

## The Walk

### Bharat Shekhar

Buta Singh whined and pawed at the door.

Auntiji glared at Dhatri, "Take him walkies, you bewakuff ladki. Uff JAO or he will scratches hole in door." She turned to her Kitty Party gathering, "Darwaja Amriki teak da. Vary expansive... like Amriki steak." Auntiji pronounced the last word to rhyme with teak.

Mrs. Baweja gave a horsey laugh, "Amri-ki ya Amar Kalony ki?" In sotto voce, she whispered loud enough for the whole room to hear, "Many second hand farnitare di dukaans in Amar Kalony like Khanna Shanna Shoppes, all selling same type doors every day."

Auntiji muttered under her breath, "Tainu te main dekh liyangi, khasam nu khaniya... you I will see, husband eater" (an expression she used for every widow). She turned back and screamed at Dhatri, "Ja bewakuff. Uff you go. Nahi to Buta susu on floor. Piddly piss."

Dhatri did not get a word of this Pinglish being thrown at her, but she understood Auntiji's tone all right. She hurriedly found the leash to put around that fat sausage they called Buta Singh.

“If this is a dog,” she thought as she opened the door, “then I am Birsa Munda.” In Dhatri’s mind, the fat, waddling dachshund was ‘lenda’, a fat, horizontal leech, wobbling on tiny tottering legs. How Kariya would have laughed, if he could have seen his sister dragging a lenda on a leash!

But Kariya was half a world away, back home in their village in Jharkhand. And she was here.

While they were packing her off, the thekedar had told her father, “Dilli is the land of milk and honey. Poora Opportunity. All our boys and girls are going there and becoming rich.” So for a grand sum of 20,000 rupees and promise of monthly money orders, baba had put her on a one-way train, alien, alone...

Over the last six months, Dhatri had learned to survive.

She had also come to understand that for the poor like her, there was no milk or honey in Dilli, only ‘malik and honi’ (owner and fate). The owners (Khannas, Khemkas, Khans, Khuranas, Kharbandas...) literally owned the fate of the girls from tribal areas that served as maid servants. Dilli estyle...

## II

Suddenly she felt something warm and wet trickle down the side of her foot.

“Harami Kutta” Dhatri screamed. While she had been brooding about home, lost in thoughts, that lazy lenda of a Buta Singh had decided to use her as a convenient

piddle post. He was so fat, his tummy brushed the ground when he walked 'ghis, ghis'. Unlike others of his species, Buta did not waste energy trying to find shrubs to spray, or tree trunks or car tyres to mark territory. He just off loaded in situ and he did it in batches.

Knowing this full well, Dhatri withdrew her foot quickly. But that incontinent SOB was quicker and she felt another stream squishy and wet, gumming her toes to her chappals.

Something snapped in Dhatri. In that instance that fat lenda's little wee-wee became everything that was pissing on her in this city.

In that yellow stream were the burning eyes of Auntiji da ladla, her son, following her... everywhere. Soon they would be followed by his groping hands, Dhatri knew.

In Buta's horrible, yippy bark, she heard Memsaab's (grope wife) shrill stream of commands, never ending.... 'Dhat teri idher! Dha teri suna nahi! Dhat teri mar gayi kya?' Always Dhat teri, never Dhatri, never.

In those bulging, greedy eyes she saw reflected Auntiji's grasping soul—grabbing everything, giving nothing. She even slyly took all the Kajus from the namkeen and then blamed Dhatri for stealing them. Or the juiciest piece of mutton, the baby's condensed milk....

In Buta's wobbly fat legs and dragging belly, she felt the baby's (her charge) crawl as he whined and bawled - demanding to be fed, cleaned, clothed, unclothed, burped, strangled, strangled, str...

Dhatri heard a terrible, choking sound from below, a hoarse, raw rasp, like a death rattle. She looked down and saw with glazed eyes Buta Singh dangling in midair at the end of the leash, which she had pulled up to make his feet leave the ground. He was jerking in mortal agony, with his tongue hanging, now black in colour, eyes popping over their sockets.

“KILL HIM!” a voice screamed in her head, “Kill the blood sucking lenda leech.”

Buta wiggled like a fish at the end of the hook.

Dhatri was hallucinating again. This time she saw her mother, before her, alive, sadness dripping down from her cut lip.

“No Dhatri”, she said, “munni, we were not made to hurt others. Sing-Bonga bore us because he wanted earth to be happy.”

*Happy? Is this happiness? Was your getting beaten up by your drunken husband every night happiness? Is my getting pissed on like this HAPPINESS?*

She wanted to scream, ‘Aisi khushi se to achhi khud-kushi. Suicide is preferable to such happiness.’ Instead, she lowered Buta Singh back on the ground gently, who coughed, gasped and plonked down, panting heavily. He looked so fat, funny and forlorn at the same time that Dhatri laughed and patted his head, “Sorry Butua Babua. You may look like a lenda leech. But you are not the real bloodsucker here. Come, let’s go back.”

The Amriki teak the Darwaja was open when they returned. The kitty party guests were departing. Mrs. Baweja (woman with horsey laugh) was just saying her byes. Aunttiji saw Dhatri, "Ai lo ji. Maharani returns. Should we make you chai ka cup-shup, or you will be wanting only gup-shup? Bloody two hours taking for one little walkis! Besharam you are."

Mrs. Baweja, suddenly pally with her rival, shook her head sympathetically, "All these Biharis all same-shame. Aalsi to the bone, lazy haddis. They are saying taking dog for ghumana, but going to do kuchhi-koo with boy frands. Morning-evening always kharrata snoring. Sunday Church learning all bad habit, meeting-mating other sax. Tribal bibal. Tussi dhyan rakhna. Takes care. OK tata ji."

Dhatri wanted to scream, "I AM NOT A BIHARI. I DO NOT HAVE ANY BOY 'FRAND'. I WORK FROM MORNING TO NIGHT WITH NO BREAK. I DON'T SNORE, AND THE TWO HOURS THAT I GET EVERY WEEK AT CHURCH IS THE ONLY TIME THAT I FEEL ALIVE."

Instead, she quietly began picking up the cups and saucers from the table. Buta Singh wagged his tail. He waddled to the table, and licked her hand.

'Dhat Teri...' a voice screamed from inside the house, "Kahan mar gayi? Where you died? Change baby diaper."

Buta Singh cocked his head and let out a contemptuous 'woof'. Dhatri patted his head and smiled.

Who was telling the story? And whose story was it anyway?

The words fluttered and flew in the wind.



**Bharat Shekhar** lives in New Delhi, India, and started out his career as a researcher and then lecturer in history. Somewhere along the way 'his tree' shook and dropped him in the IT field as an Instructional Designer.

His stories and poems have been published in several journals and anthologies including 'Words, Words, Words', 'Inscribed', 'Here and Now', 'Being Boys' and 'Pens on Fire'. Two others have become picture books. His latest release is a collection of short stories for children titled 'Talking Tales'.

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