

My Uncle Chajju it was who really caused most of the trouble about the tractor. Of
5 course, not being a devout person he was not the person who raised the slogans
'Religion in Danger,' 'The invention of the Devil,' and so forth. In fact, as soon as the
affair began to assume the form of a Hindu-Muslim issue, he literally put his foot
down on the machine and very proudly had himself photographed, as a Sahib has
himself photographed with his foot upon the back of a tiger which a Shikari has
10 actually shot. Nevertheless, it was a phrase of his which was responsible for the
whole rumpus, or rather a great deal of it.

The facts of the case, which has assumed the significance of a legendary happening in
our parts, were these. When the big landlord of our village, the Nawab Sahib of
Bhagira, died, his only son, Nawabzada Mumtaz Ali Khan, who was reputed to be a
15 worthless, irresponsible fool, addicted to such European habits as bad company and
drink, came home from abroad and started to behave in a manner which most people
thought was quite mad, or to say the least, somewhat strange. For, in the old days
when a Zamindar died, his son and heir generally levied a tax for the funeral expenses
on the peasants and followed it up by levying another tax still for the motors and the
20 horses he had brought and generally made the peasants aware of the advent of a new
order. But, on his arrival, Nawabzada Mumtaz Ali Khan issued a proclamation that
the sum of seven lakhs, which has accrued through the illegal dues of the previous
year would be distributed equally to all the peasants of his seven villages and that
anyone who came to see him and put token money at his feet before making his plea,
25 would not be listened to at all, and that uncle Chajju, who was the ring leader of the
goondas of our parts and had been exiled was to be allowed to come back.

Most of the peasants, whose fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers had been
known to pay Nazrana, though secretly happy at being relieved of illegal exactions,
still thought that it was bad form on the part of the new Nawab and a breach of the
30 old custom, for, they said: 'After all the Zamindar is in the position of a ma-bap to us.'
And uncle Chajju came back thumping his chest like Goonga, the famous wrestler, the
Rustum of Hind, and declared that the new landlord was simply yellow and
frightened of him.

When Mumtaz announced his next set of reforms, that he intended, by deed poll, to
35 renounce all rights to his land and formed a Co-op in which all the tenants had equal
shares, there came various deputations from the elders of the villages, relations and

friends to restrain him from his insanity before the papers finally went through. The Deputy Commissioner of the area called the errant boy to him and reprimanded him severely for betraying the trust reposed in him by his forefathers, the community and the Sarkar. And, needless to say, the papers were annulled and the reforms were not executed.

Of course, Mumtaz was nothing if he was not a stubborn mule, once he had got hold of a notion in his head. And he began a long series of debates with the Sarkar about his right to divest himself of the land and yet avoid a Court of Wards being imposed on him. But while this matter was still dragging on and all kinds of opinions, good and bad, were being expressed by people about the Nawab's strange behaviour, he brought in that tractor which caused the biggest crisis of all.

Certainly Mumtaz had chosen the wrong moment to introduce this gadget on his estate. For, the months of talk about the new-fangled ideas which he had brought from Europe, and adverse comments on the long-haired, unkempt, dishevelled men and women, called, 'Comrades,' who went in and out of the 'Big house,' day and night, his reputation was in that state of stasis when one more error would lead to a final show down. Perhaps he forgot about the fate of Amir Amanullah of Afghanistan. Or, may be he modelled himself on Mustapha Kemal. At any rate, he only escaped by the skin of his teeth and he ought to be grateful that he is alive today.

The actual incident happened under the banyan tree just outside the big home one morning. The giant tractor had been fetched about eleven O'Clock from the Railway Station by Comrade Abdul Hamid the Engineer. Abdul Hamid brought the monster engine not across the main road, which is mostly empty except for straggling pedestrians, but through the fields of the estate when the peasants were busy ploughing for the Rabbi harvest, and, as the machine furrowed the earth deeply before it came to rest at Mumtaz's door, the peasants gathered from all sides, chased the tractor, some shouting, some just staring, some whispering to each other, all aghast with wonder or fear at this new monstrosity which had appeared in their lives and which threatened to do something to them, they knew not what.

It was at that juncture that uncle Chajju took the lead in the crisis. By one expletive he crystallised the feelings of all of them.

'Rape-mother,' he said caustically, even as he sat smoking the hubble-bubble under the banyan tree.

'That's right,' old Phagu chimed in. 'I hear it tore up the earth as it came along.'

'The earth then has been desecrated!' said Shambhu Nath, the Brahmin priest.

‘Han, the Corn Goddess, the mother, the giver of all food, has been raped!’ said his devotee Dhunni Bhagat, running up behind him.

‘Toba! Toba!’ said the Maulvi of the mosque, rolling his eyeballs and touching his ears under his green turban.

5 ‘Rape-mother!’ repeated uncle Chajju. ‘Why doesn’t this boy Mumtaz come out and tell us what is in his mind, the secretive one. What is his game?’ and he wore a quizzical expression on his frank face, which was more the index of a hurt pride than anything else, almost as though being an open-minded, hearty, old rogue he resented the fact that Mumtaz had not taken him into his confidence.

10 ‘I hear,’ said Jodha, the oldest peasant of the village, ‘that as the White race has never possessed the Shiva-Shakti which was in the sinews of our people, they have been inventing all kind of artificial medicines to make themselves potent. If it is true, what Dhunni Bhagat says, that the Corn Goddess has been raped, then this instrument
15 ought to be sent back across the seas to the perverts who have invented it... Why, our religion, our shame is involved! Darkness has descended over the earth. What are things coming to? That our boys should be supposed to be so weak that they can’t plough the land with the good old wooden plough! That I should have lived to see this insult to our race!’

20 ‘Ohe chup kar, Baba!’ said Chajju. ‘It is not your voice we want to hear, but that of this young landlord of ours.’

‘Toba! Toba!’ whispered the Maulvi rolling his eyes and touching his ears.

‘Why are you touching your ears and whispering because we have spoken the truth!’ said devotee Dhunni Bhagat. ‘You are very shocked at our language but seem not to care that our mother earth, the Corn Goddess, has been desecrated...’

25 ‘To be sure, it is a question of religion,’ said Shambu Nath. ‘No Hindu landlord would have brought an artificial instrument like this to tear up the earth of a Mohammedan village.’

‘To be sure!’ said Tirath, a crotchety, old shopkeeper, ‘our religion has been despoiled.’

30 ‘Ohe chup, stop this kind of foolish talk and call that young son of a gun to come and explain to us what he has inflicted on us,’ counselled uncle Chajju.

‘To be sure! To be sure!’ said one of the young peasants. ‘It is probably an electric machine, with power stored in its belly,’ said another.

‘Uncle Chajju is right — we must know what it is for?’ opined yet another and tried to touch the tractor ever so gingerly.

5 ‘Ohe careful, Ohe careful, it is the magic of Shiva-Shakti in a new form,’ speculated Jodha. ‘The invention of the Ferungis, who have weakened our race. You might die of the touch as the crows on the electric wire die every day.’

‘Our Mahatma had already warned us against such machines,’ said Dhunni Bhagat. ‘We will not stand for the rape of the Corn Goddess, specially under Congress Raj.’

At that instant Abdul Hamid, the Engineer, emerged from the big house.

10 ‘Now then, come and tell us your meaning in bringing this here,’ challenged uncle Chajju.

‘Get away, get away, don’t crowd round the Tractor,’ said Hamid arrogantly, ‘Nawab Sahib is coming.’

‘Ohe look, folks, our religion has been despoiled!’ shouted Dhunni. ‘And he talks like this, Our Corn Goddess...’

15 ‘Yes, there is leather on it, I am sure, somewhere,’ added Shambu.

‘Go, go, lentil eaters,’ shouted Hamid.

‘Don’t you insult the priest of the Goddess after you have trampled upon her body!’ said Dhunni.

20 ‘Don’t you bark,’ said Hamid, measuring himself up against the devotee, with his torso stretched tight.

‘Toba,! Toba!’ sighed the Maulvi and wagged his beard,

‘Come, Come, boys,’ counselled uncle Chajju. ‘There is no talk of religion or the Corn Goddess or anything like that. All we want to know is what is this machine, how it is going to be used and what it is made of...’

25 ‘To be sure, to be sure, uncle Chajju is right, that is what we want,’ said the boys of the village.

‘I can settle that easily,’ said the Nawab craning his head behind the knot of men who had gathered round Hamid, the Engineer. ‘It is a Tractor — that is what it is called.’

‘So it is the rape-mother tractor!’ said Chajju partially satisfied.

‘It has despoiled the body of our mother, the Corn Goddess!’ shouted Dhunni.

‘It has ruined our religion,’ said Shambu.

‘We will have no truck with this Tractor,’ said Jodha. ‘Toba, Toba!’ said the Maulvi.

5 ‘Ohe, stop this loose talk,’ said uncle Chajju. ‘Let him explain now, let him talk since he has broken his vow of silence, the shy boy.’

‘Well, it is a machine which can do the work of a hundred bullocks in one hour. It will till the land of all our seven villages in a fraction of the time that it now takes us to plough it.’

10 ‘Are you sure it is not a gari with hidden guns in it?’ asked Chajju. ‘You haven’t brought it to shoot us down with, have you?’

‘There is probably imprisoned here all the Shiva-Shakti which the white race has robbed us of during their rule here,’ said old Jodha.

‘There is magic power in it!’ said Phagu.

15 ‘Jinns,’ said another peasant.

‘Bhutts?’ said yet another.

‘Don’t be so suspicious, brothers,’ said the Nawab, ‘It is for your good that I have brought it. It is only iron and steel, so tempered as to plough the land quickly.’

20 ‘I would like it to be taken to pieces before I can believe that there is no magic in it,’ said Phagu. ‘And Jinns and Bhutts?’

‘Ohe it is the Shiva-Shakti, fools,’ assured Jodha.

‘It is all right so long as there is not a gun concealed in it,’ said Chajju. ‘That is all I am concerned with, for I am a man of peace!’

25 At that there was loud laughter, for my uncle Chajju is too well known as a cantankerous, quarrelsome creature to be altogether accepted at his own valuation as a man of peace.

‘Well,’ said the landlord after the amusement had subsided, but before the atmosphere of goodwill built up at the expenses of Chajju had altogether evaporated, ‘The Tractor is yours and you can take it to the fields.’

5 ‘I suspect it is like the decoy wooden horse that was used by the soldiers in the story of the land across the seas!’ said Phagu shaking his head sceptically.

‘I think, Baba!’ said uncle Chajju. ‘You are right in suspecting this engine. And I agree with you when you ask for it to be taken to pieces before our eyes. We will only be content if it is reassembled before our own eyes. Because, then, we can learn to master all the Jinns and Bhutts in it!’

10 ‘Uncle Chajju,’ said the landlord, ‘I can see your meaning. It is right that you should be able to contact the Jinns and Bhutts in it. I nominate you to be the foreman under whose supervision the Engineer Sahib will take it to pieces. And then you shall learn to drive it, so that all the demons in it do the rough work of the village and give us more time to sleep under the shade of this banyan in the afternoons.’

15 ‘It is a great shock to my sensibility to learn to harness a steel plough,’ said uncle Chajju, ‘especially as I have never got over my love for my two bullocks who died in the drought, but I don’t mind putting myself out a little if all of us can really have a longer siesta... In the hot weather there is no place like the shade of this banyan.’

20 Uncle Chajju is one of those funny men who has only to open his mouth to say a word to make people laugh. Perhaps it is his manner more than his method. Certainly, it is the tonal quality of his thick Punjabi accent that gets the villagers like a contagion. The amusement created by his speech reconciled all the recalcitrants to the Tractor, though not until after it had really been pulled to pieces and each peasant had touched its several bolts and knobs and felt the motive power of its dynamo next to their ears.

25 After the terror of Jinns and Bhutts had been appeased and curiosity satisfied, it remained for honor to have its due share. The Nawab photographed all the villagers with the Tractor in their midst. And, of course, uncle Chajju, in the role of the new driver, stood like a colossus right in the foreground of the picture, as a Sahib stands with his foot upon the back of a tiger which a shikari has actually shot.

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