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A Telugu story in translation

DIL HAI TO BAS: HEART IS WHAT MATTERS

(ORIGINAL TITLE: DIL HAI TO BAS)

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“Bhubaneshwar to Bombay Konark express will shortly leave platform No.5” came on the announcement in Hindi and English, and it was indistinct. When the announcement was next in Telugu I understoodit, maybe because it was my mother tongue.

I passed on the emptied coffee cup to the cafeteria boy who had stood rooted, gazing at me, impatient to wait until I sipped it off. The lad was no more than ten. As soon as I paid him, he scurried along to the next bogie, resuming hisshouting “Coffee! Coffee!”

The train pulled out slowly. It moved past the platform and kept company with a parallel track. As Vijayawada slid behind, my mind shrank like a deflated balloon. Until now I had passed the time by observing the surroundings and the neighbouring passengers. Presently, the verdant fields on either side brought back memories of the environment of my village, mother’s love and father’s indulgence. The more I tried to push them back the greater they surged in. Adjusting my curls that flapped to the breeze, I glanced sideward.

Hubby was chatting with someone in Hindi. I had always called him *baavaright* from my childhood because he was my maternal aunt’s son. He would easily mingle with anyone, strange or familiar. I was not like that. I was rather shy and got tensed up to talk to strangers.

Right from my childhood, all the relatives decided en masse to hook me up to him. It was how our marriage must have taken place. Otherwise there was a lot of difference between *baava* and me, as much as between a mammoth and a mouse.

Our village had facilities only up to Class Ten, so I studied only up to it. Mom didn't agree to send me to a neighbouring place for higher studies. Father was apprehensive whether *baava* would marry me if I didn't have higher education. When I was in Class Ten, *baava* went to the city for his engineering studies. I too thought that people might pass mocking comments like: "That engineer's wife is only a Tenth!" But how could I disregard mom's decision? That's why I shut up my mouth and stayed indoors.

Our houses lay side by side. *Baava* would visit his home once or twice a year. Whenever he did, he wouldn't go back without talking to father. The way of the villagers was strange. Even when I was in front of *baava*, father would unabashedly ask him: "Hey, when would you marry her?" Feeling bashful I would scamper inside. Yet my heart throbbed with curiosity for his reply.

Years rolled by like seconds. *Baava* got a job at the Ambarnath Ordnance Factory in Maharashtra. Since it was a central government job, though in another state, he promptly went there, causing a big jolt in my heart. Where was the Kavutaram village in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, and where was the Ambarnath town in the Thane district of Maharashtra? It was one year since he joined the job. When he visited the village last, he was said to have candidly told father: "Uncle, if you want to give Lata's hand to me, get us married in this year itself. It's difficult for me being alone and cooking food. If the marriage takes place in June-July, I would immediately take her along with me."

Though it was reason to celebrate since *baava* himself broached the topic, the thought of marriage in June itself, and on its heels the journey to Ambarnath – a far off place in another state where the language and the people were strange – overwhelmed me with fear. At dinner that night, I moved father about it: "*Naannaa!* Couldn't you ask *baava* about the prospects of a transfer to our state?"

“Yes, I did dear. And he clarified that it would not be possible in the near future. Anyway, why are you so nervous to live together with your own *baava* whom you knew right from your childhood?” said he. “You should be a bit plucky,” he added a gentle note of reprimand.

Tears rolled in my eyes. Of course, I wasn't brave and outgoing by nature. I couldn't move with strangers in a jiffy. A girl of inhibitions that I was, could I leave mom, dad and younger brother behind and go away to live at a new and distant place? Such moments brought in me a feeling against this marriage.

Soon June came in. *Baava* arrived at the village from Ambarnath a week ahead of the wedding. Being the only son in his family, he had to take care of everything himself related to the wedding arrangements. Whatever was needed, one had to go to the town to fetch it. Wedding took place in my home, and the Satyanarayana Swami puja in his. Our homes being adjacent, there was an atmosphere of gaiety and festivity in both, on both the days. A week of fun and frolic wheeled by. Every evening, *baava* and I used to go out for a ride or a movie on the scooter of the village president's son.

‘If only time passes like this with *baava* living here itself – how delightful it would be!’ I mulled. Hardly had I been lost in these ruminations before the tickets for our journey were reserved. Seeing both of us off into the bus for Vijayawada – auntie, mom and dad stayed back. They booked the things necessary for our small family with the parcel office.

It was 8:00 in the morning when we reached Vijayawada. The Konark Express was scheduled to arrive at 8:35, but as usual came late by half an hour. I got into it with indifference and took my seat. The train chugged on toward Mumbai at a great speed.

I felt like jumping out of the train to return to my village to see mom, dad and brother again and again. The images of the school I studied at, our fields, the temple of Siva, and the rose bay shrub in front of our house – all moved across my mind and drew tears from my eyes. The very thought that I left my village which had become a part of me and that I was moving away to a far off land made me weepy.

“Lata... what happened?” It was only when *baava* affectionately placed his hand on my shoulder and shook me, did I come around. The tears that stayed like flowers in the eyes slid down and dropped on my lap.

“Just a grain of dust fell into the eye.” I turned toward him and smiled. Smart that he was, he found my smile lifeless.

“Let me pull down the glass shutter.” Saying so, he bent over me and slid it down. The breeze blowing in from outside was arrested, but who could arrest the thoughts stirring within me?

“*Baava*, when will we visit our village?” I asked him, meekly.

“It’s not even two hours since we left the village, yet you’ve got so home-sick!” returned *baava*.

‘*Baava*, you know how to run with the time. You can part with the mother who bore you and the village you were born in – for the sake of a job and for earning money – and move from country to country. But I can’t, I’m sensitive. It grieves me to leave our village. People like you can’t understand my sensitiveness...’ I wanted to speak out the sorrow in my mind, but in the meantime he plunged into a jovial talk with his co-passenger and was laughing aloud. Again I became lonesome.

The train reached Secunderabad to a hustle and bustle. It was three in the afternoon. I had a cup of tea here, having had lunch at Kazipet. After the engine was changed, the train resumed its movement. After crossing Tandur the last station in Andhra, the train entered Karnataka. We had dinner at Wadi Junction. For a little while, I passed the time by shuffling through the newspapers that we brought along. In the meantime, *baava* made the bed and I climbed onto the upper berth. But not a wink of sleep I got.

With me having come away from the village, who would pluck the rosebay flowers in front of our house and take them daily to the priest of the Siva temple? Who would help mom in her cooking? Who would answer brother’s queries during his study? A barrage of thoughts clouded me into a disturbed sleep.

At five in the morning I got up. *Baava* had already returned, brushing his teeth. I too refreshed myself and came back in ten minutes.

“The very next station is Kalyan Junction. We have to get down there and go back by two stations by the local train,” said *baava*.

I wasn't aware of the time the train had entered Maharashtra from Karnataka. The passengers who had chatted with *baava* in Hindi, also gathered near the door. As soon as the train pulled in, we alighted and it started again slowly.

It was nearing six o'clock. There was a slight drizzle. The fog enveloping the surroundings had not yet cleared, thereby conjuring up the ambience of a hill station.

Some five or six people approached *baava* immediately after spotting him. I was surprised that so many friends came to receive him and so early in the morning. These were the friendships he cultivated during the last one year.

A boy picked up the suitcase from my hand. They were all talking to *baava* in Hindi, and I couldn't understand a bit. In the meanwhile, the local had arrived, and all of us hurried on into it. And it left the station as fast as it had arrived. It halted at Ulhasnagar before reaching Ambarnath.

So it was here that my new family life was going to begin. Now at this dawn I didn't have as much fear and anxiety as I had in the night. The cordiality that *baava's* friends beamed, dispelled my inhibitions, partially though. We reached home by an auto.

It was a single bed room portion in the J Quarter of the Ordnance Estate. It was simple and nice enough. This had been allotted to *baava* as a bachelor. Now there was a chance of moving into a bigger portion.

“*Kyaa Rajeshwar? Hamaaree bahoo ko laayaa?* What Rajeshwar! Have you brought along our daughter-in-law?” A woman came up agog. Her enthusiasm indicated that the question was directed at me. I looked at *baava*.

“*Haa... Maa abhee aayaa.* Yes, mother, we have come just now,” said *baava*.

She joyously drew me to her and kissed me on my forehead. I was surprised at her initiative.

“She lives in the next quarters,” said baava. “Before you joined me, it was she who rather took care of my needs. She enquires if I have brought her daughter-in-law,” he explained in Telugu, and I developed great respect for her.

Baava’s friends took leave one after the other.

“*Baava*... Do you think that with no knowledge of Hindi, could I get on here in this Maharashtra?” I raised my doubt, gently.

“Silly Lata, look here... This vast land of India is our native land. *Whatever the corner in this country, it is ours* – cultivate that thinking. Fill your mind with satisfaction that the entire land from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari is ours. Then only can you grow up. If you lead yourself into misgivings that you can’t move out of your village, out of your state, and out of your caste – you will be no better than a little frog in a big pond. In the one hundred portions of the quarters here, there are people drawn from all the states in the country. Yet we are living together like brothers. Lata, where there is a will there is a way. You can see your mother and brother in the people living here. You can turn these very two rooms into a celestial garden. Am I not right?” said *baava*.

The sentiment of idealism exuding from *baava* bowled me over. By now, a week had passed by in his company, at this strange place. Whoever I came across here so far, I had noticed a concern in them to help others. I felt the atmosphere of a joint family. I began to feel that Ambarnath was my whole world. People from all over the states visited the hoary monolithic Shiva temple here every evening. It was a temple of love and affection. Everyone talked to the other in a language of smiles. I didn’t understand their language, nor did they understand mine.

Only of late, I had begun to pick up Hindi. By and by, I comprehended their Hindi words blended with Marathi. I began to imbibe the broadmindedness of *baava* slowly and steadily. The people all around showered warmth and affection. Our means of communication was not the language, but only gestures. What if? Between heart and heart where was the need of a language? This revelation dawned on me.

[The story 'Dil hai to bas' is from the collection of short stories Manasu Tadi Aaraneeku (Let not the moistness of your heart dry up) by Omprakash Narayan Vaddi. The original Telugu story was first published in a leading magazine, Andhra Prabha Weekly, Feb 14, 1990.]

Bio:

1. Omprakash Narayan Vaddi(Original writer)

Omprakash Narayan Vaddi is a senior journalist and writer in Telugu from Hyderabad. Originally hailing from Machilipatnam (Krishna District, AP) and born on Sep 8, 1966, he began to write poetry and short fiction from his college days, and draw cartoons when he was twenty. Over a 1,000 of his cartoons have appeared in various leading Telugu weeklies and monthlies. About 50 of his stories have been published in various dailies, weeklies and monthlies. He has reviewed over 500 movies for the *Jagriti* weekly during the last two decades. Besides an anthology of short stories entitled "4 Into 5" by four writers including himself, he has brought out his own collection *Manasu Tadi Aaraneeku* (2013) (Let not your heart dry up). Starting off his journalist career with *Jagriti*, he later on moved to Mumbai to work for the *Capital Market* magazine until its Telugu version was launched from Hyderabad. After working for the Telugu version for some time, he had stints with the *Superhit* cine weekly, the dailies *Vaarta* and *Andhra Jyothi*, and as the cine correspondent for *Sakshi TV*. An MA (Political Science) and an MCJ, he is presently a senior correspondent with the *ABN Andhra Jyothi* news channel.

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2. U Atreya Sarma (Translator)

Interested in literature, U Atreya Sarma is into writing poetry, freelance editing, book-reviewing and translating. His output – about 250 poems and 400 writings (articles, editorials, reviews, forewords, translations) mostly in English and a sprinkling in Telugu – has appeared in various print/online media and anthologies. A freelance editor with 17 years of experience, he is presently the Editor (Fiction, Reviews, News & Events) & Contributing Editor (Telugu Literature) of the e-journal *Muse India* (www.museindia.com). His past editorship includes *Bharatiya Pragna* monthly and *Cyberhood* weekly. He has also brought out Telugu literary features in three issues of *Muse India*. He is also the official critic of *Metverse Muse*, an international journal of metrical poetry published from Visakhapatnam.

He composed in English the profiles of 132 modern Telugu stalwarts for the bilingual book *Marapuraani Maanikyaalu* (2010) (with wordy & pictorial sketches in Telugu by BNIM, a noted writer & artist).

Atreya Sarma has edited three books: *Lung Care and Long Life* (2012) by Dr Shyam Sunder Raj; *Memoirs & Musings of an IAS Officer* (2013) by KV Natarajan, IAS (Retd); and *Turquoise Tulips* (a collection of short stories) by the USA-based Dr Ashok Patwari (in publication stage). The fourth one is in the pre-publication stage – a revised fictional autobiography by Gian Singh Shatir (a Sahitya Akademi Awardee, Urdu).

Sarma's translation of 16 Telugu short stories by a senior and prominent writer Dr Mallemala Venugopala Reddy under the title *Salt of the Earth* (2013) has been acclaimed by reviewers. As a panellist, he has translated into English 6 out of 36 chapters of Jnan Pith awardee Viswanatha Satyanarayana's Telugu mega novel *Veyipadagalu*, under the aegis of the Hyderabad based Viswanatha Sahitee Peetham (scheduled to be launched on Oct 18, 2015).

Atreya Sarma features and encourages poets through the weekly column 'Wordsmith' in *The Hans India*, a Hyderabad based English daily circulated in AP & Telangana states.

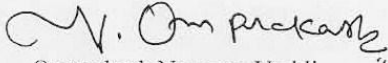
He holds an MA (English), a PG Dip (Mass Communications & Translation Techniques), a BA (English, Sanskrit, History) and BSc (Botany, Zoology, Chemistry), and CAIIB (Part I) with mid-level managerial experience in SBI.

While his home base is Hyderabad, Atreya Sarma lives between Hyderabad and Pune.

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Letter of permission to translate short fiction

I hereby permit **U Atreya Sarma** to translate my Telugu story "**Dil hai to bas**" (from the collection of my short stories, *Manasu Tadi Aaraneeku*, 2013) into English for the online journal *Episteme* of Bharat College of Arts & Commerce, Badlapur (W).



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