

Another Sabitri

by Dilip Mohapatra (July 2016)



Shuffling of boots of the security men
on the hospital's cobble stoned courtyard
where the national flag is to be hoisted
on the Republic Day
wakes her up from the trance
of the forty winks that she could
steal away from long hours of nightlong vigils
as she leans against
the betel leaf stained walls of the corridor
while beside her wrapped in a dirty
moth eaten quilt
her husband lies supine
a skeletal hand sticking out
linked to an inverted bottle
hanging from a stand and feeding
him intravenously
with reluctant drops trickling hesitantly.

As the clock strikes eight

and the guard commander barks the command
to present arms
and as the tricolour rides the mast
the human form under the crumpled quilt
whimpers and shudders for the last time
and her heart beating louder she feels his pulse
that beats no more.

The ward boy appears and urges her
to vacate the corridor for others in queue
and she dumps her belongings
the body and all on a trolley cart
and pushes it to the burning ghat not far away.
She doesn't want to get her husband back
like the other one did by tricking
the God of Death
but simply wants to consign it to flames
on the funeral pyre and pray for
his salvation.

The undertaker shuts the gate on her
for she has no money left in her purse

to buy the fire wood
having just paid the hospital bills
and she is left with her only possessions
her five young kids and nothing else.
Caught between the dilemma
of assets and liability
she takes her final decision
to pawn her two sons to her neighbour
who graciously agrees to pay her
five thousand rupees
that could take care of the last rites
and feed for few days
the remaining three.

Note: Saga of the Odia woman Sabitri from Champua village who pawned her two sons for husband's funeral. Saddened by a recent ToI coverage.

Dilip Mohapatra (b.1950), a decorated Navy Veteran started writing poems since the seventies . His poems have appeared in many literary journals of repute worldwide. Some of his poems are included in the World Poetry Yearbook, 2013 and 2014 Editions. He has four poetry collections to his credit published by Authorspress India, and one non-fiction, a book of wisdom titled Points to Ponder. He holds two masters degrees, in Physics and in Management Studies. He

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