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Two stories from "Trishanku Aur Anya Kahaniyam", by Mannu Bhandari. A translation and commentary

Storck-Newhouse, Nancy Deane, M.A.
The University of Arizona, 1988

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TWO STORIES FROM TRISHANKU AUR ANYA KAHANIYAM,
BY MANNU BHANDARI. A TRANSLATION
AND COMMENTARY

by
Nancy Deane Storck-Newhouse

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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Anoop Chandola
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Date

April 27, 1988
DEDICATION

To Darrell
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Anoop Chandola, who introduced me to Mannu Bhandari's literary work and gave his support to this project, and to Dr. Hamdi A. Qafisheh and Dr. J. Michael Mahar for their assistance.
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Mannu Bhandari is a critically-acclaimed author in contemporary India. The two stories from *Trishanku Aur Anya Kahaniyam* (*Trishanku and Other Stories*), "Trishanku" and "Darar Bharne Ki Darar" ("The Rift of Filling in the Rift"), are presented translated from the original Hindi into English. These stories, written from the viewpoint of adolescent female narrators, explore the concept of rebelling against long-established tradition in India, seen from the standpoint of young persons seeking maturity. Each contains a 'story within a story' wherein a marriage is highlighted: one a non-traditional 'love marriage,' and the other a traditional arranged marriage which is unhappy.

In addition, there is a commentary in which facets of Mannu Bhandari's literary skill and implications of the above-mentioned themes are considered, and various problems of translating from the Hindi language into English while trying to do justice to a consummate artist are discussed.
"The boundary wall of the house gives Man good protection, but in addition it also ties him into one border. School, college, the places which accomplish development of the individual's brain, there his personality is also blunted in the name of discipline and rules and regulations.... The matter is this, brother, that the opposition of each thing remains only inside of it."

These are all; I'm not presenting a quotation from some book. My capacity just isn't of the type for reading heavy, bulky books. These are fragments of those words and discussions which are carried on in our house day and night. "Our house," that is, the arena of intellectuals. Here, amid cups of coffee and cigarette smoke, great prolixities are fastened to issues ... large veritable revolutions are made. In this house exists little work and very many words. I didn't study anywhere, but it surely looks from my house that for intellectuals to work is perhaps forbidden. Mater is free after the luxurious faithful attendance of her three
hours' job. Whatever little or more time remains after reading and writing goes into this or that debate, or otherwise in reposing. It's her opinion that as the body becomes inactive, indeed the mind and brain become active, and twelve out of the twenty-four hours a day she keeps only her mind and brain active. Pater is more than two paces ahead. If he had his way, he would also wash only at his table.

The word which is spun the most of all at our habitation is modernity. Wait, don't get the wrong idea of modernity. This is not the modernity of a hair cut and eating with knives and forks. This is the extreme modernity of intellectuals. What that is, I myself don't know, but yes, the matter of abandoning tradition is much heard in it. Keep kicking off tradition. If you come sticking to tradition, you will be kicked out.

Although the topics of the whole world are pounded in the arguments, there is still one topic perhaps very dear to all people. and it is marriage; that is to say, ruin. While the beginning is slight, the issue instantly proceeds to the intellectual level. "The institution of marriage has already become absolutely hollow ... the relationship of husband and wife is largely artificial and superficially imposed." ... And again the shreds of marriage are with profligacy blown to the four winds. In this argument the women would usually go in one direction and the men in another direction. The atmosphere of the debate would become so heated this way that I
would totally believe that now surely one or two people
would get a divorce. But I saw that no mishaps ever
occurred like this. All of the friends, having gathered
and well folded the layers of their very own marriage, sit­
ting stricken, settle down on it. Yes, the tone and speed
of the argument is just the same today.

Now reflect, they will invoke curses upon marriage;
then free love and free sex have to be supported. In this,
the rebounding, romping male would remain ahead -- looking
as if having made it the issue they have already enjoyed
half the pleasure of it. Papa is a big supporter himself.
But when it so happened that in the house an elder sister
from afar, who kept silent and never participated in these
discussions, acted upon this in a total way, then all of
Papa's modernity y y ... down the drain! Added to that,
Mommy looked after all the matter easily in the right way,
and tying in the bond of useless matrimony, gave meaning
to the life of the elder sister. However, this matter is
very old, and I have heard reference to it only with very
subdued and concealed language.

Papa and Mommy had a love marriage, also. However,
this is completely another thing, that ever since I became
mature enough I didn't see them making love, I saw them only
making arguments. Before the wedding Mommy had to argue a
lot with her father also about this decision of hers, and
this cycle of arguments had perhaps gone on very long. In
spite of this, it isn't an arguing marriage, it's indeed a love marriage, mention of which Mommy does make with great pride. Pride, not in regard to the marriage, but about the fact that she waged war with Grandfather. She had already repeated so many times the dialogues that took place between herself and Grandfather that I had them memorized. Still today when she mentions it, having deviated from tradition, one catches the glimpse of the satisfaction of having accomplished something rising on her face.

Well! I am being brought up in the house just like this, very free and unfettered. And in the process of being brought up, I unexpectedly one day became grown up. This awareness of being grown didn't burst so much from inside myself, as much as outside. An interesting incident was connected with it, also. It was thus, that directly in front of the house is a porch -- a room and a roof extended in front of it. Every year two or three students who came would stay in it; they would study strolling around on the roof. But I just never paid attention. I was not old enough to care. This time I saw that two young men had come there. There were then just those two, but at evening there would be a large concourse of their friends, and not only the entire roof, but the whole locale would echo festivity. Jesting to each other, and also flinging sarcasms at whichever young ladies would have come within their wandering gaze! But the true center of their gazing was our house ...
and evident, I should say, that it was only me. Whenever I came out on the verandah even to do something, from there one or two remarks would come trickling down while gam­boling in the air, and I would start to tremble on the in­side. For the first time I felt I existed ... and I just not only exist ... I am the center of attraction of some­one. With honesty I should say, then this first awareness of being myself seemed thrilling, and indeed in my own view I began to feel like a new person -- new and grown up.

The situation seemed strange. When they would make sarcastic remarks, then I would get annoyed with anger. Even though nowhere in their remarks was there uncivility ... it was a joviality rubbing gently at the mind alone. But when they would not be there, or being there, remained only mutually busy, then I would continue waiting -- within myself an unidentified restlessness would remain a trial and a bother. The world is this, my concentration would be centered only there under every condition, and leaving the room I would just stay hanging around on the verandah.

But this noisy, raucous behavior of these boys cer­tainly caused sleepless nights for the neighbors. Our lo­cality is the colony of businessmen from Hatharas and Kharza. Those in whose homes there were young, unmarried women were threatening the boys with the breaking of their legs and teeth. Because what was visible to all was the fu­ture peril of their girls. There was this much heat in the
neighborhood, and none of it was known to my parents. In truth the matter is this, that these people have made their state as an island. Remaining in the middle of everyone, yet separate from everyone.

One day I said to Mommy, "Mommy, those boys who have come in front, they toss remarks at me all the time. I won't listen silently; I will answer from here, too."

"Which boys?" Mommy asked with surprise.

The miracle is, Mommy knew nothing at all. In a tone mixed with annoyance and a little thrill I told the whole thing. But there was no special reaction from Mommy.

"Show me who the boys are ...," she said in a very cold manner and began to read again. My being teased which seemed so exciting to me, Mommy's apathy about it like this didn't seem right to me. If it were someone else's mother, then she would tighten her belt and would fix their seven generations, but it was as if there was just no effect on Mommy.

At the decline of the afternoon the assembly of boys gathered on the roof; then I told Mommy, "Look, these boys are the ones who keep looking here all the time, and no matter what I do, they keep on teasing me about it." I don't know what there was in my conversation that Mommy kept regarding me unblinkingly, and then slowly she smiled.
For a little while she inspected the roof boys, and then spoke, "They look like college boys. But these are unexpectedly children."

I felt like saying if it weren't kids would it then be old men teasing me? But at that time Mommy spoke, "Tomorrow evening let's invite these people for tea and have them make friends with you."

I was speechless.

"You are going to invite them for tea?" As if I just wasn't trusting Mommy's word.

"Yes, why what is it? Hey, it used to be in our time that you couldn't meet, so consolation was sought in passing only sarcastic remarks from a distance. Now times have changed."

I was thrilled indeed with none but this idea. I thought, Mother is in truth some high thing. These people will come to our house and will make friends with me. Suddenly it began to seem to me that I am very lonely and that I have a dire need of some friendship. In this neighborhood I didn't have special intimacy with anyone, and friends solely of my parents come to the house.

The next day passed in extreme doubt. I don't know if Mommy still keeps her word fully, or if she had spoken casually in just an impulsive mood and that the matter is finished. At evening I said only to remind her, "Mommy, will you really go invite those boys?" These were my very
words; otherwise then this was the gist, "Oh, Mommy, please go!"

And Mommy actually did indeed go. I don't remember if Mommy may have gone to anyone's house in the neighborhood more than two to four times. I remained waiting for her return with bated breath ... in every limb feeling what seemed like a strange light dancing. What if Mommy just came bringing them along? What if they treated Mommy with rudeness? But no, they didn't seem like that. After about a full hour Mommy returned. Excessively happy.

"They were dumbfounded to see me, all their courage just having been lost. It seemed to them, because so far people have been threatening them from their houses to break their legs and teeth, as if I had arrived straight at the house to fix them. But wow! The poor kids were so hospitable! They are just very sweet children. They have come from outside; there isn't a place in the hostel, therefore they are staying in the rented room. This evening when Papa comes, let's have them invited."

The time of waiting becomes so burdensome; it was after all my first experience. Papa came, and then Mommy related the whole matter with great enthusiasm. The satisfaction and pride of doing something different was as if spilling out from her every word. Papa was not the type who would remain behind. He listened to Mommy, and he was also very happy.
"Invite the boys. Hey, let them enjoy life and have a good time." To my parents a forceful opportunity was being presented for showing their modernity.

Sending the servant, the invitation was made; then just the following instant all were present. Mommy introduced them with great etiquette, and there was the exchange of "Hello ... Hi."

"Tanu, my child, make the tea for your friends."

Darn it! If Mommy’s friends should come, even then Tanu should make the tea, and if her friends should come, even then she has to do it. But suppressing my wishes, I got up.

The tea party continued on. A lot of jesting and joking went on, also. They kept putting forth the explanation that the neighbors falsely accuse them.... They don't do anything objectionable. "'Just for fun' we may do something; otherwise there isn't any substance to all this."

Papa encouraged them, saying, "Hey, in this age it is all right to do everything. If I got the opportunity today, I wouldn't lag behind."

A wave of laughter ran from here to there. After about two hours they began to go, and then Mommy said, "Look, remember that this is just your house. Whenever you want, do come over. It will be good company for our daughter, Tanu.... At some time she could use your help in her studies, and look, if you wish something to eat or drink
then just say so. I will have it made for you...." And the boys went while being captivated with Mommy's affection and close affinity and Papa's openness. Well, they had been invited in order to form a friendship with the helpless one who had just remained like an on-looker of this display.

After their departure, we continued to talk about it for a long time. Inviting to the house for a tea party the boys who had been teasing their daughter, and introducing them to her to make friends with the girl, this entire matter was appearing indeed very thrilling and romantic. From the next day Mommy would mention this event to every visitor. In making the account, clever Mommy builds up the rather insipid matter also in this interesting way, that again this thing was none but hugely interesting. Whoever would hear it would say right there ... "Bravo, that is the way it should be. Your viewpoint is very healthy toward things. Otherwise people will talk big, but they would suppress the children; even at a minute suspicious doubt, they will certainly spy."

And Mommy being pleased with this praise would say, "And what isn't it then? You remain free and keep the children free. We were suppressed in our childhood, with 'Don't do this ... don't go here.' Our children at least shouldn't be victims of this being ground down."
But Mommy's child was being just another victim of being ground down at this time, and it is that she was supposed to be the heroine of the drama but instead Mommy had become the heroine.

Well, the outcome of this entire incident was that the behavior of those boys was none but changed instantly. Mommy loaded upon them a nobility to which acting with conforming behavior was made their compulsion. Now when they would also see Mommy and Papa from their roof, then a wave ambiguously paying respects; and they would see me, then smiling ambiguously they would toss a "Hi." In the place of sarcastic remarks our conversation was begun ... conversation largely open and without hesitation. There was just this much distance between the roof and our verandah that the chatting was able to be performed by speaking loudly. Yes, this thing was certain, that the entire neighborhood heard our chatting and heard with much interest. Just as we would begin to talk, four to six bodies with heads popping out of the windows would stick there.

It is not so that love affairs of girls in the neighborhood did not exist; even events concerning girls had already occurred. But it was more or less a thing of big secrets, and it used to be properly concealed. And the neighbors when they used to be cognizant of any secret in this way by their keen glances, then they used to become greatly content. Men twisting moustaches in an attitude of
hauteur and women teasingly harassing by hands, well exaggerating by additions, would spread propaganda from here to there about these incidents, with somewhat the gist of, hey, we have seen the world ... you can't throw dust in our eyes.

But here the situation had just been turned upside down. Our chit-chat used to be so much in public that people hidden and concealed under cover of windows used to have to see and hear, and hearing also like this nothing came into their hands from which they would obtain some spiritual contentment.

But the matter had to grow and the matter grew. It was this that slowly, slowly the assembly of the roof began to solidify in my own room. Daily just at any time two, once in a while three or four boys arriving, would settle down, and the laughter and jokes of all the world and the course of tittle-tattle would go on. There would be also musical merry-making and tea-drinking, too.

At evening the friends of my parents would come to meet, then someone from among these people would just be sitting there. People who in the beginning had had great praise of 'Stay free and maintain the free' saw the form staying free was taking, then even in their eyes some strange-appearing doubts began to swim.

One or two friends of Mommy also said with subdued voice, "Tanu really is moving very fast." All of Mommy's
own enthusiasm had fallen low. And abandoning tradition, the thrill of doing something untraditional had already fallen in a complete way. Now then she had to digest this naked truth, that her inexperienced daughter of tender age stays surrounded in the middle of three or four young men. And the situation was this, that she was neither able to accept this circumstance completely nor was she able to just deny this sequence which was started in great zeal by none but herself.

Finally one day, making me sit down beside her, she said, "Tanu, child, these people assemble here every single day. After all, you have to study, also. I am but seeing that in the round of this friendship your studying is all being spoiled. This all must not then go on like this."

"I do study at night," I said carelessly.

"Heck, studying at night! How much time is there left indeed? And again this noisy group of four every single day doesn't please me that way. It's all right if they visit once in four to six days, and you indulge in tittle-tattle. But here then one or another just continues holding on daily." Anger was deepening in Mommy's voice.

This tone of Mommy's didn't seem right to me, but I was silent.

"You have been very open with them, tell them they should sit home and study and leave you alone to study. And if you do not have courage to say it, then I will say it."
But the state of affairs didn't come to the telling of even anything. Then somewhat from surfeit of studying, somewhat from other attractions of Delhi pulling them, the coming of the hostel boys became less, but Shekhar would arrive none but daily from the room in front ... sometimes at afternoon, then sometimes at evening. I didn't concentrate on whatever the subject was in the presence of three or four boys; the very same subject, being manifest most of all in one alone, came. He used to speak little, but he used to try to say something very much beyond words, and suddenly indeed I had begun to understand his wordless language ... I hadn't only begun to understand alone, I had begun to even give rejoinder. None but quickly it arrived into my understanding that between Shekhar and myself something like "love" had begun to grow. Although perhaps I only wasn't able to understand, but after seeing Hindi films it wasn't particularly difficult to comprehend.

Until in the mind it wasn't anything at all, it was all in all largely unobstructed. As it was indeed "something," then the desire of protecting it from the gaze of others also arose. When at any time the other boys would come, then they would come solely making noise from on the stairs -- speaking with extreme loudness. However, whenever Shekhar would come, he would come while creeping, and we would talk speaking in a hushed tone. The way that it is, the subjects used to be just very ordinary ... of school, of
college. But they used to seem something special indeed in whispering. Make love somewhat a child's game, somewhat mysterious, then it becomes enormously thrilling, otherwise it is immediately a straight plane. But a sixth sense Mommy has of knowing every secret of the house and family members and of which even Papa stays frightened ... with this there was not even the slightest delay on her part in comprehending all this. No matter how subdued and concealed Shekhar would come, Mommy would be even in any corner of the house; she would be disclosed with a thud, or again would ask from right there, "Tanu, who is it in your room?"

I saw that a strange-seeming worry began to appear faintly upon Mommy's face over this behavior of Shekhar's. But I could never think that Mommy would get worried like this on this matter. The house in which night and day love topics of various kinds may be just ground up -- the love topics of unmarried women, love topics of the married, love topics going on with one with two or three lovers -- this matter should be very commonplace then for that house. When it was about a friendship with the boys, then with one or two, it can indeed be also love. Mommy perhaps had understood that this whole situation must go the way of nowadays' artistic films -- of which she is a big supporter and admirer -- but in which from beginning to end nothing sensational ever occurs.
Whatever it may be, this worry of Mommy's also certainly made me slightly shaken. Mommy isn't just my mother, she is also friend and companion. In none but the way of two very close friends we talked of the whole wide world -- laughing and making jokes. I wanted her to talk about this matter also at this time, but she didn't make any conversation. Just, when Shekhar would come, then she abandoning her natural negligence, would carefully remain hovering around my room.

One day I alighted in order to go out with Mommy; then an affable lady of the vicinity was just dashed against the door. After giving and receiving words of salutation and welfare, she came to the true intention of things, "These roof boys in front, are they your relations?"

"No."

"Oh, I see! Daily they just continue sitting at your house in the evening, then I thought that they must be some relatives of yours."

"They are Tanu's friends." Mommy tossed this sentence in this way so somewhat carelessly and unhesitatingly that the helpless woman went back with the grief that the arrow did not hit the bull's eye.

That woman went back, but it seemed to me that having taken the cotton yarn of this matter into her own hands, Mommy now surely is going to card my little bit. Nothing happened to the woman who spoke, but then the weapon
spoiling everything for me came into Mommy's hands. For many days something is indeed being rolled and gathered also in her own mind. But Mommy said only this much, "It seems there isn't anything to do in the house of these people -- whenever you see them, they stay sitting piercing the beak into the house of another."

I wasn't only assured; on the contrary, comprehending the green signal for this from Mommy's side, I made some of my own speed, and sharp. But this much certainly was accomplished, that in one hour out of three hours with Shekhar I would spend time in studying. He would teach me with all his heart, and I would study with all my heart. Yes, in the very middle he would stop to write such lines on very small slips of paper that I would be jingling on the inside. Even after his departing those words of those lines ... the emotions behind the words would continue producing a swishing sound in my very nature, and I would remain engrossed in them.

Inside me a world of its own was going on ... greatly full and complete and colorful. These days I wouldn't even feel the need for anyone else. Seemingly, as if I am just complete in myself. Mommy, who always remained with me, is also "out." And perhaps the very reason is that I indeed abandoned concentrating on Mommy. The words then of every day just exist, but words alone only exist -- beyond that, nowhere nothing.
The days were passing, and I was immersed solely in myself, in my own world, and I was being sunk deep ... as if oblivious in this one way to the world outside. One day I returned from school, changed clothes. I raised hell for food, ate it with uncharitable criticism, and when I burst into the room, then Mommy lying down just spoke, "Tanu, come here."

I came near, then for the first time the contemplation was that Mommy's face is becoming red. It struck me. She lifted a book from the side table and from within it she cast forward five or six slips of paper. Gosh! I had wanted to get help from Mommy, so I gave her my book when I left. By mistake the slips written by Shekhar were kept in it.

"Then is this the way the friendship of you and Shekhar is going? This is what you study sitting here? ... He comes here in order to do all this?"

I was silent. I know nothing could be more foolish than answering back to Mommy when she is angry.

"Freedom given to you ... independence given, but isn't this then the meaning of it, that you take up improper benefit from it."

I was still silent.

"A girl too little, and look at her feats. As much concession as you give, just that much their feet are lying
stretched out. I will give one slap, then the whole romance will be collapsed in two minutes...."

Upon this sentence I abruptly arose wild with rage. Blood rushing to my face in anger, I lifted my gaze and looked in the direction of Mommy ... but what is this! This then isn't my Mommy. Neither is this Mommy's angry gesture, nor her language. But nevertheless these entire sentences appeared somehow very familiar. It seemed, all this I have heard somewhere, and in no time it flashed in my mind -- Grandfather! But Grandfather had been dead then how many years; how was he alive again? And that also inside Mommy! ... After coming of age she who would always indeed keep picking a quarrel with him ... would keep making only opposition to his every word.

For a long time Mommy's lecture in the "Grandpa" style continued, but that did not touch me at all ... only something was shaking me from inside; then was it this, how Grandfather sits arrived inside of Mommy?

And then in the house a peculiar-seeming tense silence was overwhelming -- especially between Mommy and me.... No, Mommy didn't live then in the house, between Grandfather and me. I can make Mommy understand my word, I can also understand her word -- but Grandfather? I then am unacquainted also with this language and also with this angry gesture. How would the question of talking crop up? Papa is certainly my friend, but totally in another way. To play
chess, to have a test of strength with the hands, and the request which Mommy may not execute completely, to have her execute it completely. In childhood I used to remain on his back and even today I jump on his back without any hitch to fulfill my every wish. But in spite of his being this much 'my dear friend.' I always solved my own personal matters with Mommy. And there is such a pin-drop silence -- the fact that Grandfather beat Mommy and was in complete control.

I had given a red signal with just a hint to Shekhar, so he isn't even coming, and it is the time in the evening which has become hard to pass for me.

Many times my feeling was that I should go to Mommy, and clearly I should ask, 'Why are you annoyed this much? I didn't hide anything at any time. And if it is the friendship, then this all just must be. Did you understand that we are in a way brother and sister...?' But at that time the idea would come that where indeed is Mommy, to whom should I say all this?

It has been four days. I haven't seen the face of Shekhar. From my slight hint of what it was at the house, that poor one just left off coming upon the roof, also. His friends staying in the hostel were neither visible, nor would they come. If someone would come, then at least I would just ask about Shekhar's state of affairs. I know he is emotional to the boundary of foolishness. He then
didn't know this properly after what has happened here! It seems, the ambitions of all had been vanquished solely from the apprehension of Mommy's anger.

That way since yesterday the tension in Mommy's face has surely been somewhat loosened. The hard frozen look of three days has melted. But I have decided that Mommy will now have to start the conversation.

After washing and bathing in the morning, I was ironing my uniform behind the door. Outside Mommy was making tea, and Papa was sitting head pierced into the newspaper. Mommy perhaps didn't even know that I, having bathed, began to come outside. She spoke with Papa, "Do you know what happened last night? I don't know, since then I have felt very bad ... after that I then just couldn't sleep."

My hand was stopped right there by the softness of Mommy's voice, and ears were affixed outside.

"About halfway through the night I got up to go to the bathroom. Darkness and silence were spread out on the roof in front. Suddenly a red star-like light shone out. I was startled. I looked with consideration, then very slowly a form came swelling up. Shekhar was standing upon the roof smoking a cigarette. I returned quietly. After approximately two hours I went again, then I saw he was strolling on the roof that very same way. The poor one ... I cannot explain how I feel. How extinguished Tanu also
remains." Again as if none but reproaching herself she said, "First then you give freedom and again when they may advance ahead, then you slash them down. This is nonsense."

A deep exhalation of relief came out from within me. God knows how the momentum swelled in my mind of the desire to go running and hug my Mommy. It seemed, after a time subjectively long, as if Mommy has returned. But I didn't say anything ... being ready, I ran off.

Yes, while returning I was certainly thinking that I would talk to Mommy freely now. For four days God knows how many questions had been gathering in my mind. Now what! Now then she is Mommy and there can be at least all the talking and questioning then with her.

But arriving at the house what I saw made me speechless! Shekhar sat on the chair holding his head in the palms of his hands, and Mommy sat on the arm of that very chair, and she was gently rubbing his forehead. As soon as seeing me, she spoke in a hugely easy natural tone, "See this insane! For four days this gentleman hasn't been at college. Nor indeed has he eaten or drunk anything. Get food also for him along with yourself."

And again Mommy having sat down by herself, making appeasement with great affection, made him eat. After eating Shekhar didn't stay. He returned bent and bowed down with the burden of the similitude of gratefulness to Mommy, and inside of me such a flow tide of happiness swelled that
all the questions of consideration up until now were gone out of sight with that very one.

The whole situation then had time attached to it in the coming upon an equal, but it has come. Shekhar also now leaving off one or two days began to come, and whenever he would come, then more often we would indeed talk of studies. While expressing shame for his deeds, he made the promise with Mommy that he now won't do any of the kind of task with which Mommy may have complaint. Whichever day he wouldn't come, I would make conversation from the verandah for a very little while two of three times.

And again a love affair which has the consent of the family had no significance for the neighbors, and they sending reproaches in two or four names to this terrible (modern) time adjourned their interest in any unexpected and untoward development in the matter.

But one thing I certainly saw. When also Shekhar would be sitting a while longer in the evening, or would be coming in the afternoon, then inside of Mommy Grandfather would begin to feel like wriggling, and the repercussion of this would begin to appear faintly on Mommy's face. Mommy doing her best wouldn't then let Grandfather speak, but to push him completely in the back was perhaps not within Mom- my's control.

Yes, this topic had certainly been made the theme of conversation daily between Mommy and me. At some time
she would say in joking, "Tanu, this friend of yours, Shekhar, is a big slithering boy. Hey, in this age boys ought -- they should stroll, should go around ... should enjoy life. He keeps gazing and staring here the whole time hanging around on the roof with a gloomy face in the way of love-lorn people.

I would just laugh.

Sometimes being emotional she would say, "Child, why don't you understand, that when it comes to you how many ambitions I have in mind. Regarding your future, I have kept envisaging lovely day dreams."

Laughing I would say, "Mommy, you are really marvelous! You dream for your own life, and also you see dreams of my life. Leave some dreaming for me also."

At some time she would say in the manner of speech of making to understand, "Look, Tanu, right now you are very little. Apply your entire concentration to studying and throw these silly things off from your brain. It's right, when you are big, then also make love and get married, too. Anyway I am not going to search out the young man for you... You just search out yourself, but you have to come to this much wisdom that you can make the choice of the right sort."

I would understand this rejection of my choice and would ask, "Okay, tell me, Mommy, when your choice was Papa, then did it please Grandfather?"
"My choice! Having ended all my studies, I made my choice at twenty-five years of age ... understanding and thinking well, and I understood with wisdom," Mommy would say, concealing losing her self-control in anger.

Age and studies, these two indeed then in this way are the two propositions upon which she keeps thrusting into me from time to time. I was good in studying, and the question of age remained, so the feeling would be that I should say for that, 'Mommy, your generation, which used to be effectual by the age of twenty-five years, ours will be there by the age of fifteen years, why don't you understand this?' But I would remain silent. Grandfather only happened to be mentioned, lest he rose awakened, then....

The half-year exams had come close, and I had applied my entire concentration to studying. Everyone's coming and the musical festivity were instantly stopped. Jelling, I did so much studying these days that Mommy's heart became glad. Perhaps somewhat assured also. After turning in the last paper it was seeming that it was a burden which was removed, My mind being excessively light felt like enjoying life some. I asked Mommy, "Mommy tomorrow Shekhar and Dipak are going to the picture; may I go along, too?" Up until today I had never walked around with those people.... But after doing this much studying, I was now none but available for this much freedom.
Mommy kept looking at my face a moment; again she spoke, "Come here, sit here, I want to talk to you."

I went and was seated, but did not understand what there was to converse about ... you say 'yes,' or you don't. However, Mommy has the disease of conversing. Even her simple 'yes' or 'no' couldn't come out without clinging to fifty or sixty sentences.

"Your exams are over; I was making a program of pictures myself. Say, which movies do you want to see?"

"Why, what's wrong in going with those people?" So much irritation had filled my tone that Mommy instantly was just watching my face.

"Tanu, I have kept giving complete freedom to you, child, but only at the speed that I too should be able to go along, also."

"Why don't you say clearly whether you will let me go or not? Words to no purpose.... I should be able to go along also ... from which place has come this talk of being able to go along with you?"

Mommy said while rubbing my back gently, "I will have to go along in any case. If at some time you fell face downward, then there should be someone to lift you up."

I comprehended that Mommy wouldn't let me go. But she brings round by persuasion with love this way, then even a quarrel can't be picked. Arguing with her simply means that you hear her viewpoint, that is, a class of fifty
minutes. But I absolutely didn't understand, what is the harm after all in going? "No" in every word. She used to say that in her childhood she was scolded a lot with "Don't do this, don't go there," and she is doing all that very thing now herself. I have had enough of her. I rose and with thumping steps went into my room. Yes, I tossed one sentence, "Mommy, whoever will walk, he will fall also, and whoever will fall, he will rise also, and he will rise solely by himself. He doesn't need anyone."

I don't know if it was the reaction to my words, or if something just woke up in her own mind that at evening she had Shekhar himself plus three or four boys who had arrived at his room to be invited to a party in my room and served a great hot meal in there. It was so entertaining that my afternoon anger was washed away.

The examinations had been finished and the weather was agreeable. Mommy's attitude also was indeed agreeable, so the adjourned arrangement of the friendship was begun again, and nowadays then it was as if there was nothing else to do, but again a shock!

On this day I returned from the house of my girl friend, then the harsh voice of Mommy was heard -- "Tanu, come right here!" From only her voice it was clear that this is a danger signal. At one instant I came dumbfounded. I went near her, and her face was stern like before.
"Do you go into Shekhar's room?" Mommy fired the gun.

I understood that from the street behind someone performed his feats.

"How long have you been going in there?" I then felt that I should say, 'Whoever has given the news of the going, that one probably will have just told also the remaining things....' Someone by adding and subtracting will have indeed told. But Mommy was flaring up in the way in which it's understood it's better to remain silent. That way, no reason for this anger of Mommy's was entering into my understanding. If two or three times I have just gone into Shekhar's room for a short while, then what had been such a sin? But no act of Mommy's would then be with reason ... she is just being solely guided by her mood.

It was a strange difficulty. There's no purpose in conversing with Mommy in anger ... and my keeping mum was provoking Mommy's anger the more.

"Don't you remember, I had forbidden you indeed in the beginning that you must never go into their room? Three whole hours he sits here like an ascetic in meditation, isn't your heart content with that?" Layers of distress, anger and terror were becoming deep upon her face, and the understanding just wasn't coming to me of how I should explain the whole situation to her.
"The poor people in front calling to me have warned of that then.... You know, this head up until today didn't bow down before anyone, but there I could not raise my eyes. You won't leave us in dignity so we could lift up our face in front of others. The whole neighborhood is spitting on us. You have as if cut our nose in disgrace."

Wonder!

This time then the whole neighborhood began to speak just from inside Mommy. The surprise is that Mommy who had been completely cut off from around herself until today ... she had only made blowing away humor of it, today she is speaking as if singing their tune.

Mommy's lecture was as usual in working order. But I then just turned off the switch of my ear. When the anger is cooled, Mommy will come back to herself, then I will explain: "Mommy, you are carrying this smallish affair much too far in vain."

But God knows what sort of dose she took that her anger just didn't cool off. Moreover there was this, that now my anger began to climb from her anger. Again in the house a strange-seeming tension was increased, This time Mommy also perhaps told Papa more or less. He did not say anything ... he indeed right from the beginning kept out of the entire affair ... but this time an unexpressed tenseness was certainly visible on his face.
About two months before when events had been this way, then I had become scared on the inside, but this time I have made the decision that if Mommy would become like Grandfather then indeed to deal in this entire affair, I too will have to encounter him in Mommy's way ... and I will certainly do it. I should show then that I am after all your daughter. And I go upon none but your engraved footsteps. Herself then she had gone moving away from tradition ... the whole of my life she kept making me drink that dose of untraditionalism, but it's as if I placed my own first step only for her to drag me back and begin trappings of bringing me upon the other side.

In my mind I considered a huge lot of logic that one day I will argue with Mommy. Very clearly I will say that Mommy this much indeed imposing a tie had had to keep it, then from the start she would nurture in just that way.... Why had she kept making and teaching issues of giving freedom for no rhyme or reason? But this time I smouldered and became ashes. Feeling this way, I would remain fallen in only my room as if mute and motionless. When I would feel very heavy, then I would cry. I who would fill the house the entire days with happiness and laughing, instantly had become silent and constricted solely in myself. Yes, one sentence I was repeating time and again..., "Mommy, you better remember that I will also do just what I want." Although it was not clear even to me what I really wanted to do.
But in the afternoon today I absolutely, absolutely didn't have confidence in my ears, when I heard none but Mommy's shouting from the verandah, "Shekhar, tomorrow then you people will be going home for vacations, tonight just eat dinner here with your friends." I wouldn't know, passing with what a hard struggle, Mommy must have arrived upon this circumstance.

And that night Shekhar was present at the dining table with Dipak and Ravi. Mommy was feeding the food with just so much love ... Papa was making jokes in that right way indeed open, as if nothing had happened in the interval. In the windows to the right and left, two to four heads had become stuck. All entirely had risen to being the very easy and spontaneous manner of the beginning....

I exclusively being instantly neutral in this whole situation was thinking this very thing, that Grandfather in a way was completely Grandfather -- one hundred percent, and for this very reason how simple it must have been for Mommy to fight. But how was it possible then to fight with this Mommy, who lives being Grandfather a moment, then being Mommy a moment.
CHAPTER TWO

"DARAR BHARNE KI DARAR,"
A STORY WRITTEN IN HINDI BY MANNU BHANDARI

Translated into English by Nancy Deane Storck-Newhouse

THE RIFT OF FILLING IN THE RIFT

I had forbidden everyone in the house to come into the room at the time when Shruti Di might arrive. Little brother and sister have absolutely no manners on this matter. If anyone at all comes to see me, then they hover around the visitor in the way as if he may have come only to meet them.

Once more the thick, heavy curtains of the windows and doors were drawn, with which there was a darkened light and cooling effect. Being more assured in this environment, she will be able to talk of her own personal matter.

In the afternoon, since the time her phone call came, I was in a strange-seeming mental confusion; the hoarse sound and choked tone of Shruti Di, who often laughs and giggles, bothered me very much. Along with this word of hers, "Nandi, who indeed is mine here except you, with whom I may be able to tell my things, with whom I may be able to share myself," in my mind the sentiment of a pride-filled satisfaction also floated.

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She is older than I am in age, approximately seven or eight years, and is a famous painter. There have already been many exhibitions of her pictures; reviews on her have already appeared in the newspapers. Among artists she is held in esteem. There isn't any shortage of those visiting her; on the contrary she gets even very distressed sometimes from all of them. In spite of all this, I, I alone, seemed to be to her such that she might share with me her extremely personal sorrow; taking me into her confidence she afterwards may come to speak of her matters.

Suddenly I seemed very, very great to myself and began to feel like a dependable person. Whatever the sorrow is that has fallen upon Shruti Di! Economic difficulty, if this is the matter, then there is no worry. I looked quickly at my passbook. There is indeed somewhat more than four thousand. If necessary, I will give her every penny. If this much does not work, then I will borrow from Mother. In the house I am in a total way assured concerning my influence.

But no, the matter won't be one of money. Vibhu Da by himself is in a good post; she herself earns money. Besides, they are not among those creatures who are so concerned for money. At this level she is extremely carefree and capricious. The place where others in the staff boast of saris and jewelry, there she comes wearing anything without inhibition. "We eat carrots and radishes as fruits."
She never hesitated to make this kind of declaration even in the midst of extremely snobbish people.

What then? Calcutta hadn't proven completely favorable to her. It is more than two years, but even now she continues being occasionally distressed by this feeling: "How I got trapped here!" How many times indeed she said, "Nandi, I think I should pack up and return back. Is this any city, full of low-minded people? All selfish and tricky!" And in her eyes would be swimming the shadow of a profound gloom. At that time it always seems to me that this is a sorrow neither of near and dear people abandoned nor of the lowly people of this place ... it's as if its roots are solely somewhere else.

But at no time was there the courage to arrive at those roots. In spite of the entire friendship, I have been made to feel none but always a wall of age difference. Today she herself breaking down that wall is coming to unfold before me her inner self.

In whatever way possible, I just have to make myself worthy enough that I might be able to share and understand her sadness.

Just about twenty minutes before the time, unexpectedly lifting the curtain of the room, she entered the room. My heart hadn't been in studying; thus resting my book then on my chest, I had closed my eyes. At her voice indeed my eyes opened. Making undue haste, I got up. Inside myself
I cursed myself. Will she think that even after knowing the matter is of her adversities I was falling into a carefree sleep? How would someone tell about his pain to a person who isn't touched at all!

While pushing back the guilt which had come out solely involuntarily upon my face, I, abruptly placing my hand on her back in the way of elderly persons, seated her upon the divan. But once more to me my own behavior seemed artificial in the way of over-acting. The foul smell of fakery in over-sympathy is bound to come. Still as yet the entire issue isn't known. I hurriedly withdrew my hand.

Shruti Di had come wearing a cream-colored sari, which was making her face appear even more yellow and pale. The darkness of the room had also made more dense the gloom of her countenance. I never until today had seen her this gloomy and lifeless. As by getting dissolved a lot the color of clothing becomes faded, so in that way indeed perhaps because of crying a lot her eyes were very dim and greatly extinguished and dispirited.

I began to look toward her face unblinkingly. Slowly I asked, "What is the matter, Shruti Di?"

She kept her gaze piercing only upon the floor. It seemed as if she was groping for words in order to make conversation. Again suddenly looking toward me, she spoke, "I don't know what to say. For a long time after telephoning you, I continued to regret that I bothered you unnecessarily."
For what will you indeed even be able to do in all this, what can anyone do? It will just be that having told it I will be lightened. But should I load the burden on you to make myself light, does this make any sense?" And a deep, sorrowful sigh was drawn from her mouth. Also, her eyes had become somewhat dampened.

For a fraction of a second my sleeping once more flashed into my mind. Observing me thus fast asleep, didn't this thing enter her mind! With great preparedness I said, "Why do you say so? What worry will there be to me, hardly? If I can share even some of your distress then I will be very happy. Since your phone call I have been thinking of nothing else. Lying down with my eyes closed I was thinking of none but your words." (Will she indeed believe these words of mine?) "After all, what was the matter, why are you worried?"

"For several days I wanted to impart the issue to you, but every time I would go silent. However, now it all will not be borne by myself alone. Besides, even otherwise I will need to accept a lot of help from you. Will you not stand by me?" And being enormously helpless-seeming she caught my hand. Tears gathering on the edge came rolling down her cheeks.

Her tears pierced a hole into the inside of me.

Her helplessness suddenly made me an elderly person!
I said while gently rubbing her hands with great affection, "You are so sensible and yet being worried like this! Please tell me, what is the matter? Something or other will just work out. Crying and crying this way, you will only ruin your health. In only days you have taken on a weird look!"

It seemed indeed to me that I said a thing just very beaten and worn out; nevertheless there was great satisfaction to me in the elderly manner of speaking. I began to attach quite a bit of maturity to myself.

"Nandi, it appears now that I will have to make some decision; rather I should say that I have made it. There is nothing to be gained by drawing coercion to the situation."

She was talking drawing out the matter, and even if she might have addressed it to me, I felt as if recapitulating from time to time she is weighing the firmness of some judgement of hers already made.

"But what type of decision? What situation are you saying it's a matter of drawing to?"

Suddenly she looked at me with a direct glance. With a look as if she shouldn't be trusting in this naivety of mine.

"For two years you have been coming and going regularly from my place, was there never doubt of anything to
you? The relationship of Vibhu and me, didn't it ever seem abnormal to you somewhat?"

Her gaze had remained upon me even now. My negative reply was none but written in the amazement spreading upon my face. It occurred to me that she surely must perceive me as a child and extremely stupid. It could be that now she may just not talk of any matter of hers. Someone whose view may be solely this superficial, what must making that one your secret-sharer indeed be! Spontaneously, a slight dismay just began to spread in my mind.

But perhaps she wasn't thinking in this way. "I think now I should just arrange for a separate home for myself. If an appropriate-seeming house of two rooms is available it will work." Again she spoke in a voice full of a portentous tone, "Will you look for a house for me, Nandi?"

"But why? Has there been a quarrel with Vibhu Da? Hey, there are just always quarrels like this. Because of them do you really break up your home?" I had risen excessively curious, and I was facing a problem of which I could see neither beginning nor end. In addition to this was also coming to my mind that whichever issues break up a home, what do I know of this thing?

"Quarreling?" There was a strange bitterness in her tone. "What quarrel will there be, Nandi, when our concord just never was? There being nothing on the inside,
we were carrying on only outwardly. But now it has begun to seem that at last what kind of compulsion is there to maintain the making of a home?"

Her damp eyes were pitched upon the floor, and the figure of Vibhu Da was just swimming before my eyes. An openness full of great closeness was in their behavior. Thus they used to meet more or less in the house, but when they met then it was with the feeling of oneness with each other! Then this was all artificial? It was very hard for me to believe this!

"Finally after struggle and conflict for many days, I at last just made the decision that I will now live only separated! And I say the truth, Nandi, since making the decision it's indeed as if I have been lightened. I have been free from one tension."

But there were tears that once more came rolling down.

It was as if I wasn't believing a single word of hers.

"What is all this that you are saying, Shruti Di? There has to be even a very great reason. Will you be able to stay separate? Will Vibhu Da agree to this?"

"He won't, then he will. But this time I will talk to him only after deciding on a house. You just look for the house for me, Nandi. I wouldn't be able to do the
running around here that's needed for a house. Nandi, right now I am very, very tired."

And indeed she being seemingly exhausted lay down propped up on the circular cushion and put both her hands on her eyes.

I can't tell how much attachment I felt for her. Moving a little nearer her, I gently caressed her hair very slowly.

I am the witness of such a big decision in the life of Shruti Di. Upon me is the full responsibility for the beginning of a new life. Like a child, how much she depends on me, how much she trusts me. I will have to make myself worthy of this trust, and in my home the condition is such that there should be someone to offer even a glass of water for the quenching of your thirst.

Abruptly the idea came to me that I should have something sent for in the way of a cold drink for her. By coincidence I arose just before little sister called out from behind the curtain, "Big sister, please take this."

With the voice, Shruti Di just arose and sat down. "Please stay lying down; no one will come in here. I have stopped that by forbidding everyone actually at the first." At least now if Shruti Di will realize that even without proof I have accepted her word with complete seriousness, she should have the solace that she hasn't given her confidence to any wrong person.
I set the tray on the table between us. Cut watermelon was on a plate and, at last, squash in two tumblers, these people working with wisdom sometimes.

"I'll not take anything; I don't want even a little bit."

But I compelled her to eat by coercing, just exactly the way in which Mother sometimes does to me, by being displeased. I was determined that if she wouldn't eat, I would administer a scolding -- 'Problems do not leave you by giving up eating and drinking,' but she ate with talking once or twice.

She seemed somewhat more healthy after eating and drinking. Then it occurred to me for the first time that perhaps she hasn't indeed eaten anything since morning. I had in mind giving a scolding on just this thing; my courage had grown by degrees, and the distance of deference which had continued between us both until today was contracting by itself, but again I merely stayed quiet, as there were still many opportunities to come.

She again began to speak from the beginning about herself and Vibhu Da; she was talking in the right way, as if by repeating her past one more time, she may be justifying her decision, it being unknown whether before me or before herself. The bitterness in her voice was dissolving, and the resentment full of gloom in her eyes.
And in front of me the facts of her life kept opening up, a guess at which even having been with her for up to two years I couldn't have made. But now in this new context, again and again her sentences spoken here and there, her being suddenly sad after bursting into laughter, her disinterestedness in dressing up or in putting on make-up, her talking of going back abruptly, the meaning of all these was, at it were, made clear. One time upon her laughing a lot I had interrupted her inappropriately, then while laughing she had answered -- "Do you know, Nandi, that the person laughs a lot who has deep wounds inside!" Even then it never occurred to me, in truth I am then the great fool. Very much indeed I was the child ... for that reason I was never able to guess the truth of the matter even with all such hints.

Along with this, some satisfaction also flashed somewhere upon the internal layers of my mind -- the Shruti Di whom I had always considered older and higher than myself, she is so miserable, so defeated somewhere from inside, that her true situation is worthy only of pity. But at that time I concealed this ignoble thing inside myself.

She asked as if to obtain my support for her decision, having heard the whole thing -- "Now just tell me, Nandi, after all this what wrong did I do in making this decision?"
In my mind arose this very first reply -- "Wrong! You have at least stayed this many days; I instead, I would have been separated long ago." But pushing back this short-sighted and childish answer, I said in a greatly well-modulated voice,

"I won't utter a word of wrong or right, Shruti Di, but nevertheless I will certainly say this much, that in this situation it is neither this easy to break up the home, nor proper. It's easy to make the decision, but it will be very difficult to bring action to it."

To me my words seemed hugely balanced and well-reasoned. A new self-confidence of being able to be involved on the inside of the situation awakened. Fully from that very thing I spoke, "You should wait some days, have a little patience. I will talk with Vibhu Da once, after that you do something."

She looked at me as if in disbelief. Then exhaling a long breath, she said in a tone of great despairing, "What will happen by talking? To you this is seeming today's decision, but you wouldn't know how many uneating days and sleepless nights are behind it. There are long drawn out cycles of arguments; when there was nothing else left, then did I make this decision!"

And her tone again was submerged in some deep place. Abruptly she started weeping bitterly.
Her crying churned on my insides. I took her head into my lap and began caressing her hair gently. I was being obliged to be silent, but I was weeping to myself.

About eight o'clock I insisted that she eat, but this time she didn't accede. Therefore, I hired a taxi myself and took her home. She continued to forbid, but I had made the decision within myself that so long as the situation wouldn't pull itself together, the burden of every matter of hers will remain solely upon me.

As they did daily after the meal, brother and sister began calling to play cards; upon my refusing they began to insist, then I got angry ... will understanding never come to them? Whatever may happen anywhere in the world, to them it is a matter of their game! But again pity ensued; they are poor babies, how can they comprehend the seriousness of the thing?

When I slept at night I felt I did not know whether having talked to me of all this, Shruti Di was lightened or not, but I truly began to feel very burdened; what a huge responsibility is upon me!

It was decided to meet Vibhu Da at six o'clock at Gariyahat Quality restaurant. He said, "If there is a crowd there, then we will go to Lake's" He seemed eager to talk himself.

The arranging for the talk with Vibhu Da was made at my initiation, but now what will I talk about? What if
talking of this he would chide that this is their own extremely private affair, who then are you in the middle of it? But no, he isn't that rude.

All the day I kept framing an argument to myself. What would I say to state the case of Shruti Di ... how would I convince him? I'd never had an opportunity of conversing with him openly on any subject, nevertheless I made up my mind that I will absolutely not hesitate.

It was indeed apparent talking with Vibhu Da that he knew all the words between Shruti Di and myself. So Shruti Di had already told him. I don't know why it didn't seem good to me; nevertheless, I kept listening with concentration to the words of Vibhu Da.

This was the other aspect of the problem. In spite of presenting his arguments and logic with utmost skill, he had the awareness somewhere of the weakness of his side; he was saying time and again that Shruti has become unnecessarily insistent. "Why don't you persuade her? Nandita, she has great faith in you, she is also depending a lot on you."

The touch of begging in Vibhu Da's tone was continually increasing. My importance in my own view was also increasing by just that much.

Now it was my turn to speak. One after another, forceful arguments and precise phrases were entering my brain. I would never speak very much, but today I astounded
myself with my argumentative energy. My overpowering influence and the effect of my words were definitely falling upon Vibhu Da.

It was ten o'clock, but we weren't able to arrive at any conclusion at all, and now it was appearing very desirable to go home. Vibhu Da came to drop me home. We also stood and stood there at the door, and for about twenty to twenty-five minutes we kept talking.

When I went upstairs, Mother took me to task. "Where were you until now? Are you aware of the time? It is eleven o'clock."

I began to get angry at Mother. Why doesn't she comprehend what a huge responsibility is upon me? What will she understand? To her the decision of what vegetable will be made for those in the house and the most important decision of all in someone's life have almost the same significance.

After changing clothes, I lay down; then Mother's annoyance-filled tone was heard, "You should eat!"

"I'm not hungry!"

"Where has your appetite gone these days?"

Really, my appetite had, as it were, died. At night I couldn't even sleep properly! The dry, withered face of Shruit Di, swollen dim, and her lusterless eyes would keep spinning in front of my eyes the entire time. What sort of
bitterness has filled her sweetest chapter of life! The whole juicy relish of life was just as if squeezed out!

Mother, arranging for my marriage, just stays distressed night and day nowadays. Who knows where the arrangement talks are going? What if something like this happens to me? I'm not sure what sort of fear I began to feel.

"No, to me it isn't my things right now; I must consider only the matter of Shruti Di alone." Saying this, I just pushed out useless fear.

When I came out from bathing the next day, Shruti Di was waiting for me in my room. It seemed as if she had passed the night in waiting to meet with me. I drew all the curtains and sat down next to her.

I was relating the words I'd had with Vibhu Da, and emotions of various sorts were coming and going upon her countenance. Once in a while she would flare up, and her eyes would become watery. Another time she spoke in a tone of great teariness, "I have bothered you a lot, Nandi! What you must also be thinking is where you have been entrapped. But what should I say, if I talk to you for one hour, then my heart becomes a little lightened, otherwise my mind continues getting overcast all the time. Since four o'clock this morning I have been waiting for daybreak that I might come to see you."
And unexpectedly the thought occurred -- can it be that Vibhu Da may have begun to wait so early to see me over there?

When the library man came to retrieve the books, then for the first time I realized that fifteen days had passed in doing all of this. During these days I stayed not even a little bit aware of myself. Those same lengthy discussions and arguments, but the thing is that it's stuck at the same place as before.

Now I have felt that this is the quarrel of two egos, two personalities, and these people are prepared to break up the home; they won't break their egos. In general it is the mistake of Vibhu Da, but while realizing this he also isn't ready to admit it. It began to seem to me on my own that now Shruti Di indeed needs to become separated.

And for this very reason she now said to me, "Abandon this debating contest, Nandi, and find a house for me. A lot of time has passed in making arguments and counter-arguments." Then I acceded. Although in my mind there was certainly the slight pierce of defeat.

"Vibhu thinks that I would not be able to remain apart. By nature I'm very dependent, that's correct; every human depends upon someone or other. I do, too. But not upon Vibhu. Were I to be dependent on him then he would ask too great a price; there isn't the capacity to give all that much in me."
Once more stopping an instant, "I depend on my job for eating and on my art for living!" Then she looked at me and spoke, "If there is a house near you, then I will depend on you in time of crisis and adversity; where does Vibhu just enter into all of this?"

I don't know if in saying this all she was reassuring me or herself.

I decided I will now get a new house for her. Vibhu Da wants to trample upon Shruti Di and her art, all this will not be.

Daily in the morning from eight to eleven o'clock we would look at houses; in one day the commission agent would show us ten to twelve houses. Upon returning I would just pay the taxi bill. Shruti Di would be very annoyed. One or two times she scolded me also, but she had already become so tired out that she wasn't even scolding.

Paying the taxi or the restaurant bill would never bother me; on the contrary, I would just have a sense of achievement. There would be the satisfaction of carrying out the assigned responsibility successfully.

At last a house was settled on, then returning home Shruti Di lay down in a lifeless manner on the divan, as if in some way she had arrived at the conclusion of a long, torturous journey; there was a fatigue and gloomy quietude.

This day also she didn't want anything to eat or drink even when requested very much; at the time of leaving
she said, "Okay, Nandi, now this evening you just go to the owner and pay the rent. If he reduces it a little, then fine, otherwise let it be so. Now I wouldn't be able to do anything."

And she departed as if drinking to the utmost her tears.

In the evening the agent said that the house-owner has gone to Bombay and will return in two or three days; at that time the matter will be decided. When I notified Shruti Di she said in a largely weary-sounding tone, "Good, Nandi, tell me then when it is done. I have left it more or less in your hands."

I don't know how Shruti Di spent those two days, but to me the time truly passed heavily. Having been cut off from my own life, I had been associated with these people in such a manner that now I wouldn't be interested in doing anything at all of my own.

How good it would be if I could save this home. Then it wouldn't be Shruti Di alone, Vibhu Da would also be grateful to me.

I made Lilua-wale Dada agree to come one day to have Shruti Di's luggage shifted. How much luggage there will indeed be!

Items necessary for cooking I will buy from the Lake-Market in just one day. The rest will be settled gradually. Actually what I want settled is to have her over here after
I have put everything in order. She should have nothing to do at all, nor under any circumstances should any distress fall to her.

On the morning of the third day just when I had finished tea, Shruti Di arrived.

"Hi, you?" To me Shruti Di appeared very thin. In her hand was a packet. "Vibhu has come, too."

Just as she said it, Vibhu Da strolled inside. A small box of Jaljog was in his hand. While raising it quickly in my direction he spoke, "With great difficulty the mind of your Shruti Di has become right. Here, have these sweets in this happiness."

As if speechless, I would sometimes look at the face of Shruti Di, and sometimes his! "You are one fool, she is another fool." And opening the small box he extended it toward me.

I looked at Shruti Di; a very insipid-appearing smile was on her face. She saw me looking and then turned her glance away as if she were trying to avoid me.

"Look, Nandita, what has Shruti brought for you?" And hurriedly raising the packet she opened it.

It was a beautiful-looking sari hand-painted of Tasar silk.

"This thing was made all day and all night yesterday." She opened up the entire sari and spread it on the divan.
"Wasn't a matchless thing made? When you wear it you alone will shine, in all of Calcutta."

I want to praise the sari, I want to make explicit my pleasure in this whole thing, but not even one word would come out of my mouth. I don't know why I am feeling as if very insulted inside. But they perhaps don't have the respite to understand my train of thought ... they are just mutually complete. I then am as if nowhere.

"Come on, Shruti, let's go." And putting his hand on her back he got Shruti Di up.

This entire expressive gesture is only impressing me as petty and extremely cheap; in spite of all his openness Vibhu Da to me seems clever and crafty. My mind started to fill with revulsion.

"I am going to take her to Digha today in order to pacify the heat of her brain. After returning, we'll see you, okay?"

With great difficulty came out of my mouth, "All right."

Taking Shruti Di in the manner of a victor he went down the stairs with a thudding sound. In the way of pushing and forcing myself, I also descended behind. The taxi was standing there. I glanced at the meter, then none but involuntarily all the figures which were registered on the meter during the search for the house swam in front of my eyes.
Sitting down inside, Shruti Di took my hand and
pressed it in her hand with gratitude, affection and close­ness -- all were there in her touch, but it was as if I had
become devoid of all sensation somewhere.

As it left behind the dust of dirt and smoke, the
taxi accelerated ahead. I don't know why I was feeling as
if someone has cheated me badly.

I came up with footsteps greatly weary and fa­
tigued. On the divan the sari was lying spread out. And I
was feeling as if they first give very great assurance to
the child, and later amuse with one or two toffees, then
take off.
Mannu Bhandari is a critically-acclaimed author in contemporary India, and my comments upon her literary skill and upon inferences drawn from her work will be predominantly but not exclusively based upon the two selections presented herein, but also upon "Stri Subodhini," another short story in the collection *Trishanku Aur Anya Kahaniyam* (*Trishanku and Other Stories*), and in passing upon *Maha Bhoj*, a novel by Mannu Bhandari.

It is my opinion that every phrase in Mannu Bhandari is golden and that her artistry extends to the titles of her works. "Trishanku," the title of her classic story, is the name of a mythological character in Indian legend who wished to procure the throne of Indra, the king of the gods, for himself. As a result, Trishanku found himself suspended between heaven and earth, a part of neither region.

The adolescent heroine of "Trishanku" is suspended between the world of traditional Indian society and her parents, who want to consider themselves a non-traditional family, yet she is not allowed to pursue the experiences that she assumed such supposed "modernity" would naturally afford.
Although social change comes slowly, the parents may not be completely in the vanguard of it as much as they presumed.

The title "Darar Bharne Ki Darar," which is herein translated "The Rift of Filling in the Rift," contains sexual overtones suitable to a story of a troubled marriage, darar being translatable also as "crack" or "crevice."

The proper name which comprises the title "Stri Subodhini" ("Mrs. Subodhini") is linked to the word subodh, which in Hindi is "clear" or "easily intelligible." Its Sanskrit root is budh, the primary meaning of which is "to be awake" or "to come to consciousness." The basic proto-Indo-European root is *bheudh-, "to be aware" or "to make aware"; from it are also derived English "bid" and "bode" (Morris 1971, 1509). Budh forms the basis for the epithet applied to Gautama of the Shākya tribe: Buddha, "The Enlightened One" (Lanman 1978, 201). Su-buddhi in Sanskrit is "having good wits," or as a name, "Bright-wits." The story "Stri Subodhini" is in the form of a letter to young girls from a woman who when young and unmarried had become involved in a heart-rending romance with a married man.

That a touch of irony and sarcasm, in addition to puns and double entendres, appears in Mannu Bhandari's work, including her titles, is exemplified in Maha Bhoj, which means Great Feast. However, without the aspirated "h" with the "B" on Bhoj, it is Maha Boj, which is "Great Burden" or "Great Load," akin to the meaning of Mahābhārata, the
title of the magnificent Sanskrit epic, the longest epic in the world. Moreover, there is the pun with Maha Bhog, which can alternatively mean "Great Enjoyment" or "Great Suffering."

The name of Tanu, the female narrator and protagonist of "Trishanku," is in the masculine gender. In India, when an individual's name is of the opposite gender than his or her true one, the correct gender is then denoted by a second, or middle, name. A male bearing a first name in the feminine has a second name in the masculine, etc. Therefore, the assumption is that Tanu's middle name is feminine. In the story, when Tanu's mother addresses her, she says, "Tanu, bete," which is literally "Tanu, son," instead of "Tanu, beti" (Tanu, daughter), and the masculine vocative is in agreement with the gender of her name rather than that of the individual herself (Bhandari 1978, 110). It is translated as "Tanu, my child."

The Hindi word tanu means "thin" or "slender," and it is a cognate of the English word "thin" and of Latin tenuis (Lanman 1978, 162). These variants stem from the proto-Indo-European root *ten-, "to stretch" (Morris 1971, 1545). Tanu also means "body" (which is the same as the Farsi word tan), but also in Sanskrit tanu carries the meaning of "person," one's own person or self, used like atman as a reflexive pronoun (Lanman 1978, 162).
This shade of meaning is apt for the story's main character, because Tanu is an adolescent already asserting herself as a person to be reckoned with, at least in her own estimation. And this is in spite of Mommy's power and grace, such as was displayed at Tanu's tea party, where Tanu was all but ignored. Yet, as Tanu takes on a life of her own in the reader's mind, there are signs that she is beginning to identify with her mother's self-esteem and social dexterity, judging by the confidence with which she, so young, undertakes the affair with Shekhar, even trying her own hand at manipulation at times.

The reader of the Hindi story has evidence concerning the narrator's true gender long before the reader of the translation does. In Hindi it is revealed by the feminine ending of the verb in the first line of the second paragraph of the story: "I am not presenting...." (Bhandari 1978, 105). The English reader must infer it from the text and cannot do so with certainty (although there is a hint of it in the characterization of the "rebounding, romping male" phrase) until several pages into the story when the protagonist is the center of the young males' attention and furthermore is thrilled by it (Bhandari 1978, 106).

The first paragraph of "Darar Bharne Ki Darar," with its homey atmosphere, fortified by humor, contrasts with the quotations which begin "Trishanku." The verb endings in the first sentence of this story specify in Hindi that the
narrator and Shruti Di are females, but in English this information is absent. Any question in the English of Shruti Di's gender is dispelled in the second paragraph. Nandi's remains only implicitly determined until one-third of the way through the story when her sibling calls her "big sister" (Bhandari 1978, 55).

Nor is there any doubt in the Hindi concerning the nature of the relationship between Shruti Di and Nandi. The latter always addresses Shruti Di in the formal, plural polite form (and, after all, Shruti Di is the elder), while Shruti employs the informal, singular (but not impolite) form with Nandi. Without this evidence, the reader of the English translation infers these distinctions from the characters' words and attitudes.

Whether one describes these stories as written for women about women or not, the perception of Woman's position in marriage is the underlying thread connecting them, and also tying them to "Stri Subodhini." In Tanu's home, her parents' "love-marriage" has set the precedent for the home's "modernity," the word that is spun the most in it. Here, with another thrust of Mannu Bhandari's humor, is a little-disguised nudge at Mahatma Gandhi's now-famous dictum that all the homes in India should spin their own cloth. Words are what is spun in Tanu's habitation. The reader sees that Tanu is precocious (Bhandari 1978, 106).
Because a 'love marriage,' occurring when a boy and girl fall in love and then get married, is unusual in India where most marriages are of the traditional pre-arranged variety, much ado is made in the household about Tanu's parents' love marriage. Technically, it is an achieved (or acquired) marriage as opposed to the ascribed one. It may even represent an inter-caste marriage, going against one of the strict rules governing marriage alliances, that of traditional caste endogamy. Tanu's mother attained her own marriage only after considerable argument with Tanu's maternal grandfather. So there is an indication that Mommy's and Papa's marriage is perhaps an inter-caste marriage. Given the sanctions against such marriages, Grandfather might have been more amenable to Mommy's 'love marriage' choice had it been within the same caste. It seems Mommy had found a man who not only loved her but who psychologically suited her, in this case apparently letting her enjoy the balance of power in the home. There were evidently high stakes involved which led her to reject the uncertainties of the arranged marriage and to wage war with her father.

In light of this, Tanu obviously expected to be allowed to go on a 'date,' but Mommy's reaction is nothing but negative. At this point the quotation from the beginning paragraph displays its relevance: "'... the opposition of each thing remains only inside of it (Bhandari 1978, 105).'" Albeit, most mothers of an adolescent girl would also most
likely be concerned about the things Tanu wanted to do, and would also exercise the option of rejecting an immature choice of a prospective husband.

To Mommy the 'country boys' seem like "children" (Bhandari 1978, 109). When she tells that she arose in the night, she uses the English word "bathroom" (Bhandari 1978, 118). Mommy is not only urban, she is cosmopolitan. In India, a mother's inviting the boys to tea at a house where there is a young, unmarried girl (even though the boys properly ignored Tanu) is a very bold step. Much can be deduced about India from these stories. Mommy does a balancing act using her wits in order to live in the society of the neighborhood and still maintain her image in the home that she is in the forefront of change.

In a land where divorce is all but unheard of, and in extreme cases the only recourse of an unhappy wife has customarily been to return to her parental home, had Shruti Di left her husband to live by herself as a woman alone, she also would have in a strict sense been outside the mainstream of proper conventions.

All three are suspended between different worlds. (Mention should be made, however, that they are all firmly ensconced in the upper middle class.) No matter how socially atypical these protagonists may be, they do evince traits characteristic in historical depictions of Indian women.
In Indian literature it is not unusual for women, seemingly powerless, to employ their intelligence to work shrewdly within environmental restrictions to gain desired ends or modify circumstances.

Ancient stories are replete with such examples. In the Sanskrit tale "The Red Lotus of Chastity," translated by J.A.B. van Buitenen (1973, 109), a virtuous young wife says, "I shall go and save my husband with a trick...." Another illustration is the story dating from the same period (circa the eighth century C.E.) entitled "Destiny Conquered" which centers around a chaste young girl who by clever contrivances of mental acuity won the husband she wanted (van Buitenen 1973, 138-156).

In the stories by Mannu Bhandari, there is reinforcement of the notion that marriage is seen to be the source (and certainly the only dependable one, and really the only one) of security and protection for a woman.

Abdul Qadir Badauni in Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh, his chronicle of events which occurred during Emperor Akbar's reign of the Mughal Empire, relates the account of a Sayyid Musa, a Muslim, who fell in love with the Hindu wife of another man. The lovers spent three days in the home of friends of hers. After her relatives had surrounded the dwelling and brought claims and litigation, the woman returned to her own home giving the story that she had been transported in the night by a male of "glorious form with
a crown encircled with jewels on his head, and two wings of light upon his breast...." She had been taken to a tower, she said, and was returned only after everyone there had seen her weeping for three days. In Badauni's words, "this beautiful deception" was, according to him, believed (Badauni 1973. 2:116).

From the description in "The Rift of Filling in the Rift" of Shruti Di's avoidance of Nandi's eyes at the last meeting, the suggestion is that she perhaps has finally won her husband's love, while letting him believe he is a victor. There is no clue from her previous conversations to reveal whether or not she was trying to accomplish something by indirect means. That's part of the beauty of the story. Shruti's agony is genuine, but that she is subtly, maybe even subconsciously, clever is portrayed in flashes like her "debating contest" remark (Bhandari 1978, 61) and her 'reverse snobbishness,' whether affected or ingenuous.

Nandi listens to Shruti Di, and although the reader isn't apprised of the details of the source of pain and dissatisfaction in this traditional marriage, the story illustrates that security and protection, and even stability in the practical concerns of everyday life, do not guarantee personal happiness.

Nandi regards Shruti as an 'honorary' big sister, as is seen in the Di (the shortened form of Didi, "Big Sister") which Nandi adds to Shruti's name when addressing her or
referring to her. In turn, Nandi has designated Vibhu as a "Big Brother," Da being short for Dada. "Lilua wale Dada" (Bhandari 1978, 62) may be an actual elder brother or he could be a more distant family member or a friend. Whoever he may be, he lives in Lilua, Lilua wale signifying "Lilua-er" rather in the way Americans says "New Yorker." Because it is in the respectful form, wale is plural rather than in the singular wala. Brothers in India traditionally oversee the welfare of their sisters, and this male is willing to do the favor for Nandi.

The importance of the parental home to young females is gently underscored in these two stories by having the girls' homes be the focus of the action. Mommy only tells about her visit to the boys' residence, and the home of Shruti Di is not intruded upon. All of the dialogue in "Darar Bharne Ki Darar" takes place within the cocoon-like shelter of Nandi's home, with the exception of a few utterances by Vibhu Da. In "Trishanku" all of the dialogue except the brief conversation with the neighbor right on the doorstep also occurs within the confines of the house.

Both stories are about girls who are trying to assert themselves as 'grown-up.' In this, endearing Nandi is stymied. Even Tanu's comparative ineffectualness was brought home to her in the matter of Shekhar.

Tanu is mindful that any other mother would "fix" the boys' "seven generations," or in other words, ruin them
to the extent that the effects would be felt for seven succeeding generations (Bhandari 1978, 108). Although used in a humorous context, the observation is based on a serious apprehension of cause and effect, a truth we in the Western world often ignore -- that disaster in a family influences many generations.

Another translatable humorous device Bhandari uses is ambiguity: the setting up of a situation and then giving the reader a sentence which can be applied to it in several ways, or to different characters, some or all of the applications being humorous and/or satirical. For example, there was the matter of the parents in the neighborhood threatening the boys, not so much because of the boys' remarks intrinsically, but out of the parents' concern for their daughters' reputations, which in turn will affect the arranging of 'good' marriages for the girls. Tanu says, "There was this much heat in the neighborhood...," and the reader surmises that it was not all heat from parental anger only, but also from the boys' and girls' attraction for each other (Bhandari 1978, 108).

Later, Tanu comments in regard to the neighbors' attentiveness to her very public conversations with the boys, "... hearing also like this nothing came into their hands from which they would obtain some spiritual contentment." One interpretation is that the loud chats contained no edifying or profound substance, amusing enough in itself (as
the reader didn't imagine that they did). But it assumes more humor, and in addition sarcastic overtones, in light of the preceding context in which the neighbors had been noted to derive contentment by inferring the well-kept secrets of other people's private misbehavior (Bhandari 1978, 112).

With words that have several meanings. Bhandari often furnishes high humor. Tanu relates,

The whole situation then had time attached to it in coming upon an equal, but it has come. Shekhar also now leaving off one or two days began to come, and whenever he would come, then more often we would indeed talk of studies. While expressing shame for his deeds, he made the promise with Mommy that now he won't do any of the kind of task with which Mommy may have complaint (Bhandari 1978, 119).

The Hindi word for "task" or "work," i.e., the writing of personal notes to Tanu, is kam (the "a" is pronounced as in "ah"), which also means "sexual desire."

Endeavoring to stretch the text in order to deliver the alternative meanings into English would be to adversely affect its quality. And the fun of the puns would be lost to a non-Hindi-speaking reader, anyway.

At times the various shades of meaning of a single word may reinforce the themes and characterizations of the stories. Mommy says of Shekhar, "He keeps gazing and staring here the whole time hanging around on the roof with a gloomy face in the way of love-lorn people." Majnun, the word for "love-lorn" is the name of Laila's lover of the
Arabian Tales. Majnun in Arabic literally means "crazy." Majnun went mad over his love for Laila and in that condition became emaciated. In addition to "love-lorn," in Hindi the word also means a "very lean and thin person," which is also the meaning of tanu. Thus Tanu and Shekhar are linked with the fabled couple with humor which Tanu appreciates (Bhandari 1978, 120).

Mannu Bhandari's fascinating word pairs give depth and resonance to the text. In addition, the words in these rhyming, or phonetically-similar, hyphenated pairs complement and bounce off one another. One of these is sitti-pitti, consisting of an adjective which means "dumbfounded" or "stunned" and a noun phrase denoting "all courage" or "entire reality" (Bhandari 1978, 110). Graphically, these pairs resemble each other more closely in the Deva Nāgari script. There is a precedent for them in the Hindi lexicon with some popular expressions such as anne-jane wale, which means "comers-goers," or "passersby." Although the translator grieves to see the humor of the word-play missed in the English, Bhandari's stories stand by themselves substantively, in a consummate way, in a language other than Hindi.

With the goal of altering Mannu Bhandari's text as little as possible, the translator faces the difficulty of adhering to the Hindi syntax while transmitting the phrase semantically. Because in Hindi the principle verb always occurs at the very end of the sentence (as it does also in
Farsi) auxiliary verbs are immediately 'before' it. It is not unusual to have a string of three or four verbs at the end of a sentence. Other verbs in the sentence in the form of gerunds or participles appear at the end of their individual clauses. Adverbs, of course, must necessarily precede in a Hindi sentence they verb they modify. This does not mean that they will be immediately before it. Considerable thought is devoted, therefore, to deciding whether a given adverb should be placed before or after the verb in the English, because its position there carries a semantic effect in terms of importance and stress.

Direct and indirect objects may also be randomly placed in a Hindi sentence, as long as they precede their related verb. The subject, which can also be positioned anywhere in a sentence, is marked as such only when the verb is in the simple perfect form. Then the particle (ne) marking the subject is in the "postposition," i.e., to the right of the subject as one reads from left to right in the Deva Nāgari script.

"Book of Shekhar," which is livre de Shekhar in French and ketab-i-Shekhar in Farsi (another Indo-European language) is Shekhar ki kitab in Hindi, where the order is reversed. The option exists in English to translate these also as "Shekhar's book." In relation to the left to right
direction of the script, the title "Darar Bharne Ki Darar" is "Rift - Filling in - of - Rift." To get the meaning it is necessary to work 'backward.'

In Hindi, adjectives may be placed on either side of the word modified, and when working back from the main verb, the adjectives can usually remain in the translation where they are found in the text. Yet, the order of sequential adjectives can present a problem as the translator tries to determine if their order should be going 'away from' or 'toward' the word modified.

Mannu Bhandari's use of intentional ambiguity is also predominantly retained in the translation. However, following Hindi syntax too rigorously can occasionally result in English which is too misleading. Considering an only slightly complex phrase, this is the order in which the words appear in the Hindi: "But - Mommy - ke pas (a construction signifying a possessive, but not strictly "of") - house - and - family members - of - every - secret - at - knowing - of - a - sixth - sense - is...." If it is put into English as "But a sixth sense of knowing every secret of the family members and house belonging to Mommy," it is too equivocal. Changing "family members and house belonging to Mommy" to "family members and house Mommy has" makes little difference. "But Mommy has a sixth sense of knowing every secret of the house and family members," is
preferable although it follows the word order of the Hindi less rigidly (Bhandari 1978, 114).

One only hopes to do justice to a Mannu Bhandari. In the case of long and involved sentences containing multiple prepositional phrases, participial phrases, and relative clauses, the goal of adhering to the Hindi syntax can be intimidating. While it is tempting sometimes to proceed on the basis of the meaning alone and rewrite the entire sentence in English, the danger would exist that the translator's style of writing might be imposed on Mannu Bhandari, an eventuality that was herein assiduously avoided.
LIST OF REFERENCES


