

Democracy for Teenagers



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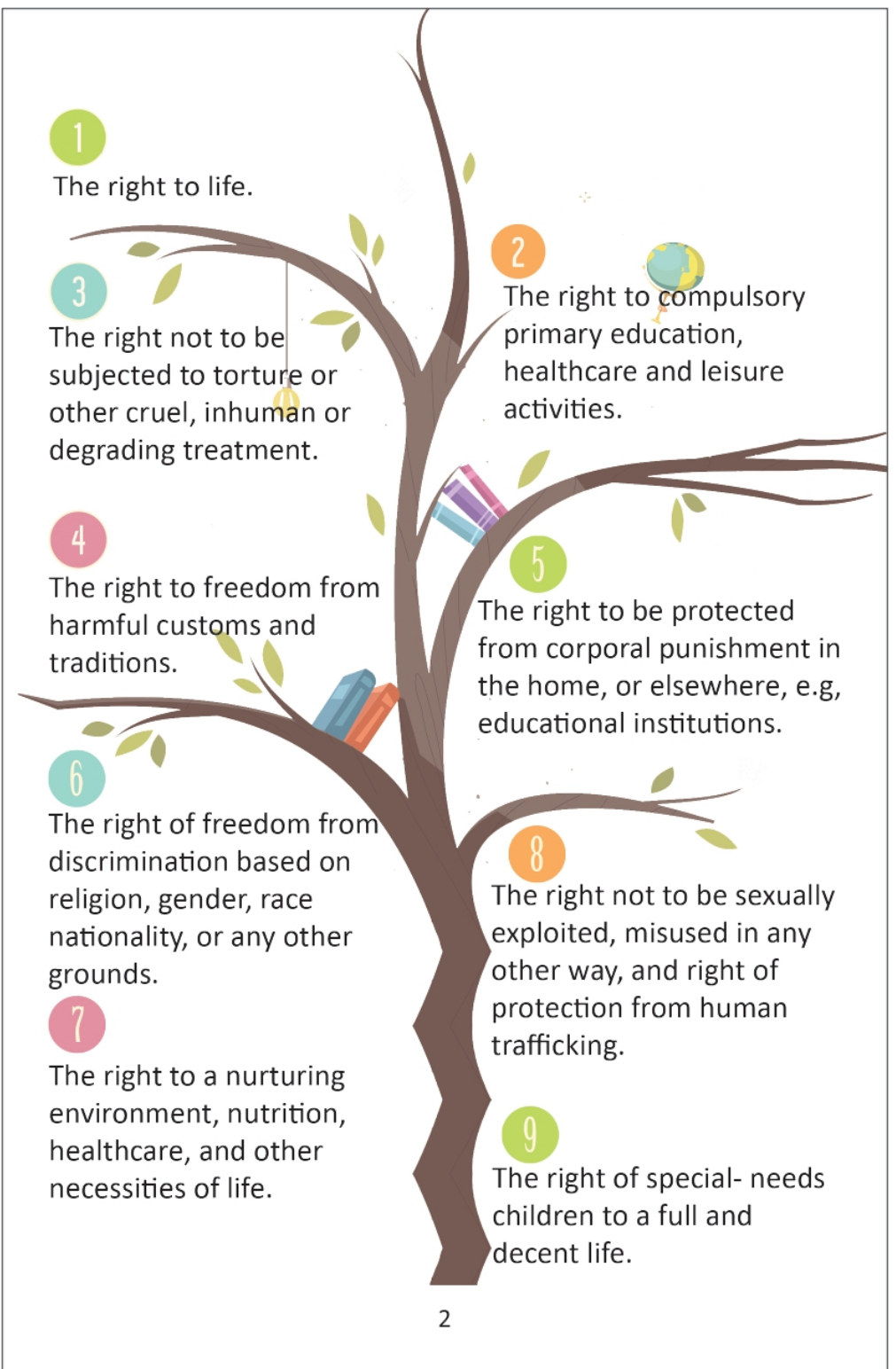
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1 Rights of the Children

Pakistan has signed the International Convention for the rights of the child. Under the convention, everyone under 18 years of age is considered a child for the rights it guarantees. The rights include:

This convention also obligates the state to give weight to the opinion of children, child labor, provide opportunities for higher education, to make laws for the protection of children, and to provide a separate system of justice for minors.

The Constitution of Pakistan also guarantees certain rights to children, however, work still needs to be done in this regard, and there are many practical steps yet to be taken. Article 25-A of the Constitution makes it the state's responsibility to provide primary education for all children.



2 Democracy

Democracy is a system of governance. Under this system, the business of the state in any area is carried out according to the wishes of the people living there by their chosen representatives. This government is chosen through a free and open political process, for a limited time, and works without bias or discrimination, to protect the interests of all citizens. The progress of democracy in Pakistan has been challenged by religious extremism, interference by state institutions, and undemocratic social attitudes.

Another special thing about a democratic system of governance is the idea of equal rights for all citizens. Even though the choice of government in a democratic state is by the choice of the majority, no citizen is discriminated against in carrying out the work of the government and the state. All citizens, no matter what beliefs they hold to, what language they speak, their race or the region they live in, or their political ideology and affiliation, are equal before the state, government, and law.

A democratic system can work only when it is built on the foundation of humanity, political freedom, peace, and justice. In a democratic state, equality and brotherhood, freedom and

human rights take precedence over religion, ideologies, race or nationality.

The Constitution of Pakistan declares her to be a democratic state where the business of the state is carried out by a government chosen through and working under, a federal, parliamentary system. Articles 25 and 26 of the constitution provide a (limited) guarantee of equal rights for all citizens, but, unfortunately, there are also laws and social attitudes that promote discrimination based on gender, creed, and nationality. There have been many times in our history when unelected governments have ruled the country, freedom of expression was curbed, and ideology was given preference over individual freedoms. This is the reason Pakistan is so far behind on the indicators of human development such as education, health, gender equality, justice, and the protection of human rights.

To solve these problems, we must, in the future, make sure that the government is free from the interference of unelected institutions and religious extremism so that the Pakistani people can choose their rulers, find solutions to their problems, and protect their rights. The solution to our problems is 'more democracy', and active participation by citizens in the political process. It is the duty of every citizen to engage in democratic and political struggles to solve the problems we face and to tolerate differences of opinion from others.

The Tap (Story)

(Part 1)

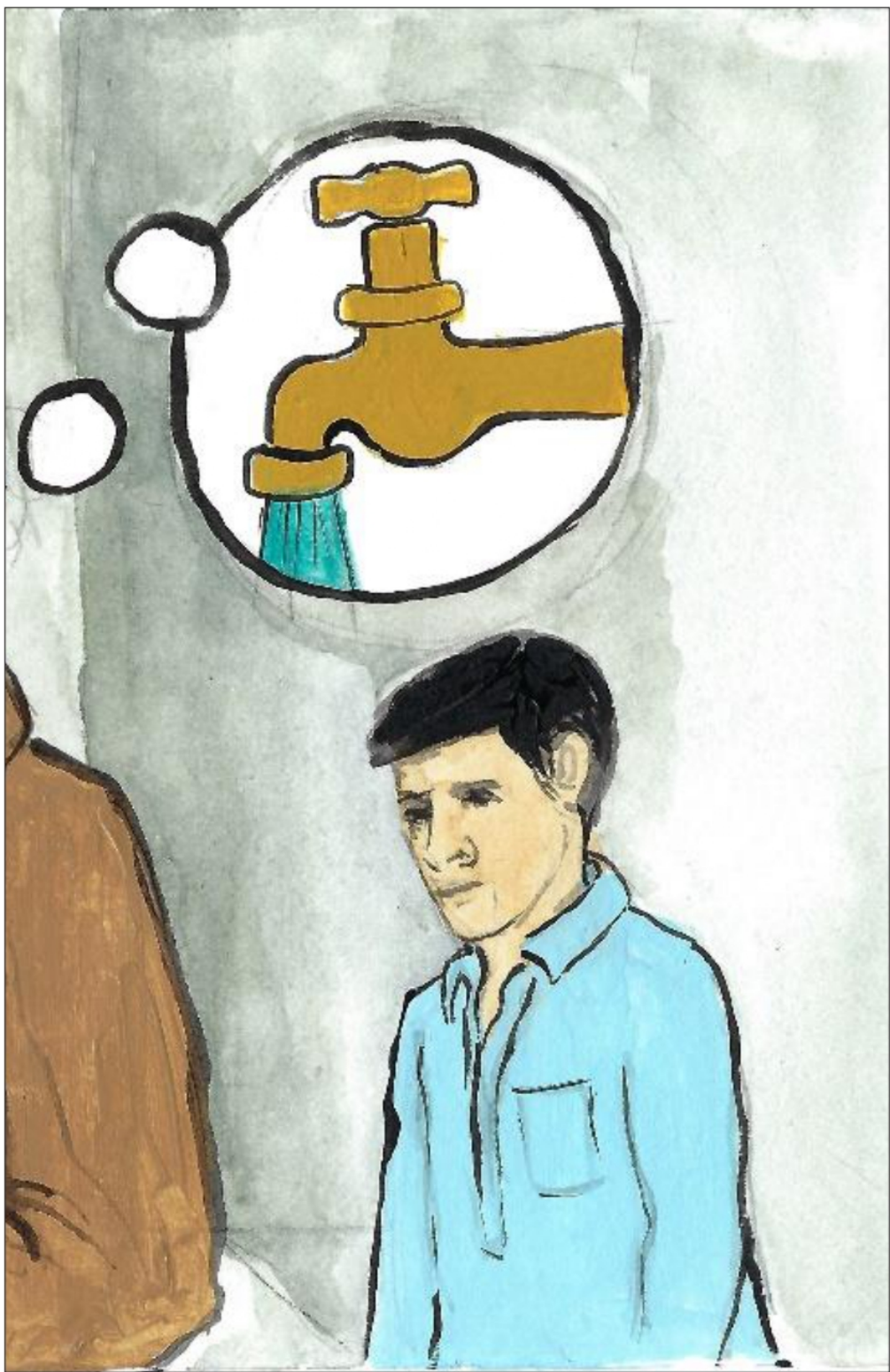
Meraj Din felt as if his legs would give out under him at any minute. When he was a young man, he could walk for miles on end, and not get tired, but then, he also had a lot of time to walk back then. Yet now, his legs got tired after walking short distances, and he had to take a rest after every fifteen or so minutes.

He remembered the time when he was as young as his grandson was now, 10 or 11; going to the river never felt tedious. Even though there was no bridge in those days, Meraj Din could cross at any point by swimming across when the water was low. Now the river had lost its flow, and he had lost his youth. Whenever he had to go to the river these days, he would take a Ching Chi from the village, get off at the flour mill, then walk the rest of the two miles. Today he had not waited for the Ching Chi and had started on foot.

Every so often, he stopped and checked his pockets, took out a shopping bag, and made sure of the money and his identification card inside. His grandson had told him that he would not be able to cast his vote without the ID card.

He had had breakfast as usual and was sure he would not be bothered by hunger while he was out. Thirst was also not a problem since there were water-taps, hand-pumps, and tube-wells at short distances along the way... but, maybe thirst was a problem... maybe, water was THE problem. He became more disturbed as he passed over the bridge. He was deeply aware of the river drying up, and he felt helpless. He could not believe that a river could ever go dry, that there would no water in a river. Yet the river was drying up. The earth groaned with thirst, and the taps were running dry.

In his youth, the old people of the village had many stories about great floods, but no story about rivers going dry. Rivers rose and fell, sometimes changed their course over the land, but could not go dry. His grandson would probably be the first of the family who would grow up with tales of a dry river. He felt the river had been losing water, slowly but steadily. The people had started putting up tube-wells in their fields -not in his village, but in the lands at some distance from the river, there were now tube-wells with cruel hearts who sucked out water from deep inside the earth. Now, the tube-wells had to bore into the earth at greater and greater depths, from a few dozen feet to hundreds of feet under the ground; and still, the water would not come.



He did not know what to do. Especially since his son had brought the whole family to live with him in the city. The city had many fine shops where one could find something to eat at any time of the day, and all through the night, but where one could not be sure whether one would get any water when one turned on the taps. He had known a lot of mornings where all three of his grandchildren had to use a single bucket of water to wash up before going to school. The hope of finding water in the taps in the morning, and of finding water in the river-bank in the summer, amounted to the same thing. There was definitely some relation between the thin streak of water that flowed out of the taps in the afternoon, and the flimsy line of water flowing weakly in the river, looking even tinier due to how wide the river-bank.

In the schoolbooks his grandchildren read, it said that Pakistan was blessed with an abundance of water and that five great rivers flowed through her land in all seasons. The names of the rivers and canals, and the paths they took, he could recall even in his sleep. Yet he did not know whether his drying river was one of those five, or whether his village was part of Pakistan. He did not even know who to ask. He knew in case of theft and robbery, he should go to the police station; to go to the hospital in case of injury or sickness; he knew one went to the patwari to check land records, and to the court in case of a dispute... but where to go and who to ask about the water in his river going away, no one knew.

He asked his son, he asked his grandson, he asked the neighbors. They all said this was the government's job.

His grandson's books said that the government is created by the vote of the people, and was answerable to the people. He knew the MPA's and MNA's of his area, but none of them knew anything about the water. Meraj Din wanted to cast his vote for the water in the taps and the river-banks.

He had heard a lot of politicians giving a lot of speeches... in his village, on the radio, and the television. There were many things in those speeches: schools, hospitals, power, jobs... but not water... never a mention of water. He needed water, millions like him needed water, but there was no mention of water. So, he had decided that he would cast his vote this time. He would cross the river, over to the other side, go inside the school-building that was large enough to be seen from far away, and he would cast his vote for water.

Yes, water was the problem. He thought again about all this for a minute, then stepped down onto the path leading from the bridge. On both sides, he saw banners, flyers, and posters for this or that political party, this or that candidate for office, and, even here, he found no mention of water. He still thought that he should cast his vote, and kept moving forward. It was nearly 10 o'clock, when the red-brick school building, its walls, and the tall trees planted outside and inside came into sight. There were a lot of people gathered there; it was like a festival. He

made sure he still had his ID card, then got into line for the voting booth.

(Part 2)

Whenever I am about to turn a tap on, I think about my grandfather. Father says he has grown quite old, and that is the reason he does not remember most things. Three years ago, father brought him to live with us, but he never got comfortable living in the city. He kept turning the taps on and off and switching the motor on to check whether the water was running. He said he had voted for water in these last elections, and now it was the government's job to give water to our houses. He would get very disturbed in the mornings when there was no water. So, we took him back to the village. He was a lot better in the village, yet, whenever we visited him there, he would ask us about the water situation in the city. Father had forbidden us to say anything that might agitate him, so all we ever told him was that things were just fine.

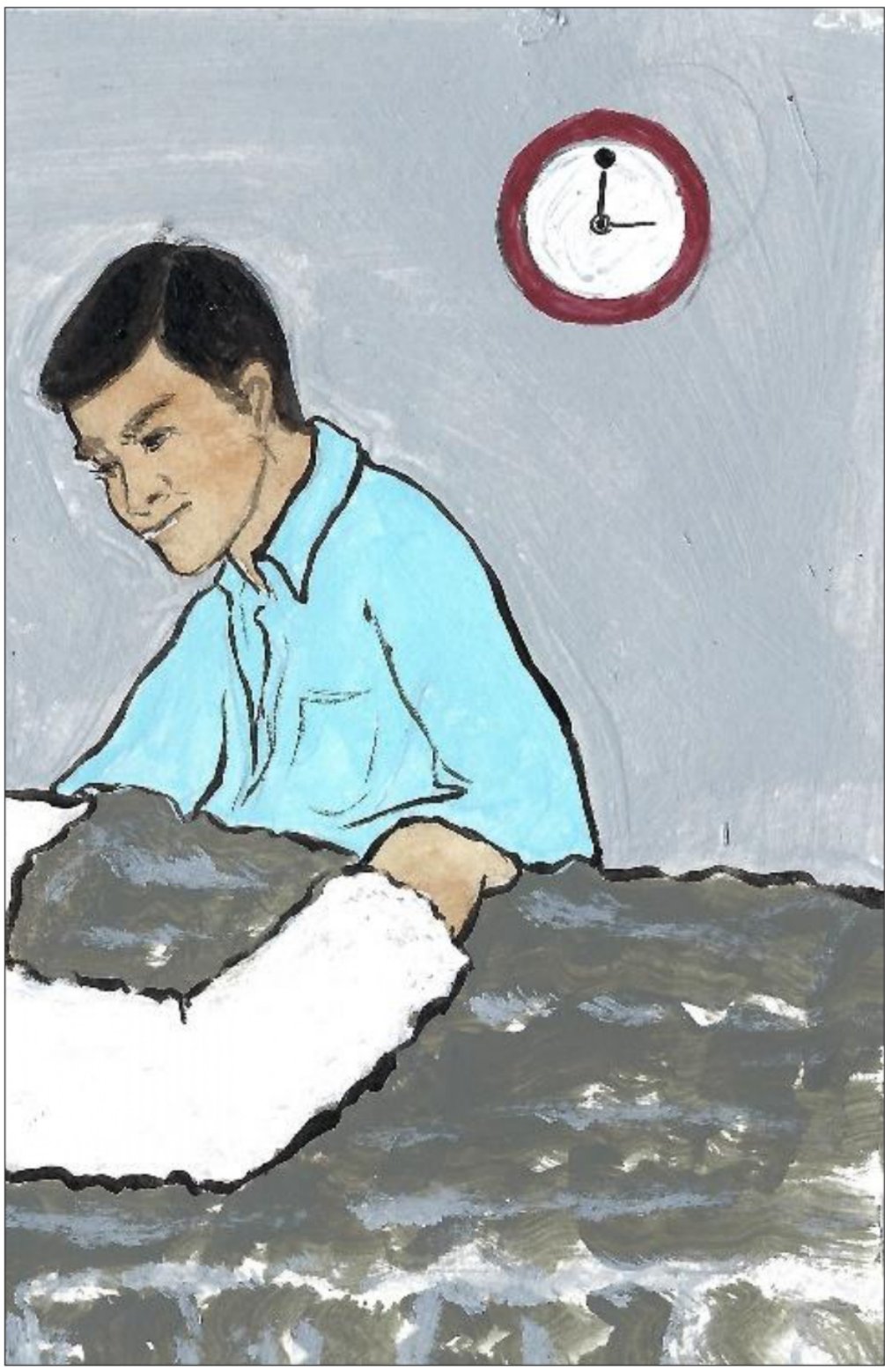
He was worried about the river. He would tell us stories about the river and its floods; about how, once, his buffaloes were carried away by the flood-waters and he brought them back after a long search. He told us stories about the snakes that would come out with the flood-waters, and how, when the water was low, he would cross the river by swimming through. He knew the all about the river, and the names of all the canals that flowed out of it. Now, he had become so old that he could

not walk to the river by himself, but he would ask whoever he met about whether or not there was any water flowing in the river. Grandfather said Khwaja Khizer watched over the rivers; he was the one I have been named for. When I would ask him where Khwaja Khizer lived, he would just smile, and say, 'at the bottom of the river', or sometimes, 'who knows?'

Whenever we crossed the bridge on the river on our way to the village, I tried to look outside the bus, down into the river, to catch a glimpse of the green-clad saint, yet all I ever saw was sand, mud and a thin streamlet of water.

The city, grandfather used to say, was a strange place: shops were open 24 hours, but turn the taps on, and there is no water. While he lived here, he would dictate letters to the municipal authorities to me, complaining of the lack of water in our taps. It was I who told him that one had to go to the municipality office and union council in case of such problems. He once asked me when there were going to be elections for the government, and listened to my guessed-at answer with a lot of attention.

This morning too, there was no water when I turned on the tap. I thought of grandfather. This would upset him if he were here. The three of us washed up with the water still in the bathroom bucket and went to school.



It wasn't yet the second period when we were told our father was here to pick us up. Surprised, a little dazed, we got home to find mother stuffing our things in a suitcase. Father asked her with a tired voice why she was packing so much, and she replied in an equally subdued tone that we may have to stay in the village for who-knows-how-long.

Father told her to be strong and told us to change our clothes. On the way to the village, no one spoke. While passing over the bridge, I looked into the river: there was nothing there. Grandfather said the river was drying up, now it held water only during the rainy season, and then only a little.

It was around afternoon when we reached our village. Grandfather looked very, very old, and he was lying down with his eyes closed. There was a drip in his left hand and his bedside smelt like a hospital. After a while, our uncle, my father's brother, told all of us young ones to leave the room. We were allowed back in later in the evening. Uncle was feeding grandfather some juice through a straw. We said salam, and he opened his eyes to look at us. He tried to say something, but he did not have the strength, so he just looked at us for a while before closing his eyes again.

We came back outside. A strange sadness lay over the entire house. I wandered around aimlessly, here and there, to no purpose. I would look into my grandfather's room periodically. He would have some broth or juice through a straw,

sometimes open his eyes, but mostly, he just lay back on his bed with closed eyes. Even though no adult had said anything to us, none of us felt much like playing, and we made no noise and created no disturbance.

I saw strange dreams at night. I saw flooding rivers and the old man who is their protector. At some point in the night, thirst woke me up, and I saw that the fan in the room had stopped. There was no electricity. Going outside for water, I saw a light in grandfather's room and went to investigate. When I looked in, I saw my father fanning grandfather with an old fan, I went over to him and asked if I could fan grandfather for a bit. He said yes.

"It's good you're here. I'll just go outside to turn on the generator." He left using the torch on his mobile phone; there was an emergency light shining in his grandfather's room.

For a while, I fanned grandfather. Once he opened his eyes, looked at me, and then tried to ask for something. I could not understand so he pointed at the glass on the bedside table. I fetched it immediately and fed him some water through a straw. He drank a little, then lay back down.

After a while, my father came back. He asked if things had been alright, I said sure. Hearing our talk, grandfather opened his eyes again. Father said the generator had run out of fuel, and that uncle had gone with a container to get some. He said to me that there were a lot more problems in the power supply

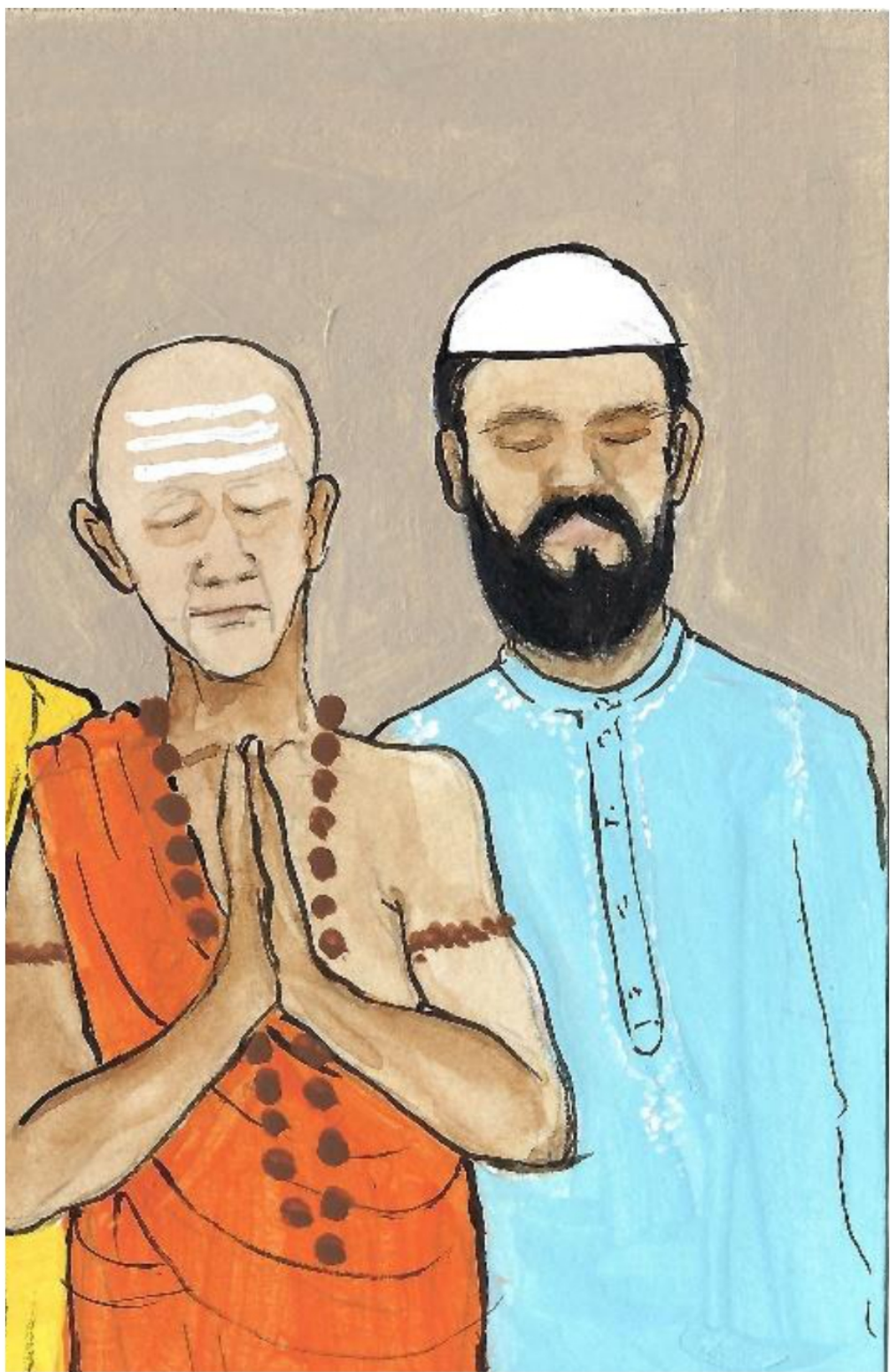
in the villages, as compared to the city; also, the healthcare was a lot worse, and that we may take grandfather to the big hospital in the city when it was morning. Grandfather fell back into a doze.

When we heard my uncle's motorcycle stopping outside, father went out again, leaving me to fan grandfather. After a while, he opened his eyes and said something. I reached for the water, but he shook his head no. He spoke again, and this time I leaned in close to hear. He was saying something about taps and water. I told him things were a lot better these days, there was always water in the taps. Hearing this, he finally smiled and closed his eyes contentedly. I stayed by his side until my father and uncle got the generator working, then quietly left the room.

3 Pakistani Minorities

Pakistan is not a country of just one nationality, race, creed or religion. The people who live here speak many different languages, the cultures that they come from differ from one another, and they adhere to various beliefs, creeds, and religious traditions. These differences do not mean that one Pakistani's beliefs are wrong and another's are correct, or that one community's culture is superior to the rest. All Pakistanis are equal, as human beings and as citizens. The Constitution of Pakistan, in its Articles 20 and 28, guarantees the right of all citizens to safely practice their beliefs, live according to their own culture, and use their language.

In every region of Pakistan, and among all its communities, many different festivals and special days are celebrated and observed. On these special days, we find joy and sorrow, love and brotherhood. All these festivals are part of our heritage, and we should participate in them all with respect and passion.



Minorities living in Pakistan:

We can think about minorities who live in Pakistan in three ways: (1) Based on creed and religion; (2) Based on nationality and race; (3) Based on gender.

Religious and Cultural Festivals:

Festivals are the living expression of a society's spirit. They give society a chance to come together and give a practical demonstration of their cultural values. Faith, seasons, sorrows, joy... our festivals encompass all aspects of human life.

Some important religious and cultural festivals of Pakistan are:

Christmas:

Christmas is the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ (a.s). It is celebrated on December 25th every year. The day is observed with the offering of special prayers and worship services. People exchange Christmas cards and gifts. Houses are decorated, and scenes from the life of Jesus are displayed on the streets and squares. The scene one sees most often is the nativity: the infant Jesus a.s in his mother's a.s arms, three kings who have come with gifts for the new-born and Joseph a.s watching over them protectively.

Christmas trees are put up in houses and are covered with beautiful decorative items. Special songs of worship and celebration are prepared that are sung the world over. In addition to traditional dishes of delicious food, a Christmas

cake is also cut and shared. The character of Santa Claus is associated with this festival: tradition holds that Santa Claus is a saint, who keeps a record of which children have been naughty, and which children have been nice throughout the year, and then brings presents for the good children and coals for the naughty ones.

Holi:

This festival of colors and joy celebrate the arrival of spring. It is celebrated according to the Bakrami calendar, on the first day of the month of Chet. This day symbolizes the victory of good over evil, but is also a day of forgiveness, and making peace between estranged friends. On this day, people dance sing songs and play with colors, having mock fights with multicolored powders and colored water as weapons. These colors are traditionally prepared from turmeric and saffron petals and flowers. According to certain traditions, the festival of Holi started in the city of Multan. It is also traditional to distribute sweets on this day.

Gurunanak Gurburab:

This festival celebrates the birth of the founder of the Sikh religion and the first Guru of the Sikhs, Baba Guru Nanak Devji. Guru Nanak was born, according to the Bakrami calendar, on the night of the full moon in the month of Katak, at the city since called Nankana Sahib, which is today in Pakistan. Sikhs from all over the world come to Pakistan every year to

celebrate this event. These pilgrims visit the holy places of their faith in Pakistan, places such as; Sacha Sodagar Dawara, Kartarpur Sahib, Rohri Sahib, and Punja Sahib Gurudwara. The Gurgurab celebrations commence with morning prayers, called 'bhaat pheriaan'. Two days before the birthday of Guru Nanak, akhand paath is carried out: this is a reading of the sacred text of the Sikh faith, Guru Granth Sahib, which goes on continuously for 48 hours. Torches are lit in Gurudwaras. On this occasion, a procession led by 'panj pyaray' and a palanquin housing the Guru Granth Sahib is also carried out.



Eids:

Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Azha are celebrated on 1 Shawal and 10 Zilhajj, respectively, according to the Hijri lunar calendar, every year. The birth of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w.w. is also celebrated with respect and joy on 12th Rabi al-Awal.

Eid al-Fitr is called the 'sweet eid' because, on this day, people prepare sweet dishes such as sheer khurma and sawayan (vermicelli in sweet milk). At the time of Eid al-Azha, financially well-off Muslims sacrifice some halal animal -sheep, goat, cow or camel- depending on what they can afford. The meat is then shared and eaten among family members, neighbors, and indigent people: this reminds us to share the good things in life with those less fortunate. We are taught to spread joy and share happiness with others, by giving fitrana on Eid al-Fitr, and sharing meat on Eid al-Azha.

Basant:

Basant is another festival that celebrates the arrival of spring after winter, and the renewal of the year. The traditional date for Basant is the 5th of Maagh, according to the Bakrami calendar, and it is celebrated -mostly in Punjab- by flying colorful kites, of many different makes, shapes, and sizes. Just when flowers of many colors bloom and spread over the ground like an intricate and beautiful carpet, the sky is also colored with kites of many hues. People gather on roof-tops and courtyards, fly their kites and have matches where two

kites meet and try to cut each other's strings. The kite that stays in the sky wins. People play songs of happiness and love in loud volume and share spicy snacks. According to tradition, kite-flying originated in China around 5000 years ago, and people all over the world fly kites during various celebrations.

The festival of Basant Panchami is celebrated every year at the shrine of Hazrat Nizam Uddin Aulia as well. According to tradition, Hazrat Nizamuddin was heartbroken at the death of his nephew and would not be consoled. His devotee, Ameer Khusrau, sang songs for him in the manner of the Hindu women of Delhi to comfort him, and since then, these songs and this festival are associated with the shrine of Nizamuddin Aulia.

Nauruz:

Nauruz is another spring festival. It is a celebration of life - Nauruz meaning 'new day'; it is the start of the month of Farvardin and the New Year. The first day of the Persian New Year falls within a day of 21 March of the Gregorian calendar. In Pakistan, it is celebrated mostly in Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan. Before the days, houses are thoroughly cleaned, and new clothes and flowers are arranged. Garlands of jasmine and roses are hung on windows and doorways. Colors are made from different kinds of stuff: grains, spices, minerals, and flowers and are used to make elaborate patterns on the floors. Another special thing about this festival is 'haft seen' (ہفت س)

or seven seen: seven foods whose names start with the letter seen: so, e.g, sabza (grain), saib (apple), sirka (vinegar) and so on.



Baisakhi:

Baisakhi celebrates the harvest of the wheat crop, it is celebrated in the Punjab region on the first of Baisakh or mid-April when the wheat crop has ripened and ready to be cut. High on the hopes of a good crop, farmers all over Punjab are eager to celebrate Baisakhi. A mela on this occasion is

organized at Hasan Abdal as well, which, before Partition, used to be held on the bank of River Ravi. Bhangra dance is an essential component of this event. Certain folk songs associated with Besakhi have also been quite popular. Men, women, boys, and girls put on colorful clothes and do the bhangra on the beat of the dhol, all full of spirit and joy.

Sindhi Cultural Day:

This day is celebrated for the protection and promotion of Sindhi culture in the first week of December every year since 2009. Sindhis celebrate their language, dress, customs and traditions, handicrafts and lifestyle. People wear Ajrak and Sindhi caps. Traditional dance and music also add to this festival's brilliance.



Decision (Story)

There was a box of snacks in my hand, very carefully wrapped in red paper. I could tell without opening what was in the box: a piece of cake, one vegetable roll, and one chicken roll. I knew because I had helped in packing all this. The rolls were in a pouch so that oil from them wouldn't get on the cake or the box. Shamoon's mother had made the cake and these rolls herself. Shamoon's



mother makes the best cakes. Her rolls are probably the best in the world, -except maybe the one we had in Rawalpindi with Maju Chachu, but her cake is just perfect. Not so soft that it melts immediately and becomes watery in the mouth, not so hard that you have to chew a lot. Her rolls are also amazing, so spicy that you don't even feel the need for ketchup or sauce, and fried just right. But to open the box, or to eat, or to...

Shamoon's mother was giving these boxes out to the other children while chatting gaily with Ms. Rifat. Shamoon was also cheerfully helping his mother distribute the snacks. A while ago, I too was part of the cheer: this very morning, I had helped draw the Santa Claus on the whiteboard and had written 'Merry Christmas' in large letters with green, blue and red markers. It had taken Shamoon and me two whole hours, and our hands were still covered in marker stains, even though we must have washed them a hundred times since then.

A week ago, we had put in a hundred rupees each and bought lots of really soft, and very red paper. We had cut little triangles out of it, and now those hundreds of little red triangles were hanging in the school corridor outside.

Yet I had lost the stomach for all this activity. I was under a cloud: my thoughts were dark, my purposes were unclear to me, and I did not know what to do at the moment. I shouldn't have come to school today, and called Shamoon at his house in the morning and told him I was sick. But he would have known... It was no use anyway... I was here now, as planned, with paper flags, rolls, children cheering, a cake, and a refreshment box coming my way.

First Shamoon had cut the cake with his mother, amidst especially loud cheering from the children and Ms. Rifat; then he had told us briefly about Christmas, some of the children

had then told jokes, and now it was time for the distribution of snacks.

I had been preparing myself for this moment, but now that it was here, I did not feel prepared. As I got further ahead in the refreshment box line, my mother's voice echoed in my head: Shamoon and his family are different from us, and I was not supposed to eat anything cooked in their house.



I was thinking all this when I came up before my friend Shamoon and Ms. Rifat; my hands were numb and my throat was dry. I do not know how I raised my hand and received that refreshment box wrapped in red gift-paper. I was confused

now. I could smell the vanilla and sweet spices on the cake, and that pleased me thoroughly, but I had promised my mother this morning that I would not eat one bite of this cake. That was the condition on which I had been allowed to come.

My head was just empty, and it felt like one solitary bee was buzzing around in it, banging its head on the walls of my skull. I wanted to escape from this place. Shamoan's mother, seeing my face, kindly asked me how I was. I smiled a bit, weakly, and opened the box, took out a packet of juice, and began drinking. She was a bit reassured and moved on to speak to some other kid, as well as to help Ms. Rifat pass out the tissue paper.

Slowly a thought took hold of me, and I started feeling a bit like normal. I went into the corridor, broke into a run, and then turned in at the bathroom door, a new smell coming from behind it, giving me pause. I thought. I thought. But the voice of my mother. And the look on my father's face. What if I ate the cake now? I could do it... it was my decision. But then I remembered the things my parents had said. So, with one breath, I steeled my heart and went in, and went to the dustbin, and threw my box in.

My heartfelt weary, I felt old. To take my mind off things, I walked outside to the basketball court where I found 9th and 10th class boys shooting hoops against each other. A few boys from each class in line for the ball and the rest standing, walking, play-fighting, and sitting around. I could not be





distracted, I was still disturbed, so I went back towards the main corridor in the school building. As I walked further, I could hear Ms. Rifat shouting. Actually shouting, with a sort of anger I could not have imagined possible. I stopped. A cold fear took hold of me, and I was glued to the ground, I dared not go and face the class, and

Ms. Rifat. Yet I did, eventually. Ms. Rifat called us all up in the classroom and asked who the culprit was, if he or she did not come forward, we would all be punished. I looked outside the window, at the grassy strip that goes by all the classrooms, I followed it with my eyes, just to have something to look at. I saw Shamoons mother standing looking a bit lost, and Shamoons... whose tears I could see even though he had his hands on his face, just whimpering silently.



4

Environmental Change and Global Warming

Humans rely on their environment for all the conditions of their existence. All the necessities of our life and all human activities -including food, clothing, and fuel- depend on the raw materials we get from the natural environment. Yet human activities can also affect the environment negatively. Excessive cutting of trees, excessive consumption of water, construction, garbage and wastage, use of fuels, and mining can change the environment in any place. And, all these changes, in all the many places where they happen, affect the climate of our planet as a whole.

The out-of-control environmental changes we have been seeing lately have been caused by human behavior and can be countered and brought under control by modifying human behavior, and through human effort. To fight climate change, we must reduce reliance on fossil fuels, stop wasting water, adopt renewable energy sources, and use recyclable products whenever we can. Humans must change their behaviors and lifestyles, control their population growth, reduce reliance on plastics, conserve water, and think about the welfare of all life-

forms who share this earth with, and of the future generations, just as we think of our present welfare.

Metal Wheels (Story)

The park had disappeared behind huge machines. They were the first thing one saw when one entered our street from the side of our Quran-tutor baji's street. The Big One was painted yellow, and it was taller than most of the houses on our street. As tall, exactly, as the tallest trees in the park. When one got closer, one saw a truck engine in front of its trawler, and a small, tiny driver's cabin. The trawler's wheels were taller than Amna, we used to measure ourselves every day against them, she claimed she was a few inches taller than they were when she stood on tiptoes and did her roaring lion pose. Ever since the machines had come, she had been pestering me to help her climb the truck, because, as you may have guessed, she was too short to have managed herself. She tried.

I kept diverting her attention to the road-roller standing beside the big machine's trawler, and to its metal wheels in particular. I would explain to her that they were made of metal and would not puncture. And that if she ever told home that I had to repeat last week's lesson, or that I did not know the dua again today, they would come and....



That gave her pause, sometimes, then we would go throw stones in the huge rotating drum next to the road-roller. It was a bit hard for me to look inside the drum as well, so we would climb up on the park's wall, and then, we could both look into it. Amna was a bit afraid of the blades inside the drum, but she threw her stones anyway.

Sometimes a dog would be lying under the rotating-drum because it was damp and cool. Amna was afraid of him, so on those days, we came back without throwing stones. In the morning, on the way to school with baba, we saw the machines again, and they were just as mysterious to us as when they had first appeared in our street.

It wasn't as if we hadn't ever seen rollers, or rotating-drums for mixing cement and things, or cranes. What disturbed me was that they had been parked here, in front of the park, to no purpose I could fathom. I had asked baba a lot of times on the way to school as to why they were here. He would mutter something about fixing the road, or something. That did not feel honest, our road was just fine; and, then, if they were fixing the road, where were the tar-coal and crushed stone and sand? It was just the machines, and they just stood there like a threatening gesture, doing nothing at the moment. I wanted them to get a move on, get started building the road or whatever they were going to do, so I could crush bottle-caps and things under the road-roller. I also wanted some coal-tar for my cricket bat.

Rehan had told me this was his brother's trick: dip the toe of the bat in coal tar, cover all the stoke right up to your sweet spot -that sweet, sweet spot where you get the best sixers- then tape it all uptight; also, do a coat of coal-tar on the part where the handle meets the body of the bat, and tape that up as well. This whole process gives you an unbreakable and very powerful bat, according to Rehan's brother, and I wanted to try it on my bat as an experiment.

So, I had asked Rehan to help me experiment, yet two weeks had passed since then, and I was becoming impatient. I had been waiting for Sunday when I could go around on my bicycle more easily. We were allowed to go to the park on Sundays, and, usually, Amna and I would ride our bikes there until evening. This Sunday, I did not go to the park, but to Javaid Uncle's street, which is broken all over and has deep potholes that fill up with water and cause bikes to fall over, whenever there is rain; I thought, maybe, they were fixing the road over there, but there was no sign of any work being done there as well.

I found the answer on Monday. Rameez told us that they were going to build a shopping center and an apartment building where the park was. It sounded impossible, but I had heard such things a couple of times before, about how the land of the park would be taken over to build this or that. So, I wanted to ask baba. The park had been here since this housing colony where we lived began; according to baba, when my

grandfather bought the plot where our house is today, the park was just four low walls around a bare ground, with just a few tufts of wild grass, here and there. He said it became greener and more beautiful as the colony developed and more people began living here.

I had been born here, we had all grown up here. The park was as familiar to us as our house. You could say it was the center of our little neighborhood. It was impossible to navigate our neighborhood without it, and everyone who had to be told an address here had to hear about it: if you were looking for my house, it was the third one to the left from the park, Rehan's house was the one facing the small gate on the opposite side from our street, our Quran-tutor baji lived in the street going from that corner of the park, and if you wanted rolls, samosas, or French fries, Amanullah sold his Hyderi Qalandari finger-chips in front of the water-filtration plant, just outside the park's main gate. The park was part of our lives.

To the people living around the park, it was like an extension of their homes. One could see people's clothes hung out to dry on its walls, and on the branches of the trees inside. It had hosted weddings and funerals. It was part of our stories: like the time we had gone to the village for a wedding, and a thief had broken into our house, Uncle Irshad was walking in the park, had seen the thief leaving with our things, and when he passed by the park's gate, had suddenly come out running and screaming, and tackled him to the ground. Or when the power

had broken down for two weeks, and all the women had taken to sleeping on the rooftops, and all the men on charpais (traditional handwoven beds) laid out in the park. Or when there was a big fight during elections, and Majid bhai and Imran bhai -who belonged to opposing parties, and so, were enemies for the duration of the election- convinced everyone fighting to move to the park and to leave behind all bats, sticks, or other weapons, so they would all have more room and a better, fairer fight. Those two were the only ones who actually fought in the end, or sparred rather as they do at the boxing gym every evening.

Yet, every time the adults began to talk about the park, the mysterious Court Case came up in the end, and everything else was forgotten amidst discussion of court dates and lawyer's talk. This talk of the court case was our inheritance from previous generations since it had been going on just like this for decades.

So, I tried to ask my father when he came to pick me up from school. I did not wait even to greet him, that is how disturbed I was by what Rameez had said: as soon as I saw him, I asked him whether it was true that they were going to build shops and buildings in the park. He told me to get on the bike since we were in the middle of traffic. When I insisted on being answered, he grabbed me a little roughly by the arm, and told me sternly, to sit.

I thought for a while that I should be angry with him, but I wanted to get to our street and the park even more, and see how things were. When we finally got near home, I saw a crowd gathered in front of the park. I ran inside the house and dumped my bag, then I came back out, still running and went to see what was up with the crowd. Baba stood in the doorway with my mother and did not stop me.

As I broke through the crowd and got to the front, I saw that part of the park's wall had already been torn down, the machines were inside the park and a few policemen stood in front, forcing people back. The sound of chainsaws filled the air, as workers on top of the big crane-like machine worked on cutting down the trees. On one side, Irshad Uncle stood waving around a file and speaking in a fast, feverish voice. Amanullah stood behind him, stroking his back consolingly and trying to calm him down. There were official-looking notices on the park's walls, and some workers were piling rubble from the walls into a lorry to be carried away. It seemed we had lost our case.

I looked around and found my baba standing to one side. He looked dejected and confused. I slipped deeper inside the crowd so he would not see me, but continued watching him. After a long moment, he moved, he walked through the crowd and walked into the park. He stared at the metal wheels of the roller which was now inside the park, and passing over the flower beds and jogging track. He moved in front of it, and



looked at the huge metal wheel, at the man driving it, and at the flower-beds that were slowly being eaten up by it. Then he bent down and removed one of the jasmine shrubs, digging at the ground under it, until the whole plant was out, root and stem. Then he gathered a few more plants like this and left without saying a word to anyone.

Slowly the cloud dispersed. The policemen left. The machines were doing the work with only Amanullah, Uncle Irshad, and myself watching. Then we left as well.

By evening most of the park had been demolished, and in our house, a jasmine plant grew in a pot on the roof.
