

New-birth

"O dear, have you made a list of clothes and other things we are taking along?"

"Not yet, first let the tickets be finalized, reservations be done..."

"O yes... sure there's time, yet you can jot down the names of the essentials..."

It's been a long-time wish of Bibhuti Bayan's wife – visit the shrines and the famous tourist spots of India. (Bibhuti Bayan is not a real name, it's a pen name. He is a writer and is known by that name only.) Bayan was a government servant, took retirement a couple of years back and now he is a 'senior citizen'. Of late, his mind and body has been feeling a kind of laziness, a sort of obstinate fatigue..., has not penned anything worthwhile for a long time, he thought, yes, it won't be bad if a trip is made outside, perhaps this helpless inactiveness would go away that way, so he became busy to fulfil his wife's wishes, decided a list of places they would visit, made an itinerary through mutual discussion, calculated how much money would be required, then remembered that since they are senior citizens they would get a 50 per cent rebate on their air and train tickets. But a problem came on the way – although he has government documents to prove his senior citizenship, his wife has no such proof.

It's been long time back that his wife passed matric and BA, now there's no such document such as matric certificate or mark sheet, or BA diploma at hand, moreover, it would be cumbersome these days to attain a duplicate one going through the official rigours, and it would be time consuming too. So what can be done now? Wife said, why, only last year Mr. and Mrs. Hari Kakati traveled a couple of places, his missus too had no document as a senior citizen, but somehow she got one – ask him, how they found out a solution. Bayan said, 'you are right, let me ask Kakati.' So he met Hari Kakati, Kakati said, 'yes, we too faced such a problem, but an advocate known to me came up with the solution, very simple, means your missus will have to make an affidavit mentioning her date of birth is this, place of birth is that, father-mother such and such, and passed her matric or BA from this school or that college in such and such year, etc., and get it duly signed by the court – this everybody accepts as a certificate of age.' 'O' is it – Bayan said – 'then we better do this – now tell me which advocate should I meet?' Kakati said, 'our advocate will be the best, since he is known to me – Satyen Ojah, must have heard his name (Bayan nodded his consent), senior advocate, I will phone him regarding your problem. You just meet him – he will draft the affidavit – o' yes, your missus may also have to accompany you, she will have to sign the affidavit –'

Accordingly fixing a time Bibhuti Bayan went to Ojah's chamber, Ojah stood up and welcomed him with a wide smile, 'O' Choudhury *Dada*, come in, come in – I am calling you *Dada*, I am very much younger than you – certainly we know you as Bayan. *Hah hah* – anyway, I have typed your affidavit, here, please go through...Is it OK? Good, you can then take this, put *Baideu's* signatures on it – here, here and here – no, no she need not come, I will be there as a witness – you just bring me this tomorrow with *Baideu's* signatures, tomorrow itself I will get it signed by the Notary – Notary, means what is called Notary Public –'

'Many thanks,' Bayan said, 'tomorrow, if I can today also, I will give this to you with the signatures.'

'You can call me *tumi* (means you when a person normally addresses

someone younger).’

‘OK, I take your leave then, you must have other work too –’

‘No, no work pressure as such, I am more or less free – sit for some more minutes – it’s my good fortune that I got to meet you so closely. All these years, I have only been reading your write-ups –’

‘You read my works?’ Bayan asked with a hesitating smile.

‘Without fail. You can call me a fan of yours – but I just can’t understand one thing – it’s been a long time that we have not come across any of your new writings – Bedabrata too has expressed grief about this – Bedabrata Das, short story writer... you know him perhaps?’

‘Yes, very well.’

‘But I don’t know, maybe we have been missing your writings.’

‘No, you are not missing anything. In fact, I have sort of stopped writing these days – age has also caught up, no such enthusiasm like before, resources too have exhausted –’

‘No *Dada*, can there be an end to resources – how eagerly we all wait for your writings –’

‘Very kind of you to say so – but really, after a certain age the creative power or urge does not remain so – I mean, what I have done all these years is fine and good – now our days are over, means we should leave the scene quietly for the younger generation, enter Bedabrata Dases and exit Bibhuti Bayans, *hah hah* –’

Mildly striking the table with the dot pen in a rhythm, Satyen Ojah heard Bayan’s words, smiled, paused to think awhile and then said, ‘Yes, Choudhury *Dada*, perhaps what you have said is not incorrect – we had read an English poem in the college, something like – *Old order changeth, yielding place to new* – it’s perhaps true. Old goes, new comes.’

‘Not only comes, should come. Otherwise, be it literature, be it society, everything will become stagnant –’

‘Right *Dada* – if you observe things minutely, you will realize that the old gives way to the new. Take for example this dot pen, earlier we used to write with fountain pens, now the fountain pen days are over, everybody uses the dot pen these days. Earlier, our mechanical watches and clocks needed rewinding with the key, now have arrived quartz watches, digital clocks. The battery powers it, and forget winding the key. Now one can see digital watches in everybody’s wrist. Earlier there was typewriter, now it has become almost extinct, computers have replaced the typewriter. Then people played gramophone, record player, radio, etc. Now those have been dethroned by VCD, DVD, TV and what not. Those good old landline telephones are also almost out of fashion, now there is mobile phone in everyone’s hand – next is coming robot, robot will do everything a man does, then there will be no requirement of man, man will go and robot will come, *hah hah* –’

‘Yes – have heard that robots can think also, they play chess, write poetry, story –’

‘Maybe they are able to write poetry – but it will think or write as per its programming inside, other than that it cannot do or think anything else – if there arises a situation not included in its programme, it becomes helpless –’

‘Right. And humans only will do the programming for these robots, isn’t it? A situation uncontrollable for the robot will have to be taken care of by humans only, isn’t it so? Human will go, robots will come – it can happen, but human brain will make an exit and robot brain will take over – can such a thing happen?’

‘Exactly – you have touched the salient point *Dada* – what’s inside the brain of flesh and blood human being and what’s not, nobody knows – at least till now no one can say that like in a robot only this much have been programmed in a human brain – there’s no limit to human brain’s thinking –’

'Oh, very rightly said, you have pointed out the right thing. OK then, I must now take leave, took enough of your time - '

'No, no *Dada*, it's nothing, I enjoyed talking to you, didn't expect that I will meet you this way - only felt sorry that you have been thinking that your resources - I mean what you have termed *mal-masala*, *hah hah* - have exhausted - all this time what I have understood is that you have not run out of stock, you are wrongly assuming it to be so -'

'Is it? O' yes, it may be so. Means, suppose I have in my hand a huge volume, say *Complete Works of Shakespeare* - that surely isn't Shakespeare's 'complete *mal-masala*', had he been alive, Shakespeare would have written much more. Then came say Dickens, long time after Shakespeare era, but the relevance of Shakespeare did not wean away after the arrival of Dickens - people still have been reading Shakespeare - let me give you a trivial example, it's not that the days of fountain pen are over with the arrival of the dot pen, fountain pens are still used, I too write with my old Parker sometimes. And what we have got from Dickens is certainly not 'complete *mal-masala*' of Dickens - in fact, he could not transform many of his thoughts into writings - perhaps you know, his one novel remained incomplete - *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. He collapsed on the writing table with his head on the manuscript of that novel, Dickens passed away that way.'

'O' is it *Dada*? How like a true writer!'

'O' dear, have you packed my suitcase?'

'Oh that one, I have done it yesterday itself - here are your shirts, I think these are sufficient, these are your innerwear, these are handkerchiefs...'

'OK, done. I will take the camera in hand. And give my notebook too.'

'Notebook? Why? I have already given your diary...'

'No, no, since we are going to visit new places, I think only photographs are not enough for a memory, photos cannot tell one's feelings, mind's impressions - just thinking, while travelling, whenever and wherever I get an opportunity, I will note down things - later it will feel good going through it, maybe other people too will like reading it -'