioners.

Suresh, the son of Chalittar Sahu, sells

various kinds of sweets, offerings, and rose-sugar drops to tourists in front of the Qutub Minar. Suresh has kept his lodging in Mehrauli. In the morning, he places the sweets on a wicker basket and starts selling.

Chalittar Sahu and Laddulal Sahu can be seen in the Durga Puja fair, making jalebis in large vats of Dalda. Yes, when the rumor of cow fat in Dalda spread in 1983-84, that time they fried jalebis in ghee and gave them to everyone. Whenever there is a wedding, thread ceremony, or the conclusion of an Ekadashi fast at someone's place, Chalittar Sahu and Laddulal Sahu are hired; they dig a trench for the stove in the ground and work for a week. Frying jalebis with a ladle, boondi with a perforated spoon, and numerous delicacies with various molds.

Ramparvesh, the son of Lachmi Das the weaver, is in the village.

Prashant, the son of the Suri Shivanarayan Mahto, works in DLF Emporia in Vasant Kunj, Delhi, and plans to open his own shop; he lives nearby in Kishangarh. Night and day he is engaged in the arrangement of his shop. Shivanarayan stays in the village with his

wife. He has opened a shop in the room of his outer veranda and fulfills the small daily needs of the villagers.

Lal Kumar Roy is a Kurmi. His son Suman has passed the Allied Services in the IAS exam and has been allotted a government quarter in Vasant Kunj. Lal Kumar stays in the village and has good farming.

Satyanarayan Kamat is a Keot. His son Madan is a guard in the Big Bazaar mall in Vasant Kunj and lives in Kishangarh. Satyanarayan's ancestors were guards at the place of the landlord of Darbhanga.

Shyamanand, the son of Ramdev Bhandari, works in the KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken) shop in Big Bazaar mall, Vasant Kunj; he is a chicken expert. He lives in Kishangarh. Ramdev's ancestors used to work in the kitchen during the time of the Darbhanga landlord.

Kapileshwar Raut and Ramavatar Raut are Barai (betel-sellers). Palan, the son of Barai Kapileshwar Raut, has opened a betel kiosk next to the open-air salon in Vasant Kunj. To fulfill the betel-chewing needs of the people

of Bihar. He lives in Kishangarh.

Kapileshwar and Ramavatar Raut will often be found in the betel garden. Walking next to the thatch. Propping up the betel vines on reeds. Placing soil near the roots of the betel vines in the thatch.

The barber quarter has thirteen houses. They are very talkative. They keep demanding their traditional annual share with a list throughout the year. The outsiders who come during Durga Puja cannot return without giving the share. Previously, they used to go from veranda to veranda once a week to cut hair, but now they say—those who want their hair cut should come to my doorstep. Yes, if one has to go to a wedding party, then once or twice a year they might go to some veranda in the quarter. But even that is in one place. Those who want it cut should sit in a queue. It's not that someone comes now and someone comes then. Now one person from each of their houses has also opened a salon in Jhanjharpur. What salon? A plastic board is just stood up on the side. The use of nail-cutters has stopped completely. Go cut your own nails. During birth-impurity, the barber's

wife will come and cut the fingers of the mother, that's all. And while cutting the beard with a sharpened razor, if blood falls, it's not like I've struck you. There must have been a pimple. No friend, the Topaz razor is for the salon in Jhanjharpur. Vidyapati belonged to them, but later the Brahmins started trying to snatch him away by putting a cap on him; everyone is unanimous on this point.

Here in Garh Narikel, sugarcane farming has started, following the example of those from Balath-Rampatti. After the Lohat sugar mill closed, all the villages in the area stopped sugarcane farming, but not those from Balath. If Rampatti has craftsmen for nutcrackers, knives, and cutters, Balath is no less. The villagers started making jaggery with their own skill. Balath jaggery began to be sold in the area. Now some people from Garh Narikel have started this work.

A seer of wheat I'll eat all year round,

But I won't let my beloved go, O soul.

Mohan Gabaiyya has arrived at that same jaggery factory. He keeps singing songs. People come and see Mohan Gabaiyya.

The wells have all collapsed, only one or two remain.

Hand pumps have been installed everywhere.

Earlier, people would not take the water of the hand pump as ceremonial sipping-water, because there was a leather washer, and only the water of the well and pond became ceremonial water, but now that is not the case. Somewhere plastic washers are used in the hand pumps.

The Agarmast tree is small and its leaves are thick and filled with water; applying its juice on a cut stops the bleeding. Castor, hibiscus, arikandchan, aak, kathari champā, banana flower, croton, kalpnath, pumpkin, banana bunch and banana heart, khokhas, chrysanthemum, sponge gourd, chandrakala, chirchiri, jatadhari, jom, jalebi-tree, taggar, basil, water lily, bhaint, thalkamal, thorn-apple, Nepali basil, pasijh, poro greens, malkoka, moti jhaba, raja-rani greens, lakshman-booti, guava, shani, sanjha, sajmani, night-jasmine, turmeric, pineapple. There is no heartwood in the mango tree. The fruit of the date palm is eaten and the juice is called toddy; drinking toddy causes

intoxication. A cut-mark for dripping toddy on the date tree. Peepal and Banyan have grown on the date tree; it is said that these two can grow anywhere.

But you will not find a single date palm in Garh Narikel.

Vegetables, pickles, chutneys etc. are made from the fruit of the Kadam and eaten. The Gullar tree; vegetables are made from the fruit, rubber is made from the milk, it serves as some medicine for newborns, the leaves are fed to a goat after it gives birth, then the goat gives milk quickly. Chaf bamboo. Three-round mango tree. Doma Bombay mango tree has recently arrived in the village. Tuin; drinking its crushed fruit cures menstrual irregularity and leucorrhea.

Tamarind tree, coconut, neem. Matchsticks are made from the wood of Pithari. The bark of the Peepal tree is used in hoof-disease and medicine is made from its fruit. Peepal tree, Banyan tree.

Small fruits grow on the Banyan tree but they are not eaten. The wood of Barhar is useful and the fruit is eaten. Chilies. Mahua tree.

The wood of Mahua is very good. Oil is made from its fruit and the fruit is eaten. Sarpat is used in reed-fences and it also becomes fuel. There is much heartwood in the Sissoo tree. Hurhur, Sita Sohago.

Kharhi is used in reed-fences etc. The betel vine climbs on the Kharhi; its use is seen in the betel-garden. Kadam tree, carom seeds, ginger.

English babool tree. Elephant foot yam, jackfruit tree, Kadam tree, oleander flower, kaas grass, pumpkin, cactus, kechli, keravir, kesaur, karbir, kharhi. Sajmani tree, tabh lemon, arnad lemon, wood-apple. New budding branch of rose. Gulech. Gullar tree and fruit. Genhari greens, sponge gourd. Moonflower. Chichor grows in the lowlands. Chhatban. Dhatrim with clusters on the branches. Tilkor fruit; it turns red when ripe, given to parrots to eat. Dudhiya plant is beneficial in piles. Thorn-apple plant. Neem tree; a decoction is made from its bark and leaves and drunk, and wounds are washed. Nepali basil. Pointed gourd. There are thorns on the Pasijh tree. Water kesaur grows in the lowlands. Chutney is made from mint leaves,

syrup is made; drinking crushed leaves reduces stomach gas, useful in kidney stones. Horse gram dal tastes good when made with eggplant. Its use prevents stones. Baghandi. Bamboo oidh. Baijantri. Jackfruit-like, banana-like flowers. Now a money plant has arrived; some say keeping it brings money, some say money disappears. Henna leaves, pigeon pea plants on the ridges. Tilkor fruiting on the vine. Croton with red leaves and khamhrua with green leaves.

A decoction of Shyam-basil leaves is beneficial in cold. Sammi. Custard apple, teak leaves.

Sahor tree; its twigs make toothbrushes. It is said that lightning does not fall on the Sahor tree; at the sound of lightning, people shout, "Sahor-Sahor."

Growth is very slow in the Sahor tree. New apple trees and eucalyptus. Kumhi, kechli flowers brought by European women. Farhad tree; tying a piece of Farhad branch in the cattle's trough kills worms or makes them flee.

Menagobi; these leaves are fed to cows and

buffaloes to induce heat if they are not mating on time. Arjuna tree, it has fruits. Jujube. Periwinkle; diabetes patients drink its crushed leaves. Eating the flour of the stone of the jom also benefits diabetes patients. Chichor, a wild plant growing in most of the land in Mithila. Water kesaur.

Ammat is still made.

All these are still in Garh Narikel... not in Balath... Mohan Gabaiyya keeps coming and going to Garh Narikel.

How could the flood finish these trees and plants?

There is some agricultural land near Egachha.

The farming of wheat has also started.

The same method of farming still... but only artificial fertilizer is given. Poison is given in the fields... when Surju brother gives manure, it yields three maunds per kattha, but who would do as much hard work as him, waking up at four in the morning...

A pair of oxen, the plough; the shaft—is

joined to the plough and tied to the yoke.

The pins, the yoke—on the shoulders; two oleander pins in the yoke on both sides do not let the oxen move here and there. Away from the pin, a rope of one and a quarter feet is tied. The rope is tied in the samail (a three-quarter foot wood/bamboo piece). Below the shaft, the petar does not let the shaft open, it allows it to go high and low. In the plough, the putthi, a two-foot iron blade is set in the putthi below, it tears the soil.

The handle—the ploughman puts his hand on it. A three-foot/6-inch grip is fixed in the handle (muthiya). The hitch—is tied and joined in the yoke-shaft, the rope is 4-5 feet. Two maidors (ropes)—two of 10-11 feet—tying these to the leveller and tying them to the oxen, the ploughman uses the leveller. The leveller—(bamboo/wood) 6-7 feet—the ploughman stands on it to level.

In the ploughman's hand, there remains a switch/stick for driving the oxen. The ploughing for wheat is done 3 inches deep with 4-5 tillings. For maize, it has to be done 4-5 inches deep.

Seed—in one acre (100 decimals), 2 maunds of wheat seed, 10 kilos of maize seed. Fertilizer—in an acre 20 kg DAP, 5 kg Potash, 5 kg Urea, 5 kg Zinc are given at the time of sowing wheat. In maize, soil is mounded after it becomes one and a half to two feet high. 2 rows with 2 feet width. 2 quintals of fertilizer are given in an acre. 100 kg DAP, 50 kg Urea, 20 kg Salphic, 120 kg Potash, 10 kg Zinc. At the time of irrigation, we mound the soil after giving fertilizer, then we irrigate. After irrigation, one quintal of urea is given in one acre.

Types of vegetables: Singhiya bitter gourd—large—high break/plain. Small bitter gourd—hajariya/julmi. White bitter gourd—patniya (medium size). Named watermelon—delicious—red inside, white/mottled on top (green-white). Maiko—light black. Pahuja—blackier than maiko. Rajdhani—in black color. Maharaja—large and small in black color. Saini and Sugardibi—of black color. Nath—light mottled (white/green). Gangasagar—clean white like pumpkin. Soraiya—mottled. Cucumber—julmi—small. Hybrid. Maiko—long/green/yellow. Maharaja—cucumber,

agricultural—green in color, less long,
thicker at the back and less at the front.

Catfish, saurbachba, shrimp, kamal kant,
kotari, garchunni, gaichi, chahi, garai, naini,
pothi, biket, buari, bhulla, kaua, derhba fish.

Bhunna, gaichi (gaicha), kabai, tengra, pothi,
shrimp (jhinga), saura, singhi, catfish,
chenga, bachba, chahi, derhba, mara, kotari,
kanti, khursa, naini, dhallai, rebha, lapchi,
bhakur, golhi, darhi, buari, bhonra, tor, hilsa,
patasi, channa, baghari, bamauch, chelha,
sui, silver carp, common carp, biket,
chelhba, rohu, bhunchatti, bhulla. How could
the flood finish these water fish?

Fried chechra kept in a bowl, oil flowed from
the cooked broth, O friend.

Pous is here O friend, the grain is new,
cooked catfish, O friend.

Two of us together kept it in the bowl, now
the life will not survive, O friend.

Magh is here O friend, the cold is heavy,
cooked catfish, O friend.

Two of us together kept it in the bowl, now

the life will not survive, O friend.

Phagun is here O friend, the westerly wind
has arrived, O friend.

The mara fish is being seared, the fire has
started, now the promise will not survive, O
friend.

Chait is here O friend, diseases are on all
sides, taking various forms, O friend.

Fried bhutni cooked fragrant, the doctor
provides medicine, O friend.

The month is here O friend, the month of
Baisakh has arrived, O friend.

The interest and love for fish is gone, now
nothing is needed, O friend.

Jeth is here O friend, cooked bhakur fish, O
friend.

Two of us together kept it in the bowl, now
the life will not survive, O friend.

The month is here O friend, the new Ashadh
has arrived, O friend.

Cooked saur with mango pieces, the broth

became very thick, O friend.

Sawan is here O friend, everything is beautiful, cooked tengra fish, O friend.

Two of us together kept it in the bowl, now the life will not survive, O friend.

Bhadav is here O friend, cooked shrimp with kotari fish, O friend.

Aasin is here O friend, cooked fish-head as a hot offering, O friend.

Kartik is here O friend, garai and gaicha fish have arrived, O friend.

The interest and love for fish is gone, now nothing is needed, O friend.

Stuck in the water, thrashed outside

Sat in the scales, slipped at the market.

Garai is Ganga, kabai is Kashi, if eaten then a resident of Vaikuntha.

In the month of Magh if gaichi is eaten, slipping and sliding one goes to Vaikuntha.

The goari of Jeth, the boari of Magh...

The feet do not touch the ground for all...

Bhulla fish and broth of kabai, for that the
bhulla breaks the beads of the necklace.

No fish without mustard, no merchant
without a pot-belly.

In the month of Magh if catfish is eaten,
slipping and sliding one goes to Vaikuntha.

The head of rohu and the belly of bhunna.

The master eats the head, the slave eats the
tail.

Greens of Sawan, curd of Bhadav, dew of
Aasin, chahi of Kartik

—stay saved.

Birpur is nearby we forgot Janakpur, such a
large Kosi where did we enter.

Kabir says listen O brother saints, nothing
will work without fish.

Millet bread, mara fish.

The meat of snails is eaten as a dish; they are
boiled and sucked out, and after keeping

them in a vessel for five to seven hours, the released water is given to children to drink in case of rickets, and it also benefits in asthma.

Crab. Doka.

But the fish of the Dakahi pond has stopped. Because of the flood the fish flee, so the villagers planted fox-nuts (makhana) in it. And since fox-nut was farmed, the fish in the pond ended.

The month is here O friend, pleasant Agahan, with roasted flattened rice, O friend.

Fried chechra fish is crunchy, the mind feels full of intoxication, O friend.

Pous is here O friend, new grain with catfish broth, O friend.

The kabai is crunchy, biting under the teeth it makes a sound, O friend.

In the Magh clouds the cold makes the body shiver strongly, O friend.

Seeing the piece of dried boari, the mind is overwhelmed with joy, O friend.

The taste of fish increased, cooked tengra

with mixed rice, O friend.

Chait is here O friend, diseases all day,
seeing various forms, O friend.

Fried bhunna kept in a bowl, eating it one
feels great happiness, O friend.

The month is here today, the very hot
Baisakh, O friend.

The mind's interest in fish is gone, taste
pieces of sugar-candy every day, O friend.

Jeth is here O friend, the rain falls below, the
head of bhakur on a leaf, O friend.

It will fall and be forgotten, come and slip,
make the new rice, O friend.

The clouds O friend rain in Ashadh where the
branch of the mango tree, O friend.

Breaking the raw mangoes, put the saura in
the bowl, O friend.

The month is here O friend, Sawan has come,
filled with eggs and neck, O friend.

Fried darhi fish and mara, eat to the full
stomach, O friend.

In Bhadav shrimp was found, eating it I filled
the storehouse, O friend.

The month of Aasin, worship of gods, sound
of conch and bell, O friend.

Cooked rohu fish, sitting to eat the offering
is complete, O friend.

The month of Kartik, millet in the garden,
very fried and unique, O friend.

The twelve months are complete, Harinath
sang with pride, O friend.

Kabir also says—

With millet and fish, servant Kabir has said,

All saints join and eat, the body becomes
pure.

Darhi is mercy to the body, very digestive,
pothiya is the support of life.

Naini is the name of Narayana, the saintly
saura is generous.

Dhalai fish is the pilgrimage of Janakpur,
kabai is Kashi with folded hands.

Shrimp is the greatness of Prayag water,

singhi is a resident of Mathura.

From khursa to Kurukshetra and Dwarika,
Mathura is like heaven.

Rohu, rewa, tengra, buari, gaichi read the
Quran.

Bhakur is the Lord, crosses the ocean of
existence, chelhwa boards the airplane.

Giving fish in all pilgrimages, he gets the
bath in Ganga.

The fruit of the world, Jagadamba redeems,
all joined together eat the world.

If oil falls on the head of rohu, it wins over
Indra by pushing even heaven.

Even in that if mango-pieces are added, what
is Kashi that comes to the house?

Fish is also caught with a fishing rod.

For small fish, a net—the bhourī net—is
used. The bhirka is lifted by hand and
thrown. Yarn and iron pellets are used in it;
iron pellets of 25 grams each, about 2.5 to 5
kilos, are used. The anta net is small and is

set at the bank at night. The kothi net is large and bamboo is used in it. The bisari net; the fish will be startled during the day, so it is set with stakes at night and fish are caught at night. The chatti net—of plastic, both large and small, used during the day, in both Ashadh and Sawan, lifted in 5-10 minutes. There is a thick parachute net of yarn, a current net of a mixture of yarn and nylon, and a large hata net of yarn. Small fish will fly away from the parachute. Large fish are caught with a large rod, large chatti net, and the great net of yarn. Both large and small fish are caught with a bamboo jangha. It is tied with a 4-cubit standing coconut and nylon rope. Fish are also caught with the tip of a bamboo splinter. Fish are also caught by putting 100-200 bundles of jute sticks together. The hata net is as large as a kilometer and is made of yarn. The chanch kahra is of bamboo. They are caught by encircling the stream/channel. Moving the water, a basket is set, encircled by bamboo splinters.

Danra fish (derka fish), munha fish, pothi, latta (pia fish), garai, palva, tengra, singhi, catfish, chapra, paina, rewa, garahi, urantha,

mohul, buari, eel, baghar, chelwa, kauwal, gorra, saul, bhoura, kajal, kalbaus, chittal, bhoi, katti, bhaukuri, silon, rohu, mirka, grass carp, silver carp, China catfish, kabai, China kabai.

Darba—small, thin—2-3 inches, black on the back, white on the sides. Garai—black; chopra—wide, black, dull; palba—thorns on both sides, also thorns on the back, color—yellow-white, it also has a mustache. Tengra—large fish, it also has three thorns, mustache on the mouth. Singhi—thin, two thorns on both sides, red in color and red and light black. Catfish—thick and also expensive. It also has two thorns, red and light black. Paina—white in color, thorns on the back. Rewa—white, quarter to half a kilo. Darhi—thorns on the back, white. Urantha—thorns on the back, bent downwards, white. Bhalu—long mouth, white-standing (yellow), thorns on top, thorns near the navel (in all fish). Boali—large mouth—up to 20 kilos, white, thorns on the back, fins on both sides (in all fish). Eel—long, lives in holes, mouth in front, round mouth, long like a needle, thorns on the back, two thorns on the navel. Baghar—small, from 1 quarter to a

quintal, black-brown (yellow), thorns—one on the back, two on the sides, tail-wide, mouth flat, width—more.

Chelba—white, no thorns, fins on both sides for moving, fast among fish. Kauai—white, mouth long. Gorra—mustache, beard, thorns, bent in front.

Saul—red and yellow, long, 2-3-5 kilos. Bhoura (gajal), saul, mottled, large up to 20-25-40 kilos, round-round white, green and black. Kalbaus—color light black. Guessed fish. Chittal—more wide, of 20-25 kilos, 2-3 feet wide.

Silon—domesticated, of 3-4 kilos, reared in ponds. Rohu—yellow, light white, thorns on the back. Mirka—light red white. Silver carp—domesticated. China catfish—imported (domesticated), thorns on both sides. China kabai—domesticated (imported), thorns here and there on the back. Kabai—thorns on both the gill and the back. Chenga fish—goes far even in dry conditions, like kabai. Some other aquatic animals—Gangetic dolphin—eats fish in water, no harm to humans, plays with humans, whistle sound (dolphin). Gharial—

in Ganga near Kursela, mouth long, one to one and a half cubits, teeth—like fingers, color red, tail long, 3 cubits. Bonch—color and form like a human, black, hair on the head—drowns by catching the hair.

But trucks upon trucks of fish arrive from Andhra.

Arsi—the fish-trap is still there.

Mortar. It is still there.

The field is still ploughed with the cultivator.

The kothi basket and the rod, the fish-catching rod with the basket.

With tape, compass and scales, with chain, segments and paper-pencil, Gul Hassan used to measure land. Fish is caught with a rod like an iron broom, fish is trapped with haffa and type. There is tiari, a fish-catching snare. Fishing rod.

Grain is still kept in the granary.

Clay stove still.

Grain is still kept in the large basket.

Hookah. Small baskets, large baskets.

Wood is cut with a saw. The chisel is also called rukhan. Making holes in wood is its main job. Khatkas is the tool for marking on wood. The auger is used for making holes in wood. The block plane is the tool for cleaning planks. The firming chisel is also called batari; making joints is the main job of this tool. Jharikas, mark is given with this tool to cut the groove-joint of the frame. Marking is done on the door-panels and frame with a string. The angle of the wood is straightened with the plane. Batam is the tool for correcting the angle of the frame, door, cot, bed etc. The drill is the tool for making holes in wood. The adze, along with cutting and trimming, hewing the wood is the main job of this tool. It is also called a hammer. It is a tool used in many jobs like hammering nails etc. Iron plane, a tool for planing planks, frames etc. The anvil is the main tool of the blacksmith; any iron is first heated in the bellows, placed on the anvil and struck with a hammer to make things. The bellows is the blacksmith's machine.

Axe, small axe still.

The sickle is sharpened with a chisel. Naberī,
a vessel for keeping water to temper tools.
Pattar, the sickle is placed on this plate and
sharpened.

Tools are sharpened on the stone. A large
punch makes holes in thick iron. Iron is cut
with a large chisel. The adze is the tool for
hewing wood. File—the sickle, trowel, chisel
etc. are filed with this file to make them
sharp. Pliers are used to catch hot iron. A
punch is the tool for making holes in iron.

The flood could not finish all this.

But now the most rotten calf is set free and
by branding him he is made a bull, and this
is spoiling the breed.

The town-crier still sounds.

Bamboo bridge.

Wooden cart.

Crows everywhere. Don't know where the
native crows have gone. The city crows have
probably killed them.

Arrai Danga in Malda, everyone spoke

Maithili. In that area Bengali is taught and children now speak Bengali, not Maithili.

Between the two embankments is the Guartoli. Previously this was a quarter of the village but now the voters' list here has gone to Jhanjharpur market. When the voting booth was at the village school before, long ago, they were not allowed to vote. Now it is the opposite.

After the embankments were built, the lands of Banraha village have also become expensive. Earlier when a matchmaker came, even if he saw ten katthas on a boy of this village and one bigha share on a boy of Banraha village, he still made the alliance in this village. Because even with a share of ten bighas of field in Banraha village, living was difficult. But now their fortune has opened, the lands of that village are high, so when the flood comes, their fields get irrigated.

And since no one used to do teaching before, all the Banrahas became teachers. And now look at the teacher's salary. When all the Banrahas go out wearing washed dhotis, the bodies of these villagers burn. Of these villagers means the people of Garh Narikel.

Kunjra quarter on the pitched road. The people of Miantoli have got their names recorded in the voters' list of the neighboring village.

The quarter of the Malliks is also there. The reason for getting the name recorded in the voters' list of the neighboring village is the same reason why Guartoli is no longer in the voters' list of this village.

But a village is hardly made of a voters' list.

How many types of paddy varieties still grow...

Who knows for how long they will...

Painjhali, sorna, sita, jaya, singra, karravati, kalyani, kasahan, malida (paddy black fragrant, awned, plant also fragrant), bhathanni (thick grain, in low land), bakke, sugava, kherha (awn in paddy, thick grain), ranga, panjhali (long grain bent in front), chinma, sathi, dasariya, chananchur, kariakamor (paddy black fragrant), basmansuri (thick, half-ripe), kanchi mansuri, mansuri, dhusri, ramdulari, mamai, shukla, jagarnathiya, jasua, thirty-four,

thirty-six, najir, jalli, dabra, R-R eight, sonalika, pankaj, parmali.

Now garma (summer) paddy has also arrived among the crops of Mithila. Paddy gets ready in Agahan, bhada in Bhada and now in the month of Chait-Baisakh garma paddy has started growing in the marshy land.

Rice of gaddari (wild grass) is made and its cooked rice too, but this is not gaddari paddy. By the way, cooked rice is made of wheat too.

Skimmed milk has arrived in the village. Butter is removed by the machine. Milk goes into the machine two or three times. The curd of skimmed milk is thin and sour.

In 1936-37, the people of Bhojpur-Buxar also fled from Burma and came to Purnia, Araria; Hari Babu of Dumraon had settled them in Burma and after the separation of Burma from India, these people came to this region as refugees. You will find many Burma quarters in these areas. In this region, they also had a hold on agriculture and commerce. Among the migrations in Mithila, following the creation of Bangladesh in

1971, the Hindus there came to Kishanganj and later the Muslims there came to Purnia and Kishanganj. This internal migration against the external migration affected everything, including the speech of Mithila. Caste and religion-based marriages among Muslims, Rajputs, and Bhumihars started happening outside the geographical boundaries of Mithila; from that too, the difference in speech became visible.

The migration that occurred over a period of thirty years emptied the villages of Mithila.

The Mahatma Gandhi Setu built on the Patna in 1981 and the rows of Patna-Darbhanga deluxe coaches contributed to the crowds of Mithila residents going out. The failure of the governments of that time in the political, economic, educational, social, and cultural fields did form a basis; the thirty years after independence also drew a dividing line between the Mithila in Bihar and the Maithili-speaking area in Nepal. The Kamala embankment built in 1960 and the still incomplete Kosi project shattered the rural economic base of Mithila. There is also a fundamental difference between the ancient

migration and today's migration. The Maithil Brahmins and Karna Kayasthas of Mithila used to go since ancient times for the display of their scholarship, teaching-learning, and for livelihood in the courts of other kings; while the non-Maithil Brahmin-Karna Kayastha castes traveled to distant lands for commerce, bodyguard duties etc. In ancient times, Morang and later Bhadohi became centers for buying the labor of Mithila's workers, but in this, Morang falls in the Mithilanchal of Nepal, yet it started being called an exile because the rulers there had become non-Maithil Gurkhas.

Stratification within the caste, difference of opinion between two castes, polygamy, child marriage, mercenary marriage.

Not even a symbolic movement happened against child marriage and in favor of widow remarriage. When the Shudra poet Ailush wrote Vedic hymns, that society was so strong that Alexander had to face stiff resistance from the Shudra clans. In the context of Mithila too, when its craftsmen and all the so-called lower-level people of society were strong, then Janaka was named from jana (people) and then a chain of

Simraunagarh, Pajebagarh, Balirajpur fort, Asurgarh fort, Jaynagar fort, Nandangarh, Katragarh, Naulagarh, Mangalgarh, Kichakgarh, Benugarh, Varijanganarh, etc. was revealed as the architectural art of Mithila. And these forts were in accordance with the naming of Mithila as one who churns the enemy. Buddhist caves, idols of Tara etc. are also present as discussions of other forms of craft art. But this fanaticism kept increasing and today achievement in the name of architecture has become zero in Mithila. The economic condition became such that people started fasting one evening. Migration stopped starvation but at some cost. Similarly, a learned woman like Maitreyi remained vanished for millennia due to caste fanaticism (both internal stratification within a caste and between two castes). The decline of education was such that out of the six philosophies, four philosophies emerged from Mithila, but today village after village is full of those who do not pass the matriculation exam.

The area toward Kusheshwarsthan remains submerged even without floods, during the rainy season. But this situation is after 1978-

79. Earlier that area was fully fertile, but with the uncontrolled construction of embankments in India, the accumulation of water started there.

But no news of the floods in that area ever comes; if it ever comes, it is only this propaganda that all this water is the accumulation of water released from Nepal.

The people toward Kusheshwarsthan learned the art of fighting this new crisis.

To go from Kusheshwarsthan to Mahishi Uguratara Sthan, one is told to come during the flood season because it is easy to go by boat then. In the dry season, the boat cannot move in the ditches and puddles and don't even ask about the condition of the road. The form of the crop changed; by doing fish farming somehow or other, this region forcibly learned an art of living. The wrath of the Kaushiki queen in 2008 came to the fore.

The Second Petal

Ghenghi has died. Before leaving, she deeded all her land to Gauri Shankar Sthan.

Public hearings still happen there today.

The school is running on that.

Mukhdev has set up camp in the sugarcane factory.

And Mukhdev continues telling stories...

He continues singing songs...

It is a talk of old times...

There was King Daksha of Garh Narikel.

King???? Listen friend, there used to be a king in our village before, that's why "Garh" (fort) is attached to the name...

The children of Garh Narikel are gathered outside the factory... to hear a story from Mukhdev...

...That king was very powerful. But there was no market in his kingdom. The king thought, how will a market be held in my

kingdom? So the king had drums beaten in his kingdom that a market would be held in my kingdom and whatever goods of anyone were not sold, I would buy them. People of the whole kingdom started coming and holding the market. In this way, every day whatever goods remained in the market, the king would buy them.

Many days passed like this. Once a thread-seller came there to sell thread, but by then the market had ended and his thread was not sold. The king bought his thread.

But from the day the king bought the thread, his condition started declining. After a few days, the king's condition became like that of a poor man. The king said to his wife—Ambika, listen. Poverty has spread in our kingdom. Now our kingdom is no longer fit to live in.

From there the king departed and while going reached some country.

The name of that country was Garh Pingal.

Not Garh Arnadneba... no friend...

The name of the king there was also based on

the country. Wandering around, the king of Garh Narikel reached that city of King Garh Pingal and started saying, O brother, will someone keep me in a job?

The king said—Yes. I need a servant. Keep him.

King Garh Pingal had a hundred servants and he needed one more servant because he had 101 horses. He stayed at the king's place and every day started going for the horses' grass and started bringing grass after scything it.

The wife of King Daksha of Garh Narikel was pregnant and the wife of King Garh Pingal was also pregnant. And it was such a coincidence that the wives of both kings gave birth to children on the same day.

The King of Pingal called a Brahmin and had the astrology checked and the king named his daughter and said, why is her name Maduvan?

The Brahmin said that her marriage will happen on the sixth night.

From that day, the king grew tired of

searching in his kingdom but he did not find him. The king's maidservant said, why do you all worry? The servant the King Saheb kept last time, a boy has been born at his place. Let the marriage be done with him. That child's name according to the zodiac sign was Dholan by the king.

The King of Garh Pingal thought this is a very good thing, since he is nearby, let the marriage be done with him. Since the day was already fixed, the marriage was done on that sixth night. After a few days, King Daksha said, now it is not fit to stay here. Now we should go to our own country.

The camel on which the king had come, he said to that camel—Sadhin, now walk to our country. Now the king-queen-child departed mounted on the camel. Going some distance on the way, they found a forest. In that forest by the side of the road was a pond. On the embankment of that pond lived a pair of tiger and tigress. The king thought, when our children go to their in-laws by this road, then this tiger will eat our children. Therefore it will be right to kill it. The king killed the tiger and as he moved forward, the tigress said, King, just as you are making me a widow,

similarly when your son goes to his in-laws, I too will make his wife a widow in the kingdom of Garh Pingal.

Only the king and the camel heard this voice of the tigress. Reaching his home, the king told this talk to no one. He put his camel in a large pit dug out because by staying outside she would tell this talk to his child.

At that same time, he gave that small boy to the gardener-woman Hareba-Pareba of his garden. Both his sisters started serving him very well. As days passed like this, this child became capable and even then he knew nothing.

Over there that girl Maduvan also grew up. When the girl became young, while wandering with her friends, some companion said to her, O sister. Now you have become capable. Your father is not thinking anything about your marriage. Hearing this, the girl became very worried. Going to her palace, she lay on the bed and gave up eating. Upon this, her mother went to the girl and said, daughter, why are you not eating food?

The girl said—Mother. The friends pester me

very much. Therefore I do not feel hungry.

The mother said—What do they say to pester you?

The girl said—They say to me, what does your father lack, that your father is not getting you married?

The mother said—Daughter, your marriage was done on the sixth night. Your in-laws are in Garh Narikel. Don't know why they don't come?

Hearing this, the girl said, get a house built for me on the bank of the Jamuna and arrange everything. I will distribute alms for twelve years. Hearing this much, the king did the same. The girl Maduvan started distributing alms on the bank of the Jamuna.

Banjara traders were going from Garh Narikel to Garh Pingal for commerce. When the Banjaras reached Garh Pingal, they were moving forward along the bank of the Jamuna stream. While going they reached that place where the girl Maduvan was distributing alms.

That girl asked—Where are you all going

and from where have you come?

The Banjara said—We have come from Garh Narikel and we do commerce of diamonds and pearls in Garh Pingal.

The girl said—When you return after doing commerce, will you take a letter of mine?

The Banjara said—You keep the letter written, we will surely take it.

When the Banjara returned, he took the letter and left, and when he reached Garh Narikel, the two sisters who were Hareba-Pareba—and were very great sorceresses—finding out by the power of magic, they informed the king and taking that letter from the Banjara, they burnt it in the fire and did not let the king's son know about it.

This letter of the girl was destroyed. She, poor thing, kept waiting. Some days passed. That girl had reared a parrot.

She asked the parrot—Can you take my letter?

The parrot said—Yes. I will give the letter to the king.

The girl, writing the letter, hung it around the parrot's neck and said—Go.

The parrot departed from there. The parrot departed flying in the sky and reached the Garh Narikel kingdom where Hareba-Pareba and King Dholan lived. Flying, the parrot sat on his shoulder, and cut the thread with his beak and dropped it. At that time, Hareba-Pareba were sitting in King Dholan's garden. It was the winter season. They were sitting by lighting a fire. As soon as it dropped the letter, the gardener-woman put that letter into the fire.

King Dholan felt very angry. He gave two slaps each to both and said, both of you leave from here. Both sisters caught him and started placating him.

That letter of the girl was also finished.

The girl became very worried. Much more time passed.

One day a great soul in the form of a yogi was going along the bank of the Jamuna. The girl's gaze fell on that great soul. The girl was very worried and was crying. That holy man came hearing the girl's crying and asked the

reason.

The girl told the whole story.

The great soul said, you write a letter and give it to me and I will deliver that letter there.

The girl, writing the letter, gave it to the great soul. The great soul departed from there.

The girl gave the great soul ganja, bhang, and opium. Eating and drinking, the great soul departed from there. After a few days, the great soul reached Garh Narikel, where Hareba-Pareba and King Dholan lived. He set up his camp in the middle of the garden. It was the night time. It was about to be morning. At that time, the great soul took out an enchanting flute and started playing. Hearing the sound of that flute, King Dholan woke up and as he got ready to walk, both sisters used a lot of magic-spells on that flute. But nothing went wrong for the great soul. King Dholan woke up and giving two kicks each to both, went to the great soul. The holy man took out that letter and gave it to King Dholan.

And reading that, King Dholan became extremely poisoned with rage and went home from there and taking a sword started asking his father, tell me where my marriage has been done? The father remembered that tigress, so he told a lie and said, I have not had you married.

Being filled with rage, he placed that letter before the king. The king became very worried reading that.

He said to his son. See son. I had you married on the sixth night and I did not perform the gauna (bringing the bride) because while returning I had killed a tiger. Then he told the whole story and said, that out of fear he did not have his gauna performed.

Dholan said—Where is my mount? Give my mount.

The king said—The camel is under the floor. Whether she is alive or dead, I don't know.

When King Dholan brought the camel out from under the floor, worms had infested the camel's body. He cleaned her and fed her grain and snacks. By feeding her, she became healthy as before.

King Dholan said—Sadhin, your feet have been tied for many days. If you cover the path of fourteen leagues in one day in four gallops, then I will know. We will reach Garh Pingal again. The camel made her pace in one day. King Dholan departed for his in-laws. Mounted on the camel, he took the gun on his shoulder and departed.

While walking he reached that same forest. They were going by the same road where that tigress lived. King Dholan saw the tigress and killed that tigress. Then he went to his in-laws in Garh Pingal and set up camp in the flower garden. Leaving the camel there, he broke and destroyed the flower garden.

The gardener-woman said, I will have you beaten by the king and I will take compensation for as much destruction as you have caused.

King Dholan said—Go, do whatever you have to do.

The gardener-woman departed in anger and went to the king. She told the king.

The king asked, where is he from.

The gardener-woman said that he has told his home as Garh Narikel.

The king sent his soldiers.

They asked Dholan—Where are you from and from where have you come?

Dholan said—My home is Garh Narikel and I have come to my in-laws in Garh Pingal.

The soldiers went and told this talk to the king.

The king welcomed him with joy and seating Dholan in a palanquin brought him to his home. After a few days, the king saw off his daughter and son-in-law from Garh Pingal for Garh Narikel. From there King Dholan and that girl Maduvan went to their home and started ruling.

Then when did this king's throne go?

Where did the fort vanish?

What concern does the vanished fort have with Narikel?

Everything has changed but the village is the same Garh Narikel. Clear...

The tendency to look back...

In Sawan-Bhadav, when there is grass and more grass for grazing, one gets lost, because no matter how much one grazes, on looking back one sees grass and more grass, it seems to him that nothing has been grazed.

Now instead of whispering, games like geni dipped in kerosene, ludo, hide-and-seek, dais kos single bulbul master, cricket, volleyball, badminton have also arrived.

Grasshopper, butterfly, tukili, green-colored "Hanuman ji's horse"—a grasshopper, like a JCB machine, it seems this machine was built seeing this—all these are still in Garh Narikel.

From Aasin to Magh, dew falls. In Baisakh there is no grass but the donkey gets fat, looking back one does not see a single blade of grass, it seems to him that he has grazed plenty.

Very few people used to grow wheat.

Previously it yielded five seers per kattha, now it yields a maund per kattha. Singh-ji of

the government agriculture office in Jhanjharpur taught the villagers the new method of wheat farming.

After ploughing and making furrows, after sowing the seed in it, then on the twenty-second day when the plants emerged, Singh-ji spreads urea. Lush green plants emerge. The whole Garh Narikel gathers. Singh-ji also got the permit for urea issued. The villagers are bringing urea filled in tyre-carts.

Mohan Gabaiyya opposes pesticides and urea by singing songs; fie, this Mohan Gabaiyya opposes everything by singing songs.

But some things he is saying correctly. It is poison after all, this new fertilizer. It's hardly stronger than cow-dung manure. But if wheat is a new crop, the fertilizer is also new!

Mukhdev is saying, you will see there will be a shortage of pulses and oil, wheat will be farmed and pulses and oil will have to be bought from the market.

In wheat farming, there is so much expense in fertilizer-seed-pesticide and irrigation that there is a loss in share-cropping, but there is

savings in paddy. So if one doesn't do wheat, one won't get land for paddy farming on share-cropping either. So one has to do wheat farming.

How does all of this Mukhdev's talk turn out to be correct?

The Third Petal

A handful of rice.

Even now, a "handful of rice" is kept aside while putting water on the stove in Mithila. And it is given to beggars. After threshing and winnowing, the "first-share" is kept. Bauku brother weighs it, that share is given to him.

How could the flood finish all this...

The people of Garh Narikel. Waist like a fist,
head like a large basket, eyes like a snail,
curly hair hanging on the cheeks, chest like a
washerman's plank, teeth blackened with
tobacco, trimmed nose, one-and-a-quarter
cubit twisted mustache, ears like a
winnowing fan, muscular arms.

Just like that...

Nine yards long, seven yards wide. Doing the
sixteen adornments and the thirty-two
ornaments.

A twenty-two cubit shawl, pachua dhoti,
twenty-two yard wrap, a palm-wood stick of
twelve paseri (sixty seers).

Just like that... this and that...

The people of Garh Narikel.

Black and also fair.

Trimmed nose and also flat.

Straight hair and also curly.

Blackened teeth and also teeth like a hoe.

Sixteen yard pachua dhoti and also loincloth
and strip of cloth.

Just like that...

People see Mohan Gabaiyya, old and frail...

Singing songs... telling stories... laughing
and talking... the joy of Garh Narikel... the
joy of the people there...

Engrossed in his work.

People talk among themselves... how old
would he be...

Friend, he would surely be about a hundred
years old. Because of the glory of such
people, the village does not drown.

No matter how much flood comes...

Such people do not die... they only keep
singing songs. And even if Mukhdev Ram
dies, then another Mukhdev Ram Gabaiyya
will take birth in Garh Narikel, who will keep
singing for the rights of the deprived... for
many hundreds of years... and more.

Mukhdev never even told the tale of the

Thousand-Headed One.....

Sahasra Shirsha

A thousand heads, a thousand mouths, a
thousand kinds of talk-stories, truth and...|

Om, Sahasra-shirsha purushah.
Sahasrakshah sahasra-pat.

A thousand heads, a thousand eyes, with a
thousand feet, he has covered the universe;
he is not within the control of the count of ten
fingers.

Padbhyagam shudro ajayata.

From the feet, the Shudra was born.

Padbhyam bhumirdishah shrotrat.

But from the feet, the Earth too was born.

Om Dyauh shantirantariksha gvang shantih

(May there be peace in the sky, peace in the
atmosphere)

(May there be success, it is accomplished)

