

Vol. 7, No. 4: CLRI November 2020 | p 248-258

## The Watch on her Wrist

Dr Ratnottama Das Bikram

Originally written in Assamese by Dr. Ratnottama Das Bikram  
and translated by Subhajit Bhadra.

**One/ A set of dialogues? ...No, it's a preamble to a true story**

What? Spot dead!?

: Oh yes, A truck knocked him or perhaps he himself knocked against the truck. The truck did not stopped by. The boy was lying somewhere and the bike way lying somewhere else on the roadside....had reportedly been lying for a long time. Then police...

: Oh shit...such a young boy... lay there like that.....

: You were telling something about police. What did u you say, did police come later?

:But the question is, why should Mr. Changkakati gift a bike to a boy with newly sprouted moustache and beard who was admitted to a college a few days ago?

: Oh, it is not about the bike....it's the pride of wealth, the pride, do you follow? It attracts even the most indifferent person. Almighty knows all.

: But, for all that, such a young boy.....

: Wait a bit, to top them all, the wallet in his pocket; the expensive cell phone and the waist belt were missing when the dead body was handed over to his family!

Two/ The oscillating pendulum and dusty time

There had been too much dust. The layers of dust were found everywhere. My pitcher shaped neatly kept *Tanpura* that looked like the skins of the well-kept horses of the polo, gathered a fine layer of dust. With the *aanchal* of a saree, with an end of the *dupatta*, I wipe it off and caress it with my hands. Nevertheless, a layer of dust has stuck on the oiled body of the *Tanpura*. Oh, my *Tanpura*....Oh, my adorable peacock! How long it did not get back to life with the magic touch of my hands!

"You too, mother! Why do you call the *Tanpura* a peacock and hug it? You can call it a cuckoo if you like. A cuckoo is a song bird and not a peacock."

No, it has been quite a long since Nihar spoke like this. Her words like this used to spread a wide smile on my face that shone like daylight. Hugging her and having showered a kiss on her, I said –"This is my song bird."

How long has it been since Nihar stopped singing? Where did she sing for the last time? In some programme in her Medical College? When? When? How many days, how many months passed away? I don't hear even the humming sound of my little song bird these days. She has become serious over the time. She has been growing more and more mature day by day. And Ashim? Where has he been going over the time? The other day, I was cleaning his rack of old books. I touched the old books one by one. His handwriting is as familiar to me as his hands. I knew his letters that tilted towards the right and with these he wrote his name and the date of purchasing the books.... and in some places he wrote my special name which only he would call me. Before another small wave of smile that spread across my face, Ashim entered and raised an outcry.

"What the hell are you doing? Oh, it is dust and dust everywhere. All these junk of old books. Why should you do these all by yourself? All these useless job."

I wanted to show him, "Look, here's Huxley's *The Brave New World*. You gave it to me much before the arrival of our Nihar. And look at this one, look; I gifted you this book..."

No, I didn't say anything. I neither had the willingness to speak nor to show anything. Somewhere inside my mind, somewhere in an innermost recess of my mind, each word kept on knocking again and again—

"Junk of old books" --- "Junk of old books"!?

"Useless job" --- "Useless job"!?

How I wished the uncomfortable oscillation of the words to stop. Only if... The oscillation of a pendulum stops when its velocity is reduced to zero. The intensity, and its speed and

the velocity of a word that knocks my mind are so immense! It is very powerful indeed! Will the oscillating period of this be eternal?

Such a word or two keep on oscillating like a pendulum inside my mind these days; and the shape of the pendulum is like that of a hammer. Two sharp nails lying at both the ends keep oscillating continuously I wish it gets distracted from its path of oscillation.....

It is an age of machines of an imaginary future period as it is mentioned in Huxley's story. Two different worlds, two different eras. Do Ashim, Nihar and I live in the same era and in the same world? I don't understand much of their conversations. Both the father and the daughter speak very little either to understand or to ignore. When do they have the time to talk? Even if they have time, they are not in mood to talk, rather they are tired. I do not understand it clearly, whether their tiredness is in their bodies or in their minds. The book of Huxley that Ashim gifted me much before the arrival of Nihar, appeared to me that it turned into an ash-coloured bird that suddenly flew away flapping its heavy wings before my eyes. It seemed as if a flock of ash-coloured unknown birds followed it. That one is *Shesher Kabita*—the first gift I gave to Ashim. Those are Ashim's paintbrushes. That one is the first cap of Nihar—Ashim kept this cap as treasure...and...and that one is my favorite peacock, my *tanpura*! All other colourful birds of the flock have turned ash-coloured and the bird also flew away along with the flock of birds. The soft plumages of the birds were flying in the air. There were specks of dusts all around me...

It has been very much dusty....dusty indeed. There are specks of dusts all over the place. Does the bed shared by Ashim and myself also covered with the layers of dust? Having taken two classes in the mid-day and having entered the room, these thoughts flashed in my mind. The dryness of the throat after taking two subsequent classes suddenly went away. I forgot to change the cloths. I went straight to the bed room in that manner. I touched and felt the bed cover repeatedly. I made some furtive glances over the blue coloured bed sheet along with white flowers on it, but I could not decide, are there any specs of dust there? I dragged the long and wide bed cover and I started shaking it vigorously like an insane person. Suddenly Ashim's medical journal slipped and fell on the ground. Oh, Ashim was reading the journal having lit the bedside lamp last night. He hardly gets time to read any other book these days. Suddenly I sensed that perhaps he stayed awake until late at night. What was he doing? Medical journal? Did he look at my pale and lazy face which had been drawn towards sleep? Did he remove some strands of unkempt hair from my cheeks and forehead? Did he adjust the cloth I wore? Did he? Did he?

I can't remember properly. Perhaps he didn't. Perhaps he went to sleep having switched off the bedside lamp and dragging the cloth to cover his neck. He has hospital duty in the morning. Was I sleeping there too? There, by his side? Okay, what did I cook for the meal last night? Was it a preparation of chicken? Yes, it was. Chicken curry with black pepper is a favourite item of both Ashim and Nihar. The leg piecess of the chicken are their most favourite item and I serve them on bowls. I can remember it clearly that while they were

munching the legs of chicken last night on the dinner table, they were discussing which patient expired for what reasons. Blood was oozing out of the body of a woman profusely, it spread on the white marble floor of the hospital, and she died primarily due to the lack of blood! Blood could not be obtained in time. Ashim commented apathetically on the Government Medical College. And Nihar said—"And afterwards, the blood stains could not be removed from my apron and *churidar* even after giving them to a laundry, papa. Forget about the apron! But my beautiful *churidar*! I don't know what prompted me to wear the new *churidar* on that day. You know, papa, that *churidar*....."

My head was reeling. I saw the bowls of chicken curry on the dinner table contained blood and blood only. Having chewed the cooked legs of the chicken, Ashim and Nihar continued talking about certain cases. To them, the patients were not humans; they were 'cases'. Each of them was a 'case'. Their words stared hitting the two ends of the nails plunged deep inside my head. A pendulum was oscillating continuously like a hammer. What time was it? Was the time paused? It was ten at night. Now? It is dark outside. Is it dark inside too?

I looked at the clock hanging on the wall in front of me to know the actual time at that moment. Was time moving? Or it is paused? I looked at the beautiful clock that was 'gifted' by some talkative medical representative. Suddenly I saw the clock in a different way. It was gradually becoming twisted, flat and big in shape. It seemed as if it was emerged from the paintings of Salvador Dali! I did not know how long I was staring at the clock leaving my meal untouched. Was it for too long? Was it the reason that Ashim and Nihar became worried

and restless? Both of them become worried and take care of me at slightest excuses at that time, when I least feel the necessity of being taken care of. Some questions were oscillating in my mind like a pendulum. But, no, I did not ask them, "Don't you have any feeling when a patient expires? Don't you feel anything when someone's pulses lying within the fold of your hands stop at a point of time? Don't you feel anything at all? Anything?"

Last night I left my dinner half eaten. I did not know when Ashim had slept. I did not know whether Nihar was studying or not. I did not know whether he had looked at my indolent face that was drawn towards my overpowering tendency to sleep. Did he remove a strand of unkempt hair from my face? Did he adjust the cloth that covered my body? Did he do it?

Again I shook the bed sheet with force and spread it on the bed. Wow! What is this? A photograph? Where did fall from? Did it fall from Ashim's medical journal? Was it lying near Ashim's pillow? Did it fall off when I shook the bed cover? I picked up the photo on my palm. Who is this woman carrying a baby on her lap? Her face was glowing with a soft smile. The cherubic child wearing a woolen cap was looking in absolute amazement. It was perhaps because of the flash of the camera in front of her. The woman was wearing a saree with floral design, she also looked like a flower, bright and fresh. I touched the photo softly with my fingers. When and from where did Ashim take this out? Isn't it my small singing birdie wearing her first woolen cap that was knitted by me with the wool that had been brought by Ashim? It seemed as if Nihar in the photograph were looking at me and giggling. This

toddler Nihar could make some giggles that time. And she could burst into laughter till she had a hiccup.

I felt that my eyes were moist. I caressed the photograph clicked by Ashim long back. There was no trace of any speck of dust on it.

*Three/ Is it a soliloquy? We can say, 'it is the speech of the storyteller' or the 'narration of the narrator'*

The mood and temperament of Doctor Ashim's wife was not good at all. She started disliking everything day by day. She seemed to be obsessed with the thought of 'it-doesn't-feel-good-at-all', all the time. She could not explain this feeling to anybody else. Her inexplicable words seemed to swallow her up. Today also she is in a more morose mood. She was feeling blue like hell. The reason behind this goes like this:-

The young son of Mr. Changkakati had a bike accident. He died on the spot. He was young and only son in the household. Changkakati's home no longer remained a home anymore. The recent topic of discussion in the neighbourhood was nothing but the accident only. Some of the people truly expressed their grief and sympathise with the family. Today the doctor's wife asked her husband and her daughter, who is studying medical science, to pay a visit to their neighbor Changkakati's house. But...

*Four/ A clock that stopped*

It was late in the evening. I stayed for long at Changkakati's place almost forgetting the time. I did not even look at the watch. I felt that my chest was still heavy, but my mind was light. I shared the grief of Mrs. Changkakati by touching her

quivering back with my firm hands. Did I try to console her or I tried to lighten my own heavy heart by crying along with her for some time?

It was already the late hours in the evening. Even after asking them, Ashim and Nihar did not accompany me to visit the Changkakaotis. Ashim had an important surgery to do. What should I say? After attending the classes and ward, Nihar would return very tired and exhausted. What should I say? Having finished my classes in the afternoon, instead of returning home, I went alone directly from my college to Changkakati's house. Now I am about to enter my home and it is already late in the evening.

My heart skipped a beat when I was about to open the gate. Why is the house drowned under a deep pool of darkness? What is the time? Ashim would not be around at this time. However, Nihar must be present. What is she doing in such darkness? Why had she not switch on any source of light? Why is it so dark? Nihar?

I hurriedly entered home. The door was kept ajar. It got opened with a light push. Nihar? Where is Nihar? There was a sound of sobbing! Where is my Nihar? I rushed immediately to find out the source of the sound. She was found lying flat on her stomach on the bed and sobbing with certain intervals in between. I advanced slowly towards her and caressed her unruly curly hair. She continued to cry in the same manner. Her back was heaving up and down with her convulsive gasping. I put my hands on her back: "What happened, darling?"

Then the intensity of her sniffles increased.

: She died, Mom.—Nihar hid her face in my lap.

: Who is it, darling?

: A very young girl child, Mom. Nihar again started sobbing vigorously bursting into tears.

: Her body was covered with blood, her small body...Mom, she was hardly five years old. She was brought to our hospital.

Hiding her face in my lap with regular sniffles, Nihar continued to speak out the incident. Nihar was crying. Nihar was sobbing. The girl with high sensitivity and early maturity was crying. It was really a rare sight to see her crying. When did she cry like this for the last time? Who was that little five year old girl who breathed her last in Nihar's hospital? From where did she come? How did that all happen?

: Our professor rushed in to see her. I was standing nearby. I was checking her pulse holding her hand. I felt her pulse... and the pulse in the tiny hand of the little girl suddenly stopped. It ceased to vibrate just in front of everybody. It was stopped beating just in my hand. Professor had a close look at her and started running here and there. And...and mom, I was caressing her hand and then I... I... carefully opened her closed fist. There was an image of a flower drawn with a ball pen on her palm. A watch was drawn on her small wrist in blue ink... with a ball pen...Mom, it was a watch. A watch...

I hugged tightly the matured final year student of medical college who was habituated with the sight death, who studied and worked in a place where death is a daily affair. Like a small child, she curled up into my lap and continued to sob. An image of the innocent face of a demised girl of five, whom

I had never seen, flashed before my eyes, the face that could no longer be seen by anybody...

Having hugged Nihar, I continued to sit in the dark. The lights of the house should have been...well, let it remain as it was. Ashim will reach home soon. Let him come and switch on the lights of the house.

### About the author



**Dr Ratnottama Das Bikram**

---

Dr Ratnottama Das Bikram is an Assistant Professor in the Department Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, University of Delhi. Along with her teaching and guiding research scholars, Dr Das has been associated with fieldwork based indigenous-lore (folklore) studies. Particularly, she has been working on the culture and lore of the Lepcha tribe of Kalimpong. Dr. Das is a creative writer with two critically acclaimed books, *Hariguna kahana najai* and *Nakh norokha sowaleebor*. Her first novel was recognised as the Special Book of the Year by “Jeevan”, Guwahati, in 2013. Dr. Das has also got the “Travel Grant for Young Authors” by Sahitya Akademi in the year 2016. A known newspaper columnist in Assam, Dr Das writes regularly in newspapers, journals and literary magazines and has keen interest in paintings.

---

## About the translator



## Subhajit Bhadra

---

Subhajit Bhadra is a writer, poet, critic, translator and an assistant professor in Bongaigaon College, Assam. He has authored seven books and edited five books. He has published four books of translation. He has published research articles in various reputed national and international journals. He currently teaches English literature in P.G. Department of English at Bongaigaon College, Assam.

---

## [Get Your Book Reviewed](#)

If you have got any book published and are looking for a book review, contact us. We provide book review writing service for a fee. We (1) write book review (2) publish review in CLRI (3) conduct an interview with the author (4) publish interview in CLRI. [Know more here.](#)