

2 शहर अमीरों के रहने और क्रय-विक्रय का स्थान है । उसके बाहर की भूमि उनके मनो-
 4 रंजन और विनोद की जगह है । उसके मध्य भाग में उनके लड़कों की पाठशालाएँ
 6 और उनके मुकद्दमेवाजी के अखाड़े होते हैं, जहाँ न्याय के बहाने गरीबों का गला घोंटा
 8 जाता है । शहर के आस-पास गरीबों की बस्तियाँ होती हैं । बनारस में पाँडेपुर ऐसी ही
 10 बस्ती है । वहाँ न शहरी दीपकों की ज्योति पहुँचती है; न शहरी छिड़काव के छींटे, न शहरी
 12 जल-स्रोतों का प्रवाह । सड़क के किनारे छोटे-छोटे बनियों और हलवाइयों की दूकानें
 14 हैं, और उनके पीछे कई इक्केवाले, गाड़ीवान, ग्वाले और मजदूर रहते हैं । दो-चार घर
 16 बिगड़े सफेदपोशों के भी हैं, जिन्हें उनकी हीनावस्था ने शहर से निर्वासित कर दिया है ।
 18 इन्हीं में एक गरीब और अंधा चमार रहता है, जिसे लोग सूरदास कहते हैं । भारतवर्ष
 20 में अंधे आदमियों के लिए न नाम की जरूरत होती है, न काम की । सूरदास उनका
 22 बना-बनाया नाम है, और भीख माँगना बना-बनाया काम है । उनके गुण और स्वभाव
 24 भी जगत् प्रसिद्ध हैं — गाने-बजाने में विशेष रुचि, हृदय में विशेष अनुराग, अध्यात्म
 और भक्ति में विशेष प्रेम, उनके स्वाभाविक लक्षण हैं । बाह्य दृष्टि बंद और अंतर्दृष्टि
 खुली हुई ।

सूरदास एक बहुत ही क्षीण-काय, दुर्बल और सरल व्यक्ति था । उसे दैव ने कदा-
 16 चित् भीख माँगने ही के लिए बनाया था । वह नित्यप्रति लाठी टेकता हुआ पक्की सड़क
 18 पर आ बैठता, और राहगीरों की जान की खैर मनाता । 'दाता ! भगवान् तुम्हारा कल्याण
 20 करें — ' यही उसकी टेक थी, और इसी को वह बार-बार दुहराता था । कदाचित्
 22 वह इसे लोगों की दया-प्रेरणा का मंत्र समझता था । पैदल चलनेवालों को यह अपनी जगह
 24 पर बैठे-बैठे दुआएँ देता था । लेकिन जब कोई इक्का आ निकलता, तो वह उसके पीछे
 दौड़ने लगता, और बगिघियों के साथ तो उसके पैरों में पर लग जाते थे । किंतु हवा-
 गाड़ियों को वह अपनी शुभेच्छाओं से परे समझता था । अनुभव ने उसे शिक्षा दी थी कि
 हवागाड़ियाँ किसी की बातें नहीं सुनतीं । प्रातःकाल से संध्या तक उसका समय शुभ
 कामनाओं ही में कटता था । यहाँ तक कि माघ-पूस की बदली और वायु तथा जेठ-वैसाख
 की लूलपट में भी उसे नागा न होता था ।

1



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.

Premchand

Playground: Rangbhoomi, trans. Manju Jain. Delhi, Penguin Books, 2011.

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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 banias 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 chammaar, 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.

तुलसीदास, कवितावली – उत्तरकांड 148.

SOURCES —

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लालची ललात, बिललात द्वार द्वार दीन
बदन मलीन, मन मिटै न बिसूरना ।
ताकत सराध कै बिबाह कै उछाह कछू
डोलै लोल बूझत सबद ढोल तूरना ॥
प्यासे हू न पावै बारि, भूखे न चनक चारि,
चाहत अहारन पहार दारि कूरना ।
सोक को अगार दुख-भार-भरो तौलों जन
जौलों देवी द्रवै न भवानी अन्नपूरना ॥

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.

