



# **SILENT** CRIES

The story of African Slaves, Indian  
girmityas and Racism 1820-1995



**DR SATISH RAI**

# *Silent Cries*

Dr Satish Rai

# **Silent Cries: A Journey through Four Continents**

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1st Edition (1995) Published by  
Sahara Publications, London, UK

Second Online Edition (2013) Published by  
Ram's Creative Temple  
Sydney, Australia

Third Edition 2017 Published by Educational Publishing House, New Delhi, India

ISBN:

Cover Design by Satish Rai

E-book formatting and uploading by Satish Rai

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## **Acknowledgement:**

This book has been written with generous help and support from several people. The original version was prompted by Nayesh Radia way back in London. As a friend and house mate his support was crucial at every stage of writing and publishing and eventually adapting the book into stage play.

Nigath Khan acted as an inspiration for me to write each chapter of the book. She would read each chapter as I wrote and faxed them to her. She would read the chapter and provide feedback without ever complaining. This process lasted over one year and I can say that the book may not have been completed without Nighat's support.

I also acknowledge my friends in London; Hugh Gulland, Sandy Gillett, Surinder Paul, Satnam Singh, Dev Barraah, Kamrul, Parvinder Singh, Sunny Bharati and Mohammed Ahemedullha, who remained by my side during very trying times I faced in London during this period.

I thank Sandy Gillett for posting her copy of the book and Rani Ram for painstakingly re-writing the whole book on laptop from the hard copy. However I take responsibility for any mistakes or omissions that may still remain in this book even after several editing and proof-reading. As a writer I may not have the necessary editing and proofreading skills as yet. Every attempt will be made to improve these skills in future.

Finally I thank all my friends who have read the book recently and encouraged me to release the second version.

**Dedication:**

I dedicate this book to my parents and children Priya and Rishi.

## Prologue

A series of events led to the writing and publication of the first version of this book way back in 1995. An integral part of my job at the London Borough of Newham council as Principal Anti-racist Officer was to recruit and train volunteers from the local community on racism and providing appropriate support to victims of racially motivated crimes and harassment. I found myself repeating the same information on the origin of Euro-centric racism and the nature of racism present in Britain at that time during each of the monthly training sessions.

I decided that a training video containing this information would be a good idea to avoid repetition and make the sessions more interesting. I had no knowledge of how to make a video film at that time so I discussed this idea with an actor/director friend. He liked the idea and we started to work on a script. However the friend had little theoretical knowledge of race and racism issues and he found it very difficult to translate the knowledge I had on to paper. It was finally resolved that I should write down in a story what I wanted to say in the video before we could put translate it into a video script.

Thus began my journey to translate the theoretical knowledge that I had gained during my BA (Hons) degree in Sociology and several years of experience as an anti-racist worker in UK into a story.

## **Preface to the second print edition**

*Silent Cries* was written in 1994 for the purpose of adapting it for the play by the same name. The novel was launched on the evening when the play *Silent Cries* was launched at the Tom Allen Centre in Stratford, London, in February 1995.

When writing this novel, Satish Rai was employed by the London Borough of Newham as a Principal Race Equality Officer. He managed a multi-agency project that involved London Borough of Newham, Newham Metropolitan Police and Victim Support Newham. His role was to recruit, train community volunteers to provide support to the victims of racially motivated crimes and harassment and to manage the project. At that time the London Borough of Newham had the highest number of recorded instances of racially motivated crimes and harassments.

At that time, London Borough of Greenwich situated across the Thames River, where Satish Rai lived and was an elected councillor, was known as the racist capital of Europe. Greenwich got this notoriety after racist murders of young Rolan Adams, Orville Blair, Rohit Duggal and Stephen Lawrence in early nineties.

The first part of *Silent Cries* is based on Satish Rai's undergraduate and post-graduate academic researches in London after he resigned from the London Metropolitan Police in 1987. The second part of the novel is based on his own experiences of racism in the London Metropolitan Police, as a worker at the Greenwich Action Committee on Racial Attacks from 1987 to 1992, and as the Vice Chair of the London Borough of Greenwich Race Equality Committee and its Police Spokesperson from 1990 to 1993. He gained additional insight on race issues when he wrote UK's first comprehensive antiracist policy and action plan, which was first implemented by the London Borough of Greenwich in 1990s. He also chaired the Greenwich Council and Woolwich Metropolitan Police joint committee on strategies on addressing racism and racial attacks, until 1993, when he resigned from the Labour Party.

During this period he assisted the families of Rolan Adams, Orville Blair and Rohit Duggal after their brutal murders. He had accompanied Orville Blair's mother to the hospital to view her son's body and attended funerals of Rolan Adams, Rohit Duggal and Stephen Lawrence. He worked with other antiracist groups such as Newham Monitoring Group and Southhall Monitoring Project.

Since migrating to Australia in late 1995 Satish Rai has been concentrating his research and work on girmity (the Indian indenture system). He was the first person to raise the issue of the 100th anniversary of abolition of the Indian indenture system (girmity) in 2015 during Girmity Divas in Fiji. The occasion was later commemorated at the Uttar Pradesh Pravasi Divas in Agra in January 2016 and was introduced by Shri Chandra Prakash, a prominent personality of Lucknow. Since then events to commemorate the 100th anniversary of girmity has been organised throughout the world; the first one was organized by Indian Diaspora Council in New York in February 2017.

The second print edition of *Silent Cries* is being published to mark this momentous occasion and as a tribute to the millions of girmityas, the Africans who had been enslaved and transported to the Americas and the thousands of people who have

suffered Eurocentric racism since the so called discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus.

I specially recall the events surrounding the racist murders of the innocent Black and Asian people during that time and since then. I feel for their families and friends. I also feel deeply for the millions of Indians who were recruited and transported throughout the globe and the Africans who were enslaved, transported and subjected to inhuman treatment over many centuries. The tears are for all the victims of racially motivated crimes and harassments and all those who have suffered and continue to suffer discrimination of any kind.

My thoughts also goes to all the animals who are being abused and brutalised based on ignorance, insensitivity, human greed and selfishness. May knowledge and sensitivity triumph over ignorance and brutality, some day!



## Chapter 1

Rewa is a little village in the heart of West Africa. It is almost inaccessible, except through a narrow passage in the rugged mountain terrain situated in the West. Beyond these mountains however, exists a luscious valley with a river running through it. The thick forest at the foot of the mountain gives way to ever green plains on the banks of the river. On the east bank of the river exists the small kingdom of King Ismail.

One of the ancestors of king Ismail had discovered the passage to the valley many centuries ago. He returned to his coastal village and brought his clan to the valley. When he died the valley was named Rewa after him in his memory. Since then the succeeding kings looked after their people well and the little clan slowly grew into a thriving village. King Ismail became the king at the age of twenty one and has been ruling his people for over thirty years in the traditions set by his ancestors.

However for some two centuries the people of Rewa have been hearing stories about a large number of people from beyond the mountains being captured by some white devils and taken away in huge canoes to far away places, never to be seen again. In some villages all the able-bodied men and women were captured and taken away for ever. The old and children were either killed or left to fend for themselves. From time to time a few would manage to escape from the white devils. Some of them even came to Rewa after their escape. It is from these people that the Rewans heard about the atrocities beyond the mountains.

Rewa has plenty of rich land. Its abundant fruit and root crop could provide for many. King Ismail welcomed the refugees and soon Rewa had many young and energetic people living in the village. The young new arrivals were grateful to the king and worked hard in the fields. They built nice huts and kept the warehouse filled with crops.

The King however had one big worry. Now Rewa had many young and healthy people. It was well known that the white devils were after the young and healthy villagers as well as the jewels collected by the villages over several centuries. Although Rewa was far from the coast and was well protected by the mountains, he also knew that people were aware of the passage into the village. He knew that some of the African natives were helping the whites to capture their own people for money or foreign goods. After many years of hunting and capturing African people along the coast, the whites were now looking toward the inland areas for more people to enslave and transport to some far away land. He was getting more concerned as weeks passed by and realised that it was his duty to make sure that his people were properly protected.

He talked regularly to his people about the security of Rewa. He told all those who went beyond the village not to talk to anyone about the existence of Rewa. He trained a group of men and put them as guards at all the key positions on the village perimeters. He told them to look out for any strangers and if anyone unfamiliar should enter the village, he was to be informed immediately. His security strategy worked

well for a few years now and he felt reasonably satisfied with the arrangements. However he was aware of the serious nature of this danger and the need for continuous security of the village.

The Rewans were grateful to their King for providing them with a good life and the safety from their enemies. In return they worked hard and obeyed the King's orders. They were always pleased to find an opportunity to express their gratitude towards the King. Any villager would feel very proud and honoured if any such opportunity ever arose in his or her life time.

There were certain occasions when the whole village would be able to show the king their gratitude and loyalty. A wedding ceremony was such an occasion. The villagers' joy held no bounds when they heard that their prince, Prince Jamal, was to get married to the Princess Norrie of Mba, a village beyond the mountains.

People of Mba travelled for many days to attend the week-long wedding celebrations. During the week many friends and relatives of King Ismail arrived for the final day of the celebration. The villagers had worked very hard for weeks to decorate the village and gather the best crop and animals for the big feast. Many extra huts were put up for the guests to sleep in the night.

The final night for the big feast arrived and the wedding ceremony passed off without much fuss. Now everybody was gathered in the big lawn in front of the king's hut, waiting impatiently for the feast and the celebration to follow. The more hungry ones sat expectantly around the huge oven made by digging in a rectangular pit in the ground in one corner of the lawn for the purpose of cooking the feast. Many large stones from the nearby river were put inside the burning pit. In the meantime, chunks of meat, whole goats and large birds were marinated in spices. They were then wrapped up in banana leaves and tied with strings made out of some tree bark. When the stones turned red hot and after the fire had died down, the carefully prepared food was placed inside the hot pit with layers of banana leaves in between. After all the food for the feast was thus placed more banana leaves were placed on it. Finally the food was covered over by a layer of earth in order to keep the heat in. Now the food was left in the pit for a few hours to cook slowly.

The whole process in itself provides the guest with great spectacle. Only a few people had acquired the art of cooking a feast like this, and the others watched the whole process intently so that they could also learn to prepare their food in that way some day. The food had been in the oven now for earthen-oven now for several hours. The mouth watering aroma which slowly escaped from the oven slowly spread over the whole village.

Inside the royal hut the king and the other royal guests had been enjoying the aroma for a while. Like everybody outside, they too had to wait for the chief cook to give her approval before the food could be taken out and served to the royal party and the guests. This approval was given only when she was absolutely satisfied that the food was properly cooked and ready for royal consumption. The food must be tender and enough time must be allowed for the spices to be properly marinated inside the meat, giving it the unmistakably rich and succulent taste.

Therefore, during the final stages of this process the chief cook had to endure a lot of friendly name calling and abuses from the hungry guests. Inside, the royal party was getting very hungry now. Unable to hurry the process they too indulged in abusing the chief cook.

“We will let her taste her own medicine tonight.” King Ismail said, pacing up and down the hut. “After she has given the approval and served us the food, we will tie her up in the centre of the lawn. We will then place a basket-full of steaming food in front of her, just far enough from her so that she cannot reach it. We will then begin the feast and tell her how delicious it is.”

The royal laughter was silenced by the booming voice of the chief cook who had silently appeared at the door of the hut.

"I have heard that Sire and just for that I will delay the feast for another half an hour." She announced.

The king looked at her in a mocking anguish. He drew his sword and handed it to the cook.

“Here Kuki, take this sword and rip my belly apart with it, but please, after you have fed me. On the other hand, I think I will do it myself, for I can’t wait to tuck into the delicious meal a moment longer!”

The king dropped to his knees in front of Kuki and clutched his belly. The appreciation for the feast had begun. Kuki stepped backward and spread herself face down in front of the king.

“Forgive me for saying those words Sire. I came into inform you that the food was ready and you can begin the feast now.” Kuki apologised.

The king stood up and helped Kuki to her feet. He removed a chain of silver beads from his neck and handed it to her.

“It’s alright Kuki. Take this as the king's appreciation for the hard work done by you and your assistants.” He said smiling. “Now go outside and inform the rest that the royal feast will now begin.”

A very happy Kuki left the royal hut as the royals prepared to go out onto the lawn for the feast. Kuki supervised her assistants to remove the food from the oven. One by one they placed the steaming chunks of food on specially prepared leaves in the centre of the lawn. As the last piece of the food was placed on the leaves, King Ismail appeared on the lawn. He was followed by the rest of the royal party.

King Ismail was a large tall man. Hints of grey hair and the bulging belly gave away his age and love for good food. His huge and imposing figure was in contrast to his soft gentle eyes and ever present smile.

Behind him appeared prince Jamal, tall and broad-shouldered like his father. He possessed his father’s soft eyes and gentle smile. It was not hard to see him

growing up to be exactly like his father in a few years time. But now, at age twenty one, he was just beginning his life in the footsteps of his illustrious father.

Just behind prince Jamal walked the tall and elegant princess Noorie, his newly wed wife. She had long plaited hair with gold beads shining brightly in the moonlight. She had unusually high cheekbones and was very attractive. Her face and neck was covered with gold jewellery. Her flowery wedding gown dragged behind her. Behind them walked the rest of the royal party.

For a few minutes the other guests forgot their hunger and the aromatic food placed in front of them. The drum played loudly as they danced and cheered the royal party. The cheers became frenzy when the newly-wed arrived in the centre of the lawn. The king acknowledged the crowd and sat down on the ground first, followed by rest of the royal party. The rest followed them.

There was no more formality now. The king was too hungry to wait any longer for the food. With a simple wave of his hand he signalled start of the great feast. They all ate heartily and paid generous compliments to Kuki and her assistants.

The feast lasted for several hours. The food was served by Kuki's helpers and one by one everybody enjoyed the feast. The drums played in the background and the whole village buzzed with excitement. As soon as the feast was over the lawn was cleared of the food. The drums began to beat louder and the dancing began in earnest.

## Chapter Two

Just outside the village entrances another group of joyous people were getting ready to pounce upon the royal wedding celebration. This group consisted of twenty white slavers and thirty Africans who had volunteered to assist them to capture their fellow countrymen for the whites. They all were promised foreign goods, alcohol and land in return for their services to white slavers.

Ten of these traitors had gone ahead to locate and overpower the village guards. Amongst them was Ramulo, a former refugee of the slavers, who had left Rewa some six months ago to return to the coast. Now greedy Ramulo had forgotten the kindness of the Rewans and led the slavers to the peaceful village.

The atmosphere in the village itself was pregnant with joy and merriment. Having feasted on the delicious food, everybody were now dancing to the heavy sounds of the drums. The scantily dressed dancing girls danced tantalizingly and one by one, pulled out the men onto the lawn. The newly wed Jamal and Noorie danced happily in the centre of the courtyard with rest of the royal family dancing around them.

The dancing went on for hours. After a few hours king Ismail become tired and sat down on his throne now placed outside his hut. His queen sat beside him as they watched the others enjoying themselves. They looked happy and content. From time to time they spoke to each other and laughed. Soon some other older royals joined them as they become victims of excessive dancing and merriment.

The slavers cautiously approached the celebration area, having first made sure that there was no one still in the huts. They first surrounded the area, their rifles loaded and ready. Then out of the darkness, a volley of rifle shots blasted out, dwarfing the sound of the drums.

The villagers, having never heard a blast of rifle, were totally bewildered and frightened. They throw themselves on the ground and covered their ears as more blasts followed. The king and Jamal picked themselves up and looked around for some sort of explanation. They did not have to wait for too long.

Out of the darkness a white man, dressed in an army uniform, stepped into the arena, his rifle still smoking after the last blasts. He was joined by the rest of the white slavers, their rifles pointing at the royal party. Behind them the black slaves surrounding the rest and pushed them to the centre of the arena.

Tom Walters, the leader of the slavers slowly approached King Ismail's throne and sat on it. Another slaver dragged Jamal and Noorie to where the king was standing. Walters told them to sit down and instructed the rest of the villagers to lie flat on their stomach. He then turned towards the king and addressed him in a loud and clear voice.

“My name is Tom Walters and I have come to trade with you, the king of this good village of Rewa. King Ismail you have something I need and for which I am

prepared to reward you handsomely. Do you understand what I am saying king Ismail?" Walters spoke in broken Rewan dialect.

"Tom Walters, I understand what you are saying. I have gold and silver in my hut. I am willing to trade with you. You can have the gold and silver. Please tell me what you have got for us."

Walters was silent for a while. He turned around and looked at his fellow slavers and mischievous grin slowly spread across his face. He did not realise it was going to be so easy. Some of the other kings and chiefs were not fooled so easily. He had to torture some of them for hours in order to get to know where their treasures were kept. A few even gave up their lives to save the treasures of the village. But this king offered him no resistance at all. He will be able to get out of this place in time at all, he thought to himself.

"My dear king, call me Mr. Walters. I'm pleased to hear that Rewa has so much treasure. I have something very good for you. For now instruct your men to bring out all the treasures to me. Three of my men will help them." Walters said and directed three of his men to ensure that all the treasures were brought out.

The king told five of his villagers where the treasures were kept and asked them to bring them out. Everybody waited in silence as they disappeared in the darkness. In a little while they returned with four sacks filled with the Rewan treasure, collected by the villages over several centuries. Amongst them were the gifts presented to the newly weds.

Walters opened the sacks one by one and his greedy eyes feasted on the glittering treasure. He could not believe his luck. There was enough treasure here for him to retire in style after this trip. The people of Rewa looked so healthy, even the old ones. A quick glance told him that he could take at least two hundred from here and sell them at a very good price. The profit from that sale, added to his share of the treasure, will make him a very rich man in Britain, he thought. He instructed the same men to take the treasurebags to the horses and put them safely in the saddle bags. He then turned to the king.

"In the meantime my dear king, we will show our appreciation and join your son's wedding for a while. Please bring me some of that delicious food and ask the women to feed my men." Walters said. He turned to one of his men. "Frank, bring me a couple of bottles of rum. The king must taste the rum, he deserves some now. My good king, come and join me."

The king did as he was to do by Walters. He did not like this white man ordering him around in his village, in front of his own people. But he felt powerless now. They had the awful thing called rifles and he knew what they could do with them. So far the situation had not been so bad. He had given away his treasure but more gold and silver could be collected afterwards. After eating food the devils will leave and they can get back to their normal lives. There was not much harm in keeping these people amused, if it is going to save his people, he thought to himself.

Walters handed the king a bottle of rum and told him to drink it. The king did not like the smell of rum and tried to hand it back to Walters. But Walters convinced him that what he was about to try taste was the favourite drink of the god; which will give him unbelievable powers.

“The way to drink this is to put it down your throat as much from the bottle as you can in one go. The more you put down the more strength and pleasure you will gain from it.” Walters said with a grin. The king soon overcame his reservation and took the bottle from Walter. He took a large swig from it and slowly removed the bottle from his burning mouth. His face screwed up in deep contortions and his eyes bulged out. He dropped to his knees and held his head in his hands for a while. Walter’s men laughed uncontrollably at the king as the villagers looked in unbelievable horror at the king. After a while the king stood up. The pain was gone and a strange look of pleasure had replaced it. He staggered up to Walters.

“Mr. Walters, my god sir, this god’s drink is indeed excellent. As you said, it needs getting used to though. But it is the good stuff. Yes, a good exchange for the treasures. How much more of this I will get, Mr. Walters” the King said.

The rum was beginning to take effect on the king now. Walters was getting more pleased with his strategy. If he could get the king drunk he may be able to persuade him to hand over to him all the people he wanted. On the other hand, if the king refused to cooperate he could be easily subdued, he thought.

“My dear king, I’ll give you hundreds of these bottles but first you’ll have to do something else for me.” Walters said.

“Mr. Walters, what else can I give you now? I have given you all our treasures. There is nothing of value here for you now.” The king replied.

Walter’s men returned with more bottles of rum, he told them to place the rum near the king.

“There you are my dear king, as I promised to you. Plenty more bottles of the god’s drink for you! Now you’ll rule like a god over your people. I’ll send you some more later.”

The king could sense that Walters was getting up to some kind of trick. He wanted him to leave the village as soon as possible, before he could do any more harm. He still did not want to upset him in any way, should he get nasty.

“Thank you Sir, I accept this gift from you in exchange for the treasure of my people. You have feasted well and I thank you for participating in my son’s wedding. Now if you pardon us, we will carry on with the celebration. If you and your people are tired, you can rest in the tents till tomorrow morning and leave after breakfast. But it will give all of us a lot of pleasure if you stayed up and joined in rest of the celebration.” The king said.

Walters sat in a pensive mood for a while. He could not help admiring the old king. He talked well and tried hard to protect his people. He knew that the king had

realised that more was to come for his people. He almost felt sorry for him, but he must do what he had come here to do and he must do it straight away. He did not want the king to talk him into doing something that he would regret later. The only reason he started this job was to make money for him. He had been in the trade for ten years now and had not let his emotions rule him before. He killed many people before to get the slaves back to the ship. He was not concerned with what the reasons were and what happened to them afterwards. He was interested only in the money he received for his work. Now, with this job done, he will not have to do this job again. He was desperate to quit this job and go back home to his family. This load of slaves would give him the freedom to live where he belonged. He must get on with job, he told himself.

“My dear king, I thank you for offer, but I can’t accept it. You see, we have come here for something else, the real treasure that you have. They are far more valuable than the treasure that you have given us.” Walters said. He stood up and cocked his rifle. “The real treasures of your village are your young and healthy people. They will fetch far more money than the jewellery you have given me. I am going to take all the young and healthy people of Rewa with me. Now, as the king you must ask them to cooperate with us and we will be soon out of your village.”

The king stood still, trying to clear his mind quickly because he was not able to think properly. He thought he had struck a good bargain with Walters. For a little while he thought the village was safe. Walters appeared to be slightly different from the other slavers he had heard about. At least he could talk to him. Maybe he should offer him something more, he thought.

Walters looked at the king. He was getting angry. He did not like what he was seeing. He did not want to see the old king plead with him any longer. He looked at his men. They were getting agitated as well. He had to get this over with right now, he thought, before his men began to think he was getting soft.

“Look here old man. I have travelled many miles for many days in order to take these people back with me. You have got some of the best men and women in Africa. Once they are in the ship heading for Brazil, I will get thousand of pounds for them. It will take your people years to dig that much gold for me.” Walters shouted. “So now my people will pick out the ones we are going to take with us. Anyone who gives us any trouble will be shot dead.” Walters stated sternly.

"Please Mr. Walters, spare our people. They are the souls of Rewa. Without them, Rewa will die. The fields will become barren and the warehouse will become empty." The king pleaded. "The children and the old people will die one by one. And there will be no one left here to follow them in future. Without them, Mr. Walters, Rewa will become a ghost village. Please Mr. Walters spare them."

Walters was very angry now as his men stared at the scene in amazement. He approached the king and placed the point of his rifle on his chest.

“Look here, I’m not going to argue with you on this matter. I’ve tried to do this in a civilised manner, but it seems to me that you uncivilised savages are unable to appreciate our English generosity. Talk is over now. I’ll deal with you in a manner



that you savages are used to in this uncivilised country.” Walters shouted. He turned to his assistant, Frank. “Frank, bring the chains and ropes. James, keep an eye on this stupid old king whilst I pick out the slaves we're going to take back with us.”

Walters picked out the slaves and one by one his man began to tie their hands and feet with chains. Then one by one they were tied together be waist with ropes. All the healthy women and men were tied up, except Jamal and Norrie to whom Walters now approached.

“These two will be my prized slaves. I know that Mr. Stevens from the Cariba plantation in Brazil will pay handsomely for a pair like these two.” He said to the king. “Frank, make sure no harm comes to these two.”

“You white devil, you can't do this to us. You can't leave us here to die bit by bit without our beloved ones. Look you wicked animal. Look at these old parents; if you take their children away they will never see them ever again. The children will be without parents; the sisters without their brothers. Have mercy on these innocent people, for god's sake.” The king pleaded in vain.

Rest of the villagers were crying now. The two groups looked at each other. Walters and his men just laugh.

"You are just concerned about yourself now old men. You are worried that you will have to give up all your luxuries and work for your living now. Well, that's just too bad, old king. Not a bad thing, you may get to loose some of your fat if you worked a little bit.” Walters said and laughed wickedly.

King Ismail suddenly pulled out a knife from underneath his royal gown and moving with unbelievable swiftness, he plunged it deep into Walters's heart. Walters reeled back, gasping for air. He fell to the ground with the rifle still in his hand. He turned around and levelling the rifle at the king shot him thought his heart. The king fell to the ground, clutching his wound. The other slaves began firing indiscriminately at the group with the old men and the children. One by one they fell to the ground.

“Good, Frank, good! Kill all these uncivilised bastards. I think the old fool has stabbed me in the heart. I'll get his son for this.” Walters stuttered.

He turned his rifle toward Jamal. But before he could pull the trigger, Frank shot him thought his head. Frank turned to the slavers and fired a shot in the air.

“He was no go to us. None of the slaves will be shot. I'm taking charge of this outfit now.” Frank shouted out. “Everybody calm down now and we will proceed as planned. Tie up the rest and we will leave as soon as we have loaded enough supplies for the journey back.”

The king lay on the ground. Jamal and Noorie looked around them. Everybody in the other group was dead. They dragged themselves up to the king. Jamal put his fathers head on his lap and stroked it gently.

“Why has the god turned against us like this father? Why? I can’t understand any of this. I don’t know what to do now father. I’m lost with out you.” Jamal cried.

The king wiped away tears from Jamal and Noorie’s eyes with his shaky hands. He was breathing with difficulty now. His voice was weak as he spoke his last words.

"Son, don't blame the good god for the atrocities committed by men. The good god has looked upon Rewa well for many centuries. It is the greed of the man from outside and from amongst us who are responsible for all this." King Ismail voiced was fading rapidly. "Don't blame the god for the evils of men son. Don't blame the god."

“Father, I’m glad that the evil Walters is dead, but I don’t understand why you attacked him. You must have known that they would kill you for that.” Jamal asked needing an explanation. “Why did you throw away your life like this?”

King Ismail opened his eyes slowly and looked at his son.

“I was aware of the weapons they had with them and what might happen to me. Son I tried my best to stop him from taking the people I love from our beloved Rewa. But in the end I realised that Walters was not going to listen to me.” King Ismail explained. “My son, our lives are worth nothing without you young people. Even if we would have somehow survived physically for a while, we would have had thousand deaths each day. You will be taken away to a distant land. But now you do not have to worry about us here. Go with them and try to look after our people as well as you can. With god's help you will be free again someday. Son, remember that your father tried his best to save you all. Always try to fight these evil forces and one of these days our people will be happy again. Now go and look after our people. And son, look after our bride Noorie. She is our pride and honour.” The king’s voice faded away and his head slumped to one side. Drops of tears fell on the king's still face as the couple silently moaned the death of their king.

Frank saw the king die. He waited for a while and then tied the couple to rest of the slaves waiting to be marched away to the ship, anchored off the coast of West Africa. The white slavers mounted their horses. The long march to the ship began without any ceremony or regard for the murdered villagers. No graves were dug, no prayers were said and no burial took place. The big and courageous King lay unceremoniously on the silent arena; his queen lying beside him.

One by one the slaves surveyed the carnage as they walked past it towards an unknown destination. Nobody was allowed to say anything or pay last respect to their loved ones. Their hands were tied tightly behind them. They could not even wave them a goodbye. But the tears were plentiful, rolling down uncontrollably from each of their eyes down their cheeks, soaking the clothes on their heavy chest.

Slowly they walked past the familiar surroundings. They looked at everything through their moist eyes, as if trying to capture as many memories as possible before they left their beloved village forever. They all knew that they will never return to the village again. They will not walk the lanes, see the crops ripen and animals graze in the fields ever again. The trees from which they got their juicy fruits will still be there

but no one will ever climb them again. The river they fished in and spent many hours swimming in, appeared on the way. With hearts laden with grief and pain they silently walked past it towards the mountains.

Life will be worthless for all of them without these things. The pain was getting unbearable for all of them. Death must be better than this unrelenting pain of extreme loss. But with their hands chained and tied to their backs they did not even have the freedom to end their own lives. Helpless and pregnant with overwhelming grief, they walked on towards the fate which awaited them. Some of the slavers beat the slaves in order to stop them crying. The slaves welcomed the physical pain. It was a relief from the emotional anguish they all found so unbearable. Crying, weeping and with unfathomable grief, the innocent villagers walked on.

## Chapter three

Jamal and Noorie sat quietly leaning against their little hut in Brazil, reflecting on how their lives had changed so dramatically in last four months. The little corrugated iron hut they were now forced to live in by their master, Mr. Stevens of Cariba plantation, was far cry from there luxurious houses in Rewa. The conditions in which they found themselves now were appalling. Their tiny hut was amongst a row of fifty other similar ones in one corner of the Cariba plantation where all the other slaves lived as well.

As stated by Walters, Mr. Stevens paid handsomely for Jamal and Noorie. Initially Mr. Stevens went to the slave auction more out of curiosity and fun, rather than to purchase any slaves. He already had enough slaves on his farm. After attending slave auctions for so many years now, it had become a ritual for him to attend them, as it was for many other plantation owners in the town.

Some richer plantation owners had come to the auction with cash in hand in order to bid for the prized slaves. All the spectators enjoyed these auctions. The interest in them had recently increased since rumours had spread in the area about possible abolition of slavery. Some of the owners were trying to buy as many slaves as possible before the supply stopped permanently.

According to the now familiar custom the prize slaves were brought out last. Before Jamal and Noorie were bought out, the auctioneer had announced that he had a surprise for them; there were two prized slaves today instead of the usual one. On top of that it was announced that they were a newly-wed royal couple. There was a hush silence when Jamal and Noorie were brought in, still chained and roped. However they had been washed and oiled. Jamal was naked from the waist upwards, his muscular body shining in the evening sun. Noorie was dressed in a simple dress; her long hair flowing gently in the wind.

There were gasps of excitement from all the spectators as they appeared in front of them. They looked unbelievably at the magnificent couple. They feasted their eyes on them, momentarily forgetting their racism. As if embarrassed by their open exhibition of lust in front of the slaves, the auctioneer uncomfortably cleared his throat and started the auction.

Frank Masters was not too astonished by this exhibition of lust towards the slaves, especially Norrie. He was aware of her beauty and at one stage wanted to keep her for himself. On the ship many of his men wanted to have sex with her as well. Normally he would have let them have their way. That was one of the customary perks for his men on the ship. The ship customs like this kept them happy and well behaved during the long and arduous journey.

But in Noorie's case he had made a rare exception. He did not want Noorie damaged in any way. If he could deliver her to the auction unspoiled, she would fetch him a price ten times higher. With Walters gone he will then have enough money to return to England and start a business in the North. Now, as he surveyed the

excitement, he was glad that he had protected her on the ship. As the bidding went higher and higher, he knew that he had done the right thing.

There were only two bidders left. Mr. Stevens was and one of them. He too was amazed when he saw the slave couple. At his age he considered himself to be probably too old to want Noorie for himself. But he did need a good nanny for his grandson. He was finding it very difficult to replace the white nanny who had just returned to England. Considering Noorie's royal background and her presence now, he had decided that he wanted her to be the nanny. Jamal too will be useful to him. His son Stevenjunior was drinking too much after his wife's death and was not paying enough attention to the plantation. The slaves were beginning to rebel. He needed a person like Jamal to contain the slaves until his son recovered, old Stevens thought.

Being the richest planter in the area, old Stevens usually got what he wanted. Although in the end he had paid slightly more than what he wanted, he was pleased with his purchase. He paid the auctioneer and took Jamal and Noorie to Cariba plantation.

Now four months later, Jamal and Noorie considered themselves to be the luckier than some others. At least they were together and relatively unharmed, even after the harrowing journey from Africa to Brazil.

They were chained together side by side on the ship. They were forced to row the ship without any breaks for many hours. From time to time dry biscuit and water was served to them by other slave women. After a short while the whole lower deck begin to reek with the stench of human waste and filth around them. The slaves were not allowed to go to the toilet for days. Even the women were to sit in their own excrement for days. The ill were left untreated until they were too weak to row the ship. The conditions were unbearable for the people who were bought up in open and free environment in the villages of West Africa.

To Jamal and Noorie it did not make any sense why the slaves were being treated in such manner. By now not much was making sense to them. So much had happened to them so suddenly that they did not have time to understand any of it. They were used to a very slow-paced and leisurely lifestyle where changes were preceded by the knowledge of them reaching them much ahead. What happened in there lives after Walters brought his men to the village was totally alien to all of them. Now without presence of their loved ones and comfort of their familiar surroundings they were lost. They existed without any emotions or feelings. Faith, love, pain, hunger, and smell made little sense to them as they mechanically performed what they were told.

They saw their family members, relatives and friends fall ill due to starvation or the filthy condition that existed in the belly of the slave ship. They felt helpless because they were unable to do anything for them. They saw the ill being removed off their seats and taken to the upper deck. Initially the rest waited anxiously for their return. They soon found out that the majority would not return to the lower deck ever again. They wondered what had happened to them until one day another slave told them that those who did not return were thrown overboard as they were too ill to continue the journey. The captain had decided that they would not waste any

medication on the slaves who had little chance of recovering. There were plenty on the ship to row the ship.

Many of their villagers were thus lost on the journey Jamal and Noorie were relieved when the horrendous journey ended and they finally reached Brazil after several months. For the exhausted slaves the relief was short-lived. They were transferred from the filthy ship to a filthy and cramped barrack in the town to await for their auction.

At the auction the slaves looked on in amazement as one by one they were sold off to the planters like animals. Once a free and proud people, they were now treated worst than animals by the whites. Jamal and Noorie looked on as one by one they parted company with the other villagers. They looked at the white people laughing and joking at the expense of the slaves. They were oblivious to the feeling of another group of human beings being traded like common commodities in front of them. They could not see the enormous pain and degradation the slaves were experiencing. Standing in front of the traders of humanity, Jamal and Noorie wondered whether their behaviour was out of malice towards the slaves or just a front to hide their inhuman deeds.

Jamal and Noorie saw tears streaming out of the slaves as they parted company with their loved ones. They glanced at each other and said silent goodbyes. They were escorted to their transport by Mr. Stevens and driven to the Cariba plantation.

Once on the plantation they were immediately set to their tasks and had little time to reflect on their plight. Noorie was instructed to look after Mr. Stevens' grandson. She had to perform her task from dawn to late in the night. When not looking after the kid she had to assist in cooking duties in the mansion.

Jamal was introduced as the new supervisor to the existing slaves on the evening of his arrival on the plantation. The slaves did not take that very well at first and protested against Jamal's appointment ahead of other senior slaves. However all the protests were quickly withdrawn after Mr. Stevens told them about his royal background. From then onwards other slaves respected and obeyed Jamal. That was a little compensation for Jamal for the long hours he had to work throughout the week with little breaks.

Now after being on the farm for several months and after a lot of hard work, they were given a weekend off to relax and recover. Until then neither of them had spent much time together to enjoy each other's company. Sitting together like this after a long time they comforted each other. The descending evening sun reminded them of Rewa and their days in the village. They talked about Rewa and their families. They reminisced about their childhood and youth spent in the village. They became very sad. Noorie snuggled into Jamal's large chest, crying her unhappiness away. They stayed like that for a few hours and did not notice some other slaves had approached them.

The slaves found the new couple in a state of depression. They understood their pain and wanted to help them. They sat close to them for the next few hours and asked Jamal and Noorie to share their experiences with them. Jamal and Noorie

told them about their lives in Rewa and about the terrible journey they had endured on their way to Brazil.

At the end of their story they felt much better. Afterwards the others told the two about their stories as well and slowly a strong bond began to develop between them. They also learnt why their people were first brought to America. Arthur, the oldest amongst them told them his story.

“My ancestors were amongst the first slaves brought here from Africa. At that time some natives of this land were forced to slave for the white men. Our people slaved side by side of the native slaves and soon learnt to communicate to them. "You see, because of the common sufferings they became friendly and a bond of trust developed between them.” Arthur explained. "From the natives our people learnt how the white men first arrived in their land. They said that at first the white men appeared to be good people and treated the natives with respect. In return the natives were good to them and gave them food and shelter and plenty of their treasures.”

“That is how we treated them when they appeared in Rewa.” Jamal stated. “My father, the king of Rewa, gave them all our jewels and plenty of food. But the bastards were not satisfied with just that!”

“Yes... it seems that the greed and barbaric lust for blood has been in the blood of these cruel people for a long time.” Arthur continued. “On the first occasion the white men left with the treasure and all the food they could put on the ship. But they came back with more men and cruel intentions. Since then they have not stopped coming to this land and now they outnumber the native population. They have captured most of their land as well. Now these white men act as if they own this land and treat the native as their slaves.”

The rest were getting very angry at what Arthur was telling them. They had not heard this story before now they all felt deeply for the natives of this land. They shook their head in disbelief at the atrocities of the white men.

“But if they were only interested in trading with the natives, why did they have to settle here in such a large numbers?” Noorie asked.

“Well, I don't think that natives ever got to find out why the whites decided to settle in their land.” Arthur explained. “But it now appears that when they came here on the first occasion, they must have seen the rich and fertile land here as well as the other natural treasures. That must have set off the greed inside them. They must have thought to themselves that if they managed the natives well, they all could get rich in no time. Then they would have returned to their country as rich and powerful men.”

The others sat in silence for a while, finding it difficult to digest what Arthur has been telling them. For people who were used to a very simple way of life, where greed and lust for material things played little role in their lives, all these were too difficult to digest.

“Well, knowing the white people, the way we do now, it seems convincing enough reason for their being here.” Jamal said after a while. "But it appears now that

many of them chose to settle here. And I don't understand why we were brought here if there were already millions of native here working for the white men?"

Arthur smiled to himself. He himself had asked this questions on many occasions when he had first arrived here as a child. Then one day a native had sat down beside him and explained everything to him. Only then things became clear to him.

"I think the whites believe that the docile and ever helpful natives they originally met would hand over their land and labour without much fuss. They had mistaken their civility and good nature as their weakness." Arthur further explained. "They perhaps took too much for granted in their eagerness to get rich quick."

"The whites usually get what they want, wherever they went. If they can't get anything by their cunning tricks they get it through their guns!" Jamal stated. "So what went wrong there?"

"Well they must have tried all their tricks on the natives." Arthur said, still smiling. "But I think they made a big mistake through their ignorance of the native peoples' long civilisation. They did not account for the fact that they were dealing with the people with traditions and cultures which had developed over many centuries. They worshiped their land and everything on it. For the natives their land was a symbol of their gods and being slaves was a fate worse than death itself."

All the slaves were totally engrossed in the story now. It appeared to them a greater tragedy had happened to the natives of the land they were in; about which they knew little. Not fully grasping the reality, Noorie was getting excited at the possibility of the failure of the white men's plans after travelling so many miles from their home.

"This is so intriguing." She said. "So what happened then? Did they have to clear away the land themselves? I bet they didn't like that at all."

"Well not exactly. And they didn't return home either. They had not come here to return empty handed." Arthur said. He was not smiling any more now. "So, at the time of adversity they did what they did best. They used their brutality to overcome the natives. They started a war against the peaceful and harmless natives. The natives had no chance against the white men's rifle and pistols. There was no stopping their murderous atrocities. They marched through village after village killing the men, raping their women and pillaging their treasures. In a few years they killed and raped millions of the natives. That is why there are hardly any natives left in this country. They were all murdered by the white devils.

"Oh dear Lord... I can't believe this. It must have been awful for all those innocent people." Noorie sobbed. "Just imagine all those women being raped by the murderers of their men. By those evil people who probably raped them having just shot their husbands or sons or their fathers. Good lord, how could they have done that? What are these people made of?"

Arthur walked over to Noorie and gently stroked her head. Noorie sobbed on his shoulders. Jamal went inside the hut and brought out her some water for her. Rest



of the slaves sat silently and reflected on what was said. They were forced to compare the plight of the natives with their own. They did not find much difference in the way both were treated. Everyone was very sad now.

“We shall never know what sort of devil has possessed the white people, my child.” Arthur comforted Noorie. “But we know that they didn’t stop their atrocities there. After murders and pillages they began forcing the remaining natives to work for them on their own land. But once again they refused to cooperate with them.”

“So now the whites had the native's land but couldn't force them to work for them.” Jamal stated. “What a situation they must have found themselves in. They must have felt like fools when they realised that now they will have to work on the land themselves!”

The others fell silent and looked at Jamal. Jamal looked confused for a while as he thought about what he had said that made others look at him in that manner. The reason dawned on him slowly and he felt a bit silly for not thinking about it before speaking out.

“Oh no, these people haven’t been bringing our people here ever since then, whilst this land was still wet with the blood of the poor natives?” Jamal exclaimed. “God there is neither beginning nor end to their evilness!”

“And now we have these white preachers telling us how we must forget our so call primitive and savage ways and follow their civilized ways and religion.” Noorie finally said. “They have instructed us to attend their church regularly and learn to speak like them. Now we have to use the name they have given us as well. We are not to use our own names anymore.”

“The master said that I will be called Tyrone now and Noorie will be called Mary. What silly names. I’ll never use any other name than those given to me by my parents.” Jamal stated.

“Jamal my son, it’s no use resisting these people. They are evil as well as very powerful.” Arthur said. “If we don't follow their instructions, you know they have other ways to persuade us to do exactly what they want us to. They are not too fussy about killing those they think are trouble makers. We have gone through what you are experiencing now. We have seen some of our friend tortured and killed for resisting the masters. So my children do what they tell us to do for now. There will be a time in the future when we will be able to put up a resistance and get away with it. We shall wait for that time. In the mean time we all will try to help each other and pray for that time to come soon.”

Jamal and Noorie remained silent for along while. Finally they nodded their heads in agreement.

## Chapter four

Life resumed to normalcy for Mary and Tyrone after that night, it took them a while to get used to their new names though. Time passed away quickly as they continued with the hard work on the plantation. The pain and sadness were still there but they had little time to think about them after a hard day's labour. However, one evening a little brightness suddenly sparked in their life when Mary informed Tyrone that she was pregnant. Tyrone was very happy and excited about the good news and invited all the slaves to his hut for a party on day of their next leave. During day several women got together and helped Mary with the preparation of the party. Tyrone went into the town and brought some drinks for the men. That night they all enjoyed themselves and for a little while everyone experienced a sense of hope and freedom.

The old master Stevens had died a few weeks ago from a heart attack. The funeral took place a few days later without his son, who was still somewhere in the coastal town. Messages were sent to him to return to the plantation and take charge of it. The slaves returned to their work feeling slightly better within themselves.

As expected the new master arrived on the plantation two weeks later. All the slaves turned out at the mansion to greet the new master after finishing their work. He was about thirty five years old, tall and large in built. He talked to the slaves and thanked them for looking after the farm well since his father's death. He informed Noorie that he was sending his son to England but she will continue to work in the mansion as a senior chambermaid.

That night all the slaves were relieved and happy that the new master seemed to be a good man, just like his father. A week later the master left the plantation to put his son on a ship to England. He returned after a week, sad and depressed. He drank a lot and spent all his time in the mansion. Life continued as normal once again until one fateful evening when another tragedy struck Tyrone's family.

The men were gathered outside his house chatting over some drinks when one of the cooks' screams shattered the silence of the night. She was running towards the men screaming on top of her voice.

"Quick, hurry, everybody hurry! The master is raping our Mary!" she screamed

All the men jumped up, stunned. They could not believe what she was saying.

"What are you saying girl, what in the name of god are you saying?" Tyrone shouted.

"Please Tyrone hurry." The girl pleaded. "The master went into the bedroom Mary was cleaning. He has been drinking all day. He just grabbed Mary from the back and ripped off the clothes and before poor Mary could do anything he threw her on the bed and... Oh God Tyrone, I'm sorry I couldn't do ....." The girl sobbed.

Tyrone did not wish to listen any more. He grabbed a cane knife and ran towards the mansion. The rest followed him. They saw awesome anger in Tyrone's eyes and were concerned that he may do something regrettable.

"Tyrone, Tyrone, keep calm son and don't do anything silly." Arthur shouted after Tyrone.

Tyrone kept on running, his face contorted with anger. He kept remembering his father's dying words.

"Look after your wife, she is our pride." His father had said.

Tyrone ran straight into the bedroom from where he could hear Mary's screams. As he entered the room he saw Mary writhing naked on the bed; the master was sitting on the side of the bed, trying to put his shirt back on. His trousers and pistol lay on the floor beside him.

Tyrone was filled with deep anger and disgusted at the master; he raised his knife and slowly walked towards the master. The master looked up and saw him coming toward him. He calmly picked up the pistol from the floor and stood up. Tyrone still walked toward him, his eyes focused on the master face. The master raised his pistol and shot Tyrone through his heart. Tyrone reeled backwards and fell against the wall. The Master picked up the rest of his clothes and walked past the other slaves who had now gathered outside the room.

Mary grabbed her clothes and ran to Tyrone, crying hysterically. "Oh god Jamal, what has he done to you. Jamal, please don't leave me. Not you as well! I can't live without Jamal. Please don't leave me." Mary cried

Blood poured out of Tyrone's gaping wound. His body was motionless but he looked at his wife with his half-closed eyes. Mary knew that Tyrone was about to die. She could not bear to live without him. She had endured enough suffering recently. But Tyrone was at her side up till now. Without him life was not worth living now. Picking up the knife she raised it high and brought it down to her stomach. Suddenly Tyrone summoned up all his remaining strength and put his hand on her stomach and the knife went through his hand instead.

"Don't Noorie, don't harm yourself." Tyrone said softly. "You have our child to look after now. He is going to be our future, our only hope now Noorie. Please promise that you will look after yourself and never let anyone harm our child."

"Yes my prince, I will look after our child no matter what happens to me. I promise." Mary cried.

"My princess, promise me another thing. You will never let our child forget what happened to us and our people. Promise me Noorie, before I leave you." Tyrone asked her, his voice fading away rapidly.

Mary clutched his head tightly and nodded her head over and over again. Tyrone took one long look at his wife and with a slight smile, closed his eyes. Mary

held his head for a long time, drops of tears falling gently on her husband's cold cheeks.

The next day Arthur got together some slaves and arranged Tyrone's funeral. All the slaves turned out for the funeral held at the slave's church. For many weeks after that everybody remained very sad and each tried to help out Mary as much as they could.

The master asked Mary to remain in the mansion with him after the funeral. She protested when the master told her what he wanted of her but the master was not going to be ignored now.

"Mary, now that your man is dead, I feel you ought to be looked after. In a way I feel responsible for your loss. So I have decided that you will now live with me in the mansion as my mistress. In return I will provide for you and your child." The Master said.

Mary looked at him in disgust. She could not believe what he was saying.

"You're totally reasonable for destroying our lives. Don't you remember that you have raped me and murdered my husband? What makes you think that I even want to look at your evil face, let alone be your mistress? Mary shouted.

"Be reasonable Mary. I like you and wish to look after you. I liked you from the time I first saw you. I'm sorry about your man. But I had no choice. You can cooperate with me or I'll have to force you to give what I want. Remember you're my property and I can do whatever I want to do with you."

"You're an evil person. You may have bought our bodies but not our spirits. You may be able to force our bodies to do as you please but never our spirits." Mary stated. "You may even force me to do things for you but let it be known that I'll never be yours, never!"

"You may think whatever you like Mary, but be sure of one thing. Never let me suspect that you're not mine. Just remember that thing inside your belly." The Master said laughing. "He belongs to me as well. It won't take me much effort to send it to its father as well. Now always remember that."

"You're a devil, a thorough evil man." Mary shouted, clutching her belly. "How can you even think of harming a child not even born yet?"

The master came up behind her and stroked her hair. Mary stood motionless. He put his hand on her belly.

"Look Mary. I promise that no harm will come to it as long as you look after me. That sounds reasonable to me." He said "So now the decision is yours. Don't you blame me for the consequences should you make any mistake."

He walked away laughing. Mary sat on the floor for a long time, deep in her thoughts. She did not have much choice but to give in to his evil demands for now,

she decided in the end. She remembered the words of her husband and King Ismail. She will bring her child up to be cunning and patient. Together they will wait for an opportunity to seek their revenge. Until then, she told herself, both her child and she must live a dual life.

Mary gave birth to a healthy baby boy. The master christened him Winston and pretended to be his father. Mary played along with his role. She looked after him well and never talked about her husband ever again to him. In return he looked after Winston and her, despite disapproval's from other white people. Slowly many white people stopped coming to the Cariba plantation.

For Mary her plan was working out slowly. The pain and humiliation began to lessen with time and because of her love for her son. Each Sunday she took Winston to his father's grave and talked to him about his father and the people in Rewa. By the time Winston was sixteen he knew his history well, as well as her mother's plan for their revenge.

"Don't worry mother, the time for our revenge is coming nearer. I've heard from the other slaves in town that slavery will be abolished soon and we will then be free again." Winston said excitedly.

"Yes my son, our people have struggled long and hard for our freedom." Mary said. "Many riots are taking place everywhere. Many natives have joined us in the struggle for freedom and many brave people have sacrificed their lives as well. Some are running away from their masters as a way of protest."

"Yes mother, just like some of our friends from here. Remember I wanted to leave as well but you stopped me. I got angry with you and then you told me of your plan for revenge. I can't wait mother." Winston said.

Mary looked up at her son's excited face. Her face always lit up when she looked at him. He looked so much like his father. She thought about the days in Rewa when she first saw his father.

Winston noticed the strange look of pleasure and pain flicking in her mother's eyes. He walked up to her and embraced her and kissed her gently on the cheeks.

"Don't worry mother. The day for our revenge will come sooner or later. Then we'll be away from this evil place." Winston said and the two walked back to the mansion.

The freedom did eventually come when it was announced that slavery was abolished and the slaves were free to leave if they wanted to. Many chose to leave at the first opportunity. Many did not have any specific plans but left just to get away from their prisons.

Mary and Winston had an additional reason to leave the Cariba plantation; they could not stay anywhere near the farm after their revenge. A few weeks after the abolition was announced they went over their plans for the final time.

“There is a group leaving for a place up north called Guyana. I’ve arranged for a couple of horses and other provisions for us.” Winston informed his mother. “We are to meet the group at nine tonight. We’ll travel the whole night and be miles away before anyone finds out.”

“At seven tonight all the servants will be away. I’ll make sure he is drunk as usual. We’ll leave as soon as we’ve dealt with him.” Mary said.

Winston entered the library precisely at seven. The master was slumped in his chair half drunk. A half empty bottle of whisky was in his hand. The master looked at him as he entered.

“Come on Winston, I want to talk to you. I hope I can rely on you not to leave me as well.” The master said. Then suddenly he laughed out aloud. “But there can be no question of you leaving me! You will not leave me, not without your mother anyway. Mary will not leave me now, she loves me too much.” He cheered up at his own logic that he believes will keep his best slave with him after abolition. It is possible that Winston will be able to persuade some of the rest from leaving as well. He is even prepared to pay them an extra bonus to all of them for staying.

Mary entered the room and stood beside her son. “What makes you think that I love you?” Her voice finally betrayed the deep hatred she felt for him. “What makes you think that I ever loved you? I have endured your foul touches for so many years just for this day. This day will compensate for each minute that your filthy hands touched my body.”

The master looked puzzled. “But my dear, we are so happy together and I thought we had put the incident with your former husband behind a long time ago.” He protested.

“I was never happy with you, not even for a minute, you murderous bastard! You can afford to put the things you have done to our people behind you, but make no mistake, we will never forget any of this.” she strode up to his chair. “And, how can I ever forget the thousands of times you raped me over these years. How can I forget you defiling my body that awful night? Then you shot my prince in cold blood. How can I ever forget that you denied him to enjoy our son? How can I forget that my son never got to see his father?” She was seething with rage. She lashed out and slapped him hard across the face and spat on him with contempt.

The master stood up in a rage. He lashed out at her with a clenched fist. In a flash Winston dashed to the scene and struck him across the face with the butt of his pistol. The master reeled back and tried to reach for the rifle hanging on the wall. As he turned to reach for the rifle Winston shot him in the right shoulder. The master once again reeled back slamming against the wall and fell to the floor. “Now you bastard, you keep away from that rifle. Next time I will not shoot you through your shoulder! Mother please give me the rope. Let’s get this over and done with.”

Winston dragged the bleeding master to his favourite chair and tied him securely to it. By this time Mary had placed a dozen bottles of rum, a jar of water and

some roast beef and potatoes in front of him, just out of his reach. The blood was oozing slowly from his shoulder.

“What the hell are you doing to me? Untie me immediately. Can’t you see that I’m bleeding. Go and get a doctor, I will deal with you later.” The Master wailed at Winston.

“No one is going to call a doctor for you! In fact, no one is going to arrive at this damned house for along time. No one will untie you. The library door will be locked as well,” Winston enjoyed this. He pulled out the master’s shoes and socks. He stuffed one of the socks inside the mouth. “Now that will keep you foul mouth shut.”

The master’s face was red and moist with sweat. His eye bulged with fright as he struggled hard to get himself free. He made strange sounds from his gagged mouth. Mary went up to him and kicked him hard in the groin. “You have just begun to experience what we have been through for so many years. We can kill you but that would be too easy for you. As each ounce of blood drips out your filthy body, I want you to think of what my people and I went though from the hands of you and your kind.”

Winston spat at him. “And we have left some of you favourite thing in front of you, to show you how it feels to live without things that one needs but can’t have. We are not being too cruel to you. We will give you a sporting chance. We have sent a message to your son in England. We have informed him that you are dying of cancer and have only a month to live. He might be arriving in a month, so start prying for his speedy voyage. In the mean time we are travelling to our new home. Even if you survive this you will not see us ever again. Don’t even try to look for us. If I ever see you again I will kill you!” He warned him.

Without any further words both Winston and Mary walked out the door and threw the key in the dustbin. They went to stable and set off to meet the others and to their freedom and their new destination.

# Part 2



## Chapter five

*Santhia One* had left the port of Calcutta a few days ago. Its four hundred odd people on board were no ordinary passengers but the first lot of bonded labourers from North India. They were being transported from India to replace the newly freed African slaves in British Guyana. All of these labourers believed that they had signed bonds to work on farms across the Bay of Bengal. They know that they were duped into signing five years of their lives in the far and distant land, away from their families and loved ones.

Gauri sat in one corner of her room, deep in her thoughts, sobbing silently. She was in her late teens, with a slim figure and long black hair. She looked very pretty in her sari. There were almost fifty women on the ship but they chose to ignore Gauri because she was the only one without a husband or a recently made partner in *coolie* barracks in the Garden Reach area of Calcutta, where many of them were kept for several months before the journey finally began. Married women soon started gossiping about her and labelled her as a whore from the back streets of Calcutta who had come on the ship to seduce their men. They warned their men to keep away from her. On the other hand the single men on the ship welcomed her as there not enough women on the ship for them. However, Gauri was not interested in any other man on the ship. She had enough of her own problems and was finding it almost unbearable to wave off the unwanted advances from these men.

Ram Nath had been taking a keen interest in Gauri. He was a smartly dressed man in his early twenties. He was nearly six feet tall with a lean and athletic body. He had a small moustache and short black hair. Having studied in the village school, Ram was the only *coolie* who could communicate with the English supervisors on the ship and translate their instructions to rest of the labourers. After leaving the Hooghly river he informed rest of the *coolies* to prepare for a long journey to across *kala pani*. There was a lot of outrage and panic at this news. The baffled *coolies* complained that they were conned by the recruiting agents and tried to come to terms with the predicament they found themselves and how that would affect rest of their lives. Ram conveyed their concerns to the supervisors as best as he could. They seem to be sympathetic but informed Ram that nothing could be done now to change their plight. By putting their thumbprint on the contracts all of them had legally consented to a five-year contract to work on the farms in British Guyana and they will have to fulfil their obligations. It didn't matter to them now how they were recruited nor the fact that almost all of them did not understand a word of English!

Ram tried his best to clam everyone down and keep the atmosphere as good as reasonably possible under the circumstance. There were many amongst them who had left their families and their villages for the first time. The only reason they consented to the contracts was to work and raise money for their families. Many had left behind their wives and children. They were led to believe that they would soon return to their homes with food and money they desperately needed. When they realized their true situation, they became very upset and depressed. Ram went around the ship talking and reassuring them as best as he could. His concern and ability to tackle this difficult situation was noticed by his people and soon they began to regard him as some sort of

a leader. They went up to him for advice and assistance and respected his role as the leader.

It is because of this respect that he was able to keep the lecherous men away from Gauri. Gauri too had noticed Ram's efforts and admired him for it. She was also thankful to him for keeping away unwarranted advances of the men towards her. Ram and Gauri soon became friendly and shared a lot of time together, talking and comforting each other.

After finishing his usual rounds on the ship one evening, Ram came up to the top deck and saw Gauri sitting there alone, staring at the sea. He got together some food and sat beside her. "So who are you missing today, Gauri. Our beautiful country or someone special?" he asked her laughing gently.

Gauri looked at him through her sad misty eyes. "I don't know how you can joke at our situation Ram." Gauri protested. "Here we are, on our way to an unknown land, perhaps never to return home to our people and you can laugh about it? Sometimes I don't understand you Ram."

Gauri was sobbing now. Ram took her hand and squeezed it gently. "Gauri, there are times in one's life when a person is faced with little choice. At times like this we have to keep our minds clear and hearts under control. We have to analyse the situation and make a realistic decision." Ram explained. "In our case we have little choice but to go along with the journey. We cannot avoid completing the agreement we have consented to, no matter how unfairly we have been tricked into agreeing to them. There are people like Lakan and Bansi who could not come to terms with this and you know they committed suicide. That is one of the options. The other option is to protest against what had happened to us. I think the people who have chosen to take this option are very brave, but very foolish as well. They will not achieve anything by this strategy. In return they will either starve to death or be beaten senseless by some cruel supervisor. No, the option for us here is to go along with the rest who have come to realise that there is not much we can do to get out of this horrible situation. We all have to stick together and help each other as best as possible and complete the bond. I know it is difficult and we will face many more trying moments in the future. Therefore, I believe that instead of getting depressed about all this, we all have to be there to support each other. In that way we will ease the pain somewhat and perhaps come through this hell without much damaged."

Ram looked very serious as he finished his short lecture to Gauri. Gauri was quiet for a while, trying to digest what Ram had just said. It dawned to her that what he had said made a lot of sense and was very impressed with him. She looked at him inquisitively.

"Ram..., you know, you haven't told me anything about yourself. How did you end up on this ship? Where in India are you from? What does your family do, are you married...? Gauri blurted.

Ram puts a hand on her mouth and cut her short. "Stop, stop! So many questions at the same time, There is no hurry, is there? We have nearly two months on this ship for you to get to know me. So steady on and I'll tell you all about me later.

First, you'll have to tell me about yourself and how you happen to be on this ship." Ram said.

"But that is not fair!" Gauri protested. "I asked you first so you must tell me about yourself first."

"No, no, I have done enough talking for one day. And as they say, ladies first." Ram replied

"Alright then, you usually have it your way, don't you?" Gauri stated smiling.

"Well, I have got you smiling at least." Ram said "So who are you and what's your story?"

Gauri became quiet and serious as she recalled the event which had led her onto the ship. Clearly there was a lot of pain involved and she became very sad again as she related the events to Ram.

"I lived with my parents, three sisters and one elder brother in a village near Chaprain Bihar. My parents own some land and we hired some men from time to time to work on the farm. One such hired hand was Kisun. He was from another village so we provided him with a place to live as well. He was pleasant to spend time with and soon he became apart of the family, spending a lot of time with us. He was a very good looking and we soon fell in love with each other. It seemed so nice and romantic and I was happy. However, the happiness didn't last too long when my parents found out about us. They forbade me to see him any more and told Kisun to leave the farm immediately." Gauri said

"Why? If you loved each other and he was a good man why didn't he ask your father for his permission to get married to you?" Ram wanted to know.

"He did ask my father for my hand but both my father and my brother flatly refused." Gauri replied. "They said that they will not let me marry a man from another caste, a lower caste. You see we are *Brahmins* by caste and he was only a *Baniya*, you know, from the merchant caste. I didn't mind which caste he belonged, because I loved him so much. I just wanted to be with him. I was devastated when he was forced to go."

"So what happened next, did your parents force you to get married to someone else? Is that why you ran away from him?" Ram asked

"No, it wasn't like that. You see, Kisun loved me as well. One night he came back and asked me to marry him. He said we will run away to the nearby town where he will find work and support me. I was not very keen in the beginning but in the end I agreed to do what Kusin asked me. He seemed to be strong and was very reassuring. That night we went to the local temple and got married. After that we made our way from our village to Patna and later travelled to Calcutta on train. That was about six months ago." Gauri explained

"I think you did the right thing." Ram said supportively. "But what happened next? What happened in Calcutta, were you happy with Kisun over there?"

"We were very happy in the beginning. Kisun had saved up some money and we rented a small place to live. For a few weeks we were care-free and just enjoyed ourselves. Then Kisun started looking for work. That's when our problems started. There was no job for him. He would go out looking for a job all day and returned late in the evenings, tired and frustrated. The frustration led to him drinking heavily. Soon the savings ran out and we were thrown out of our flat. We had to sleep on the pavements and Kisun fell very ill. We didn't have money to even feed ourselves, let alone get medicine for him. That's when I decided to go out and look for a job. I had been roaming around the street in desperation when a recruiting agent found me. He asked about my problem and listened to me patiently. He seemed very concerned and offered to help us. He said that he worked for a ship and his master wanted a cook to work on the ship as long as it is in the harbour. He got me to put my thumb print on a piece of paper in front of a white *sahib* and asked me to return to the ship in a few days time."

"That bastard, so he tricked you as well. Did he ask you to return to the ship on any particular day?" Ram wanted to know. "Didn't he ask you to bring your husband with you."

"My husband was pleased to know that I had found a job. The agent gave me a little bit of money in advance. That night we ate a little bit of food after many days of starvation. There was no reason to suspect him then." Gauri explained. "So I went to the ship on the day he asked me to. That was the day the ship left Calcutta. And I did not get a chance to get off. I'm scared to think what might have happened to Kisun. He was really ill and there is no one to look after him. He was not even fit enough to travel back to his village. The winter is setting in and oh god, I dare not think of what could happen to him all alone."

Gauri began to sob again. Ram put his arm around her and gently comforted her. Gauri sobbed herself to sleep in Ram's arms. He let her sleep for awhile and then lifting her gently, took her inside her cabin and laid her on her sleeping rug and asked the women in the cabin to tuck her in. He slowly walked back to his cabin.

Gauri was still very sad when Ram saw her again on the deck again. "I am really sorry for getting so upset last night Ram. Thanks for putting me in bed. I'm really embarrassed that you had to carry me to the cabin. You should have woken me up." Gauri said.

"You looked so peaceful in your sleep. I was afraid you will only worry and cry more if I woke you up." Ram replied. He looked at her for a few moments. "It seems that you and Kisun got a really bad deal from the agent."

"Ram, I am really worried about Kisun. He knows no one in Calcutta and he was so ill when I left him. It is really upsetting that I am stuck here and cannot do anything to help him. If only I hadn't listened to the slimy agent. I will kill him if I ever saw him again. Why did he have to do a thing like this to us? He knew how ill Kisun was and how much he depended on me!"

"These *arkatis* are rats of the lowest kind. They will sell their own sister for a little money." Ram stated. "You see, the English *sahibs* pay the agents good money for every *coolie* they recruit for them. The *sahibs* do not question the agents on the tactics they use to catch the people. Their interest is to get as many *coolies* to the plantation. The agents know that they will not get many *coolies* if they told them the truth about their jobs. They know that people will not agree to either the conditions of the contract nor to travelling such great distance from India, crossing the *kaala pani*. So the agents use dirty tricks to get the people to put their thumbprints on the contracts and herd them on the ship. Once they get on the ship, as you know, it is too late to do anything about the predicaments they find themselves in." Ram concluded.

They sat in silence for a while, deep in their own thoughts. Gauri slowly turned around and touched Ram gently on his shoulders. "Ram, now it's your turn to tell me your story. You try to be brave and strong for the others and we all appreciate that very much. But I have noticed the pain which appears on your face whenever we talk about home. What is your story Ram?" Gauri wanted to know.

"Yes Gauri, I too have a heart and have people back home who I miss very much. In fact my village is not very far from your village. I come from Ballia, which is about twenty miles from your village. I live with my parents and five older brothers and two sisters. Everything was fine up till the last drought, some three years ago. Do you remember? When a lot of crops and animals were lost?" Ram asked.

"Yes I do remember that drought very well. We also lost crops and cattle. But not too badly, as we managed to get a well dug up just prior to the drought. We managed to do well for most part of the year, until the well dried up." Gauri explained.

"Well, we were not as lucky because we didn't have any well of our own. Things got really bad for us. All my brothers are married and have children. There are so many mouths to feed and little to feed them on. Until then, my brothers looked after me and my young sisters. They sent us to the new school built in our village. My sisters had to be married. We found their grooms from the next village. They were very understanding about our situation and didn't want any dowries at all. But our situation was so bad that we couldn't even arrange enough money for the wedding. My parents always wanted to see their daughter married off in style and now they were really sad that they were helpless to do that. My brothers and I were also very upset.

Ram had become very sad and Gauri could see deep pain in his tearful eyes. This was the first time Gauri had seen Ram in this way. "So what happened next, did you get your sisters married off in the end?" Gauri asked

Ram shook his head slowly. No, we had to fulfil our parent's dream. We talked to the grooms' families and postponed the wedding for one year. The time had come for me to use my education for the benefit of my family. I decided that I will leave the village for sometime and find work in town. I thought in one year I would be able to save enough for the wedding. Then I would return to the village and take up teaching in the school as I had originally planned." Ram said.

“That seems like the logical thing to do in that situation. So how did the agent get you?” Gauri was now familiar with the next stage of the process.

“Well, I went to the local town but didn’t find any work so I travelled to Calcutta. I guess I was lucky to find work in a grocer’s shop soon after I arrived there. The money was not that good and I began to feel that it will take me longer than one year to get the necessary money for the wedding. That’s when I met the agent! He was very sympathetic and listened to my story. He then told me about his job. He stated that I will make enough money for my sisters' weddings within six months. As I was to get free accommodation, I thought that I will be able to save much more from my wages, which in itself was much more than I was getting in the shop. The offer was too good to refuse. The only snag was that the bastard didn’t tell me how far this goddamned place was. He said it was only a day-long journey by ship. A day’s journey that bastard said! We have now been on this ship for months and still there is no sign of this goddamn place! Now I may never see my family again. And my sisters, how will they get married now?” Ram looked very upset.

Gauri thought for a while. “Look Ram, things are not that bad for you. You already have some money saved up. We should be reaching the place soon now and you will save up more money. I will not need much money so you can have my share as well. So in a few months' time you will be able to send enough money home for your sisters' wedding. You may not be there in person but you will be able to get them married in the style that your parents want. I think they will be very proud of you.” Gauri suggested.

“That’s an idea Gauri, that’s great Gauri, why didn’t I think of that before?” asked Ram

“You have been pre-occupied with problems of other people!” Gauri stated.

“What? Oh yes. You maybe right, Gauri. That is the way out for me for a while. And I will return in five years and continue with my plans. But Gauri, I will not take money from you. You will need all the money when you return home.” Ram stated.

Gauri suddenly got very upset. She turned away from him and remained silent. Ram could not understand what had made Gauri upset but he too decided to remain silent and waited for her to explain. “Ram, I am happy that you have worked out your problems. You have only five years in this hell. But for me, there is no way out.” She finally stated. “I have no one to return to. I have nobody to look forward to back home. So you go ahead and make your plans and leave me alone with my problem. Now you have found your solution, our paths have become different. So please leave me alone from now on!”

Gauri left Ram standing in bewilderment and ran into her cabin, sobbing. Ram wondered what had made Gauri suddenly so upset. He was convinced that he had not behaved in a manner that should upset her. Surely she could not be so upset because he found a solution. She too will be able to do that. It is only the question of five years and she will go back to her people as well. So what had upset Gauri so much? He wanted to talk to her, find out the reason, but he had to wait until the next day now.

However, the next day Gauri did not come out of her cabin at all, or for the next few days. Ram was getting really worried about her. He inquired about her health from some other women. All they told him was that she was not feeling well and to tell him not to get concerned about her any more. She wanted to be left alone. Ram's concern for her was turning into anger at her latest behaviour. He had been treating her well since the journey began. He was beginning to like her as well. He began to realise that he was missing their chats on the decks each evening. He thought she was not being fair to him by ignoring him. He wanted to know what he had done to deserve this treatment. So one evening he summoned up all his courage and went inside her cabin. Gauri was lying on her bed, staring blankly at the ceiling. She sat up when Ram entered the cabin. The other three women became concerned for her but Gauri told them not to worry and leave them alone for a while.

Ram went and sat on a wooden box beside her bed. He looked at her for a while, searching for any clues for her behaviour. But she stared back at him, her eyes sad and withdrawn.

"Why are you punishing me like this? What have I done to deserve this treatment from you Gauri. Haven't we looked out for each other and shared some good moments on this miserable journey?" Ram asked her eventually.

"Yes Ram, you have been good to me and the rest of the people as well. We have also shared some good times together. But it has to stop now, before it is too late for one of us". She responded after a while.

"I don't understand! I don't see any harm in continuing our friendship the way it is. The journey will be finished soon and then we will go out of this ship. We can be there for each other at least until then, can't we?" He wanted to know.

"No Ram we can't! Yes this journey will end soon, but not the journey of our lives. We have to continue living somehow." Gauri replied. "You will have your family to look forward to. In a few years time you will return to them and continue as if nothing has happened. But what about me Ram? My husband, who I love and respect, was on the verge of dying; he may already be dead! I have severed all ties with my family and my village. Returning to India will mean a life of hell for me now. I may end up selling my body in the slums of Calcutta. In that case I may as well be a whore on the farm were transported. After all, there are many frustrated men around and I maybe able to fork out a very lucrative life out there. Don't worry Ram; I may provide this service free for you, as repayment for all the help you have provided me so far." Gauri was in a really bitchy mood by now.

Ram was seething with rage. He could not believe that Gauri could come out with that kind of rubbish. He respected her. No, he loved her! He will not let her talk to him that way. He moved swiftly to her, grabbed her by the shoulders and pinned her on the bed. He just stared at her for a while, too angry to say anything at all. Gauri stared back at him. Slowly a smile ran across her face.

"I thought you did not care about me Ram. Perhaps you shouldn't care about me. I don't want to spoil your plans." She taunted him.

Ram did not know whether to get angrier with her or to laugh at the situation. He now understood what Gauri was trying to say to him. He had secretly wished for her love since the day he first saw her on the deck, but he was always afraid to expose his feelings to her in case she minded it. He was prepared to have her just as a friend rather than risk it by asking her for her love. But now things had really changed. Gauri appeared too liked him that way as well! Her face was really mischievous now and she looked extremely desirable. She laid back on the bed, her head elevated on a pillow; almost daring Ram to do something. Ram moved closer to her and took her face in his hands. He slowly lifted her face towards him and gently kissed her on the lips. A shiver ran throughout Gauri's slender body and she embraced Ram passionately. They lay like that for a while. Ram slowly pushed Gauri away from him and looking deep into her eyes, asked her if she would marry him. Gauri's huge eyes lit up and she shyly nodded her head.

“Ram, I will be proud to be your wife. I promise to be a good wife to you.” She said softly.” Ram kissed her gently again.

“I know Gauri, I know. I love you so very much.” Ram was relieved. “We will get married before we arrive in Guyana. Then we will not be separated after we arrive in Guyana. There is a priest on the ship who can conduct the marriage ceremony.”

Ram and Gauri were married two days later by an open-minded priest. Most of the labourers and some of the supervisors joined in a small celebration. Some of the labourers cooked special food dishes and a group of them got together a drum and harmonium for a sing-along. The celebration went on till early hours in the morning. Both Ram and Gauri had become very popular with most of the people on the ship and they were very pleased to see them married and happy. Next morning *Santhia One* docked in the port of British Guyana and a new life started for the three hundred and fifty surviving labourers. The rest, fifty nine of them, had died during the arduous journey. Some of them had committed suicide and others had died of starvation or maltreatment from some of the supervisors.



# PART 3

## Chapter 6

The ship was met by a number of plantation owners desperate to find the best and the healthiest workers. Within a day all the *coolies* were taken up by the plantation owners. After saying goodbyes and promising to keep in touch the *coolies* went off with their respected masters. Some of them had grown very close to each other during the three-month long journey and had developed a special bond, irrespective of caste or religion. Those who did not end up with their newly found *jahaji bhais and bahens*-ship brothers and sisters were particularly distressed. They cried and hugged each other as they parted company.

Ram and Gauri were put together with a group of twenty other labourers. They were lucky to have with them most of their close friends. Ram and Gauri were happy to be together. They were driven on two separate land rovers to a farm about fifteen miles from the port. On arrival at the farm their initial happiness was replaced by disappointment. They were housed in a row of little sheds previously used to house the African slaves. Some of the labourers came from very poor backgrounds, but even they felt that they had lived in better environment back in India. The sheds were all lined up in a long row, with little privacy in between. The bathing and toilet facilities were appalling. The cooking facility was even worse. Ram and Gauri were given the married people's shed. Fortunately they did not have much possession so they had a little bit of room to start off with.

In a different row of huts lived about ten ex-slaves, now working on the farm as free labourers. In one of the huts lived Winston, the freed slave from Brazil and his wife, who he had met about a year ago through his mother Mary. Mary herself stayed in the farm owner's mansion as a nanny and a cook. After arriving in British Guyana some four years ago Mary and Winston stayed in the town for a while. Many ex-slaves like them lived there as well, and tried to fork out living for themselves, away from the harshness of the slave plantations. Mary and Winston got fed up lazing about in the town and not doing much to better their lives. They came to know that several plantation owners were desperately looking for people to work on their plantation. After the abolition of slavery there was great shortage of labourers and other workers on plantations. Mary and Winston decided to take up work on the farm as free workers instead of wasting their time in the town. They approached several farm owners and finally chose to work for Mr. Simmons, who they found to be more compatible. They started to work on the farm about two years before the arrival of the Indian labourers on the farm. Within that time Mary had become friends with a young black woman called Juliet, who worked with her in the mansion. After working with her for a while, Mary decided that Juliet would suit Winston as his wife and selecting an appropriate occasion, she introduced her to Winston. The young couple got on very well from the beginning and within a year they got married. Winston and Juliet made a lovely couple and Mary was very happy for them.

Pleased with Winston's work Mr. Simmons made him one of the supervisors on the farm. When the Indian labourers arrived on the farm Mr. Simmons introduced Winston and rest of his men to the Indians. Ram's ability to speak English proved useful again in communicating with Mr. Simmons as well as with Winston and his African workers. As a result, Ram was selected by Mr. Simmons to be the supervisor

of the Indian workers. Ram was every proud to be given this position and began to work earnestly towards organising his group. He also liaised with Winston in order to talk about the task allocations and other issues as well. In many ways, Ram and Winston were of similar character. Both were hard working, honest and led their people during periods of crises. Together they began a campaign to improve the quality of life for all the workers on the farm.

“We have to do something about the appalling conditions we have to live in.” Ram said to Winston one lunch time. “Some of the men have fallen ill and instead of attending to their sickness and letting them time off to recover, the boss wants them to continue working. If they do not complete their allocated task they are flogged and made to work longer hours. If this does not stop we will lose some of them soon.”

Winston was aware of the problem too well. His people were treated the same here. On the Cariba plantation he was unable to help out his people, but the situation had changed somewhat now.

“Yes, let's first organise ourselves and cover for those who fall ill. The stronger ones will have to stay back a little longer to help out the sick ones.” Winston replied. “The whites may not excuse the sick from working, but they can't stop us from helping them out. I suggest that we call a meeting of all the workers on Sunday evening to discuss all this issue.”

“That's a good idea. We will be able to get every body's opinion and enlist every body's support for this scheme.” Ram agreed. “In the mean time I think we should go into the town and get some medicines for the sick. If we can get the sickness down, the task of covering for others will be reduced as well.”

Winston nodded his head. “I will ask Mr. Simmons for his land rover. He will not mind. I have used it before to go into the town. We can take a few of our men with us. I know a place where we can get some good alcohol and great food as well. We will leave after our task on Friday and make a night of it, shall we?”

Ram's eyes lit up. “Now, why didn't you tell me about that before, hey Winston? There is nothing better than a good drink and some meat after a good day's work. You know I can't eat meat at home. Gauri's doesn't eat meat and won't cook it at home either. Man, how I miss some juicy meat.”

Ram's mouth was watering. Winston looked at him and laughed. “I didn't know you like meat and drink so much Ram. I'm lucky that way; Juliet eats meat and some times shares a bit of rum with me as well. We will arrange for a dinner one evening. You should bring Gauri as well. She can be with mother and Juliet. That will leave us men to enjoy our drinks and food.”

On the following Friday, Ram, Winston and six other men drove into the town of Drosa, which was approximately ten miles from the Simmons plantation. Winston knew of a little drinking bar known as “Sam's Bar”; owned by an ex slave. This bar was normally frequented by the ex slaves living in the town.

The group from the Simmons plantation picked up some medication and drove straight to Sam's bar. They ordered some rum and a lot of food to go along with the rum. After a few drinks were eagerly drowned by them, Winston let out a secret he had kept within himself for a long time.

"Ever since I have been coming to this place, I have desired to own a place like this Ram. Maybe not exactly like this, perhaps a bigger place, like a little hotel where the newly arrived in town can get a place to live and get served good food to eat." Winston stated. "You see, when my mother and I arrived here we found it very difficult to find a place to live. We hardly knew anybody here and we spent several days on the street. There are new arrivals here all the time and they need to be accommodated and fed well. Yes, that's what I want to do some day; and at the same time, I will be able to earn a living as well. Then my mother, Juliet and I will not have to work on a farm."

The rest were slightly taken aback by Winston's sudden revelation. "I didn't realise that you wanted to leave the farm. I thought you were happy there and liked being with us all." Ram said.

"I do like being with you all and don't mind being on the farm. But I wanted to achieve more in life than being just a farm-hand. I want to do something for myself, be my own master for a change. We have been working for others for such a long time and now we feel that we can't do things for ourselves. I wanted to change that view of our people." Winston replied.

Winston had got very excited when he talked about his plans. He believed in it and it showed on his face. He stopped speaking for a while and his face changed.

"Silly me, I shouldn't be thinking like this. It's all a dream for me. I don't know anything about business and things like that. So you don't have to worry about me leaving the farm, ever. Maybe my children will leave one day and fulfil my dreams. So let's drink and be merry." Winston stated as he poured a huge measure of rum down his throat. Rest of the evening continued without any further discussion on Winston's dream of owning a hotel.

Life on the plantation continued as usual, but the medicines they brought back began to make some difference. The sick were given the medicine and they began to recover quickly from their illnesses. On the following Sunday, after the church, most of the workers met to discuss their situation. Ram and Winston alternatively put forward the case for helping each other out in their tasks as well as to improve their living conditions. After several hours of discussion they agreed to cover for each other. They also delegated to Ram and Winston the task of talking with Mr. Simmons about improving their living conditions. They wanted better toilets and kitchens as well as time to make their living compound more sanitary. They decided not to ask for bigger or extra rooms to live in because they realised that Mr. Simmons will not agree to that at the moment. They left that for an appropriate time later. Ram and Winston approached Mr. Simmons with their requests. They were ever surprised that he agreed to the request without much protest, as long as everybody did their share to work. The next Friday a larger group went into the town to celebrate.

As promised by Winston, Ram and Gauri were invited to a Sunday dinner at his home a week later. Both Ram and Gauri dressed up for the occasion and strolled to Winston's hut in the evening. They were met by Juliet and Mary. Gauri took a liking to Mary and Juliet immediately and all three went inside to talk while the men stayed outside with a bottle of rum.

Since the day Winston mentioned about his dream of owning a hotel, Ram had been thinking about how he could help him to realise his dream. Although Winston had dismissed the idea on that night, Ram felt that Winston was very serious about the idea. He had secretly studied Winston surveying the place up as if trying to figure out how he would do the place up if he was the owner. Ram decided that he should do something to help his friend out. He had made some inquiries and now he felt it was the right moment to make some suggestions to him.

"You know Winston; I worked in a shop in Calcutta for a while before being transported here. It wasn't much of a job but I learnt a lot about running a business. I would have opened up a shop eventually, if I didn't have plans to be a teacher. But now, I may not ever be a shop keeper, not even a teacher." He said "But I may be able to help you realise your dreams of owning a hotel. That is, if you still want to own one."

Winston thought for a while. He was a bit surprised that Ram had brought the subject up. "I do still want to own a hotel. But how can I? You know I have no experiences in business. I don't know how you can help me with this." Winston asked.

"Well you have told me that you and your mother have saved up some money. I had a word with Sam the other night we were there. He wants to sell up and move on. He is asking a price which I think you can afford. I know Sam's is not the place you want. But some of the money you have with you can be used to extend Sam's bar and make it into a small hotel. That will be a good way to start off. You all can stay in the hotel and Juliet and Mary can help you run it. That way you can save a lot of money and it'll be a family business as well. What do you think Winston? Ram asked.

Winston took a sip of his drink and went inside the house for a while. When he returned there was a smile on his face. He took Ram's hand and shook it for a while.

"My friend, I think your idea may do just fine. I just told my mother and Juliet about what you have just said and they agree that we should give it a go. But there is just one problem. We do not know much about money business and things like that. We may get stuck there. If that was taken care of then I can't see what can stop us Ram." Winston said excitedly.

"Well, I don't see that as a big problem. When I am not working on the farm, I will be able to help you out with accounts side and buying staff for the hotel. Ramzan was a builder back in India he will be able to assist you with the extension work. So, my friend, there is nothing to stop you now." Ram declared.

Winston looked at Ram a while, pleased that his friend had come up with a reasonable solution for him. "You are a genius my friend. We will never forget this. And of course we will pay you for all the work you do for us." Winston offered.

"I don't know about Ramzan and any other labourers he may need for the extension work, but as far as I am concerned, you don't have to pay me a penny. However, when the hotel is up and running, a few tipples of rum every Friday and a nice home cooked curry goat will be nice." Ram said smiling.

Winston shook his hand again with a big smile and said. "My friend, that's a deal."

## Chapter seven

It was not till two months later that Winston was able to move into his new home. He renamed his hotel as “The Lodge”. In the mean time more good news arrived for both Ram and Winston’s family. Both Gauri and Juliet announced that they were pregnant. They were all overjoyed and a week after Winston moved into the hotel, both families jointly celebrated the occasion with the rest of their friends. A huge party was organized at the Lodge and everybody enjoyed themselves. Some of the guest stayed back and the next day they continued the extension work undercareful supervision of Ramzan.

The situation on the plantation was slowly improving and the new arrivals from India began to settle down in their new country. They organised religious meetings and festivals for themselves and invited others from the neighbouring plantation as well. Both the Hindu and the Muslim community began to think about building religious places for their people. For most of them life began to be slightly less painful as they began to make new friend and got involved in their community activities. Once again Ram was pushed into the forefront as the leader for both the Hindu and the Muslim community. He was assisted by Ramzan, who was from a village near Lucknow in India. Together they spoke to Mr. Simmons and negotiated two pieces of land to build a Hindu *mandir* and a Muslim *masjid*. This land was near the town and more accessible to the workers from the other plantations in the area.

Things were going on fine for several months and then tragedy struck for Ram. One night Gauri started to have terrible pain. It was several weeks before the baby was due. Despite several request to the white overseers, Gauri was not allowed time off. Ram was going to have a word with Mr. Simmons in a few days time about Gauri's conditions but the problem started before he could see him. Gauri was eventually rushed to the hospital but although the doctors were able to save the baby, it was too late to save Gauri. This was small consolation to Ram at the time. He loved Gauri deeply and was devastated by the untimely death of her. The greatest moment in his life turned into the greatest tragedy. He remained with his dead wife for along time, weeping openly at her demise. A person who remained in control of most situations was unable to do anything to help himself at that moment. He just couldn't believe how or why Gauri was taken away from him. He couldn't understand why their happiness was terminated so suddenly. Didn't they just manage to overcome the tragedy of being torn away from their country and loved ones? He found it very difficult to carry on now. He looked around the room and saw a pair a scissors on the hospital trolley. He stood up and walked slowly towards the trolley.

Winston had been silently watching Ram for a while from the doorway. Ramzan had informed him what had happened. He had arrived at the hospital with Mary some time ago. She went to the ward and took care of the new baby boy. Juliet, who was only days away from her due-date, was too tired to come with them. As Ram walked towards the trolley and the scissors placed on it, Winston stepped between him and the trolley. He grabbed Ram by his shoulders and looked into his eyes.

“Ram, think about the baby!Gauri and you son; he is so beautiful. He looks so much like Gauri; same face, same large eyes, same smile. Have you seen him yet?” Winston said.

Ram turned and looked at his wife again.“She looks so pretty in her sleep, doesn’t she? I loved to look at her while she slept. She gave me peace and serenity in this far away land. I won’t be able to see her sleep any more Winston. I can’t imagine life without her; I just can’t live without her Winston.” Ram wept in Winston’s arms.

Winston held Ram for a while. He then slowly guided him to a chair beside Gauri.

“We all love Gauri Ram and we all are going to miss her as well. None of us can understand why she had been taken away from us.” Winston tried to console Ram. “Gauri is no longer with us Ram, and nothing will bring her back. However, she has left us with a part of her, a beautiful and tender part of her. That part of her needs looking after. He needs to be loved and cared for as much as you cared for Gauri. I think Gauri will want that from you!”

Ram looked at his friend for a long time. He then stood up and looked loving at Gauri. After a while he turned to Winston. “Where is our son, Winston? I want to see him now.”

Winston gently patted Ram on the shoulder and led him to his new-born son.

Everybody on the farm was supportive to Ram after this event. The Indian community gathered together and made arrangements for Gauri’s cremation. They rallied around and made sure that Ram and the baby were looked after. Ram looked after the baby in the day time. He was not allowed time off and there was nobody to look after him in the day time so he had to take him to work with him. He would put him in a cot made out of a piece of cloth near the edge of the plot where he worked and kept an eye on him as he worked. There were several other mothers who did the same with their children as well. Soon Ram had worked out a system of sharing the job of child minding with others. In the night, one of the women would come around and mind the son for a while. In the weekends Ram began to spend more and more time at the Lodge with Winston and his family. Soon Juliet gave birth to a son as well. They named him Arthur, after their old friend on the Cariba plantation in Brazil. At a ceremony on the farm, Ram named his son Shiri Nath. Mary retired from working in the lodge and devoted her time looking after Arthur. In the weekends, Mary looked after Shiri as well while Ram helped out Winston. Ram preferred to keep himself busy to forget the pain of separation from Gauri. During the weekday evenings Ram kept himself busy by organizing various events in the community. He concentrated on the task of getting the *mandir* and the *masjid* built. His long-term plan was to get a school built for the local workers and their children.

As the time went by and Ram got more and more involved in his work, the pain of losing Gauri began to diminish gradually. His five year term was over but he chose to stay on the farm for another five-year term instead of returning to India. He just couldn’t walk away from the memories of Gauri. However, he had sent home some money to his parents in India and his sisters got married. He was in regular



communication with his family as well and they did not object too much with his decision to stay back. They sympathised with him on death of Gauri and hoped that one day he will return to them.

Ram was too involved with the projects locally and did not wish to leave them in the middle. The memories of the time he shared with Gauri was still too overpowering for him to leave the farm yet. As months turned into years, Ram got more attached to the farm and the small village they had created around it. The *mandir* and the *masjid* were completed within the first five year term of his indenture.

In the second term Ram got to work on building the school he wanted so much. Pleased with the way his labourers were working for him, Mr. Simmons once again offered a piece of his land without any payment. Ram organized a small school committee and raised the necessary fund through donations from the Indian farmers around the area. Soon, under the supervision of Ramzan Ali, construction of the school began. It took several years for the school to be completed. By that time Ram had completed his second five year contract with Mr. Simmons. He was now faced with the choice of taking a free passage back to India or to lease or buy some land to farm himself. After much deliberation and consultation with his family back in India he chose to stay and become a farm owner himself. He arranged to sell his sugar cane directly to the local mill owner. He enjoyed his freedom and the chance to be his own master at last. He was not going to give it up for anybody or anything now.

Winston had been developing his hotel project as well. The extension to the hotel was completed by the time Ram's first term was over. The business began to pick up and Winston was able to employ some extra people to assist in the business. In the mean time Juliet gave birth to another baby, a girl, and they named her Abigail. Winston was really pleased with the way things had turned out for his family. He was specially looked forward to the weekends when Ram came around with Shiri. His son Arthur loved having Shiri around and the two played together most of the time whilst the fathers got on their business and pleasure.

Winston's happiness was too good to last long. As if too jealous of his good fortune, fate struck a terrible blow to his family. One day, quiet suddenly, his mother Mary got very ill. She suffered a massive stroke and was rushed to the hospital in the town. She was in a coma for several days and her condition deteriorated daily. Winston was shattered. Mary looked so strong and healthy until then and Winston did not even for a moment thought of ever losing her. Mary was always so majestic; both in stature and her out-look to life. After all she was a princess, groomed to rule her people in Rewa, Winston reflected, as he waited long hours by his mother's bedside. He thought about how her life was turned upside down. The terrible journey she had to travel though, instead of living the life of a queen back home. She lost her kingdom, her parents and her people. Not content with that her captors took her purity and murdered her husband as well. Tears rolled down his cheek as Winston recalled his times with his mother, the childhood stories, the regular visits to his father's grave. Ram had walked in with Juliet, Arthur, Shiri and Abigail. On seeing Winston in that state, they stood silently in one corner of the room.

As if sensing her son's grief, Mary slowly opened her eyes. She looked around the room and then focused her eyes on Winston. Winston beamed with joy and he reached out and squeezed her hand.

"How are you feeling mother? I am really glad you are with us once again. You really gave us a fright. Look, we all are here to look after you. Soon you will be out of this place and I will get a nurse to look after you all the time." Winston was overjoyed and could not stop himself from talking.

The others had joined Mary at the bedside. Mary indicated to Winston to stop talking. "Winston my son, we have come along way since the Cariba farm. I have tried to be a good mother and you are the only person to know how much of a struggle life has been for me since your father and I were forced out of our country. Life without your father has been very difficult and I have been longing for years to join him." Mary paused for a breath as rest of the people began to realise that Mary was saying something very unusual for her. All this time Mary had never talked about her emotions to anybody but Winston.

"Winston...Ram and my loved ones, I have tried to be good to you all." She continued. "You have turned out to be very good individuals and I am proud of you. I know you will do well. My work here is finished here. I will take my leave from you all. I want to be with my Jamal now." Mary's voice was fading.

The rest of them realised that Mary was dying. They could not believe what was happening. They felt powerless to help Mary. They sobbed silently but Mary seemed quite at peace with herself.

"Please children you must not cry. You must believe that I am going to be with somebody I love very much. You will have to look after yourself now." Mary was struggling to speak now. "One last word of advice, children. Always remember how you have struggled on this land and made them worthwhile for our masters. Don't ever forget your pains as well as your contributions. It is on your shoulders now to lift us out of this enslavement and make our people proud and equal to our masters some day. One day...someday...my children..." She slowly closed her eyes.

No one said anything for along time. They all knew Mary was no longer with them. There were no tears any more. After a while Ram escorted Winston and the others out of the room.

Mary's funeral was attended by all the friends of Winston and many others who knew Mary. Even Mr. Simmons attended. After the funeral most of them returned to the lodge as a gesture of support to Winston. Ram knew how devastated Winston was by Mary's death. For the next few months Ram gave up some of his school building work and stayed with Winston. Winston appreciated his friend's company and slowly began to get back to his work and after a while Ram once again took up the school work in earnest.

The school got completed almost a year after Ram got his own farm. Ram was called upon by the Indian community to be its first teacher. Ram was overwhelmed to be given that honour and gladly took on the job. He employed some labourers to work

on his farm and became a full time teacher. Winston was thrilled for him as he knew that Rams' ambition was to be a teacher. He organized a party for Ram and his friends at the Lodge to celebrate opening of the school and his appointment as its first teacher. After the trauma of losing Mary, life now seemed to have got back on the road to recovery for the two friends once again.

After that life for both families ran along smoothly. Ram got on with his farm as well. Winston got another extension done to the Lodge and was happy with the progress of his business. Ram got more involved with the community work and concentrated on enlarging the school. Eventually the one class school turned into a full primary school with eight classes. More teachers were recruited, some from amongst the indentured labourers and others directly from India. Shiri was a keen student and eventually two years after Ram retired from teaching Shiri became a teacher as well. Arthur eventually took over Winston hotel business. After retirement Winston and Ram spent a lot of time together. Taking advantage of the free passage back to India provided under his indenture contract Ram finally went back to India for a visit. He returned after a few months. Winston was very glad when his friend returned, especially since Juliet had died in the meantime. The two old friends found comfort in each other's company as they spent their last days splitting their time between the hotel and the farm. Ram eventually died, leaving Winston devastated once again. He fell very ill. Shiri, Arthur and Abigail nursed him but Winston died soon after Ram. The children of the two dear friends continued the friendship established by their parents. This friendship lasted for many years and through several generations, after they all died.

# Part Four

## Chapter eight

The Travellers Lodge had not changed much even after more than one hundred years. The same building which Winston had bought still stood tall and proud, surrounded by the extensions carried out by Ramzan Ali and his friends. The only difference to the exterior of the lodge was the additional extensions done to it more recently. As the years rolled on and the town grew larger demands on the hotel increased and extensions were done by the successive generation of Winston's family in order to accommodate the extra business. Inside, the décor was modern but remnants of the yesteryears could still be seen. There were more staff now and the lodge had two managers, grandsons of Winston and Juliet, Errol and Peter. Peter was thirty years old, and married with two children. Errol was five years his junior and still not married. He was tall, good looking and had athletic shape. In many ways, he resembled his grandfather Winston.

He had only been in the hotel business for about two years. He had decided to join the family business after completing his degree in accounting at the local university which he had attended with his childhood friend Prem Nath, a grandson of Ram Nath and Gauri. Prem Nath graduated with a degree in social science and stayed on to do a post graduate course in teaching. During his stay at the university, Prem had met Sita, who was studying at a nearby medical college to become a nurse. Over the years, the three had become good friends and always did things together at the university. However, Errol had not seen the other two for the last one year now. The hotel was not doing very well recently and he had to quash his desire for further studies to help out Peter in the hotel.

In the mean time Prem and Sita had got engaged to get married. They had invited Errol to the engagement party organised at Prem's farm house. Because of the pressure at work Errol could not attend the party. However he had sent a card to them on the day and also invited them for a dinner at the hotel to celebrate the occasion together. Prem had telephoned him that evening and said that they would be delighted to come to the dinner.

Errol was looking forward to meeting his friends. They had so much to discuss. However he was slightly worried for Prem. Over the phone he had informed Errol of Sita's obsession with migrating to England. Sita had recently seen an advertisement recruiting labourers to England. Since then she had been nagging Prem to inquire about both of them going to England. Winston was filled with mixed feelings as he waited for them to arrive at the Lodge. He had asked the cook to prepare their favourite food and chilled a bottle of best wine for Sita. Prem and Errol liked drinking a good bottle of rum with coke. A taxi pulled up and Errol walked outside to greet his friends.

Sita looked stunning in her red dress. She was slim and petite with shoulder length thick black hair, her red lipstick gleaming brightly in the light. She skipped lightly up to Errol and kissed him gently on the cheeks.

"How are you Errol, haven't seen you in ages. What have you been doing these days? You'll have to tell us all about it." Sita was excited to see Errol.

“Congratulations to both of you! You devils got engaged without me, didn't you?” Errol said smiling broadly. He patted Sita gently on the shoulder as he walked towards Prem. He shook his hands and they hugged each other. “What's the hurry anyway? You haven't been naughty and got my little sister pregnant or something?” Errol asked.

“It was not like that Errol. It was quite alright to live together away from home but back here we needed to do the right thing and get married.” Prem said. “If it was up to Sita we will still be living together!”

“That's not fair! Just because I dress in western style doesn't mean I have forgotten my culture.” Sita stated. “I just wanted to delay us getting married until both of us got jobs.”

“And then it would have been some other excuse. You know how she is!” Ram complained. “Sometimes I wonder if I am doing the right thing.”

“Of course you have done the right thing. You will never get a prettier lady than my little sister here.” Errol tried to cool the thing between the two. Things are already getting hot, he thought to himself, as he prepared himself for more to come.

“Nor a more clever one, my dearest.” Sita added. She turned to Prem and smiled lovingly at him. “Sorry darling I didn't mean to upset you. I was only joking, you know what I am like.” She said in her husky voice.

She kissed him on the lips. “You know I love you so much. Love me?” she asked playfully.

“Of course I do.” Prem said, smiling again as Sita gave him a hug.

“Do you lovebirds want to be left alone out here or do you want to go inside.” Errol asked, smiling.

“Lead us to the rum and food Errol. I am dying for a drink.” Prem said.

“And me to my favourite wine!” Sita said.

“I am at your service madam..., sir. Please follow me to the “Sunset” suite.” Errol said laughing and guiding them inside the Lodge.

The three drank and ate till early hours of the morning as they caught up with each others lives since they parted company at the university. Errol also told them about the financial problem at the Lodge. Just as Errol was beginning to think that his early fear of heated evening was unjustified, Sita dropped the bomb shell.

“Errol, if you don't mind, we want to have your opinion on something we can't agree on.” Sita started.

“No we don’t!” Prem interrupted her. “I thought we had settled this matter for good. We are not going anywhere, and that’s final as far as I am concerned!”

“That’s what you think Prem! I have made up my mind to go and that is final as well!” Sita stated. “Errol, make this silly friend of yours to see it my way. He is trying to spoil the only dream I ever had.”

“Heck! I thought we were going to go through the rest of the evening without any further quarrel between the two of you. If this is what you call love than I am glad I am not in love.” Winston tried to lighten the atmosphere. “But seriously for the life of me, I don’t know what the heck the two of you’re arguing about now. So why don’t you explain to me what all this is about? Going... and not going! What the hell is this all about?” Errol asked.

“Well, this woman here had been reading too many newspapers. Some time ago, she saw an advertisement by our colonial masters recruiting people to work in England. She now thinks that she can go there and be a proper nurse in an English hospital. That is her dream! Work for the colonial *sahibs* in their own country.” Prem started. His face was twisted in an unusual disgust at the thought. “She always pretended to be English by dressing up like them and cutting her hair short.” Prem continued. “Now she wants to live in their country as well. It won’t change her colour and her history, no matter how hard she tries to ape the westerners. She will always be an Indian, a descendent of the indentured slaves of the English colonialist, you hear, a slave!” Prem shouted.

“Look at him Errol, how he changes when it comes to my happiness.” Sita complained. “I don’t think I have become English by the way I dress. I am as much and Indian and Guyanese as he is. The difference is that I will remain an Indian when we go to England. But Prem is still caught up in colonial hangover. He is still living in the past and is insecure about his identity. That is why he is not willing to go to England. He is afraid that he may lose his Indianess over there.” Sita stated calmly.

“What the hell do you know about Indianess or security? You haven’t got either.” Prem shouted back. “Dressing in western clothing doesn’t give you security. And when did they start teaching you about culture and history in a nursing school? I have studied about the history of the colonialism and the atrocities committed against our people by the whites. I haven’t forgotten what my ancestors had to go through at the hands of these cruel bastards and how many sacrifices our ancestors had to make out here. This land is what it is because of the blood and sweat of our people. I don’t want to go to England not because I am insecure but because I appreciate the sacrifices made by our people for the country I love. If she likes England and English so much she should go out there alone. Perhaps she can get married to a *gora* whilst she is over there. At least her children will be half white then. That should fulfil her dreams alright.”

“I didn’t know you could be such a bastard! How can you even suggest a thing like that? And you pretend to love me... I hate you!” Sita said and ran out the room sobbing.

“Look what you have done now.” Errol said getting up. “You two do surprise me sometimes.”

Prem got up as well. He started to walk towards where Sita had disappeared.

“I am sorry Errol, but she keeps going on about it, knowing that I don’t even want to talk about the subject.” Prem tried to explain. “Don’t worry; I know how to calm her down. I will get her back.”

Errol grabbed his arm and took him back to his chair. “You sit down here.” Errol said “I think you have done enough damage already. And keep off the booze until we have sorted this out. I know you get like this when you have had too much to drink.”

Errol saw Sita sobbing in the next room. He reflected on what his friends were arguing about as he slowly walked up to her. He found himself in a tricky situation. Like Prem, he too knew about the history of his people and had a lot of reservations about their people going to England. On the other hand he knew that Sita had her mind set to go there. He loved both of them too much to see them quarrel like this. If this carried on he hated even to think about what might happen between the two. He also knew that Prem and Sita really loved each other and a split between them now will destroy both of them. Somehow he had to find a way to make both of them happy about this situation. A tricky one for him but he will try his best, he promised himself. He sat beside Sita and took her little hand in his own.

“Sita, you know what he is like when he has too much to drink. We know that he doesn't mean all those things. You know what these sociology graduates are like. They think that they are all Marxists and must hate all things that smack of capitalism. They have some kind of vendetta against capitalism. Sometimes they can become too obsessed with this dogma and then they don't want to hear anything else. But I do share his views of our peoples' history and contribution towards this country. I share his feelings and reasons for not wanting to leave Guyana. But at times, one has to make sacrifices in order to achieve something in life. Maybe I would have to go to England as well as you know, just for a while, in order to get out of my financial problem here.”

“Is that true Errol?” Sita asked, wiping her tears and looking at him in amazement. “I didn't realise you have been thinking of going there as well.”

Errol helped her to her feet and they walked towards where Prem was sitting. “Well, it crossed my mind just today, after you brought up the subject.” Prem stated. “Come with me, I want Prem to hear this as well.”

They went back into the room and Sita walked up to Prem.

“You see Prem, Errol too thinks that this is a good idea and wants to go to England as well. You are the only one who is dumb enough not to see a good thing.” She accused.



“Is that true, Errol?” Prem asked “So you too have decided to betray our country like this women here?”

“Look you two, we have got a situation here and it can’t be resolved if you keep on attacking each other.” He turned to Prem. “Yes, I have been thinking about it tonight. I share your views about these people and I’m not too keen on the idea. But we have problems here.” Errol continued. “Firstly, you know as well as I do that Sitais hell bent on this idea. Secondly, you know, the Lodge is in financial trouble. If Peter and I don’t raise some money soon we may lose it eventually. You know we can’t let that happen. So I have been thinking seriously about this England business since you have told me about it. Peter can look after the hotel on his own and I can go to England for awhile. I can work hard and save as much money as I can. With enough money saved, within a few years we will able to recue the hotel and I can return. Likewise, you can take Sita there as well. Look, it is just a suggestion. That way she will be able to see for herself what it is like over there. Soon she will get over her infatuation and both of you can return home. On the other hand both of you may get to like the place. Then you can make a decision about where to live. You will be in a better position then to make a choice. At least this way you will be together. Prem, you don’t have to do this for me, but do it for the person you love.”

Prem sat in silence for along while. Sita and Errol paced up and down the room, expectantly. “I will neither do it for my love for Sita nor for my friendship with you. You shouldn’t ask me to make a choice like that Errol.” Prem said.

Both of them looked disappointed and Sita was about to throw her tantrum again. Prem silenced her.

“But I will do it for my love for both of you. Yes you devils, to keep you two happy I will go anywhere, let alone to that bloody country.” Prem said smiling.

Sita and Errol couldn’t believe their ears. Sita ran up to him and planted a big kiss on his lips. Errol poured a large rum and coke. “Here my friend, you deserve this.” He said, giving him a big hug.

Prem embraced both of them. “But remember, we will go there for just ten years, maximum! After that we shall come back and help our people here. After all they have looked after us and educated us all these years.” Prem stated.

“Of course, we will never let these people down.” Errol said.

“We will not betray them Prem, we owe them that much.” Sita said smiling at Prem.

“What I now want to know is if you two still love each other and if the engagement is still on.” Errol asked.

Prem walked up to Sita and hugged her. “Yes, I love her, and I will always love her.” Prem said. “We have to get married before we leave though.”

Sita kissed him and looked lovingly into his eyes. “Yes, I love him too, despite his temper!” Sita said.

Errol breathed a sigh of relief. He was happy that the three of them finally made a decision that will keep them together again. “I’ll drink to that.” Errol said. “Come on, let's dance. We have a wedding to celebrate about now.”

## Chapter Nine

The seat belt sign came on and the pilot announced that the plane was approaching Heathrow airport. Sita looked excitedly out of the window. It was nearly mid-day and the summer sun was shining brightly outside. It was nearly a year after the decision at the Lodge to go to England that they finally got thing together and were ready to depart. In the meantime Prem and Sita had got married and had a lavish ceremony on the farm. All of them had great difficulty in persuading their families to consent to their migration, even a temporary one. However they persisted and in the end their families relented. On the day of their departure many people came to the airport to see them off; their parents, bothers, sister, relatives and many of the villagers. The farewells were very emotional and almost everyone was in tears when the three said their final goodbyes and began their long walk to the customs. They could see everyone waving wildly as they walked along the passage leading to the aeroplane door. The three stopped for a while to wave back to them. It was a moment of strange emotions for all of them. The sad feeling of leaving their loved ones was mixed with feelings of excitement for the new adventures which awaited them in England. With final waves the three slowly walked though the plane door, smiling faintly to the waiting hostesses.

Once inside the plane they were thrilled to see the luxurious settings of the plane and the prospect of their first flight. Sita discovered that she was actually frightened of flying, but not wanting to be laughed at by the men, she sat quietly during the flight. On the other hand Prem and Errol took full advantage of the free in-flight drinks offer and started on the rum as soon after they got in. As the flight progressed Sita was getting more and more concerned about the state two were getting into.

“You two have had enough. So don’t ask for any more drinks. When we are going though the customs, I want you to go to the washroom and wash your faces. Brush your teeth as well. We don’t wan Faruk and Shabnum to think you two are good for nothing drunks.” Sita told them.

“Oh, yes I forgot about them, I don’t give a damn about the little old Faruk. Remember him Errol; we used to play together when we were boys? They used to live in my village. I haven’t seen him since I went to the university.” Prem said.

“Yes I remember him. He was always interested in playing soccer. My dad told me that one of his forefathers, Ram....no... Ramzan built the extension for the Lodge. He went into the building trade as well, didn’t he?” asked Errol.

“Oh yes, this chap Ramzan and our folks have been good friends for years. Yes his dad was in the building trade as well. Faruk got the English bug much earlier and had left Guyana about five years ago. My father told me that he got married to a girl from Pakistan about two years ago. He lives somewhere called East Ham in London. Tell you the truth;he is not such a bad chap Errol. We don’t have to worry about transport as he is coming to pick us up from the airport. What about your friend Errol? You sure he is going to be at the airport?” Prem asked with concern.

“I hope so! I got to know about him only a few weeks ago from one of our cousins. I have written to Sam and hope he has received the letter in time.” Errol stated. “I have the address on me anyway. I’ll find my way to his home one way or the other.”

“Don’t be silly, if he is not there. Faruk will drop you there. After all he lives in London too, doesn’t he?” Sita reassured Errol.

They didn’t have to worry. After clearing the customs and refreshing themselves in the toilet they found Faruk and Sam waiting for them outside. Faruk and Sam had already met while waiting for them. Sam told Faruk that he lived in Lewisham and Faruk offered to give them a lift home on the way to East Ham. By the time they met the newly arrived their travel plan was sorted out. Errol and Prem were relieved to find out that Shabnum was not at the airport. Despite their attempts to sober up they were still very unstable on their feet.

“Faruk, these two had a skinful on the plane.” Sita explained to the two Londoners after the greetings were over. “Let’s hurry home before they fall asleep or something else happens.”

“Don’t worry Sita; I was in a similar condition when I arrived here.” Faruk said with a grin. “We’ll drop Errol and Sam on the way home.”

They walked up to Faruk’s old ford escort car and drove out of the airport. Faruk and Sam laughed and joked as the three new arrivals looked around and commented on the different things they noticed on their way to Lewisham. The two remembered how they too went through a similar process when they first arrived in England. Soon they were outside Sam’s flat. Errol and Sam got off the car there and said their goodbyes. Sam invited the three in but they declined as they all were very tired. They promised to come by another day. Errol kissed Sita on her cheeks and hugged Ram.

“We are here now my friends, let’s get to work. Remember why we are here and we will return within ten years.” Errol reminded them of their promise.

“Not a day later, sooner if possible. I already miss home.” Prem stated

“Well, I am ready for my bed.” Errol said. “I’ll give you a call soon.”

The two went inside and Faruk drove towards his home in East Ham. He explained to Prem and Sita that his house was on the east end side of London, which is another poor area of London.

“A lot of people from India and Pakistan have settled there. As more and more people come in, they seek out their friend and families in these areas and thus the population of the Indians and Pakistanis, known as Asians here, is growing rapidly. When I first came here I too stayed with relatives from Guyana. Two years later we put some money together and bought an old house rather cheaply. Being a builder, I soon did it up and a year later we sold it at a profit. With that money we bought two more houses, done these up and sold them too. Now we have our own house to live in

and a couple of houses to do up and sell. That is what I do now, thank god.” Faruk told them.

“What do you mean, didn’t you start building work straight away after coming here?” Sita asked him, surprised.

“No. I had thought I will get work as a builder straight away. That’s the main reason I decided to leave Guyana.” Faruk replied. “But I had a shock when I came here. I applied for many building work but nobody would employ me. For four month I had no jobs and my money was running out fast. Then my relatives impressed upon me about the reality of job situation here. He told me that I will never be employed as a builder here. This job was reserved for the whites. The only jobs I will get here are the ones the whites don’t want to do. The low class and menial jobs; the jobs these people brought us to do here.” Faruk looked very upset now.

The car had pulled up outside an old house amongst a row of terraced houses. Faruk invited them inside and helped them with their luggage. Inside, the house was very neat and tidy. They went inside the lounge and Faruk told them to relax and make themselves at home.

“Shabnum, we are here. Come in and meet my buddies from back home.” Faruk shouted out. “I’ll put on some old Hindi music to remind us of home. After tea and some snacks, you two can have some rest. Shabnum has been cooking all day for you. I am sure you’ll like her cooking.”

Shabnum entered the room with a tray full of tea and snacks. She was a tall and slender woman with long black hair floating behind her. But her most striking feature was her huge green eyes. She smiled shyly as she walked gingerly to the centre of the room and placed the tray on the coffee table.

“Let me introduce you to my beautiful wife Shabnum. She has been looking after me for two years now. I don’t know what I would have done without her.” Faruk said proudly. “And Shabnum, these are very good friends of mine from back home. We all grew up together in the village until these two decided that they were too good for us and went to the university.

“Hello, Faruk has not stopped talking about the two of you since he received the letter. He has been so excited to meet you.” Shabnum said in her soft voice. “It is our pleasure to have you here with us. Faruk won’t feel so lonely now.” Sita handed over the tea to Prem and Sita.

“We are really grateful to both of you for putting us up. Obviously we will try not to be a burden on you for too long.” Sita said.

“I’ll get upset if you two ever talk about being a burden on us. We want you to feel free to be with us as long as it takes.” Faruk said. He helped himself to some *samosas*. “Look at this drunkard, he has fallen asleep already. Never mind, after a few *samosas* I will help you to your room, and Shabnum will help you unpack.” He said to Sita as he made Prem comfortable on the settee.

Prem slept tightly till nine o'clock, snoring gently. The dinner was ready by then and the three were waiting to eat. Sita was getting a bit cross with Prem for showing her up on the first day. At nine she decided to wake him up and asked him to get ready for dinner.

"Come on Prem, everybody is waiting for you." Sita complained.

"Oh shit, is that what the time is?" Prem said, jumping out of the settee. "Give me a second and I'll join you. Just show me where the things are. You should have awoken me up sooner."

"Now, don't blame me just because you can't control your drinking." Sita got more cross and pushed him out of the room. "After you finish upstairs come through there into the kitchen for dinner. I'll tell them you are finally up."

Prem came down after a few minutes and apologised for being late. Shabnum had cooked plenty of Indian food.

"I have made some lamb curry and *bhindi* for you. Faruk told me that they were your favourites." Shabnum said to Prem as he sat down. She served him some of the curry. "What else are you going to have, *roti* or rice?"

"Hey Faruk you remember our favourites *bhindi*? Your mother used to cook them for us. Great stuff! And she would serve them hot, straight out of the pan. And *hotrotis*! We used to eat like pigs!" Prem said and Faruk nodded his head. "I'll start with some *rotis* thanks. The food smells just great." Prem said to Shabnum and she smiled back to him.

"You never told me that they were your favourites, Prem I would have cooked them for you. You always said to me you like aubergines and roast chicken." Sita complained to Prem.

"Only because you can't cook *bhindi* and lamb curry the way I like them. You tried and it was a disaster, remember? I didn't want to offend you so I never asked you to make them again." Prem said. "But these, they are just the way I like them. Can I have some more Shabnum?"

"Of course you can. I have cooked plenty. Faruk told me you are a big man with a big appetite." She stated smiling. "I thought you'll be fat when Faruk said you were big. Now, I can see he meant that you are tall and muscular. You must need a lot of food to keep all the muscles in shape."

"Oh yes, I love eating. But I have to do a lot of exercise to keep trim and fit." Prem replied.

"I can see that. You must get Faruk to do some exercise as well. He doesn't take care of himself and is developing bit of a belly!" Shabnum said giggling playfully.

“Yes, I am sure Prem will get Faruk fit and trim for you Shabnum.” Sita said. “I want to keep up with my fitness as well. If you can show me where the local gym is I will start again. Perhaps we can go together. You may benefit from some workout as well, I think. But for now can we talk about some important things, like getting ourselves a job? We’ll have plenty of time to talk about Prem’s fitness once we have got a job.”

Sure, I’ll show you where the gym is Sita. I’ll go with you for company. But I don’t really need any exercise to keep slim. I guess I’m just lucky that way.” Shabnum stated. She turned to Prem. “I’m sure you don’t need to start a job straight away. You must relax and enjoy yourselves for a few days before you start looking for a job. Once you start working you’ll find no time to look around. Isn’t it Faruk? He has even taken a few days off to show you around. He will be able to give you a few hints about looking for jobs over here.”

“Shabnum is right. I have taken some leave especially for this purpose.” Faruk agreed. “I must warn you that it will be difficult for you in the beginning. You may not initially get what you want in the way of jobs. I think we’ll start by getting to know the area first. There will be plenty of time to work later. But for tonight let us relax and enjoy. Come on Prem, I have some rum. We’ll have some drinks and leave the ladies alone for a while.

“That sounds great to me.” Prem said getting up. “And you can finish the story you were telling us in the car.”

## Chapter Ten

For the next two weeks the four went sight-seeing around London. Each morning Shabnum and Sita would prepare a picnic while the men planned out the day's tour. For the first two weeks Faruk drove them around in his car. After that he returned to work, and the other three travelled around on buses and the underground trains. During this period Prem and Sita updated Faruk about recent developments in Guyana. In return Faruk and Shabnum informed the newly-arrived about the situation in Britain. As days turned into weeks Prem and Sita began to get more and more concerned about their future in Britain. They wanted to discuss more about their job situations and get a place of their own. Prem and Sita's worries began to increase as time went by and they got even more depressed when they learnt about Faruk's experiences and struggles to get a decent job.

"I couldn't sit around and do nothing." Faruk told them one day. "The job I wanted to do was not coming around. The choice for me was to sit around and do nothing, go back home or take a low class job. Going back to Guyana was a very tempting at the time but I decided against it. I didn't have the guts to go back and face the folks empty handed. So in the end I decided to take a low job and wait for something better to come by later."

"So what did you do? What kind of job did you finally take on?" Sita asked.

"Through a friend I came to know about a job as a kitchen hand in an Indian restaurant." Faruk said looking embarrassed. "Would you believe it Prem, me working in a restaurant as a kitchen hand? But I took on the job. I lied to everybody back home and I told them I was working as a manager of this place. I was desperate but I worked damn hard and for very long hours. That's how I was able to save up some money. It was hard but in the end it paid off. You know the rest of the story. Tell you what; I'll take you to the restaurant one day. I still go there sometimes, to remind me of the early days."

All were quite for a while. Faruk looked embarrassed. Sita and Prem reflected on their future prospects for their job search and possibilities of them ending up doing similar types of jobs.

"Faruk, I would have probably done the same thing." Prem said in the end. "What am I talking about? I am beginning to feel that I too may have to settle on something like that for now. At least you have made it."

"You have a better chance of getting the type of job you are looking for Prem. You have a degree, don't you? Shabnum asked.

"Yes, I have a degree alright. But I don't know what they are worth or what good they are over here. So far I have applied for a number of lecturing and teaching posts, but most of them haven't even replied to me. Those who have bothered to reply said that they don't have any vacancies."



“There is a place here which can tell you what your qualifications are and what they are worth here. I think you should get them assessed as soon as you can.” Faruk suggested.

“Yes, and you should try some other jobs as well.” Shabnum said “But I think Sita will have more problems getting what she wants. I heard on the TV that they are not taking any more ethnic nurses. Most of the jobs in the hospitals are the low class jobs category such as cleaning or washing the linens.”

“I have not come all this way to work as a goddamn auxiliary in a hospital!” Sita exploded. “I have studied hard and got top marks in all my exams. I did not struggle all my life to do cleaning jobs for anybody.”

“You have to be realistic Sita. We all have struggled back home and I also had dreams.” Shabnum said sadly. “But if they don’t want to give us the jobs we want then we have to take what is available. Otherwise we all have to stay home.”

“Just because you couldn’t get a job doesn’t mean that I can’t get one either.” Sita sniggered. “At least I have some qualification to help me get what I want.”

Shabnum walked away from the three and sat down on a bench some distance away.

“Sita, what the hell is the matter with you.” Prem said annoyed. “At least try to be civil to people who are helping us.”

“Don’t worry about it Prem I think Sita is just frustrated about the job situation.” Faruk said. “I will talk to Shabnum.”

Faruk strolled over to Shabnum and sat down beside her. Sita sat silently, gently picking at grass blades from the ground. Prem stared angrily at Sita until she looked up at him. She saw the anger in his eyes and lowered her eyes to the ground again. “I thought this is what you wanted so much, coming to England. Now that you are here, I hoped that you will start using your brains, at least once in a while. We haven’t been here even a month and you are up to your old self again. I really don’t understand you sometimes. You know, I can take it if you don’t care about my feelings; at least it is between us. But how can you be so insensitive to the people who are so nice to us?” Prem asked.

Sita looked up slowly. She looked at Prem for a while, looking sad and serious.

“You also can be very insensitive Prem, to me. You know how much I love and care about you.” She said sounding hurt. “I like and respect Faruk. I also appreciate what they are doing for us. But I don’t know what happens to me whenever Shabnum comes near you or says something to get your attention. At times I want to tear her eyes out. I’m sorry Prem, but I can’t help it.”

Prem was shocked and stared speechlessly at Sita. He tried to make sense of what Sita had just said. But he found it very difficult to grasp what she tried to imply.

“Come on Prem, you must be blind not to notice that she is after you. The way she looks at you, jumps at every opportunity to do things for you and to defend you.” It was Sita’s turn to be surprised at Prem’s apparent naiveness.

“I am amazed that you could even think like this about Shabnum and me.” Prem said. “Here we are in a strange land and with tons of problems, trying to achieve our dreams. And all you can think about is this silly thing. Where are your priorities Sita? Where is your trust in me? I just can’t believe this is happening. You have been behaving like a jealous little girl all this time for nothing, for nothing what so ever, Sita.”

Sita was looking at the ground again, her thick black hair covering her face.

“Prem, I can’t help myself for the way I am feeling. Maybe I am wrong about her. Maybe I am reading too much into the situation. But the fact is that I feel this way. She is very attractive and open in her manners. We have been together for some time now Prem.” Sita said, her voice breaking up.” I sometimes think you may be getting fed up with me and maybe I will lose you. I don’t want to lose you Prem. I love you so much. Perhaps that is my problem.”

Sita lifted her head and looked at Prem. Tears were rolling down her cheek and she was sobbing. Prem moved quickly at her side and embraced her.

“I love you too daring, you know how much.” Prem said softly.” But Sita, trust is very important part of love. Without trust love cannot survive. It is difficult enough when we are in familiar surrounding and amongst families and friends. Over here, we don’t have all these. Therefore it is more important for us to trust and help each other. Promise me that you will tell me everything that bothers you and we will try to solve it together.”

Sita nodded her head. “I will Prem, I promise.” She said slowly. “Prem, I’m beginning to think that I made a mistake by forcing you and Errol to come here. I miss Guyana and our people very much. I really miss my parents Prem; I wish we could go back.”

“Go back? You can't go back! You've just arrived here.” Faruk's voice boomed behind them. “You can’t expect to survive in this county on love and cuddles alone, you two. Let's head back now. Or have you forgotten that we have been invited by Errol for dinner in Lewisham?”

The four returned home, got changed and then Faruk drove them to Sam’s flat in Lewisham. On the way Sita and Shabnum sat quietly in the back. Sensing the tense atmosphere in the car, Prem tried to cheer everybody up.

“I'm glad that we're going to visit Errol. I really feel like a good drink tonight. I hope Errol has saved us some of that duty free rum.” Prem said.

He was surprised not to hear Sita giving him her usual reminder not to drink too much. He turned around and looked at her. She just smiled and he smiled back,

blowing a gentle blow kiss towards her. Shabnum watched them quietly and turning her head away she stared into the darkness outside.

They were greeted warmly by Errol when they arrived at the flat. He announced that Sam had cooked them a wonderful dish of curry goat but unfortunately had to go to work.

“Curry goat and rice, my favourite!” Sita said, sitting down. “Doesn’t it smell great Prem? This reminds me of home.”

“I love curry goat too.” Faruk stated. “I haven’t tasted home cooked curry goat for years.”

“Errol, I see you haven’t forgotten the rum.” Prem said taking a glass of rum from behind him. “Cheers old boy. Now tell us what you have been up to. How is the hotel management job hunting going on?”

Errol handed drinks to the others and sat down. He suddenly looked sad and depressed.

“Things are not looking too good, Prem.” Errol said slowly. “I have tried many hotels for work as a manager. What an experience! Some of them wouldn’t even let me in, you know, the posh ones. The ones who gave me an interview were not interested in hiring me as a manager at all, not even as a waiter. Some of them tried to be polite and said that they had nothing for me.”

Errol stopped for awhile, trying to control his anger and disappointment.

“We have had similar experiences Errol.” Sita said. “Prem and I have been trying so hard to find work in our fields but not even a look-in far.”

“Just think, I left everything back home to be treated like a leper by these people. Even the desk clerks and the waiters treat me as if I am nobody.” Errol was angry and hurt. “I don’t stand a chance getting a decent job in my profession here. I shouldn’t have rushed in like this coming here. I should have made some inquiries before making the final decision.”

Sita looked uncomfortably at the others. She saw Prem looking at her from above the rim of his glasses. He shifted his look when he noticed Sita looking at him.

“Both of you are in this terrible situation because of me. I’m sorry; I shouldn’t have forced you two to bring me here.” Sita apologised.

“You don’t have to apologise to me Sita. Fair enough, it was your idea to start off with. But I made my decision to come here because of my situation.” Errol said trying to console her. “It has little to do with your reasons to come here Sita. So stop blaming yourself.”

“Look, we all made a choice, for whatever reason, to come here. We all knew what we were doing at the time. There is no point in either blaming anybody or need

for any one apologising.” Prem said. He stood up and poured drinks for the others. “We are here and are in bit of a mess. But we all are educated and intelligent people and we are not going to let this defeat us. So let's try to resolve the situation together.”

“Boy you are beginning to sound like a true community activist, Prem. I read in my history book back home that one of your ancestors was bit of a politician as well. Perhaps you should start something like this here, don't you think, Sita. Looking after the welfare of our people?” Errol was smiling but sounded serious.

“We have to sort out our situation first.” Sita stated. “But I do think there is a need for someone to speak for our community on these matters. Yes, later on I think Prem may like to do that. I know he has the talent for this type of things.” She added proudly.

“I think he will be very good in this type of job. Remember him making all types of political speeches at the school debates.” Faruk added. Shabnum sat quietly, stealing glances at Prem from time to time. She was beginning to admire him for his intellect as well.

“He didn't stop just at the school. Weren't you the president of the union for a couple of years Prem?” Errol asked.

“Yes he was! That's where I met him for the first time. I still remember him making a great speech during the student strike. And I immediately fell in love with him.” Sita stated. “I tried to make him notice me for weeks after that. But he appeared not to notice me when I tried to draw his attention to me. In the end I decided to join the union as well, just to get near him for him to notice me.”

“You err... you cheeky one, and all this time I thought you were committed to our cause. You worked so hard for the union.” Prem said surprised. “I did notice you before that though. But you appeared to be a spoilt little brat, pretending to be something you weren't. Errol do you remember me telling you about her before she joined the union?”

“Oh yes, but you don't want me to repeat here what type of things you used to say about her, do you now?” Errol said laughing. “And when she appeared in the Union, suddenly everything changed. Heck, I have never seen a man change so much in such a little time.”

“Well it's nice to know that my efforts in the union paid off nicely. One of these days you'll have to tell me the things he used to say about me Errol.” Sita said.

“I know Errol is a very discreet person. So am I and Errol knows that as well. He knows well what I am talking about.” Prem said to Errol grinning. “I think we have delved enough in the past for now. Thanks for the compliment though. But I agree Sita. First we have to sort out our job situation here. Once we are a bit secure I am prepared to take on this task of representing our people as best as I can.”

Errol got up and started to pace slowly up and down the room. Realising that Errol wanted to say something serious others remained silent. Prem got up and poured drinks for Errol and himself. Errol took the drink from him and finally sat down again.

“Well, I have something to tell you lot. You see, I have sorted out something for myself for now. It is nothing big and it was very difficult decision for me to make but I have made it. I could not sit around any longer.” Errol said looking slightly embarrassed.

“That’s great! You’ve found a job, that’s all what counts at this moment. What is it Errol, tell us?” Sita asked excited.

“Well it is a bit of a come-down from being an owner-manger of a hotel back home! You see, Sam works for the London Underground railway as a guard. He suggested that I should join him, so I went for an interview there. They offered me the job and I took it. Well, at least I can travel free on the Underground now.” Errol looked at his friends for their reactions.

Both Sita and Prem looked slightly shocked. It had not crossed their mind till recently that one of them will be taking a job of an underground railway guard.

“The money is not too bad. If I am careful I maybe able to save some money, even after sending some to Peter back home to pay back the loan.” Errol explained. “After that is sorted out I want to save even harder. Eventually I want to save enough to open a small place for myself here.”

Prem handed another drink to Errol. “I think it was very brave of you to do this old chap. You turned out to be the bravest out of the three of us.” Prem stated, patting Errol on his shoulders. “Sita and I have been toying with the idea of taking on some lower class job as well. Just to start off with, you know a temporary type of thing. Thereafter we can look for better opportunities for us. At least we would have made a start. We were going to suggest this to you today. But old chap, you have beaten us to it and made our work much easier.”

Sita went up to Errol and kissed him lightly on the cheek. “That was a very brave thing to do brother. Well done and congratulation on the new job.” Sita said.

“That is the way to do thing over here to start with. Later on one can pursue their dreams.” Shabnum said. “Farukdid the same and now he is doing ok. I know Prem and Sita have been trying to make difficult decisions. Perhaps it will be easier for them now.”

“Well, I think that decision will be easier to make when some food is inside them. I’m starving as well. So let’s go in the dinning room and the two can tell us what they are going to do.” Errol said and led them into the dinning room.

Over the dinner Sita and Prem told them about their plans. Sita was thinking of taking on a job as an auxiliary nurse at a hospital in Newham. She had made inquiries about converting her Guyanese nursing qualification into the British standard. She will have to take up further nursing courses and it may take her up to three years

to complete. After that she will be able to take on a nursing job as a fully qualified nurse.

Prem decided to look for other types of jobs. In the meantime he wanted to convert his degree up to British standard as well. One university informed him that the most he will get for his Guyanese degree in Britain is two years off from a BA degree course.

“It means that I will be able to complete a BA course in two years part-time. After that I will take on a MA degree course on part time basis as well.” Prem stated. “In four years I will have my qualifications back. Then I want to see how they can stop me from getting the job I want. In the mean time I can take on a security job or something that will give me time to study as well.

“That seems like a good idea.” Faruk encouraged him. “It is not difficult for us to get into security job here. The hours are long though, if one wants to make some money. But on the other hand, the job is easy and will give you plenty of time to study on the job site, especially in the night and the weekends.”

“Well, that settled then, security job for me it seems.” Prem said. “Now the hard part is done with, let's relax and enjoy ourselves. What about another bottle of rum to celebrate this, Errol?”

“Hell heck! Sounds like a great idea!” Errol said and got up to get another bottle of rum.

# Part Five

## Chapter Eleven

Sita started her job as an auxiliary nurse in Newham hospital within a week. She joined a group of other women from the Indian sub-continent and the Caribbean. At first she resented the job immensely. As the days went by she began to accept her situation as a temporary one, until she got herself retrained, she told herself. The situation for her was made less unbearable when she learnt that there were a few other qualified nurses from back home doing similar jobs as her. Through them she got to know about getting a place for her in a nursing college and one of them assisted her to make an application for admission into a nearby college.

Prem got himself a job as a security officer without much difficulty. He looked through the job sections of the local newspapers for a few days and picked out a few vacancies that most suited him. His choices depended on how close the job sites were from home and the rate of pay, which in most cases were not much. The hours were not important to him as he did not mind doing shift work. He was fortunate to get an offer on the first interview. The work was mostly in the London city area. When the employer offered him the job at the end of the interview and he took that job. They were pleased with him and he started his duties the next day.

In the mean time Errol was getting on with his job on the underground trains. He was lucky to get a job which required only day shift. His manager was a good friend of Sam and had arranged the day shift for Errol as a favour to Sam. However Errol was not happy with the pay he was getting. He was finding it very difficult to save enough for his planned business in London after sending money home to Peter. He was getting more and more depressed with his situation and began to spend a lot of time in the pub with Sam and some new friends. He began to drink and smoke heavily. Prem and Sita noticed these changes in Errol and were very concerned. For several weeks now they have been thinking of ways to help Errol out of this situation.

“A few days ago I talked with one of my supervisors about Errol.” Prem said one day to Sita. “You know, there are always work available on my site or some other sites when the regular guards don’t turn up. I know the supervisions get into panic in order to get somebody to fill in for them. He said he would take Errol on if he agrees to be available at a short notice.”

“That appears to be a possibility.” Sita said. “It can kill two birds at the same time. Errol will be able to earn more money and he will have less time to get drunk in the pubs then.”

“Yeah he will be too tired to do anything else if he agrees to do double shifts. But he will surely be better off money wise. He will get more wages and he will be saving on his drinks as well.” Prem felt pleased with the strategy. “Lets invite the two over for dinner and then we can persuade him to take on this job.”

Errol was very pleased with the invitation but came alone as Sam was working again. The two told him of their idea and Errol agreed to take on the job. Prem arranged an interview for him. The interview went well and after the interview Errol got his uniform and other equipment. The contract was that Errol will be called in



from time to time to fill in for the absent night shift guards. Errol did not have to wait long for his first call and got called the very next night to cover for somebody who had reported in sick. That was a very good start for him and thereafter he got called out three or four evenings a week. On certain evenings both Errol and Prem worked on the same site. Although Errol got very tired at the end of the week after doing two jobs, he was pleased that slowly he was getting nearer to his target.

However Sita was concerned about his welfare and felt that he needed someone to share life with him. Although Errol was a very handsome man, he was not showing any interest in women at all. In fact he had not shown an interest in women at all since his childhood sweetheart was killed in a car accident when the two were in the final year at the university. It was quite a surprise that he took his finals and got his degree. However they knew that he was devastated at the loss and since he was not interested in any other girl. In his spare time Errol took up painting and over the years drew many paintings of his girlfriend, as if capturing all her memories before the accident cut her life brutally short.

Her death was more than five years ago now and Sita felt that Errol should find someone else. She tried to tell Errol her thoughts on several occasions but he just laughed it off.

“I’m too busy making money to think of any such things. I’m trying to save our hotel over here Sita.” Errol would say to her or he would say “I don’t need anyone else when I have you to look after me, do I?”

In the end Sita gave up on him. She got busy with her studies and soon they moved into their own flat in ManorPark. They also started to save money toward buying their own property. They asked Faruk to look out for something decent for them. Faruk suggested that they should look for a house in the better part of London the first time around so that they didn’t have to keep moving houses. He promised to find a run down house which they can buy quite cheaply. He will then help them to do it up and they will end up having a nice property at a reasonable cost. Prem and Sita thought the idea was good and asked Faruk to go ahead and find them such a place. More good news followed when Errol informed them one day that the hotel back home was in the clear and he could start saving for his own business.

In the meantime Sita began to get friendly with one of her fellow students at the hospital. She was an Irish girl called Sandy. She was in the same year as Sita and had recently arrived in Britain from Ireland. She lived in the hostel at the hospital and was very shy. For many weeks she hardly talked to anyone, but gradually she began to warm up to Sita. Sita began to like her and soon the two became good friends. When they moved into their own house Sita asked her to rent a room with them as there was a lot of space in their house. Sandy gladly agreed and moved into the house.

One sunny Saturday evening Errol and Prem finished a joint shift early and both went shopping at the local supper market. Errol was staying at Prem and Sita's house that night and they decided to make a night of it. When shopping finished Prem dropped Errol off at his house. The idea was for Errol to get on with cooking his latest recipe while Prem went to the hospital to pick up Sita.

Errol grabbed hold of the shopping and went inside the house. The music was on and Errol realised that Sandy must be upstairs. He heard a lot about Sandy from Prem recently but was yet to meet her. Not wishing to disturb her, he decided to get on with the cooking. He had promised them a special dish he had learnt from Sam. He poured himself a drink and started to chop the meat, rocking gently to the music from upstairs. In the meantime Sandy decided to come down and make herself a cup of tea. She didn't know that Errol was coming home for dinner. She strode into the kitchen but stopped in her tracks when she saw Errol in the kitchen, his back turned away from her as he merrily chopped away. Frightened and not knowing what else to do, she let out a scream and staggered backwards. Errol turned around towards her, the large chopper still in his hand, some blood dripping from it. Sandy saw the bloody chopper and let out even a bigger scream and turned around to make her escape. Errol quickly put the knife down and with quick strides got in front of Sandy. Sandy bumped into him and with a fearful cry slumped to the kitchen floor.

“Hey, you don't have to be frightened of me. I'm so sorry I didn't mean to frighten you. I should have called out, but the music was on and I thought you would hear me. I thought that Prem and Sita must have mentioned me to you.” Errol tried to explain.

He was aware that Sandy was very frightened. And he felt sorry and responsible for her fear. But Sandy began to relax as soon as she realised who he was. She looked at the tall and handsome man standing very apologetically in front of her as she lifted herself up slowly. He appeared to be everything Sita had told her about him and more. She could not keep her eyes off him.

“No, no. I don't remember them mentioning you coming here today. They must have forgotten or something.” Sandy said. “You did give me a fright though. When I first saw you, I thought you were a burglar. And then I saw the bloody chopper in your hand, and Oh shit..., I thought my time was up. My worst nightmare was staring at me right in my eyes. Shit I didn't know what to do.” She added trying to smile.

Errol reached out and offered his hand to her as she struggled to her feet. She took his hand and he pulled her up. He looked into her deep blue eyes, beautiful round face and full lips. When she finally smiled her lips parted widely, exposing her beautiful set of teeth. She was light and petite and when Errol pulled her up she landed against him, her long blond hair covering her face. Sandy made no attempt to move away from him and Errol began to tremble slightly with excitement. He was also getting a bit confused at that moment as no woman had got so close to him since his girlfriend had died. He also felt excited by Sandy and he could sense Sandy's excitement as well. He slowly moved the hair away from her face and kept looking at her. She looked back at him for a while and with a smile, slowly moved away from him.

“I am so sorry; I don't know what had come over me.” Errol apologised. “Heck! I'm so hot. I need a large drink. Do you want one as well? I think Prem has some beer and wine in the fridge.”

“I am so sorry as well. I mean you must have been frightened by my scream as well. It's Sita's fault! She should have warned me about you.” Sandy said. She moved close to him again. “I think I will have some of that wine. It was a bit frightening for both of us, wasn't it?”

Errol unscrewed the wine bottle and poured Sandy some wine in a glass. He was still very excited by her. He had not felt that way since the first time he had seen his only girl friend back in Guyana. He could see Sandy was also looking at him in a peculiar way. That made him more excited. He handed over the drink to her.

“Knowing Sita the way I do, I think that she deliberately did not tell us of this meeting. She has been trying to introduce me to one girl or another for a long time. She feels that I need some one to look after me. Although when recently she stopped this match-making thing I did wonder why. A case of a lull before the storm I think.” Errol said.

“I now realise why she has been telling me so much about you. She could not stop talking about you, how handsome you were, how considerate you were, how clever you were.....” Sandy said pretending to be Sita, but Errol cut her short.

“And now that you have met me and you find that I am none of these so you want to take a piss out of me.” Errol protested.

“No...No, it's not that. On the contrary, I think Sita was very economical with the descriptions of your attributes.” Sandy replied. “I think that you're very nice.”

Errol looked at her silently for a while. He poured them both more drinks and handed the wine to Sandy.

I haven't felt like this for a long time. I am beginning to think that Sita and Prem did the right thing.” Errol said softly. He looked deeply into her eyes. “What do you think Sandy, do you think they did the right thing as well?”

Sandy took a long sip from her glass. She was trembling inside. She felt as if she had known him for years. She felt safe and secure with him. She felt that she wanted to be with him forever. She felt very lucky to be in that situation.

“Yes Errol, I too think that they were right. I think they are very special person. And I think that they have a very special friend in you.” Sandy said gently, her voice trembling slightly. “Errol I have not felt like this before as well. And I do not want this feeling to ever stop now.”

Errol moved forward and took her in his arms and pulled her close to his broad shoulders. He kissed her lightly on her forehead. They heard the key turn and the door open gently. They quickly pulled themselves away from each other.

“I must be getting on with the cooking. I told Prem that the food will be ready by time they came home. I haven't even started.” Errol said, starting on the meat again. “By the way, Prem had said that he had an announcement to make. I think that he wants us to go to the local pub after the dinner.”

“I will help you with the cooking. Just tell me what you want me to do.”  
Sandy said. “I too remember Sita saying something about a little celebration. Maybe I can make a little announcement about our cause for celebration tonight.”

Errol turned around and looked at her. He smiled gently at her. “I think I will drink to that.” They picked up their glasses and drank to each other.

## Chapter 12

Prem and Sita were overjoyed when they found out that Errol and Sandy had got along well after the initial drama and planned to continue seeing each other. On the same night they announced that Sita was pregnant and was expecting a baby in autumn. That evening the four had a double celebration which went on till late that night. They started the celebration at home with dinner and continued with it at the local pub well after closing time. It seemed to them finally happiness was heading their way.

Errol and Sandy continued to see each other regularly and after a few weeks Sandy moved in with Errol. A few months before the baby was due both Sandy and Sita passed their final exams and started to work as qualified nurses. Sita was overjoyed at her achievement and looked forward to Prem getting his degree as well. Just before the baby was born Prem learnt that he had passed his exams and was awarded his MA degree. Joy held no bounds for the two when Sita gave birth to a healthy baby. Letters and telegrams were sent to Guyana and a party was organised by the two. Sita's mother came over from Guyana for a few months to look after Sita and baby Priya.

In the mean time Errol and Sandy had got very close and in the winter Sandy announced that she was pregnant as well. They all were very pleased but Errol didn't want the baby born out of wedlock. On the day Sandy announced to him that she was pregnant Errol proposed to her. To his great delight Sandy accepted his proposal to get married and a few weeks later they announced their wedding day to others. They decided to hold a very private marriage ceremony in a church with close with friends and invite others to a reception in Tottenham in North London.

Prem, Sita, Faruk, and Shabnum attended the wedding ceremony which passed off smoothly. They were however confused as to why Errol and Sandy had decided to hold the reception in Tottenham.

"What type of place is this anyway?" Prem could no longer hold back his curiosity after the wedding. "Is it a community centre or what?"

"Don't get impatient Prem, and don't worry, you'll get plenty of rum and Guyanese food." Errol said secretively.

"Well, it is a little restaurant Errol's friend has opened up." Sandy informed them as they persisted.

"What type of restaurant is it?" Sita wanted to know. "I haven't heard of an English or Indian restaurant doing Guyanese food. Is somebody cooking food away from the restaurant?"

"Don't be so impatient, you two. We will be there in a moment or two and then you'll be able to see for yourself." Errol said as the car pulled outside a brightly decorated restaurant. On the board outside was written *Cariba Café*. They all got out of the car and entered the café. The inside appeared to have been done up recently and

looked very nice. There were at least fifty seats and in one corner some shining musical instruments were neatly placed. In front of it was a small dancing area. On the opposite side was the kitchen and delicious aroma of Caribbean food was coming out of it. As Prem and Sita began inspecting the restaurant other guests began to arrive one by one and the musicians started to softly play titillating Guyanese music.

“You can go and taste some food while we are waiting.” Errol said to Prem. He handed over a glass of rum to him and Sandy gave drinks to Sita, Faruk and Shabnum. “I know you’re dying to get some food down you. It is not wise to get down to heavy drinking without any food inside you as you know. I might as well have some too before I get too busy.

“Cheers, congratulations and many happy returns, old boy.” Prem said as he entered the kitchen. He stopped in his tracks when he saw Sam inside the kitchen busy cooking.

“What the hell are you doing here Sam? Is it your restaurant? No wonder the food smells so delicious. Great stuff Sam and congratulations. When did you open this place?” Prem said. He was really pleased to see Sam there.

“Well Prem, I did cook the food and thanks for the compliments.” Sam said looking at Errol and Errol nodded his head. “The thing is that I don’t own the place, I am the chef.”

“That’s strange. Who owns the place then? I am sure you would not give up your job unless it was for someone you cared for.” Sita stated, looking puzzled.

“And who paid a decent salary as well. Well my friends I can’t hide the truth any longer. This place belongs to Sandy and I.” Errol announced, kissing Sandy lovingly. “My dear cousin Sam here has done me a great favour by agreeing to be the head chef.” Sandy hugged him and both of them looked proudly at their friends for their reaction.

“Well, well, well! It seems that the lady luck is smiling on you two these days.” Sita said giving them big hugs. She went across and shook Sam by his hand. “And I pray it does not ever stop.”

Prem had turned around and walked out of the kitchen. He re-entered the kitchen with a bottle of rum in one hand and a bottle of champagne in the other. At the same time the band began to play “congratulation...”

“This calls for humongous celebration now my friend. Come on Sam, pass over some glasses.” Prem and Sam poured out the drinks. “What a secret, I didn’t think you had it in you to keep this sort of secret old chap. My god, you almost gave us heart attack. It’ll take plenty of rum to recover now, you know?”

“Any reason for Prem to have a drink-up!” Sandy said with a smile. “Errol here was dying to tell you but I thought this will be a better timing to announce the opening of our restaurant. Errol tells me that it is named after the plantation on which his fore-parents worked as slaves.”

“What an excellent idea. It is in the memory of those two noble souls. Let’s drink to them.” Sita stated.

“And to the memories of all the people who were enslaved to the lands of America and Caribbean.” Sam stated.

“Oh heck, yes, let's drink to all of them.” Errol stated as he gulped down his rum and extended his glass to Prem for more.

The celebration went on till early hours of the morning. People drank, ate and danced till they could no longer do anything anymore. In the early hours they began to leave one by one. Some of them were too drunk and tired to go home, so Errol and Sandy made arrangements for them to sleep in the restaurant till they sobered up. It was nearly dawn when the last of the guests finally left. Faruk and Shabnum had left earlier as Sita and Prem wanted to stay till the end. After closing the door after Sam finally left, the four went up to Errol and Sandy’s flat above the restaurant. Sandy and Sita went inside the kitchen as Errol and slumped in the arm chair.

“Well my friend, at last I think we have achieved what we came here for. It has been a struggle but heck, we can safely say that we can pat ourselves on our backs and congratulate ourselves.” Errol stated appearing very satisfied.

“I agree, old chap. Twelve years ago we came here with a dream. Mind you, it received a big blow as soon as we put our feet here. We could have been back to Guyana straight away because of the troubles we faced then.” Prem agreed, deep in reflection of their past. “I’m glad though, that we stuck it out. It was a big gamble and a lot of pain and hard work. But it paid off and now we can relax and enjoy the fruits of our labour.”

“Yes, and enjoy our children as well. Priya is so beautiful and growing so fast. Soon she will have a friend to play with as well. It’ll be like home from home. Apart from the weather though!” Errol said laughing.

Sita and Sandy had walked back into the room. Sandy had sat down on the sofa beside Errol but Sita remained standing, listening intently to the two.

“And what about our parents, relatives and friends we grew up with? And all the rest back home?” Sita wanted to know. “I don’t want to spoil the good feelings we have here now. But at the same time I don’t want us to forget that we came here for only ten years and for a purpose. It now appears to me that we have planted our roots here for ever and returning home is the last thing anyone wants to talk about.”

Both Errol and Prem were startled at Sita's outburst. They remained speechless for a while. They also felt guilty about that for a long time now, but they avoided talking about their original plans of returning to Guyana after ten years. Now being reminded of that in this way quickly sobered them up.

“It’s such an irony that Sita is the one complaining about this now. I well remember the day I had to fight her against coming here.” Prem complained.

“Remember Errol, the time we nearly broke off our engagements because she insisted on coming here. I was the one who I didn’t want to come here. And now that we are here and doing well, she is complaining about it. What the hell is wrong with this woman?”

Prem looked angry as he paced up and down the room. It was a long time since Errol saw Prem being angry with Sita. It was a long time ago the regular bouts of quarrels between the two had ceased. Earlier, many years ago, Errol had got used to that and always enjoyed seeing the two make up after their quarrels. After each time the two seemed to get closer to each other. And now he could see Prem in a similar mood once again. But things have changed since then. During all the years of struggle in England Prem had not once brought up the fact that he was pressurised to come to here ever again. Once committed to an idea, he had put all his strength and stamina into making good in this country for all of them. Errol realised that it was Prem’s determination and guidance which played a major part in their successes so far. Seeing Prem in this mood now concerned Errol.

“Look Prem, we all had a great time today and we are also very tired. Let us all calm down now and we can talk about it later, after we all had a good rest.” Errol said to Prem. “And I don’t think it is a good idea for you to drink anymore, not when you are in this type of mood.”

“I don’t want to upset anybody, Errol. All I’m saying is that we shouldn’t lose sight of the purpose for which we came here.” Sita protested, looking accusingly at Prem. “I think I should be allowed to say that I miss my parents and the family back home. After all I haven’t seen them for many years. Instead of sympathising with me now, all he wants to do is to throw back in my face what happened more than twelve years ago. All these years he kept quiet about his true feelings. He pretended to understand and be a martyr. Now the truth comes out. Don’t stop him now Errol. Let him tell us his real feelings, the ones he kept bottled inside him all this time.”

Sita looked hurt and let down by Prem. Prem on the other hand was fuming at Sita for showing him up. She was trying to belittle all the sacrifices he had made in order for her to get what she wanted and be happy. Errol looked at the two uncomfortably. He knew well what may follow and wished he was not in the room now. Sandy looked baffled as she tried to comprehend what she was witnessing.

“Yes, I will talk now and why shouldn’t I? I sacrificed everything back home so that she can be happy. All she cared for was coming to this god-damn country. I was very happy and content over there and the last thing I wanted to do was to come here. But no, Guyana was not good enough for this pseudo-white.” Prem was very angry now. “Just to keep her happy I gave in and came here. I had to work like a slave over here to keep her happy. Endured hardship and racism but kept silent. Had to study all over again to be accepted by the white society she loved so much. And now, when the time has come to taste a bit of the fruit of this slavery, the woman complains that she is not happy here. That she misses her parents, her relatives and friends back home as well! Does she not realise that the others too miss all these things, from the very day they arrived here? For gods sake women go back home if you're not happy here.”



Prem poured himself another drink. Errol sat with his head in his hands, quietly looking at the floor. Sita was sitting on the floor now, crying. Sandy walked up to her and tried to comfort her. All sat silently for a while. Then Sita wiped away her tears and looked at Prem.

“He thinks that he is the only one who made sacrifices. He forgot that Errol and I had to work like slaves here as well. I ended up cleaning peoples dirty clothes for years. I did not find that to be a lot of fun. I too had to study again.” Sita shouted. “I stood by him all the time. And now that he has made a few sacrifices, he wants everybody to believe that he is the hero. And for my one mistake in forcing him to come here he wants everyone to believe that I’m the villain. He forgets that while he was making the sacrifices, I also gave birth to his daughter. Or maybe he was too busy to notice it while he was enjoying himself with that Shabnum. She could not leave him alone could she, not even last night? Did you two see them dancing together, as if they were glued to each other? The dirty... bitch.”

Prem turned around and stared at her, his eyes blazing with anger. His face twisted in an uncontrollable anger. He made a strange roaring sound as he moved towards Sita, his fist clenched. Sandy stood up to block his path as Errol jumped up towards him. Prem pushed Sandy out of his path and raised his fist to strike Sita. Sita let out a shriek and collapsed on the floor as Errol pushed Prem away from her. Prem and Errol fell to the floor together. Silence followed and all remained still for a while. Sita began to cry again as she lay on the floor. She dragged herself to a corner and curled herself in to a frightened bundle. Sandy slowly crawled to where Sita was and embraced her tightly. Errol helped Prem to his feet but Prem pulled himself away from him. He went across to where Sita was and stood over her.

“That’s it. She has gone too far. She is not just stupid, but totally insane as well. I can’t believe that she is the woman I had married. Silly and suspicious! Even accusing the people who helped her out when she was in trouble here of nasty things.” He looked at her disgusted. “If that’s the way she thinks and looks at things, then I don’t want any part of this. She can do this on her own, either here or back home with her family. As far as I am concerned I am out of this.”

Prem picked up his jacket and moved towards the door. Both Errol and Sandy looked at each other in amazement. Things happened so fast for them. And some of the things the other two were saying did not make any sense to them. They did not understand how and why Shabnum’s name had come into this and why Prem got so angry about it. On seeing Prem picking his jacket up Errol went over to him.

“Prem, stop for a while. I really can’t understand what this is all about. But heck, I am sure things can’t be this bad.” Errol said to him.

Sandy walked over to Prem. She looked sad and confused. She grabbed Prem’s arm and gently pulled him across where Sita was now sitting.

“All this can’t be true. You two are a perfect couple and an inspiration to others. Even Errol looks up to you Prem and I admire Sita and the way you two worked to stay together. You two surely can work out things together. Come on now, it’s time to enjoy yourselves now.” Sandy pleaded to Prem.

Prem stood silently. Sita wiped away her tears once again and glanced at Prem. Prem looked at her and looked away. Sita slowly got to her feet. She took a tissue from the table and blew her nose. She then turned towards Prem.

“Let him go, you two. I know he has been planning this to happen for some time now. He wants to find a way to leave me you know? But he hasn’t got the courage to tell me that he wants to leave me for that woman. He needs to manufacture a reason for him to leave me. If he can blame me for ruining his life, then he can walk out of Priya and my life without feeling guilty about it. He has even picked out this moment to do this so that his dearest friend Errol does not have to feel bad about him. You see Sandy, keeping up his good image is very important to this man.” Sita said. Prem was fuming again and Errol struggled to keep him away from Sita. “It all makes sense to me now. While I work my guts out and looked after his child for him, he sneaks off to see that slut. No wonder she hasn’t got any children. She has to remain fit and look good for Prem. Remember, he doesn’t like over-weight women. Well, I don’t give a damn now. He can go away and live with her, for all I care. I just feel sorry for her poor husband.”

Errol listened to Sita in amazement. As she carried on with her attack on Prem, his amazement began to turn into anger. In the end he could not believe what Sita was coming out with.

“You stop that now Sita. Just stop it and keep your mouth shut for a while.” Errol’s voice boomed out. “All those times when you nagged at Prem I had said little. I treated you like a little sister and forgave you of your little misgivings. I even supported you when you wanted to come over here. That was OK, but Sita, enough is enough. Accusing Prem of betraying you is almost a sin. And poor Shabnum, I thought that was an old story. The woman made a small mistake and you have been holding a grudge against her for all these years. I just can’t believe this. And Faruk, heck, he is the most innocent person in this business. Can’t you understand? Whatever happened in the early days, these were the people who helped us out here. Do you want to ruin their lives as well by your silly suspicions and accusations? I know Prem is totally innocent in this affair. He treats Shabnum like a sister and has been doing so ever since he found out about Shabnum’s feelings towards him. And I know that Shabnum too now sees Prem as a brother. So why don’t you put your thinking cap on and start behaving in a sensible manner?”

Even Prem was surprised at Errol’s outburst. Sandy just stared at her husband, feeling out of depth in this intriguing relationship between the three friends. She had thought that she had come to know them well by now. She wondered how much more remains hidden from her about the three.

Sita looked astonished at Errol. He had never shouted at her all these years she had known him. Even when she knew she was taking a bit of liberty with Prem he supported her. She had appreciated that very much as she knew very well that Errol loved Prem as a brother and admired him. She slowly wiped her tears and stared at the two men. Errol still looked angry. Prem had come back in the room and sat silently on the sofa. She got up and walked slowly to Prem and sat down on the floor in front of him. She took his face in her hands and looked in his eyes.

“I’m sorry Prem, I am sorry for everything. I have been very silly to think that way about you and Shabnum and to say all those hurtful things.” Sita said softly to Prem. “I have been selfish and forgot to think of us as together. You know how I get sometimes. But I promise that I will try very hard not to think like that again. I will try not to let you down again.”

Prem sat silently for a while. Sita put her head on his lap. Prem put his hand on head and gently stroked her hair.

“I would have never forgiven myself if I had struck you Sita. But it is not nice for you to test my patience like that. You know very well that I don’t like getting upset with you. I hope I never have to get upset with you again” Prem said in the end.

Sita got up and cuddled up to Prem on the sofa. She rubbed her nose against Prem’s and smiled sexily at him. Prem held her tightly in his strong arms. He realised how close they came to losing each other forever. He felt that he loved this little fragile woman in his arms even more now. He looked at Errol and smiled. Errol smiled back at him. Prem pulled Sita towards him and kissed her passionately.

Errol winked at Sandy and they got up to leave the room. Errol switched off the light.

“There are some blankets on the settee. You can pull out the settee into a bed. See you two for lunch tomorrow.” Errol said.

“For dinner may be!” Prem said as Errol closed the door behind them. Errol picked Sandyp in his arms and carried her to the bedroom.

“Yes maybe for the dinner. Yes indeed.” Errol said to Sandy. She smiled at him and they kissed each other.

## Chapter thirteen

A few months after the party and the incident at the Cariba Café, Prem and Sita decided to take Priya for a holiday to Guyana. Prem had been offered a job as a race equality officer in a London council. He had one month to spare before the starting date for his new job. He decided to take this opportunity to take the long awaited holiday, before he got stuck in another job. Sita did not need much persuading. They told Errol of their plans and invited him to take a holiday as well. He was very keen on the idea and got quite excited. However he hesitated because Sandy was only a few weeks way from delivery and he was very busy at the restaurant.

When Errol talked about the holiday to Sandy, she noticed how excited Errol was about the idea. He had not been back to Guyana since he had arrived in England. She knew that he will love to travel back home with his dear friends. She thought about the situation for a few days and finally decided that it would do Errol good to go on this holiday. She had good staff in the restaurant and Sam was there to help her with its management. Errol was thrilled when Sandy told him that she did not mind him going. After that he did not need much persuading and soon the four set off for Guyana.

The holiday was a great success. Everyone had a lovely time and they all appreciated the break and meet-up with their love ones. They soaked in the good weather and friendship of their people. Upon their return to England they felt they were ready to tackle the second stage of their lives in Britain. They all thought it was nice to be back home and it may not be a bad idea to stay in Britain for a few more years. Now was the time to reap the benefits of their hardlabour as well as to take advantage of the education system for the children. They will return home after the children were educated and settled down with their own lives in Britain. By that time the parents would be approaching their retirement ages. They all were in agreement that it would be the right time for them to return to Guyana and enjoy their retirement and also contribute to the welfare of their people.

Prem started his job in the council with a lot of vigour and enthusiasm. Sita settled back in her job and Errol's business began to grow. Sandy gave birth to a girl and they named her Noorie. Errol and Sandy decided to have another child and the next year Sandy gave birth to a son. They named him Jamal. Prem and Sita were proud to repay the honour to Errol and Sandy and become God-parents to Noorie and Jamal. The three children began to grow up together and soon became good friends.

Prem began to get more and more involved in the struggles against racism and increasing number of racial attacks experienced by the ethnic communities in Britain. As the seventies began to close, the National Front appeared on the political scene. With that increased the activities of its members and supporters. Prem got involved with several community organisations and political parties which attempted to counter the activities of the National front. After two years in his first council job, Prem got a job in another nearby council as the head of its race equality unit and Sita was appointed a ward sister at her hospital. With the additional income now coming in the two decided to buy a larger house. After several months of searching they brought

a four bedroom “semi” in Essex. In order to celebrate their promotions and as a house warming treat they organised a party at their house for their friends. Prem also invited some of his work colleagues and comrades from his political circle.

Errol and Sandy were amongst the first to arrive at the party. Prem and Sita were putting the final touches to the party arrangements when Errol's car pulled up. They went out side to meet them.

“That's a greatlooking car Errol! When did you get that?” Sita asked on seeing the two getting out of a big Jaguar.

“Only a few weeks ago, we meant to surprise you. But I see you have a surprise for us as well. When did you get that BMW? It is a beauty!” Sandy said. “You don't do things by half do you?”

“We have been thinking of getting a comfortable car for some time now. We noticed this one in a local showroom and fell for it immediately.” Prem explained. “Enough of this now, let's go inside.”

“Just a minute Sita, I want to see the outside of the house first. Look at this front garden. It's so big! I wonder how big the back garden is.” Sandy said excitedly. “You have got a good thing here Sita. This is a nice area as well. You must be really excited about this.”

“Travelled a long way since arriving here in the sixties, haven't we, Prem. Isn't the area bit too posh for a socialist like you Prem. Bit contradiction isn't it?” Errol asked teasingly. Prem remained quiet.

They inspected the house and then moved to the rear garden where Prem and Sita had set up a BBQ. A rich aroma of sizzling lamb chops and sausages was filling up the air.

Prem was deep in his thoughts as everybody settled down around the BBQ. He was thinking about what Errol had said and was not too pleased about it “It is no contradiction at all Errol!” Prem could not contain his feeling any longer. “I do not believe that socialism means strict adherence to poverty. I don't believe that socialists should doom themselves to poverty and squalor. I don't believe that only these people have the sole right to be called a true socialist.” Prem defended his position earnestly. “For me socialism has a very different meaning. It is a vehicle for social mobility. It is a means to get out of the vicious cycles of poverty while maintaining the basic values of humanity. Achieve a good living standard without exploiting others in the process. That's my idea of socialism.”

Sita brought in some other guests to the BBQ area when Prem was talking. Sandy poured drinks for them and she handed one each to Prem and Errol. They took the drink and sat under a picnic umbrella in one corner of the garden.

“This is the greatest contradiction of all. There is no way one can become rich without exploiting others. You can't say that you have become so rich without taking money from the deserving Prem. At least have the courage to acknowledge the thing

as they are. You don't have to explain to us or try to impress us with your politics." Errol said laughing out loudly.

"This is rich Errol, coming from a person whose only interest is to make money. I remember well when we used to talk about social justice during our Uni days. At least I have stuck to those ideals." Prem stated. "But you I have been noticing recently have been running after money more and more."

"I didn't want to tread on your soft spot Prem. Why don't you just accept that you love money as much as the next person? Why do you want to camouflage your greed for money by unloading your guilt onto me? At least I work hard for my money and do not thrive on poor tax payers money like a parasite."

A little crowd had gathered around the two friends. Sita and Sandy had never seen the two speak a word against each other before now. They had kept quiet so far, thinking they were joking as usual. Looking at them now, they realised that perhaps they were getting a bit too serious with each other.

"Prem, some of your work colleagues have arrived." Sita tried unsuccessfully to distract his attention.

"Why don't you look after them? I wanted to talk to Errol about something." Prem said to Sita and she walked away towards the new guests. Prem poured drinks for Errol and himself. He slowly walked over to Errol and handed him his drink. Looking intently at him Prem drank his in one gulp, slammed down the glass on the table and wiped his lips on the back of his hand.

"Errol and I want to talk a bit about politics as we drink this rum which I brought from the money I earned like a 'parasite'. But he thinks that the food he sells at a five hundred mark-up price to the poor people from back home is fine. The drink he sells to them at a huge profit is OK. But he thinks that I am a parasite! I, who has devoted so much time helping people suffering racial attacks, and all the injustices of racial discrimination! He thinks that I sacrificing hours and hours of my free time to make sure that Black people have decent life in this country is being a parasite. I go out and sit in people's home and shops so that they can work and sleep peacefully stands for nothing in his eyes. And what does he do for our people? I tell you what he does. While people like me go out sacrificing our time, limbs and life marching for our rights, he calls me a parasite. Why doesn't he examine his consciences for a change and tell us what he has done for his people here?"

Prem took a long sip of rum from the bottle. Errol looked at his friend with horror. He had seen Prem tear into other people like this before. He never thought he will be on the receiving end of one of his outbursts some day. He sometimes felt that Prem went a bit too far when he got into one of his moods. He wanted to tell him about this so many times but had always stopped himself before from doing so. But today he was going to teach him a lesson, he told himself.

"I don't know why these do-gooders believe that they have the monopoly on racial attacks and racism. I know there are many people who assist in fighting against racial discrimination or those who are suffering racism." Errol started. "Since arriving

here I too have suffered all the types of racial discrimination imaginable. He knows that I didn't get a decent job because of my colour. When I went looking for a place to live, I was told everywhere that there were no vacancies. I have been called a nigger and a black bastard on so many occasions that have I lost count. I have chosen to work hard and build a future for my wife and children. These are my choices and I am entitled to them. If I choose not to get on the band wagon of the race relations industry, it does not mean that I do not know what is going on or that I do not care about my people. I don't go around shouting racism at every opportunity in order to get more money for myself and my friends to grow rich on. I choose to leave that sort of hypocrisy to likes of Prem. I may put mark-ups by few hundred percent, but I do not live in a nice posh house and drive a new BMW while the people I pretend to assist rot away in grotty old council flats."

Errol took the bottle of rum from Prem's hand and took a long sip from it. He handed the bottle back to Prem.

A pregnant silence followed. All the eyes were on Prem. He sat silently, looking long and hard at Errol before speaking again.

"You amaze me man, you seriously amaze me. You and your kind! You stand up and say that you have suffered racism, that you are aware of what is going on. But you proudly announce that you choose to ignore all this. You choose to get on with your life." Prem spoke slowly, emphasising each word. He stood up and took a sip from the bottle, throwing it to Errol afterwards. Errol caught the bottle in time and took a sip from it as well.

"Well my friend, you maybe surprised to know that there are Black people over here that cannot just get up and get on with their lives. For so many people, living with racial attacks and racial discrimination has become a way of life." Prem continued. "These people cannot afford to go and buy a business. These are some of the most vulnerable people in our society. These are the unemployed, the old or women stuck in the little flats on the council estates. These are the people who have great difficulties with getting on even with their normal lives. You know, for most of them racism is the final straw. They have to deal with it for many months or sometimes for several years without any help or support from anybody. Believe me; they are not as lucky as you are my friend. They are not educated or have a network of family or friends to help them out when it happens. Most of them do not have a white wife or partner to help them buy a restaurant to get rich as well!"

Errol suddenly became very angry. His eyes became blood-shot and he stared angrily at Prem. He then walked slowly towards Prem, stopping inches away from him, his tall frame dwarfing Prem.

"That's it! How low can you get? You can't win your argument so you have to bring my wife into this. Heck, I can't believe this man. All this while we loved and respected you. But you...heck! I think all this politics has gone to your head. Man, I think you have some serious problem. I just feel sorry for Sita. I don't know how she copes with you." Errol shouted.

He picked up his jacket and threw the bottle of rum bottle to Prem. “You can finish this bloody thing with you socialist do-gooders. I am out of this bloody place. Come on Sandy, we are not going to stay in a place where you are not respected.” He said and took of Sandy’s arm.

Sita stood speechless for a few seconds. She saw the two walk towards the door. Sandy looked back at Prem and Sita. Her eyes were filled with tears. Sita ran up to them and grabbed Errol by his hand.

“Please Errol stay back. Just go inside while I talk to him. I will calm him down. Oh god, I can’t believe this.” Sita said to Errol.

“Yes Errol, this seems to be such a silly argument to fall out with your friends of a life-time. Please go inside and we will try to make sense of all this.” Sandy begged Errol.

“I don’t want anybody begging him to stay. He can go to his nice house and bury his head inside. We will make sure that the streets are safe for him to walk on without fear. We’ll fight on, you hear Errol? Prem shouted.

“I hear what you say, Prem, loud and clear. You will continue to line your pockets while the poor people continue to be harassed and discriminated. You cannot... or is it that you do not want to do anything for these people anyways.” Errol shouted from the doorway. “Why should you people get rid of racism anyway? Doesn’t it pay for your big house and shining cars? You don’t want to stop a good thing now, do you Prem?” Errol grabbed Sandy’s hand and with a wry smile at Sita, guided Sandy away from the house to their car. Nobody spoke for a long time.



## Chapter fourteen

After that incident Errol and Prem did not speak for many years. They avoided going to places where they might bump into each other. On occasions when they did arrive at the same party they avoided each other or one would leave if avoidance was impossible. On the other hand Sandy and Sita continued to meet, both at work and at each others homes. Neither Prem nor Errol tried to stop them from being friends. All the children met frequently and their friendship developed even further. Soon Noorie began to attend the same grammar school in Essex attended by Priya.

Errol and Sandy moved to WalthamForest in order to be nearer Noorie's school and yet not too far from their business. Sandy and Sita met most morning and afternoons when they went to drop and pick up the children. Sometimes Sandy would stop at Sita's so that Priya and Noorie could meet at home as well. Soon Jamal joined them at the grammar school as well and the three spent most of their time together in and out of the school. Sometimes Prem would ask Jamal and Noorie about their father.

"Is your father still making a lot of money Jamal? Isn't he ever going to stop filling his coffers?" Prem asked one day.

"Dad and Mom are working very hard, uncle. They do make money but they spend a lot on the mortgage and on us. So there is not much left to put in the coffers." Jamal said.

Priya walked up Prem and sat beside him. "It is so strange dad; uncle Errol was asking something similar about you. He wanted to know when you were going to buy a bigger house or get a new car." Priya said. "He said that the government is almost giving away money to anyone who shouted racism after the inner city riots. It is true dad? Do you really..."

"What I don't understand is why uncle and dad keep talking to us about each other." Norrie interrupted Priya. "If they are so interested about what the other is doing, why do they keep avoiding each other? All it takes is for one to pick up the phone and call the other. I have never seen two grown-ups behave so much like kids."

Prem looked at Noorie and the others. He smiled warily.

"You will not understand this now Noorie. It takes grown-ups to understand why we adults sometimes behave like kids. Something even we don't understand why. Pride and politics this time I think. You dad is too proud and....perhaps I am too political." He said, looking very sad.

"Dad says that you were too proud to admit that your politics may not be entirely right. He always says that. That is the reason why he never got involved in politics. I think that all the political parties have some good points but maybe none of them have got it totally right. Therefore it is not right to blindly support one particular party, as you do uncle." Noorie stated.

Prem looked at Noorie with a hint of surprise. He smiled at her.

“You are turning out to be a bit of politician yourself Noorie. Make sure that your dad does not get to know about this side of you. He may pick up a quarrel with you and chuck you out of the house.” Prem mused. “But don’t worry, if he ever does that you can come and stay with us.”

“That is a lovely offer uncle. Then I will have more time to learn about politics from you. I have got most of my political thoughts from you. I am amazed that you know so much about it.” Norrie said, looking admiringly at Prem. “But I discuss politics with my dad as well and get the other side of the coin from him. He seems to be in agreement with most things you say. I think he secretly admires you for the work you do. But like you, he has too much pride to make up with you. I do wish you two will make up soon.”

“Come on uncle, I am getting bored with all this political stuff. You promised to play tennis with me and Priya.” Jamal complained. “I shouldn’t have brought Noorie with me today. All she wants to do is to talk about politics. How boring! Come on uncle Prem, let’s go and knock some balls around now.”

“Come on Jamal, you spoilt my moment of appreciation and glorification. You want to leave just when Noorie began telling me how wonderful politics is.” Prem protested. “Anyway Noorie, don’t forget what we were discussing now. We will continue with this when I return.”

Noorie and Prem continued their discussion on politics regularly. Priya and Jamal were not too interested in what these two had to say. They were more interested in sports so whenever Prem and Noorie started to talk politics at home, they read books or watched television. However, despite the children’s efforts to get Prem and Errol together, the two former friends refused to speak to each other. Priya did her A-levels and went on to a medical college in London. Norrie was next to take her A-levels. She passed her exams and decided to take journalism at a London university. Everything was going good for the two families, except for the fact that Prem and Errol still did not speak to each other. Then suddenly, without any warning a tragedy struck!

One evening Sandy was about to leave home for the restaurant. Errol was already there, preparing for a large party they had to organise for the Guyanese Embassy. Many important dignitaries were to attend the party, so Sandy had made special efforts to dress up. Sandy was getting concerned that they were getting late, but Noorie was still getting dressed.

“Noorie it’s already gone eight. We were supposed to be there half an hour ago. I’m going to start the car up. Come down quickly.” Sandy shouted and went outside.

A few minutes later Noorie came running outside to the car. She looked very pale and shaken.

“Mom, something has happened to Jamal. That was aunty Sita on the phone from the hospital. She won’t tell me what’s wrong with Jamal. But she said we must

get to the hospital at once.” Noorie was almost in tears. “Mom lets hurry to the hospital, I think something bad has happened to Jamal.”

“I don’t understand! Jamal was at a party with his friends from the university. There must be some mistake. Let me talk to Sita.” Sandy stated, trying to get out the car.

“Mom, don’t! You are wasting time.” Norrie said firmly. “Aunty Sita can’t mistake Jamal for somebody else. She has phoned dad and uncle Prem as well. They are on their way to the hospital now. Please mum, hurry up. Let’s not waste any more time here.”

Sandy suddenly became very worried. Why has Sandy phoned Errol and Prem? She would not do that if it was not important. So many things went through both their minds as the car sped to WhipsCrossHospital. They parked their car outside the casualty department and ran inside the hospital. “Please John take care of my car. I don’t have the time to park it.” Sandy shouted to one of the hospital attendants, throwing her car key to him.

She did not wait for an answer and kept on running towards the casualty with Noorie running right behind her. As they turned the corner they saw Sita and Prem standing outside the casualty. Sita saw them coming and turned away to wipe her tears. Prem looked very shocked and stood there emotionless. Sandy had seen Sita turn around and wipe her tears. Sandy’s heart sank as she realised something was really wrong.

“Sita...Prem... what has happened to Jamal. He is alright isn’t he? Where is he? I want to see him. What’s wrong with Sita..., why is she crying Prem? What’s going on?” Sandy asked, her heart beating rapidly.

Unable to hold herself any longer Sita began to cry again. She hugged Sandy and began to sob loudly. Prem went up to them and pulled Sita away from Sandy and sat her down on a chair. He then went up to Sandy and Norrie and embraced both of them.

“Sandy... Noorie, I don’t know how to do this. I myself don’t know precisely how or what has really happened or why. But I think the best thing to do first is to tell you two the truth. Come on, sit down here first.” Prem said.

He guided the two to the chairs beside Sita. He sat down between them and took their hands in his own.

“I got here a few minutes before you did. I managed to talk to one of the doctors here, because what Sita was saying to me did not making any sense to me.” Prem tried to explain what had happened.

“Tell us about Jamal, Prem. What is it all about? Where is he? Sita told Noorie that he was hurt. Is he hurt badly? Is that why Sita is crying?” Sandy asked.

Prem found himself in a very awkward situation. He did not know how to tell them what had happened. In the end he decided that it would be the best if he simply told them the truth.

“The doctor told me that Jamal was brought here about an hour ago. Apparently, according to the police, he was involved in a fight with some white boys. One of the white boys pulled out a knife and attacked him. Apparently the white attacker stabbed him in the neck. They said one of his arteries got cut. By the time he arrived here he had lost too much blood. He was taken into the operating theatre as soon as he was brought in here and they tried their best to save him. But Sandy, Norrie, I’m afraid Jamal is no more. He was already dead when he arrived here.” Prem voice was shaking as he informed them that Jamal was dead.

Sandy gave out a loud cry and collapsed into Prem’s arms. Noorie was too shocked to do anything. She sat silently, staring blankly at everybody. Sita took her into her arms and tried to comfort her.

Prem was getting concerned for Sandy's health because she was now breathing with great difficulty. Little foam was coming out from one corner of her mouth. Sita took one look at her and ran to the reception and brought back a wheelchair. They helped Sandy into it and Sita quickly pushed her into one of the treatment rooms. She then grabbed hold of one of the doctors and asked her to examine Sandy. They two went inside the room and after a short while Sita came outside.

“She is alright now. It was the shock and the doctor has given her some medication. We may have to keep here over-night.” Sita informed them.

Noorie was still sitting there in shock, staring blankly at the ceiling now.

“Sita please get a doctor to have a look at Noorie here as well. Poor girl, she is in a state.” Prem said.

Sita gently guided Noorie to another cubical and asked the same doctor to give her some medication as well. Norrie still didn’t say a word, doing everything as if she was in a dream.

Prem remained outside. He phoned Priya and told her to get ready. He told her that they will be staying at Errol’s home that night. Priya was very surprised about them staying at Errol’s and wanted to know why, but Prem told her that he will explain everything to her when he picked her up.

As Prem put the phone down he saw Errol rush in. They had not seen and spoken to each other for many years now. Errol saw Prem and they looked at each other for awhile. The look on Prem’s eyes told Errol that something had happened to Jamal. It didn’t take him long to work out that something was drastically wrong there. He walked slowly towards Prem. Prem looked at his friend. Errol’s face was sad but the eyes were inquisitive. Prem held his arms out as Errol approached and the two friends embraced each other tightly. Tears rolled out of Prem’s eyes.

“I’m sorry, Errol. I’m so sorry! Jamal, they got him as well, Errol. They got our child and I couldn’t do anything about it. Me and all the bloody race relations industry stood by as the racist shits stabbed him to death. He is dead Errol, he is dead!” Prem said in disgust.

Errol’s whole body shuddered when he realised that what he had suspected was true. He wanted to sink to the floor and cry. He wanted to go outside and kill those who were responsible for his son’s death. He wanted to do something, anything at all; as long as he did not have to think about what was happening. He wanted Prem to make everything right. He wanted Prem to take charge of the situation. But he saw that Prem was in no state to do anything. In a few minutes, right in front of his eyes, Prem broke down completely. Prem blamed himself for what had happened and for not being able to do anything to prevent what had happened to Jamal.

“What good am I if I can’t look after my own, Errol? I have let everybody down. Jamal, our son is no more! You were right Errol. The business I am in is bloody useless. We’re no-good blood sucking parasites. That’s what we are! Each one of us! Parasites, living on racism, living on the plights of the victims of racism, living on the plights of the victims of racial attacks. I’m so ashamed Errol, I’m so ashamed.” Prem stated as he slumped to a chair.

“Prem, you can’t blame yourself for what has happened to Jamal tonight. It is the bloody racists who are responsible for his death.” Errol stated angrily. “But Prem now is not the time to argue about this. We need to keep control of ourselves. We have a lot to do at this moment. Where are the women? Have you seen Jamal yet?”

Prem looked at his friend. Somehow Errol looked cool and calm. He got up and wiped away his tears.

“Sorry, Jamal. I’m alright now. I am afraid it was very hard on Sandy and Noorie. They needed some medical attention. But don’t worry, they are ok now. Sita is with Noorie and Sandy is still under sedative. I think we will have to leave her here over-night.” Prem informed Errol. “I saw Jamal when they took him into another room for family to view his body before they take it to the mortuary. Some police were here with him. I’m sure they would want to speak with you soon and explain how it happened.”

“Ok then. I think we should go and see Jamal and then speak with the police. I want to know who has done this to him and what the police are doing to get the bastards arrested.” Errol stated.

Prem guided Errol to the room in which Jamal’s body was kept. There were two policemen outside the room, a constable and a sergeant. The sergeant politely asked them who they were. Prem informed them who Errol was and both the policemen sympathised with them for their loss. The sergeant then took them inside the room. Jamal’s body was covered with a white sheet with blood stains on the left side of his neck. He then slowly removed the sheet and stood back silently. The two friends looked at Jamal’s body for a long time. He appeared to be sleeping. There were no other marks on his body but for a small cut on the side of his neck. They looked at each other as if to ask how a person could die from such a small cut. Nothing

made sense to them at that moment. They remained there for a long time, saying nothing, just looking at the body. Tears rolled down from both their eyes. The police sergeant watched them silently. He turned around and wiped some tears from his own eyes. He took out some tissues from his pocket and gave them to Prem and Errol. They took the tissues but the tears still flowed gently down their cheeks. The tears seemed to come from their heart and they had no control over it. They let it flow. After a long time Prem got hold of Errol by his shoulders and guided him out of the room. At the door they turned around slowly and looked at Jamal. They wiped the tears away and with a final look at him, they walked out the room.

Outside, the police sergeants talked with them at length about the stabbing. From the facts reported to him, he had found out that Jamal and his friend Julie, a white girl left the party they were at to get some food at the local take away shop. As they walked back to the party with their food they were followed by a group of white youth. The same group had earlier racially abused Jamal and his friend at the take away. Jamal got fed up with the harassment and the abuses and told them to leave them alone. The youth were drunk and one of them attacked him. Jamal tried to fight him off. As he did so another youth took out a knife and slashed at him. The knife struck Jamal in the neck and he immediately fell to the ground. On seeing what had happened, the white youth ran off. Jamal's friends ran back to the take away shop and called police and ambulance. Both the police and ambulance were on the scene within a few minutes; but too late to save Jamal. Julie and the take away shop owner gave police very good descriptions of the attackers. The police made extensive inquiries straight away and so far they were able to arrest four of the attackers, including the one who had used the knife. They all have been charged with murder of Jamal.

Errol and Prem thanked the police officer for the information. They agreed for the local police superintendent to call Errol next day. Errol then went to see Sandy but found her sleeping. They decided to let her rest there that night. He then went to see Noorie, who still had not said a word. On seeing her father, she showed a little bit of emotion. As she stared at him tiny drops of tears rolled down her cheeks. Errol went up to her and embraced her. He sat there for a long time, holding her tightly, rocking gently. After a long while he stood up.

“We can't stay here all night; we must go home. There we'll decide what we must do next.” Errol stated.

“That's right. Sita, you drive Errol's car and take him and Norrie to his place. I'll go and collect Priya and bring her over.” Prem said and they slowly walked out of the hospital.

## Chapter fifteen

That night Prem's family stayed at Errol's home. On leaving the hospital Prem picked up Priya and the two went to his home. Others were already sitting in the lounge when Prem and Priya arrived. Prem had already told Priya about Jamal's death. Priya was crying as she entered the room. On seeing Priya Noorie burst out crying as well. Norrie stood up and Priya rushed to her. She embraced her and the two cried uncontrollably.

"He is no more Priya, he is no more! They got him, just like that. One flick of a knife and we lost our bother. That's all it means to them." Noorie sobbed. "Why don't they realise that he was somebody's brother, somebody's son, somebody's nephew Priya, and somebody's friend? Why don't they realise that he was a person just like them, just a human being like them, full of life and ambitions for the future. I simply don't understand what's going on Priya. Nothing makes sense to me now."

They both sat down on the sofa, Priya wiped Noorie's tears with her tissue.

"It feels like a horrible nightmare Noorie... I just can't believe. I'm sure we'll wake up soon and find out that it is just a nightmare. It can't be true, it can't be true. How can it be true?" Priya cried.

Their parents watched them silently. They knew that they could not do much to help them at that moment. The best thing for them was to cry out their grief. After a long while, Sita went up to them and gently helped them to their feet.

"Why don't you two go up to the bedroom? I'll fetch some hot drinks to make you two relax a bit. Some people will be arriving here soon. It will be better for you two upstairs. Do you want us to call any of your other friends now?" she asked as the girls walked towards the bedroom.

"No aunty Sita, we prefer to be on our own tonight. If it's ok we will do the ringing tomorrow." Sita nodded. "Now go up and relax. I'll come up and see you soon." Sita said as the two disappeared up the stairs.

Sita went inside the kitchen and brought a bottle of rum and two glasses in the lounge. She poured the drinks and handed them to Prem and Errol.

"Here now, drink this. It will help you to relax a bit." She said.

"Sita, it doesn't seem right to drink tonight, does it Errol?" Prem said. His voice was shacking with grief. "How can we sit here and drink when our boy is lying there? It just isn't right."

"I don't know Prem. I just can't forget Jamal lying there on the bed. He looked so peaceful and calm. Just the way he slept at home. I just can't get that picture out of my mind." Errol said, tears beginning to roll down his cheek. He wiped them away with the back of his hand but more appeared. "I'm sorry, I can't help myself."

“Now, now... tears have not harmed anybody. Just drink this. It will help a bit.” Sita said. She poured herself a brandy and the three sat down silently for a while.

Soon the telephone began to ring. The news of Jamal’s murder had appeared on the television. Many of the family friends and relatives saw the news and were horrified. Many of them telephoned to sympathise and to find out what happened. Most of them wanted to come to the house at the late hour but they were told politely to come around the next day. Only Sam, Faruk and Shabnum were invited to come to the house that night.

Everybody stayed up for the whole night. They talked about the situation and made preparations for the funeral. They decided that a small funeral will be held in five days time. An invitation list was drawn up and people took on responsibilities for various jobs that had to be done. By the time everything was sorted out it was nearly morning.

In the morning Chief Superintendent of the local police station called at the house. He was very sympathetic and all of them had a lengthy discussion. He had worked with Prem on other race related cases and found it easier to explain things through him to the others. He left the house around lunch time, stating that he will call again when he has any further information.

Soon after he left, the door bell rang again and two men appeared on the doorstep. One was an Asian man in his forties and the other was slightly younger African man. They stated that they were from the local anti-racist organisation and they were there to offer the family help and support. Errol invited them inside and asked them to take seats. Sita had gone to the hospital to bring Sandyback home. Norrie and Priya were upstairs and Prem was in the kitchen, making tea. Sam had left for work, stating that he will return later on.

“If you have come here about Jamal’s murder, I’m afraid we have taken care of everything. I don’t think that there is much you can do for us now. Would you like to have some tea?” Errol asked. They both shook their heads and Errol continued. “Well, in that case I thank you for coming here. If you two gentleman don’t mind, we would like to rest a bit now.”

Errol went to the door and held it open for the two. The pair looked at each other in surprise. They remained seated and Errol shut the door and came back in the room. The Asian man responded first.

“Mr. Winston, we know you must be in shock after this brutal racist attack on another of our black youth. Too many of these murders are happening for our liking. With this European union thing and the opening of the borders, the number of racial attacks is increasing relentlessly.” He stated. “We have been in the business of providing support to the black people for many years. We have the experience in this field better than anybody else. I’m sure we will be able to assist families like you who have been unmercifully subjected to this unprovoked and brutal attack.”

He seemed pleased with his speech. He looked at the African man who smiled at him. He stood up and approached Errol confidently.



“People don’t realise that we need to get together and fight this sort of things. We cannot let another innocent person like Jamal be racially murdered again. We must ensure that no other parent in this country is subjected to this from of brutality ever again.” The African man in dark suit and thick sunglasses stated.

Prem had entered the room silently and stood behind the two. Errol listened to them impatiently for a while. “Look gentleman, at the risk of repeating myself, I’m saying to you that fortunately my friends and I have taken care of everything. Thanks for your help, but no thanks. Can you please leave now so that we can get on with what we were doing?” Errol said, moving once again towards the front door.

The Asian man stood up but stopped in front of Errol. “Mr. Winston, we understand that you are still under shock, and understandably so. That’s the reason experts like us are around. We are here to take care of this type of situation in a professional manner. Perhaps you can’t appreciate how important it is to get in quickly in order to be on top of the situation.” The Asian man stated. “We can’t let the police off the hook. We will make sure that racist thugs are brought to justice. They have to be locked up for good this time. We will make sure that justice is done, even if we have to call a national demonstration. We will not leave any stone unturned in order to get justice for your son. We’ll take care of everything ourselves. We have our organization and the community behind us. All you have to do is to give us your consent to start a campaign. We have decided to call it. “Justice for Winston Family” campaign! Here is a consent form. All you have to do is sign here. You see, we have to get this done in case something happens later...just as a precaution you know. There are ...”

Errol had walked back to the sofa and was now sitting down with his head in his hands. Prem had put down the two cup of tea he had brought in on the coffee table. He was getting angrier as he listened to the men. He clutched tightly the top of the chair he was leaning against. His face was twisted in anger. He could not hold himself back any longer. He walked further into the room and stood behind the two men.

“Why don’t you two shitheads listen to what the man has said. He has stated twice that he does not want your help. You’re now annoying him and I’m getting pissed off as well.” Prem stated in controlled anger “We have enough to do here and do not wish to listen to your bullshit. So, if you are not out of this room within twenty seconds, I will personally throw out you two vultures so fast that you won’t know what has hit you.”.

The two men turned around and looked at Prem. They started at grin sheepishly when they recognised him.

“Oh it’s you! We should have guessed. So your organization has got here first! We have to give you credit for taking the initiation this time. You must have got this thing signed and sealed by now. When does the campaign start?” the Asian man asked “Don’t worry, we will start another campaign any way. Mr. Winston we will soon realise what type of organisation you represent and he will be forced to come to us. He will soon learn how useless your people are.”

“You bloody bastards! Can’t you people ever leave anybody in peace? Won’t you stop at anything in order to promote your own careers? Do you have to exploit even dead people in order to promote your organisation’s political ends?” Prem screamed. “You sons of bitches, Jamal is like my son. You hear, my son. Leave my son in peace and fuck off, you rotten scoundrels.”

Prem was upon the Asian man. He grabbed his collar and pushed him towards the door. Noorie, who had come down with Priya by now, held open the front door for him. Prem shoved the men out and spat at them.

“Now, you keep away from this house, you shitheads. For good, you hear me? Don’t ever return.” Noorie shouted. Errol pushed the other man outside the door and he fell on the pavement as well.

“We’ll report this assault to the police. You won’t get away with this.” The Asian man said as the two picked themselves up from the pavement.

“If you two are not out of my property in the next five seconds, you’ll get more of what you deserve.” Errol warned them as they ran out onto the street.

After making sure that the two had left, the three went inside. They found Prem lying on the sofa, clutching his chest. He looked pale and short of breath.

“I can’t breathe properly Errol. I think I need to go to the hospital. Oh shit, it is getting unbearable.” Prem whispered.

His head slumped as he became unconscious. Errol ran to the phone and called for an ambulance. The ambulance arrived soon and took Prem to hospital. Errol went with him and after an examination the doctor informed him that Prem had suffered a minor heart attack. However after a while he was released to go home. Sita returned to the hospital and took them back to Errol’s home. Prem was put in a bed and ordered by them to have complete rest for a while. All of them stayed with him for sometime. Sita stroked his head gently as they talked to each other in the bedroom. Prem opened his eyes and looked at them.

“I have made a decision. That is if Sita and Priya agree.” Prem said, speaking softly. “I want to go back home, to Guyana. We’ll stay here for sometime after the funeral. I won’t go to work now. I want to spend some time with Errol, Sandy and Noorie. But then we’ll return home as soon as we have taken care of affairs here.”

He looked at Sita for an approval. Sita looked at him for while. She looked at Priya but did not say anything. Sita looked back at Prem and smiled

“I think it is a very good decision Prem. You need some rest now. You’ll only worry here. I’m just worried about Priya. She has lived here all her life. Will she want to go with us?” Sita asked.

“I don’t mind, mum. I’ll do whatever is good for you and daddy. I can finish my studies in Guyana. I can go to the same Uni you and daddy went to, can’t I?” Priya stated.

Prem looked at Priya for a while. He slowly shook his head. "Priya doesn't need to come with us right now. She can finish her studies here and then make her mind up," Prem said. He looked at Sandy and Errol. "I was hoping Priya could stay here until then. I was hoping that Sandy and Errol will be able to keep an eye on her after we have left."

Errol looked at Sandy and Noorie. They both nodded their heads. Errol looked at his friends and smiled.

"That is fine by me. I am sure Sandy and Noorie will love to have Priya with us." Errol stated. He looked at Priya. "We only need Priya's approval now. What's your view Priya? Do you agree with this?"

"It's OK with me. But dad and mum have to come and visit me here or let me visit them every year." Priya said.

"We promise to do that my dear. Do you think we'll be able to keep away from you for that long Priya?" Prem said smiling.

After that day things went on much smoother. The funeral was well attended. After the hard work, Errol, Sandy and Norrie went away to Guyana for a break. When they returned, Prem and Sita were ready for their journey back to their home in Guyana. Prem had taken medical retirement. They rented out their house and sold the rest of their property. They opened up a bank account for Priya and deposited enough money for her to last at least two years. On the day of their leaving they had lunch at Errol's restaurant. Afterwards, Errol drove them to the airport, accompanied by Sandy, Noorie and Priya. On the way to Heathrow airport Errol informed them that they too had decided to return home to Guyana soon.

"We will join you in a few years time, Prem. We just want to hang around for a few more years, just to get things sorted out." Errol said. "But we wish we were leaving with you two today though."

"Whenever you come over, I'll be there for you Errol. We'll pick up from where we left off so many years ago."

They all gathered outside the customs gate. It was nearly time for them to board the plane.

"I can't believe this, thirty years ago we came here together. So much has happened since then. But now it seems that it was only yesterday we arrived here." Errol said. His voice was shaking. "Heck, I'll miss you two."

Prem and Sita hugged him tightly. Sandy, Priya and Noorie joined them in the good bye hug.

"Guyana is not that far now. And we'll be here next year for a visit." Sita said, wiping tears from Errol's eyes from a corner of her sari. "In the meantime Errol and Sandy, we leave our daughter in your care."

With that Sita and Prem walk through the customs gate and onto the plane that was roaring loudly to take them back to home. The rest of them waited there for a while, as if they were unable to move away. But finally they walked back slowly to their car park as the plane flew over them towards Guyana.

## Chapter sixteen

### Epilogue

Prem and Sita stayed in Guyana for two years. One year after returning home, Priya visited them over there. The next year they visited Priya in London. They stayed with Errol and Sandy. They learnt that Noorie was still at the University studying media studies. Priya was about to complete her studies and was looking forward to her medical career. She told her parents that she was now coping well on her own. She told them that they need not visit her if they wished to spend more time on their own. Prem and Sita were thinking of going on along tour to India, and they were relieved that Priya was able to cope on her own now. They promised to invite Priya to visit them in India after she had completed her studies.

For next four years Prem and Sita toured extensively in India. They established their base in the village of Prem's ancestors and travelled all over the country from there, returning to the village from time to time. Priya joined them in the village after completing her studies.

In the meantime Noorie finished her studies and began working as researcher for BBC in London. Errol and Sandy ran the restaurant successfully for several years. Once they were satisfied that both Priya and Noorie were securely established in London, they began their plans to live in Guyana. They sold their business and were ready to return to Guyana. Prem and Sita were still in India. They informed them of their departure when Prem phoned them one evening from there. He was thrilled to get the news they were expecting for a long time. Prem told Errol that they will wind up their tour of India and head for Guyana as soon as possible. Prem and Sita reached Guyana after three months. Errol and Sandy had already arrived there. The four friends met after four long years and spent many days reminiscing. Errol and Sandy brought a small farmhouse near Prem's farm. The four began to spend many hours helping each other on the farm or travelling the country. Then one day they received a call from London. Noorie informed them that Priya and her were coming to visit them in Guyana week's time. Prem and Sita had not seen them for a few years and looked forward to their visit. Noorie had stated in on the phone that she had very important news for all of them. The excitement was overwhelming as the four friends went to the airport to receive them.

They all returned to Prem's farm where Sandy and Sita had prepared a feast. After a hearty lunch all of them settled down for a chat.

"So Noorie, what is this important news you have to tell us? In our excitement we forgot to ask you this earlier." Prem asked.

"Well everybody, as mum and dad already know, I got involved with politics after you left and joined the Labour party. I know it is not the best party uncle, but I had little choice. I gave a lot of my time to the Labour party specially after completing my studies. I wanted to get to the top as soon as I could. With a lot of hard work and a bit of luck I moved up the ladder very fast." Noorie stated proudly. "Well, there was a by-election earlier this year and I was selected to contest the election. And would you

believe it? I got elected as a member of the house of Parliament. I still can't believe it. I am a MP at the Westminster!"

The three of them sat astonished for a few moments. They just couldn't believe their ears. Errol was the first to react. He got up and slowly moved to his daughter and embraced her.

"Our daughter, a MP... Heck! Who would have thought of it?" He said proudly. "Sandy, Sita, Errol my friend, what can I say? One of the children of a slave got elected to the power house of the British Government? Heck, what can we say about that, Errol?"

Prem slowly got up as well. He walked up to Noorie and hugged her. The others rushed and hugged as well.

"All our suffering have been given a meaning today, Errol. All the pain we all have suffered throughout the centuries seems not to matter for a moment." Prem said slowly. "My child, we are all proud of you. Because of you we all can stand tall and say we are the best amongst the best."

Noorie kissed Prem and hugged him tightly. She looked very happy and radiant. She looked at him and smiled gently.

"You have been my inspiration uncle Prem. All your lectures, your talks when we were young and your hard work in the community are the reasons that I became a politician!" Noorie said. "I know how hurt you were after Jamal's murder. I know you really wanted to make a change. But I also understood that you had to get away. So I decided to try to finish what you always dreamed about. I know I'm yet to learn a lot from you. That's one reason I have come here; so that you can teach me all you know. Uncle, things haven't really changed much back in Britain. Racial discrimination, attacks and murders are still going on, while antiracist organisations fight with each other. The governments and council are still getting away with doing little. People are..."

"...things will be the same unless a new approach is taken by responsible people; people who are not selfish in their motives. People who understand the issues well." Prem interrupted, caressing her forehead gently. "But we have plenty of time to discuss this later. Today we must celebrate on your success as well as that of little Priya. We must not forget her other wise she may get annoyed with us. What do you say Errol?"

"We will never forget Priya. She is a doctor now! Our girls have made us all very proud." Errol said "Prem, we have not brought out the rum for a long time. I think today is the right occasion for our favourite rum! I think today is the right occasion to get re-acquainted with our long-time friend."

Errol took out a bottle of rum and poured two drinks. He also poured some wine for the women. He handed all of them the drinks.

"Let's toast to our daughters! Here's to their future successes." Errol called out.

After the toast they all settled down in their chairs. Suddenly Prem and Errol got very silent. They stretched back in their rocking chairs, deep in their thoughts. Slowly tiny drops of tears rolled down their cheeks, as they silently reflected on their long journeys. Sandy and Sita looked at them in silence. They looked at each other and silently left the room. Noorie went and sat beside Prem and Priya sat next to Errol.

“Uncle, why are you two crying today? We thought you two will be really happy for us. Are you thinking of Jamal? Is that why you two are crying?” Priya asked Errol.

Errol kept quiet for a while. He tried to say something. He could not get any words out and kept silent.

“We think of Jamal everybody Priya, all of us.” Prem said after while. “We are not crying because of that. Today children, for the first time, our tears are of happiness. Yes, for the first time in our life, we feel like crying because we are so happy and cannot express our happiness in any other way.”

Prem turned and looked at Errol. Errol looked at his friend and nodded his head slowly. “Heck you always had the way with words Prem! Yes... you always did.” Errol said. “Silent tears of happiness!”

The friends smiled at each other as they settled back in their chairs again. Priya and Noorie silently left the room.

**The end...**



**Dr Satish Rai** is Sydney based academic, film/tv producer, journalist and community development worker. He was born in Fiji where he received his primary, secondary and part of his tertiary education (University of South Pacific & Fiji School of Medicine. He migrated to UK in 1980 and after working as a Metropolitan police officer for five years, (1982-1987) he retired to complete his BA (Hons) degree in Sociology, majoring in race

equality issues. He became a politician (elected councillor in London Borough of Greenwich, 1990-94), and a community development officer; becoming a Principal Race Equality Officer for a London Borough Council. He also substantially completed MA degree in Social Policy and Administration the Goldsmiths College, University of London before migrating to Australia in 1995. He completed a MA degree in Communication and Cultural Studies at University of Western Sydney in 1997. In 2011, he completed a profession Doctor of Creative Arts degree (in film production) from the same university. This involved making a documentary drama based his research thesis on exile of the Indian girmityas in Fiji. The thesis (found here-<http://www.amazon.com/Satish-Rai/e/B00C7KBYPQ>), and film are called In Exile at Home-a Fiji Indian Story-found here-(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EqU-x80kpE>).

*Silent Cries* was his first novel which was published in 1995 by Sahara Publications London, UK. *Silent Cries* was adapted into a play by the same name and performed in several theatres in London, culminating in Hounslow Asian Arts festival in 1995. An online version of the novel was released via Amazon Kindle Bookstore in 2013. The present second print edition is being printed because of the growing global popularity of the 100th anniversary of abolition of Indian indenture system. *Silent Cries* explores the connection between the African slave system and the Indian indenture system and how both contributed towards the post World War II racism in UK. Dr Rai hopes that this novel, based on his undergraduate and post-graduate studies in London, plus his experience as a politician and anti-racist professional in UK, will assist in understanding the Eurocentric racism in the west.