



Flight

Sourabh Chatterji

Asato Ma Sadgamay, Tamaso ma Jyotirgamay, Mrityorma Amritam
Gamaya

In the hollow of a deodar, on the foothills of the Shivaliks, grew two parakeet chicks, Vritt and Chitt. Vritt was bigger, stronger and also a little louder, but Chitt had a soft voice, deep eyes, even though a little slender and both were dear sons of a big & beautiful mother. All over the forest she would fly, fetching seeds, fruits most juicy

and nuts most dry, for she loved her young ones, in whose eyes she saw her own reflection. Vritt ate voraciously but mother fed Chitt adequately. And while mother perched on the edge of the hollow, both wondered at the softness and the strength of her wings, the sharpness and the brightness of her beaks, her loud squawk and whistle mellow. When the dawn arrived, they were amazed by the fiery ball passing by, and the joyous dancing of the trees, to the rustling chorus of the leaves. Then whole day, they both would love, talk and play and alongside each other always they would stay. And when night fell, they would cuddle and take cover, under the velvet feathers of their mother, wondering at the strange noises outside and far away those glittering eyes, beyond the leaves, playing seek and hide. As they looked at their mother appreciably, she would exaggerate their each and every quality, as if it was out of the ordinary and before losing themselves to dreams they would tell each other a long or a short story. Vritt and Chitt thus grew bigger, like shadows of each other, in the warmth and shelter, of beauty, love and wonder.

One morning, both brothers woke up lazily, to the sun's brilliance dazzling them sharply. Mother had already left for food. They lifted their eyes and saw the rays, flashing as it filtered through the haze. Awoken into awareness, all around they heard strange voices. Suddenly, something aroused Vritt from inside. He crawled up to the edge of the hollow and stretched his neck outside. Chitt followed tentatively and stretched along hesitantly. And both were so dazed, by the dewy morning beauty, that they looked on amazed. Rows after rows there were trees after trees, as far as they could see, all dancing faintly together to the slight cool breeze. And the pearls of dew, slipped from the leaves green and blue, into the abyss one by one, as they tried to hold on to them to the last, like a loved one. Suddenly, they felt a faint breeze touching their face lightly, as if to greet them to a new world politely. Beyond the leaves there were birds, big and small, above and below, their hollow, moving from tree to tree, singing and alluring them to their musical mystery. Their heart was tantalised in delightful amazement and their whole

being ignited with a hopeful excitement. As they stared on, an angelic apparition, emerged from the mist and approached them in a majestic flight. It was their mother, her wings very wide and her long tail giving her a royal glide. On the hollow when she came and perched upon, her glorious reflection, kindled in them a light of their own realisation. That's what they were meant to be-Birds. That's what they were meant to do-Fly. Then they both fed from her beaks vigorously.

Night fell and both brothers, lay snugly beside their mother. Beyond the leaves of the farthest twig, the clear midnight blue sky, with millions of starry eyes, seemed calling them outside. Then looking on, thinking something, in his calm and deep voice Chitt enquired "Mother, when can we go out? when shall we fly?" Caressing his forehead lovingly, mother responded instinctively, "Beware sons! the world outside is beautiful and exciting but then there are turbulent winds, wily predators and situations enticing. Erelong, your wings will be wider, your tail shall be long, your claws will be firmer and your chest will be strong. You can then ride the winds assured of your freedom songs." Then her love outpoured and she snuggled, and they cuddled, in her warm assurance. But nothing could put Vritt to peace, for he couldn't forget the image in the eyes of his mother, that had grown quite a few green feathers

As days passed by and as brothers grew bigger, so did their awareness, their desires more so, their hunger. Again and again to feed them, the mother would go round, with the result that mostly she was not around. And as more and more feathers came on their wings, stronger and stronger to the outside grew their belonging. But while, Chitt remained calm, patient and awaited, the outside drift kept making Vritt more and more edgy, anxious and agitated. Chitt observed Vritt as he looked more outside, leaving his brother alone and longing inside. Slowly, as Vrit spent more and more time on the edge, both spoke and played everyday a little less and Chitt's presence kept receding the holl's hazy darkness, like a light, moving farther away into the night.

One morning Chitt was stirred into a shocking awakening, as if there was a crisis awaiting. He looked towards the edge of the hollow, where Vritt was perched precariously, fluttering his wings vigorously. Chitt asked querulously, "Vritt ! what are you doing? Careful Brother!! you will fall, where are you going!" Vritt retorted, "Mother has been gone overlong and I am hungry, I can't wait any long." Chitt advised fanitly, "Be patient brother! don't you remember about the predators?" Vritt desperate to break free, replied petulantly, " I am stronger and bigger of us two, I will be able to fly and find my food, I can't stay hungry like you" Saying this Vritt dived outside, flapping even more strenuously.

No sooner did he leave the holl, a strange force pulled him down and transformed his flight into a fall. He tried following, what he had seen his mother doing, but still small were his wings and all he managed was a slight skimming. He slid downwards into the abyss towards the earth, and landed awkwardly, tumbling and a little hurt. Out of breath and disoriented, he tried to get on his feet but stumbled. His throat burnt like fire and his whole body buckled in pain. Somehow he mustered the energy to crawl up to a tree's cavity to rest and regain. Then he looked above and around. There were deodars after deodars, towering, intimidating *deuses*, standing in submission, with their million hands open, heads bent in salutation, singing in honour of the sun, arising from the eastern horizon. And grass, shrubs and weeds spread all over the ground, somewhere tall, somewhere low, somewhere green, somewhere brown. Here and there, there were some patches, that were clear.

Vritt raised his head to look for his hollow, but he could'nt see it anywhere. He tried to cry out for his mother but his dry throat choked with thirst and fear. The greeting songs which called him out, now sounded like portentous warnings. Winds seeping through the tall grass seemed like thousands of snakes hissing. Rustling of the leaves resounded with a frightening tremor. The magnificent world now stunned him with its terrifying tenor. The sky seemed distant, home left far away, all the little one could find was damp

cold earth to lay. Frightened and cold, he retreated further into the hole. Injured and tired, he started losing himself to sleep as he retired. As he fell asleep, an image emerged from the dark deep. His mother in all her flying glory overfilled his heart with a loving but painful memory, and he cried as he slept.

The image of his mother, her bright green feathers, her scarlet beak, her long tail, those wings wide, her loving eyes, covered him in all her magnificent splendour. He felt the warmth of her feathers as he used to snuggle below her. Then the calm voice of his brother, resounded in his ears. The memory of his slenderness stirred him into his present loneliness. His heart pierced by arrow of separation, outpoured with tears of desolation. In sadness he lay, sojourning into his past days, recollecting the security and freedom, which lay within the boundaries of love and home.

Suddenly, hunger shook him back into reality. That's why he left his home, that's why he lay in this grassy cavity. Now he knew, neither he could fly nor flee. He looked here and there. Beyond the grass, in the open patch, he could see, left over by some other bird, an old eaten berry. He held back, afraid to venture but hunger kept on prodding him further. Compelled by his instinct, he took a breath long and deep, and ran towards the patch and picked up the berry, returning back to his scoop in a flurry. Out of breath, still he ravenously pounded the rotten old berry. Oh! It tasted so good. He felt a little reassured, his pain slightly obscured. But the berry instead of satisfying his hunger, inflamed it further. Now his eyes looked further beyond, but still his wings hurt and could not fully respond. He stepped out of his scoop stealthily and started looking around carefully. The birds on the trees cried out in a tumultuous frenzy, as if there was some urgency.

Across the grassy patch he could see, another berry, bigger, fresher and juicy. It looked really inviting, but around he could hear some strange voices rising. He had to chose whether to go for it or stay, but what if someone else came and took it away. He had to decide fast, he wanted to keep his cravings at bay. So he took a deep breath

again and rushed fervently. Reaching it, he pierced his beak into the berry ardently. Sweet juice outpoured, luring him to eat there itself eagerly. Then he picked up the remaining, to take it back to eat peacefully in his dwelling. As he rushed back he stumbled. Then he felt as if he was being lifted. But his wings were still folded. He found himself lying on soft span and straightened up, to look into the eyes of a man.

When Vritt recovered he discovered, he was in a cage, but he wondered what to do, so young was his age. It was an old, broken cage made of iron strips held together by

winding wires, and the old green paint hanging from the rusted strips stood witness to many suffocated desires. It was kept, on a cement plinth around a sacred fig, that stood on the far end of a mud floored backyard. Along the boundary was a wattle fence. There were some chairs kept on the near end. Beyond the boundary, was arising an uncertain darkness, gradually smothering all existence into a stultifying stillness. Body quivering, soul shuddering, wings fluttering, with his beaks he tried twisting, the iron strips in vain. Finally, when his energy drained his eyes overflowed and his heart cried out in pain.

Thus Vritt spent his first few days in prison, frightened, restless, loveless, in a miserable condition. Looking at the trees, wondering at the sky, seeing other birds, he also longed to fly. To their twitterings and their songs, he could only reply with a sigh. Gradually, with time the pain started subsiding, especially when he started realising, that in the prison he never suffered from hunger, and adequate food and water was just two jumps from his hanger. More so, the man he saw every day was not only harmless, but also shared his food, and was quite generous. Everyday, he would come to him many times, smile, whistle, call him differently and talk to him strangely and if Vritt whistled back, he would give him a berry. He filled his bowl of water and food again and again and never kept him hungry.

It was a slight cold night. Curled up in his cage, Vritt lay lost in dreams of his flight. Suddenly, his body trembled as a strange smell

wafted across his nostrils. He raised his head to look into a pair of glittering eyes beyond the grill. It was a cat, fully black, licking its lips greedily, swaying its tail slowly, while she inspected the cage carefully. Finally, before she poised for attack, she tried pulling up an iron strip with her fangs, failing which like a snake upon it she sprang, pushing it pulling it and finally toppling it with a clang. To Vritt it was clear, it was one of those strange creatures which mother spoke about and as his stomach contracted with fear, it bursted out the loudest squawks anybody could hear. Suddenly, the backdoor opened with a crack fully and the man came out with a stick fretfully. The cat jumped over the fence and ran away fearfully. Then the man straightened the cage, picked it up, said something and whistled softly. He took him inside, kept him in a warm corner and filled up his bowls. The warmth and softness had him reassured and he settled in one corner of the cage consoled. As his eyelids started to close, the image of the cat from the dark deep arose. Now he could clearly see himself in those grey eyes. Then he saw her claws, her tail and her terrifying canines and then came the image when she was ready to plunge. His being quivered, but a faint whistle opened his eyes and soothed his ears, and the kind eyes of the man substantially reduced his fears. Then there was a realization. What he thought was his prison, was actually his security, his protection. He had what all beings fought for everyday. He had, what the black cat hadn't. He had what all beings seek assurance of every moment – security of life, assurance of food. Anything else, he needn't.

As seasons passed, Vritt grew bigger, a ring grew around his neck, his chest felt stronger, his wings became wider and his beak became redder. But he didn't even have the desire to flap them or flutter. Gradually, he stopped looking at the sky. Rather he looked in front. He had lost the touch with the bright rays of the sun. The rustling of the leaves to the slight breeze gradually grew fainter and the birds riding high in the sky slowly receded farther- barely visible, barely audible.

But Vritt was not disconcerted. Rather he had settled. He had gradually started to like his certain, comfortable and sluggish existence. He had more than a reasonable subsistence. He had grown accustomed to the man, learned to whistle and somewhat speak like him and it was an agreeable co-existence. Every time, he spoke like him, the man would give him juicy berries, fruits and seeds. The more he spoke back the more food he had. All that was to be done was to follow, all that was required was compliance. It was so easy and he was already gaining the man's confidence. What was on his mind now was not the sky, stars, or the sun, but how was the master's temperament and what were his directions. Now and then, he would observe sparrows, parrots and other birds in the courtyard relentlessly fluttering, hopping, pecking, scurrying, fighting, stealing and then scooting. When the sweltering sun scorched everything, they would land there thirsty and gasping, stealthily sipping water from the puddle and bathing, situation permitting. While he lay under the shade of the sacred fig comfortably, they would come around his cage and look at him curiously. He wondered what they thought about him frequently, but he considered them deprived and unfortunate, proudly. Thus, Vritt settled into his prison and his delusion. Now he saw the world through those strips of iron and he gradually got used to that vision.

The rusted cage over time had grown weaker, but to Vritt it had become dearer. One night as the man lifted the cage to take Vritt inside, its floor fell off and all the food and water spilled outside. But Vritt didn't fall. Prompt he was to hold on to the iron strips of the cage's wall. He just couldn't let it go as he held on to it with his beaks and claws. Then he saw the man smiling and whistling, as if something strange was happening. Inside the house he came and closed the door and put the floorless cage on the floor. The man again whistled at him softly, filled up his bowls and rewarded him greatly, as if he had reached a major milestone successfully.

Vritt, now, lived in a cage without a base. It was just a cover, a shroud of iron strips, above him spread over. From now on

whenever, the man would pick up the cover to shift him from one place to another, Vritt would punctiliously hold on to the the strips, while he was carried over. Food and water was slid from under. He adapted to the change so fast, as if he had completely forgotten what he was. Now, whenever guests visited, the parrot with love for his cage, was proudly presented. They were first brought close to the cage and when it was gradually lifted, the parrot would promptly grasp the strips and along with it was proudly hoisted. It was a demonstration as if it was some quality in the man himself that was put on exhibition. Then the man would put the cage back on the ground with an expression of self-fulfilling satisfaction.

One day a friend of the man, visited him with his son. While they sat in the backyard laughing and talking loudly, the young little boy ventured around playfully. Vritt could make out that the friend called him Hari repeatedly. Playing around the boy came close to his cage and on his knees went down looking at him curiously. Vritt looked back at a brown boy with black hair, strange smile and kind eyes. Hari's face looked like the sky, on which, like glimmering stars, laid his eyes. His hair rustled like a willow tree and from his entire being soothing waves came towards him and as if from an eventide sea. In his innocence was the openness and freedom of the vast sky, he recollected he had seen in his mother's glorious flight.

The descent was rapid from that mood of elevation, when suddenly he had the realisation, that above him there was no cage, no protection. His heart erupted with a quiver which travelled through him like a tremor and his each and every feather, stood up on its end in terror. Then a stirring bellow pulled him back from panic's hollow, and he saw the man with his friend standing and laughing with the cage in his hand hanging. Apparently, both had come there to see the display, but with Vritt's mind diverted things didn't go the usual way. But what had happened was even more than expected and the relation between the cage and the parrot was even more clearly demonstrated, even to Vritt himself . However, the boy neither laughed nor smiled but looked at him with surprise, as if

there was some deep malaise. In so many days the boy was the only man who was differently amazed. Vritt felt strange, awkward and even ashamed.

The winds had become stronger lately, moving the trees violently and the leaves, upturned by the wind, rustled anxiously. The sun, amongst the clouds, played hide and seek repeatedly and as the dusk approached, the returning flocks cried out loudly, calling attention of Vritt eagerly. From his corner in the lawn, Vritt again looked at the birds, sky and the sun as if remembering something forgotten long. Suddenly, he felt the wind touching his face with a strange affection, as if to remind him of their old connection. He was a little flustered but soon regained his attention. Suddenly, he felt an image in front. He looked more carefully trying to focus his vision. Yes, it was a parrot, just outside. It was looking at him astonishingly with his rounded deep eyes. Then it walked up and said in a soft voice, “Vritt!”.

A soft ripple arose far away in the deep ocean of time. Then like a wave, it kept gathering mass of memories and as it approached it kept gaining momentum, finally when it hit the shores of the present, it brought everything altogether to one moment, in all its gigantism. Yes, he knew the eyes, he knew the voice, he knew his breath and he felt his warmth. He was his Chitt, his brother, he seemed his own image, he looked exactly like him rather.

“Vritt , my brother, you are here!”, said the parrot outside sobbing. “How long it has been! how long I called for you ! how long I looked for you! how long I cried for you ! and you are here, in this prison ! I feel so sorry for you !”. “Sorry! ...why sorry? ” Vritt asked curiously. “Aren’t you seeing, how comfortable I am in my dwelling”. Chitt, found it perturbing. He asked, “Vritt! What do you mean ? What are you saying ! ” With a sense of arrogance, Vritt clarified, “Yes, as you can see, there are very few like me . I mean unlike other birds, I am cared for, fed well and live in security. I don’t have to fly hither and thither scurrying and scrambling for food all over and if you remember”, he said even more proudly, “ I

live with that strange animal man, for I have many qualities and can do many things, so he looks after me and provides me everything, here itself in my dwelling.” “You know”, Vritt said a little loudly, “I can even speak and whistle like him and whenever I do so he rewards me gratefully... .. and we are great friends”.

“ Rewards!” Chitt retorted with a disgusting sneer, “You are proud to sing songs of the man and whistle like him!! This voice doesn’t belong to you. You are just the carrier. This man is not your friend, he is your master”. Vritt felt humiliated and he strongly rebutted, “The man gave me food when I was dying of hunger and what you call prison protected me from predators.” Clouds gathered up from the horizon, following one behind the other like soldiers, marching to the beats of thunder. Vritt narrated the story of his hunger, and of the attack by the cat - emphatically, fearfully, traumatically.

Chitt heard patiently and genuinely living through his experiences vicariously. Then he spoke considerately, “ Brother , your behaviour has been moulded, by the circumstances that have unfolded. When you left the hollow you were young, you faced pain, hunger and death. The man fed you, the cage protected you and then you forgot everything –the sky, the trees , the sun, the stars and Time. But you did not forget your fears. You became your fears. But you are more than that. To live content, in an assurance, which submits the self into subservience, is a matter of contempt. Vritt! remember who we are ? We are birds and we have wings. Our food, we fly, peck and collect, not sit at one place and get fed. But collecting food is not everything. A bird rises above and flies, that’s where his nature lies-freely, fully spread, not at one place remaining folded. Our identity is our wings, our flight is our meaning .” Then Chitt jumped over the cage and holding the strips firmly, spoke in a calm voice, but with assurance and poise, and his voice kept on resounding louder and clearer, “You are vulnerable no longer, your wings have grown and so must you, above your fears. Look into me and who you are, see”

Suddenly after an overwhelming thunder, the lively winds started blowing away the clouds asunder, allowing the sun to re emerge

from under. Vritt looked mesmerised into those same eyes- deep, shining and tranquil but alert, awake and aware . As he focussed into them, he saw an image , a large, green and round head with a black ring around his neck, and a beak scarlet. He saw himself, a figure regal with a majestic chest donning a robe royal. In the background he could see the sun shining the sky and the birds flying high, beckoning him to the sky. Inside him something stirred, and as he quivered, his wings spread instinctively and he fluttered. His wings were too large, for those eyes and for his safety cage. For the first time he felt them touching those iron strips. He felt the same sensation on his tail which he saw now went beyond the walls. Suddenly, Vritt felt a shiver - his brother was there no longer.

Sensation was followed by realisation of his present condition. He slid from anger, to shame, to humiliation, to dejection, not because he ended up in his cage but because there he held on . He had wings but flying he shunned, he had a voice but spoke not his own , his body he saved but his soul he disowned, he followed the master but defied the One. His heart broke, his throat choked . He closed his eyes and lifted his neck to cry - he could'nt. From his eyes his sorrow overflowed and every thing blurred. As his eyes dried , on its periphery he felt a figure standing near the boundary and it walked up slowly. When Vritt looked carefully he realised he was the same wheatish small boy –Hari. He came and sat

down near the cage. An ocean of compassion outpoured from his face. Then the boy stood up and slowly lifted up the broken cage.

Vritt was hypnotised. His body and mind were frozen by the simultaneous assaults of despair and surprise. He did not hold the cage this time . Then he looked up and saw the world without the iron strips- a clear open sky. A tremor arose from deep within and travelled to his wings and they started fervently flapping. They didn't hurt, there were no grills to touch. He flapped again and his claws started departing the earth. He felt a downward force . But now with his chest, his heart , he flapped extremely hard and as he arose he saw, the world from above- the way he was born to see. He

saw the trees dancing to the breeze, and it came and touched his face, to greet . He folded his claws and flapped harder and went farther and higher and was relieved.



Sourabh Chatterji

Sourabh Chatterji was born in 1976 in Lucknow, India. He is a serving Army officer and was commissioned into the Armoured Corps in 1999. He has been regularly contributing to journals and magazines. His essay on current issues, “Water Wars : Implications for India”, won the second prize in the USI Gold Medal Essay Competition-2019. Apart from writing his interests include meditation, nature, solitude and contemplation.

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](#).

Authors & Books

We publish book releases, Press Release about books and authors, book reviews, blurbs, author interviews, and any news related to authors and books for free. We welcomes authors, publishers, and literary agents to send their press releases. Visit our website <https://page.co/Vw17Q>.