

Food for a chudail

Rinchin

There was a narrow path from behind her school straight to their baadi, and half way down the path, gudiya could see her door. Once she reached the mahua tree, she saw that there was more than one person inside. Her mother, she knew would be sitting near the chulah and she could see one side of a stranger, her blue saree-blouse. But the way in which the saree was worn was different for the way her mother or the others wore it . So she knew that this was the Chudiyal from outside, the one who was making her mother create trouble. “What did she look like?” The little girl thought. And before she could start to imagine, there she was, her face peeping out of the door looking at her.....gudiya's eyes widened, the Chudyail was winking at her and then she made a face. The girl was so surprised that she ran down the path. The Chudyial was laughing and in broken saadri she was calling her back...aye noniwhy are you running away, arre gudiya....are you mad or what, come back! That was her mother.

Gudiya knew she was running away for fun. As an answer to the game that the chudiyal had started by winking and making faces . And she didn't really run away, just circled the house and came in through the front door, so that without having to cross the visitor she could go straight to her mother.

Gudiya went and sat close to her mother and hiding her face behind her mother back, she mumbled, whose come?. So you'll run away or what? Said her mother, trying to push her away, but gudiya hid her face in the folds of her saree. Arre kabhi to sharmati nai hai. Why are you behaving like this today.

Her mother shrugged her off , making her sit straight.

The visitor asked her- so you are Gudiya?

Gudiya bhi aur Chanda bhi. Said Gudiya from behind her mothers back

Both names are yours?

Yes , she nodded.

So should I call you Gudiya or Chanda?

Gudiya, tum gahr par ho aur gudiya ghar ka naam hai. School mein ayee to Chanda

The visitor laughed , then asked “so now tell me gudiya, why did you run away.?.....am I so scary?

“Gudiya nodded”

“ Mein kya chudeyial hoon?”

Gudiya nodded and her mother looked embarrassed but the visitor laughed. Didi tum iski baat ka bura mat manana, Kuch bhi bolti hai.

“Maine bola kahan maine to sirf sar hilaya”, and this time even her mother burst out laughing.

Gudiya knew her mother hadn't laughed the first time , because she knew that it was the truth.

Only three days back Neti Ram had come and she had heard him say to her mother, “kyon janki , why are you getting us all into trouble,why are you going against your own community”

“I thought my case was against the company, how is it against the community? .” Her mother had asked sharply.

“you trying to prove that the company bought your land illegally through someone else. Those that you name are our own people. It wasn't their fault, they just did what the company people told them.”

“So let them fight with the company too, why are you stopping me from protecting my land.

“You are doing this because of that chudiyal vakil. Dont be fooled by her, she is filling her own pockets by using you, its all a plot to blackmail the company.”

“ I know who is wanting to fill their own pockets.

“ and now she is inciting you, so you are feeling very strong but later that woman's

going to go away and you'll be facing the company all alone. They will destroy you. Then that woman wont be here to help you..”

“she didn't tell me to file the case. I asked her to help. Because none of you helped, I went to her.” mother paused and then said with more force , Neti ram it is a shame that you come here threatening me instead of standing with us, don't you want to save this land, and you are our mukhiya? ”

“ I know what love for land you have, its just a way of getting more money,but no good will come out of it...you will get nothing...not even what you are getting now, and that outsider woman, that vakil, she will either end up dead or in jail...and you also better watch out . ” after he left her mother's face had been hard and she kept quite.

Gudiya had crept close to the mother. Later as she went out towards the hand pump to get water, she had seen neti ram and his men coming down the same way, she tried to ignore them, pumping furiously even though the bucket was full. As he passed her, he looked at her and asked for water, his tone was playful but she didn't like it. There was some thing unpleasant in his manner. She shook her head. No. He had stopped and looked at her. Surprised, then with half a laugh he said, maa to ban rahi hai, tu bhi chudelan banegi kya. and as he walked away she heard him say to the people with him....maar maar ke bhageyegechudhelan..ke”.

Later at night she had clung close to her mother scared, but she didn't tell her what neti ram had said to her. She was frightened of what neti ram had said, but she had also been thinking – if the chudiyal was helping her mother fight the company then she couldn't be all bad. After all she was helping them save their land and Gudiya, didn't like the company too. They had closed up the way across the road and now the access of the village to the next village across thirs was closed. The two villages were so close to each other that they were almost one. They even shared the same pond, where they all went to bathe and wash. everyone had been so surprised when the company had started

the fencing. Gudiya couldn't believe it, could a company buy up a whole village? Peoples houses, their trees and dev, everything. The children from the other side could not come here because the route had become too long. And soon the whole village had to shift out any way. All the houses had to be broken before they went. Her friends had left and while their parents had said that they were doing it of their own will, they hadn't seemed to happy about it.

Sleepily she had kept thinking the woman Neti ram had called the chudiyal, the one who was turning her mother into one too, and may be even her. Was she really bad, and would she really get them into trouble. But her mother seemed to trust her.

Now as gudiya stood looking at the visitor, seeing the chudiyal face to face , she too felt herself liking her. Her mother seemed very comfortable with her . And she seemed relaxed. Unlike the time Neti ram and his followers were here.

The mother and the chudiyal kept talking, soon some other women form the village too came and and they all started talking ... what will we have if not our land....., your land is your land.....you have right to stop any one taking it....and its illegal....what will we do with coal, eat it?, ...how should we get proof of the farji registrygudiya's mind wandered off into her own world after little while. But she felt happy sitting among all these women, it seemed safe.

Soon she went out and under the tree and where her friends were playing village -village and gudiya and two others went to the fields and the one stayed behind to cook. While playing , gudiya asked her friends about chudiyals, how does one make out if a person is a chudiyal or not, no one quite knew

“...earlier they had their feet turned backwards and dirty matted hair, but these days they have become clever, they look the same as us, so one could never make out.”

“But they smelled different”

“and also their pee was red”

“ what?” asked gudiya

“Yes its the blood they drink”.

Later they changed parts. gudiya was starting her cooking. The others were now ging to go and work in the fields. Gudia always like to start all over again. So she broke of the old chula and started to make hers all over again. Three stone and some mud. She was almost half done when

“what are you playing ?”That was the chudiyal on her way to pee behind the tree. This woman was nice but she was just like a chudiyal, scaring you from behind. There were stories about chudiyal, that they could breathe on to you and you would become one too. gudiya looked up said “I'm cooking”.

“So will you make food for me too?”

“What will you eat”

“what ever you make bhaat and dal, chutney”

“not children?”

“No no I eat only the company ke dalal”

After the woman went away gudiya went behind the tree to check the spot where she had peed. It looked like normal dark mud, just how it looked when she peed or her mother or for that matter any one else. And more over she didn't really know what a chudiyals pee looked like either. And if munna was to be believed and they peed blood, then too, it didn't match.

Gudiya and her friends went back to playing, village village, there were houses to be made, floors leopoed, khet to be jotoed and food to be made. their game went on for a long time and then her friend started to leave, the drums would start soon. A team form another village had come for a dance performance to their village. They were going to perform here today and gudiya wanted to go there now. But the visitor still hadn't come out. Gudiya looked towards her plate of food, the others had all thrown away the

remains of their make believe game, but gudiya had promised the chudiyal. She had kept her plate of food.

Finally tired of waiting gudiya went in, There she saw that the the visitor was already sitting and eating. “What about the food I made”, asked gudiya. “Why did you ask me to make, if you were going to eat already?

Oh! the chudiyal looked startled, “She forgot” thought gudiya. Then the chudiyal said “I'm sorry, let me finish this, and then ill come and eat yours.”

Gudiya made a face and went out behind the water drum. They were all like this the grown ups never did what they said they would. First ask, and then forget!

She looked at her plate-she had collected small pebbles for potatoes and very fine gravel for rice, little white flowers for bhajji. She even cut up green leaves into rounds, for roti. Roti was made only on special occasions, But then food for the chudiyal should be special.

She waited for a while in her make believe kitchen, and she could hear the drums of the pandal starting to play. And she couldn't sit and wait for the chudiyal the whole day could she ? So she went back to them. “I am going to the naach, but I've kept your food by the drum.

There were more people sitting in the house now, some men had dropped in too, and there was again the same talk going on. Of course gudiya knew by now that the visitor really didn't care for her food. If she didn't want why did she ask, just like all grown ups pretend that they are interested in our games, but not really care. But gudiya believed in her game and she had done what she had promised, let the chudiyal do whatever she wanted. Gudiya came back after a few hours, to find that her mother had left too. So she went to her neighbours house, Your mother has gone to amakona for a meeting with the vaklil bai, she will come back tomorrow morning. Gudiya nodded, she knew this meant that she would be sleeping here tonight. “ I'll get my copy and come” she said going out of the door. “get some tamatar too from your baddhi , as you come,called surja mausi

form behind.

As she went into her baadi, she saw something red underneath her tree. The small broken plastic plate was kept there, washed and clean. The plate that she had kept food for the chudiyal in. Her food had been eaten. The pebbles, the flowers and the rice and even the roti. On the plate now, was a small gudhal flower. And small parchi with something written on it in big bold writing. “*Khana bahut accha tha, gudiya ko chudiyal ka pyar*” . On the way back to surjas house, gudiya ate up the hibiscus flower and wondered when the chudiyal would come back. And if she were to become a chudiyal, as neti ram had threatened. It would not be such a bad thing.