

THE GATES OF HEAVEN

Kaviya K.¹

¹ Student, B.A. English Literature, Department of English, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

Sorgavaasal is a short story written by Vaasanthi. It was first published in the Tamil magazine, *Aanandha Vikatan*, in the year 1977. The story revolves around Bindhu, a nine year old boy, whose life becomes a hurdle all of a sudden. The story is set in Shillong, Meghalaya. His mother dies, his father is arrested and his elder brother goes missing on the spur of the moment. With a mentally challenged sibling to take care of, the story tells, from the point of view of Bindhu, how he overcomes these problems and takes a leap of faith to move on in his life. This story revolves around the contemporary problems in the society. This paper is the translation of the Tamil short story *Sorgavaasal* into English as *The Gates of Heaven*.

Keyword: Translation literature, Vaasanthi *Sorgavaasal*

“Won't he let me in today also?” was the constant thought in Bindhu as he stood waiting at the prison gates with lunch in his hands. The freezing Shillong air meant nothing to him than his worry for Hariram. The police do not seem to let him inside unless bribed. Where would he go for Rs. 2? His father already starved a day. However, he stood there in the confidence of *Madrasi MemSaheb*¹, who made phone calls in hope of trying to let him in.

He walked to the gate, anxiously. To his surprise, he was let in by the prison keeper with a stern moustache whose stern voice followed, “Give the lunch and leave quicker.”

Without a second thought Bindhu rushed inside in great relief. He saw Hariram seated with his head bent on his knees.

“I have bought you lunch, father.”

Hariram lifted his head suddenly. How much he looks aged in these five days? Bindhu's eyes filled with tears as soon as they saw his father.

“The prison keeper didn't let me in. So, I couldn't bring lunch yesterday,” he said as he was unpacking the lunch. His eyes were fixed on Hariram. Hariram ate in silence. His eyes never met Bindhu's.

“You are hungry. Aren't you, father?” asked Bindhu.

Hariram did not reply. It was silence all again. Bindhu wanted to talk. He longed for at least one word from him. Were the spices enough in the food he cooked for him all by himself? What to do with corn that looks ripe all of a sudden? So many, were the questions in his mind.

Fortunately, he made Rs. 3 to bribe the prison keeper by selling some corn, in case he demanded money. Else Hariram should starve another day. *Madrasi Memsaheb*'s help saved his hunger today. It was a hard time for them without Hariram. Jagdish, Bindhu's elder brother took care of the cows and milked them. Bindhu woke up at five, every morning and supplied milk at the doors of the customers. He had to absent himself to school to carry lunch for Hariram. But he wasn't much worried about it. He was determined to learn them later. Why, won't Hariram go home in a week, just the way Bindhu believed?

Hariram finished his meals in silence. He sat as if his ears heard nothing.

“Won't you come back in another two days, father?” asked Bindhu.

Hariram twitched his lips, as if he didn't know the answer to his question.

“Why are you still imprisoned when you have committed no crime? Do you know something, father? People speak silently that you have cheated other's money. They say that the police are not fools to let you roam free.” But he stopped at once upon looking at Hariram; tears were rolling down his cheeks. Bindhu was in tears on seeing him. He scolded himself over his carelessness in telling these to his father. He was interrupted as the jailer's voice came in.

“How long will you be inside? Isn't lunch over yet?”

Terrified, Bindhu rose up. He looked at Hariram and asked for leave. Hariram nodded silently. Bindhu was in tears again. He lifted the lunch bag and left without turning back. How many more days will he keep carrying lunch from home to the prison? How many more days will he need to absent himself to school?

“Hey, Bindhu!”

Bindhu turned in shock. It was those two bullies from school. They stood near the beetel shop with *beedi* in their hands. Perfect hooligans.

“Bunking school, Bindhu?”

“Calm down pal! How can he come to school when he already didn’t have enough time to carry lunch for his criminal father?”

“Look! This will be a plight when you have a criminal as a father.”

Bindhu did not say a word. He kept walking, wiping the tears. “What benefit will I have in answering them back when I don’t have strong arms? Oh God! Won’t you send back my father soon? Won’t you prove the world that my father is innocent?”

Bindhu began to walk home hastily. Unexpectedly, the skies turned dark. He must reach home before it rains heavily as he must carry hay for the cows while Jagdish milks them.

It started to drizzle and Bindhu walked even faster. He left the umbrella back at home, for his brother. Black clouds marched towards him like black demons. Suddenly, he was caught with the thought of Dinesh, his younger brother. He has no brain development. Though five years old, he only recently has begun to speak a few words like a parrot. He would be dancing in the rain right now without bothering about the chillness and suffer from cold at night.

“If mother was there now...”

Bindhu got despondent at the thoughts of his mother. “How virtuous she was! How nice were the stories she narrated! How yummy her food was! Often she would say: Upon death, God will open the gates of Heaven for those who think good and does good. There will be no trouble once one reaches there, the Abode of God.” But the Gods opened the gates very sooner for her. A year back she died silently without any disease. Dinesh was four and Bindhu, seven, when she left them.

It began to rain heavily. Bindhu rushed into a shop for shelter. It rained cats and dogs. He pulled his woollen coat even closer. His legs shivered in the cold. How many problems, thoughts, fears and confusions danced inside that small head! “As soon as father comes home everything will be back to normal. The world will be peaceful once again!” If so, he can sell milk, as usual, to *Madrasi Memsahab* and to two other customers in the morning, then have two *rotis*² and leave to school.

Bindhu can never control his laughter each time he thinks of *Madrasi Memsahab*. She wakes up before sunrise and demand coffee very early in the morning. If it gets late to milk the cow and deliver it to her, she would ask him, “Why are you late *da*³?” She used to add *da* with most of her sentences and sound extremely funny. However, she is a very nice person to Bindhu. She would give him food whenever it went in excess and she could never tolerate if he ever looked dull. He thought that God would keep the gates of Heaven open for her.

It now stopped raining completely. Bindhu lately realised that those who took shelter in the shop had left already one after the other. Though it was only around 4:30 p.m., the sky already began to get darker. Bindhu walked home fearing Jagdish. Deciding by himself that Bindhu had been roaming the village, he would whip him, without asking for an explanation. If Bindhu ever made a sound, he would whip him harder.

He thought of his mother. Though she was a nice person Hariram often got angry with her. Bindhu, with eyes wide open, has seen him beating her like a mad man and, she accepting them silently. She never accused Hariram or told Bindhu the reason for Hariram beating her. Sometimes she would hug Bindhu and cry aloud. She would caress him and say, “You need to be a good person, think good and do good. Bad thoughts should never touch your heart. God keeps count for all our actions, son.” Bindhu never knew what to reply her. He would feel comfortable every time she caresses him and felt a kind of unexplainable pleasure. Whatever she spoke sounded as a promise to him. Her words, “Think good and do good” always rang in his ears. The thought of his mother, as a good person, stood pleasantly in his heart. “But why did she leave all of a sudden? Her words keep echoing in my mind. If she were alive she couldn’t have stood to see Hariram imprisoned. How big a problem it is for us, because of Dasrath?”

“Here, I am home. Looking by the sky, it must be around 5:30 p.m.” Bindhu walked even faster. Jagdish would have distributed milk by now. Bindhu was sure that he would get nice scoldings from him.

“Hey, Bindhu,” a voice interrupted him.

It was *Madrasi Memsahab*.

“I still didn’t get milk *da*,” she complained.

“Not yet?” asked Bindhu in shock.

“No *da*,” she replied.

“Fine, I’ll get it now.”

Bindhu rushed to the byre and found that Jagdish was not there. Either was there any trace of milk extracted. The cows looked unsettled.

“Where could have Jagdish gone?”

He thought that he perhaps might be sick and be resting at home. He walked home in confusion. Dinesh was sitting at the entrance staring at something. Bindhu crossed him and went inside. Jagdish wasn’t there.

“Dinesh, where is our brother?”

It did not look like Dinesh heard him. So he repeated once again, and louder.

“Jagdish has gone to the bazaar,” Dinesh replied slow and steady.

Bindhu was perplexed whether to believe in what his mentally underdeveloped brother told him. It again began to rain cats and dogs. He locked Dinesh inside the house. But Dinesh kept repeating that Jagdish has gone to the bazaar. Bindhu wondered if it could be true but couldn’t understand what work Jagdish could have at the bazaar when he did not even milk the cows.

It’s now long since the rain stopped. Bindhu panicked and felt a riot inside of him. “Did the police arrest Jagdish too?” That very thought was itself dreadful to him.

It was this same time, last week, when they heard a loud knock at the door while having their food. Two policemen barged into their house and got hold of Hariram. That bastard, Dasrath, was with them.

“It is he, to whom I gave Rs. 10000,” he said pointing Hariram.

Before they could analyse the situation they were put into, the policemen demanded Hariram to hand over the money. Not knowing what money, Hariram asked, “Which money?” As soon as these words were pronounced the police beat him thoroughly. In fear Bindhu hugged Dinesh and trembled on seeing his father being dragged to the prison.

From that day onwards Bindhu walked to and from the prison to their house with lunch for Hariram. For two days Dinesh never spoke a word. Jagdish sat like an insane for hours and finally went to sleep. So did Bindhu, but with tears in his eyes. He was afraid to question his brother about what just then happened. Only in the morning they came to know about Dasrath’s forgery. Dasrath had been involved in an archery scam and got Rs. 60000 through it. Once the police knew about the scam and questioned him, he pointed at random men and claimed that he shared the money among them, so that he could escape the scam. Hariram’s imprisonment is an effect of it. None knew when the case will go for hearing and get a judgment. Bindhu still could not understand why Dasrath, who was so good to them until then, needed to blame his father unnecessarily.

Bindhu heard the cows from the byre and came out of his thoughts. Once again fear struck his heart: why has Jagdish not returned yet? The cows never submit to anyone except his brother. He decided to search for him which will be a lot easier than milking the cow by himself. He started outside to look for his brother.

“Hey Bindhu.”

He turned.

“Where is the milk *da*?”

He couldn’t control anymore. He cried out aloud and *Memsahab* got terrified. Still crying, Bindhu spoke his heart out.

“What will I do alone *Memsahab*? What will I look after? The cows or the house?” he cried.

“Do not grieve, Bindhu. I’ll ask my peon to look after the cows. Jagdish won’t go anywhere, he’ll return soon,” she said as she consoled him. She forcefully fed him two *rotis* and said, “Would he have left you untold, if he weren’t your step-brother?”

Bindhu remained silent. He knew Jagdish was born to Hariram’s first wife and that they weren’t brothers by birth. But he never thought of him separately. His mother also never treated Jagdish differently.

He got up quickly. “I will go to the prison and meet my father,” said he as he left.

There was a big crowd in front of the prison. A policeman told Bindhu that he shall be let inside at dinner. There were two hours to dinner. Bindhu sat in a corner, tired and puzzled. Everyone spoke within themselves but Bindhu was able to make something out of it. It seems that many were caught last night on the scam and that many shocking news has come out. Bindhu got relaxed to an extent upon hearing it. If the culprit gets caught, his father can be easily proved innocent, right?

“Did you hear Hariram’s story”, Bindhu turned shockingly towards the man who said so.

He saw two acquaintances of his father seated at some distance from him. Bindhu, in shock, stood there unconscious of the surroundings for a while.

“I cannot believe that he is such a scoundrel.”

“It’s shocking how he had hid it cleverly for almost a year”

“We all know that his wife was virtuous and chaste. But he always doubted her. Who would have expected that he would kill her along with his first wife's son? He also made us believe that she died of a heart disease!”

Bindhu stood as if he was about to faint upon hearing it. Would there be any meaning in their conversation? Did his father even kill her?

“Was she killed? Why would he kill such a good mother? Was this why she died all of a sudden? Why do I even believe these men and their blabbering and blame my father?” They still gossiped something.

“Somehow Dasrath came to know about the murder. He blackmailed Hariram and demanded Rs. 10000 from him as soon as he got caught in the scam. Where could Hariram go for so much money? Once he knew that Hariram could be of no benefit, he leaked the issue. So, now Jagdish is imprisoned.”

Bindhu nodded his head telling no to himself. “There could be no way for this to have happened. How can they blame my father? Dasrath should be insane. How good a mother she was? Was she killed in such a way, she who taught us to think and do good?”

Bindhu felt as if his heart would shrink and stop beating. He heard the dinner bell and rose suddenly. He wanted to ask his father and confirm it from him that it all was a lie. “This is not true. This should never be true.”

“Father,” he called out as he entered.

Hariram looked at him and again buried his head in his knees.

Bindhu looked at him fixedly and seriously.

“Is it true? Is what they speak true?”

Hariram did not respond.

“Say father,” he demanded.

Shocked by the stubbornness in Bindhu's voice, he raised his head. “What do they speak?” he asked.

Bindhu could not speak a word. As tears blocked his sight, his throat struggled to make a sound.

“You... You have killed mother...” said Bindhu as he cried. “Tell me that it is not true. Tell me that it is a lie,” he cried.

Hariram sat motionless staring at Bindhu. Bindhu's shoulders panted as he cried.

“Speak father. Is it true?”

Hariram hesitated for a minute. Bindhu looked into his face eagerly.

“My son, I can't say ‘no’ anymore,” he mumbled.

Bindhu felt as if his eyes would fall out. He screamed, “No... No, it's a lie,” holding on to the bars.

He stared at his father as tears rolled down his cheeks continuously. After a while he asked steadily: “Why father? What wrong did mother do?” he shook Hariram's shoulder.

“Your mother was not a good woman, son. Dasrath...” he bit his teeth.

“Don't talk anymore. You killed my mother and now you blame her? Are you a father?” he rose up and fumed.

“I wish you are sentenced to death,” he said turning back one last time as he moved out quickly.

His legs themselves carried him to his home. His mother's words came to his memory: “You can't cheat God, my son. He keeps count on all your actions.” Did she die such a death?

He saw Dinesh sitting at the door step, shaking his legs. “Jagdish has gone to the Bazaar,” said he. Bindhu hugged him and cried out aloud. He said, “Let us both do good in our lives. But, will God give up on us like how he gave up on our mother?”

“I don't know,” said Dinesh.

“Will the gates of Heaven be open for us?”

“Yes, they already are,” replied Dinesh pointing at the door of their house.

KEY: TRANSLITERATED WORDS

1. *Madarasi Memsahab*- refers to a white foreign women staying in India, here, she has come from the South-Madras
2. *Rotis*- a flat round bread cooked on a griddle
3. *Da*- it is male tag in Tamil, like “dude” in English

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Glodjivic, Anica. *Translation as a Means of Cross- Cultural Communication: Some Problems in Literary Text Translations*. 2010. Pdf

Gorea, Lucia. *Lost in Translation- Beyond Words*. Pdf

http://www.valaitamil.com/literature_short-story_vashandhi/

Theiss, Irineu. *Overcoming the Barriers of Linguistic Differences*. 2003. Pdf.

