

IMPACT FACTOR: 5.47

ISSN 2278 - 9529



GALAXY

INTERNATIONAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH JOURNAL

Refereed and Peer-Reviewed
Open Access e-Journal

Vol. X, Issue-2 (March 2021)

Editor-In-Chief : Dr. Vishwanath Bite
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The Witness

Giti Tyagi

Author, Poetess, Reviewer, Translator

Former Senior Lecturer

MM University, Ambala, India

Educational Consultant, Karnal, India.

Shefali always had a strange curiosity, an urge to peep into the verandah of the house just outside the huge wooden gates of her in-laws' house, on the corner of the crossroads every time Shefali crossed that house. The huge gates of her house, or rather the haveli, that squeak the moment they are opened, have a fascinating tale to tell. They were built so high so as to allow the mahout of the elephant to sit upright even while crossing the gate. Well, in which era that elephant lived and adorned the haveli, Shefali had absolutely no knowledge of that because she never heard any legends related to it. Whether there was even an elephant, or simply a tale to inflate the pride of the residents of the haveli, it's hard to justify. But, yes, the stories were passed on from generation to generation and that helped the swollen pride to continue. What else could exactly be the purpose of keeping an elephant in a village home with no purpose to serve! Nobody knows about the whereabouts of the place where that so called 'elephant' was kept, if at all it was. But Shefali vividly remembered one funny incident. As is customary to boast of our previously owned proud possessions, someone from her in-laws proudly informed a girl's father who had telephoned them for the 'Rishta' of their daughter, that 'In our home, an elephant used to sway around.' But, in no moment, he was left speechless when the girl's father replied, 'Did the elephant ever walk a few steps also, or did it merely sway?' And then, hanging up the phone, the girl's father never called them back. Well, whether a myth or a reality, the swollen inflated pride swayed and swerved in the haveli.

Back to where the story began.

The house outside Shefali's in-laws' haveli!

Every time she went past that house, she felt she might hear something or perhaps see someone. Though there resides no one today, the residents all perished. Perhaps some cinematic, movie-like scene was what her imagination expected. She had heard the fascinating



story of the Master (Teacher) who lived in that house along with his three daughters. Nobody ever knows what goes on in someone's mind. The plans, the shrewd thoughts, the cruel plots, the calculative reasonings....the unexpected contriving!

One night, after dinner the lights were dimmed and they could hardly see each others' silhouettes in the dead of the night when the story was told. A perfect setting for a crime story narration!

The villagers have various versions of the story as if some story telling competition was being held. Each one added an interesting twist to the original. The day of the incident....

The narrow lane outside the haveli was, as usual, bustling with passers-by. The greetings exchanged, the daily concerns discussed and the villagers, after making a small stop-over here and there, went on with their respective tasks for the day. It was almost past noon, when a sudden loud noise of a gunshot caught a man's attention. He turned, stood still, motionless under the Maulsari Tree outside the huge wooden gate of the haveli. Turning towards the origin of the gunshot, he could very clearly see the Teacher, cool and calm, holding the rifle and aiming at his daughter. Down on the ground of the verandah lay his elder daughter in a pool of blood. Already shot and dead! Not able to believe his own eyes, the witness to the gruesome incident felt jammed and jarred. A second shot fired. And the girl made futile attempts to save herself, falling ultimately. The third daughter tried to run to the main gate. Aiming again, he fired but missed the girl. He couldn't be in a fit of rage or anger as he aimed with an extremely poised and calm attitude. Continuing with the carnage, he raised the loaded rifle. Before the girl could escape from the gate and run out in the lane to save herself, another bullet was fired and this time, it hit straight on the target. The screaming girl plummeted down to the ground as the fallen tree. The Teacher showed no regret. He went in, sat quietly on his cane chair and perhaps congratulated himself for the act of savagery that he had successfully accomplished as his daughters lay outside in the verandah unattended.



Gradually the neighbours and the villagers gathered. They hurriedly arranged for the funeral rites of the girls who had been unjust victims of their own father's pernicious planning. No one bothered to call the doctors or the police. Where were these villagers when the girls were being mercilessly killed?

The girls were cremated by the villagers. Their father wasn't much interested to know what happened to them, nor did he attend the funeral.

No police case was registered and the Teacher continued to live in the village, often seen leisurely smoking the hookah lying on the cot in the same verandah where, some time earlier, lay his daughters dying and shrieking for help.

What happened to the only witness, the man standing under the Maulsari Tree, who was the only one who could have helped police to arrest the Teacher?

The villagers found him lying in the shade of the tree where he stood watching the whole scene....the bullet that missed the girl had found another target and he became another innocent victim of the carnage. Or was the bullet purposely aimed at him to eradicate all evidence?

There was another witness who is also the witness of many more woes and tears, and even smiles and cheers. But it prefers to remain quiet.

There stands even today, the witness to the eerie incident....a majestic, gloomy, quiet....

Maulsari Tree!



Third Person Bionote About Giti Tyagi:

Giti Tyagi is an Editor, Creative Artist, International Author & Poetess, Book Reviewer and Translator from Karnal, India. A Senior Lecturer and an Educational Consultant, Giti Tyagi's stories, articles and poetry have been published in reputed magazines, journals, ebooks- Devour: Art and Lit Canada, Parousia Magazine, Muse India, Call Beyond.

Editor of 'Beyond Corona: The Silver Lining'; Author of 'Priceless Pearls', 'The Ascent of a New Dawn' and 'Crossroads & Other Stories'. Giti Tyagi's much appreciated poems and stories have been winning hearts of the readers of all age groups. She has won several poetry and creative story writing competitions and is an extremely popular story writer for reputed children's magazines.

Giti Tyagi was honoured in 2019 for her contributions in the literary world.