

## The anguish of creation

I was driving the other evening when a car in front of me suddenly flashed its warning lights once and came to a sudden halt. I, too, applied the brake immediately. I observed that we had come to a traffic signal; the red light was on. I changed gear and waited. I noticed that the car in front was a cream-coloured Fiat covered with a layer of dust. The luggage rack on top was loaded. It could be seen through the rear window that the back of the car was also stuffed with boxes, baskets and packets. Surely, they were coming from a distant place. A chequered, woollen coat at the steering wheel and above that a head of hair – it looked kind of familiar. Through the glass, sitting on the left side of the back seat, could also be seen a girl, whose cascading open hair was held together in the middle by a purple, plastic ring and beneath her mass of black hair a light, purple shawl. The girl rested her right hand on the driver's seat. Her full and fair hand stood out against the blue seat-cover. The pair of bangles looked a part of her beautiful, rounded-hand. Light fell at some point on the ring on her hand and through some gap in her hair on her earring making both of them sparkle. In the cornice of the window there were a few small packets, a few oranges and beside that a pair of knitting needles and a half knitted something in pink – looked like booties or a bonnet or some such things...

The light had turned amber; I got ready to step on the accelerator. "Looks familiar – isn't it Matin Ahmed? I had heard that he had married a couple of years ago. That Nazmina Khatun? Oh yes, most likely it was Nazmina. I had heard that she was extremely beautiful and whatever little I could make out from the back it looked like she was indeed very beautiful - at least very healthy..."

The light had changed to green – I blew the horn – "Nazmina hails from Nagaon, doesn't she? That means Matin's in-laws are from Nagaon which means they are coming from there. Perhaps they had broken journey at a few places. In between she must have knitted – Girls! What not they do. Even in the darkness, while watching movies, they go clickety-click with their needles..."

I blew the horn – but the car in front did not move ahead. Cars began streaming down from the opposite direction but the car ahead simply made a choking sound, rrrr...rrr..., and stopped. It didn't start. "I have work, I am getting late." I got slightly impatient. At the back a line of cars impatiently blew their horns; rickshaws and pushcarts, scooters and motorbikes were slowly gathering. They frequently blew their horns. Teet – Teeeet –

The girl leisurely turned her head around and looked backwards through the rear glass. I was preparing to blow the horn loudly. A ray of light dispersed from her radiant face and fell on my fingers which were resting on the horn, forcing them into stillness. A little startled, I kept on looking. There was sweet joy writ on her schoolgirl like pure and immature oval face, but on her completely unpretentious and poised pair of lips there was a half-open sweet smile. Her elongated, dream-filled, half-open pair of eyes fluttered as if engrossed in some other world. Her mystifying smile seemed to be saying, "What amusing things keep occurring" or some declaration like this. I had just heard about her beauty but there was no doubt now, this must be Nazmina – perhaps not the face that launched a thousand ships but surely the face that silenced a hundred motorcar horns.

Teeeeeet –Teeeeeet...

The jammed cars made a shrill, reverberating noise in protest. The car was unable to start. Nazmina once again turned her head towards the front and once again within my view is the long hair held together by the purple, plastic ring. "What funny things keep occurring" – Oh as if for Nazmina these things are not deserving of being worried about; she remained as if untouched by the snarling traffic and traffic jams; she was as if engrossed in

some other world and these were but some petty and unnecessarily troublesome situations, some passing trivial problems that were not unexpected. She got occupied with some other concern, as if she was composing something on her own.

Composing something on her own –

Unexpectedly, as if receiving an electric shock, I realised that after arriving at the traffic signal I too was composing something on my own - something which was yet shapeless as of now, something still formless, still unconstructed, and completely vague; but something was being created. I had heard a lot of things from here and there about Matin and Nazmina, a heap of romance packed incidents, everything very romantic - various narratives – suddenly all these treasured raw material were being reinvented and something new was shaping up, a foetus, a body; it contained some sort of story within it. This car malfunctioning, this halted traffic flow, this unexpected situation, this guilty cheerless face; some story was taking shape out there.

Hoot – hoot – hoot –

Vroom! An auto rickshaw came out of somewhere and tried to unsuccessfully go past Matin's car, almost brushing against it. The driver looked angrily at the car. Looking foolish and perplexed Matin – it was Matin Ahmed – got down from the car and looked at the disorderly and disgruntled traffic. A policeman was coming towards him from somewhere with an overworked, annoyed look. Pointing his cane at the gathering traffic he told Matin something with urgency, Matin also desperately pointed towards his car and his gestures seemed to indicate that he was helpless since his car would not start. Having no other alternative, the policeman summoned a rickshaw puller from the traffic and the two of them together push the car. Matin controlled the steering wheel from outside through the driver's seat. In this manner, the three of them pushed the car to the front of a shop on the side of the street. Not going ahead I too drove my car in between a motorcycle and a push-cart laden with tin sheets and parked it behind Matin's car. Finding the road clear the cars whooshed past. The rickshaw puller went and mounted his rickshaw. The policeman having nothing more to do hurriedly entered the dark traffic control room to direct the traffic gathering on the road located perpendicularly.

Meanwhile, the traffic light turned red again – this time the traffic was flowing from the perpendicular road. I got down from the car and walked towards Matin.

"Hello, what's up?"

Matin turned round. His face showed relief on seeing me.

"Oh buddy -you! What ill luck! The battery is down. I had charged it just the other day. There must be some kind of a short circuit somewhere. If I switch on the light for some time the battery gets discharged. I have come all the way, so far - from Nagaon – no trouble at all. After entering the city I had to switch on the light for a while and the battery goes down."

"Oh the battery is down? You are coming from Nagaon?"

"Oh shucks! Just see - I have not even realised." Hurriedly Matin continued speaking, "Don't mind, brother. You have seen what a fix I have gotten into in this jam. Mina - you have not met him. She is my counterpart, my wife."

There was no leisure for courtesy in such a chaotic situation. I raised my hands hesitantly to give a kind of uncertain *namaskar* and smiled a sweet smile. Nazmina pushed her head a little out of the car towards me. She had a rug and two medium sized packets on her lap and her left hand was trapped beneath that. Nazmina raised the right hand which the shawl had not covered and with it she hesitantly acknowledged my greetings and coyly smiled at me. The car once again seemed to brighten up by a flash of light. I could smell a sweet scent. I noticed amongst the luggage on the seat a large, red leather deluxe handbag and an unopened illustrated magazine. For a moment I felt as if this was a glimpse of the inner room of a palace where Nazmina reigned as the *Begum*, Her incomplete bust in the window frame astonished and compelled one to think – "so full and such high abundance."

I turned to other things: such overflowing health and such rounded hands, face and body. But instantly I could understand that these were all superfluous; Nazmina's real radiance lay in her beautiful, distant eyes.... Looking troubled and perplexed and beating his cane against his palm, the policeman once again came back. "Eh! You have not yet been able to take away your car. What are you saying; you have not yet been able to get it started. But you cannot park it here. This is a no parking zone."

"Let's push it," I said.

"Oh I think there is no other alternative; we will have to push it," Matin said. "One push will get it started. But I will have to sit at the steering. The car is so loaded; and over and above she is also there. You will not be able to push it alone. We'll need at least another person."

This time I was really irritated. "Your romance may be super-romantic; your wife maybe super-delicate, like a flower, but your honeymoon period is long past. Is it necessary to keep your wife so daintily inside the car without allowing her to step onto the dusty street? In such traffic jams even Julius Ceaser would have to "Id Cleopatra, "Cleo, my love. Will you get down from the chariot for a minute? Let me get my chariot started." "

The policeman said, "Alright, let me also give it a push along with him. But please clear the car from here, Sir and shifting the cane to his other hand he got ready to push. I saw Nazmina summon Matin with a slight nod of the head. From what I could make out of their gestures from a distance, Nazmina seemed to be saying, "let me get down also." Matin frowned as if to say, "Will you be able? Sure nothing will happen?" Nazmina smiled slightly and said, "What kind of a person are you? What can possibly happen? Just one push and it will be done. It will take half a minute only."

Compelled but unwilling Matin opened the door and extended his hand towards her. Removing shawl, rug, clothes and many big and small packets Nazmina accepted Matin's hand and got down from the car. Matin tenderly helped her on to the footpath in front of the shop and said, "You stand here for a minute only; it will be done in a jiffy."

Whatever I saw I saw right away; I did not turn to look again. I understood that the reason for her round swollen look was very much natural. Matin quickly came near us and turning his head away from the policeman spoke very rapidly in a lowered voice, "You understand brother. I am quite apprehensive; she cannot be allowed to get up and down very frequently in this condition. She is into the ninth month, very critical stage. She had gone to her mother's house, the doctor out there said, perhaps she will have to be hospitalised in a day or two. You know Dr. Borbora - he had told us that he would fix up a paying cabin for us out here. Without delaying any further I have brought her back from my in-laws place. I have not been able to introduce her properly to you. Don't mind. You have seen what a mess I am in. Later, I will take her to your place one day. Now her movements are completely restricted. The doctor has asked us to see that she does not go through any kind of strain....

Nodding my head I got ready to push the car. Matin sat himself on the driver's seat at the steering-wheel. Again I caught sight of the oranges and the knitting material; a half knitted something for a baby - on the cornice of the rear seat. Nazmina's dream covered eyes, her absent minded look, her colour-filled, radiant inner world her separate world filled with assorted joy, some anxiety, some uneasiness, several preparation - special food, special habits, special exercise, new routine, new room arrangement, needle work, woollen clothes, woollen socks are definitely connected with this small creation; But "anguish?" Here there was no trace of anguish. Even I had an idea striking my mind; arriving at the red light even I felt a joy arising in me. Immediately certain doubts pressed down upon me. Would it materialise? Would it be fruitful? Would I be able to express it on paper? If it turned out to be ridiculous? If it turned out to be utter nonsense? If it turned out to be completely boring? Abandoning my important work for this call of cerebral adventure I stopped my car at a traffic signal. What was the need for me to get down to push somebody else's car? Here all the words were integrated - wish, joy, doubt, discipline, zeal, outburst, anxiety,

uneasiness, worries, everything – Whatever Nazmina was going through I was going through the same. Anguish was the only thing that there was absolutely no trace of. On the one hand there was the policeman and on the other I was pushing Martin's car dodging all the disorganized traffic and thinking all the while who was it who had discovered about the "anguish of creation?" At the time of creation, perhaps, there would truly be some pain. Perhaps in the last couple of days even after a lot of care in the paying ward Nazmina would suffer some pain and agony just like that which I suffer when I begin to write. I get cramps on my leg from continuous sitting, my head starts aching, my eyes burn and my fingers pain. My plight is like that of the poor writer of Europe whose predicament I have heard about. Outside his room it is snowing, inside poor fellow he has no coal to light a fire. He is shivering in the cold and trying to write. These problems will be there, this anguish will be there but it is a fall out of the main task and always physical.

(Radio Talk)