

would prove beneficial for the country, and it is possible that the Shah himself had this object in view; but our present experience makes us believe that the journey was made only with a view to see the sights of the world. Had this not been so, the country from end to end would have flourished and the breeze of prosperity would have blown over it. But, alas! we wish for something, for which Fate does not wish.

The tide was out, and the shore was very muddy. I got on the back of a negro to go out to the boat, and began kicking him playfully with my heels. He got cross, and said, "What are you doing, Sir?" "Keep quiet!" I replied, "I am spurring you." At this, he laughed heartily and as he laughed the white teeth in his ebony head shone like pearls in black water. I boarded the ship, and after a while there was a great uproar. They got ready to weigh anchor. The cargo was all loaded, the wheel stopped singing¹ and steam came out of the engine. At last, at half past twelve, it gave its parting whistle, and the ship began to crawl over the surface of the water. I nodded my head and saluted Bandar-i-'Abbas from a distance and by signs conveyed to her that if ever I returned that way safe and sound I would cut her dead! At the time of the ship's departure, I went on the quarter deck, where I found the Captain. Taking from him a telescope, I had a last look at Bandar-i-'Abbas. The moving panorama at the time was very pretty. The negro coolies, who had come on board before the ship's departure to load it, swarmed down ropes into their respective boats? To take their minds off their

1. *Rāy mūdā* is the name of a treatise on music which however merely consists of a collection of pictures.
2. *Hūrī*—a small boat—is a Bombay word.

work they sing choruses, in their raucous and unmusical voices, when loading or lifting heavy loads. I was very keen to write down their songs, but did not understand what they said. I called a negro and asked him in Persian to repeat his song to me. He could read and write a little and dictated the beginning of it which made me rock with laughter. In reward, I gave the tuneful singer a rupee and hoped he would explain what it all meant. But alas! they were just casting off so there was no time for me to find out what it meant or what the jokes were.

Sajjad Dählawi 'Azimabadi.

THE SALT INSPECTOR.

Selections from the Prem Pachisi

(by Munshi Prem Chand)

When the Salt Department was established, and a general prohibition was imposed on the enjoyment of one of Nature's bounties¹, people found the front door closed and so began to look for openings and cracks. Embezzlement, misappropriation of money, and bribery prevailed everywhere². They gave up the respectable and profitable appointment of *pat-wārī*, and accepted the post of guards³, in the Salt Department.

An Inspector of this Department was envied even by pleaders. It was the time when English education and Christianity were regarded as synonymous

1. *Khudāshād nī'mat*: literally, a God-sent blessing; greedily was brisk.
2. *Tahrī's ka bāzār garm thā*: literally, the market of making *Bary andāz*: literally: a lightening thrower: hence a match-lock man—a guard.

terms. Education in Persian served as a certificate of distinction: and people, after reading a few love stories, became qualified for the highest positions in life.

Munshi Bansi Dhar too, had read all through the story of Zulakha¹ and had made himself familiar with the sad stories of Majnun² and Farhad³. These stories he supposed to be more important than the discovery of America, or the Battle of the Nile⁴, and so set out to earn a living. His father who had a wide knowledge of the world⁵, reasoned with him and said, "My son, you are aware of the wretched condition of our family; we have run heavily into debt, the girls are growing up fast⁶: I am just like a tree on the bank of a river in flood, and don't know when I am going to fall; so now you must be the head and manager of the family. Don't worry for

1. *Zulakha*: Potiphar's wife: the story of whose amours with Joseph has been written in great detail, and is well known in all Muhammadan countries.
2. *Majnun* 'madman': was the nickname of Qais, the legendary lover of *Laila*. The stories of his wanderings and tribulations in his search for *Laila*, and of the eventual death of the reunited couple are well known in all Muhammadan countries.
3. *Farhad*: who is known as *Koh-Kan*, the 'mountain-digger', was the lover of *Shirin*, the mistress of the *Sassanid* King of Persia, *Khusrau Parviz*. The story of his unsuccessful suit which culminated in his suicide is well known. The rock carvings at Behistun near Kirmanshah, some of which are attributed to him, are world-famous.
4. The first line on page 210 should read—*Inko darydt-i-Amirika aur jang-i-Nil se ziyada ahannu khayal kar-te hain*.
5. *Jahan-shida*: Persian, literally, having seen the world.
6. Literally, are rising like the Ganges and the Jumna.

a minute about your pay or position, which is like the tomb of a saint, but rather you should regard the offerings and the *chadar*¹. You should look for a job which has some 'perks'² attached to it. Monthly pay is like the full moon³ which appears for one day only and then gradually disappears. • The 'perks' are a running stream, from which thirst is always quenched. Monthly pay is given by a human agent, and that is why, it is never in abundance⁴, while the other income is obtained from a superhuman source, and so is abundant. You are a learned and educated man, so it is unnecessary for me to tell you what to do. It depends largely on the ability to read a man's mind and the expression on his face. Study each man, see what he is in need of, look for your opportunity, and act warily. You may be cruel or indifferent to one who is in need of something, but it is difficult to conclude a bargain with one who is not in need of anything. You must bear all this in mind⁵, for this is what I have gathered from the experience of a life-time."

This paternal advice was followed by a blessing. Bansi Dhar listened to all the advice very attentively like a dutiful son, and then set out on his journey into the wide world, where perseverance is one's companion, courage a helper, and a man's own efforts are his guardian. He started at an

1. *Chadar* here refers to the sheet offered at the grave of a saint.
2. *Baladi*: literally, extra: over and above. *Baladi ragun* is a euphemism for bribes.
3. *Purn mashti*: the day of the full moon, or the last day of the Hindu month.
4. Note the expression in Urdu.
5. Literally, tie into a knot.

auspicious moment, and was lucky, and so was appointed an Inspector in the Salt Department.

The pay was fairly high, and there was no limit to the 'perks'. The letter (containing the news) delighted the old munshi, for it was a security with which he could conciliate the wine merchants¹. His neighbours envied him, and the importuning of the money lenders was changed to tenderness.

2

One winter's night the guards and watchmen of the Salt Department were patronising the tavern and showed so little inclination to leave that they might have been its door-keepers². Munshi Bansī Dhar had arrived but six months before, but even in that short period, his honesty and devotion to duty had inspired his officers with confidence and trust in him, and the public with distrust.

The Jumna flowed a mile to the east of the office of the Salt Department, and there was a bridge of boats across it.

The Inspector had shut himself in his room and was fast asleep, when suddenly he awoke and heard the rattling of carts and the shouts of boatmen instead of the sweet soft murmur of the stream.

He got up and wondered why carts should be crossing the river at dead of night, and if there was nothing underhand, why they required the dark curtain (of the night). This thought increased his suspicions and so, donning his uniform, he put his revolver in his pocket, and urging on his horse, reached the bank of the river in no time.

1. This shows that the old munshi must have been a heavy drinker and was heavily in debt to the wine merchants.
2. Note the Urdu expression.

There he found a line of carts, longer even than the scented tresses of the beloved¹, crossing the bridge. He hailed them in a tone of authority and asked to whom the carts belonged.

For a while there was dead silence, and then after some whispering² among the drivers of the carts, the driver of the leading cart replied, "To Pandit Alopi Din."

"Which Pandit Alopi Din?"

"Of Datta Ganj."

Munshi Bansī Dhar nearly jumped out of his skin. Alopi Din was the biggest and most notable landowner in that part of the world, and his transactions, other than his business in grain, ran into lakhs of rupees.

He was a very influential³ personage on intimate terms with all the officials. High British officials used to shoot over his lands and were often his guests. The poor he fed all the year round⁴.

Then Bansī Dhar asked them where they were going.

"To Cawnpore," was the reply; but when he asked what was in the carts, he was met with stoney silence, and the Inspector's doubt turned to certainty. Having waited in vain for a reply, he shouted out, "Are you all dumb? What I want to know is what have you got in these carts?"

1. *Zulf-i-ambārīn*: the locks perfumed with ambergris. Indian and Persian poets love to exaggerate the length of the beloved's hair.
2. *Sar-goshi*: a whisper, from Persian, *sar*, head and *gosh*, an ear.
3. *Hakkān-rās*: Influential, from *hakkām* plural of *hakkīm*, officials, and Persian *rasīdān*, to reach; approach.
4. *Sadda barāt*: Alms or food distributed daily to the poor or to travellers.

As, even then¹, he got no reply, he rode his horse up to one of the carts, and felt one of the sacks. Here was proof position²—they were lumps of salt

Pandit Alopi Din, half asleep, was coming along in his richly decorated *rath*, when all of a sudden some excited drivers came and woke him up.

"Maharaj!" they cried, "The Inspector has held the carts up. He is at the *ghat* calling for you!" Pandit Alopi Din had great faith in the power of the "Almighty Dollar"³ having proved it many a time.

He often used to say, "Why, leave alone in this world, its writ runs⁴ even in Paradise."

This assertion of his was quite true, for Law, Truth and Justice are all of them the playthings of Wealth, with which it amuses itself as it likes. Still reclining, he said in a lordly way, "All right, get along, I am just coming."

The Pandit Ji then quietly prepared some betels, and throwing a quilt over his shoulders went up to the Inspector and said in a free and easy manner, "Well Babu Ji, greetings⁵! What offence have I committed that these carts have been stopped? You ought to treat us Brahmans with more consideration!"

Bansi Dhar recognised him and unconcernedly replied, "It's the Government's order."

Alopi Din laughed "I don't care a damn for

1. Note the idiomatic use of *jab koi*.
2. Literally, doubt embraced certainty.
3. Literally, gold, peace be on it.
4. Note the expression in Urdu.
5. *Ashir bad*: a common form of greeting among Hindus which is used as a blessing by Brahmans and by elders to youngsters etc.

Government orders nor for the Government," he said, "I look on you as my Government. It is purely a domestic matter between us, and I will do whatever you say! You have taken all this trouble for nothing, for it was unthinkable that I should come here without offering anything to the God of the *ghat*. I would have reported myself to you."

These sweet words of Wealth had no effect on Bansi Dhar, as his zeal for honesty was quite fresh, and he said sharply, "I am not one of those scoundrels who dispense honesty for trifling sums! You are now in custody, and will be prosecuted to-morrow morning according to the law. I have no time to say any more: Jemadar Badlu Singh, take this man into custody!"

Pandit Alopi Din, his retinue and the cartmen were aghast. Probably this was the first time in his life that he had had to listen to such un congenial remarks. Badlu Singh went up to him but was much too overawed (by his high position) to catch hold of his hand. Alopi Din had never found Duty so indifferent to Wealth and was dumbfounded. "He is only a schoolboy," he thought, and has no idea what Wealth really is; he is a green-horn and shy; I shall have to cajole him a bit more." Then he said very humbly, "Babu Sahib don't be so cruel, I shall be ruined and my honour dragged through the mire and after all you won't get anything out of it; at most, a small sum of money by way of a reward; whereas I am at your service in every way?"

"I won't listen to such things," said Bansi Dhar sternly.

The support on which Alopi Din had always

1. Note the idiom in Urdu.
2. Note the idiom in Urdu, and compare with No. 1 above.

relief, and which he had considered to be as firm as a rock seemed to be slipping from under his feet.

216 His self-confidence and pride of wealth had suffered a severe shock, but still he had great faith in the quantitative power of wealth, so he said to his overseer, "Lala Ji, present a thousand rupee note to the Babu Sahib; he is just like a hungry lion!"

Bansi Dhar lost his temper and said, "Let alone a thousand, not even a lakh would make me stray from the path of duty!"

Wealth flared up at this foolish recklessness of Duty and pious annihilation of self; and now a severe struggle took place between the two powers. Wealth was repeatedly annoyed, and made several attacks with the vigour of despair.

The bribe was increased from one thousand to five thousand, from five to ten, from ten to fifteen and then to twenty; but Duty opposed this mighty army with manly valour, and stood against it all alone like an immovable mountain.

"I am not in a position to offer you any more, said Alopi Din in despair, so you can do what you like!"

217 Bansi Dhar shouted to his Jenadar. Badlu Singh, cursing the Inspector in his heart, went up to Alopi Din. The Pandit Ji was alarmed and stepped back a few paces and said in a very forlorn manner,

"Babu Sahib! for God's sake take pity on me, I am prepared to settle with you for twenty five thousand rupees."

"Impossible!"

"Thirty thousand."

"Impossible."

"Well won't you take forty thousand?"

"Let alone forty thousand," said the Inspector,

"I wouldn't take forty lakhs. Badlu Singh, take this man into custody. Now, I don't want to hear any more about it!"

Duty trampled Wealth under her feet.

Alopi Din saw a man the size of a giant coming towards him with handcuffs, gave one despairing look round, and fell down in a dead faint!

4

The whole world slept, but its tongue was awake.

When morning came, everyone was talking about what had happened, and everywhere cries of reproach and disgust arose. It seemed as though vice no longer existed in this world. Why, a milkman who sold water as milk, government officials who forged daily accounts, Babu Sahibs who travelled by train without a ticket, bankers and traders who forged notes of hand, all of them were wagging their heads as if they were saints!

Next day Alopi Din was called to account, and when he set out with two constables for the Court, his head bowed with shame, handcuffed, and grief and sorrow in his heart, the whole town was in a whirl. Even at fairs the people did not seem so eager to see what was going on!

There was such a crowd (in the Court) that one could not see where the wall ended and the ceiling began.

There remained but for Pandit Alopi Din to come into Court. He was the leviathan of this vast sea² (the

1. For *ruh* read *do*.

2. *Nihang*: here means a shark, it also means a crocodile. *Bahr-i-gulzumi* means the Red sea or the Arabian Gulf.

Court), the officers respected him, the staff were his debtors, pleaders and *malhars* flattered him, and the peons and night-watchmen were his willing slaves.¹ As soon as they saw him, they rushed at him from all sides and everyone of them was absolutely dumb-founded²; not because Alopi Din should have done such a thing, but because he had fallen into the clutches of the law. For why should a man, who had enough wealth to make the impossible possible, and whose glib tongue could charm the very gods, be made the victim of the law? When they had recovered from their amazement, they began to sympathise with him.

219

A group of pleaders was formed straightway to defend him against the charge, and on the battlefield of Justice the fight between Duty and Wealth began.

Bansi Dhar was standing by in silence, all by himself. Save truth, he had no defence and no arms had he other than straightforward statements.

Of course he had witnesses to support him, but even they seemed to be hesitating, for they had been won over to the other side, and even Justice herself seemed unfavourable.

It is true of course, that Justice is not in need of wealth, but it is more keen on acquiring it behind the screen than it could be openly; and in the garb of invitations and presents Wealth assumes an extremely deceptive aspect.

It was a Court of Justice, but the intoxication of Wealth had befogged the officers. The case was

1. Literally, slaves not bought for money.
2. Literally, put their fingers between their teeth (in astonishment).

soon settled, and the Deputy Magistrate wrote the following judgment:—

“The evidence against Pandit Alopi Din is weak and vague in the extreme. He is wealthy and comes of a good family. It is highly improbable that he should have done so low-down, and dishonourable a deed merely for the sake of a few thousand rupees.

“Munshi Bansi Dhar has, evidently been guilty of a most unfortunate error of judgment and unnecessary zeal.

“I am glad to see that he is a fine young man with a keen sense of duty. But his devotion to duty, which was in excess of the normal requirements of the Salt Department, got the better of his discretion and common sense, and in future he must be careful.”

220

As soon as the pleaders heard this judgment, they jumped for joy, and Pandit Alopi Din came out of the Court smiling. His supporters showered rupees on him. A flood of generosity and liberality inundated the Court and its waves shook the very foundations.

When Bansi Dhar came out of Court looking as proud as Lucifer, he was greeted with taunts and jeers. The peons and constables bowed down to salute him; but all this pretence and insinuation merely swelled his conceit.¹

Had he won the case, he might not have assumed such a vainglorious air. But the world had taught him its first lesson—that justice, learning,

1. Literally, would have had the effect of cold air on the intoxication of pride.

imposing titles, long beards and loose cloaks¹ were none of them entitled to real respect.

5

Bansi Dhar had picked a quarrel with Wealth and Influence, and so, of course, had to pay for it. About a week later he received an order for his dismissal. So he was punished for his devotion to duty, and the unfortunate man set off for his home, with a broken heart and at his wit's end.

The old Munshi had been suspicious of him from the very first, and recollected that the boy had not paid the slightest attention to the advice he gave him when he was leaving the house.

"I have to put up with the importuning of the wine-merchant and the butcher," he thought, "and turn into a holy man in my old age, whilst he earns nothing but his pay! I too have been in service, though I never held any rank; still whatever I did, I did it in grand style; and now he is going to be an honest man (and will follow the maxim), 'The *masjid* must be lit with a lamp, and one's own home can be in darkness.'"

"A plague on such intelligence; all he has been taught has gone for nothing!"

Meanwhile Bansi Dhar arrived home tired out.

When the old munshi heard all about what had happened, he beat his head and said, "What I would like to do is to knock my own head off and then yours."

For long he regretted what he had done and grieved over it all. In his wrath he even used

1. Loose cloaks: as worn by mullas etc. *Dhale* is a senseless appositive.

bad language and had Bansi Dhar not got out of the light, his wrath might have assumed a more practical form. It was a great shock to his old mother and her hopes of Jagannath and Rameshwar¹ were blighted. His wife, too, did not speak nicely to him for several days.

And so he had to put up with the stern looks of his relatives and the malicious sympathy of outsiders for a whole week. One evening the old munshi was in the midst of his worship² when a decorated *rath* stopped at his door. It had green and pink curtains, and the bullocks were of Western breed, with blue cords round their necks, and their horns mounted

222

1. *Jagan-nath*: Lord of the universe; an incarnation of *Vishnu*. The great temple of this deity is at Puri in Orissa, and the great annual feast called *Rath-jatra* is held there in the month of July when the huge chariot of the idol is brought out of the temple.

Rameshwar: *Rameshwaram* is a famous place of pilgrimage for Hindus, and is situated on the coast of Madras north of Ceylon, and 164 miles by train from Trichinopoly. In the *Patanjania* it is told that when *Rdm Chandar Ji*, in pursuit of *Ratan*, came to the sea, he prayed the sea-god's assistance to enable him to cross to Ceylon.

For some time the sea-god paid no heed to his request, till *Rdm Chandar Ji* shot some arrows of flame into the sea, which caused such a violent upheaval in nature that the sea-god appeared and told him that a monkey called *Nal*, who was with him, would be able to build a bridge.

This he did.

At the bridge head on the shores of Madras *Rdm Chandar Ji* erected an idol of Shiva, and there a temple has been built. Pilgrims who bathe in the waters there have their sins forgiven them.

2. Literally, counting beads whilst repeating the name of *Rdm*.

manager of all his estates, and his pay *per annum* was to be Rs. 6000, and a daily allowance for his out-of-pocket expenses besides. He was to have horses to ride, and his authority was to be unlimited. In tremulous tones he said, "Well, Pandit, I cannot find words to express my thanks to you for looking on me as a fit person on whom to bestow these boundless favours. But, to tell you the truth, I am not worthy of such a high position."

"Don't praise yourself," replied Alopi Din, laughingly.

"Anyhow, I am your slave," said Bansī Dhar gravely, "and I am only too proud to serve such a Divine as you; but I am neither learned nor clever, nor have I any experience which would make up for these deficiencies¹. Moreover," he added, "for such a high post a great business man² and an experienced superintendent³ is necessary."

Alopi Din took out the pen from the pen case and after putting it into Bansī Dhar's hand said, "I need neither learning, nor sagacity, nor experience, nor knowledge of business, for I have already tested the virtues of these gems. Now fortunately I have found such a priceless pearl, that the beauty of learning and sagacity will prove nothing in comparison to its lustre. Here is the pen, hurry up and sign this legibly and be done with it. I pray to God only that He may ever keep you the same unkind, harsh and rude, but dutiful inspector who met me on the river bank!"

1. Note the Urdu expression.
2. Literally, one understanding affairs.
3. Note the Urdu expression.

Bansī Dhar's eyes overflowed¹ with tears. So much gratitude could not be contained in a small thing like a heart. Once again he glanced at the Pandit with a look of reverence and admiration and signed the document with a trembling hand. Alopi Din jumped up in an ecstasy of joy and embraced him.

A DISINTERESTED BENEFACTOR.

1

It was the month of Sawan,² and Reoti Rani, having stained her feet with *mihndi*³ and dressed her hair⁴ went to see her mother-in-law.

"Mummy darling," she said, "I, too, am going to the fair⁵ to-day."

Reoti was the wife of Pandit Chintaman.

1. For *jhalak* read *chhalak*, from *chhalaknā*, to overflow; to be spilt.

2. *Sāwan*: the fourth Hindi month corresponding to July-August.

3. *Mihndi* or *hind*: is a kind of myrtle, which is used to reddens the hands and feet as a cosmetic.

4. *Mang choṭi*: *mang* is the middle line where the hair is parted, and *choṭi* is the hair at the back of the head.

5. This is a story of an accident at the "dolls' fair". This fair is still held at many places in the United Provinces and elsewhere. Girls pretend that their dolls have been married and that they are sending them off to the house of their in-laws.

Boys and girls collect near a river or a pond, and they both beat the dolls with their sticks before the girls put their dolls into the water to send them off to their new homes. The ceremony has no religious significance. The custom probably originated in the days when girls were looked on as a curse in the family, not only because of the expense they caused, but more especially because of the fighting that ensued when they were kidnapped, which cost many lives.

See also page 78 lines 18 etc.