

A Word

[All from LNJP]

Many words stand before us, holding inside them many difficulties. And others, in spite of being cast in simplicity, do not allow us to enter them. So what will we call such words? What makes one word different from another? What all does a word contain?

A memory: Which gives the word its recognition

A story: An incident that keeps the memory of the word alive.

Time: A word carries with it the shadow of time.

Image: Every word has an image associated with it.

Thought: Different people think differently of the same word.

Sound: A sound follows every word.

Every word cannot be explained. Sometimes we don't understand words ourselves. Sometimes we might understand a word, but are unable to explain it. Our ways of understanding and seeing that word may also differ.

Tales from Words

Neelofar

Rascal – Rob – Woo – Fantastic – Follow

My brother is a rascal. He won't let me get out of the house, but who knows how many women he follows around himself. Who knows how many girls he woos. What is fantastic is that boys keep their sisters reined in, but tease other girls. Then, they don't think those girls must also be someone's sisters! But I am certain every girl doesn't get entranced by my brother. Some must surely rob him and leave him, teaching him a lesson!

Roof – Mistaken – Bird – Mosquito – Joke around

It was around 5:30 in the evening. I was on the roof, collecting the laundry which had dried in the sun. A small boy was standing to one side. His face was turned towards the sky and he was looking at a bird with much interest. The bird's legs were very long. So were the wings. I thought the boy was my brother Rehan – he looked just like him from behind. So I went and slapped him on the back and said, "Rehan, what are you looking at?" He turned around and I saw he wasn't Rehan! I had been mistaken! He was Salman, my neighbour. He said, "*Baji*, you gave me a scare!" I said, "You have turned into a mosquito! Don't you eat anything?" He said, "I'll come eat at your house." I said, "Our house doesn't have food to needlessly give away!" We joked around for a long time.

The Day of the Exam

Lakhmi Chand Kohli

This story is from the days when we were giving our pre-board exams. And one day something happened which made the classroom echo with laughter. So come, let me tell you about that day.

December days. We were giving our pre-board exams. It was Tuesday, and our paper was to begin at half past one. The boys reached school by one pm. Everyone shook hands and started chatting. But no one talked about the paper everyone had come to give. Forget that. No one even knew which paper it was that day. Thinking of this, they would laugh and chide one another, saying, "You've come to give an exam. Do you even know which subject it is in?"

Never mind. It was time for the paper. All the boys went and stood at the door of the classroom. They wanted to know which teacher would come to class that day. Everyone was thinking it should not be Babu Lal. Everyone was praying for this! And see how fast their prayer was answered. It wasn't Babu Lal but a very good teacher, JP sir, who came.

JP sir doesn't interfere. He sits quietly to one side. Seeing him, the boys were happy. Everyone said *namaste* to sir and went and sat on their respective seats. Then sir started distributing, first the question papers and then the answer sheets. After that he said the one thing he always says.

Sir: Sit quietly and do your papers. There should be no sound.

We said: Ok sir, we won't give you an opportunity to complain.

Then all of us boys sat and started looking at the question paper. We were looking for the question that would carry the maximum marks and would also be the simplest. Maybe that is why everyone's eyes first fell on the same question, and sounds arose in unison.

The boys said: *Oye!* Just look at question number six!

One boy asked: Where? Which one?

The other boy replied: Take a look at the fourth question on the third page. So everyone read that question and started talking to one another. Sir wasn't in the classroom, so we couldn't ask him about the question. So everyone started talking about attempting that question. Now you must be wondering what the question was.

So listen: What are the characteristics of gang?

Everyone started answering the question. And then everyone had probably written similar answers. Roughly, it was:

Gang is something that can't be seen. It is usually hidden. It is sometimes formed through spinning lies, usually to do good for people. But sometimes a gang can be used for bad deeds. If it escapes, it could take lives.

Everyone wrote approximately a page and were really happy that they would score at least in question number six. But things didn't remain favourable for long. A teacher came to the class.

This other teacher: Children, turn to the fourth question on the third page.

All the boys turned to the page and said –

The boys: Sir, we have already answered that question. Sir, it was a

very good question, sir, and very easy.

The other sir: Son, there is a misprint in that question. It isn't "gang", but "gas". Please correct the mistake.

The boys: But sir, we have already answered the question, sir. One whole page. We'll have to do it again, sir.

Sir: Son, but the question is wrong! You will simply have to do it again. The question doesn't make sense the way it is right now.

Again and again, all the boys would look at the question, and decide not to redo it. Their faces had to be seen! Everyone was looking at one another and saying, "*Bhai*, I'm not doing it. If you want to do it, then go ahead". The other would reply, "*Abbe yaar!* What are you saying! Am I mad to do it again?" Another boy spoke.

One boy: *Abbe yaar!* How much difference is there between gas and gang? Both can't be seen. What we have written is correct.

Another boy: Yes! You are right my friend. And it's not like we will score anything in this question, or that any of us are going to pass by answering it.

So, in most probability, no one bothered. Maybe some did. But, actually, the story should really begin from the point when sir would begin reading everyone's answer sheets one by one. Someone had written that gas fires shots, someone that gas is responsible for the spread of terrorism, and someone that gas remains in hiding. Hearing this, all of us burst into laughter.

My *Pyaaaz* (Onion)

Rakesh Kumar

Our *Pyaaaz* is not a vegetable or salad. The onion I mention is a boy who I can't forget. Onion is a boy, whose name is Sanjiv. We really love him. And because we could not name him *Pyaar* (Love) – love is after all love, and who are we to change it – we decided to call our dear friend *Pyaaaz*. He didn't mind it at all, and never asked us not to call him by that name.

It was 12th February. We entered our classrooms after the prayers and sat down on our desks. The first period was about to begin. I said: **Rakesh: Beta**, all of us will be whipped today! I was the class monitor in those days. I elaborated: **Rakesh: Who** all haven't done their work? *Beta*, today everyone will get it good. One boy spoke from behind, "Yeah, you be careful as well". I said, "Don't worry about me. I've done my work". Then Sanjiv (Onion) spoke. **Sanjiv: Beta**, I keep teachers like Babu Lal in my pocket. At this I started checking his pocket. I retrieved from there a slip of paper on which were written names of our seven teachers. **Sanjiv: Am I** the boss or what! **Rakesh: What style!** Fantastic! After some time, the bell rang. I said: **Rakesh: Now your bell will ring.** **Sanjiv: Oh** let the rascal come. I will ring his bell.

Just then, sir came and we sat down on our seats. We said, "Good Morning, sir". After that... May god bless us! (We were thinking sir was in a good mood that day.) But sir said, "Ok donkeys, kick ass". Everyone took out their Hindi books. But (*Pyaz*) said, "Sir, where should we kick?" **Sir: On** your face! *Abbe* donkey, I mean take out your book, and you are talking about kicking. **Sanjiv: Ok** sir, my mistake. Sorry. **Sir: Books** out? "Yes sir". Sanjiv didn't have his book. So he went and sat with another boy. **Sir: Today** we will read Swati's poem, "The Iron Trees Will Turn Green". Everyone opened to the page with the poem. Then, sir asked, "Yes children, what does trees of iron becoming green mean?" The whole class started to think. Sanjiv got up immediately and said: **Sanjiv: Sir,** I'll say. **Sir: Yes,** speak. Meanwhile, I said, "There goes one". **Sanjiv: Sir,** iron trees are not green. Sir started to get angry. That is, the volcano came alive. "Yes, so why don't you tell me what iron trees are like". Sanjiv started answering with great ease. **Sanjiv: Sir,** the leaves of iron trees are of tin. And its branches are iron rods. **Sir: And?** What else? **Sanjiv: Sir,** and if you water them, they rust. Sir shot up from his chair in anger and said, "Yes *Beta*, come here". Sanjiv did as told. Sir slapped him across the face. **Sir: Now** have you rusted? *Abbe* moron, if iron won't rust with water, what will? Now tell me, how long has it been since you opened the book? **Sanjiv: Sir,** ever since I bought it. **Sir: Where** is the book? At home? "Yes sir". **Sir: Are** you pickling it? Yes sir, exactly sir. **Sir: Shut** up and get back to your desk.

And (*Pyaz*) sat down quietly, hand on his cheek. I said, "Well, did your bell ring!" And we laughed for days, thinking of this.

A Held Decision

Azra Tabassum

I am sitting in a room (ten by twelve feet), a notebook in hand. The walls around me are a dark shade of grey. That's because my house has been reconstructed just a few days before, and the freshly plastered walls have not yet been whitewashed. To my left is a Godrej almirah. To my right, several iron boxes and atop those, many bundles of clothes. A black and white checked curtain covers these.

I am sitting right in front of the door, my back resting against the wall. Over my head is a showcase. It's filled with all kinds of junk. I can see a four-legged wooden seat near the door. The seat is at least ten years old. Before the house was reconstructed, it was usually spread out in the kitchen. Right now, dirty linen and mattresses are kept on it.

I began thinking about decisions I had taken which altered the course of my life. From many episodes that passed from before my eyes, it was a memory from school that struck me. My school was Bulbuli Khana, on Asaf Ali road. Yes, it was my own decision to leave school. A decision I have made and implemented in my own life. A decision I still carry with me. I still remember that day. I used to live in my uncle's house then.

While getting my result signed by him, I said, "*Khaluji*, I will not go to school from tomorrow".

"But why?" He is tall and broad. He has thick lips that remain open even when he closes them. His cheeks are fat, and he has salt and pepper hair. His eyes are big, but because he wears thick glasses, they look even bigger. My uncle and aunt loved me a lot. I also loved them just as much. But a strange fear of school had settled in my mind.

There were many girls in my IX class who were repeaters. Madam used to call them 'failures'. I used to think she would say the same to me if I ever flunked. In my second term, I flunked one subject – maths. My doubt turned to certainty. I thought I will have to repeat a year, so I may as well drop out of school. That is why I spoke to my *Khalu*, and that is why today he was looking at me with his questioning eyes. I was in turmoil, and didn't say a word. Then he spoke gently, "*Beta*, why do you want to give up studying? If you find it difficult, tell me. I will arrange tuitions for you".

I knew my *Khalu* meant what he said. But I was absolutely sure. I didn't agree to a thing he said. Uncle thought maybe someone else would be able to explain to me. He asked my aunt, even my mother. But I was firm in my decision. I would not return to school. I left school.

Now I feel bad. Maybe I should have at least finished class X. Sometimes certain decisions also bring despondency with them. I feel that way sometimes.

I was thinking all this while gazing at the wall in front of me. Suddenly, as I focussed on it, my mind shifted to another thought. About Parvez.

Parvez, who I had really liked since childhood. He died on 11th January, 1999. He was studying engineering. He was very good at studies. He used to like me a lot as well. When I left school, he tried to explain to me why I shouldn't, but I didn't listen even to him. I was really sad when he died. Only after his death did I realise how much I loved him. But neither of us had told the other this. He left without telling me. And after he was gone, my life changed. I didn't care about food or water. All I wanted was to get to be where he was, whatever it took. His face would always be before my eyes. He was six feet tall. Dark coloured, with medium-sized eyes, a long face. He was really simple in his living. His hobby was to remain drowned in his books. Sometimes he would behave like a child. He knew just how to get eld-

ers to see things his way by always being respectful to them. Everyone would be absolutely impressed with him in the very first meeting, including all of my family.

After he died, I decided to die as well. But all my attempts came to nothing. Time passed, and the decision faded from my heart. I thought, so what if he is not here, he will always be with me. My life has taken a small, new turn. In which there are many new faces, new feelings. Fun, play, and silences. Along with all of these, he is still part of my life.

Patient

Neelofar

When I look at someone, I don't for a moment think of her or him as
thief
a ~~patient~~. If we go to a hospital and see people, we might think they
thieves thief's
are ~~patients~~. Actually, you can tell a ~~patient's~~ condition by looking at
Thieves thieves
her or him. ~~Patients~~ look tired. But some ~~patients~~ look healthy. For
instance, someone who is going to get a stone removed doesn't nec-
thief
essarily look like a ~~patient~~ before the operation. Only when we get to
thief
know of the operation do we believe she or he is a ~~patient~~.