# **The play**

# **THE JOURNEY**

**FIRST SCENE**

(A fakir is seated on a ramp with a maulvi and two disciples. He is singing a Goalparia folk song and the others are accompanying him:

TUIJE AMAR PRANESHARI

TOKE NA DEKHLE AMI

KEMONE BASI…..

TUI AMAR PRANER BAHAR

NA THAKLE AMAR JIBON ANDHAR

TUIJE AMAR PRANESHWARI………

Oh my love!

How shall I live without you?

You're the one, who's possessed my soul,

### You are the lady in my life!

## **SECOND SCENE**

Local: A railway station

Time: Evening

(A pile of firewood is to be seen when the stage lights up. Rabeya enters with a bundle of firewood on her head. Dumps it on the ground next to the pile. Goes back to collect another. The look on her face suggests she is waiting for someone. Suddenly Sakitan's entry with a scream.)

Sakitan: R….a…b….e….y…a…….

Rabeya: Oh, it's you. She didn't come? The train is about to arrive.

Sakitan: *Battamij aurat*! How dare you?

Rabeya: If the train passes by my earning will be squandered. Dulali didn't come?

Sakitan: Dulali will not come.

Rabeya: Why?

Sakitan: Dulali is my daughter.

Rabeya: She's my niece.

Sakitan: She's mine. My own.

Rabeya: You too is my own-----my only sister.

Sakitan: Ashamed to say that.

Rabeya: Say on.

Sakitan: You don't have a husband. And for these three years who knows how many men you’ve slept with.

Rabeya: Hold your tongue!

Sakitan: My daughter with you--------impossible.

*(Dulali's entry playing with a bamboo basket)*

Dulali: Mahi [[1]](#endnote-1)…………..

*(Seeing her mother on the platform Dulali gets off-guard)*

Sakitan: You are doing business, you do. Collecting firewood from the forest and selling in the market, sell. Want to sell anything else, sell. But why are you dragging my daughter? What is the scarcity in my daughter's life? She has a father to look after her.

Rabeya: Oh. But she's coming here by her own wish. What's wrong with it?

Sakitan: What's wrong with it? You don’t have a husband.

Rabeya: (*Pause*) Yes. I don’t have a husband. And that is why I don’t have to suffer from husband.

Sakitan: (*Pause. To Dulali*) *Oi Beti* , you whore! On the pretext of selling firewood flirting with men in the train, eh! (*Looking at the bundle of* *firewood*) This bundle------This bundle-------- (*kicks off the bundle and throws the firewood all over the Stage like a bewitched woman*) after a few days, it'll be time for you to be married and you are flirting with men. What is the scarcity in your life? Your father is giving you no food, no clothes? What is your father not giving you that you are mingling with this *bazari aurat*?

Rabeya: (*Reacts angrily*) *Didi*, first look at yourself and then blame others.

Sakitan: I know myself well…I am happy.

Rabeya: (*Ironically*) *Beti*, didn’t your husband give you *talaq* after you gave birth to three girls.

Sakitan: Yes, he did. It's my fate.

Rabeya: (*Collects the firewood splintered on the floor and showing it to Sakitan*) And this is my fate. I believe in my own hands. Yes, my own hands.

Sakitan: Yet, I am happy because I have my husband to stand by me.

Rabeya: *Saali*! You'd have died out of hunger. There was no way out that you married that old scarecrow of a mason. *Saali haramjaadi*!

Sakitan: Still I have a family…a happy family.

Rabeya: *(Smirks*) Very happy family? Tell me the truth, are you really happy?

Sakitan: (*As if a change occurs in her. Comes and sits beside her sister* *Rabeya.)* That bloody old vulture…. doesn’t let me sleep the whole night…doesn’t care whether I am willing…even during those these………so hungry Always…this a human body …….the whole night…(*starts crying*)

Rabeya: (*Consoles her*) It is better to live alone than to serve such a husband. Look at me. It's been three years my husband gave me *talaq*. What has come of me? I am doing business. Earning my own money. All by myself.

Sakitan: But the way people ask you the price of your body along with the price of firewood, nobody dares do that to me.

Rabeya: (*Gets angry and pushes Sakitan to the floor*) What do you think of me? A whore? *Bazari aurat*? *Saali haramjaadi*! Grown so arrogant after getting a Husband. I'll see for how long that bloody old fellow feeds you. *Saala haramjaada*! Old vulture!

Sakitan: Don’t use such words. He's my husband. Don't have a husband yourself! That's Why……….

Rabeya: Yes, I don't have a husband. So what? And you, so proud of your husband! *Arre*, Earning with my own hands. Managing my food myself. I am free. I have a World of my own. I am free.

*(Lights a bidi)*

Sakitan: Rabeya, are you really free?

Rabeya: (*Turns her face to Sakitan)*

*(Sakitan drags Dulali away by her hands but stops and comes again to Rabeya*)

Sakitan: Does a woman become free after a *talaq*?

Rabeya :( *Silent*.)

(*Sakitan and Dulai exit. Rabeya is recalling her past.)*

(A *song sung during the bathing ceremony at a wedding comes from the offstage:*

BANGLA GHARE THAIKARE DAMAN

BANGLA LEKHON LEKHE ARBAN KE

BANGLA LEKHTE LEKHTERE DAMAN

GHAMIA OSTHIR HOISE ARBANKE

KOTHAI ROILE DORODER BAAP MAO

KEMNI BATASH DEN O ARBAN KE…

*Rabeya touches the mud-walls of her hut; her heart flutters at its beauty.*

*A voice offstage recites the Sura from the Quran, which is done at the time slashing (HALAL or JOBAI) a hen/goat etc:*

NAITUAN AJBAHAJAN HAWAINA BEHAISU

YA RUZZU AANHUDAMUL MASSFUA TAKULA

LA MUHU HALALEL ZAMIEL MUMENINA MUMENAT

BISMILLAHE REHMANER RAHIM.

*Rabeya gets alarmed and goes looking for her dear duck*.)

Rabeya: Ti..ti..ti..ti..

Hannan: (*carrying the slashed duck and singing a Bhatiali song*) Dayal Amar Katha aar tumar nai mone…

Rabeya: Ti…ti…ti…ti..ti…

Hannan: Days are really getting bad.

Rabeya: My dear duck!

Hannan: I’ve invited the *maulvi* in the evening.

Rabeya: The whole day keeps swimming in the pond backyard. When in shoo her for food, comes dancing around.

Hannan: Jonab[[2]](#endnote-2) will come, recite the Quran. Days might better, *Insaallah.*

Rabeya: Whenever I call her ti..ti..ti…she comes scampering.

Hannan: (*Throwing the basket with the dead duck for Rabeya to catch*) Take this. Cook it with *daal*, put more chilies. I’ll go fetch the Jonab. A few others are also coming with him.

(Hannan hurries out, singing.

*A dead duck on a basket*

*And Rabeya on stage.*

*Rabeya feels the duck and the blood dripping down its neck makes her shiver.*

Suddenly enters a bunch of women.

An air of celebration everywhere.

All start preparing for the milad.

*Rabeya is pensive losing her dear duck.*

*She is not acting easy with the guests but conscious of her responsibilities as the house maker.)*

Dulali: Oi Mahi, what’s going on? We’re a bit late. Oi, come, come.

Rabeya: O come come. O baideu, come. How many people are coming for the *milad*? How much rice should I put?

Sakitan: Put four kilos.

Rabeya: Oi Fatima. Go and wash the rice.

Dulali: (*addressing a woman*) What vegetables are you bringing?

Salma: Cauliflower, cabbage, tomatoes…everything. What else do you need?

Rabeya: Wahida, what news? How many months?

Wahida: Three months.

Rabeya: How old is the other girl?

Wahida: One year.

Rabeya: What? One year! Then your husband is really something.

Fatima: Oi, listen, something really interesting.

All: What? What?

Fatima: How long is it Amina got married? That day I saw she is pregnant. The way she walked getting down the rickshaw!!

(She mimes. All laughs.)

Salma: Wait a little. I too have something to say.

Sakitan: O, she too has something to say. Listen…

Salma: That Pakija in front of our shop and that Anup the street crossing…

Sakitan: O, that *lambu*, that Hindu…

Salma: Yes. What a show! Wait in front of the shop and exchanging glances…

(All laughs)

Dulali: (*screams seeing the duck at the basket*) O Mahi, is this the one for dinner. I’ll skin it today.

(Rabeya keeps staring. Someone calls out her name and she comes to her senses.)

Wahida: Are the *masalas* ready?

*(A girl applies nail polish sitting at a corner*.)

Sakitan: (*to Dulali*) Go and see what she is up to.

Dulali: Oi, what are you doing ha? What is that in your hand? Show me, show me. *Alta*……….who gave you *alta*? Who gave you?

Girl: I won’t tell. Give me back my *alta*.

(The girl chases Dulali, all laughs.)

Dulali: Tell me who gave you please.

Girl: Selim gave.

(All dances singing along ‘Selim gave.’)

Another girl: Oi did he also gave you a kiss?

(*Hannan enters and everyone stops.)*

Hannan: What is happening here? Jonab is about to come. And you are making merry.

(All goes back to their work.)

Hannan: Come Jonab, come*.(approaching the outside door)*

(Maulvi and a few others enter.)

Maulvi: Rabeya, Are you well?

Rabeya: Allah is keeping.

(Hannan inspects the mats everyone would be sitting on. Rabeya gestures at him to come to her.)

Rabeya: *(whispers)* So many people. I worry the food will not be enough.

Hannan: Don’t worry. Let the men eat first and then you women manage something.

(All resumes cooking.)

Maulvi: (*After reciting Sura fatiha*) Then brothers, *Kiyamat*, which is the final judgment will be there and we all will face final trial. Allah has said in the *pak* Quran Shariff-

*Innas sayata na arsiyatul la raiba alkina lame,*

*Aksarane nasu na yumumin*

That is, Kiyamat is inevitable, inescapable. No one can get rid of it.

(In the middle of this Dulali comes with burning incense sticks, the *maulvi* looks at her for a moment and then resumes…)

The *musalman* who does not do *namaj*, the *musalman* who does not follow the *Shariyat* laws, will rot in hell. They’ll burn in raging fire, the sun itself will come down and sit on their heads. The ghee inside the heads will drip to the ground, tup…tup…

A man: Ya Allah!!!

Maulvi: And the one who’ll offer *namaj*, the one who’ll keep *rojas*, the one who’ll pray to Allah will be given a place in *jannant* or *bahest*.

A man: *Hujur* will you tell us about *bahest* in detail.

Others: Yes, yes *hujur*. Tell us about *bahest*.

Maulvi: You want me to tell you about bahest? O.K. then. What is this?

A man: This is a mat.

Maulvi: Not this………….this.

Another man: Earth.

Another man: Jamin.

Maulvi: Oh, no. I am not talking about mat, earth or Zamin. I am talking about this world. What is there for us in this world? Poverty, sickness, death? What are we doing here? Going out for work right at dawn, working the whole day for a handful of rice, brothers are killing brothers, aren’t we?

*(While the maulvi was thus getting excited sound comes from the kitchen of something like a plate falling to the ground. Everyone looks at the direction of the kitchen. A woman trying to lift it drops it again. The other women try to suppress their laughter*.)

Hannan: *(to maulvi)* They’re making *pulao*.

Maulvi: But these things are not there in *bahesta*.

A man: (*alarmed)* what, *pulao* is not there?

Hannan: No, no. *Pulao* is there. Jonab is talking about other things.

Maulvi: Oh, the wonders of Allah! There are tasty fruits in the orchards for Allah’s favorites. Grapes, apples, chestnuts, walnuts…

Others: Bah! Bah!

Maulvi: As soon as a man gets hungry the trees come walking to him.

Others: Ya, Allah.

Maulvi: That’s why I say you should clear your way to *bahesta* while on this world. No one knows, except Allah, when you’re going to die. Even a tree-leaf cannot shake without His permission. Brothers, no one knows when *malikul maut* or *Ajrail Aleh* *Islam* comes to take your soul away. Listen what our *marfati* songs say.

Maulvi: (*starts singing)*:

AMAR MOINA GELO URIA RE..

AMAR MOINA GELO URIARE

SHONAR KHACHA SHUINNYA KARIA

Others: Bah, bah! What a song! What a voice!

Another man: Arre, baba. You too sing with me.

Others: We?

Maulvi: Yes, sing.

(*Maulvi sings and the others accompany him.)*

AMAR MOINA GELO URIA RE..

AMAR MOINA GELO URIARE

SHONAR KHACHA SHUINNYA KARIA

NANA RANGER OI KHACHATI

AAHAA KOTO PARIPATI RE….

### TOBU KENE DEIJE PHAKI

### EMNI SENIR DAYALRE

SUINNYA KARIA…

*(A young girl comes in, tries to lift the bundle of firewood lying near Hannan but drops it again. The song stops. Hannan gathers her Sunni lying on the ground and gives it to her. The girl smiles at him coyly. The maulvi notices*.)

Maulvi: (*Clearing his throat)* O Hannan Bhai, You’ll get. You’ll also get. In *bahesta* you’ll get women thousand times more beautiful than her. You’ll get un-smelt, untouched *huris*.

Hannan: (*nervous*) Things *hujur* says!

Another man: Hujur, just now you said *huri*, what is a *huri*?

Maulvi: Huris are fairies in *bahesta’s*, *apsara*. Allah created us human beings in flesh and blood. But he has created these huris with scented potions, kasturi, perfumes, rosewater etc.

Others: Bah. Bah. The wonders of Allah!

Maulvi: And another interesting thing. Allah has kept seventy *huris* for each person in *bahesta*.

A man: (*in disbelief*) is it true hujur?

Maulvi: Yes. Seventy per person.

Hannan: And our women do not even know how to care for us.

Maulvi: Let these mortal women go to hell!!

(The call for evening prayer offstage.)

Rabeya: (*to Hannan*) Please listen.

Hannan: Is it ready?

Maulvi: Then I’ll go for namaj. I think dinner is ready Hannan?

Hannan: Yes, almost.

Maulvi: Then we’ll have dinner after namaj. What do you say?

Others: Yes, hujur.

Maulvi: You go ahead, I am coming.

(The others leave.)

Maulvi: Hannan Bhai, I need water for *uju*.

Hannan: What do you say *hujur*? You’ve not yet done *uju*?

Maulvi: (*gesturing at Hannan to come closer*) Listen Hannan Bhai, Gibrail *Salleu Islam* himself fainted at the sight of a *huri*. We are just human beings, what do you say?

Hannan: (*smiling)* Jonab you too… *(to Rabeya*) Hey listen, give Jonab some water for *uju*.

(All women are busy preparing dinner so Dulali has to come with a tumbler. Dulali gives the maulvi a stool to sit and the tumbler.)

Maulvi: What is your name?

Dulali: Dulali.

Maulvi: Whose daughter are you?

Dulali: Sakitan’s.

Maulvi: O Sakitan’s. (*His roving eyes slips over Dulali’s body.)* You have grown up already.

(Dulali, making sense of the maulvi’s intentions comes back immediately and starts his ablutions. Rabeya, coming to fetch the bundle of firewood notices a scar on maulvi’s feet. Seeing Rabeya notice, he folds his pyjama up as much as he can.)

Rabeya: You have developed a scar on your feet.

Maulvi: (*nervous*) What? Oh…yes, yes.

Rabeya: Why don’t you put some medicine? I’ve got herbs with me.

Maulvi: You’ve got medicine?

Rabeya: Yes, you put it once and the scar will vanish.

Maulvi: Give me then.

Rabeya: O.K. I’ll give you.

(*Hannan’s entry. Seeing his wife and the maulvi in a conversation he gets off-guard. He steps back, stops and comes back.)*

Hannan: (*to maulvi)* Jonab, I hope your *uju* is over?

Maulvi: *(nervous)* Oh, yes. Yes. Then I’ll go to masjid. I’ll go ahead.

(Maulvi exits.

*For sometime Hannan keeps pacing up and down wondering if he’s heard it right.*

*Rabeya orders around to make the dinner ready and herself arranges the plates.*

*Hannan writhes inside. Suddenly the girl appears whose Chunni he’s lifted from the ground. For a few moments she keeps smiling at him and then leaves.*

*Rabeya was busy along with the other women when Hannan comes and starts beating her brutally.*

*Rabeya did not get time to understand why Hannan was behaving like that suddenly.*

*The woman tries to free her but Hannan scares them off with his abuses.*

*But that girl did not budge, Hannan comes forward and they look at each other. Then the girl walks away, in rhythm, coyly.*

*Only Hannan and Rabeya remain on stage.*

*At stage down right Hannan dances to the tune of the song he learnt from the maulvi:*

*AMAR MOINA GELO URIA RE*

*AMAR MOINA GELO URIARE*

*SHONAR KHACHA SHUNNYA KARIA…*

*On stage down left Rabeya rolls on the ground and wails as if she is being forced to sex.*

*Hannan keeps dancing frantically while Rabeya howls in agony.*

*Lights go off slowly.)*

1. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)