

THREE SHORT STORIES

Shamit Bagchi

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Manik

PROLOGUE

The location of this story is one among the several suburban districts of Bengal during the days of British Raj, when the number of Rai Bahadurs and Khan Bahadurs had turned innumerable. They were the local oppressors, a sort of henchmen of the larger group of oppressors, the Britishers.

The Story...

Along with the two classes, the oppressors and the oppressed were another class of people, those neither oppressed nor the oppressors and one among them is the hero of our story, Manik. This extraordinary group as mentioned earlier comprised of thieves, rogues, beggars, pickpockets and others such people with "nothing to do with future" attitudes. Our Manik was a strange man, he disliked everyone and as a consequence no one could tolerate him, one exception being Shaukat chacha, a servant at the famous 'Doi Mishti' (Yoghurt and Sweets) shop. Often Chacha, as Manik called him without the knowledge of Kaluram Seth, the miserly owner of the sweet shop, used to give him Rosogullas, sweets and other confectioneries, especially on days when Manik could not earn, rather steal or garner money enough to fill his stomach. Manik quite often dreamt that one day he would be a King or Nawab or something of the sort, but could never imagine how, since the very thought of hard work to earn money would make his head ache, and bring about such sickness unheard of. He had not known of parents ever since he recognised the

world around him. Ambitionless is too soft a term to describe the sorry state of rogue Manik. He had been locked up in the premises of the Dumdum jail a dozen times and by then the pot-bellied police constable had become a great friend of his, though under his seniors officers never admitted so, by looking at Manik with pretentious eyes of contempt.

Well that would be enough for Manik's past, but now he had caught a new fever, an obsession, he had fallen in love. He had first seen her on the eve of Durga Puja (a period of the year when the Bengalis worship the Goddess deity Durga) and she seemed to have caught his fancy. Now he could hardly stay a day without catching a glimpse of her. How wonderful it would be if she could be mine ,how beautiful she is,he thought. And at one stage the obsession reached its peak and he decided that he would have her, come what may, though she was Rai Bahadur Kedar Singh's... Kedar Singh the word struck terror into Manik's heart. Getting her out from the Rai bahadur seemed to be as daunting a task as a rabbit snatching a tiger's kill .Well he would somehow get her, he decided after a lot of contemplation, consideration and planning. He struck off the word impossible from his dictionary. Night after night he thought of her, her magnificent eyes, her fair and frail body. The more he thought about the day (Actually it was the last day of Durga Puja, when for the first time he had reached upto an arm's length from her, she had seemed to shy away from his starry eyed gaze, as if unable to bear, when Kirtichandra the old haggard looking foolish servant had shooed Manik away as the Rai Bahadur was coming to inspect, God knows what) ,the more Manik seethed in anger .That was the last time he had got so near her. Oh! well Suborna was her name. Day and night Manik thought of her, he thought to himself and they would go away, far, far from this dirty world to Calcutta, there he would make a fortune and live a happy and prosperous life.

All these days he had practically eaten nothing and had become a symmetric heap of bones .Nothing other than Suborna rang bells in his mind.

Then finally came the night of his romantic adventure. It was a new moon's night, the jackals were baying in the far dense forest, the amplified sounds of insects were ringing in the still moist air and in the pitch black darkness of the sinister night he set out to accomplish his ambition. The thin silhouette of a body somehow, shivering reached the Rai Bahadur's house. The silence startled him, he recovered when he heard the light snores of Prasad, the watchman he was fast asleep and so was the entire household. Slowly, very slowly, he pushed open the gate and entered the open area in front of the portico of Rai Bahadur's Mansion. Prasad continued to snore aloud; he tiptoed to the hind quarters of Rai Bahadur Kedar Singh's massive building. Without any effort he opened the door of the cold, stinking room and there was Suborna, as though awaiting Manik's entry, wide awake. She stole away out of the room with him, with his arms round her body, in complete silence. They safely and swiftly reached the gate when Prasad's snoring stopped, Manik froze, all of a sudden perspiring heavily. Prasad jerked awake and felt as though someone's tresses were rubbing against his face. Manik prayed to God hoping Prasad would start snoring again but instead, Prasad switched on his bulky torch and had hardly caught a glimpse of the intruder that he started yelling "Thief! Thief!" and caught hold of Manik. Manik with a kick and a punch struggled to escape, but his starved body could hardly coordinate, his assault was nothing for the burly Prasad. Manik was floored by two slaps from the mighty hands of the watchman and by then Rai Bahadur Kedar had also reached the scene of commotion, and here came to a dismal end Manik's 'romantic' adventure.

EPILOGUE

The dark night's adventure was followed by yet another visit of Manik to the Dumdum jail on account of accusations of trying to steal Rai Bahadur's possession, where upon Manik's friendship with Gobordhan, the constable deepened. As for Suborna, the magnificent chestnut turkish breed 'female' horse, she was tied back to her previously allotted wooden

plank in Rai Bahadur's stable. She was Rai Bahadur's favourite and he often rode on it. The day Manik was released from the jail he again caught a glimpse of his love, teetering in the stable and chewing its day's feed of hay and grasses (manik gnashed his teeth thinking, had he escaped that night, he would have sold Suborna in Calcutta, and been a rich man by now). And well! he thought as he passed Suborna, it gave him a sidewise furtive glance.

Jumbled Tones

FIRST HARMONIC - Emergence

The first three essentials of the literary art are imagination, imagination and imagination.

- Ambrose Bierce, The Devil's Dictionary

Every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished

- William Wordsworth

Slamming his right fist on the table out of frustration he gave a shout of disgust. There were no new things here, no ideas, all his creative energies seemed to have just trickled down and dried out and he had nothing to write about. He just sat there considering when an idea struck him.

"Is Shubhendu there, are you home", Partho babu shouted as he came up the narrow winding stairs. There were times when he got so

irritated that he just held the pen in his hand, so tight that ink squirted out on to his fingers. He was getting an idea when this man Partho babu that is came in interrupting. He would come everyday at about the same time and sit there for an hour talking to no end. He quickly scribbled down a few words and terms so that he would not forget the new additions he had just imagined for his novel.

“Oh, come in, come in”, said Shubhendu, “Please sit down, I am mostly home at this time of the day”.

“That’s true I trouble you everyday, you must be getting really annoyed with this old man”

“No, no I did not mean so, anyway I don’t do anything worthwhile” said Shubhendu, concealing his utter disappointment; he had struck upon a new scheme of things for his novel.

“Come on Shubhendu babu, you are such a great writer, that our whole neighbourhood is so proud of; and you say you are doing nothing useful” the old man went on. “It was a long time back when we had another prodigious writer like you as our neighbour, what was his name I forget” he scratched his head as though trying to bring out the name “Yes Tapan Haldar or so his name was I gather, that was about six years ago, I used to come along with Jamini to visit him”.

Jamini Shanyal had been Partho Chandra Shanyal’s wife until she passed away eight months back. Partho babu had become very reclusive for the first few months having lost his age old life companion. He was now eighty two having gained back his good humour.

“Those were the good old days . . .” he started . . .

It was seven in the evening when Partho babu left apologising again in the end. Shubhendu felt pity for the old man after he left, his anger dieing out. He continued with his novel till about ten in the night and then had a dinner of fresh fruits bought in the morning; grapes, apples along with a handful of dry dates that his friend had given him on return from Oman. He put off the lights and saying a prayer closed his eyes. He fell asleep surprisingly fast perhaps from the exhaustion of the thought processes, composing his third novel. The first one had been an utter failure while the second one had hardly sold under a hundred copies. Dismal would be more appropriate. He often dreamt while asleep of distant lands, but strangely today his cache of dreams seemed to have been wiped clean, as he snored oblivious of the barks of a dozen dogs outside. They were yelping and screaming unusually loud possibly anxious or scared of something.

SECOND HARMONIC – Case Partho

Certainly Nothing is unnatural that is not physically impossible

- *Richard Brinsley Sheridan*

He woke up early to find his mind numb as if someone had given him local anaesthesia for the head. He washed his face and as if in a trance-like state unlocked and opened the door and went out and searched for the milk bottle and newspaper which were there as usual. He spread open the newspaper 'The Statesman' and went over the headlines and literary sections quickly before going over and making his

tea. He had a bath and had to go over to Calcutta to meet the assistant editor of Swastik Publishers for his upcoming novel. He would also have to speak to people from Koumudi Publishers in case something went wrong and try again with Krishnanand Publishers, though he knew they were so adamant the last time saying they published only established famous writers. He did not want to try other lesser known publishers as his ego would not allow, and they were just below his dignity. It would be a hectic day today he reflected. He quickly finished his breakfast with the left over fruits from the previous day and went out anticipating success out of his ventures today.

He came out and had reached the portico of his dingy apartments when a little boy came running up to him and said, "writer kaku, where is the special toffee you promised me yesterday".

He was known among the children in the apartment as 'writer kaku', a Bengali equivalent for 'writer uncle'. Shubhendu Lahiri was disgusted at being interrupted right when he was leaving for an important mission of his.

"Sorry, tomorrow dear, surely", he blurted out and stroked the boy's head; as though he had taken up the responsibility of all the children in the apartments. The Nikhil Banga Colony as the area was called situated in the heart of outer Barasat was where the apartment was situated. Shaped like an E with the middle stroke erased it was an old building with the exteriors recently painted with a cream colour as if to hide its eerie death-like interiors. He had been staying in a nearby building since the age of ten and now he was thirty three. His father Shatinath Lahiri had died of a severe heart attack and unable to bear the tragic incident his mother Koirali Debi had passed away two days later; that was when he was thirty. It was after these sad events that Shubhendu had shifted to this building. Shubhendu, six feet two, with a bespectacled fair and wiry frame

walked out carefully like a stick insect. He went to the bus stand and boarded the next bus that went via Calcutta.

He came back disappointed, two of the publishers had rejected him outright and the third less well known had shown uncertainty but agreed in essence and would look into the as of now unfinished manuscript. They wanted something more interesting, more stimulating. He knew that big, boastful publisher company would come up with a number of tantrums to reject him, go to hell he thought cursing the publisher. He had tried his luck at journalism after graduating in arts. But that was a rather dull phase of his life as dull as the paper for which he worked. Then after five years he had tried freelance writing, but it did not turn out to be lucrative. It was then that he had turned on to writing Bengali fiction.

“Salaam Saab”, a watchman said in a groggy voice, smoking a bidi, as he reached the apartment gate. Shubhendu waved back at him muttering something. He was climbing the staircase when he looked up, to see something glowing fly past and vanish into the clear night sky, he just did not bother; he was tired and hungry, he climbed faster and went into his house. He sat at the table for a sometime and then switched on the television to find the ‘The News Follows’ across the screen on the national channel. After washing his hands and feet he unwrapped the plastic carrier to reveal another plastic food box within. Watching the anchor pompously reading the news he gulped down the food. “Microsoft is going to go in more aggressively into the embedded systems software to counter the open source Linux, the Microsoft head Bill Gates had said today at a press conference in Bangalore, on his two day tour of India” the anchor mouthed as she glanced over the written copy in front of her; technology news flashing above her right shoulder. He would buy a laptop, and some Bengali software, Shubhendu gathered; it would make writing or creating the manuscripts faster and easier, though he knew nothing of this much hyped software hardware gibberish. Anyway he was happy as of now to do the writing manually he decided.

The next day went uneventful; he had visited the houses of two friends, one of them just married. The couple had asked him to come over for lunch. He came back at about two and then after a short nap, resumed his work on the novel. At about six in the evening he was thinking about what to do next, when he was somewhat relieved to think that Partho babu would be coming at about this time, good at least this would pass his time and kill the boredom. His novel was nearing completion and three or four more days would be enough for completing the short novel. He waited till half past six and yet when Partho babu did not turn up, he went out to see if everything was all right. He went to the lower floor to find Partho babu's door closed. He rang the door bell and then knocked loud on the door, but to no avail. Hearing him knocking, Sunetra Moitra came out.

"I too did not find him outside today; normally he comes out and sits outside in the morning on that elevated platform", she said pointing at the concrete elevation outside Partho babu's door. "Probably he is not well, try ringing the bell again". They tried to get Partho Shanyal to open his door; it was clearly fastened from within; but after sometime when nothing happened, a few of the neighbours had gathered, talking animatedly and swinging their hands and gesturing and speaking loudly.

"He must have passed away inside", suggested someone.

"Probably", said someone else.

"Probably he is severely ill", said Gourango Moitra, husband of Sunetra Moitra.

"We will have to break open the door", chipped in Shiv Shankar Gosai, the strong accountant, who worked at Baranagar.

Someone said something about calling the police and another commented on how this would surely create a nuisance. They called in a few more neighbours and broke open the door after informing the police.

To their utter amazement they found no human presence in the house. There were just two rooms apart from the kitchen and the bathroom; the big window at the right side of the sitting space was open and the bed in the adjoining bedroom seemed to be dishevelled as though slept on. The interiors otherwise was spartan without any signs of a struggle or any form of violence. But where was Partho babu and how was the door locked from inside. All very strange and mysterious thought Shubhendu. It could be abduction, or was it a case of burglary and murder people conjectured, but who would abduct or kill Partho babu. More so because there was not much wealth Partho babu possessed.

Sunetra Di as Shubhendu called her was standing wide eyed, when her eleven year old son came in running and sweating profusely, having played cricket with other children in the nearby park. He was a sharp child and grasped what had happened quickly, many other children had also gathered around.

“Was it an alien abduction, ma; don’t you remember they were talking about UFO sightings from Calcutta in the News when I came back from school in the afternoon”, he asked looking smugly at his mother. It was true that news had appeared about the previous night’s UFO sightings, but such things hardly received attention.

“These children feed on science fiction day and night nowadays”, said his father Gourango, indicating him to leave the place.

“Go on complete your homework, looking out for how to waste time, Go”, he barked at Himanshu. Himanshu turned coolly away and before leaving again made a point.

“Partho dadu’s disappearance surely has something to do with the alien UFO sightings”, he said before disappearing behind the door and into their house which was just beside. And certainly he wasn’t completely off the mark.

THIRD HARMONIC - Cover-up

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

- John Emerich Edward Dalberg, 1st Baron Acton

There were a series of pings followed by a grating sound and then silence. Partho Shanyal sat there beside those weird looking medical instruments and machinery and almost fell asleep.

“But all the tests were unsuccessful wasn’t it doctor”, said the muscular man beside him.

“We will try a few more tests and then decide”, said Dr. Kanti Biswas, still smiling as always.

"I don't think he is lying but I do not still understand; what exactly is he talking about".

"Oh he is just hallucinating", replied the doctor.

"Shall I go back home now, will you take care of the rest doctor, I am feeling very sleepy", asked Partho babu looking up with pleading eyes at the doctor.

"Oh surely you can leave now, just get him a rickshaw, Rabi", said the doctor turning to the muscular man, as he rose up.

Rabi Ray would have been very useful but he had just walked down to the corner of the lane to fetch a cycle rickshaw, when a group of men in a Maruti Omni arrived and pushed their way to the laboratory. Three of them caught hold of the doctor and Partho babu and held chloroform dabbed handkerchiefs on to their noses. One of them pulled out all the saline lines and connections from the man lying on the stretcher and pulled him away. The men were dressed as nurses. Before anyone could find out they had moved out and went back into the Maruti van. Two of them stayed back and when Rabi came back he too was chloroformed and laid unconscious and then they locked the door with the three man inside and hurried back to the Maruti van and were gone in no time. The man they had just abducted was none other than Ramcharan Yadav the watchman whom Shubhendu had met the day before.

The Maruti van stopped at a nearby tea stall and one of the men with a strong angular face came out and bought a few cigarettes and paan got into the van and drove away.

A few minutes later they were driving through the busy new Howrah Bridge, when one of their cell phones rang.

“Lab Down Hill”, someone spoke on the phone.

“Lab down and out, Guru here, the job is done sir”, he said.

“Very good, bring him here fast”

And then the connection snapped shut.

The driver was asked to drive faster and the car drove into a bend and then disappeared inside a huge opening in the walls, something like a huge garage. This was about eight hours before the residents of the Shiuli Apartments in Nikhil Banga Colony discovered that Partho babu was missing.

“I was alarmed thinking he would know something, but this guy does not seem to know the difference between a plane and a car”

Ramcharan Yadav sat there staring at the gang of people crowded around him.

“Please leave me I don’t know whether it was a plane or a car Saab, it had landed behind the apartments and when I had a doubt I went there to find what was wrong when it raced forward and just rose up into the sky and disappeared”.

“OK that’s enough, throw him into the cell”, commanded the neatly dressed middle aged man, he looked like an executive in some company.

“No Saab, please Sir believe me I know nothing about all this”

“What shall we do with him? What is the point keeping him here, it would only create more trouble”, asked another tall immaculately dressed man who had been sitting silent till now.

“Why did he have to test drive yesterday?” a shorter man spoke up, then bit his tongue as though he should not have uttered what he had just said, looking sheepishly at the immaculately dressed man.

“We have enough problems, don’t add fuel to fire”.

“Just call up the Hospital and inform that those three are locked inside the Psychology Lab, someone”, instructed the tall man.

“Then release this guy after some more questioning, get it; I am leaving now for Delhi, I’ll have to do a lot of answering there”, and then he walked out.

Three men sat on one side of the polished gleaming table of the small but well furnished room. On the other side was the tall immaculately dressed man showing slight signs of nervousness. They were at the HQ at Chanakypuri, New Delhi.

“So Major Probhat Chatterjee, you think nothing serious leaked”.

"No sir, I believe . . ."

He was cut short by the balding middle aged man the one at the centre among the three men.

"I don't want this I believe this and that, have you brought the situation under control. Its should not spill over like the Hijack drama last time"

"No sir we were very careful but this unexpected breakdown during the very last test caused the problem"

Again he was interrupted, this time it was the man on the extreme left "Even after this so called test have you got any success, any concrete results"

"Sir the evaluation is in progress, we undertook three to four tests yesterday and the day before"

"A specimen were included in the test drives"

"Sir actually yes sir, three of them have stopped responding after the tests, we could extract information from the fourth though distorted in physical form - based on which the further tests were carried out"

"Fine, but see that the PR side is handled carefully, at least for the time being, I understand the professor is adamant but secrecy is the utmost priority here, so tread carefully, now you may leave and yes keep an eye on local rumours, we will keep our tabs on media".

There were rumours that the new writer Shubendu Lahiri had also seen something strange on the night of 5 May. It had struck Shubendu after the Moitras' son had mentioned alien UFO sightings. He had also noticed something unusual isn't it, that night, yes he had he gathered. Something flying; he had ignored it as a plane then. And then reporters started trickling into Shubendu's apartments to overwhelm him with questions and queries as he tried to parry them all throughout the night. He had himself been a reporter once and this seemed to have attracted more reporters.

The next day the three people were found gagged inside the hospital lab, including Partho babu, when rumours of government's involvement had been out. Rumours that aliens had visited earth and the Govt knew something about it and that aliens had been captured and other spacecraft had come to rescue the captives. The atmosphere was rife with all kinds of rumours. Some compared the situation to the English movie Independence Day others to ET. The state government feigned innocence, absolutely unaware of anything. The Indian media got something very interesting to report about, blaming and abusing the government and intelligence agencies. The Pakistanis and Chinese spoke of secret weapons of mass destruction and then when nothing substantial; apart from a few tripod like marks behind the Shiuli Apartments, evidently the landing site of the alien craft some thought; was found all the hoopla died down and the frenzied reporting and gossiping died out. Of course no one found the watchman Ramcharan afterwards, he had possibly run away; some people thought he had a definite hand behind Partho babu's abduction - being a Bihari very few Bengalis believed him.

FOURTH HARMONIC – PreActivation I + Problems

It was a month later that a usual meeting of a handful of scientists from the S N Bose Institute of Physics, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), The Indian Institute of Science and other such prestigious institutions was held at a complex in Bangalore. There was not much brouhaha as physicists were no longer considered glamorous; information technology had taken over as the glamour boy of the public minds and the media. Not in any sense was this meeting informal. There were almost twenty such meetings already during the past few months. There were strict guidelines to be followed. The famous NTK – ‘Need To Know’ principle had been followed; only those required to know need to be informed of the project – strict privacy. Even the families of the chosen few scientists did not know why or where they were. All the scientists were on oath not to reveal anything of what would go on inside the meeting complex and during the design and implementation phases. The congregation was always held for two days each time they assembled there. The concept prototype had been designed and tested in half a dozen locations to see if atmospheric conditions hindered with its functionality. Of course all done in perfect confidentiality, except the Calcutta episode, where the prototype had had to make an emergency landing raising many eyebrows. But the cover-up was excellent - only they had had to fall back a little on the schedule due to the delay imposed.

“The harmonic interferences have been reduced to a large extent – though reformations do cause a problems still”, said Prof. Biren Dutta, his English was just too perfect.

“Zero to original will almost always cause problems, as yet humans cannot be risked, but does the location and environment anomaly still persist Prof P”. They almost always called Professor P Basu as Prof P. None knew what the P stood for and Prof P had agreed that he himself did not know.

"Location anomalies have been precisely eliminated, based on Dr. Radharama Pillai's calculations and start-up simulations have shown very little fluctuation probably a few inches, but the environment anomaly I am sorry to say still exists. That locked door in Calcutta was the most visible instance. Space-time slowdown seems to be pushing the arrow of time back by seconds - a most singular phenomenon I would say".

"You mean - past in the immediate vicinity of the craft's domain is getting recreated, I don't believe this"

"Exactly as you say, how else do you explain the locked door incident in Case Partho or the circuit switching back in the mail account password of Dr. Ramesh Sharma - Case Ramesh"

"Yes that's true", reflected the young Computer scientist Subramaniam Iyengar. : "I think we might well exploit this anomaly Sir, if I may use that word"

"Yes but the exact period of environment lapse is yet to be estimated, our team member Kabir Sahni - to your left - is trying to estimate it mathematically and based on previous data and upcoming results; probably then we might be able to as you say exploit it"

"OK all that is nonsense talk, lets turn our focus to the original matter, has our primary objective been successfully met", asked the tall immaculately dressed man in his gruff but dignified voice.

"Do you understand, Sir that this is not a matter of making a toy, and will indeed take us a few more tests"

“All right, I get it that you need at most how many more months one, two”

“About that much time, yes”

There was silence for some time, then Major Probhat Chatterjee spoke again.

“OK gentlemen the talk session was indeed fruitful and our time constraints have been fixed; wish you all the best, you can all resume your duties at the lab for the next two days”

The meeting having dispersed, the scientists and engineers and others started towards the Laboratory which looked more like an old building, betraying the true intent of the grand project on which these assembled Indian SciTech-gurus were working.

“How are you able to understand whether the craft has actually reached its destination” asked Lata Karanjikar, a new comer and a research assistant; one of the three recently selected ones under the age of twenty eight after thorough tests and examinations of their abilities, all the three were from the IITs.

“Well there are signal detectors which get the signals magnified and locate it on the co-ordinate grid over there”

“But the process is so viciously fast - how do you even keep track of the location”, she asked.

“That is a trickier question; actually the speed is set beforehand and the auto speedup process constantly sends out signals and they are simultaneously controlled from the grid using a remote control like system. Till zero or near zero size is attained we can locate and constantly guide the craft”

“But how about the momentum that is supposed to reach infinity as velocity approaches that of light”

“Good point, that’s what the payload is for it is capable of emitting away mass just like decay of matter and the momentum almost proportionally decreases, that is the brainchild of our genius Prof. P”. The professor continued “This decay is what causes the problem of reformation anomaly as the object sent is never completely obtained back”

“So there is heavy compression or something of that sort”

“Yes but that is natural we don’t induce the compression”

“But in the first place why was this project taken up so zealously by the military and the Indian Government, what is so remarkable about all this and what is its purpose, madam?”

Prof Giribala Kishor smiled a broad smile at her. Prof G as she was called led her to a computer monitor some thirty inches across.

“Not one there are many stupendously surprising consequences of this E-craft”

Code named E-craft it was short for the Einstein-craft, a concept that could challenge the technological superiority of the superpowers if successful. It was also intentionally called E-craft so as to confuse with some networking concept like E-mail, E-commerce and so forth.

"Its killer technology, dear – that's what I would call it", she told her.

"Look here", she said touching a key on the transparent keyboard, as a Macromedia Shockwave Flash animation started playing on the huge screen enunciating in slick graphical details the uses and far reaching consequences of their new technology.

First it showed how the transportation time of objects and people could be virtually brought down to zero or near zero. Be in the India now and in USA the next nanosecond. Also space travel would come into reality with such high velocities becoming achievable.

And of course the time dilation phenomenon (which was first theorized in the Lorentz Transformations and later Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity had also enunciated this) could be exploited for eternal age – perpetual life or longevity but with the drawback of perpetual travel. The concept was that an object the closer to the speed of light it travelled the slower the time would flow around that object. In a sentence 'A moving clock runs slow'.

Also one of the most useful reasons of taking up of this project had been the concept of length contraction, wherein with increase in the velocity of object its length decreases, so if speeds of around that of light were achievable the object travelling at that velocity would have almost zero length or near invisibility. 'The length of a moving object is shortened'.

Lata stood there open-mouthed, yes all this was staring at her face and yet she had not grasped the project's motives. Of course you could transport anything anywhere across barriers as the object could be reduced to atomic proportions even human beings ;and then when they slowed down they came back to their original size : which could be exploited to the great advantage of the Indian military forces – high tech intrusion and atomic intruders.

This zero to original size concept had indeed been a problem to achieve as with very high velocities the momentum would go up in direct proportions; change of momentum would become infinite which is not practical and this was regarded a reason why the velocity of light could not be achieved. And yet in a series of trials before and in Case Partho (which they named after the disappearance of a certain Partho Shanyal) after Partho babu had locked the door and taken the unconscious watchman to the nearby hospital who had fainted having seen something very strange; but when the craft made a emergency landing inside the room – the lock had disappeared and the fastener had got fastened from inside, as just a few seconds back when Partho babu had been inside. Did that mean the craft overshot the speed of light and had recreated the past?

Prof. P had worked around the problem of infinite momentum and created a concept of matter decay to bring down the mass of the travelling object to near zero and as a result the resulting momentum would also go down. This decayed matter would follow behind and assemble back at the destination. Rapid slowdown of the moving craft or object was possible using magnetic gravitational fields and then the complete body would re-emerge once the speed was brought down to zero. Though early runs had been successful in the concepts of time dilation and length contraction one particular problem still existed: the object after decay did not completely re-emerge and this was termed as the reformation anomaly. That is the reason they had not sent any human

beings as yet but they would have to consider this possibility later and that meant complete refinement and perfection of the technology.

FIFTH HARMONIC – PreActivation II + Launch Pad

Thorough research and refinements for almost a month had brought them to a near perfected E-craft voyage technology. The specimens – white mice were coming back much less distorted, some had become minute sized but that would not happen again the scientists had assured him. Major Probhat was very much enthused by this phase of the project. Large sums of money had been expended on the project and the result would be sweet, he was certain. But to get a human being to volunteer for the voyage had been very tough. No one had agreed to be a guinea-pig. Some of the project team members had been apprehensive and objected to such a drastic measure. It might cause irreparable damage to the volunteer they had warned. A lady had even walked out of the last meeting which finalised the event – the first test of this type – involving human beings.

The tests for start-up were ready. The E-craft stood at the centre on the decked platform - milky white almost glowing. The anti-heating coating over the titanium body gave it that distinct white glow. The heat produced was enormous during warp – drive phase when the speed had once reached $0.991305 c$ or 99.1305 percent the speed of light – that was the maximum they had officially reached - except in Case Partho where...

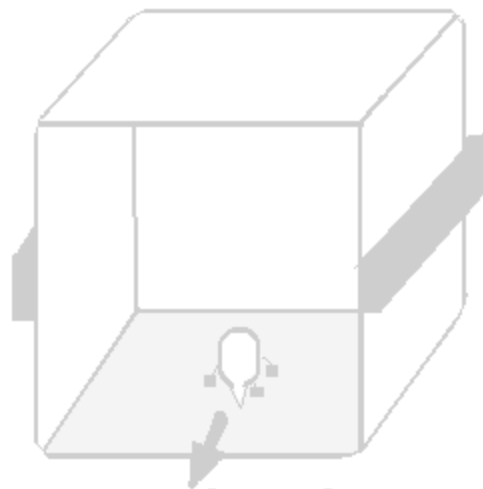
This overflow was a reason for much debate as the time barrier had been reversed. This was one other reason why a very heavy body had not yet been sent in the craft. This latest specially designed version of the

craft's hull itself had a diameter of four feet with the pointed nozzle in the front which faced the direction of motion. It had a height of about two feet with an elevation from the ground of another two feet – looking like a saucer. Big objects seemed to get distorted more even becoming small or miniature versions. They could not have risked the lives of any human till now when lately the distortions had been reduced to a large extent. This warping of the travelling object had greatly distorted the initial crafts and they had to be discarded; progressively increasing in size this was their sixth machine – called 'Sushashth'. Would this become their most successful craft today being their D-day; the top three scientists and the major heading the project were standing and were very optimistic of the outcome - a feat that no one else had achieved.

"Countdown started yesterday at 23:00 hrs; the launch is scheduled for 9:30 hrs IST", said Biren Dutta in his impeccable English looking for any change in Major Probhat's blank but smiling countenance. It was 7:45 am in the cool fresh morning.

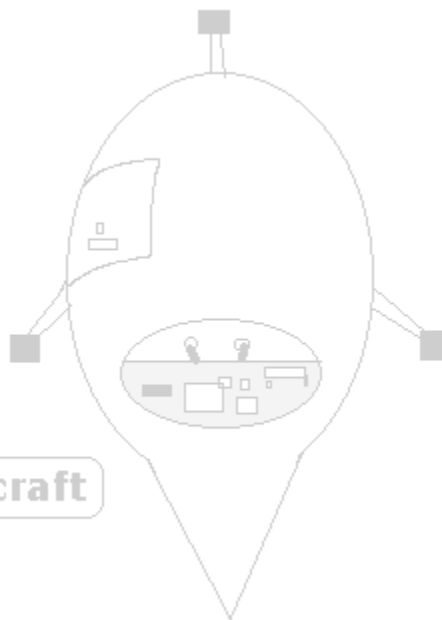
"Great", said Major Probhat. "I was looking forward to this day".

The huge cuboid hall where the craft stood, had three sides covered - the side facing the nozzle of the E-craft was open for fly-by. All the hi-precision electronics component, software, hardware, embedded technology and real-time controls had been developed indigenously. A first of its kind in India. The assembly of the body and the design had been done in isolation by engineering experts from select institutions all over India. In all about 450 technical experts had been involved in the project.



Launch Pad

pn LP 22375 classified TS Phase 5 IIII6632



E-craft

pn E-C ProjMain 001292 classified TS Phase 2 IIII002

Someone had once joked that E-craft stood for Egg-craft as it had an uncanny resemblance to an egg.

It was 8:30 about an hour from the unique launch; the volunteer would be here in about fifteen minutes. The technicians were doing last minute tests and the computer scientists monitored the prevailing conditions and the data coming in from the monitoring sensors inside the craft. But they did not know that this day would be one of the most amazing days in their lifetime what no human being had seen ever before – a spectacle that was to unfold in the very near future.

SIXTH HARMONIC – Final Activation + Minor Technical Glitches

The state is made for man, not man for state.

- *Albert Einstein, The World As I See It*

Before God we are all equally wise – equally foolish

- *Albert Einstein, Address at the Sorbonne*

The volunteer entered the room from the left side entrance of the launch pad. He was greeted by loud claps. But the volunteer did not seem very happy; strains of nervousness marred his face; he stared at the craft and then at the scientists and the control room beside the launch pad where a hundred others stood or sat busy with the controls or their monitoring work. The volunteer was none other than . . . Clang! There was a sound of something having dropped; something fell on the floor and everyone looked up. It was a belt which had been loosely strapped and had dropped to the ground from the volunteer's waist. Ramcharan Yadav picked up the belt and strapped it back loosely; it would be properly tightened only after he entered the craft as the first human

volunteer. He had pleaded first to be left out but later on promise of payment of a large sum he had agreed anyway otherwise he would be put into the jail they had told him – this was of course the military and the RAW's job; the technical people had nothing to do with this; they had not even know if the volunteer had agreed; only Professor P had been informed and he had informed others that the volunteer had been fully prepared for any eventuality.

Actually Ramcharan Yadav had seen the emergency landing of the test E-craft behind the Shiuli Apartments and had ventured to open the small E-craft when it had been stationary but the hidden cameras inside had taken his photographs and then flown back and immediately army men had come down to find him in the Apartments; at this time Yadav had ran up to the apartments scared that he would be apprehended or afraid of the consequences and at that time out of fright had fainted in front of Partho Shanyal's house. Partho babu had heard the commotion and come out to see Ramcharan lying unconscious and he had taken him to the nearby hospital in an auto rickshaw at four in the morning. The hospital had asked Partho babu to stay back because a late night case was an emergency, so he had stayed back. The army men had not found the watchman right away but had later come to know his whereabouts from the auto rickshaw driver and then abducted him from the hospital.

National interest is more important than individual interest; but then every individual has his own fundamental rights and it was these forms of coercive tactics for experimentation that went against those very human rights. But national interests would have to be satisfied and what was now happening was a culmination of this grand national endeavour. Despite himself Ram Yadav as they called him was now to board the E-craft.

"Fifteen minutes for fly-by", announced someone from the control centre.

Both the launch pad and the control centre were mobile units capable of being assembled and put into use in one day's time. They were now ready. Ram Yadav reached the craft when the entrance automatically opened out, the interiors visible. It was dull blue inside; there were a series of sensors and this machine also had a control panel near the elongated nozzle – this was the Phase 2 of the craft capable of maneuverability from within the craft designed taking into consideration human crew. The initial machines were much smaller and were capable of taking mice or other such small things such as the watches or clocks etc. there were a series of sensors, detectors, transmitters and other circuitry inside. The tremendous velocity required was attained by means of an immense magnetic plasma field created using the massive accelerating rings strapped around the launch pad which created continuous booster fields.

Ram Yadav was fully strapped and padded to the seat as he lay sprawled there - capable of unstrapping and climbing out of the craft when the craft landed at its destination. The door was shut and latched but could be opened from the inside using a remote button.

"Minus 20 and counting" the operators voice came softly in the control room. Prof P was rubbing his hands in anticipation.

And then after sometime "Minus 10 and counting".

" eight seven six five four three two one zero"

And then the display board took over showing +1 +2 and so on as the seconds ticked by.

The craft was still stationary but the launch pad was slowly engulfed by vibrations and coolant vapours and then within a split second the craft shot out and was gone like a thunderbolt through the open end of the launch pad.

Ramcharan Yadav did not feel anything in the beginning only a light headed feeling as though he were about to burst out laughing and then a sudden firmness in his stomach as though he was getting compressed and then he gave out a cry and he was out of control of his own body; he suddenly had many thoughts of his childhood days rushing past him - something beside him was growing enormously big as though a big balloon being filled up and he tried to hold on to it with his hands – he had often dreamt this dream but this was reality was it not. It just expanded and expanded then he seemed to be drowning in some viscous liquid and he panicked unable to figure out what was happening. He felt sharp excruciating pain in his left hand as though it was being twisted. Then all of a sudden there was peace and extreme bliss as though he had been here earlier for quite some time and then he lay there head touching his chest surrounded by a layer of warmth; hands and feet together and utterly oblivious as though he did not know anything of where he was; the end of consciousness and then total darkness; asleep. Beep Beep Beep . . .

“We have a minor glitch Professor P and B, would you mind coming over here, the speed has seemingly crossed the light barrier”, said someone at the coordinate grid and then “Oh my God, he has disappeared, we have LOST him”.

“What rubbish. Kishor just focus the radar and increase its scope field”, barked Prof. Biren Dutta turning to the young man at the radar screen and controls.

Still the coordinate field was blank as though the craft had never been sent at all.

“But how is this possible, if he is present then we should be able to spot him, the circuitry is intact”, commented Prof. P.

Major Probhat came running to the coordinate display, beginning to sweat profusely.

Then minor variation in the blank screen and the craft was shown by a small green spot on the screen.

“Great we got him back” said the man at the coordinate display grid.

“Track him carefully and bring him back to the launch pad at 0.90 c and then apply brakes”, said Biren Dutta.

As soon as the craft had flown out the launch pad had been closed and all its ends were shut off, nothing could enter the launch pad except air and molecules and atoms and of course the E-craft which was now the size of an atom.

It was the inherent likeness and symmetry that was prevalent in the universe - atoms on the subatomic level looked similar to the solar system on the planetary level with electrons and protons instead of the planets, the earth, its moon etc and the forces or space-time that was amazingly symmetric. But if space could be traversed why could space-time not be traversed? Like a four co-ordinate system - x, y, z, t those familiar with mathematical coordinates would surely understand. You could be

wherever you wanted to be on that graph and go back and forth, back and forth.

The circuitry was still working accurately at the sub-atomic level because of that symmetry. Every thing had got miniaturised proportionately.

“Wow just look at that, we have done it again”. The craft had got into the launch pad with all its doors and walls completely shut.

“Magic again”, said Prof. P. “Black Magic”

When at a distance the field of the launch pad rings would be increased and the craft would be shrunk again to an atom and accelerated back out to some location from where it had flown off. That meant the craft could go only up to a maximum distance till where the magnetic plasma field had its reach. And at present this radius was about two kilometres. But this field creation required tremendous power and consequently whenever they conducted the voyage or tested the craft, that region would invariable have a power failure - load shedding for a national cause.

The craft came back to the original size inside the launch pad.

Some one spoke on the microphone at the control room and the signal got transmitted automatically to the craft “Ram Yadav; are you fine? Aap accha hai kya?”

There was a hiss and then no more sounds. They scanned using the ten onboard cameras; but to their astonishment no one was seen inside. The craft was empty as though Ram Yadav had vanished literally into thin

air. "Where is he?" a female voice spoke. Lata Karanjikar was asking the question.

"I don't claim to know." muttered Subramaniam Iyengar wide-eyed and mouth gaping.

"Definitely an oversight on our part, our calculations were positively flawed", concluded Biren Dutta.

FINAL VIBRATION – Severe Oversight to limbo

A mother's pride, a father's joy

- *Sir Walter Scott*

Raghuveer Yadav stood there glad that the rains had poured and his crops would be successful this time. He was also very happy for another reason and so was his entire household, he was about to become a father and a boy would certainly be a cause for immense pride he contemplated. He was bringing home a basketful of vegetables and fresh

fruits to feed his wife Jamuna. She needed nourishment at this stage the doctor had said so.

Then after a month he was now a father and they called the child Ramcharan; they would put him in the nearby school they decided. His son would have to get educated and become a babu – Ramcharan Yadav babu they would call him they joked. His mother was very concerned and cried sometimes at his son as he had a disability – his left hand was slightly distorted, bent backwards. She could not remember but her mother-in-law told her that she had once fallen off the bed while asleep a month before Ramu was born. Unfortunately Raghuveer died a few years later and those were the days when India was undergoing a tough phase of political turmoil, the phase of Emergency. Later they had got displaced and had to move over to Calcutta from bordering Bihar - Ramu, Ramu's mother, Ramu's maternal uncle and his wife. He had grown up there and had done odds and ends to earn a living after which at the age of twenty three he had got the job of a watchman in a nearby building. He had been lucky enough to get the job but too late. His mother had died a year before of tuberculosis when they were in abject poverty; he would never forget that day when he had gone out to do some work at a construction site, when he had come back he had found a crowd at his door and by then everything was all over.

What was that white flash he had seen, he ran down to the rear of the building where he had seen it flying to and then stood still, stunned; approaching forward very very slowly . . .

They never found him again. The techno brains just could not place their finger on the exact causes and nature of the problem that had caused this loss of life, only some theories floated around. The presence of a human mind had changed the entire field – so powerful was the effect of the human mind or was it the soul - and accelerated the craft over the

limit and much further creating a vortex of chaotic, immensely jumbled tones.

It is said that his soul had got caught in an infinite cycle, trapped in limbo and whoever had read the account about Ramcharan would invariably find a man his left hand strangely bent backwards; standing behind him peering over his shoulder trying to find what had happened to his existence – trying to decipher himself from among the multitude of jumbled tones.

Life's a voyage that's homeward bound

- Herman Melville

concept boundary

>> Everyone says '*I am the one*' !

It was all neat and picture perfect – of course dark, null and void. There was no one, everything seemed calm and distinctly still, until the beam; a dense stream of rays hit them; the men were up and running in no time. Tens, thousands, millions of men, tall well-built hulks started running upwards, faster and faster, the staircase was full teeming with colliding messengers in no time eager to pass the message on; jumping hurdles morphing into each other as they reached the door; one of them pushed it open; and all of them rushed in ; an immense room full of liquid men and women, bright glowing ones, rising and falling; talking in tones harsh and soft, murmurs and loud clear voices. As though a great fair a conclave of strange solid mucous like creatures, they the men that is, all reached the last group of fat pink men and started to disappear as they came in contact with the bloated pink mass of men, all collapsing on the floor drifting and flowing back here and there as though searching for a place to hide.

The fat pinkies discussed for a few moments and then a roar of laughter as they decided to try out their naughty little plan.

“OK, done go on start”, said an experienced pinkster.

As all this was going on in one isolated corner of the room, other door opened and closed; troops of men trooped in and wild sounds and strange booming music appeared and disappeared; these men rose and fell as other older masses of creatures stayed on there. As the pinkies said start; another door opened and a gunshot was heard and the trigger

happy men in orange started disappearing out of the room; at breakneck speed back to their destination, some new point; but as this happened a series of men dislocated and split up from the pinkies and drifted into the the central dome; the sanctum sanctorum as it were, where a sage sat meditating in the calm; unaware, unflappable deeply engrossed. As the men came in contact with the sage, unearthly and divine smells and good feelings arose, as though the sage emanated all the powers of wisdom and the best of all worlds from his seat of ...

He awoke and saw him walking down the path. No he had never felt this jealous of any other person before, he felt nausea almost a dizzy feeling of hatred as soon as he saw him. How can I get even he thought, he has always been on the top as if by default, he knew not in what way to think critically of the person in front of him, as he was blinded by anger and was sure he could cripple him now – this was the time, the opportunity he had been waiting for had come; stab and run and run fast. He brought out his newly polished kukri, ready to kill . . .

A groan was heard and multiple fairies and all looking so strangely alike - with long white robes as though dancing together and floating around, suddenly they all turned red then black and back to white; but now they all had fangs, sharp fangs glistening in the dull glow of the background who swooped up and all of them flew out reaching the same room, all attempting to overpower the other and reach the room first like ferocious wild beasts. Those fair glowing skins with dark interiors all collapsed as they reached the congregation of red mistresses at the other end of the room and boisterous giggles and shrill laughter rang out in the room . All the lights went out in the room and then flickered back again. The busy room over flowed with men and women entering and leaving from all the countless number of doors. As the fairies darted back to the lowest regions of hell as though they had no better work. But within seconds the central dome opened and a pristine chaste lady in the brightest of white robes sat discussing the complaint against the red mistresses.

They had met a few months back, and now he sat there with her, hand in hand, and as she made that sound, he suddenly had an urge to . . . but then thought of postponing such things to after marriage.

The black and red glowing things sat assembled and as it happened again they reached out and shot into the room through one of the doors. Now the view to the room was clearer, it sat in the air floating in a coagulated mass with infinite stairways and doors openings in all sides and the walls stretching in all sides unable to view all angles the right and left hemispheres extended in all directions, but the dome was not visible anywhere now as though invisible and enveloping the room. The glowing objects started oscillating and moving to and fro – as new

It was so cold outside he would have frozen he started immediately rubbing his hands and once more ran into the room.

Inside he found some more warm clothes and put them on. He had just eaten his breakfast of delicious sweets and eggs and pizzas and yet thought of some more food now that he saw the freezer and other aroma wafting in to the room from the kitchen he had a mouthful and his stomach ached as he ran to the that little room – sound of flushing water followed ...

He put on the music system and sat down to relax...

The whole region started vibrating; the liquid river or was it a pond started rippling and hoards of men emerged out from nowhere and started dancing as though in a rock concert and started zig-zagging and climbed higher and higher as though under the effect of some hallucinogenic dose and reached 'the room' and as soon as they entered everyone stood staring in rapt attention... and then they all started dancing ... under flashing lights and drums and the accompanying sonata reached a frenzy and was immediately followed by light music and all in the room swayed to the tunes...

The sage and the priestess discussed various points and sat there ready to take up any other issues; but this time as the door opened a bell rang louder and louder each time and kept on ringing. The sage and priestess became indistinct, appeared to be merging and becoming a single entity and kept growing in size - the half man half women - all that was now visible was the creature growing larger and larger as they become bigger than the room and all the surrounding, the city, the oceans, the world and solar system, the constellations, the black pitch black stars all under its reach - encompassing all concept boundaries and exceeding everything in size and extent, the infinite space, the infinite time and space, dimensionless and all pervading.

The relatives started weeping, and the parents, especially the mother started wailing in total distress over the motionless body.

And as rapidly as they had grown, they grew smaller and distributed back into each of the creatures in this universe and the child was reborn with all the orange men and white fanged fairies and red and black objects and the hidden dancing men. But the associated monitor - the consciousness, the absolute arbiter, the judge and jury, the ultimate ratifier; the ascetic sage smiled at the flawless priestess and resolved to prevent the onslaught of the reds, pinks, blues, greens; and the anger and jealousy and lust and greed and ... ; the sights and sounds and touches and smells and tastes of life; (But these very senses help us interact, learn, and acquire knowledge - the front end to the back-end 'central dome' which occasionally fails too, all part of the game).

and this way the game began again !

>> Arent they '**absolutely right**' !

Anything within the concept boundary is bogus

But Logic applies, please do not lose the focus;

We can grasp as we can best

And then lies the infinite rest.