शहर अभिरों के रहने और क्रय-विक्रय का स्थान है। उसके बाहर की भूमि उनके मनो-रंजन और विनोद की जगह है। उसके मध्य भाग में उनके छड़ों की पाठशालाएँ और उनके मुकदमेवाजी के खाद्य होते हैं, जहाँ न्याय के बहाने गरीबों का गला घोटा जाता है। शहर के आस-पास गरीबों की वस्त्रियाँ होती हैं। बनारस में पौड़पुर ऐसी ही बसती है। वहाँ न शहरी दीपकों की ज्योति पड़ती है; न शहरी छिड़काव के छिँटे, न शहरी जल-स्रोतों का प्रवाह। सड़क के किनारे छोटे-छोटे बनियों और हल्लबाजों की दुकानें हैं, और उनके पीछे कई इक्कबाजें, गाड़ीवान, ग्वाले और मज़दूर रहते हैं। दो-चार घर बिगड़े सफेदपोशों के भी हैं, जिन्हें उनकी हीनावस्था ने शहर से निर्वासित कर दिया है। इन्हीं में एक गरीब और अंधा चमरा रहता है, जिसे लोग सुरदास कहते हैं। भारतवर्ष में अंधे आदमियों के लिए नाम की जरूरत होती है, न काम की। सुरदास उनका बना-बनाया नाम है, और मीठा मांगना बना-बनाया काम है। उनके गुण और स्वभाव भी जगत्प्रसिद्ध हैं — गाने-बजाने में विशेष रचन, हृदय में विशेष अनुराग, अध्यात्म और भक्ति में विशेष प्रेम, उनके स्वभावात्मिक लक्षण हैं। वाहा दृष्टि बंद और अंतर्दृष्टि खुली हुई।

सुरदास एक बहुत ही श्रीमान कृत, दुर्बल और सरल व्यक्ति था। उसे देव ने कदाचित् भीख मांगने ही के लिए बनाया था। वह नित्यप्रति लाठी टेकता हुआ पक्की सड़क पर आ बैठता, और राहगिरों की जान की खूर लिया। ‘दाता! भगवान् तुम्हारा कल्याण करें —’ यही उसकी टेक थी, और इसी को वह बार-बार दुहराता था। कदाचित् वह इसे लोगों की दया-प्रेरणा का मंत्र समझता था। पैदल चलनेवालों को यह अपनी जगह पर बैठे-बैठे दुआएं देता था। लेकिन जब कोई इक्का आ निकलता, तो वह उसके पीछे दौड़ने लगता, और बिंदुओं के साथ या उसके पीछे में पर लग जाते थे। कितु हवागाड़ियों को वह अपनी शमनशक्तियों से परे समझता था। अनुभव ने उसे शिक्षा दी थी कि हवागाड़ियाँ किसी की वातें नहीं मुनती, प्रातःकाल से संध्या तक उसका समय शुभ कामनाओं नहीं कटता था। यहाँ तक कि माछ-पूस की बदली और वायु तथा जेठ-बाँसाक की लू-लपत में भी उसे नागा न होता था।
The city is a place where rich people live and conduct their business. The area outside the city is a place for their diversion and pleasure. In its middle portion are the schools for their boys and the arenas for their lawsuit addicts, where the poor are throttled in the name of the law. All around the city are settlements of the poor. In Banaras, Pandepur is just such a settlement. Neither the light of the city street lamps, nor the drops of the city sprinklers, nor the flow of the city water supply reaches there. Along the sides of the street are tiny shops of merchants and sweet-sellers, and behind them live a number of ikka drivers, bullock-cart drivers, milkmen, and labourers. There are also three or four houses of down-and-out white-collar workers, whose desperate condition has banished them from the city. Right among them lives a destitute and blind Chamar, whom people call Surdas. In India there is no need for blind people to have a name, or to have work. Surdas is a ready-made name, and begging is a ready-made occupation. The nature and virtues these blind people share with their namesake, the blind poet Surdas, are world-famous: a special relish for singing and playing, a special affection in the heart, and a special love for the way of devotion and spiritual contemplation, these are their inherent traits. The outward vision is closed and the inner vision open.

Surdas was an extremely feeble-bodied, thin, and simple individual. Perhaps fate had made him just for begging. Every day, leaning on his lathi, he would come and sit on the main road and pray for the welfare of the passers-by: ‘Oh my benefactor! May God make you prosperous.’ This was his refrain, and he repeated it over and over. Perhaps he thought it was a mantra to inspire people to take pity on him. He remained seated in his place when he addressed his prayers to those on foot. But if an ikka came along he would run after it, and when it came to a buggy, his feet acquired wings. He considered motorcars, however, to be beyond the reach of his good wishes. Experience had taught him that motorcars don’t pay any heed to what anyone says. From morning to evening he spent his time in wishing others well, nor was he ever absent, even in the cloudiness and cold winds of January or the burning heat and hot winds of June.
A city is a site where the rich live and trade. The area outside it is a space for their recreation and amusement. In the city’s centre are located schools for their sons and their arenas for litigation, where the poor are strangled in the name of justice. On the peripheries of the city are to be found bastis, settlements of the poor. One such basti is Pandeypur in Banaras. The light of the city lamps doesn’t reach there, nor do drops of water when the city is sprinkled, nor does the flow from the city’s waterworks. There are small shops of halvais and baniyas on the roadside, behind which live several ikka-valas, carters, cowherds and labourers. There are also a few houses belonging to the depraved rich, which have been banished from the city because of their dilapidated condition. A poor, blind chamaar, whom people call Soordas, lives in one of these. Blind men need neither name nor work in India. Soordas is their ready-made name, begging for alms their ready-made vocation. Their qualities and temperament are also universally celebrated; special interest in music, exceptional love in the heart, distinctive passion for spirituality and religious devotion are their natural traits. The outer vision shut and the inner open.* Soordas was extremely frail, weak and simple. Perhaps destiny had created him only to beg for alms. Every day, he would go tapping his stick to sit by the tarred road and implore the welfare of passers-by. ‘Benefactor! May God make you prosperous’ was his constant refrain. Perhaps he thought it a mantra to inspire compassion in people. He would remain seated while invoking blessings upon pedestrians. But if an ikka happened to pass by he would run after it, and his feet grew wings if they were buggies. Victorias, however, he considered to be beyond the scope of his good wishes. Experience had taught him that victorias don’t listen to anybody. From morning to evening his time was spent only in invoking blessings. Neither the clouds and winds of winter nor the hot blasts of summer could keep him away.

*Soordas (1478/79–1581/1584), poet, saint and musician, was born blind and lived in Braj, near Mathura.
To the goddess Annapūrna

The covetous crave,
    the wretched whine from door to door,
With squalid looks and mind
    that cannot drive away anxiety;
Seeking for funeral food, or that
    of wedding or of any other festival,
They wander wildly, questioning
    at each note of drum or clarion;

Thirsting—yet they find not water,
    hungered—yet finding not four husks,
Dreaming of a mountain of food
    when there are not even lentils
Man must remain a façade of sorrows
    weighed down by the load of grief,
So long as the goddess Annapūrna, Plenitude of Food,
    does not melt with compassion.
WHICH VERSION?

A. Ruya was lying facedown on the bed, lost to the sweet warm darkness beneath the billowing folds of the blue-checked quilt.

B. Of the bed from the head to its base – the blue-checked quilt - its mountain ranges, shadowy valleys, and soft blue hills - veiled with - in the soft, warm darkness - Ruya facedown stretched-out slept.

C. Ruya slept on her stomach in the sweet and warm darkness under the blue-chequered quilt which covered the entire bed with its undulating, shadowy valleys and soft blue hills.