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Short Story: "Block"

By M. M. Vinodini¹

Translated by K. Purushotham²; edited by Bonnie Zare³

Abstract

Despite India's Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act of 2013 (and with a 2020 Amendment awaiting approval), it is likely that at least one million people work as manual removers of human waste, helping the 60% or more of Indians who do not have access to flush toilets. The story "Block" puts us inside a manual scavenger's mind as we accompany Jilakamma on her rounds in Andhra Pradesh. M. M. Vinodini writes about this labor with true empathy. Entering the daily life of someone who carries out this very stigmatized job creates new understanding of the intense unfairness suffered by these workers. Readers are spared nothing as the story—and human waste itself—wraps around their five senses. As Jilakamma seeks a solution in the midst of dead ends, the tale exposes casteism, governmental neglect, and economic deprivation, making us keenly aware of every worker's dignity, no matter the task.

Keywords: Casteism, Rehabilitation act of 2013, India's caste system, Dalit women.

Short Story, "Block", M.M. Vinodini

"It's not even ten days since I had paid you five rupees. You're at it again. Am I your bank account?" Satyanarayana came up to the verandah shouting at her. He flung a few coins at her and went in without even glancing her. Jilakamma, waiting in drizzle, collected the bit coins lying in slush—a rupee and two fifty-paise coins. She murmured to herself, "Is it for two rupees, after all, that he made me wait in the rain for so long?"

Jilakamma took the tin-tray and the bucket and reached the backyard through the narrow lane along the house. In the bucket was a dented tin-tray and a foot-sized broom which was worn out, having been used for several months. Placing the bucket on the floor and inserting the coins in the sari tied at her belly, she talked to herself. "It's been a month since he had paid me five

¹* Block was written in Telugu (an Indian regional language) in 2012 and has not yet been published. A Hindi version translated by Shanta Sundari appeared in the magazine *Anyatha*.

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rupees. He can't hand me the money, just hurls it on the floor. While giving me money, he sports his swarming-worms-in-shit face. Having eaten his fill, he relieves himself—heaping up turds. Had I been in possession of some money, why would I come to his backyard where he takes a dump! Do *I* seem to him like a heap of shit?" Speaking to herself, she took out the end of her sari and fastened it across her nose as a shield against the stench.

It was still raining. The house that she was getting ready to work at was next to Satyanarayana's house. The backyards of the houses were as horrible as their front yards were beautiful; the front had colourful walls, decked up elevations, and beautifully blooming creepers. The houses were decorated at every festival and ceremony with festoons of mango leaves; the thresholds auspiciously decked with turmeric and *kumkum*⁴; and the front yards with colourful *rangoli*⁵. One would hear the murmur of "flowers" (amorous talk) and babies crying to nurse; the shouting of the vegetable-vendors and din of children. The young girls, clad in silk half-saris, longed to dance—drenching themselves in the rain; the innocent children were making paper-boats in the rainwater, and young people were hollering enthusiastically at the cricket match. Over there on the first floor of the house were the souls that pen romantic poetry enjoying the sight of the coconut trees bathing in the rain. The homes were beautiful, resembling what would be heaven!

To ensure this heaven stayed beautiful, the silk-clad young girls, tender-eyed kids, cricket-playing youth, and poets alike would spend a few minutes in the wee hours in the smallest room, the backyard toilet. Jilakamma reached the backyards of such houses to remove the waste from the toilets. The rains made the toilets slushy. Excrement and fluids—that couldn't be accorded a place in the pristine house—would flow out just behind it. The garbage of the house, stale rice and curries, papers containing the shit of the kids (who were yet to learn to sit in the toilets), menstruating rags, pus-ridden cotton used for wiping off wounds, discarded condoms and secretly shaved hair—all possible human garbage was present there, suffocating in a heap.

It was on such a heap that Jilakamma stopped. Squatting on her bare feet over a heap, she opened a wooden shutter to get to the contents. When she removed it, a dreadful stink wafted on her face like warm vapor. A big heap of turds lay under the it. After one after the other of a house's inmates defecated, the edges of this heap spread over. The water used for cleaning themselves got mixed up in it and flowed like water-thin excreta itself. Jilakamma, who had opened her knees and faced the shit, was filling the tin-tray with it, then emptying it into the bucket. Since the tin-tray was worn-out, more than half the turds tumbled out before going into the bucket. So as to make full use of the broken tray, she was sweeping up the shit with the broom towards the bucket, trying not to let slop hit her legs.

Somebody like Jilakamma could easily know it all—what exact kind of stench would waft—when you've eaten *biryani*⁶ or pulses, what kind of colour the turds would be corresponding to the curries you might've eaten, how powerfully you would defecate having eaten curry with pickle or tamarind juice, whether the shit was due to a pill, or loose-motions, how the kids would defecate and how the ailing ones would, how you who frequently visit the toilet would defecate, how you might defecate on the fourth day after a spell of three days of constipation, how to recognize your shit if you had eaten and drunk to the extent of bursting your belly, when the worms

⁴ A bright colored powder used for social and religious markings in India made from turmeric or other local materials.

⁵ An art form originating in India in which patterns are created on a floor or tabletop out of colored sand or other powders.

⁶ A mixed rice dish common in India.

would form after defecating and what kind of worms—Jilakamma could easily know it all. But anyway, each category's shit got mixed up in the heap that she was shoving.

At last, the shit was moved. Drenched by the rain, she closed the shutter. As her knees pained her due to the prolonged sitting on her feet, she placed her knees on her palms to stand up. Carrying the bucket on her right elbow, she walked to open the next shutter. She went on opening and closing the small wooden shutters, visiting the toilets of house after house. At last, the bucket got filled to the brim with shit. It grew heavy, too heavy for heaving onto her arm. Having inserted the tin-tray into the shit pile, Jilakamma lifted the bucket with great difficulty with both her hands and placed it on top of her head. Without allowing the bucket to tumble, she bent down slowly to get her broom lying on the ground. It continued to rain.

Excrement spilled as her feet made their way, the rainwater dripping through the broom standing upright in the bucket. Jilakamma resembled exactly the broom. The wet shit was spilling over, sometimes hitting her shoulders and sometimes dropping straight to the floor.

* * *

Jilakamma stepped into one of the houses, which was at the fringe of the village. They were called houses only in name. If anybody from the village were to come and see, they might say, "But those houses are not even the size of a room in our house." The twilight seemed like the interweaving of light and darkness. The water in the drain in front of her house seemed a bit fresh as the rainwater was flowing in it. Keeping the bucket under the edge of the thatched roof to collect the dripping-water, she rubbed and washed her feet and hands, and went into her house. Her daughter Kotilaxmi seemed downcast. Knotting her own hair Jilakamma said, "Why do you sit like that; get up. Light the wick-lamp and cover the hens under a basket." She sat on the cot at the veranda. It rained more, as it got dark. Lighting the wick-lamp, Kotilaxmi placed it between the veranda and the room. The girl was like the flame, tall and slim, only she was dark. The hibiscus flower she had sported in her hair in the morning was facing downwards, wilted. Jilakamma thought while looking at her daughter, it seems like she has been fasting for the last four days. It began to rain more. Darkness, rain, and fear entwined in the heart of Jilakamma. "Kotilaxmi! I'll just go up to Rajamma, cook a little rice." Jilakamma tucked her sari up to her knees and took out the *gongadi* (small country rug) to cover her shoulders, starting for the house of Rajamma. When she walked, she looked as though she was swimming in the rainwater.

"Come Jilakamma! I'll serve you fish-curry," Rajamma said sarcastically, seeming to be fishing, while draining the rainwater out of her house with a dented plate.

"The condition of my house is similar too. It's Kotilaxmi who had gathered soil from here and there and raised the height of the veranda. Lest we too would have been fishing in rainwater like you," Jilakamma remarked while sitting at the veranda. "You have a daughter who's like gold. She'll go and fetch soil; she'll fetch everything!" Rajamma said approvingly.

"Why do you say so, Rajamma! You know the saying, if one is rich enough, where is the need to worry! Isn't it because Kotilaxmi had run after *him* to the movie halls and amusements that I'm squishing in the shit I collected today? Guraiah asked for five thousand rupees of dowry for her to marry his son." She smiled wryly. "He may as well have asked for a watch, ring and a silk towel as the wedding gifts."

"They used to offer *voli* (bride-price), and bring home the bride in the olden days," Rajamma said, while tidying and tucking her sari at her belly. "Aa! Those days are no more. It's because those days are no more, that these problems have landed on us," she said, rubbing her hair

with her sari-end. “Jilakamma! Why don’t you borrow some money from your brother-in-law; he will offer you if he has any.”

“Why do I go to him for help! His brother (my husband) didn’t even bother to look at our daughter’s face when she was born. Without even considering that I had recently delivered, he kicked my stomach and snatched the money I’d hidden near my side. He broke my hand! And eloped with that widowed bitch...Wasn’t it my brother-in-law who helped make that affair happen? Don’t ever mention his name, Rajamma! There’s no end to the problems if one begins to disclose them. No sooner did his brother go wandering than this brother of his pestered me to sleep with *him*. A worthless widow-son! By the last *Diwali* festival Kotilaxmi was eighteen. I could hardly earn anything as I’m single-handed! What’s to offer in this marriage?” she said as her throat became dry. Jilakamma briskly wiped off her tears, wetting her sari-end. Blowing her nose with another part of the same cloth, she continued, “Guraiah said in no uncertain terms that he would look for another match for his son if I failed to offer him a thousand rupees by the end of the month.”

“*Aa, Aav!* He’s that sort of man. For the sake of even a bit of money, that guy would gulp down steaming mounds of shit. His son works in the government office; but, well, you know, there isn’t much work—just an hour in the morning and another in the evening—that’s all.” Pointing at her mud stove that had gotten extinguished, Rajamma continued, “Look at this mud stove! It is out. I’m tired of blowing air into the stove,” she said and pushed a heap of sticks into the stove. The house immediately filled with smoke reacting to the rain-doused sticks.

Rajamma went inside, and then reappeared with a glass of gruel from the boiling pot, which she poured into two dented glasses. Mixing in a pinch of salt, she handed it to Jilakamma, and said, “Drink a little of it; don’t be depressed. Let me tell you something. You have been cleaning the toilets of those Brahmins. Why don’t you borrow some money from them?”

About to sip, Jilakamma stopped. “You mean *they*? Would they offer me money, Rajamma?” The question was asked as if she was not supposed to ever hear such a fact.

“It’s not whether or not they offer; first of all, try. They might or might not. We are left with no other choice...?”

Though Rajamma’s suggestion sounded improbable, Jilakamma felt it was not a bad idea to try. True, what other alternative was there?

Rajamma was alone—and lonely. For some reason she never got pregnant. Precisely for this, her husband left her, and married someone else. When she walked in the street, her faded hair tied back in a red ribbon, she appeared as a dark statue. If any man dared to misbehave with her, she would unleash her tongue, “I’ll defecate right up to the brim of your mouth, you!” Scared of her, nobody used to have anything to do with her. The two women had been friends since their childhood, sharing each sorrow or pleasure.

* * *

“How dare you, you scavenger’s whore! First of all, get out, you! Not worth a quarter rupee, you’ve asked for two hundred! How are you going to re-pay the debt, vay! Do you even know the value of two hundred rupees? Do you think that money is like a heap of shit! Money is *money*, vay! It is the goddess of wealth! The hands that shove shit—are *your* palms lotuses so that She would come and be seated in them? Do you ask me to betray Her by making Her sit in your palms, vay! First of all, move away from here, you whore!” Saying so, Satyanarayana took the

cheroot off his mouth, and spat the gristle on her. Jilakamma turned her face, but her left ear got it and it seeped past her neck. It was thick and sticky like a boiled decoction. A powerful stench!

Jilakamma stood there motionless for about fifteen minutes. When the gristle trickled into her blouse, she wiped it off with her right hand, and looked in the direction of Satyanarayana. He was not there. She walked towards the road. It was more or less a similar experience as when she approached five-six other Brahmins earlier in the day. For twenty-five years her palms turned into the tin-trays moving shit, the shit of everyone and off everyone. She thought to herself, “When asked for money, they jump as if suffering from boils in their arses. Their property has grown during all these years. The prices for the crops have gone up; but not the wages. Why, they’ll soon have money to raise toilets for their dogs! But they refuse to help me in marrying off my daughter.” As Kotilaxmi appeared to her in her mind, her tears surged the ridge of her eyes just as the wind at times would raise the surface of the water tank.

* * *

Rajamma got awakened suddenly when she had felt a sense of touch at the foot-side of the string cot. Thinking that it could be a dog she looked for a stick to drive it away. But realizing that it was Jilakamma, she said, “Oh you? What’s the matter? What happened?”

Tears running down, Jilakamma said, “I asked several people for money. No one helped me. They were asking me how I, a scavenger, could repay the money. They were speaking whatever came to their tongue just as air moves through their asses and farts out. They say that the Goddess of wealth wouldn’t alight on the palms of people like us. My face—Satyanarayana spat on my very face,” Jilakamma said as new tears sprang into her eyes.

“What? The pot-bellied one spit on your face? Isn’t he the one who had once in his childhood swallowed a coin, which was taken out of his ass by your fingers? How can *you* seem disgusting to him? Does he think everything is as easy as taking a dump?” Rajamma felt angry. She continued, “Didn’t you clear out their waste all these years with your right hand? They don’t even remember your service. If you were to be absent for a day, they’d be swept away by the swarming shit pile.” While she said this, Rajamma was suddenly reminded of Kuntelladu. She thought for a while. Kuntelladu was known as an expert in clearing the blocked toilets.

Suddenly Rajamma became quite calm. Placing her hand on the shoulders of Jilakamma, she said, “Let me tell you something, for good or bad. What we need is money. That man, Guraiah, might even look for a different match for his son if anyone offers a thousand rupees extra.” Her tone became low and secretive. “So, you know what to do? You should block the toilets you serve with a mass of stones and bricks. Ha! Let’s see how the Goddess of wealth will not come to us.”

Rajamma advised what was to be done and how. Initially Jilakamma refused. Then she said okay—then no. At last, she consented, fear merging into desire.

* * *

Jilakamma bundled a few pieces of bricks in an old rag and placed it under her arm. She covered the bundle with her sari-end and went out. Recently some of the toilets had been converted into *Bombaayi* (septic) toilets, but even there the dry toilets remained. Jilakamma would begin her day’s work first attending to the fancy toilets. Then she would collect the waste into the bucket from the dry toilets, go out to the outskirts, empty the bucket, and leave for her house.

With her left hand Jilakamma stuffed stones in some toilets and lumps of rags in others, inserting stuff in the passageways as far as she could stretch her arm. The following day onwards, she continued to cleanse the toilets as usual without a break. After a few days, the stench of the excreta grew unbearable to the residents.

This day they were waiting for Jilakamma impatiently. Though she had been working in those houses for the last twenty-five years, she was still an untouchable dung heap. Nobody had seen her face clearly so far. These were all ones who spoke not one word less than required. It is doubtful whether anyone knew her name. They would refer to her as the scavenger, worker, cleaner, or something else. Such were the people talking to Jilakamma about the impending problem of the toilet blockage. "Whatever might've happened; how to solve the problem?" They began to bargain on the wages to be paid to her. Awkardness draped on their faces, they said, "First of all, clean it." Jilakamma too was replying, "It's a difficult work *amma!* I've to insert my hand deep into the toilet. I've to search for the block by my right hand. It takes a lot of time. I can't insert my left hand," she showed how her left hand was misshapen, twisted by her husband long ago.

At last, they decided on the fee to give her: quite high! Jilakamma felt contented. The fee was equal to the tip that you might leave for the waiter after stuffing oneself and paying the bill. Even to offer that, they had to negotiate with her after repeated consultations and confabulations among the members of the family as though they were fixing a very big deal. When the work was done, they drew the money out begrudgingly, as though they were spending money completely unnecessarily.

Jilakamma borrowed an empty bottle of kerosene from Rajamma. A string in two parts was hanging on the mouth of the dark bottle. Jilakamma felt happy, as she didn't need to struggle any longer for the money required to fix her daughter's marriage. She asked Rajamma to be with her, keeping company when she unblocked the toilets. "No, they'll suspect you if I accompany you. And don't take the help of Kuntelladu as he will demand a big share. Attend to the work alone," Rajamma said.

Taking the bottle of kerosene into her hand, she poured a little of it on her right hand before getting started. She bound the end of her sari against her nose and looked down. The shit appeared as severely fermented dark flour, stinking unbearably. A hair was floating here and there. The white worms had bored in here and there and were swarming in groups; some crawled around the basin. Jilakamma longed for Kuntelladu's help. But she was reminded of what Rajamma had told her, "Nothing will be left for you after his demands."

Jilakamma, her nostrils blocked by the indispensable sari end, shoved her arm entirely up the tunnel at one go. Searching for a long time in different directions, she took out a small lump of rags. Since the block was cleared, the blocked excreta moved downward at once. By then the white worms were already crawling on her legs.

Excreta coated her arm and the worms moved up her legs. None came forward to pour water on her arm. Somehow, she managed to pour water with her broken hand. Then she cleaned the toilet with an acid mixture, collected the money, and left. Thus, either a piece of brick or a lump of rags was taken out of every toilet. Each one made the payment as agreed upon. Rather than knowing why it had gotten blocked, they were happy it was clear and mercifully their bowels could follow suit and clear themselves out now too.

As she received it, Jilakamma was collecting the money and placing it securely under the sari tied at her waist. The currency notes! The notes that made a ruffling sound like the silk sari of Goddess Laxmi! Jilakamma visualized her daughter, Kotilaxmi, in a bridal-clad sari that

ruffled *fela-fela*. She felt as though half her heart's responsibilities had been off loaded. Jilakamma welcomed Goddess Laxmi, she who had alighted in her palm and was reposing at her waistline.

Since Jilakamma had been busy with the work and had not eaten her meals, deadness suddenly rushed into her ears. Developing a headache, her temples were under pressure. She wished someone had rescued her with some water to drink. But she hadn't mustered the courage yet to ask for water. Normally they don't mind offering tea to anyone who comes for any sort of work in those houses. But she knew already they wouldn't offer *her* plain water even in the hot summer's noon.

At last, she reached the house of Satyanarayana. It was already four in the evening. She took a lump of rags out of the toilet. Though she felt hungry and deaf, she convinced herself to go forward, knowing it was going to be the last of the houses. She cleansed the toilet thoroughly. Contemplating eating some rice and relaxing for a while, she washed her arms, held the empty bottle of kerosene, and stood in front of the house for the wages. Satyanarayana was seated there. Subrahmanyam too was seated along with Satyanarayana. Narasimha Murthy, Sheshasai, Jagadeeshwar Rao, and Gopal Rao, too, sat there. They all belonged to those houses, those toilets. All the men assembled over there seemed to be steeped in thought and angry. They were talking to each other seriously, gesticulating. Having looked at Jilakamma, who was standing in front of his house, Satyanarayana came out. Tidying the *lungi* that was coming off his large belly, he asked her, "Have you removed something from my toilet?"

"Aa, yes! I've taken it out ayya!"

"What did you find in it?" he asked her sarcastically, nodding his head up and down.

"Some rags of menstruation," she said in an appropriately low tone, indicating women's things.

"Then what did you take out of my toilet?" Narasimha Murthy asked her angrily.

"It's something that blocked the toilet," answered Jilakamma, trying to recall.

"Then what was it in my toilet, was it a piece of brick or a lump of rags?" asked Subrahmanyam fondling his bald head.

Subrahmanyam got his dry toilet replaced by the Bombaayi toilet. He himself could not predict when he would have to go, and how quickly. Sometimes he would sit and defecate suddenly even as Jilakamma was at work cleansing the dry toilet through the shutter meant for the purpose. The excreta fell on her arms without any warning. Once she had suggested to him not to relieve himself without notice, especially when she was there at work. He tried to kick her with his foot, scolding with English words. Since then, she was scared of him.

Thus she answered him in a small mutter, "There's nothing, ayya."

Satyanarayana flared up like a kerosene lamp. "You scavenger whore! Did you think that your tricks would work! Did you think we're not aware *you* had stuffed pieces of bricks and lumps of rags in the toilets! Are you of the opinion that we are so gullible as to believe all of our toilets block at the same time? How could you take us for granted, you scavenger whore! You want to cheat us, you!" he said and climbed down the porch steps. As he shouted like that, the cords of his neck swelled; his eyes reddened.

Scared, Jilakamma stepped back. All the families came out at his piercing cry. "You tried to cheat educated people like us, you! You're not an ordinary one, vay," said Subrahmanyam.

“By the way, in all, how much money have you made, vay? You take it out,” Sheshasai said, biting his lower lip angrily. Satyanarayana said, “You! Take out the money wherever you had placed it.” He kicked Jilakamma’s small waist while tidying his lungi. At once Jilakamma fell down. “Garbage-faced widow! First of all, take out the money from where you had placed it,” commanded Narasimha Murthy, slapping her cheeks and making her legs go in a seated position.

Jilakamma was terrified. With an empty and begging stomach, she felt faint. She couldn’t open her mouth even to say please don’t kick me.

“Look! This whore is not responding in spite of kicking her,” Subrahmanyam kicked her belly once more. She whined with pain. Having been hit on her face, her nose began to bleed. A lot of people gathered around. They all understood the matter. The women among them expressed wide-eyed surprise. One woman said, “*Abba!* How could she take recourse in that! Didn’t she feel ashamed of doing so! How I wonder would she eat rice with the same hand that accepted money illegally. *Ammo!* Had we known that she’s of this type, we wouldn’t have allowed her to come on our premises at all. What all she might have taken recourse to—what a trickster! Being a woman, ah, she decides to trick us!”

“What’s to be considered is not whether one is a man or a woman; it’s the caste that one is born into. She did this because she belongs to an immoral *jati*,” some others were discussing among themselves. A few others expressed wonder, “*Ammo!* What a rip-off! What lies!” They played a role in the dispute by telling them, “First of all get the money!” Satyanarayana kicked Jilakamma’s spine and she crumpled up sideways, holding her stomach. He repeated, “You wretched whore! Take out the money.”

In the meantime, Subrahmanyam bent past her and said, “*Abba!* She stinks of shit.” He groped her chest to know if she had placed the money in her blouse. He checked around her waist. He could feel the money tied next to her belly. Jilakamma was pleading with him—joining both her palms not to take out the money. He continued to try. Jilakamma held the money fast with both her hands. Subrahmanyam grew angrier and kicked her ferociously. He continued to kick her unstopably with vengeance in his eyes, saying “You bitch!” between each kick. Jilakamma, a whirl of pain, still held fast to the money. Satyanarayana, who had noticed, swiped at the sari and it unraveled. Grabbing the money, he left the sari and the woman bare. Since Jilakamma was without an underskirt to call her own, the watching women turned their faces saying “*chi-chi*,” shame! The knot of her blouse had loosened earlier in the fight. The young men, who learnt from their Telugu texts and the cinema hoardings that women are pear-shaped; that women look pretty, doubted the image of women in their fantasies, seeing Jilakamma. Here was a woman, alright, but she hung dry like a vertical desert; a woman’s chest, like the pulp of sugar cane, could be roller-crushed.

Jilakamma turned sideways, moving herself to cover her private parts. The people dispersed. Satyanarayana was counting the money back to those who had paid her the wages. Pocketing the remainder, he saw the heap of dry black leather that was Jilakamma, and said, “Why are you still waiting here? Get up and quit, you whore!”

He was about to leave. Jilakamma, emerging from a faint, couldn’t move. Subrahmanyam, who felt insulted by her disregard, found revenge rising in him thinking of how he, an educated man, had been cheated by this dirt. Having stopped, he brought all his strength into his legs and pounded her body. Sheshasai and Jagadishwar Rao had to hold him back. They restrained him by convincing him that she might die if he continued to kick; that might land them in trouble.

Blood poured down her face; soil matted her body. The bruises on her body bled. She could not tell how many bones in her body were broken. She could move a little when all the people had gone away. Mustering strength, she could somehow catch hold of her sari by moving about on her elbow; she wound it around her body and moved up with difficulty. The sari began to soak up the blood of the wounds. Her hair hung on her shoulders. She could walk a couple of steps. In spite of her best efforts to muster strength, no part of her body could be brought under her control. She remained there for a while. She raised her hands to knot her hair and get it out of the way. Her right hand developed swelling. Thinking that her right hand now might be broken, she wiped off the blood coming from her nose. "It could have been alright for them to kick me; but they should have left the money," she thought, and was seized by grief. Earlier she cried because of bodily pain; now the cries were different. Cries of innards opening out of her stomach, shouts as loud as the sky shudders. Her sorrow was beyond the cries of death of a family member; she was crying as though her heart had shriveled, as though something indescribable had happened.

* * *

Her twenty-five years of work had become no more than traces of shit at the edge of the broom.

Her entire youth got charred in the worm vapor that wafted out when she opened the shutters of the turd tunnel; her entire strength leaked out through the holes of the bucket she had carried on her head.

She didn't get the monthly wages promptly for the job she had rendered—there was neither a hike in the wages nor back pay for having had too low a wage from the start. Neither bonus nor increments. Neither an advances nor a leave at all!

* * *

As for Kotilaxmi's wedding, something got blocked.