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Antique Thumri



[Stuti Goswami](#) · 14:24, 23 Jul 2011 · 10423 views · 5 min read



I have often seen your car speed away, especially on holidays-- shredding the city's melancholic dusk... or some stifling evening. Your glitzy cars sprinkle on the passers-by the fragrance of being 'freshly bought'...

Sometimes I grow perplexed counting your cars. So many of them... so many colours, models, shapes, sizes, curves; different companies, different names. Cars—royale, official, personal...

If the interiors of a car is elegant like somebody's drawing-room, that of another is intricate... for you at least it is. Still, you are accustomed to them all. If one has a classical recital playing on its radio, another has a cricket commentary. You might as well watch some movie or a popular music video. And you are in love with all this ...at least its better than listening to the evening news.

Nowhere does your demeanour betray your irritation, your unease. You might find on the seat an empty tiffin box with pictures of Tintin or Shaktimaan. On other days, you'd find Salman Rushdie, J.K.Rowling, Stephen Hawking, One Hundred Years of Solitude or 'Darjeeling Jamjamaat'. Income Tax, Service Tax files are also there; as are 'Motor Cycle Diaries'—Che Guevera, 'Debonair' or even recent posters of cds—films—theatres. Ramdevji's Yoga Magazines, newspapers beaming headlines of insurgent activities or student agitations, 'India Today', the unruffled cover of a poetry anthology—you flip through all these. Nowhere does your countenance betray the slightest emotion. It is as though you do not think at all, as though you were a motionless unflickering lamp.

Today as well I saw your car; it was hued in bright silver. As the last rays of the setting sun rolled down the edifices of the High Court, I saw your car take a sharp turn southwards, around the fringes of daylight. On its power steering was the hand of your companion. You were seated beside him, on the front seat.

Leaving the bustling city far behind, as your car speeds into the countryside— in the shadows of hills, touching the margins of the fields-- you inch closer. His left arm wraps around your waist, holding it firmly and drawing you nearer still. One hand on the power steering is enough to steer the car. Further there is the serene countryside, far from the madding crowd; the empty road stretches before your car. Only the white marks in the middle of the road accost you steadily.

A scenic resort. Your car halts. Packing some food and something to drink your car speeds away.

A culvert. You cross it and enter a narrow pebbled road-- that forks out from the highway to the right. Peepul and other trees on either side of the path cast cool dark shadows even under the blazing sun. Your car takes a turn in the direction of the shadows.

A small mulberry farm, a few beel, and a bamboo grove; beyond that a large tract of sugarcane plantation and a tiny processing unit. Your car halts before them. A gatekeeper hurries out of the wicker gate and salutes the car. Majestically, your sleek car slides into the compound.

Rubbing the shadows of dusk on their skins, the labourers proceed homewards... A gas lamp lights up a tiny room. Made of bamboo and cane this guest room is sparsely yet tastefully decorated. An aesthetic ambience welcomes you warmly, and you feel at home.

Outside, your car awaits you. Music plays softly on its stereo. Swaying to the rise and ebb of its melody, even the car seems to break into a divine dance. The gatekeeper not far off, smiles as he rubs some tobacco on his palm.

When the song ends, the night deepens, and silence prevails, your car dozes off. The darkness, increasingly dense, builds its nest amidst the sugarcane. A gust of wind flutters the tip of the green leaves. Some of the machines in the processing unit shudder at the murmur of dry leaves; as does the swarm of flies lying still over the heap of juiceless fibrous sugarcane...

After some time, forgoing the allure of silence, and shredding the bewitching darkness your car heads homewards.

Once again, you enter the brightly illumined city; but it's silent now. The concrete mansions-flyovers, bus stop-petrol pumps, markets-malls, streets and roads, nooks and crannies—in all their breath hang the weary stench of a tired night.

Your car halts at the entrance of an alleyway near the railway track. You alight and wave at your car. It continues happily on its way and you –clutching your vanity bag—advance, faster than your car and with unsteady steps, over the broken alley.

You reach a tiny tin-roofed house by the side of a long narrow lane. Like an aged python the lane runs alongside the railway track. This house too is yours. A 40-watt bulb flickers in the verandah - waiting only for you to return.

A little ahead the basti has turned smoky. Noises flow intermittently over the air. Probably a cylinder had burst in the evening or a kerosene stove had burnt some of the hutments. It might even have been some explosives hidden in somebody's possession. The fire has doused –and so it is smoking.

When you reach your home, you turn around for a moment. Your opulent, silver car-- now on the even city roads--is gradually dissolving in the distance. Far away, the twinkling red back-light smiles at you, promising to meet again. You smile back. Of course! You are a car yourself ...dazzling red, whose purpose It is to douse burning flames!!

by Tapan Das

Translated from the original Assamese story 'Prachin Thumri' by Stuti Goswami



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