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The Five-Lettered Puzzle

*Gutimali Goswami**

As he turned the pages of his favorite comics, he encountered a strange “entity”. It was then in vogue. He heard a mention of the same, often in those evening *mehfils* of thoughts and opinions amongst his family seniors and their friends over a cup of Majuli tea. He wasted no time to prove his legitimacy being one of this age of technology and science. The search bar of google was loaded with the five lettered word. With a thug sound as he entered the world of internet he was bewildered to see the cobwebs laid in front.

Not sure where to land, he rushed to his dada who was busy solving chemical equations of ninth standard. Softly he enquired, “Dada, can I ask you something?” Barely raising his head the elder nodded. He took the pencil and wrote in one corner of his brother’s rough copy and asked, “What does this mean”. Covering his ignorance and portraying authority over his borrowed knowledge he at an ease said, “Oh! This is something very complex.” The other day when I was helping Maa with the dishes, I heard her saying it is just like a chemical equation, where we have reactants and products. She also added with a grin that Sharma uncle and Uncle Stephen that evening almost got to a mood of *yudh*, and the rest were sure on which side of the arrow in the chemical equation to fit it.

Poor one, now with a more jumbled head borrowed the sheet as he was not even sure how to pronounce it. A strong smell of *hing*, mustard seeds, curry leaves and *garam masala* treated his olfactory senses. But soon the walls of the house echoed coughs, it was the mischievous red chilly playing a trick. He went to his mother who was busy making *aaloo dum*. All drenched with sweat in the *paakghor* he gingerly

stepped near and asked, “Maa do you know what this thing means?” Myopic, she hardly cared to see the soft handwriting and forwarded him to his father. His father who was a history professor at Gauhati University was making love with Nicholo Machiavelli. His lips were painted with a typical smile, the one that you find when you quietly put in your mouth a freshly fried *puthi maas* from the *kerahi*, without letting your Maa know about the same, just when she turns back. His eyes were devilish brown, not sure whom to blame, the light of the table lamp or the pages of *The Prince*.

He, though reluctant and scared to disturb his father, from a distant pronounced where the second half of the addressal was elastic and long like the *telpitha* made from *borasawl*, “O! Deutaaaaaaaaaaaaaa”.

His father barely managed to get out the scene as he reached near and forwarded the same sheet. His father took him in his lap and with a laugh looked at him. He was elated as the black carbon word almost tickled his taste buds.

“Karma” he said, is “the Sanskrit word for action, work or deed. Though it is a conceptual principle that originated in India, you should know what Nicholo Machiavelli felt about it. He was one who wrote *The Prince*.”

“Deuta, Prince you mean *Roja*.” ‘lil kid asked, almost getting himself ready for a “exomoyot ejon roja asil” kind of story.

“Yes my son, yes. He said that a Prince or a king should...wait let me read it out for you.” His fingers almost slapped the book numerous times as he turned the pages to get to the passage of his quest.

“Look here, “He who neglects what is done for what ought to be done, sooner effects his ruin than his preservation”, also he says, “It is the end that justifies the means.”

“Deuta, yester night *koka* said that people of a country look up to their King or Prince, follow his words, conducts and deeds. He is one whom they not only respect as a ruler and protector but also as a tutor to lead a better life and a guide” little one enquired.

“Ye....sssss, that’s true,” in a confused voice the father declared, not sure which way the curious mind intends to draw the idea.

“Then if the Prince uses immoral means to achieve ends to gain glory and survival, the common man of the *samrajya* too will follow the same to attain goals which are grand according to them in their lives. Like, will that be okay if I use unfair means to gain good marks in my test tomorrow, because it is important and grand for me now, as that gives me good score and thereby *malpuwa* with the evening glass of milk and Maa a bright smile?” He breathed long as he finished and continued to struggle with the rubber band that now got a knot with frequent use of it as a *Ketepa* to strike pieces of paper.

His father caressing his hair said, “*Xuntu!* Why don’t you ask koka about the same? He is on his bed in the next room.”

He jumped up and with some ecstasy hurried towards his grandfather. His grandfather had already overheard the entire conversation and now with a gentle and calm smile looked at those bright eyes. It was already a quarter past nine. He must be sleepy and tired. His brother too turned up and in a note of celestial announcement from the sky declared, “Food is ready, Maa has asked all to be in the dining hall.” As he left in a rhyming tone he sang, “*borha bhaat nothoba raakhi, paba sorai bhangiba paakhi*”, something that his mother taught him when he was a kid not ready to eat his food.

“Koka, tell me, what does karma mean, should I go with nicho...nicho...lo...” the curious head enquired back and stumbled pronouncing Italian.

“*Karmanye vadhikaraste ma phalesu khadachana, Ma karmaphaleheturbhurma te sangostavakarmani.*” (Srimad Bhagavat Gita)

Karma means action. We must work good and virtuous. We have a right to decide our course of action. It is on the basis of that we are judged and gifted accordingly. The immoral and incorrect path might be easy and tempting. But the harder the path, the surer is a good gift at the end. We have the liberty to choose the path of action, but dear we do not

owe any right to select, choose and expect the fruit of action. So the fruit of action should not be our motive nor a companion of our action or Karma”, grandfather ended with a mild cough to clear his throat.

With a fuller intellectual appetite he now walked along with his *koka* for the dinner. He now knew which side of the equation to place and operate the concept of Karma, if it is to be regarded as the reactants of the chemical equation of life that is the course of action we take or the product of the same equation that is the goal of our life.

“What was the khichdi that was cooking, Pritam?” mother with a smile of satisfaction asked.

“East was greeting west and *Gita* was encountering *The Prince*”, father with a mouthful of basmati shrouded with aloo dum and hari chutney said.

“Well then, where did you finally put your candidature, my love” his mother laughed.

“Maa, I am still wondering whether to watch *Agneepath* or *Saath Khun Maaf* after the following days’ exam.” The entire house laughed out loud as the little philosopher pronounced.

Glossary:

Agneepath: Bollywood movie; meaning-road/path of fire.

Bora saul: A variety of glutinous rice found in Assam. It has an important role in Assamese traditional occasions like Bihu. It is used in Jolpan (snacks) and Pitha (rice cake or pancake). Soaked and ground bora saul is used in preparing Pitha. Boiled bora saul is served as Jolpan with curd or milk, jaggery or sugar.

Dada: Brother (Assamese)

Deuta: Father (Assamese)

Dum Aaloo: An Indian potato curry

"Exomoyot ejon roja asil": Once upon a time there was a King (Assamese)

Garam Masala: Spices

Hing: Asafoetida

Karma: The law of cause and effect forms an integral part of Hindu philosophy. This law is termed as 'karma', which means to 'act'. The Concise Oxford

Dictionary of Current English defines it as the "sum of person's actions in one of his successive states of existence, viewed as deciding his fate for the next". In Sanskrit karma means "volitional action that is undertaken deliberately or knowingly".

Kerahi: A bowl-shaped frying pan with two handles used in Indian cookery (Assamese lexicon)

Ketepa: A bow made of sticks and a strap of elastic (Assamese).

Koka: Grandfather

Maa: Mother

Malpuwa: A pancake served as a dessert or a snack, popular in India and Bangladesh.

Mehfils: A gathering or evening of courtly entertainment of poetry or concert of Indian or Pakistani classical music (particularly Hindustani classical music) and dance, performed for a small audience in an intimate setting.

Niccolo Machiavelli: Author of the now classic treatise on public administration *The Prince* (1531)

Paakghor: Kitchen (Assamese)

Puthi maas: Rozy barb/ Red barb, *Puntius conchoni* (a fish species found in Assam, India)

Roja: King

Saat Khoon Maaf: Bollywood movie; meaning - All (Saat - Seven, here used metaphorically) sins (Khoon - killing someone, here used metaphorically) forgiven (maaf).

Samrajya: Kingdom, Empire

Telpitha: a type of cake, dimsum or bread from the eastern regions of the Indian subcontinent; common in Bangladesh and India, especially the eastern states of Odisha, Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and the northeastern region.

The Bhagavad Gita (Song of the Lord): often referred to as simply the Gita, is a 700-verse Hindu scripture in Sanskrit that is part of the Hindu epic Mahabharata

Yudh: Battle

***Gutimali Goswami** has completed Master Degree in English Literature from Tezpur Central University, Assam. She is fond of celebrating the roots of her nation, culture and tradition. She loves passing time involving herself into critical analysis and comparative analysis of various established and conventional thoughts and ideologies. She aspires to be a teacher and a critical analyst. She can be reached at gutimaligoswami111@gmail.com