

The Poisoned Shift

Dedication

"To those who became the voice of
the change instead of wishing for the change"

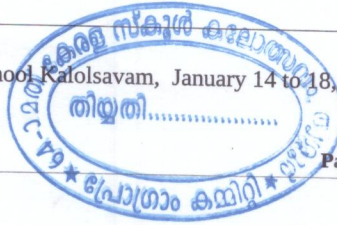
The sun crawled his way up along with the
whispers of the birds. Malli's feet sprinted restlessly,
almost mechanically. Never stopping. She went to
wake up her daughter, Radhu, who thinks herself
as a big girl ready to support her struggling
mother.

She went back again to stir something which
can barely be called as 'curry.' She rushed to
pack her things and kissed her daughter
a good by before leaving the rented room.

The clock struck 9 when she reached the
factory. It was a textile industry based factory.

Most of the workers were female and were single.

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mothers like her. She miserably tied her up before wearing the coat provided by the company.

She rushed to her position before greeting her colleagues. She looked around curiously. Before asking, "Where is Sobha and Vimala?"

"You didn't know?", The women next to her whispered.

"What happened?", Malli asked again.

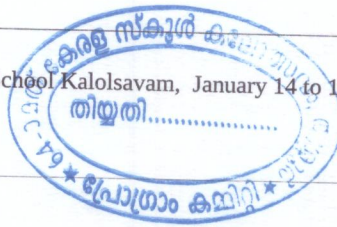
"Sobha died yesterday, Due to some seasonal fever."

Malli stood there stunned. Suddenly Vimala emerged from the door, half coughing and half breathless. Vimala placed her belongings and came to her position.

"Why were you late", Malli whispered to ~~Sobha~~ Vimala.

"The rain is pouring heavily, I had to call an ~~quick~~ auto~~rickshaw~~. Such a waste of money."

"Did you hear about Sobha?", Malli spoke quietly, as if she couldn't process the words out of her.



"I did, Somedays ago she went to check up
at the clinic provided by our factory." Vimala
ticked her tongue disxappointed. "I Guess every
things is written in our fate"

"But, I didn't hear anything about her funeral?"
Malli frowned with confusion.

"Your innocence makes my heart warm, Malli."
Vimala smiled slightly. "we live in slums Malli.
Her Surname became her Identity And her identity
Became a verdict she never appealed."

Everybody went back to work. Malli's mind was
occupied by the words of Vimala. She gently
folded the fabrics while she thought about
her daughter.

She was 11 years old, But still faces the harsh
discrimination from her teachers. Malli still remem-
bers the day when her daughter came crying
from school.



... Malli came back to reality, hearing the cough ...
... of vimala. Malli rushed towards her and patted ...
... her back. She looked around while ^{Kaali} ~~Kati~~ gave ...
... her some hot water. Vimala tried to wipe ~~of~~ ...
... her sweat on the forehead. Everything seemed ...
... blue for her. She nodded saying its ~~bad~~ fine. ...
... But she collapsed abruptly witnessed by everyone.

... Everything was in a rush. The carried Vimala ...
... to the clinic within the factory. Some went ...
... back to their work to avoid scoldings from ...
... the officials while kaali and Malli stayed ...
... back with Vimala. The doctor ran some tests ...
... on her while both of them stayed out of the ...
... room.

... "Malli, I don't think People here are sick or People ...
... here died due to some rainy ~~fever~~ fever". ...
... kaali spoke looking at a paper which was ...
... scattered on the doctor's table. kaali was the ...
... most literate among them. She could read.

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Malli's head turned towards her.

"What do you mean Kaali?" Malli's curious eyes
saw through the paper, unable to understand
what it says.

Kaali carefully examined the paper. She read
letter by letter, trying to make out every
detail.

"Sobha didn't die due to some stupid illness,
Malli." Kaali let out a shaky exclamation.

"She died due to some lung scarring
caused by... Asbestos machinery insulation!"

Malli looked at the paper again, then at Kaali.

"Kaali, I don't understand!"

"I don't either, but one thing is clear. The Air
we breathe is slowly killing us, Pushing us
towards death. It is affecting our lungs."

Malli placed her hands on her mouth unknowingly.

Her life flashed in her mind. Her daughter?

Her mind began to race. If something happens
to her, then Radhu will be alone.

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"What do we do now?"

"Escape? Fight against this?" Kaali looked at Malli

Hopefully. "We can let others know"

"Kaali, I'm scared, we will lose our job."

Their panicked conversation was interrupted by

the doctor. Kaali suddenly held the papers behind her back.

"Vimala is alright, she needs some rest. That will

do". The doctor spoke before diving into his

mobile phone.

Both Vimala and Sobha expressed the same

symptoms. With a heavy heart Malli walked

out of the clinic. She already knew

what's going to happen to Vimala now.

She wanted to fight, just like how Kaali says,

but she can't afford to lose this job. Malli

and Kaali didn't speak further about it.

They both grieved in their own spaces.



The next day crawled up again. Malli was once again moving mechanically. She didn't get an ounce of sleep yesterday. She thought of ways of raising her child incase she decide to quit. She then thought about people to leave her child with, incase something happens to her. She packed her things and went to the mirror. She put on her bindi and tied her hair up. She sighed as she saw a hand full of hair. She touched her hair. She really lost a lot. She looked at the mirror again to find her daughter staring at her with an understanding look.

She stepped inside the factory on time. She placed her belongings and wore her coat. She rushed to the workplace to find people crowded. The centre of it stood Mr. Rao, chief executive officer of their wing. "As you all know, due to some viruses, people are getting sick". Mr. Rao started.

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"So we must all take precaution against this!"
Rao looked around. "And many of our workers, sobha
Divya, chandra, hussein, and as of today, I'm
dissatisfied to tell you that we lost one of our
workers again, kimala-"

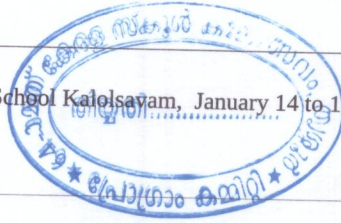
Malli's heart beat fastly she knew this would
happen. But it was too soon. Her eyes water
teared up. She looked down. If she had done
something yesterday maybe— Her thoughts
were interrupted by another voice.

"Did she really die sir?" People's gaze followed
the voice origin of the voice. kaali. Their eyes
landed on kaali. "Or did you all just killed
her?"

Whispers surrounded the room. People looked at
Rao for answers. kaali raised a paper. Malli
recognized in thick of fingers. Report of sobha.
kaali looked around at the workers.

"The company, They are killing us slowly
and they call it employment".

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... Kaali Said it. She spoke about it. While the workers
... stood there stunned. Nobody dared to move.

"You think People here will listen to you,
... this is not some typical cinema for them
... to follow your lead. If you speak one more
... word about this nonsense of yours I won't
... think twice about calling the security."

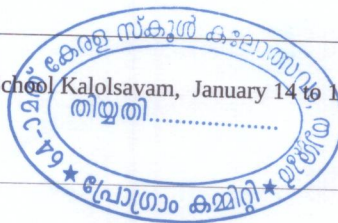
"I refuse". The eyes landed on Malli now.
... Malli pushed past the crowd and turned to
... look at them. "I refuse to work here anymore.
... and you don't have to."

Malli let out a sigh and took a deep breath
... and spoke again.

"The Air is Killing us. Safety is a privilege.
... It is a right. Denied to only those who
... cannot afford to refuse work. When survival
... becomes a struggle, silence is forced, not chosen."

Malli untied her hair and harshly unbuttoned
... her coat before throwing it on the floor.

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She walked out side, the factory

"I refuse". Malli sat down in front of

it "I refuse to kill myself myself"

Suddenly people joined, more and more sat

down with her raising their voice, it almost

feels like a single voice. The day could have

ended differently, but they chose to change the

usual. The day could have ended differently,

maybe they could have kept their silence

but they chose not to do it. Life is the distance

between birth and death and between them

there is choice.

In a nation of many tongues, silence is forced
only on to those who speak differently!!

~ Author

They say the