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## The Jump

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The place where I am standing right now is desolate in true sense of the term. Not a single cow or dog is around. The trees are silent, the sky is unmindful, the hyacinth-covered pond nearby is absorbed in itself. What is remarkable here is the rail track – a pair of lines lying like two identical twins on the bed of innumerable igneous rocks. These are for which I have come here. I have come to commit suicide. The express trains of the South-Eastern Railway gear up their highest speed while plying through this particular area. When the trains rush past with a deafening sound in about two minutes they seem dangerously imprudent. It is this audacity that is desired for ensuring a flawless and definite death – so that nothing remains after it.

No, really my heart is not quivering a bit. There is not a bit of hesitation or fear. I have come this far on absolutely indifferent footing. There is nothing to drag me behind; there is no more enchantment with life. Purely emotionless – and so, calm. Just one thing is not letting me be free from tension. The fact is that in the bag hanging from my shoulder there lies quite thick a notebook. That is the manuscript of a forty-five thousand word long novel written by me. It is in Bengali. I have written this bit by bit for the last two years. After numerous modifications and changes the writing took this final form.

Placing the bag containing the manuscript a few away from the rail track, I will throw myself on the track when the train comes. I will throw myself without any confusion – suddenly I will run and fall flat on the lines. I know there will be no mistake. All through my life I have committed mistakes, I have thought wrongly, known wrongly, walked on the wrong paths. As if it is the wrong in which I have my inborn right. But this time I will not commit any mistake.

There was no other way out. What else could have been a better way than this? There are several other means of dying – perhaps one can die more easily. But that may not bring the result that I want. When the train runs me over, my body will lie here in pieces. However desolate this place may be, someone or the other will surely find my corpse. The body will be found by tomorrow. People will come to know – the local police will be reported – news media will come. The smell of mystery will spread – investigation will start – various possibilities, conjectures and hints will be discovered. Perhaps my corpse will be shown on the TV screen throughout the day with a catchy story. The news will spread up in various layers of administration. Even the Writers' Building will be in turmoil with this. Nowadays there is immense interest in people of every sphere about a body lying by the rail lines. It may well be hoped that in the present troubled situation my death would become an issue with newly found political or romantic links. There is only one possible gain for me in this – if in this connection somebody reaches for the manuscript in my bag. Be it a detective or the media – if at least for the sake of investigation some person of fine intellect can find any literary merit in that writing. Then if the wind is

favourable, news may spread – there is something, something in that writing. I have heard that the lucks of many people favour after their death.

What other means is there but for playing a lottery like this? Usually no publisher or magazine of repute will publish a novel written by an unknown writer like me – so, there is no other way out for that writing to draw any attention. There is none familiar to me in Kolkata – none of the good writers, critics, intellectuals or people of some cultural coterie would find time to read this writing of mine amidst their huge business. So, being left with no other option, I have taken this step. In fact, this suicide is a tactic – it is not possible for me to give this novel so much publicity by any other means. If somebody calls it unethical greed or slyness unbecoming of a writer, I cannot help. At least in this extreme situation I am desperate – my eyes and ears are shut. Yes, I want, unambiguously want, that my writing may find its readership, that it may reach many readers, that the manuscript may become a book and get sold in shops. If there is at all any power in my writing, may it be examined – the brain that once wanted only to write may get legitimacy. Which language-worker does not crave for that! Those who have acquired a deep indifference about their writings are great. I cannot elevate myself up to their stature. Is it really too much unjust to make a provision for one's own writing at such a time of utmost consumerism, in this weather of selfishness? Believe me, I do not want to do anything for myself – I never had any craving for being famous. But the writing, that is impersonal – he who writes is not me. But there was nothing more in my life except this writing – I did not want anything else. For the sake of that desire or for the last wish let the writing may be read – let it reach the hands of the reader. If readers refuse it, that will be the infallible. The suicide is without an alternative. There is no other way to draw attention of the readers except this noisy end. I do not believe in such a myth that after my death someone would discover my writing from a tin box kept at a corner of my room. At least in the contemporary world it is not possible to cherish such a belief. Perhaps nothing will ever happen – after being run over by the train my body will create no turmoil at all – the bag with the manuscript will be thrown aside for avoiding and diminishing troubles. But the slightest hope does not die in the face of death. I have left in a file back at the mess several published and unpublished stories, articles and novels written by me so far. I have brought only this one novel with me in a bag because I have an extra faith on it.

But why am I depending on such a writing that has been read by none but me, and about whose relative importance there is deep doubt even in my own mind? Perhaps I am building a castle in the air. Still, if it remains – if even after my death it exists – if it beats with life after my body becomes still. After death a man is nowhere in this vast, indifferent world. What else can a man do against this definite extinction but for writing? This writing records the intimate whisperings of the soul that will be lost in the space after death. Though these whisperings did not let me live peacefully so far – and to listen to them a man like me could not live properly – I had to write for their sake. I did not have anything better than those to talk about in this trivial life of mine. When, from quite an early age, I decided to write, I did not realize how suicidal that decision had been. To search for appropriate words, to become blue with the poison and melancholy of mind, to endure the restless groan of the spirit – all through the life – who wants to have those willingly? But what can be done – nature makes each individual differently. I am not to be counted – many great talents have endured far greater torments and in spite of that have created great works. Firstly, I was not born with even the slightest fraction of their talent, and secondly, for a powerless man like me it was improper to such aspirations. Still I have continued writing – struggling against my own incapability – hiding from the eyes of people, keeping the

secrecy of forbidden sinners – banishing from the mind the thoughts of outcome – I kept on writing. But let me just take a chance before death – to see what happens.

Apart from that my provision for living is exhausted too. I have little tuition at hand now – and those who are there would not stay long. It is also a kind of daily intellectual sabotage to provide notes on literary texts for examination against my own conscience and belief. How long can one tolerate prostituting one's intellect? In fact, I had waged a self-acclaimed revolt from my school days against the hellish system of education that we all have to undergo. I used to find pride in my being unsuccessful by writing in the examination what I wanted to. Walking in the opposite direction of the common path, I have demonstrated my personal protest as far as I could. I had to pay the final price of these whims by being deprived of fifty-five percent marks in my M.A examination. After failing to understand how to prove my quality by writing answers of two-mark questions, I have stopped sitting for the job oriented tests. I have succeeded in dissociating myself from these systems, that is true – but it has mattered to none but myself.

Despite there being an apparent bravado in this sort of failures, I know that in reality I am a misfit in all the inevitable tasks of life. By a strict, merciless law the nature of this universe throws out as waste all those that are unable to get evolved in compliance with the techniques it teaches. I am sure that I have understood the hint of nature – the verdict has been reverberated in the blue dome of the sky – my death is inevitable. After hearing this verdict, let the task of bringing down the fatal blow be accomplished by me myself. Every sane person desiring to commit suicide wants to die basically for two reasons – either one wants to punish oneself severely, or one has no more ties left with this world. In my case both these reasons are very much relevant. A socially unskilled person like me must be punished – a person who cannot even lock his own room properly, who goes on mistaking while counting money, who dials wrong phone numbers, who buttons up his shirt wrongly, who cannot cross roads properly, who always submitted the incomplete answer-scripts in examinations, who has not learned anything from practical experiences – must be punished. After the death of my father all ties have been severed as well. A few girls wanted to come close, but whenever I felt that a tie was forming, I began misbehaving. Imposing a cruelty upon myself, I obliged them to go away from me. How could I let them walk the wrong path when I knew everything about myself? There was physical craving, but I did not touch them lest the touch should bring duty with it. Rather, when every night other men lie on the bodies of their women, I lay on the bed of alphabet. I knew the risk of writing – if the tenacity of living with words does not bring success, suicide would be my destiny. From a long time ago I had that mental preparation – so, here, standing beside this lonely rail track, I am not suffering any new conflict.

As I knew that such is my destiny, during the last few months I became very much proud and adamant. Usually I am self-centred, extremely egocentric. How can there be so much egoism in so worthless a person? Sometimes it seemed to be a symptom of mental illness, a kind of neurosis. Is it not a pre-symptom of schizophrenia to make a habit of living with the truncated reality in my own self? It is natural for a writer to have so much pride, but that does not suit me. One who has spent his life tilling barren land, one who has profound doubt about his own ability – why should he harbour so much pride? Still, what could I have done except trying on relentlessly? I stuck to a steady belief – I thought, whatever may the outcome be, I will be a whole timer in the work of writing. I will have to catch every wave of thought – I will have to catch with words the short-lived particles of consciousness that are always falling on the platform of mind. Let the rest of the world go to hell.

But everybody is not fortunate. Outer encouragement often helps one overcome one's limitations. Several of my writings have been published in different papers and magazines, but have not attracted any kind notice of anybody. There was however a different path also. I could have carried my writings and get them read by the established personalities of the literary field by persistent and tireless request. Many people say that it is useless to write without acquaintance with the renowned writers of Kolkata. But I am from a suburb – I could not approach anyone in the fear of being refused, in a bad habit of averting the reality, and for some inertness and a suppressed vanity. I could not speak of myself to anybody – always feared to ring anyone up – lest one should feel disturbed. Better was my empire of falsehood – a shabby rented room full of earthy smell – and within it I am unchallenged.

But how long can one go on with this self-deception, this construction of falsehood? Now I am tired, I do not possess the confidence of going on writing without expectations – so I want to escape – suicide is in fact a sort of escape, like the escape of weak-minded cowards. I am one of those who deceive themselves by trying to cover up their own incapability with the excuse of deprivation, those who feel sleepy after a little fatigue. Still, this death is not a luxury – it is a bitter necessity. I did not have any control over my birth, but over my death I have. Let my face be hidden in an atom to cover up the shame of an unsatisfactory life. I was sluggishly carrying this life for thirty-two years. Now there comes the respite. But the motive with which I have come here will perhaps ultimately elude my reach. The moment the police come to realize that this man used to write, everything will be closed then and there. Most people do not regard the writers as part of the normal humankind – and perhaps they will think that this man was insane and the writing a delirious gibberish. Perhaps they will think rightly – but oh the endless! you at least have pity for this unfortunate wretch. If there is a next life, I will settle my life neatly from the very beginning.

Now there is only one fear – if the train is too much late, the molecular compactness of my determination might get loose. If the positive sides of life suddenly become exposed to attract me towards them, if the falling rays of the setting sun get a purple tinge, if a tune arises out of this silence! Whatever may there be, I am not returning today.

Oh, yes, the earth vibrates. The whistle of the train running in a dangerous momentum blew up. The silence stretched out to the horizons exploded into pieces and fell on the barren ground. Here and there the sunrays reflected on the rail lines and dazzled me – as if they were the sharp weapons of an executioner. As I give ears to the rail lines, I hear the song of ecstasy – the song of pure freedom – there is no trace of pain in that. I conjecture that the train is hardly at five minutes' distance. Hissing like an anaconda, the front of the engine gradually came in the view. I could have laid myself down now, but what if somebody arrives before the train? Then let the manuscript be properly kept. As I am placing the bag carefully on the soft grasses, it seems that there is an unfathomable cavern in front – as if I am throwing the writing from a high peak down to the depth of time. How many strange wild flowers have bloomed in the grass-land – what a rich diversity of colours – what a wealth there is in these nondescript flowers.

No – there is no more time to distract my mind to all this. I have heard that suicide is very difficult. So the concentration must not falter a bit – I will have to jump absolutely flawlessly. O, there comes the train – the driver must be thinking that this man has come to see the train. In a moment his notion will change – he will surely understand that the man has been run over by the train. But it is not possible to stop the train when it is so near. Now I give jump. The loud laughter of the steel wheels reverberated in all the directions. I do not know what awaits me – immortality or oblivion.

**Original Story:** ‘Jhnaap’ [Bengali], published in the Bengali newspaper *Aajkaal* on 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2010.

**Author:** Tamal Bandyopadhyay

**About the Author:** A noted writer of this generation, Sri Bandyopadhyay has authored and got published eight novels and more than fifty short stories till date. His writings have been published in such well-known Bengali magazines and papers as *Desh*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Anandamela* and *Aajkaal*. He was awarded the Best Bengali Novelist of the Year 2012 by *Sangbad Pratidin*.

**About the Translator:** Arpan Adhikary obtained M.A. in English with First Class from University of Calcutta in 2012, and qualified UGC-NET in 2013. Presently he serves as an Assistant Teacher of English (PG) under the Department of School Education, Government of West Bengal, at Nandanpur Adarsha Vidyapith (H.S.). He has presented papers in several state-level and national-level seminars and his papers and articles have been published in authentic, peer-reviewed journals and books.