

AUDITION PIECES

CHARACTERS

Mrs Dalal – middle-aged woman with aspiration to higher status.

Mrs Misra – a callous, selfish woman, also of middle age

Boori Mal – an elderly, emaciated refugee from Bengal.

Mr Dalal – a vain, impulsive dreamer.

Mr Chatterjee – a ‘Holy Man’ who remains seated for entire play.

Plumber – a devious, sycophantic tradesman.

Sanjee – An ‘Untouchable’ dressed in loin cloth and turban.

Mrs Khana – a neighbour

Mrs Gupta- a neighbour

Woman

Taxi Driver

Sharbat Khan the Knife grinder – a Pathan (A Sikh)

(6 female; 6 male) plus others if possible

MRS MISRA, MRS DALAL AND BOORI MAL.

Mrs Dalal Good morning Boori Mal.

Boori Mal I was dreaming about my daughter's wedding. We married her to a school

principal. The rice was cooked in rose water. The mayor was invited.

Everybody washed their fingers in pewter bowls.

(BOORI MAL stops for breath. MRS DALAL and MRS MISRA

glance

at each other, indicating that they have heard the story before.)

Mrs Dalal Boori Mal, you should not be carrying your pail –

Boori Mal: Mustard prawns were steamed in banana leaves. Not a delicacy was spared.

Not that this was an extravagance for us. At our house, we ate goat twice a

week. We had a pond full of fish.

Mrs Dalal You are quite out of breath.

Boori Mal A man came to pick our dates and guavas. Another clipped hibiscus.

Yes,

there I tasted life. Here I eat my dinner from a rice pot.

(She bends to rub her bad knee)

Mrs Dalal: I have some ginger paste for you, for your stew. I will bring it later.

Mrs Misra (Quietly to Mrs Dalal) The home that she left gets more luxurious at every telling. Do you believe her ?

Mrs Dalal Who knows ? It is clear that she comes from Bengal and that she had to leave

her family behind after partition.

(BOORI MAL reaches the flat roof)

Boori Mal Have I mentioned that I crossed the border with just two bracelets on my

wrists ? Yet there was a day when my feet touched nothing but marble.

Believe me, don't believe me, such comforts you cannot even dream them.

MR AND MRS DALAL

(ENTER MR DALAL by rickshaw. He has two small ceramic basins)

Mr Dalal Boori Mal. I have a job for you. Help me carry these basins upstairs.

Mrs Dalal ! Mrs Dalal. Mrs Misra. Come and see.

(ENTER MRS DALAL to flat roof and MRS MISRA and OTHERS)

My hours of filing receipts for a distributor of rubber tubes, pipes and toilet fittings are over. My noble employer, Mr Sethi, is opening a second branch in Burdwan and, following his assessment of my sedulous performance over the years, he is promoting me to manage this branch. To celebrate my new – and very well deserved – promotion, I have bought two basins.

Mrs Dalal What are we supposed to do with two basins in a two roomed flat ?

Who ever

heard of such a thing ? I still cook on kerosene. You refuse to apply for

a phone and I have yet to see the fridge you promised me when we were married. You expect two small basins to make up for that ?

Mr Dalal This is only a beginning. We will not have to carry water to wash. We will have running water like the mayor. We will be civilised.

Mrs Dalal So we are not civilised, Mr Dalal. We are no better than the monkeys at Kali's Temple. We are no better than the dogs that chew at our garbage. A plump little vendor of toilet pans dares to say we are not civilised. . .

Boori Mal Our baths were scented with petals and attars. Believe me, don't believe me . .

Mrs Dalal Be quiet, Boori Mal. I am talking to my husband.
(BOORI MAL carries a basin upstairs)

Mr Dalal It is only a beginning. We can take holidays in Simla .

PLUMBER, WOMAN,

Plumber Ya Allah ! Who will know their future ? Who wants to know ? I am a telephone to Allah.

(A PREGNANT WOMAN in a burka comes forward)

Woman Sufi Sahib ! We have four daughters. My husband has always wanted a son. Tell me I will have a son this time ?

(PLUMBER joins two ends of the coil and a spark sputters into life.

Everyone is mightily impressed. He dials a number in the air with his finger.)

Plumber Seven . . .Eight . . . Six. Allah ! Do you hear me ? This poor woman wants a

son. She has four daughters. Do you call that fair ? Have you not heard her

prayers ? (To the woman.) He's been busy. Prayers for the new country you know.

(Starts a dervish dance but almost falls over.)

Wah Allah ! Wah Allah ! There is no limit to your compassion, your love for us all. Such miracles you perform.

(He works himself into a frenzy and drops to the ground.)

Miracles. A son ! A son !

(THE WOMAN places coins at his feet and THE CROWD slowly drifts away

Apart from MRS MISRA AND MRS KHANA. THE PLUMBER recovers and counts the coins.)

SHARBAT KHAN AND MRS MISRA

Khan Good day, ladies. You need knives grinding ?

Mrs Khana Yes. Wait till I fetch my knives.

(EXIT MRS KHANA)

Mrs Misra Where are you from, yaar ?

Khan The hills, motrima, the land where the air is clean and the sun turns the

white peaks red in the dawn, where leopards lurk in the caves and the rivers run clear as crystal from the hems of the snow banks.

Mrs Misra If it is so beautiful, why are you here ?

Khan Let me tell you a story. They came to our village. We heard the cry 'Allah-o-Akbar'. We hid in the temple, the whole village, but we knew they would find us. They demanded one girl, one girl and they would leave. My father summoned his daughter, my sister, to the front. She was eighteen. With tears in his eyes he drew his sabre and sliced off her head. The other men did the same with their women. They did not want to see them defiled. I remember the silence, the silence and the hiss, hiss of the swords. I hear the sound every night. I cannot sleep. It echoes in my head. I travel the roads of India to escape it.

Mrs Misra And have we not seen our girls stripped and thrown in a well with 'Zindabad Pakistan' carved on their breasts ?

Khan We have all suffered.

BOORI MAL

Boori Mal My daughter was so beautiful. Her skin glowed with mustard-oil massages and turmeric. Her eyes were outlined with kohl and glistened in the lamplight. Her hands were painted like lace with henna and fluttered as delicately as moths over the halwa. There were log fires under cauldrons and the air was perfumed with wood-smoke, biryani

and spicy goat korma. Such luxury you cannot dream. I must go. I must buy things for the wedding. The guests will be here soon. I must hurry.

(SHE RISES AND SHAKES HER SARI)

I must go to the bazaar, buy candles and incense, a new sari with gold and silver trimmings, marigolds for garlands, jasmine and sweet lilies for the table,

frangipani flowers and oleander, water lilies. So many flowers. So many colours. It will be wonderful. My groom so handsome in a pure white turban

with a golden kula and his face veiled with strings of marigolds. A purple satin

lungi and a shirt as white as snow. See how he walks proudly through the throng. My groom. So handsome . .

MR CHATTERJEE AND MRS MISRA

Chatterjee A lamp does not flicker in a place where no wind blows. Boori Mal should seek stillness and sweet contentment.

Mrs Misra Mr Chatterjee's wind is far from sweet.

Chatterjee A beggar may feel happy when he dreams of spending millions. A rich miser may starve himself, believing he is poor.

SANJEEV, MRS MISRA, CHATTERJEE, MRS KHANA

Sanjeev Ghandijee is dead ! They have shot Gandhi !

Mrs Misra Rubbish, banghi. Why do you say such things ?

Sanjeev It is true, motrima. It was on the wireless. I heard it. He said ‘The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. Our beloved leader, our Bapu is dead.’ It was Nehru. I heard it.

Mrs Khana It must be true. The light has gone out of our lives. There will be more blood shed, more killings.

Chatterjee Gandhijee said ‘An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind’. We lived as brothers before we were torn apart. We must be brothers again.

Mrs Misra It must have been a Muslim. Only a Muslim would do such a thing.

Sanjeev No, motrima. It was a Hindu who shot him.