

10 THE TRIBUTE



As I reached my desk in the office, my eyes stopped over a letter. It contained that familiar, petite handwriting of my elder brother. After a very long time he had written to me. I shrank within for not writing letters home, all these days.

In my student days, it was almost a routine affair. I used to go home to that distant village on a **rickety** bus, caring nothing for the strain of the journey. My home-my village - they used to pull me away from the **moribund** city life. Now things have changed and I too have changed, a great deal at that! A lot of **cobwebs** have settled around me. I am swept by that invisible tide of time, and business. I was studying at Bhubaneswar, where I got my job and now for these two years, I have thought of home not even once. Many a time my mother has written letters complaining about my negligence in writing to her. She has even reminded me of those pre-marriage days of mine.

Yet I have never been able to break those **strands of complacency** which have coiled around me. I have kept quiet to prove that I am busy and preoccupied. Now she does not complain. Probably, she understands my position.

Usually my elder brother does not write to me. He does not need anything from me. He has never sought a token from me in lieu of his concern for me as an elder brother. In those days when I was a student, the only thing that he enquired about was my well-being. During my stay at home, he would catch fish for me from the pond behind our house and would ask his wife to prepare a good dish, for I loved fish. When the catch was **scanty**, the dish would be prepared exclusively for me. He would say to his wife: "You must make the dish as delicious as possible using mustard paste for Babuli." Even now, he is the same man with the same tone of love and compassion. Nothing has changed him - his seven children, father, mother, cattle, fields, household responsibilities. He is the same - my elder brother.

I handled the letter carefully. He had asked me to come home. Some **feud** had

cropped up. The two sisters-in-law had quarrelled. Our paddy fields, the cottage and all the movables and immovables were to be divided into three parts amongst us. My presence was **indispensable**.

It was my second brother who was so particular and **adamant** about the division He wanted it at any cost.

I finished reading the letter. A cold sweat **drenched** me. I felt helpless, orphaned. A sort of despair **haunted** me for a long time. Quite **relentlessly**, I tried to drive them away, **yawning** helplessly in a chair.

In the evening when I told my wife about the partition that was to take place, I found her totally unperturbed. She just asked me “When?” as if she was all prepared and waiting for this event to take place! “In a week’s time”. I said.

In bed that night my wife asked me all sorts of questions. What would be our share and how much would it fetch us on selling it? I said nothing for a while but in order to satisfy her, at last guessed that it should be around twenty thousand rupees. She came closer to me and said, “We don’t need any land in the village What shall we do with it? Let’s sell it and take the money. Remember, when you sell it, hand over to me the entire twenty thousand. I will make proper use of it. We need a fridge, you know. Summer is approaching. You need not go to the office riding a bicycle. You must have a scooter. And the rest we will put in a bank. There is no use keeping land in the village. We can’t look after it, and why should others draw benefits out of our land?”

I listened to all this like an innocent lamb looking into the darkness. I felt as if the butcher was sharpening his knife, **humming** a tune and waiting to tear me into large **chunks** of meat and consoling me saying that there is a better life after death.

Gone are those days: gone are those feelings, when the word "Home" filled my heart with emotion. And that affectionate word "Brother" what feeling it had! How it used to make my heart **pound** with love! Recollecting all these things, I feel weak, **pathetic**.

'Where is the heart gone? Where are those days? Where has that **spontaneity** of feeling gone? I just can't understand how a stranger could all of a sudden become so

intimate, only sharing a little warmth by giving a silent promise of keeping close.

But I became my normal self in twin days. I grew used to what had been a shock. Later on, in the market-place, keeping pace with my wife, enquired about the prices of the different things she intended to buy. Buying a fridge was almost certain. A second-hand scooter, a stereo set and some gold ornaments. I prepared a list of the prices. She kept reminding me about her intentions, and was showing lot of impatience.

It was Saturday afternoon. I left for my village. The same bus, was there, inspiring in tile the old familiar feeling. I rushed to occupy the seat just behind the driver, my favourite seat. In my hurry I **bruised** my knee against the door. It hurt me. The brief-case fell off and the little packet containing the Prasad of Lord Lingraj, meant for my dear mother, was scattered over the ground. I felt as if the entire bus was **screeching** aloud the question. "After how many years? You have not bothered in the least to retain that tender love you had in your heart for your home! Instead you have sold it to the butcher to help yourself become a city Baboo!! Curses be on you!"

I boarded the bus, collecting the brief case and the content of the soiled packet, wearing a shameless smile for the cleaner and the conductor of the bus.

It was five in the evening when I got down. I had written beforehand. My elder brother was there to meet me at the bus-stop.

He appeared a little tired and worn out. "Give that brief-case to me. That must be heavy" He almost snatched it away from me. I forgot even to touch his feet. This had never happened earlier. He was walking in front of me.

We were walking on the village road, dusty and ever the same.

I was usually crossing the street along to go to a teacher in the evening for tuition. It was generally late and dark when I returned from my studies. Unfailingly my elder brother would be there to **escort** me back home lest I should be frightened. He would carry the lantern, my bag of books and notes. I had to follow him to do so. If I lagged behind he would ask, "Why! You are perhaps tired. Come hold my hand and walk with me." He sometimes used to carry me on his shoulders while going to the fields for a **stroll**.

The bus-stop was some distance from the village. I had fallen behind him. He

stopped and asked the same old question he used to ask. I just could not speak.

The past was sprouting up in me. The childhood days and the days now! Time has **coagulated** for me. I have changed. But my elder brother? Time could not bring upon him any change. As in those days, he was still walking in front of me, carrying my bag. I felt so small!

Hesitatingly I said, "Brother! Give me that brief-case. Let me carry it for a while."

"Don't you worry," he said, "It is heavy, and you are tired. Let us quicken our steps. You must be feeling hungry. It is time for the evening meal." I followed him in silence.

We reached home. It was already dark, the time for the lighting of wicks before the sacred Tulsi plant. Unlike those days, none of my nephews rushed towards me howling. "Here's uncle." My sister-in-law did not run from the kitchen to receive me. I was all quiet and calm. Only my mother came and stood near me. The second brother and his wife were nowhere to be seen. In the entire house, there was an air of unusualness - rather the stillness of the graveyard. As if the house was preparing for its ultimate collapse!

I tried to be normal with everyone. But there was that **abominable** lull all around. My second brother and his wife, in spite of their presence at home, showed no emotion. They were all set for the partition and they cared for nothing else. I could not sleep that night. And the following morning passed quite uneventfully.

It was mid-day. Seven or eight people had gathered in our courtyard to supervise the division. We three brothers were present. Mother was not to be seen anywhere in the **vicinity**.

We were waiting for the final separation, as if ready to slice out the flesh of the domestic body which our parents had nourished since the day of their marriage. And then we would run away in three different directions clutching a piece each.

All the household articles were heaped in the family courtyard. These were to be divided into three parts; all the small things of the house, almost everything movable starting from the **ladles** made out of coconut shells and bamboo to the little box, where father used to keep his betels. The axe and the old radio set too had been produced. A

long list of all the items was made. Nothing was spared, neither the dhinki (wooden-rice-crusher) nor the little figures of the family idols.

I saw my elder brother rise. He stopped for a moment near the pile of things and unfastened the strap of his wrist-watch and placed it on the heap with the other things. Perhaps a tear trickled down his cheek. With a heavy sigh he left the place.

I had often heard him say that father had bought him that wrist-watch when he was in his eleventh class. But I also remember well-in my M.A. final year he had mortgaged that watch to send me money to go to Delhi for an interview. He had sent me an amount of one hundred and fifty rupees - I remember clearly. No one knows whether the writst-watch would come back to him or not. His action seemed symbolic on his snapping all his attachment with the past.

I was silent. My elder sister-in-law was in the backyard. My second brother was often whispering things into his wife's ear and was there taking his place with us. It was like the butcher's knife going to the stone to sharpen itself. The elder brother was calm and composed. Like a perfect gentleman he was looking at the proceedings dispassionately, exactly as he had done on the day of the sacred thread ceremony of his son and on the day of my marriage. It was the same preoccupied and grave manner, attending sincerely to his duty. While discussing anything with my second brother, he had that same calm and composed voice. Not a sign of disgust and regret.

I remember, the year father died, we had to live under a great financial strain. It was winter. The chill was as its height. We had a limited number of blankets. The cold was so biting, particularly at midnight, that one blanket was not enough for one.

That night, I was sleeping in the passage room. When I woke up in the morning I found my elder brother's blanket on me, added to mine. Early at dawn he had left for the fields without a blanket on his shoulders. If he had been asked why, he would have surely said in his usual manner, that he did not feel the cold. Now I have a comfortable income. Yet it had never occurred to me to think of buying any warm cloth for my elder brother. He is still satisfied and happy with that old **tattered** blanket that he had covered me with once. The same blanket was there before me, with all the other things.

I shivered with the cold, and my own ingratitude. The process of division was

finally over. Whatever the second brother demanded, my elder brother agreed to it with a smile. My second brother proposed to buy the, share of land that was given to me and offered eighteen thousand rupees as the price.

In the evening, my elder brother took me along with him to show me the paddy fields that were to be mine. I quietly followed him. We moved from boundary to boundary. Everywhere, I could feel the imprints of his feet, his palm and his fingers. On the bosom of the paddy fields **sparkled** the pearls of my elder brother's sweat. He was showing me the fields, as a father would introduce a stranger to family members.

In the morning, I was to leave for Bhubaneswar. I had no courage to meet my elder brother. Before leaving for the bus-stop, I had handed over the same slip of paper to my elder sister-in-law, which had the details about my share. Writing on the blankside of that slip, I had asked her to deliver it to my elder brother and stealthily slipped out of our house. I had written:

Brother,

What shall I do with the land? You are my land from where I could harvest everything in life. I need nothing save you. Accept this, please. If you deny, I shall never show my face to you again.

- Babuli

Dash Benhur

About the Author

Jitender Narayan Dash was born on August 3, 1953 in Nayagarh District, Odisha. He writes under the pseudonym (pen-name) of Dash Benhur and is a very popular name in Oriyan literature. His major contribution has been in the field of child literature consisting of folktales and legendary stories. He was the winner of Orissa Sahitya Academy Award for his *Kunapain Anabana Geeta* in 1987.

About the Text

‘The Tribute’ shows how the joint family system in India is crumbling. Babuli, the main character in the story, feels emotionally shocked when he hears about a

dispute in his family and the consequent partition.

GLOSSARY

rickety (adj)	:	loosely built
moribund (adj)	:	coming to an end, dying
cobwebs (n)	:	spider webs
strands (n)	:	threads, pieces
complacency (n)	:	self-satisfaction
scanty (adj)	:	small in quantity
feud (n)	:	a bitter quarrel, dispute
cropped up (v)	:	grew
indispensable (adj)	:	very urgent
adamant (adj)	:	firm; not moving
drenched (v)	:	made wet
haunted (v)	:	kept in grip
relentlessly (adv)	:	mercilessly
yawning (v)	:	opening the mouth to inhale air, showing boredom
humming (v)	:	giving out a low sound
chunks (n)	:	pieces
pound (v)	:	beat fast, throb
pathetic (adj)	:	sad
spontaneity (n)	:	sharpness
bruished (v)	:	got hurt, scratched
screeching (n)	:	screaming
escort (v)	:	go with someone
stroll (v)	:	walk in a slow and relaxed way
coagulated (v)	:	became very thick, frozen
abominable (adj)	:	very bad, unpleasant
vicinity (n)	:	the nearby place

ladles (n)	:	spoons with long handles
tattered (adj)	:	torn
sparkled (v)	:	shone

ACTIVITY - 1 : COMPREHENSION

A. Choose the correct alternative :

- The story shows Babuli's father as
 - healthy
 - dead
 - ill
 - none
- Babuli's second brother appears as
 - broad minded
 - selfish
 - friendly
 - none
- Babuli was gifted a wrist-watch when he was studying in
 - eighth class
 - ninth class
 - tenth class
 - eleventh class
- In the story the tribute has been paid by
 - the elder brother to Babuli
 - Babuli to the elder brother
 - the second brother to the mother
 - the sister-in-law to the father
- The chief reason of the division of property is a quarrel between
 - the brothers living in the village
 - the sisters-in-law living in the village
 - the mother and the sisters in law
 - Babuli and the second brother
- The theme of *The Tribute* is
 - religious
 - domestic
 - political
 - historical

B. Say whether the following statements are true or false :

- Babuli has a deep love for his village. []

2. Babuli's wife was disturbed to hear about the partition. []
3. The village bus is quite luxurious and attractive. []
4. The second brother did not want any partition. []
5. Babuli touched the feet of his elder brother after coming down from the bus. []
6. The mother was present at the time of the partition. []
7. The second brother was unwilling to buy Babuli's land. []
8. Babuli's wife wanted to buy a car. []
9. The elder brother had seven children. []
10. Babuli donated his property among the poor. []

C. Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words :

1. What was the complaint of Babuli's mother in her letters to him ?
2. How did Babuli's wife react to hear about the partition ?
3. What was the attitude of Babuli's second brother regarding the partition ?
4. How did Babuli feel when he accompanied his elder brother to the paddy fields?
5. Why was the wrist-watch of Babuli's elder brother mortgaged ?

D. Answer the following questions in about 60 words :

1. How did Babuli differentiate between his student life and the present life ?
2. How was Babuli fed during his stay at home when he was a student ?
3. How did the family members behave with Babuli when he came home at the time of the partition ?
4. Which childhood memories did come up in Babuli's mind when he was on the village road while returning from Bhubaneswar ?
5. Justify the title of the story 'The Tribute'.

ACTIVITY - 2 : VOCABULARY

A. Match the words in column A with the words of their meanings in column B and also use them in your own sentences :

Compassion = feeling of sympathy

Example : The younger brother had no compassion for the elder brother.

	A		B
1.	indispensable	:	torn
2.	abominable	:	very urgent
3.	adamant	:	a relaxed walk
4.	stroll	:	a nearby place
5.	tattered	:	pawned
6.	mortgaged	:	firm
7.	pathetic	:	frozen
8.	coagulated	:	sad
9.	vicinity	:	hateful

B. Find out synonyms of the following words :

pathetic, adamant, feud, screeching, abominable, mortgaged, compassion, complacency, unperturbed

C. Write one word from the lesson for each of the following expressions :

1. A spoon with a long handle
2. A nearby place
3. thanklessness
4. something small in quantity
5. sacred

D. Convert the following adjectives into adverbs and frame one sentence on each:

words : invisible, relentless, abominable, busy, quiet, helpless, innocent

Example : pathetic : pathetically.

Babuli pathetically remembered this past days.

E. Fill in the blanks of the following sentences with antonyms of words given in brackets :

1. People soon forget goodness shown to them and become full of _____. (gratitude)
2. We do not have sympathy for _____ people. (innocent)
3. I am always _____ to those who are in trouble. (helpless)

4. The Government is going to levy tax on _____ property. (movable)
5. A _____ breakfast is good for digestion. (heavy)
6. The GST bill was initially _____ by the Rajya Sabha. (accepted)
7. Babuli's wife was _____ to hear about the partition. (perturbed)
8. Hindus are _____ towards all human beings. (cruel)

ACTIVITY-3 : GRAMMAR

RELATIVE /ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

An adjective clause works as an adjective in the same way as a noun clause works as a noun in a complex sentence. An adjective clause modifies or tells something about a noun or pronoun; the noun or pronoun that is modified is known as the **antecedent**. Usually an adjective clause is placed immediately after its antecedent; the clause is connected to its antecedent by a relative pronoun - who, whom, whose, which, that ; it may also be connected by a relative adverb, why, when, where. Hence this clause is also identified as a **Relative Clause** :

Types of Adjective Clauses :

- (a) Defining (also called restrictive Relative clause)
- (b) Non - defining (also called non-restrictive Relative clause)

Defining Relative Clause :

1. A doctor is a person *who has been trained in medical science*.
2. An atheist is a person *who does not believe in God*.
3. A teacher is a person *who imparts knowledge to students*. If we omit the words in italics, we learn only that a doctor is a person, an atheist is a person, and a teacher is a person. Such information about these persons is unsatisfactory, even though all the three sentences are grammatically correct. The “persons” in the sentences are defined or distinguished from each other by the adjective clauses in italics. The definition of a teacher is no longer simply a person, but a person who imparts knowledge to students.

As the antecedents in all the three sentences have been defined by the adjective

clauses (relative clauses) they are called defining clauses. Since they are integral part of the sentences, they are not separated from the antecedent by commas.

EXERCISE

Complete the following sentences by using defining relative clauses.

Example : A tailor is a person *who stitches clothes*

1. A surgeon is a person _____
2. A barber is a person _____
3. A dietician is a person _____
4. A poet is a person _____
5. A painter is a person _____
6. An engineer is a person _____
7. A wrestler is a person _____
8. A cook is a person _____

The relative pronoun 'that' is used only in defining clauses ; it may denote both 'persons' and 'things'. The relative pronoun 'who' denotes persons and 'which' denotes things :

1. I like men **that** work hard. (person)
2. I like books **that** contain classical learning. (thing)
3. I like men **who** work hard. (person)
4. I like books **which** contain classical learning. (thing)

If the antecedent is a vague noun / pronoun the use of 'that' or 'who' is equally appropriate.

1. I am waiting someone **that / who** can help me.
2. They are the type of people **that / who** can support demonetisation.

If the antecedent is a well identified category of individuals, '**who**' is preferred to '**that**' :

1. The judge *who was popular for quick judgements* has resigned
2. The air hostess who met me at the airport turned out to be my classmate.

The relative pronoun of a **defining** relative clause may be omitted when it is not the subject of the relative clause :

1. The district administration did not give me information (that) *I wanted*.
2. The dress (which) *I saw in the showroom* was attractive.

Such clauses are called **contact clauses**.

Non -Defining relative clauses :

Non defining relative clauses merely provide additional information about the noun/pronoun (antecedent).

My brother, *who lives in America*, is coming next week.

The relative clause in italics gives additional information about the antecedent (my brother). In this situation the relative clause is called **non-defining** (or parenthetical), and is enclosed by commas. Even if we omit the clause, the meaning of the main clause remains sensible. The information contained in the main clause and relative clause may be given in two separate statements :

My brother is coming next week. He lives in America.

As the relative clause gives additional information, and not the essential one, it could even be represented by an independent clause in parenthesis :

My brother (he lives in America) is coming next week.

The use or absence of commas in relative clauses change the meaning of sentences altogether:

1. My brother who lives in America, is coming next week.
2. My brother who lives in America is coming next week.

In the first sentence the presence of commas implies that the writer / speaker has only one brother (it is therefore impossible to define which one). It is a **non defining clause**. In the second sentence the adjective clause is not separated by commas. The absence of commas implies that the writer / speaker has more than one brother ; that one of them in particular is being referred to _ the one who lives in America and another may be living somewhere else. It is called a **defining clause** because it distinguishes and defines which brother is coming.

EXERCISE

Fill in the blanks with appropriate conjunctions 'who', 'whom' or 'that':

1. The person _____ donated money is a famous industrialist.
2. The boy from _____ I borrowed the book is my friend.
3. The book _____ contains the data of census is in our library.
4. The bank manager _____ the police arrested is from Mumbai.
5. The currency notes _____ were banned on Nov. 8, 2016 are no more acceptable.
6. The wrist-watch _____ I bought last year is not working properly.
7. Is Anil the man _____ you met at the airport last Sunday ?
8. The terrorist _____ the army killed is said to be from Pakistan.
9. The Indian scientists _____ work at the NASA are highly talented.
10. The foreign travellers _____ visited India in the past praised the Indian culture.

ACTIVITY-4 : SPEECH ACTIVITY

Divide the class into Group A and Group B. Now ask them to hold a debate on the topic - 'Joint family system should be maintained'. Let the Group A speak in favour and the Group B against the topic .

ACTIVITY-5 : COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph in about 100 words describing the benefits of a joint family. You may include the following points :

- (i) A joint family - heritage of ancient culture
- (ii) Promotes emotional attachment
- (iii) Mutual harmony
- (iv) National integrity
- (v) Individual confidence