

When I Carried Her Across the River

She was waiting for me at Safakadal *ghat*,

Bundled like a large jute bag,

Sitting at stone-steps -

Sullen and sad.

I was wrought-up -

Guilty over my lateness,

Apprehensive of the society -

Unprepared for the mission.

Our eyes met in fearful frenzy,

Hands stretched but recoiled back -

As touch was taboo,

She got up.

I accepted the first *shikara*,

Slowly guiding her to seat,

After feigned disinterest

I sat with her.

The boat undocked itself
And half-circled to move away.
Our destination was Habbakadal -
Her in-laws.

When I found ourselves
Distant from the surroundings,
I looked at her face -
She was wet and sobbing.

How to console her
Was the challenge -
But I had to try -
I spun into thoughts.

Finally I asked her
If she could tell me her anguish,
She stared hard
And the sobbing increased.

I recoiled to my struggle,
Going over the bits I knew -
She had suffered for her principles,
But was defiant.

How do you empathize
When there is no resonance,
How do you heal
When the wound is self-inflicted?

The boat kept on moving,
The scenery kept on changing,
Jehlum was smooth,
The sunshine was upbeat.

The tears on her face
Wouldn't stop,
Her sorrow remained unraveled,
Our journey was coming to an end.

Boat docked,
And I defying custom,

Lifted her by hand -

Brought her to *ghat*.

I escorted her to in-laws,

She entered the gate abruptly,

Without a goodbye -

I froze to the ground.

I was able to take the same boat back,

The river was mourning,

Dark clouds were gathering in the sky,

Splashing waters echoed a doleful tune.

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Notes:

1. Safakadal, Habbakadal: Bridges and their surrounding localities in Srinagar, Kashmir, India.
2. *Ghat*: Waterfront
3. Shikara: Small, hand-propelled boat.
4. Jehlum: The main river running through Srinagar.

