

## Shoes

I have lived with some futile stories  
told by the characters from a fiction.

Stories

of a pair of shoes

my grandfather wore

producing awe-inspiring noise

like the thunderbolts.

He was a gentleman.

My maternal grandfather, the royal male.

He was a government officer

honest to the core

pleased his bosses ,the Britishers,

and pleased his wife, the

*Mem Sahab*, wearing full-sleeved blouses,

imported raw-silks, *kundan* jewelry

chewing betel and *supari*.

One day, grandfather was no more.

My granny long lived, her head held high,

telling us umpteenth times

the story of her husband's

shoes.

I grew up, the fourth girl in  
the house of half a dozen girls;  
I dared to ask her once  
why wasn't he a freedom fighter? Why  
wasn't *Bapu* his ideal? Why did he  
wear imported suits instead of the *Khaddar*?  
That would have  
held our heads high.

*"How dare you? How dare you?"*

The story of the *shoes*, the royal pair of shoes  
was dribbled into my ears in chorus  
this time, to shut  
my mouth, then and there.

Our grandpa  
if not a deity, was certainly a  
venerated ancestral spirit.

I was fed the story of shoes  
again, once I was a teen.  
My father's polished pitch-black  
shoes. Then I looked for many other,

farther words and shoes  
that travelled along the disillusioned roads.  
Throughout the long, tropical days of Odisha  
our father floated inside us  
like an invidious, old god, obliging  
our brains with luminous words,  
clamming our brains with the  
tapping noise of the shoes.

Time rolled on.  
Another pair of shoes appeared  
in my providence,  
crushed the  
flowers of my other kingdom  
where I was supposedly an empress.  
Shoes, this time, shabby, unpolished  
though.

I stopped planning the pages  
of my poetry books  
got lost amidst the missing lines  
till I forgot the art of breathing.

Then I thought I could

overcome

the echoing tap-tap of the shoes  
and chose to be a single-parent  
one fine morning.

Now there is a pair of small shoes  
neat and tidy, my son's shoes.  
No bangs or traps  
clasp my intellect with these shoes.  
In the midst of the chasm's yawn  
is there still a newer  
and better dawn?

But  
who knew? The  
noiseless clamor of the shoes  
had entered my head  
like the early sun of summer  
filtering into our rooms!!  
Now I keep myself busy  
sipping cinnamon herbal tea  
eating almonds, listening to music  
reading things of my interest.

I have heard  
the edge of the shoes had  
vanished decades ago  
when I first began writing in  
English without a flaw.

Does memory spare you?  
Do the futile tales by futile  
characters stand by you?  
Do androgyny and patriarchy  
give you the space  
to think otherwise?

The lispng, curious clatter of all those  
shoes haunts me now  
in my long summer days.

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