

## A Translation of an Urdu Short-Story. "Khudgharz"

Dr. Shazia Siddiqui Khan

Associate Professor & HOD, English, Mumtaz P.G. College, Lucknow

**Abstract:** This article which I have sent for publication is a work of translation, from Urdu to English. It is my attempt at translation of an Urdu short-story. *Khudgharz*, authored by the much published, celebrated and decorated Urdu writer, Mrs. Ayesha Siddiqui. It is taken from her collection of short-stories entitled *Ghoomte chaak ki keel*. a collection of 21 brilliant, imaginative masterpieces that have flowed from her pen. In her stories, Siddiqui paints a poignant and authentic picture of diverse lives and characters, most belonging to the culturally rich Muslim background of *Awadh*, into which she herself was born.

**Keywords:** Translation, Urdu, Short-Story, Awadh.

### INTRODUCTION

Her language is replete with the unique, indigenous expressions of *Lucknawi* Urdu, which makes for delightful reading. This is a maiden attempt at translation of her stories, and my humble tribute to her unmatched talents. The fact that Mrs. Siddiqui happens to be my mother is just a coincidence!

#### Self Centred

Such a long night of the hills, but even that concluded and she had not moved an inch. She had buried herself under the quilt since evening, without even turning over to the other side, as if all her contact with the world was severed. Khala Amma had only inquired how she was doing, and she had pounced at her like a hungry lioness out to tear away every single shred of her flesh.

The dirty bedspread of darkness had spread out since evening, as if one hand could not see its other. And in that God forsaken estate, the darkness is always thicker. To tell the truth, who would ever call this desolate, decrepit building a mansion? Exposed walls, ceilings on the brink of giving way and broken-down courtyards. It felt like some demonic entity had spread its wings over it and innumerable evil spirits were hovering above. Khala Amma says that Asma's troubled spirit also visits here. Someone cries disconsolately on murky nights. Footsteps are heard crackling on the dry leaves. Sometimes a shadow is seen under the lush trees in the garden to the left. Of course I have never seen it but I have full faith in her words. When have those tormenting others ever found peace? From how many faces did she snatch away those smiles? Forcefully, she had scooped away all the light of this mansion. This darkness that she has spread is the very same in which she has also lost her way. I do not have the courage to even peek into the

courtyard, and look at Fatto's bravado. She has come from Arshad's, all alone.

The long, white burqa, covering her right down to the legs, waist bent, tangled hair like dried straw, a network of wrinkles on the face and eyes reflecting a graveyard. She emerged before Khala Amma in the dark like a question mark and she instinctively asked "Who is it? Fatto?"

"Ae All well? From where have you ventured out, to die in this darkness, and why have you come, bearing all this fancy stuff? Did you have an argument with Arshad? Though he, poor thing, is such a gentleman."

"Enough! No need to eulogise anyone. If my arrival is an irritant, say so, and I'll leave."

"Arey- arey, are you in your senses? I only meant to sympathise, and you're getting furiously enflamed!"

"I don't need anyone's sympathy. Mop up all your maternal instincts and store them in your bosom", she spoke in a broken voice and, stamping her feet, went off to the large courtyard ahead, where she stayed. I was listening to everything, behind the cover of the doorway. My heart ached, seeing her. I could not summon the courage to come out of hiding and go to her. Though Fatto Khala would lay down her life for me. But when Khala Amma was verbally roughed up, where would I stand?

Fatto Khala has a very cheerful and friendly disposition. One can never guess the quantity of love brimming in her bosom that she goes on pouring it over any and everyone, and yet it never depletes. She squirms with misery even if a miniscule wood splinter pierces someone's flesh. She shelters all the children under her wing like a mother hen. Not only does she look after their

reading and writing, but also combs and settles their hair and even stitches their clothes. I believe that through this she has found a medium to humour her deprived life. If she was not thus lonely and barren in this world, then why would she have needed to stare at so many faces to catch a tiny ray of courtesy. She would have dolled up and decked her own children to satisfy her maternal instincts.

For forty years she has borne the burden of her old-as-the hills existence on her own shoulders. She herself never agreed to unload this weight on anyone else. In her youth, many strong, handsome suitors vied to marry her. But she was adamant in her rejections and never could that convert into acceptance. It was not like there was no trace of emotion glowering in her youthful heart, or that she had never dreamt of a Prince Charming. Over hours stretching past the days, her ears had ached to tune into even a muffled sound from a familiar one. Her heart had leapt up to her throat at a single glimpse of that special someone. But then- then why did things happen that way?

It so happened that she was betrothed to Arshad from childhood itself. In fact, her hand had been asked immediately after she was born. Subsequently, the marriage was finalized and even formal announcements made, once she had turned eighteen. Now she had started to use the veil to keep herself hidden from Arshad's glance. This *purdah*, of course, had 'cunning' arrangements that went along to reveal her to his eyes, all very conveniently. Arshad would cross her path so suddenly that she, biting her finger nervously, seemingly had no option but to hide herself in some such corner which did not totally cut her from his view and yet not keep her fully visible at the same time. She would post herself at the window from where she saw the path that Asma and Arshad took, while on their way to buy her trousseau. As Asma returned, guffawing and twirling about, it was as if fearful, dark shadows crawled across her eyes. Asma's boldness was known to her. Arms thrown around their mother's neck, her darling little sister always managed to have her way every time. Even with her, playing a stubborn, spoilt child. she would wheedle out and extend ownership over whatever caught her fancy. So, finally did she snatch Arshad away from her too. It was on one of those darkening evenings in that mild winter, that unabashedly did Asma ask her for Arshad.

Fatto khala is one thick-skinned woman! Such a storm of events hit her, yet, not the smallest wave of pain spread over that face. I was very young then, but I vividly remember how lovingly Fatto khala decked up Asma as a bride with her own hands. It seemed as if sparklers seemed to be bursting out of Asma's face. And why not? Her heart's desire had been fulfilled. It was as if she was in full bloom. She was even being taunted for her utter coyness, but what to do? Her efforts failed to conceal her ecstatic state.

A great load had lifted off Arshad's mind too. He felt regret at having iced Fatma's hopes, but Fatma - no one could have guessed from her reaction that she had ever been even remotely associated with him.

This took place ages ago. It had been erased from everybody's memory that someone had axed Fatma's heart. Those ugly, painful taints in her heart, caused by the innocent-faced Arshad, were washed away. If that were not the case, then why would she have empathized with Arshad's tormented life. After years, he had returned to the same city following his transfer. But he was alone now.

Having spent nineteen golden years of her life with him, Asma had recently bidden farewell to this world. Now how was it possible for Fatma to see Asma's children motherless and yet keep nursing her offended feelings? Moreso, now all those memories seemed belong to a distant dream-world. Not a spark was now felt in the cold ashes of those emotions. Those nights of waking up with a start repeatedly, had long since gone past. Neither survived the need to mask that nameless agony with a forced, illogical smile. What remained was just the level desert of life with an unknown journey ahead, which she had traversed with scorching steps and had now reached such a far point, that she genuinely felt sorry for Arshad's devastated life. This feeling of sympathy had drawn her to Arshad's place. For the whole day, she kept herself occupied with his children's trivial chores. He could now realize how barren a home felt sans a woman's presence. The cluttered house once again began sparkling as a mirror. On his return from office, Arshad felt as if Asma had made a comeback once again. On such occasions he felt as if she was lurking somewhere very close. Smilingly, such memories tugged and clutched at him. He would lose himself so completely in such moments, with not an ounce of awareness or understanding of anything else left. He would find

Asma's reflection in every visage he faced to talk. It was in one such moment of weakness that his sleeping emotions found tongue, and the outpouring of the restlessness and inebriated state of his heart before Fatma was such, that the deluge drenched her.

She stood, shell-shocked. With gaping eyes she stared at Arshad. His gleaming eyes conveyed to her the message of a new life. Dreamily lost, she was looking at Arshad. He still looked just as handsome and impressive. This was the same attractive physique for which she could have sacrificed the world. His beckoning hands made her feel a certain sensation in her own hands too, and then, subconsciously, they began to extend his way. She felt as if she was soaring in a new valley of dreams, when all of a sudden, a cruel gust of wind blew a lock of silver hair on her forehead.

And then, on its own, her gaze got fixed on her withered hands.

Hands which could surely support a helpless one but were now rendered immune to the sensation of heated emotions. For a long time she kept looking at these dry hands that resembled withered branches, and at the nerves protruding out of them. And then, in the spur of a moment, the volcano that had been simmering inside for years, gushed out:

“Selfish!”

She screamed so loudly that her voice cracked-!!

With bowed head and tearful eyes, Arshad has narrated this whole saga to Khala Amma today. Fatto Khala is still lying in the same manner, devoid of sense, motionless, but who can dare stir this living zombie to consciousness?

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