



Kundan Singh Kesar Bai

[Translation of a Short Story by Acharya Shivpujan Sahay]

Silky

Introduction

Acharya Shivpujan Sahay (1893-1963) is a prominent Hindi writer, editor and journalist associated with the development of modern Hindi prose. His works are characterized by Social realism, simplicity and the lives of ordinary people. Some of his famous works include *Dehati Duniya*, *Mata ka Anchali*, *Kahani ka plot* and *Smriti Shesh* among others.

Kundan Singh Kesar Bai is the only short story written by Acharya Shivpujan Sahay in Bhojpuri. It gains particular significance for its portrayal of a husband and wife from a rural background who are involved in the freedom struggle. The narrative brings the nationalist movement out of urban, elite spaces and grounds it within everyday life of the village. The story extends a couple's relationship from a mere domestic bond to a political partnership. It is significant to note that the wife is not confined to a passive role, she rather comes out as equally aware, resilient and invested in the freedom struggle. Sahay subtly challenges the conventional gender roles in this unique story and also reinforces the idea that the freedom movement permeated even the lives of the most marginalized and linguistically diverse communities.

Translation

Both were in the prime of their youth. The incandescent beauty of their forms often left viewers spellbound. The villagers often said in awe: When Brahma was bestowing beauty, those two must have reached his door first. Blessed indeed, embodying an

ethereal beauty. The farewell moment at their wedding was no less than a spectacle. They had no one but each other, no family to share their lives. Yet their courtyard pulsated with life in their presence. Each time one raised a gun, the other gazed upon the fierce expression, a smile flickered on their face, knowing well the storm raging within. When one played a flute, the other joined in humming with a rhythmic click of fingers.

On a night of full moon in Ashwin, beneath the soft patter of rain, they lounged on a woven mat in the courtyard, enjoying a playful conversation. He said softly, "I love you more than I can express in words". "I cherish your love more than anything", she replied, "I adorn myself in your love. You must remember, every single time when I have adorned myself in your love."

"In the frost embrace of Magh, in the burst of blossoms in Phalgun, in the tender unfolding of Chaitya, in the lazy sun soaked days of Jeth and under the dark of clouds in of Asadh and Sawan, in the darkness of Bhado, in the shimmering light of Karthik and in the shimmering breezes of Sharad and Poos."

The voice softened further. "In all the moments you have loved me, I adorned myself in your love with such tenderness that your eyes glimmered. I have woven your affection into something that made you smile. Do you remember, my love?"

But instead of a response, a yawn escaped her lips. Stretching into the fading light, he said with a sigh, "we have been blessed with so much happiness by god, but all this while, we have never done anything for the service of our motherland."

"My friends say: "Ever Since you have married, you have confined yourself within the walls of your house like an effeminate.""

“But what can I do about it?”, she said. “You must find the answer within yourself. If you rouse the spirit, sing the songs of patriotism to stir the souls, and respond to your friends with your strong initiative, no matter what you do, I will always stay by your side. Pick up the flag and see if I won't walk proudly by your side. I am a daughter of Kshatriya, after all.”

“My friend even went to the prison along with her husband. No matter the path you choose, I will always walk with you. Even if I have to burn into flames with you, I won't feel any pain. I will not hesitate walking on the edge of a sword, as long as I am with you.”

“You must decide for yourself first. I will be right behind you. A wife is her husband's shadow.”

“Listen...I am not trying to interrupt you but it is not only my fault. And mark my words. With the first ray of sun tomorrow, I will be the first to march out with the tricolour flag in my hand.”

“I'm not just weaving tales here.”

“You are quite a smooth talker.”

“Fine! Tomorrow when my boots step out of this door, you will watch my passion surge like a storm.”

In 1942, the land of bhojpuri was burning with an unstoppable rage. Every street boiled with defiant men. Each direction echoed, the explosions of rebellions, warehouses were being raided, spears and battle axes were being sharpened in several alcoves, the white hapless officers were being beaten in some corners, stations were plundered, police stations were reduced to rubble, post offices burnt in flames, railway tracks were being ripped off the ground. Policemen retreated to the shadows, fleeing from the rebellious wrath.

Strategies were being carved out in the cornfields. In an attempt to fit a camel through the eye of a needle, chaos enveloped the whole land, with the surge of an unstoppable energy.

Following the footsteps of Kundan and Kesar, the villagers eagerly joined the rebellion. The voices united in a single chant-to overthrow the British raj. The white officers dashed away at their sight. Their spirit and courage inspired people to come forth, but their aura was no less enchanting.

With each step, a roar followed. The crowds craved their words and captivating presence. People were spellbound by their beauty and will. They wielded such power over the masses that the British's hold began to falter. The government issued warrants on their name. The villagers guarded Kundan and Kesar fiercely. When the tricks of the police didn't work, then a different group of military personnel was deployed. Yet, despite all their efforts, they could not find a single clue of their whereabouts.

One fateful day, they returned to take back the remains of their home. Little did they know that the British officers were silently waiting for them. Kundan was talking to Kesar. Suddenly got alarmed hearing a slight whisper. With a firm tug, Kundan steeled himself and loaded his gun. While Kesar with the swiftness of a storm drew the sword out of scabbard, and wrapped the end of her saree like armor around her waist.

They drifted out together, tearing through the stillness. The police officers stood paralyzed as the door burst open. In the flash of an instant, Kundan killed three men. While Kesar, like embodiment of Goddess Durga, sliced two men, as their heads rolled down on the flood. Before the officers could get a hold of the situation, they severed the hands of a couple of officers, cracked the skulls of some, while a few lay with pierced chests, as their blood traced the floor and piercing sharp cries filled the

air. With a fierce display of their Kshatriya's strength, both the warriors stood, blood stained but unwavering. In a turn of events a bullet struck Kesar, and she collapsed over Kundan's body. The villagers started to gather hearing the sound of bullets, while the British officers quickly slipped away with the body of their men.

The villagers bathed the bodies of Kundan and Kesar in the sacred water of Ganges, anointed them with sandalwood, draped garlands across their still form, and showered the braves with flowers. The prayers mingled with the scent of incense, camphor in solemn reverence.

The procession marched from one village to another in honor of the martyrs, and their names were sung in every corner. Their bravery was worshiped as the villagers offered flowers at their feet in reverence. But one particular whisper of awe echoed from every direction, "Such noble death is destined for the rarest on earth."

They guarded them as one would protect the fragile blink of an eye. When the guns at the police station remained silent, constable Goranhi was sent in their place. Yet, despite their intent, the whites could not land their strike, though no answer to their failure was ever uncovered.

On the day the furniture was to be stripped from their home, the whites lay on the earth, backs against the soil, speaking in low voices within the barn. Then came the threats, echoing in the still air.

Kundan, sensing the urgency, fastened his shorts and prepared his gun with grim determination. In one swift movement, Kesar unsheathed his sword and held Miyan with an iron grip, his arms coiling like serpents around his waist.