

Bonding sans Borders

In these times of political power play between India and Pakistan, here's a real life narrative of the ground realities from **Prof I J Bhatia**, who portrays an emotional bonding between two families through their sons, transcending the borders.



Those who die young are Like fallen flowers of early spring, Friends and foe alike weep for The death of a newly-crowned king.

The thirty-fifth death anniversary of my younger brother, Dr Ramesh Bhatia, falls on November 23, 2007. He died in a scooter accident in the prime of his youth. He was barely 33 when the icy hands of Death snatched him from us in the most tragic circumstances. Even after so many years, it has been difficult to forget him. Ramesh was the brightest jewel of our family, the darling of the whole community. When our family came to India from Burma, he had just passed his MBBS from the University of Mandalay. He worked as a house surgeon under Dr Chug at Willington Hospital in Delhi.

In 1972, he decided to go abroad for further studies. His passport was ready. He was about to leave for England in a couple of months. Our aged father did not like the idea of his separation from the family but later he agreed on the condition that Ramesh should get married. Hurriedly, a suitable bride was found and marriage was solemnised on 22nd September. We didn't know that we were heading towards a tragedy. Barely two months after his marriage, Ramesh met his end in a scooter accident on GT Road.

REFLECTIONS

The family received hundreds of letters of condolence from his admirers and friends. But I have to this day preserved a letter that came from a Muslim friend of our late brother. It is from Dr Khalid Khan, a classmate of Ramesh at Mandalay Medical College. Dr Khan now lives in Karachi, Pakistan. The letter, addressed to my younger brother, overflows with spontaneous grief. Dr Khalid Khan writes:

“Yesterday I received a letter from Dr Prem Vir, but my joy was short-lived. For, when I opened the letter, I read what happened to our Ramesh. My heart is filled with grief, my eyes with tears and his image is constantly before me since then. Not for a moment have I been able to forget him. My sister Sidika also wept with me when she heard the sad news, for she remembers him very well. It is unbearable for me to think that the boy who used to run with me in the streets of Mandalay, who used to play with me sometimes in fields, sometimes on sunlit roofs,

sometimes in semi dark streets, is no more among us. That healthy body, that handsome face, those big brown eyes sparkling with humour and life, that smile – oh, that laughter still rings in my ears... I feel he is sitting next to me, looking at me, laughing, talking, holding my hand; how could he leave us? No, Prem Lal, I can console you no more than you can console me, for this is my loss as it is yours — for my brother is dead...

Was he married only two months? Where is his widow? Tell her that her bridegroom was my brother. Tell her that there is nothing in this earth that I cannot do for her... Tell your father that I have

eaten from the same plate with his son. Tell him to think of me as one of his sons.

One day, I will come to your place. I will go to the river, where you have floated the remains of his body...I shall also throw some flowers there... Now of course, it is impossible to erase his image from memory, for me the pain is severe... the wound on my heart is fresh.... And it will always bleed.

Don't you worry my friend, I will come one day — I will embrace you, hold you tight against my breast and on the dust we will sit before God and cry together for Ramesh.”

The letter ends with the following lines in Urdu:

*“Rehne ko sada dar mein ata nahin koi
Tum jaise gaye aise bhi jata nahin koi
Ik bar to khud maut bhi ghabra gayi hogi
Yun maut ko sine se lagata nahin koi
Arthi to utha lete hain sab ashk baha kar
Naz-e-dil-e-betaab uthata nahin koi.”*