

## Dear Friend

*Sakhi*<sup>1</sup> by Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' in Hindi

Translated by BINDU SINGH

### Translator's Note

As a young girl, I developed a great love for reading stories in Hindi which continues till date. Perhaps the vivid visual world of words was a fascinating experience for a young mind. My deeper interest evolved into a sensibility for stories centred on friendship, love, relationships, and personal growth. But what left an indelible mark were the stories that brought forth sagas of sacrifices and emotional turmoil of separation. *Sakhi* by Suryakant Tripathi Nirala translated as *Dear Friend* is one such tale. It is one of the eight stories published in the collection *Chaturi Chamar*. It is a sensitive portrayal of the beautiful bond of friendship two women share; a bond even greater than filial relationships.

Written in polished *Khari Boli*—the urban tongue popularly spoken in North India; this story gives a view of the socio-cultural life in pre-independent India. The diction, words, and expressions of this story are simple compared to the other stories in the collection but Nirala has used certain Urdu words in his narration that are difficult to grasp. The influence of Sanskrit *tadbhav* is also felt. The language is more like Modern Hindi as we know it today. Interestingly Nirala who was born in Midnapore spoke Bengali as his mother tongue and learned to speak and write Hindi later in life, that too at the insistence of his wife Manohara Devi. He not only learned but mastered the nuances of the Hindi language and employed it as the *lingua franca* for his fictional works. His dexterity in this

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<sup>1</sup> *Sakhi* (Dear Friend) was published in Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' collection of stories *Chaturi Chamar* in 1945 by Kitaab Mahal, Allahabad. For the present translation refer to the story from this collection.

modern Hindi brought him name and fame and it did the same for the language.

Translating this story made me realise that the translation of any creative work is a difficult task. It is not just an exercise in grammar where you translate words, expressions, and sentences into the target language. In fact, it's a pursuit that all translators undertake to export the 'sentimental feel' of the narration into another language. There is a moment of desperation when the translated words fail to capture the full essence of the experience conveyed in the story. One cannot escape the difficulties of cultural differences. Words are situated in the social and cultural context. Therefore, specific words used for certain things and emotions in a particular language might not exist in another language. Finding an equivalent in the target language is not always the case, and replacing it with something that sounds natural and blends in the narration, and additionally conveys the same message is not an easy task to accomplish. So, in the process of translation many times one has to learn to find the middle ground because the readability of the translated work is one important aspect that I believe should not be compromised. And therefore, in this endeavour of translation, I have taken the liberty of pruning the expressions so the readers reading this story for the first time can get the feel of the story.

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### **Dear Friend**

Today it has been decided to visit the theatre. The young missies of Model Houses have all agreed to go together. Nirmala, Madhavi, Kamala, Lalita, Subha, and Shyama beautifully dressed themselves, meeting one another on the way as they gathered. It was earlier decided that all of them will meet at Kamala's house. Jyotimai alias Jyot had not yet arrived. The time to start for the theatre was nearing.

Lalita said- “She was so very happy in college today, chit-chatting, joking with the girls who had finished their classes and then left early for home. She had wholeheartedly agreed to go to the theatre. I had asked her- “What is it? You are walking on air today! Instead of replying she had looked at me and laughed heartily.”

Subha asked- “Then she didn’t attend the class?”

“No,” Lalitha replied.

“She told me that studies were ordained for her only till now,” Shyama said.

Nirmala asked- “Why? She is not facing any problems. Why is she stopping her studies then?”

Shyama started smiling and answered- “She says, now she has to stop studying and start teaching and has to make preparations for it.”

All of them looked at each other and started smiling.

Madhavi asked- “What does it mean?”

Shyama replied with a smile- “She is very concerned about teaching because the student is an ICS.”

“Really”, all of them interjected together- “So this is the case”

“Then let’s go to her house. Let us see how far she has progressed in her preparations,” said Lalitha

All started for Jyot’s house. All of them are students of Isabella Thoburn College. Some of them are in the second year, some in the fourth year, some in the fifth year, some in the sixth year. Jyot is now in the third year.

After reaching her house, all hustled themselves into her room. Just like her name *Jyot*<sup>2</sup>, her persona is also radiant. At that very moment, she was standing in front of the mirror and smiling. Suddenly seeing her friends brought a blush to her cheeks.

She said- “I was a bit delayed.” There was no reason in particular. She wanted to make an excuse, but her heart and mind were not in tandem. An intense feeling had dazed her body, even when she tried to control her desires with her soft words, it was evident to all.

Shyama said- “Now all your works will be delayed. Swiftness will only be seen while teaching the special student, that too without any payment.”

All laughed gleefully. Lalitha sees an opened envelope from England on the table and picks it up. Here she picks up the letter and there as a speeding arrow Jyot springs towards Lalitha.

But Shyama gets hold of her- “Oh, so impatient! Even though only the request to become your student must have arrived now.”

Lalitha started reading the letter in a loud voice. Shyama was holding back Jyot. The letter was written in English. More verbose than it was necessary. Byron, Shelley, and many other poets were referred to, even Vidyapati was not left behind. Jyot who was held back was brimming with happiness.

After finishing the letter, all were ready to go. They decided to hire a *tonga*<sup>3</sup> from Aminabad. After all, how can all of them accommodate in Jyot’s one motor car because the seat adjacent to the driver will have to be left vacant?

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<sup>2</sup> Jyot means light in Hindi.

<sup>3</sup> Tonga is a light horse-drawn two wheeled-vehicle in India.

Jyot remembers Leela. She said- “Oh dear, Leela is left behind. Let us take her also.”

“She was not asked earlier, and it’s doubtful if she will go” Madhavi replied.

“A typical miser, she holds her money tightly with her teeth. She earns not less than a hundred rupees from tuitions but behaves as if she is penniless,” said Shyama

Jyot is embarrassed by this comment. She replies- “If you were to write her biography, you would surely spoil it. There is no one like her in our college. Can you tell who is the earning hand in her family? She manages her expenses with the tuition money, pays for the education of her younger brothers, and also manages the expenses of the house. She does not want to trouble her old mother, and for it she toils so hard! Hard labour is making her frail. On her face, only her eyes are visible.”

## 2

Leela’s house has come. All of them enter. Leela was engrossed in reading.

Jyot grabs the book from her hand and keeps it on the table with a thud- “Miss *Layla*<sup>4</sup> don’t be enamoured by the tales of *Majnun*<sup>5</sup>. Oh Dear, all love stories end badly. Come, a Parsi company has arrived from Calcutta. Let’s all go there and receive some religious knowledge.”

Leela is two years senior to Jyot. She is pursuing her M.A. Jyot is playful and Leela doesn’t mind her playful behaviour.

With her empathetic eyes she looks at them and said- Oh Dear, you all go. Where do I have time for such things?

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<sup>4</sup> Layla is the tragic heroine in Layla and Majnun, an old love story of Arabic origin.

<sup>5</sup> Majnun is the mad lover of Layla.

“It’s not time, say it’s about the money,” Shyama said.

“Alright, the issue is money. After college, I teach tuition for five hours. Doctor Sahib, is a rich man. He advocates for the education of girls. He is also aware of my condition. I teach the new wife of Raghunath Singh, the tax collector, to earn forty rupees from there. All the expenses of the house depend on it. And after all this, I have to take out time for my studies as well. You all can understand my troubles. The shortage of time and money in my life is well understood.

“Okay, Madam. Let’s go”. Jyot said- “For you, a free pass will be arranged.”

“Jyot, you are gleaming today, like a sword pulled out from the scaffold. What’s the reason behind such happiness,”- She affectionately asked her.

“Madam, she has become the wine that is gulped down and intoxicates the senses,” Shubha answers with a smile.

“No,” Kamala said- “Now- take a look at her- a smile dancing on her lips, eyebrows arched, wavering in her attitude, there are acceptations and rejection as well.

“What is the matter,” Leela asked innocently looking towards Jyot.

“It’s very secretive and poetic as well. All this debate is delaying the matter. Truth is that she has received a letter from Mr. Shyamlal, ICS, a marriage proposal, and if she agrees- then everything -three thousand per month salary will be at her disposal. A permit has been sought to love and marry her. Now you understand.” -said Nirmala

“Then has your father agreed to this proposal”, Leela asked Jyot.

“Well said,” Jyot answered- “If you are getting an ICS groom, then fathers will readily agree for marriage.”

The room echoes with Kamala’s laughter.

“You all go. Please excuse me, I don’t have time”

“No, Madam. You will get first-class grades and we will be left behind snuggling in mediocrity, we will not let this happen. You have to come, change your clothes.”

Jyot loves Leela and also respects her. Leela also understands that her free-flowing words reflect her pure heart that can readily share even her most precious things. Therefore, she accepts her proposal, changes her clothes, and goes with them.

### 3

Leela’s class gets over before three. From there she goes to Bhainsakund to give tuition to the Tax collector’s wife. Every day she has to walk long distances. She can somehow manage to buy a bicycle. But learning to ride it in the fields crowded with men was shameful. “Who will hold the cycle? And if she falls people will laugh at her”- Such thoughts were the hindrances. So, she takes the pain of walking.

When she returns from Bhainsakund in the evening around 5 p.m-6 p.m., she has been observing for a few days that two Moslems follow her. God knows what they talk about among themselves. Sometimes they walk very closely to her and her heart begins to prancingly throb. But she would quickly walk away. As she would walk swiftly, they too would follow her swiftly. Whom should she complain to? Much of the path of Bhainsakund was deserted due to Bungalows and gardens there. Walking with her prancing heartbeat, she stopped to catch her breath only when she was near a village.

Deep within herself, she felt sorry for her helplessness. All harass the weak. But what was in her capacity, to keep quiet

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and work out a solution. She didn't tell her mother about it, what if she stops her from going then how will the expenses be managed?

One day while she was returning, she heard one of them blabbering obscenities- he was loud so that others could listen. She walked swiftly. They also walked swiftly behind her- only three-four hands distance was in between them. Then they dared to say such words that hearing it was beneath her dignity. Fear was running within her. She sees a country Sahib, wearing a hat and a coat coming on the path. Seeing him, the ruffians turn back. When Leela reaches him, panting for breath she told him- "Since many days two ruffians have been following me. I come to teach the Tax collector, Raghunath Singh's wife. When I return from there, I find them in the path. Today they said such words to me..." She controls her overwhelming emotions.

When the light falls on her face, he can see the brimming tears in her big eyes. He angrily looks at the path. He said- "Perhaps, those persons have run away seeing me. Nearby is my bungalow. Please come, I will send you back in my motor car. "But, then...", Sahib was thinking something as he walked ahead. Leela followed him. Inside the courtyard, in the garden, the Sahib was standing. The lamp post in front of the bungalow makes visible Leela's frail beauty, her long shining face, and big eyes as if she was a beautiful canvas of sadness. Sahib asks her- "May I know your good name."

"My name is Leela"- Lowering her eyes, Leela answered.

"You should be careful. Are you married?"

"No. I am a student of Isabella Thoburn College."

"In which class do you study?"



“I am pursuing M.A”, She answered softly and shyly lowered her gaze.

Then the Sahib requested to know “Are you a *Brahmin*<sup>6</sup>?”

“No, I am a *Kayastha*<sup>7</sup>”.

“Where do you live here?”

“In the Model Houses”

Sahib is a bit surprised. He asked- “Does a girl named Jyotimai live there? She is a student of B.A. first year in your college.”

Leela is also surprised. She gathers her courage. Shyly she asks- Sir, what is your name?

“I am called Shyamlal. – Listen you, ask someone to bring the car.”

Leela’s hesitation was lessened to a great extent. She said- “Yes, I have heard about you”

Sahib grew curious. Hastily he asked- “Where have you heard”

Leela smiles. She said- “Friends of Jyot had stolen one of her letters.”

Sahib answers in a falling tone- “I have not yet received any answer from her. Her father had met my father when I was in England. I have her picture that was sent to me. After returning from England, I wrote a letter to her but I have not yet seen her. Heard only praises about her.” After telling this, Sahib becomes thoughtful

The motor car arrives.

With a smile, Leela assures him that she would ask Jyot to write to him. Sahib silently lowers his eyes and stands there.

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<sup>6</sup> Brahmin is a member of the high caste community in India.

<sup>7</sup> Kayastha is a member of the upper caste community in India.

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After some time, he said- “No, please don’t ask her” Then he invited Leela to step inside the motor car.

Leela thanks him and sits in the car. The car starts from there.

#### 4

On the third day, Babu Shyamlal received a reply from Jyot. It was written-

Babu Shyamlal-

I did not write back because it was against decorum. Today, I learned about the by chance meeting you had with Leela Didi. *Layla* who is destined for her *Majnun*, will always meet her *Majnun* in such a similar manner. Always protect your *Laila*, I request you. Then our relationship will become sweeter, because to whom one’s sister is married if he can call her *Sali*<sup>8</sup> so can the girl call him *Jija*<sup>9</sup>. I hope this relationship with you will be lasting.

Yours  
Jyot

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### About the Author

Suryakant Tripathi ‘Nirala’ (21 February 1896 – 15 October 1961) was born in Midnapore, then Bengal Presidency, British India. He is one of the pillars of “*Chayavad*” movement in Hindi poetry. He was not only a popular poet but also wrote stories, essays, and memoirs. His body of works -poetry, fictional narratives, and essays reveal to readers a man who amazed his readers with his sensibility to emotion and total disregard for material craving. The present translation *Sakhi* (Dear friend) is one of the eight stories from his collection

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<sup>8</sup> In Indian colloquial language Sister-in-Law is called as Sali.

<sup>9</sup> In Indian colloquial language Brother-in-Law is called as Jija.

Dear Friend

*Chaturi Chamar* first published in 1945. It is a sensitive story that portrays the tender affection that a young girl nurtures for her friend. How the bonds of friendship are greater than even filial relationships are beautifully revealed in this story.

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