

Rays on the Face (Short story, chapter-wise)**Buddhapriya Biswas**

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Chapter 1

'Bongo amar jononi amar dhatri amar amar desh, kano go ma tor shushko noyon, kano go ma tor rukkho kesh' (Bengal is my mother. Bengal is my motherland. Why are your eyes moist, mother? Why is your hair scattered, mother?) It was the tune that was surrounding the atmosphere like a blanket. It was the day shadowed by the clouds above. The day was full of potential. A day, when people's eyes are filled with hope and terror. "They're here, run everybody, move, move", said Gayna. Some scenes were out of the ordinary. Loitering of British spies. Their stares were loutish. As if ready to swallow a full. It was a long crowd marching towards Cornwallis Street (now, Bidhan Sarani, Kolkata). It was chaos on the roads. The mob was roaring. Kaustubh from the first row was the man who was leading. Stubbles burnt fog everywhere which creating a scene, as if it were a heavenly war between Satan and other archangels versus God. From tough to tougher seconds, it was the imaginary journey of success. The image which every citizen had painted in their dreams. Kaustubh and Parth were ready to deliver their speech. All were walking with their boiling blood. All of a sudden, Kaustubh fell on his face. The festoon got torn. On a horse chariot, a goddess-like British lady was passing by. He was into a half-conscious state. Kaustubh saw her, and she saw the mayhem. With all possible hesitation and pain, he tried and stood up. *Shokal bela bhooth dekhli na ki Ki re, ki holo ta ki,* (what is wrong with you, did you see a ghost or what) said Parth to him. Kaustubh shrugged his shoulders, brushed and cleaned the dust. His *Dhoti* got stained. Felt numb at the chin. Then gently rubbed the area. He was thinking about the sight. The sight which pushed him. It was the sight which made him fall. It was the fall of love at first sight.

Chapter 2

Beshi din nei amader haathe, manush der jagroto korte gele, hobe rastay namte. (There is no more time left for us, we need to jump to the streets to make others aware.) Are you with me, Parth? *"Bakider bole de, ami snan ta shere, berochchi followed"* (tell others to gather, I'll be there shortly). It was the morning by the day after his fall. Kaustubh carried the half-torn festoon to the Dey Tailors. It was the largest tailoring shop in the town. Where the supplies never met the end. The owner was a man with a big heart. It was rare. A shop, without any faces of unfair prejudices. Keeping the festoon at the shop, he decided to have a cup of tea with the chiefs. He was walking down the stairs. Soon, at the next moment. He saw the lady. The British lady for whom he had fallen, was approaching towards him. Alas! What a coincidence he thought. Kaustubh was experiencing torments inside him. He was questioning

the existence of the human standing in front of him. The human is full of melting and brimming beauty. It was a ravishing sight. The sight into which a man wants to live his entire life. To him, it was a moment when the clocks stopped ticking. "Welcome Madam, welcome. How may I help you? *Ei koi geli tora, Memsaab er jonno chai paani aan re*" (Welcome the lady, ask her about tea. Where is everybody?) said Hari, the apprentice. *No, thank you so much. Dada, I want chota shada teen te neel* (three blue) woollen balls, *ha ha* blue, right. " (and six white) Hari packed them in a paper bag and handed them over to her. Kaustubh gained his responsiveness and was about to say that, because of her, he fell on the street and tore the festoon. But his conscience hit him. He resumed his actions. His head was down. He went out of the shop, waved at Hari without saying anything, and pranced to the club.

Chapter 3

It was firing. The streets were empty. Alarming with the moments of stillness. Kaustubh took the alleys. His moves were swift enough to defy. Every step was silent. Kaustubh made his way and landed at the chief's mansion. It was a tense discussion that was going on. One could sense the beginning of the week of the long knives. "Yes, I can do it," said Kaustubh to himself. His muddled feet led him the way to the gang. Parth gently greeted him and offered to light a cigar. Kaustubh pulled him aside. Others were out and out into an apocalyptic discussion. There were two faces of the discussion. One variety of mass was howling to see the success. Another round of people was praying. So that they don't have to fight the fiasco. Likewise, there was a duo utterly indifferent. Standing under a *Radhchura*, they were sharing until the cigar reached its butt. Parth added, *Buddhir goray dhowa dewa holo to ebar jawa jak.* (It surely boosted our grey matter. Now, let's go.) However, the multilogue was not mind-numbing. Rather, it was brain-teasing. After all, it was about the future and lives. The minute they decided to start walking; it was a sound that halted their motion. Undoubtedly, it was the boots. They were slowly nearing. The sound felt like the running of boots. Without wasting much time, the assemblage entered the mansion of the chief. Parth and Kaustubh were staring at each other. It was the first time they were allowed to go in. Chief never invited them to his place; hat too had a sharp reason. The chief's wife was a woman who loved to wrap herself in luxurious goods. It was natural to expect women to get engaged with ornaments. Here it was the same, with a slight tint of hypocrisy. She was Mrs. Sen, wife of Chief Dada who belonged to the so-called society.

Chapter 4

Babu Sampradaya (rich and elite Bengali bending down from the balcony she saw the crowd at the entrance. In the meantime, it was a respite from the burning hot weather for Kaustubh and the party. They were looking all around like babies exploring the world for the first time. Everybody was pleased as well as ashamed of their appearances. Parth pushed Abhay and said to notice the awesome blazer of the major-domo. Well-pressed, shiny black coat with a bit-stained white shirt inside. Kaustubh was seeing the antique vases kept on both sides of the main door. Which seemed silver-plated. This was a time that hit Kaustubh. The grandeur was reminding him of the sight. He knew. it was not achievable. But there was no bondage for

dreaming. He exhaled and engaged himself. Suddenly, everybody moved their eyeballs to the staircase. It was none other than Mrs. Sen. Her walk was slow and graceful enough. But again, there was apathy in the posture. She tied her hands and stood on the base stairs. She was staring in grimace towards Chief Dada. He was not much agitated. It was common for him to absorb every day. An act he was fully habituated to. With a least bothered expression, chief Dada asked everybody to shift to the hall area to have a sit. Mrs. Sen followed him. Chief Dada was now sure about the happenings. He was partially gazing at his wife. "This is not going to happen in my house, tell them to have a seat on the marbled floor", she screamed. "Not everyone can afford marble", she added. He didn't know she could ever react like this. He was feeling embarrassed. "Offo! Why are you coming towards me with a grudge? Let them sit there," said with a boasting yet mocking tone. She was crossing the limits. By hook or crook Chief Dada had to stop these ugly talks. He called the major upstairs. domo and ordered to take Mrs. Sen. It was entirely disgusting to deal with her at the moment. He said to Kaustubh to arrange the festoons for the rally. Parth and Abhay were the painter of the group. Kaustubh and Chief Dada were discussing about the engaging slogans to push people to join the rally. It was tough to make plebs understand the power of unity.

Chapter 5

Kaustubh was orphaned when he was sixteen. He was the one who brought up his brother, Parth, of three years less than him. They had seen many phases of life. They had come across thousands of unexplainable situations. With hundreds of insecurities and uncertainties, they managed to stick with the right path. It was easy to flow with dirt being a parasite. But it was always a challenge for a being to match the pace with the process of purgation. No one was concerned about them. Both of them shaped themselves in such a way that one is incomplete without another. And that is called being complementary to each other. They had few acquaintances around the hamlets. But nobody dared to ask them about their conditions. They thought if they would ask, they had to give Kaustubh and his brother Parth the shelter and meal for days. So, everybody used to ignore them, also if they didn't want to. Kaustubh had burnt many midnights' oil till he was capable enough to teach Parth. It was a time they had to keep wet towels on their bellies to shoo away hunger. Starvation had been a permanent monster hiding under their bed. They fought against many mini wars every day. Now it was the time to let their unity speak. Time was passing. The day was nearing...

Chapter 6

It was the day before the main day. The aim was to save the motherland. It was the smell of gunpowder in the air. Our sense of smell has been closely knitted to our emotions. It was something he questioned himself. that triggered Kaustubh. "Is it ominous?" Their club was one of the biggest clubs of the Bengal Presidency. Thus, many lives were expecting success through them. Chief Dada was the man behind each member of the club. The name of the feeling. 'Mohan Bharoter, Mohan Bangla club was itself a piece with intense ' was the title penned by Kaustubh. None of them left their house that day. It was raining heavily. The streets were again still. Men with pistols, and pistols with the sound of death. No one had

seen them being kind. They were possessed. Their men were controlled by evil spirits. Parth was filled with trauma from the very day he had lost his mother. When proletarians were dying of cholera. They died in an accident. For his condition, Kaustubh never let Parth leave the home during a baton charge (lathi charge). Many a night passed wrapped in the arms of nightmares, instead of the warm snuggles of their mother. Sleeplessness was common. An empty stomach was common. The fear of stepping on the stone without a base was very common. The only rare thing was to have the courage to stand against wrong. Which they were about to grab. Nothing was easy. They had to earn their everyday from the Almighty. Not a single day said Toodle-oo keeping a side the dreads. Suddenly, Kaustubh and Parth heard a knock. The younger one was making gestures and whispered, not to speak. Kaustubh keeping his nerves calm went near the window. He tried to look through the holes. *"Arey eta ami, bhai dorja khol"* (Hey, this is me, open the door) a voice too familiar to them said. It was none other than chief Dada who was knocking. Kaustubh hastily opened the door and let him in. Parth then stopped shivering and looked at chief Dada's face. He was shockingly mum and sweating profusely. Chief Dada was there to speak about the possible happenings of tomorrow.

Chapter 7

It was the beginning of the end. The next morning members were gathered in chief's mansion from the dawn. Abhay and Parth were brushing with varnishes on every festoon and placard. Chief Dada was busy worshipping. Mrs. Sen was there helping her husband. Each time Kaustubh sensed that, he was standing on the marble floor, the presence of Mrs. Sen was all that he could feel. Those harsh words still echo through the veins. It was the time when the majordomo along with his sons, came to serve chapati with crazy hot tea. The pot was exhaling aromatic steams. Not every day was a lucky day to have a cup of heavenly tea. Although it was just the ordinary tea leaves, and not imported. But not a usual cup for others except the Sen family. It was the juncture of the day when the Sun was ready to stretch its arms. The dawn was ending, followed by the Sunrise, filled with hope. After having the chapatis, they headed towards the pond. They bathed there. It was the way, straight and narrow, from the chief's mansion to the pond. Nobody knew except the inhabitants. So, they made a queue and started running without bothering about anything. The bombing had started. Each time they stepped, a blast occurred. They reached the pond area. Kaustubh and Parth were both carrying a rugged bag. Within which they were carrying their clothes to change. Everyone was nervous, scared, and horrified. But by any means, they had to face and achieve success. For the most part, it was Parth who believed in his brother than anyone. Nevertheless, Parth was fearing simultaneously. He knew that no one was there except Kaustubh for him. Losing someone, especially the last one. This thought never flashed to Parth till now. But it finally flashed, while he dived into the water.

Chapter 8

The Sun turned into a scorching one. It was rainy yesterday, but luckily it wasn't. All was set for picketing. The festoons and placards smelled of raw and fresh varnish. Chief Dada was leading the crowd with Kaustubh. They all were gathered near Bidhan Sarani like before.

"Are you all ready to show them that they cannot divide us?" said with reverberated voice. "It was their wrong choice of decision, that they dared to mess with us", Chief Dada added. Then, with powerful voices, everybody hailed, *Joy hok Banglar*", and they started setting things to set on fire. *"Banglar Joy Hok "* And started walking, and surrounding. All and sundry were sniffing of Kerosene and the smell of black powder. The scene was heated with the tear bombs the white men threw at them. White smoke made their eyes red. Kaustubh was running along with Parth. To get rid, they had to escape from the spot. Chief Dada screamed, "Look back, Kaustubh. Look back." It was the time when they were in the middle. Unfortunately, they were enwreathed by the demons without horns. They were trapped. Parth Held Kaustubh's hand and tried to break free from the area. But the whites were standing tightly. It seemed impossible to run away. They again aimed tear gas and ran away. It was suffocating enough. Abhay said to Parth that he was about to lose his vision and fainted. Chief Dada couldn't resist himself from attacking them back. He ran behind, but he was unarmed. Anger begets wrong decisions. And wrong decisions sometimes cost death.

Chapter 9

The time was ticking slowly. It was looking like a chain of lives. Chief Dada was running behind the British men, and Kaustubh was running behind Chief Dada to save him. For Kaustubh, he was the man. So, without caring about his own life, he decided to save the human who was a preacher to him. For the brothers, he was the noble form of life. On the other segment of the scene, the bunch of people was hailing, *"Banglar Joy Hok "* It was the climax. Nobody knew about the denouement. The British sensed that they were being followed by someone. And someone was approaching with high-spirited feet. It was the vista, thoroughly resembled Rama holding his bow targeting Ravana. It was the white men who were aiming their pistols at Chief Dada. Parth arranged a few handmade bombs and threw them at their mob. But his eyesight was weakened by the tear gas. He catapulted in an erroneous direction. Kaustubh was the man on whom the bomb landed. The blast was the last sound that everyone could hear. Parth was stunned by the echoes. Kaustubh desired and dreamt of two things. Two of them were left unfulfilled. Was it the end? No, Kaustubh was immortal. His name stands for 'immortal'. Time coloured the white pages of his desire to see the undivided Bengal. The second he closed his eyes, a beam of sun fell on his face. Which made his pallor glow. He believed in life after death. He prayed to the Almighty to attach a bond with Mary in heaven. It wasn't possible on earth and with a single life to couple with the enchanting mortal. *Vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gr̥hṇāti naro 'parāṇi tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny anyāni samyāti navāni dehī* (The embodied soul casts away old and takes up new bodies as a man changes worn-out raiment for new.)