

Maheshwar N Sinha

Noises

Dawn broke and people began leaving their beds. Birds already have come out of their nests, chirping.

Good Morning Sir!

Mr. King Kong, not more than four feet, twenty-eight kg, aged forty eight-fifty minus two; walks to Jim. Mr. Anna's house at the corner, he got a habit to sleep under porch throughout hot season of May-June, cot covered with cotton-made mosquito net, and with a table fan right in front of his face! Noising.

'Good Morning, Anna!' King Kong greets him and tries to wake him up. Anna, in a weary tone abuses, '*Bhonsadi Ke!*' (a slang in Hindi) A damned face, still a night..., gets lost, minus two of fifty...!'

'Hey! Get up! This is the month of May, untidy and long. Keep some quota for afternoon.'

'You..., minus two...! Hell...Hell down!'

'You need to have a young body, go for exercise.'

'Damn your Jims..., twenty-four gram, let me sleep, still it's night!'

'Won't you marry again? You must have a macho figure to flirt college pretty 'items' eh?'

'What a bad morning!' Anna murmurs and takes his side wrinkling his legs inside stomach.

'Really a retired guy, nobody can help him!' KK moved out.

KK loves going Jim. He arrives the yard when no one reaches, sometimes even when it's still time to begin the dawn! Very fond of exercising and oiling the body. Unfortunately, a healthy child can lift him up. It has been, for him, a bad luck that many infants went on playing in his laps. After some years, any child would be attempting to take him to play.

This colony gets up and gets down through his eyes. He works for a local businessperson and earns rupees thirty per day. This is Laborer's Colony at the heart of the city. There are about five hundred houses. When the Cotton Mill was running all these houses were quarters of its employees, mostly workers. Now the mill has locked up due to recession, selling out quarters to the respective employees, quite cheaply, the only benefit offered to the workers. The mill is dead; the colony is yet alive! Good luck for the native dwellers that they could manage some job elsewhere, otherwise most had left the place, sold their materials that were unable to be carried along! People now had a question - how to survive? Workers would get a job for merely eight hundred rupees per month and would move about twenty to thirty kilometers to their work on their bicycles.

City is not poor; it has gorgeous buildings. But, the rich class is confined, as if a land surrounded by huge oceanic water. But this piece of land governs the entire place. Rich bungalows experience floating of huge amount and accounting of currency – notes and coins until late night. At the same time, the city has become a destiny and destination for the poor people, especially after lock-up. The young lads of the colony move early in the morning for those bungalows, working for their cars, vehicles, shops, or for other commercial works, for some money. Dawn to late night!

Colony has its thirst and hunger but breathes its own air. Colony is noisy. The sun shines fairly. Everyone comes out of his or her dwelling. Women, kids, elders, youngsters! Matured people read newspapers and share lots of gossip. Some fertile brain like that of Anna would have different kind of news to share. He himself is an extra-channel, fastest in the world, very much similar to 'U'-Turn type news, local to regional, all kind. All quality. Not more than sixty percent of people read newspapers but more than one hundred sixty percent observe – an overdose!

Welcome to Anna channel! Very Good Morning it's! Hot tea, hot news, hot day! The only trees of neem and banyan – dense and green – find flock of crows, cuckoos, sparrows – twittering and singing. The month of May is of cuckoo. Some old people have their 'May' to sing a holy version – the heaven is not far! Youngsters mock them.

Ah! They used to have only hard liquor in their young age. Sad!

Now?

Everybody waits for water supply. Terrible! It is insufficient. Scarce! Catch the supply. Don't let it go even a drop. Morning sun splashes, just seven and half past! Horrible, God! Is that, that sun of weak December? Lean and thin, cold and sneezing, covered in a snow paper!

All need water! Floors, coolers, exhausters, and all! For everything, the house needs water; water for cooking, water for birds, animals, and even a jaundice patient too demands chilled water from freezer. Nice. Nice to drunkards they too need two-third of the liquor. So much water! Drainage and small rivers yearn for water! Water! Water of big rivers has been seized in big dams, they too appear dry. Dams are for controlling the supply of water to the local Corporations. Full of mud, grey water. That will be cured at home! Water is necessary; it must prevail either fresh, with punk or mud.

Are there any alternative arrangements? Wells and hand pumps?

Yes, the hand pump, in the center of colony. It takes at least half an hour to pull water by hands. It pulls out heavy water with red stones. Well. You can have a chance for your cooler, though its heavy ironed water will make your cooler rusty. But there is no chance. One can't think of celebrating a tea-party or boozy kitty-party. By the way, it will wash your stuff, and could sprinkle at garden.

The poor hand pump is crowded. Men with empty buckets would wait for water.

Today water has gone down in the hand pump. Oh! Only whistling – sooo - - - sooo - - - sooo - - -! Only a few droplets! A relief to the people. God appeared and blessed. The supply man only opened the valve and closed it. Right? Buckets, pitchers and containers all opened their mouth. Me, me and me. Crowds rushed towards the pump.

O Hand Pump, the only God! Please send some sweet water. Please draw some more to fill our pitchers. Why are you so displeased? Angry? Vomit your anguish and not red stones. O water of red color! Please smile. You are our only god. We're handling you with our soft hands, but you appear to be so angry. We love you so much, rather we adore you; still you have turned pale. Please, just one bucket full. Please!

Hey! Sisters! Why you're dashing out? Have patience. I'm waiting for hours, to get a chance - - - , and you have just come and opened all the windows and doors! Wait, wait. Mine are small ones, very little, only six in numbers. Yours are huge. They're looking only two but can soak up a tank! Some laughed at my reaction that annoyed her.

Hey sister! Why are you so quarrelsome, my legs are paining; I never got a habit to wait.

Stop my dear sister! Let me handle it.

Really sister! I've to send my husband off for office. Children are waiting to go out for playing. And there is no water.

The story all around is the same.

After a pause, some new faces appeared, probably for the first time in the colony. Tin buckets, plastic container, bladders. Me, at first me, I was earlier than you. I've only two containers. I'm in hurry. I'm from long distance.

How nice of you! You've already so many innings! Don't try for a century, give us a chance.

Who are you? Would you like to introduce yourself?

Why not my dear sister! I'm not an alien and I do belong to this galaxy where you're from! Now would you mind giving me some space? I think this is not your father's or forefather's hand pump. Am I wrong?

You're utterly not! But have it in 'Q'. Right?

Well. I'm waiting.

But I can't. I'm earlier than you.

And myself, too...!

Okay sisters! I'll look over your beautiful faces. Right?

Why so disappointed?

Sister! Let your pitchers filled. Right? I love to see them filling up.

Listen! Take a chance, only for a bucket, and only for once
- - - !

Quite not fair. I'd fill all, otherwise none, I'm from far off - -
- -. I've hardly any chance to come back.

Present witness! Have a look over her arrow and shootings! Now go back, I'll not allow you even to enter here, now get lost!

Oh! This is a public pump, for your kind information!

Then come in 'Q'.

Have you registered? Where is your name, please? Who damn says I'm a new comer...? Hey...who says damn hell I'm not here..., who the hell...eh?

Dare you try it if you can...!

I will...see me....!

And then there was a good noise, quarrelling, dashing and rolling of buckets and pitchers.

Men, youngsters and children gathered. Interesting! It was a good scene for an hour. Many buckets remained empty. Very soon, it was decided that everyone would get an equal amount, and in a queue, which they made afresh.

Within an hour, the pump turned angry, pouring stark red water. Weak and stony! Oh, no use. Vomiting almost red blood. Soon the crowd dispersed. The pump deity, who was just worshiped was left deserted No one stayed to listen its cry.

It emptied every bit, even its blood. For months, no one cares about it but when wants emerge people assemble and worship it. Oh God! This is the world! The greedy world!

The problem was water and from where to get it was the issue. Workers had gone off for their works, only youngsters and elderlies remained back. The elderlies were by no means able to carry pitchers, only youths could carry water from distance. The only medium was bicycles, which could not be enough. Water needed for everyone, at least forty liters per house; this means so many containers with so many bicycles, with many rounds! Yes, there were unemployed roaming lads who were ready to carry, but on a bicycle had become a prestige-issue for them. An outdated carriage, what their pretty girls would feel. They demanded scooter or moped or a bike. It means some oil to burn. And they got, however with difficulty!

It was the month of May. The sun was soaring!

By afternoon, the houses were somewhat filled. One is lucky and fulfilled when water is available in home.

Posh colony demanded water bottles. Their tanks and other containers were always filled; they bought water at two rupees each bucket. Majority of them have boring pumps and just needed to switch on the button. Their kids bathed as usual in shower and geyser.

But due to this, labor colony was alive, much like a celebration! By the evening the colony would get a full tank from the Municipal Corporation and every one would get enough water. Well done! Floors became wet, enough; children took shower in public, naked, throwing water sprinkle to each other. Oh! Delighted! Cool! It's too hot!

Anna teased that KK could not carry a full bucket for fifty meters. KK took the challenge. Anna bet for two hundred and fifty rupees, if he gets it through.

And they wrestled. Anna places the sum. KK, a macho of the Colony. He came and carried. Successfully!

But oh! No! Cheating, the bucket was leaking and over pouring. The condition got devoiced. No rupees!

Crowds enjoyed. Some were with Anna side, and naturally some with KK, each claimed to be right.

KK cried. Shouted. Anna and others made laughter.

After a pause, it was decided that both had won the challenge. So, in their combined elixir, the evening was celebrated with much fun.

And when KK was over drunk, shouted at Anna with all kinds of abuses he knew. And, for this auspicious occasion and for abusing Anna, he got one more extra-large peg. Soon he fell into drainage to make it choked!

The night was on its zenith. The tired body was relaxing.

Meanwhile, the fuse of power of one phase blew. Half of the quarters darkened at once! Oh! Another menace!

People from dark houses came out. Ah! There was a black-and-white shade. Some were enjoying and fans and some were feeling heat. What a mischief!

Hurry up. Make a call to the Electricity Department before they are asleep.

Good luck, the house of KK was too dark, but for him it hardly did matter. He has no conscious to feel and distinguish even bed and drainage, dark and light, fan and cooler. The world was in his pocket! But for Mrs. Getey Aunty, oh God! Where are you? The morning and the night seem the same, the worst ever, whose face I had seen in the morning, that bloody figure...! Anna, I think it were you, didn't you?

No! Aunty it would be yours, I'm sure!

Keep quiet! She always makes mockery, we're dying off, boiled and you look cool, damn you, come, bring power anyhow.

Alas! If it were in my pocket..., but why I should bother about, my own row is lightening with high voltage, why to worry then? More than fifty houses are under dark; the crying mouths should come out. Why a smiling face? Half an hour passed but none called up the electricity department.

Finally someone came forward and made a call. After a long pause one voice, apparently a little annoyed, answered that the workers were out for some another complaint and as soon as they return would be sent to make their fault.

The whole colony should have darkened! This is the double agony, god! See the injustice. Mrs. Detey Aunty curses within her heart.

In some time, some people went to the maintenance department. They found only a dozing peon present. After a good shake, he woke up and registered the complaint.

There was hardly any hope of electricity department. Young people were thoughtful. They were thinking to do something on their own. But it seemed it was an outside fault, related to the pole or transformer, the main supply side.

Mrs. Detey was more than restless, still abusing Mr. Anna, who had made her day worse!

Mr. Jorge Boosh (a local man, not of America) cried loudly 'hell this electricity!' He came out with his cot and cushion, a water glass, a sheet, a mosquito net, and beside the lane, stretched himself flat. Soon people could hear his snoring. A few more people followed Mr Boosh's style. They were sleeping.

Half of the colony was out in the streets, even those who could rarely be seen generally, mostly restless.

However, most of the people waited for men in blue with tools and ladders who would check the fault and repair. Yet some others collected wires and made connections from near-by power connections.

Kids and children were helpless. Kids in their mothers' lap were crying though still half asleep. A few children got up and were staring at the twinkling stars and full moon. What a rounded moon, the rambling and baseless clouds, Papa! Why *chanda mama* (the moon is referred as uncle in adulation) possesses cool light? Sohan began asking.

Can't it pour some magic and make our fans and coolers get running. Hey Papa! What these lazy stars do? Papa, what clouds do in addition to floating, raining and providing shades...and what..., the tree of that corner sleeps during night, how we come to know that it has slept. Papa, these trees do never yawn, never groan, how they breathe, where is the nose of a tree? Papa! How it takes its dinner and breakfast! Papa, this...papa...that...!

Women hardly get time for outdoors. They have a very busy schedule, dawn to dusk. Beginning with children, their schooling, to homework, lunch, TV serials - mostly family drama.

Mother of KK appeared in the gathering. Women began talking on conventional issues like *saas-bahu* (relation of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law).

My son has become slave of his wife. Dinu Aunty has beaten her husband with a stick, because he'd over-fried the fishes while cooking. You know how Dinu Uncle had reacted? He told in mild tone that she must beat but not with a stick, rather she must do it with her soft darling hands.

Gossips, rich and of every kind. Someone pinched why not making marry off KK, has become a liquor king of roadside.

Oh! The great problem, how an ideal couple can meet him?

Well! Do you know that smart girl of back Lane had married with a professor, an old man?

Our globe has changed.

Only due to these bloody TV shows, they're utterly useless and misleading.

Our time was different!

It was more than golden!

Gathered crowd had settled out a kind of new world for a while.

Soon, the colony darkened completely. The ditch has vanished. The remaining people came out from their houses.

Only single Streetlight was on, keeping the entire colony alive.

Distress, disappointment, slow opening of doors, crying kids in the dark. The room inside was so firing – unbearable and damp. Death could be a better choice than to stay inside.

KK, still unconscious, stayed inside- the only person.

Cots and benches taken out at every corridor. Peoples stretched out themselves, mothers tried to cool down their babies with handmade fans. Some youngsters fell asleep, but old men couldn't. They were trying to have a sleep but in vain. And it made them more worrying and restless. Some gathered under street light and began playing '*Paploo*', (game of card) consumed tobacco, cigarette, and *bidi* whatever they got available. Some young assembled and accompanied them. Everyone's

eyes had a want for sleep but there was a 'fire' in every eyes, god of sleeping was defeated.

Next, a good crowd under streetlight, with noises and zeal.

Who won, who lost - - -, some won, some lost - - - probably no won and no lost - - - -, but everyone got their next, very next morning.

Dawn breaks from the eastern side.

Everybody saw KK coming afresh, walking stably for Jim.

Where are you going Mr. King Kong? Twenty four kg. - - - -, an old man of thousand years - - - - come and have some flesh from me.

It was Anna, a fat man.

Idiot! Go and sleep, it's still a midnight!

They greeted the new day!

Author's Bio

Maheshwar Naraian Sinha, a graduate in English (St. Xavier's College, Ranchi, Jharkhand), writes both in Hindi and English. His works have been widely published in journals and anthologies including Lalitamba, Hitvada and Contemporary Literary Review India.



His paintings have been published in national and international journals including Palooka, Cezanne's Carrot (cover art), DVQ, DeJonDe Magazine, Folio Literary magazine, and exhibited at several exhibitions in Mumbai, Delhi, Jaipur, Bangluru, South Korea, Dubai, Austria and others. Recently awarded for his efforts to spread art and literature by Nisha Foundation, New Delhi.

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