



ELOQUENTIA - III

III Semester B.Sc./B.Sc., (FAD)/BVA., and other Programs under the
Faculty of Science

GENERAL ENGLISH

Under the State Education Policy

(SEP – 2024)

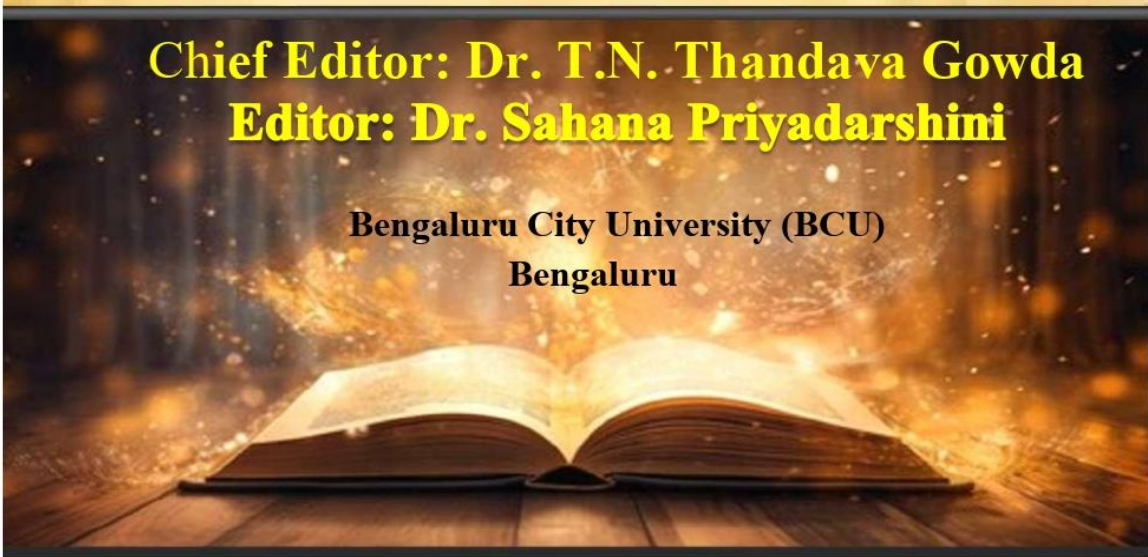


Chief Editor: Dr. T.N. Thandava Gowda

Editor: Dr. Sahana Priyadarshini

Bengaluru City University (BCU)

Bengaluru





ELOQUENTIA-III

General English Textbook

Under the State Education Policy (SEP) – 2024

**III Semester B.Sc./B.Sc., (FAD)/BVA., and other Programs under the
Faculty of Science**

Chief Editor: Dr. T.N. Thandava Gowda

Editor: Dr. Sahana Priyadarshini

Bengaluru City University (BCU)

Bengaluru

ELOQUENTIA-III

General English Textbook for III Semester B.Sc./B.Sc., (FAD)/BVA., and other courses under the faculty of science has been prepared by the members of the B.Sc. Textbook Committee, Bengaluru City University (BCU).

Copyrights: Bengaluru City University (BCU)

First Edition: 2025

Published by:

Bengaluru City University Press

Bengaluru City University (BCU)

Central College Campus

Bengaluru-560001

FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to introduce *ELOQUENTIA*, the prescribed textbook for III Semester B.Sc. students. This book brings together a curated mix of timeless classics and contemporary writings, chosen to deepen students' appreciation of English literature and language. Each text has been selected not only for its literary merit but also for its ability to spark reflection on important societal themes.

Alongside these literary readings, the grammar section offers structured and practical guidance in language fundamentals, strengthening students' command of English.

I encourage students to immerse themselves in this thoughtfully crafted blend of literature and language, designed to inspire both intellectual growth and linguistic proficiency.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the dedicated efforts of BOS and the textbook committee, whose thoughtful selections and academic insight have shaped this valuable learning resource.

Prof. K. R Jalaja
Vice-Chancellor
Bengaluru City University
Bengaluru-560001

Preface

ELOQUENTIA, the General English textbook for III Semester B.Sc. students under the Faculty of Science, Bengaluru City University (BCU), has been thoughtfully developed to strengthen students' language proficiency and communication skills. As the third instalment in the B.Sc. series under the newly implemented State Education Policy, this textbook builds on a progressive approach to English education.

The syllabus offers a comprehensive exploration of diverse literary genres, key linguistic concepts, and practical communication strategies. It is designed to cultivate critical thinking, sharpen analytical skills, and nurture a deep appreciation for the richness of literature and the power of language.

Through a combination of renowned literary texts and structured grammar lessons, students will engage with the finer aspects of storytelling, rhetorical expression, and language mechanics. The aim is to expand their literary understanding and equip them with essential skills for academic achievement and real-world communication.

I sincerely applaud the textbook committee for their diligent efforts in curating this valuable resource, and I express my heartfelt thanks to the Director and team at Bengaluru City University Press for ensuring the book's timely and accurate publication.

Dr. Thandava Gowda T N
BoS Chairperson
Chairman, Department of Research and Studies in English
Bengaluru City University, Bengaluru- 01

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF STUDIES

Dr. T N Thandava Gowda Chairperson, PG Department of English Bengaluru City University Bengaluru- 560 001	Dr. Asma Fatima Assistant Professor, Head of Department of English, Abbas Khan College for Women, Bengaluru - 02.
Dr. Prasanna Udupikar Principal, Associate Professor and Head Department of English, V.V.N. Degree College, Bengaluru- 560004	Dr. Mekhala Venkatesh Associate Professor & Research Guide, Department of English, Coordinator – GENESIS (Gender Sensitization Cell), Jain (Deemed-to-be) University, Bengaluru-69
Mr. Surendra L Associate Professor, Department of English, Government Arts College, Dr. Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru – 01.	Dr. Ravinarayan Chakrakodi Professor and Academic Head, Regional Institute of English South India, Jnanabharathi Campus, Bengaluru – 56.
Mrs. Poornima P.S. Associate Professor, Department of English, Government Arts College, Dr. Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru – 01.	Dr. Murtheppa G. M. Associate Professor, Department of English, Government College, Yelahanka, Bengaluru – 64.
Dr. Manjula Veerappa Associate Professor, Department of English, Vijaya College, Jayanagar, Bengaluru – 11.	Dr. Narasimha Murthy Associate Professor, Department of English, Presidency University, Bengaluru – 64.

MEMBERS OF TEXT BOOK COMMITTEE (BCU)
III Semester B.Sc./B.Sc., (FAD)/BVA., and other programs under the
Faculty of Science

Dr. Sahana Priyadarshini,
Chairperson, Text book Committee, Associate Professor and Head
Department of English
Govt First Grade College, Malleshwaram
Bengaluru- 560012

TEXT BOOK COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mrs. Jayashree M G Associate Professor and Head Department of English, Government First Grade College, Yelahanka Bengaluru – 560064.	Dr. Rita Josephine Eve Associate Professor and Head Department of English- PG, Bishop Cotton’s Women’s Christian College, Bengaluru-560027.
Mrs. Nandana N G Assistant Professor, Department of English, Govt First Grade College, Malleshwaram Bengaluru-560003	Ms. Vimala C T Associate Professor and Head Department of English, Vijaya College, Basavanagudi, Bengaluru – 560004.
Dr. Dharmanayaka G V Assistant Professor and Head Department of English, MES College of Arts, Commerce & Science Malleshwaram, Bengaluru- 560003	Mrs. Divya J Assistant Professor, Department of English, MES College of Arts, Commerce & Science, Malleshwaram, Bengaluru-560003.
Dr. S. Kathyayini Associate Professor, Department of English, Jain College, VV Puram, Bengaluru-560004.	Mr. Arjun V C Assistant Professor, Department of English, MES College of Arts, Commerce & Science, Malleshwaram, Bengaluru-560003.

NOTE TO THE TEACHER

Starting year of implementation: 2025-26	Total Credits for the Programme: 04
Subject: GENERAL ENGLISH	Teaching hour per week: 04
Name of the Degree Programme – B.Sc.	Total number of lecture hours/semester 60/64

It is with great pleasure that we unveil this academic volume, conceived to offer undergraduate students a well-integrated foundation in both literary appreciation and linguistic competence. This textbook brings together an eclectic array of literary texts and essential grammar modules to support a multidimensional learning experience.

The selection of content reflects the committee's unwavering commitment to academic excellence. Special attention has been given to incorporating distinguished literary works that represent a broad spectrum of styles, periods, and cultural contexts. The literary section includes a representative assortment of play, poems, short story, and essay—each serving as a gateway to understanding varied literary forms, thematic complexities, and interpretative approaches.

This textbook aspires to nurture intellectual curiosity, sharpen analytical skills, and strengthen students' command of the English language, thereby preparing them for both academic pursuits and practical communication beyond the classroom.

Here are few aspects that can be adopted to enrich the learner-teacher experience: **'Tara'** by **Mahesh Dattani** is a poignant play that explores gender bias, identity, and the emotional complexities within a modern Indian family. Through this play, students will gain insight into societal attitudes toward gender, the psychological impact of discrimination, and the power of introspection and truth in shaping personal identity. **'Water: The Elixir of Life'** by C.V. Raman emphasizes the vital role of water in sustaining life, agriculture, and civilization. Teachers can highlight the scientific, environmental, and philosophical significance of water, while students learn to value natural resources and understand their role in ecological balance and human progress. **'There Will Come Soft Rains'** by Ray Bradbury is a haunting short story that depicts a fully automated house continuing its routine in a post-apocalyptic world, emphasizing the dangers of technological advancement without human responsibility. Teachers can use this story to explore themes of human absence, environmental consequences, and the ethical use of technology, while students learn critical thinking, inference, and thematic analysis. **'An Old Woman'** by Arun Kolatkar is a powerful poem that begins with a simple encounter with a beggar and transforms into a reflection on poverty, dignity, and human connection. Teachers can guide students to explore themes of marginalization and self-awareness, while students learn to appreciate layered imagery, tone shifts, and the deeper social commentary embedded in poetry. **'When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer'** by Walt Whitman contrasts scientific analysis with personal, experiential appreciation of nature's wonders. Teachers can use this poem to discuss the value of intuition versus formal knowledge, while students learn to explore

different ways of understanding the world and the importance of connecting emotionally with nature. Through its varied and contemporary themes, genres, the text offers students a detailed and comprehensive experience. Each piece has a pre-reading activity, introduction to the author, glossary, short note about the text and suggestions for further reading to aid the learning.

In addition to the **literary component**, the **grammar component** is designed to enhance students' language proficiency. The syllabus covers Reading Comprehension which aims to improve students' analytical skills across various texts. Vocabulary development focuses on contextual learning to enrich students' word usage and retention. Through the **Presentation Skills module**, students learn to communicate ideas clearly and confidently in academic and professional contexts. By exploring different types of presentations—informative, persuasive, decision-making, and demonstrative—they develop skills in content organization, audience engagement, and effective delivery. These competencies enhance their public speaking, critical thinking, and real-world communication abilities. **Comprehension passages** steer the students to read critically, understand context, and interpret meanings accurately. This enhances their analytical thinking, vocabulary, and ability to respond effectively to questions based on the text. Through précis writing, students learn to identify and convey the essential ideas of a passage in a clear, concise manner. This skill sharpens their ability to summarize effectively, think critically, and write with precision and clarity. **Para Jumble and para completion** helps students develop logical flow, sentence, structure, and coherence in writing. These activities indirectly reinforce grammar by training students to recognise, correct syntax, transition, and contextual appropriate language. Through **Story writing**, students learn to express creativity while developing narrative structure, character development, and plot progression. It also enhances their language skills, imagination, and ability to communicate ideas effectively through storytelling. The **Reading and Writing skills** module related to **resumes, cover letters, formal letters, and business correspondence**, will encourage students to communicate professionally and appropriately in various real-life situations. These tasks enhance their ability to organize information, use formal language, and respond effectively in academic, workplace, and official contexts. Lastly **Commercial writing** shows students how to craft persuasive and visually engaging content for advertisements, posters, and brochures. This enhances their creativity, marketing sense, and ability to communicate messages effectively to target audiences.

To promote effective learning, it is essential to foster active student participation and meaningful classroom discussions. The integration of multimedia resources will enrich the teaching-learning process by offering varied and engaging experiences. It is equally important to cultivate an inclusive classroom environment where every student feels respected, supported, and empowered, thereby enhancing both engagement and academic outcomes.

The Committee expresses its sincere appreciation to Dr. Thandava Gowda T. N., Chairperson (UG/PG), Bengaluru City University, for his steadfast support and significant contributions towards the successful publication of this textbook. We are also deeply thankful to Prof. K R Jalaja, Honourable Vice-Chancellor of BCU, for her valuable guidance and thoughtful suggestions throughout the process.

As Chairperson of the Textbook Committee, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all the Textbook committee members for their dedication and collaborative spirit in bringing this challenging project to completion.

Dr. Sahana Priyadarshini
Chairperson, Textbook Committee
Associate Professor of English
Govt First Grade College, Malleshwaram
Bengaluru- 560012

**CURRICULUM STRUCTURE FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE
PROGRAMME
B.SC. AND OTHER PROGRAMMES UNDER FACULTY OF SCIENCE**

III SEMESTER - GENERAL ENGLISH Starting year of implementation: 2025-26	Total Credits for the Programme: 04	
Subject: GENERAL ENGLISH	Teaching hour per week: 04	
Name of the Degree Programme – B.Sc.	Total number of lecture hours/semester 60 per semester	
III SEMESTER- GENERAL ENGLISH B.SC. AND OTHER PROGRAMMES UNDER FACULTY OF SCIENCE	60/64hrs	80 marks

UNIT – 1

LITERARY SKILLS		30 hrs	40 marks	Page No
PLAY	TARA – Mahesh Dattani	14 hrs	20 marks	1
ESSAY	Water: The Elixir of Life - C. V. Raman	4hrs	5 marks	75
SHORT STORY	There Will Come Soft Rains - Ray Bradbury	4hrs	5 marks	79
POEM	An Old Woman – Arun Kolatkar	4hrs	5 marks	86
POEM	When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer – Walt Whitman	4hrs	5 marks	89

UNIT – 2

COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS (LSRW SKILLS)		30 hrs	40 marks	Page No
LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS				
PRESENTATION SKILLS Types - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informative/Instructional Presentation • Persuasive Presentation • Decision Making Presentation • Demonstrative Presentation 		5 hrs	5 marks	

READING AND WRITING SKILLS			
• Comprehension Passage	3 hrs	5 marks	
• Para Jumble and Para Completion	3 hrs	5 marks	
• Story Writing	3hrs	5 marks	
CORRESPONDENCES			
• Resume and Cover Letter	2 hrs	5 marks	
Formal Letters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave Letter • Application Letters • Enquiry Letter • Inviting Letter 	3hrs	5 marks	
Business Correspondence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters of Enquiry • Placing an Order Letters • Letters of Complaint • Reply to Letter of Complaint 	6 hrs	5 marks	
COMMERCIAL WRITING			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertisement Writing (Classifieds & Commercial) • Poster and Brochure Writing/Designing 	5 hrs	5 marks	

Assessment Pattern	100 marks	
Theory	80 marks	Semester Examination
Internal Assessment	20 marks	Assignment 10 marks Internal test 10 marks

TARA

MAHESH DATTANI

Pre Reading Activities:

- What do you know about gender roles in Indian society? How do they affect the opportunities available to boys and girls?
- Have you ever heard of or read any stories where family decisions had long-term consequences on children's lives? Can you share an example?
- Do you believe that physical disabilities should change the way people are treated? Why or why not?
- What role do you think science and medical ethics play in determining family decisions? Can there be a conflict between scientific possibilities and moral choices?

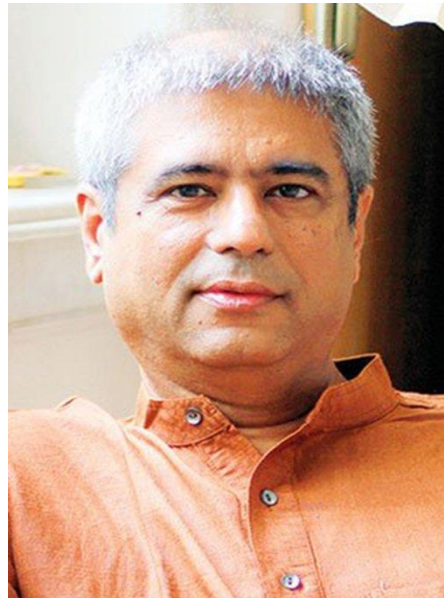
ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT:

Mahesh Dattani was born on August 7, 1958 in Bangalore, Karnataka. He was educated at Baldwin's Boys High School followed by St. Joseph's College, Bangalore. After graduation, he briefly worked as a copywriter for an advertising firm. In 1986, his first play, "Where There is a Will" surfaced. After the resounding success of his first play, Dattani began to concentrate on his writing and came up with an impressive oeuvre comprising "Dance Like a Man" (1989), "**Tara**" (1990), "Bravely Fought the Queen" (1991), "Final Solutions" (1993), "On a Muggy Night in Mumbai" (1998), "Thirty Days in September" (2001) and others. Since 1995, he has concentrated exclusively on theatre.

He is the only English playwright to be awarded the Sahitya Academy Award. He got this award in 1998. He

also writes plays for BBC Radio and was also one of the 21 playwrights chosen by BBC to write plays to commemorate Chaucer's 600th anniversary in 2000. His plays have been directed by eminent directors like Arvind Gaur, Alyque Padamsee and Lillete Dubey.

Dattani makes a bold move when he chooses to address issues concerning gender discrimination. His writings become important in exploring how deeply certain stereotypes are rooted in society.



ABOUT THE PLAY:

Written in 1990, "Tara" was initially staged as "Twinkle Tara" in the year of its writing in Bangalore. However, the year after, it was staged in Mumbai directed by Alyque Padamsee and got its present name. The play portrays the predicament of a girl child and the innate gender

discrimination in our social strata. Dattani takes up the so called “invisible” issues of Indian society and makes an entreaty to the audience for some emancipation from the social evils. The play explores the emotional distance that grows between two conjoined twins, following the discovery that they share a total of three legs, and one would have to be deprived for the other to be complete. The adults in their family opt for the boy to have the leg, despite the fact that the girl child had a better claim on the limb, as the blood flow in that limb was happening from her body. This brings into light the deeply entrenched socio-cultural discrimination in expense of a girl child in Indian society. As an attempt to atone the wrong done to his twin Tara, Chandan or Dan prepares to look back and confess the horror of the past.

MAJOR THEMES IN DATTANI’S PLAYS

His plays deal with the social and contemporary issues which often go unrepresented in our society. Dattani adopted different forms of drama as a medium to represent the real depth and vitality of human experience. He considers theatre as the medium to manifest the cause of the unprivileged segments of our society. His plays authentically externalize the problems and pent up feeling of the subalterns. In his plays, Dattani visits the unexplored soil of homosexuals, HIV victims, eunuchs, physically challenged populace etc. These rather radical themes of his drama, have separated him from the traditional Indian playwrights.

Gender Discrimination

Dattani’s plays have been acclaimed for their social realism and for portraying the uncomfortable truths of social evils. One such evil is the much-discussed belief that a woman should always be in subordinated by a man. This female subalternity has been explored by novelists in India, but Dattani was the first playwright to take up the crusade seriously in “Tara”, and to a certain extent in “Bravely Fought the Queen.” These plays depict how in spite of all protestations of modernity and liberalization, a woman in India is still considered secondary.

“Tara” poignantly talks the injustice perpetuated by the victim’s own mother whose preference is for a healthy male child in the expense of the female conjoined twin, makes the play more powerful as it does not simplistically dump the blame on men but suggests that it’s women under the influence of patriarchy who often continue the chain of injustice. In “Bravely Fought the Queen,” the women remain at home much of the time, where they take care of their ageing mother-in-law Baa and their husbands. The type of cruelty perpetrated on Baa by her husband is revealed every now and then in the play. It is also often hinted how the two women were often confined under the intricate expectation of their imagined social roles. The recurrent image of the bonsai effectively showcases the stunted condition of the women in the household. Nevertheless, Dattani cannot be accused of partial treatment of the theme of gender discrimination. In “Dance Like a Man” he explores the ways in which our idea of “masculinity” severely constricts the options for men, which in turn is enforced by both the male and female populace of our society.

Sexual Marginalization

Though there are subtle hints of Nitin’s homosexuality in “Bravely Fought the Queen,” “On a

"Muggy night in Mumbai" is widely considered to be the first Indian play boldly dealing with the subject of homosexuality. It deals with the themes of homosexual love, the vulgarity among the youths in a materialistic world, the disapproval of same-sex relationship and consigning any such relationship to trivial vulgarity, fear of ostracism and prosecution, partnership, trust and betrayal. But traditionalists consider such a relationship as something unnatural, obnoxious and disgusting one.

Dattani successfully picks up sensational issues of the society like the status of the third gender in his play "Seven Steps around the Fire". The play involves the marriage of a beautiful *hijra* (eunuch) 'Kamla' to a son of a wealthy government minister named Subbu. But the shocking revelation transformed into the murder of Kamla. Uma Rao, a sociology scholar brings this into focus the hypocrisy and repression of this 'high sophisticated class' who are beyond the reach of the Law ever for calculated homicide. Mahesh Dattani depicted the appropriate reflections of society regarding the eunuch community as in the beginning of the play we see how eunuchs are treated like non-living things; they are given the pronoun 'it/its' by characters like Munswamy who has a strong grudge against them. On the other hand, Uma, the protagonist and mouthpiece of playwright, always accords the words 'she/her' for them.

Familial Discord

The concept of 'home' and 'family' do not carry their usual comforting connotations in Dattani's plays. It is the space, where most of the discriminations, abuse and systematic dehumanization occur. Most of his plays show some sort of a dysfunctional family, where love and familial loyalty have become strangely distorted. In "Bravely Fought the Queen," the mother-in-Law was systematically abused by her now deceased husband, and in turn gave all her love to her younger son who resembled her more than the elder. The two sons enter a loveless marriage with two sisters. While the elder son is abusive like his father, the younger is a closet homosexual. The two women of the house have a stunted existence and a mentally handicapped daughter. In "Dance Like a Man," the patriarch of the household maneuvers his daughter in law Ratna's ambition to be a famous dancer to thwart the dancing career of his son Jairaj, which he considers effeminate. In the play, in order to keep their infant child out of her way, Ratna unconsciously overdoses him with opium, accidentally killing him. In "Tara", the girl child of the family is discriminated against by her own mother who prefers to have a healthy male child and separates the conjoined twins in her daughter's expense, thereby disabling her and causing her premature death.

Communalism

Dattani's "Final Solution" explored the much-debated subject of communalism. It was first staged in Bangalore in 1993, focusing on the problem of communal disharmony between the Hindus and Muslims in India, especially during the period of the post-partition riots. Dattani's purpose in depicting the post partition communal violence in India is not to convey the actual events that took place, but to present the psychological fear that has been inculcated in our minds. The play also argues that love is not restricted by religion, caste and creed, as is evident from Smita's love for Babban. The juxtaposition of love and hatred complicates the uniform and unhindered violence that is promoted in a communal riot.

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

Major characters:

Chandan

He is the narrator of the play. An aspiring writer, he attempts to write a play commemorating his conjoined twin Tara, now deceased. The play is narrated through his memories. Chandan is Tara's twin brother, whose life is forever marked by guilt and grief. While he is not directly responsible for the unjust medical choice made at birth, he internalizes the consequences. As an adult, Chandan moves to London, adopts the name "Dan," and attempts to escape his past by denying his emotional history. However, he is constantly haunted by the memory of Tara, whom he believes was wronged by fate and by their family.

Chandan is portrayed as sensitive, introspective, and creative—he aspires to be a writer. His monologues form the narrative frame of the play and reveal his internal conflict. Although he shares a close bond with Tara, he is unable to protect her or stand up against the gender biases of his parents. His transformation into Dan represents a form of psychological exile and identity fragmentation. Chandan's guilt is not merely survivor's guilt—it is also a deeper recognition of male privilege, societal prejudice, and personal helplessness. He tries to reconcile with the past through writing, but his inability to even begin Tara's story shows how paralyzing the trauma is. Chandan is the 'feminine side' of the self trying to reach out to its lost half—his character illustrates how gender discrimination not only destroys girls like Tara but also deforms the emotional lives of boys like him.

Tara

Tara is the central character of the play and the embodiment of the play's core themes—gender discrimination, emotional neglect, and unfulfilled potential. Born as a conjoined twin, Tara was separated from her brother Chandan through a surgery that favoured his chances of survival over hers, a decision influenced by the family's gender bias.

Despite her physical limitations (she has an artificial leg and later requires a kidney transplant), Tara is portrayed as witty, intelligent, and emotionally mature. She deeply loves her brother and shares a strong bond with him, often masking her pain with humour. Tara is also shown to be sensitive and perceptive, recognizing early the subtle social dynamics and hypocrisies around her, including her mother's overbearing affection and society's shallow pity. Tara's character arc is tragic. Her natural brilliance is suppressed by her family's and society's inability to accept a disabled girl child as someone with equal rights and opportunities. She remains emotionally strong and hopeful, but her spirit is slowly worn down by her physical and psychological burdens. Tara symbolizes the girl child in patriarchal societies—nurtured only in name, but sacrificed in silence. Her untimely death marks the culmination of the systemic injustices done to her, making her both a personal and societal tragedy.

Bharati

She is the mother of Tara and Chandan. Bharati is a complex and deeply conflicted character. On the surface, she appears to be a devoted mother who showers Tara with love and affection. However, as the play unfolds, it is revealed that she was complicit in the decision to give the

better part of the twins' shared organs to Chandan, under pressure from her father. Her guilt over this betrayal manifests as over protectiveness toward Tara, leading to her mental and emotional deterioration. Bharati's motivations stem from a blend of societal conditioning and personal trauma. She is a victim of patriarchy herself, torn between her roles as a mother, wife, and daughter. Her desperate attempts to compensate for the injustice through affection reveal a broken conscience. She longs to give Tara a part of her (literally, through a kidney), but is denied even that by her husband.

Her character is crucial in portraying the psychological toll that gender bias takes on women themselves. She becomes emotionally unstable and suffers a breakdown, eventually being institutionalized. Bharati embodies the internalized oppression of women who, despite being victims, end up perpetuating gender-based injustices. Her character leaves the audience with the uncomfortable realization that love without justice is hollow.

Patel

Mr. Patel, the father of Tara and Chandan, is a restrained, pragmatic, and emotionally distant figure. He represents the traditional Indian patriarch—concerned with reputation, social stability, and future prospects. Though he appears to be caring, his actions are guided by utility rather than emotion. He allows, and perhaps silently endorses, the unethical medical decision that disadvantages Tara in favour of Chandan.

Patel's character is marked by denial and detachment. He avoids confronting the consequences of his choices, hides behind reason, and prioritizes Chandan's education and career over Tara's well-being. However, he is not without inner conflict. He recognizes Bharati's instability and tries to control her, but his methods are authoritarian rather than empathetic. Despite moments where he tries to connect with his children, his emotional inaccessibility makes him a distant father figure. He fails to protect Tara from societal and familial injustice and, in doing so, becomes an agent of the very system that victimizes her. Patel symbolizes the normalized male dominance in decision-making, where love is conditional and often filtered through control and silence.

Minor characters:

Roopa

A shallow and malicious neighbour of the Patel's. Bharati bribes her to be friends with Tara, who she detests for being an amputee. She tries to lead Chandan on, but later complains of rape when he touches her. She is forced to silence by Tara, who threatens to expose her secret about having one breast smaller than the other. She is often the butt of Tara and Chandan's joke, but does not understand. She conspires with her friends Prema and Nalini to emotionally scar Tara by calling her a freak.

Dr. Thakkar

He is the doctor who performs the surgery on Tara and Chandan separating them. He sits with a God-like nonchalance in the highest stage level and often speaks deeply about the surgery and the medical complications as if in an interview. It is later revealed how he conspired with

Bharati and her father to unethically deprive Tara of her leg, giving it to Chandan, in lieu of three acres of prime land to build his hospital.

Prema and Nalini

Prema and Nalini are friends of Roopa and neighbours in the apartment complex. They never directly interact much with Tara but are mentioned several times and represent the shallow and mean-spirited social environment that surrounds Tara. They make fun of her disability and appear more interested in gossip than friendship. They serve to illustrate how cruelty is normalized in adolescence and how girls, too, are agents of the social order that mocks physical difference. They are not deeply developed characters, but they function as a backdrop of social bullying and insensitivity that reinforces Tara's alienation.

Dan (Older Chandan)

Although technically Chandan and Dan are the same person, Dan represents the emotionally scarred, older version of Chandan. Living in London, he has changed his name and shut out memories of his past. Dan is significant because he **represents memory, guilt, and repression**. His presence as a narrator helps structure the play as a dramatic recollection of trauma. He attempts to write Tara's story but fails repeatedly, revealing how deep his psychological wounds are. Dan's inner struggle also shows how gender privilege can burden men with guilt when they become aware of the injustice done in their name.

PLOT SUMMARY OF TARA

The play starts with Chandan, now called Dan, feverishly typing a play "Twinkle Tara: A Play in Two Acts", about his long-deceased sister Tara in his London bedsitter. He talks about his memories and a fanatic urge to record them to commemorate his twin sister, and how he finds himself unable to find words to write. As he speaks, we see the Patel house in a flashback as young Tara and Chandan walk in. They speak how they were joined in birth and should have remained so, but were forced to separate. Bharati, their mother, enters asking Tara and Chandan to unpack as they have moved from Bangalore to Mumbai for their treatment. She shows marked preference for Tara, as she worries over her health. Patel tries to reason with her but stops when she hints how Patel is not as fond of Tara as he is of Chandan and how he hates anything to do with their Bangalore house and their maternal grandfather. As Bharati wheedles Tara into doing her bidding, Patel tries to take Chandan to the office with him, which he refuses unless Tara goes. Their fifteen-year-old neighbour Roopa comes to meet them with ulterior motives to report on Tara whom she considers to be a freak, to her friends. She intrudes on the twins as they bicker and play cards companionably. Patel is seen to be chatting with an invisible neighbour in the alleyway out showing concern for her wife's health, as the children talk. Tara declares that she is strong enough to take on her life, as her mother has made her strong.

In this point, the older Chandan breaks off as her mind is wondering, and he is unable to write a word. He feels that he cannot do justice to the strong, gentle and kind Tara; their silent and angry father; and even their mother. He chooses to start his play with Dr. Thakkar, the god-like creature who had performed the crucial surgery separating the conjoined twins. He starts as if

he is interviewing Dr. Thakkar from his bedsitter. He introduces him as a talented surgeon associated with some of the most prestigious hospitals in USA and India. When questioned, Dr. Thakkar replies that the twins were three months old when the surgery was performed. He talks about their conjoined condition as a “defect” and specifies how it is rare for such twins to survive and also to be of different genders. The flashback brings young Tara and Chandan back as they talk about all the doctors that they had, while listening to Brahm’s First Concerto. They talk about disparate topics like their parents coddling Tara, and how Tara came across three mean girls – Prema, Nalini and Roopa who stared at her limping, and were dismissed as she made light of her prosthetic leg. Roopa comes to visit them and is bribed by Bharati to be Tara’s friend. She asks for time to think about Bharati’s offer and goes on spreading the news to her friends maliciously.

Dr. Thakkar continues his jargon filled medical interview explaining how elaborate time-consuming procedures had shown that Tara and Chandan can survive their surgery. Patel converses with Dr. Kapoor over the phone and shows relief that Tara has found a commercial donor for her kidney transplant. Bharati protests fiercely saying that she wants to donate her organ, but Patel stops her forcibly saying that she is in no condition to donate her organ. As Bharati becomes agitated, Patel hints that Bharati is overdoing her concern for Tara to cover something up. When Bharati breaks and attempts to confess everything to the twins, Patel stops her by saying that for their good, the secret should remain so. The twins and Roopa watch films together and discuss “The Mirror Cracked from Side to Side” and their sympathy towards the Lady of Shallot, who was confined in her tower. Bharati comes in and talks to Chandan about her fears and insecurities about Tara’s future, while Chandan tries to comfort her. In the alleyway, Roopa confides in Tara the myth she has heard about the practice of the Patel community of drowning unwanted girl children in milk, so that they can tell that they have choked in their milk. As Chandan helps her mother with her knitting, Patel arrives home to find Roopa and Tara watching films. He shows his anger towards what he considers banal occupation for Tara and effeminate practice for Chandan and discloses his plans about Chandan’s future. As Bharati protests, Patel confronts her about her ‘unhealthy’ obsession with Tara and her repeated attempts to turn their children against him. As Tara approaches them, Bharati tries to stop Patel from discovering the dreaded secret, and Patel decides against it in the last moment assuring her that both her parent’s love her much. An overwhelmed Tara has a seizure and as Bharati breaks down ineffectively, Patel resuscitates an almost comatose Tara with sugar. The older Chandan finishes his tale halfway, as the first Act ends.

The second Act starts with Bharati demonstrating her affection for Tara. There is a curious intensity in her behaviour towards Tara who obviously enjoys her attention. Bharati is overwhelmed when Tara says that she has everything in her life as she has her mother with her. The older Chandan is seen researching an old scrap book with paper cuttings on Dr. Thakkar’s take on the various complications about their surgery. It is also disclosed that the twins will always be sterile. In the Patel residence Tara returns after her transplant with Patel and is welcomed by Roopa and Chandan. She is later informed by Patel and Chandan that her mother had a breakdown and had to be institutionalized. She is shattered and silent as Chandan tries to cheer her with jokes. Chandan refuses to apply for college as Tara does not want to go. Patel firmly asks him to get on with his life as, in his opinion, Chandan has to earn his living unlike

Tara. It is further disclosed that their rich maternal grandfather has left his enormous house to the twins, but the money to Chandan. Patel displays his barely concealed hatred for his father-in-law and advises his children to burn the house rather than living in it. The twins have a poignant moment as Chandan wishes for stars for Tara, and Tara wishes for real legs and a healthy life for her brother.

Roopa comes in to spend time with Tara and Chandan and ends up discussing the film “Sophie’s Choice” with Chandan as he talks about a mother choosing between her son and her daughter. As she leads him on a little, Chandan ends up trying to initiate his first sexual encounter. Roopa stops him and accuses him of molestation. As Tara enters, Roopa tries to convince her that Chandan had tried to rape her. Tara forces her to silence by threatening to disclose her secret of having uneven breasts. Roopa swears revenge and runs away after disclosing that she became her friend after being bribed by Bharati. Tara bemoans the futility of money and effort to treat her. She also resolves to spend her life treating the underprivileged people with health issues. Chandan tries to comfort her and is rebuffed as Tara angrily shows her contempt for Chandan and Patel. The older Chandan is seen making a phone call to his father and being informed of his mother’s demise. He displays a decided lack of concern and refuses to return.

Tara is surprised as she is kept away from her mother. She discloses her suspicion to Chandan that Patel is deliberately keeping the twins away from their mother to keep her from disclosing incriminating secrets about him. As Tara confronts Patel, he finally confesses about the secret which Bharati has been keeping all these years. He reveals that Bharati’s father was an extremely wealthy industrialist and an influential MLA. Patel had to go against his family to marry Bharati. They had a happy marriage and were happy about having twins. But when they were born conjoined hugging each other, the family decided to recruit Dr. Thakkar for surgically separating them. The twins had three legs between the two of them and only one of the twins will have two legs. The medical reports had revealed that Tara will have better chances of carrying both the legs than Chandan. But Bharati and her father bribed Dr. Thakkar with three acres of prime land for his hospital, to give the two legs to Chandan. The leg was rejected by Chandan’s body and had to be amputated. After this, Bharati has always dreaded the secret of her favouring Chandan over Tara coming out and had tried to make it up for Tara by lavishing attention on her and turning the twins against Patel lest he discloses the secret. Tara is bewildered and shattered in learning of her mother’s betrayal and fades away slowly as Roopa and her cronies shout insults at her in the alleyway.

Chandan banishes Dr. Thakkar with all his greedy ugliness from his memories and informs the audience that he needs to atone for his guilt against his sister by writing this tragedy of Tara. He expresses his deep anguish that his family had favoured him over Tara and begs her forgiveness as his life was saved at her expense. As he speaks, Tara comes and faces him and they hug tightly in the manner they were born.

TARA

A Stage Play in Two Acts

A Note on the Play

Mahesh Dattani frequently takes as his subject the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family. His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire. Their dramas are played out on multi-level sets where interior and exterior become one, and geographical locations are collapsed—in short, his settings are as fragmented as the families who inhabit them.

In his plays, Dattani takes on what he calls the ‘invisible issues’ of Indian society. In an interview, Dattani says, ‘you can talk about feminism, because in a way that is accepted. But you can’t talk about gay issues because that’s not Indian, [that] doesn’t happen here. You can’t talk about a middle-class housewife fantasizing about having sex with the cook or actually having a sex life - that isn’t Indian either - that’s confrontational even if it is Indian.’ By pulling taboo subjects out from under the rug and placing them on stage for public discussion, Dattani challenges the constructions of ‘India’ and ‘Indian’ as they have traditionally been defined in modern theatre. He encourages other playwrights to do the same: ‘Our culture is so rich with tradition, and that’s a great advantage and a great disadvantage as well, because we’re living in the present and there are so many challenges facing us - you just have to cross the road and you have an issue. I think it is very important for our country to spawn new playwrights who reflect honestly and purely our lives, because that is our contribution to the world.’

Tara centers on the emotional separation that grows between two conjoined twins following the discovery that their physical separation was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). Tara, a feisty girl who isn’t given the opportunities given to her brother (although she may be smarter) eventually wastes away and dies. Chandan escapes to London, changes his name to Dan, and attempts to repress the guilt he feels over his sister’s death by living without a personal history. Woven into the play are issues of class and community, and the clash between traditional and modern lifestyles and values.

Dattani sees *Tara* as a play about the gendered self, about coming to terms with the feminine side of oneself in a world that always favors what is ‘male’; but many people in India see it as a play about the girl child. I included *Tara* on my syllabus for a class on Indian Performance at New York University, my students loved Dattani’s work in general, and *Tara* in particular—several of them became so excited about the play that they wrote their final papers on it. One student pointed out that Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self

rather than two separate entities and that Dan, in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write Tara's story. Dan writes Tara's story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole. Another student pointed out that Dattani focuses on the family as a microcosm of society in order to dramatize the ways we are socialized to accept certain gendered roles and to give preference to what is 'male.'

It is important to note that all of Dattani's plays, including *Tara*, are first workshopped with his company Playpen in Bangalore. Dattani puts the finishing touches on his dialogue only when it is spoken aloud by actors in rehearsal—in other words, Dattani writes plays to be seen and heard, not literature to be read. After its Bangalore premiere, *Tara* was produced in Mumbai and Delhi, where it received rave reviews. It will be included in a volume of contemporary Indian plays, titled *Drama Contemporary: India*, to be published in the US by *Performing Arts Journal* in late 2000. My hope is that it will go on to have many more productions both in India and in the United States.

Erin Mee

(Erin Mee is a theatre director who has worked extensively with K.N. Panikkar and the Sopanam Company in Kerala.)

All quotations are from an interview titled 'Mahesh Dattani: Invisible Issues', published in *Performing Arts Journal* (55).

Tara was first performed as *Twinkle Tara* at the Chowdaiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, on 23 October 1990 by Playpen Performing Arts Group. The cast was as follows:

BHARATI	Akila Thandur
TARA	Neha Sharma
CHANDAN	Salim Sheriff
PATEL	Ajit Bhide
ROOPA	Madhavi Rao
DR THAKKAR	Chippy Gangjee
<i>Director</i>	Mahesh Dattani
<i>Lighting</i>	Pradeep Belawdai
<i>Stage</i>	<i>Management</i> Narendra
<i>Sound</i>	M. Bhaskar

The play was subsequently performed as *Tara* at Sophia Bhabha Hall by Theatre Group, Bombay, on 9 November 1991, with Rooky Dadachanji, Anju Bedi, Tarini Bedi, Asif Ali Beg, 'Bugs' Bhargava Krishna, Aadya Bedi and Protap Roy, directed by Alyque Padamsee.

ACT I

A multi-level set. The lowest level occupies a major portion of the stage. It represents the house of the Patels. It is seen only in memory and may be kept as stark as possible.

The next level represents the bedsitter of the older Chandan (referred to as Dan for clarity) in a suburb of London. There is a small bed, and, in the foreground, a small writing table with a typewriter and a sheaf of papers. A part of a wall covered with faded wallpaper can also be seen. This is the only realistic level.

Behind, on a higher level, is a chair in which Dr. Thakkar remains seated throughout the play. Although he doesn't watch the action of the play, his connection is asserted by his sheer God-like presence.

On the stage level, running along the cyclorama and in an L-shape, downstage right, is the galli outside the Patels' house, which can be suggested by cross-lighting.

The play starts without any music. A spotlight picks up Dan at his writing table. He is typing furiously. He stops and removes the sheet from his typewriter. He looks up and speaks to the audience.

DAN: In poetry, even the most turbulent emotions can be recollected when one is half asleep. But in drama! Ah! Even tranquility has to be recalled with emotion. Like touching a bare live wire. Try distancing yourself from that experience and writing about it! A mere description will be hopelessly inadequate. And for me . . . I have to relive that charge over and over again. *(Pause.)* Excuse me while I recharge myself.

Limps to a cabinet, pulls out a bottle of liquor, pours some into a glass and drinks.

Yes. I have my memories. Locking myself in a bedsitter in a seedy suburb of London, thousands of miles from home hasn't put enough distance between us. *(Holds up his glass.)* My battery charger helps on some occasions. But now I want them to come back.

To masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the world in anger. *(Picks up the sheet he has been typing.)* My progress, so far, I must

admit, has been zero. But I persist with the comforting thought that things can't get any worse. I keep staring at my typewriter every day, wondering how best to turn my anguish into drama. All I find every day, without fail, is one typewritten sheet with the title of the play, my name and address and the date. Nothing changes—except the date. (*Reads from the paper.*) 'Twinkle Tara. A drama in two acts by Chandan Patel. Copyright, Chandan Patel, 93 Fishpond's Road, Tooting, London SW17 7LJ.' Today I made some progress. I even typed my phone number. (*Puts down the paper.*) Not to say that I don't have anything to show to the world yet, I do.

For instance, these. (*Picks up a manuscript.*) *Random Raj*. Short stories on the British Raj. Still hounding publishers. The publishers here ignore them because none of them deal with sati, dowry deaths or child marriages—all subjects guaranteed to raise the interest of the average Western intellectual. And back home, of course, Indo- Anglian literature isn't worth toilet paper. (*Throws the manuscript away.*)

But that's all done with. Tonight, I drop everything I've desperately wanted to be in my years in England. (*Mimes removing a mask and throwing it away.*) The handicapped intellectual's mask. (*Mimes removing another mask.*) The desperate immigrant. (*Mimes removing yet another.*) The mysterious brown with the phoney accent. The last being the hardest to drop having spent two whole years in acquiring it. And what remains is what I intend making capital of. My freakishness. I am a freak. (*Pause.*) Now, a freak doesn't have to look very far for inspiration. (*Moves to his table.*) But what is hard is to let go. Allow the memories to flood in. (*Winds another sheet on the typewriter and then stops.*) To tell you the truth, I had even forgotten I had a twin sister. (*Music fades in slowly.*) Until I thought of her as subject matter for my next literary attempt. Or maybe I didn't forget her. She was lying deep inside, out of reach . . .

A spotlight on the stage level Chandan and Tara walk into it. They both have a limp, but on different legs.

TARA: And me. Maybe we still are. Like we've always been. Inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out . . .

Patel and Bharati are seen.

And separated.

The lights cross-fade to the Patels' living room. Chandan and Tara are playing a game of cards. It is obvious Tara is winning. Bharati has finished her morning pooja. Patel is checking the contents of his briefcase and is ready to leave for work.

BHARATI: Tara, drink your milk, amma!

TARA: Sorry, new places slow down my peristalsis.

CHANDAN: New pinch for a new word.

TARA: Where are thatha's brass tumblers?

BHARATI: They have yet to be unpacked.

PATEL: It's getting late for me. *(Gets up and moves to the children to pat them goodbye.)*

BHARATI: Your father doesn't want us to use them. *(Patel looks at her.)*

He doesn't want us to use any of your grandfather's things.

PATEL: What are you saying, Bharati?

BHARATI: Now that we've moved out of his house, he doesn't . . .

PATEL: Just a minute. It was you who didn't want to unpack them. You said so yourself. You said . . .

BHARATI: Me? Why would I not want to use my own father's gifts to us?

Pause.

PATEL: *(quietly, controlling himself)*. Let me make this clear. I have no reason to tell you not to use your late father's . . . gifts. You're free to do as you please. In fact, it was you who didn't want to unpack them, so why are you...?

BHARATI: *(to Tara)* Finish your milk.

TARA: I won't! Stop shoving it down my throat.

BHARATI: Tara!

PATEL: *(to Bharati)* Why d'you serve her so much if she doesn't want to . . .

BHARATI: But she must put on more weight!

PATEL: She's fine.

BHARATI: No! She's much too thin! She . . . she must put on more weight. This morning at the clinic, Dr. Kapoor checked their charts. She's lost half a pound in one week.

PATEL: Half a pound isn't much . . .

BHARATI: *(over him)* In one month she will lose a kilo! *(Getting worked up.)* If I don't force her to eat, how will she gain weight? She will keep getting thinner till she's all shrivelled and she is only . . . skin and bones! It's bad enough that she . . . they . . . *(Moves to Tara.)* Tara. Please!

PATEL: Tara will be fine. They are both going to . . . They'll be fine.

BHARATI: The doctors are concerned about . . .

PATEL: *(testily)* I know what the doctors said! *(More calmly)* Dr. Kapoor was surprised at their progress and . . .

BHARATI: Surprised? Did you say...?

PATEL: I meant to say he was happy to note . . .

BHARATI: You said surprised!

PATEL: *(testily again)* I know I did but I meant he was happy . . .

CHANDAN: *(offering a suggestion)* Or happily surprised?

TARA: Now don't start on your sidey jokes!

CHANDAN: Or he was surprised that he was happy.

TARA: Enough, enough!

PATEL: *(after a while, quietly)* He was pleased with their progress. Beyond everyone's expectations. He is going to mention them in a medical journal.

BHARATI: No! I don't want my children being mentioned in any medical journal!

PATEL: Why, what's the harm? It will only be read by other doctors. It might help them with other such . . .

BHARATI: I just don't, that's all! I don't want all that publicity to start again.

PATEL: It's only a journal. It won't . . . *(Resigned.)* All right.

BHARATI: You will put on more weight, won't you Tara?

TARA: I'll do anything you say, mummy. Except drink this milk.

BHARATI: *(vaguely)* Anything you say, Tara. Anything.

The lights cross-fade to the street. Roopa, a girl of fifteen, is seen. She calls towards a house.

ROOPA: Prema! Prema-a! *(No response.)* Prema-a! Oh, hello, aunty. *(In broken Gujarati.)* Kem chcho? Majhjha ma? Is Prema in? *(Listens.)* Good. May she come out? Oh, nowhere special. I thought we could maybe go over to Yankee Doodle's for an ice cream or something. *(Listens.)* A cold? That's okay. I'll come up and keep her company. *(Listens and reacts with mock-surprise.)* She told you that I was taking her to see *Fatal Attraction*? No, that's not true at all! Well, I did say we will see the movie at Eros, but I meant *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. What? *(Listens.)* Oh, *Fatal Attraction* is playing there. Well, you see, they show *Snow White* in the mornings. Well, I didn't want to tell you, you see, after all she is my best friend and all that, but actually it was her idea to see both. Look, I'm sorry she has a cold. On second thoughts, I'd better not see her. I might catch it myself. So, if you don't mind, I won't come up. Tell her not to feel bad. So sorry. Thank you. Avo.

She keeps grinning until the supposed aunty is out of sight. Then she sticks her rear out in aunty's direction and makes a rude sound. She hesitantly walks towards the Patels' house.

(Calls.) Hello. *(No response. Louder.)* Hello. Tara!

The lights cross-fade again to the living room. Bharati has exited to the kitchen.

PATEL: Chandan.

CHANDAN: *(dealing the cards).* Ya.

PATEL: I was just thinking . . . It may be a good idea for you to come to the office with me. (*Glances surreptitiously towards the kitchen.*)

CHANDAN: What for?

PATEL: Just to get a feel of it.

CHANDAN: You can take Tara. She'll make a great business woman.

TARA: How do you know?

CHANDAN: Because you always cheat at cards!

TARA (*crossly, throwing her cards at Chandan*): Just because I win doesn't mean I cheat, okay!

PATEL (*firmly*): Chandan, I think I must insist that you come.

CHANDAN: We'll both come with you.

PATEL: No!

Tara looks at Patel, slightly hurt. (Patel softens his tone) Yes. You may both come if you want to.

Roopa has been listening at the door.

ROOPA: Hello!

TARA: Oh, hi, Roopa. Come on in.

ROOPA (*falsely*): Sorry! Hello, uncle. Sorry! Am I disturbing you?

TARA: Not at all. The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave.

CHANDAN: I haven't decided yet. (*Looks at Patel.*) I might stay back in the cave and do my jigsaw puzzle.

TARA: Or carve another story on the walls. (*To Roopa.*) He's a writer, you know.

ROOPA: Ooh! How nice. What kind of writing? I love stories with ghosts and monsters.

PATEL (*to Bharati*): Is there anything you need?

BHARATI (*off*): No. Nothing you can get.

Patel picks up his briefcase from the coffee table.

PATEL (*to Chandan*): Well, take care. If you two need to go out anywhere, just call the office. I'll send the car. (*Pats Tara.*) Take care.

He exits to the street. He is fixed in a spot. He mimes conversing with a neighbor.

ROOPA: Oh, good, at least you two are at home. Let's all sit down. Maybe we can watch a movie.

She makes herself comfortable on the sofa. Tara and Chandan stand beside her. Spot on them.

PATEL: Hello, Narayan saab. How is your health today? Dr. Kapoor was enquiring after you.

ROOPA (*to Chandan*): Or tell us one of your stories. A monster story. You know, like oglers.

TARA: Oglers?

ROOPA: You know, those monsters with one big eye in the middle of their foreheads.

CHANDAN: Ogres.

ROOPA (*defensively*): Well, they look like they are ogling.

PATEL: I don't look well because I'm not . . . Frankly I'm worried . . . about her.

CHANDAN: I haven't written any story about monsters yet.

ROOPA: Really? How disappointing. What do you write about?

TARA: He writes about people he knows.

ROOPA: Really? How interesting.

TARA: Yes, he is going to write a story- about me.

PATEL: She needs help. I am not so sure—maybe some kind of therapy . . . or counselling.

TARA: About me. Strong. Healthy. Beautiful.

ROOPA: That's not you! That's me! He is writing a story about me. Aren't you, Chandan?

CHANDAN (*seriously*): Yes. You will be in the story too. As the ogler.

PATEL: Maybe I need some advice . . . or counselling. I don't know . . . whether I am prepared for the worst.

TARA: I am strong. My mother has made me strong.

Spotlight on the three fades out.

PATEL: Maybe I'm expecting the worst. It may never happen—no. Things are getting out of hand. I must worry about her. Yes. I am worried—about my wife.

Cross-cut to Dan who suddenly jerks as if woken from a nightmare.

DAN: No! No! That won't do. I can't have all that just swimming in my mind. The mind wanders too much. Unnecessary details, irrelevant characters which do not figure anywhere. I've got to put it all down. I've got to make a start. (*Goes to the cabinet for a refill and takes a swig.*) Now steady, Dan boy. One thing at a time. Get to the desk. (*Moves to the table.*) Sit on the chair. (*Sits.*) Put your fingers on the keys. (*Does so.*) And type. (*Cannot type.*) Well, you can't have everything. No, wait—let me think. What is Tara? Kind, gentle, strong, her mother has given her strength. And daddy? Silent? Angry? And—mummy. (*Breaks away from his thoughts.*) This isn't fair to Tara. She deserves something better. She never got a fair deal. Not even from nature. Neither of us did. Maybe God never wanted us to be separated. Destiny desires strange things. We were meant to die and our mortal remains preserved in formaldehyde for future generations to study. Our purpose in life was maybe that. Only that. But even God does not always get what he wants. Conflict is the crux of life. A duel to the death between God and nature on one side and on the other—the amazing Dr. Thakkar. (*Smiles.*) Yes. You will be pleased to know that I have found my beginning.

A television-show type signature tune fades in while the spot fades out.

Although Dan is interviewing Dr. Thakkar, he remains where he is, in darkness. The tune ends and a spot picks up Dr. Thakkar, seated as if being interviewed in a studio.

DAN (*mock-cheerful*): Good evening viewers, and welcome to another

edition of *Marvels in the World of Medicine*. We have with us this evening at our studio Dr. Umakant Thakkar who has been in the news lately for his outstanding work at the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital in Bombay. Dr. Thakkar has been associated with many major hospitals in the USA, most notably the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia. During his stay at the Queen Victoria Hospital, he was surgeon-in-chief to a most unique and complex surgery, the first of its kind in India. Dr. Thakkar, could you tell us what was so special about this surgery?

DR. THAKKAR: To start with, the patients were only a few months old and...

DAN: How old were they exactly?

DR. THAKKAR: Oh, three months.

DAN (*mock-surprised*): Three months? Was the surgery really necessary?

DR. THAKKAR: Yes, absolutely. Surgery was their only chance of survival. You see, they were twins, conjoined from the chest down.

DAN: Siamese twins?

DR. THAKKAR: Yes. That is the common term used for them.

DAN: Is it a rare phenomenon?

DR. THAKKAR: Twins as such are not so rare, the chances...

DAN: What about Siamese twins?

DR. THAKKAR: Conjoined twins are quite rare. I think one in every fifty thousand twin conceptions could have a probability of containing this defect.

DAN: How does it happen?

DR. THAKKAR: Sometimes - we don't know why - a fertilized egg, destined to separate and develop into two different embryos, fails to do so fully. The result is a conjoinment - in this case from the breastbone down through the pelvic area. It is indeed a miracle that they were born alive. Twins with a conjunction of such complexity are, in most cases, stillborn.

DAN: How many twins of this kind have actually survived through birth?

DR. THAKKAR: There are, I think, seven recorded cases in medical literature, but...

DAN: And how many are still alive?

DR. THAKKAR: In all cases, so far, one twin has always died by the age of four.

DAN: Dr. Thakkar, what is your opinion on the Patel twins? Will they survive?

DR. THAKKAR: You see, there is something even more remarkable about this case.

DAN: And what is that?

DR. THAKKAR: Conjoined twins-your Siamese twins - developing from one fertilized ovum are invariably of the same sex. Well, almost invariably. But here these two were obviously from different fertilized eggs.

DAN: So?

DR. THAKKAR: The twins are of different sexes. Very, very rare.

DAN: *(aside)* A freak among freaks. Now I know I'll be a really brilliant writer.

Spot fades out on Dr. Thakkar as we hear the explosive opening of Brahms' First Concerto.

The street area is lit. Tara enters the street. She mimes meeting someone and smiling, starting a conversation. After a while, she slowly lifts the leg of her trousers to reveal her artificial limb. She laughs in an ugly way. Then, she says goodbye and enters the living room as the lights cross-fade.

Chandan is lying on his back on the floor, listening to the music and conducting an imaginary orchestra in the heavens.

TARA: Oh, I hate those girls!

CHANDAN *(waving his hands to the music)*: What? Made friends already?

TARA: You must be joking. *(Listens to the music.)* Oh! I love this part.

CHANDAN: How was physio?

TARA: Nice doctor. Rotten nurse. Not like Bangalore.

CHANDAN (*jovially*): Doctors. Nurses. A painful necessity in our lives.

(*Referring to the music.*) Now comes the best part.

TARA: Mind you, some of the doctors aren't so painful to look at. This one's called Dr. Gokhale. He's handsome in a '*ghati*' sort of way. I love Maharashtrians!

CHANDAN: In London you swore you were going to marry that Irish doctor, what's-his-name. And we were only twelve then.

TARA: That was London. This is Bombay. One learns to love the natives. I know.

CHANDAN: How can you know at twelve? How can you know at sixteen?

TARA: We women mature fast. Speaking of maturity, you better not skip any physiotherapy sessions. Daddy wants you to be big and sturdy. He will find out from the hospital and . . . This music is so . . . I don't know.

CHANDAN: It has passion.

TARA: Yes. Beethoven must have been a passionate man.

CHANDAN: Brahms.

TARA: Yes, and . . . what?

CHANDAN: Brahms. Not Beethoven. Brahms' First Concerto.

TARA: Are you sure?

CHANDAN: Of course. His very first.

TARA: Stop it. Turn it off. I thought that was Beethoven.

CHANDAN (*stops the music*): You've heard this so often.

TARA: Yes. But I always thought it was Beethoven.

CHANDAN: Well, they do sound similar. But this one is unmistakably Brahms. It has his quality of high tragedy and romance—of youth bursting forth in the world with all its claims. A spring-like freshness...

TARA: Do me a favour. When you become a writer, stay away from poetry.

CHANDAN: It's written on the record cover.

TARA: You mean you can feel all that in the music?

CHANDAN (*thinks about it*): Well, his music is so... I don't know... *They both laugh.*

TARA: Where's mummy?

CHANDAN: In the kitchen, where else? Showing the new cook how to make your favourite dishes.

TARA: I think I'm going to like Bombay. It's all so new and different!

CHANDAN: We've been here before.

TARA: When? Oh, you mean . . .

CHANDAN: Yes. The surgery was done here. (*Tara giggles.*) What's so funny?

TARA: You could say that we were 'separated' when we were babies in Bombay.

CHANDAN: Separated? (*Understanding.*) Oh, right! And we find each other again in Bombay.

TARA (*mock-filmi style*): Bhaiya! (*Hugs him.*)

CHANDAN: Careful, we are in Bombay. You just called me a doodh-wala.

TARA: Oh, Chandu. What would I do without you?

CHANDAN: Tara, stop saying such things.

TARA (*slaps his back*): I'd probably have a ball, that's what I would do. Having both mummy and daddy dancing around me. 'Yes, Tara!' 'No, Tara!' 'Anything you say, Tara!'

CHANDAN: They do that now.

TARA: Well, mummy, yes. It's all right. I can take it. I'm a big girl now.

CHANDAN: No, it's not all right. You can't take it, you're still a little girl with a wild imagination

TARA: Women have an instinct for these things.

CHANDAN: Women, not girls.

TARA: It's innate! We are born with it!

CHANDAN (*easing off*): Okay, okay! I leave you with your instincts. The world of Brahms awaits me.

He leans over and plays it softly. They both listen to the music which has lost its effect since it is played softly this time. Pause.

TARA: You know who I met? The ugliest girls in the whole world. Prema and Nalini. They live in the building opposite. They had a friend with them. Equally ugly. They were all running across the street, laughing their ugly heads off over something. When they saw me get off the car, they stopped. They stopped running and they stopped laughing. And they waited, watching me get off and walk across the footpath towards them. Embarrassing me, making me go slower than I would. When I reached them, they grinned. Nalini whispered something to her ugly friend. I knew what was coming. Might as well play along, I thought. I smiled and introduced myself. We exchanged names. Nalini and Prema. The other one just tittered. I smile to her as well. Then I showed it to them. The duckling couldn't believe her eyes. She stared at my leg. She felt it and knocked on it. Silly as well as ugly, I thought. 'The very best from Jaipur,' I said. 'We get them in pairs. My twin brother wears the other one.'

CHANDAN (*laughs*): You didn't.

TARA: Then they ran off. Pleased with themselves, laughing even harder. Their day was made. One of these days I'm going to tell them exactly how frightful they look.

CHANDAN: Maybe they already know.

TARA: Still, it would be nice to see their reaction. Oh, play the music real loud. Beethoven was never as good as this.

Chandan turns up the volume.

With the next phrase of music, Roopa is seen at the street as she hesitantly walks towards the Patels' house. She enters and stands near the door, not knowing what to do.

Chandan notices her first. He stops the music.

TARA: Why did you do that? I was just enjoying . . .

CHANDAN: Hello.

TARA (*turns around*): Oh, hello.

ROOPA: Hello.

TARA: Won't you come in? We were just talking about you.

ROOPA (*gushing*): Oh, really? We've only just met!

TARA: Yes. I was just telling Chandu about how you were admiring my leg.

ROOPA: Oh that! I'm sorry, I hope you didn't mind.

TARA: Mind? Why should I mind?

ROOPA: Oh it's just that . . . I thought you might feel . . . you know.

TARA: Hurt? Embarrassed? Not at all. You can say it sort of 'runs' in the family—this leg. Chandu—show her yours.

Chandu proudly shows his Jaipur leg to her.

ROOPA: Oh, wow! I can't believe it. Both of you! I don't get it. How? When?

TARA: We don't get it either. And we didn't get your name.

ROOPA: Oh. Didn't I tell you? Nalini and Prema didn't give me half a chance. You know, those two love to gas about. If I were you, I would stay away from them. They'll talk behind your back and all that. Real

bitches. They'll think of all kinds of names to call you. That Bugs Bunny and that drumstick. Some people are like that. You know.

TARA: Yes. I know. I still haven't got your name.

ROOPA: Oh—oh. I'm Roopa. Hi, you're Tara, I know and . . .

TARA: This is Chandan.

CHANDAN: Hi.

ROOPA: Hi. And you're twins? Funny, you don't resemble each other.

CHANDAN: Not all twins are peas in pods.

ROOPA (*not understanding*): Huh?

CHANDAN: Two peas in a pod. That's something we aren't.

ROOPA: Uh, yes. Yes. Very funny.

CHANDAN: Is it? I didn't think so.

ROOPA: You know—two peas in a pot. Isn't that funny?

TARA (*observes she hasn't understood*): Oh, yes, of course. (*Nudges Chandan.*) Very funny. Two peas in a (*distinctly*) pot.

CHANDAN (*catching on*): Yes. Very funny.

Roopa and Chandan laugh.

TARA (*laughs as well*): Hysterical.

Tara and Chandan burst into genuine laughter. Roopa realizes that things aren't quite as lucid as they seem. She stops laughing.

ROOPA: Well, I didn't think it was that funny.

CHANDAN (*controlling his laughter*): Excuse me. (*Gets up.*) I think I must write something down.

He moves towards his room. He can't control himself any longer and bursts out laughing. He exits muttering 'Two peas in a pot!'

ROOPA (*visibly annoyed*): Well!

TARA: Oh, don't mind. It's just some silly family joke.

ROOPA: Very silly, if you ask me.

TARA: Yes. Yes. So, tell me about yourself. Which standard are you in?

ROOPA: I've finished my ninth. And you?

TARA: We've just completed our tenth. The results aren't out yet.

ROOPA: Where are you from?

TARA: Bangalore.

ROOPA: Oh really? We're Kannadigas too. My mum's from Bangalore.

TARA: Which part?

ROOPA (*a little crushed*): Well, Tumkur really. But I was born here.

TARA: My mother is from Bangalore. My dad's Gujarati.

ROOPA: Oh, an inter-caste marriage! Was it a love marriage? Tell. Tell.

TARA: Yes. My father had to leave his parents because of the marriage, if you really want to know.

ROOPA: No! I didn't mean to be nosy or anything! But don't stop now.

TARA: There's nothing much to tell. My grandfather, my mother's father, was a very influential person. But my dad didn't take any help from him. Today my dad is the general manager of Indo-Swede Pharmacia, the biggest pharmaceutical company in the country. Heard of it?

ROOPA: Yes. I love their cough syrup!

TARA: He will soon be one of the directors.

ROOPA: Oh, that's great. So, you're going to do your plus two here in Bombay.

TARA (*pause*): Well, I don't know.

ROOPA: What d'you mean? Aren't you going to live here?

TARA: Yes. But I will soon be going in for surgery.

ROOPA: Oh, how sad! On your leg?

TARA: No. A kidney transplant.

ROOPA: Gosh!

TARA: We knew it was going to happen. I was prepared.

ROOPA: And your brother? Will he also...?

TARA: Oh, no. He's fine. Thank God for that.

ROOPA: Don't you need someone to - you know - give you a kidney?

TARA: A donor. Yes. I've got one.

ROOPA: Your brother?

TARA: No.

ROOPA: Your dad?

TARA: No.

ROOPA: Then your...?

BHARATI (*enters*): Tara, I hope you'll like Chinese for dinner. Ida says chowmein is her speciality. Oh, how I miss Gopi. Maybe I should call Vadivu Akka and ask her to send him after all. Hello! I see you've made friends already.

ROOPA (*grins and speaks in her best Kannada*): Hello aunty. *Hegiddira?*

BHARATI: Oh, we have a Kannadiga for a neighbour in Bombay. How refreshing! Especially since we had all those Gujarati neighbours in Bangalore.

ROOPA: Oh, we have them here too.

Pause, while Bharati beams and observes Roopa.

BHARATI: Sit down, er....?

TARA: Roopa.

BHARATI: Roopa. (*Pause.*) I-I mustn't interrupt you two from . . . Tara, what's Chandan up to?

TARA: I think he's writing.

BHARATI: That boy! Let me see if he needs anything. (*Exits to Chandan's room.*)

ROOPA: I think I better get going.

TARA: Well, I'll see you later. If you need my old notes or textbooks or anything, just ask.

ROOPA: Right. And remember to stay away from that Prema and Nalini.

They will be nasty to you.

TARA: That's okay. I can handle them.

ROOPA: That's what you think. Besides, they are not really our standard, you know. Their English isn't that good. They won't understand your jokes like peas in pots and all that.

TARA (*smiling*): Well, we'll teach them.

ROOPA: You will be wasting your time on them. They are, you know, (*crinkles her nose in disgust*) *wandh tarah*.

TARA: *One tarah?*

ROOPA: Odd types. Don't you know Kannada?

TARA (*understanding*): Oh! *Wandu tarah!* (*Meaningfully.*) Yes, I know what you mean.

ROOPA: Well fore-warned is fore-armed. So. Take care. Bye.

BHARATI (*enters*): Tara! You haven't finished unpacking. The green suitcase is still lying there.

TARA: It's got all my old things. I don't . . .

BHARATI: Do it now!

Tara moves to her room.

TARA: That will take the whole day! Okay, bye, Roopa. Come any time.

ROOPA: Bye!

Tara exits. There is an awkward moment of silence between Bharati and Roopa.

ROOPA: Well, *bartheeni*, aunty.

BHARATI: No. No. Stay for a while. Please.

ROOPA: No. You must be having a lot of work to do.

BHARATI: Sit down.

ROOPA (*grinning in embarrassed manner*): No. It's okay.

BHARATI (*with an element of sternness*): Sit down.

ROOPA (*laughs uncomfortably*): If you say so. (*Sits.*)

BHARATI: Tara is a very nice girl.

ROOPA (*stunned at first, then*): Yes! An extremely nice girl.

BHARATI: Good. I'm glad you think so.

ROOPA (*nervously*): Yes.

BHARATI: And you will be her friend?

ROOPA: Yes. Yes! Certainly, Such a nice girl.

BHARATI: She . . . she must make more friends. Chandan is all right - he has his writing, but she . . . He is different, he is sort of self- contained, but Tara . . . She can be very good company and she has her talents. She can be very witty and of course she is intelligent. I have seen to it that she more than makes up in some ways for what she . . . doesn't have.

ROOPA (*nods violently*): Oh, yes! That she does.

BHARATI: You will be her friend?

ROOPA (*hesitantly*): Well, yes. If you say so.

BHARATI: You will be her best friend?

ROOPA (*now playing hard to get*): Well, I don't know. Nalini and Prema are my best friends.

BHARATI: If you promise to be her best friend—what I mean is if you would like to be her friend—I will be most grateful to you and I will show it . . . in whatever way you want me to.

ROOPA: I don't think I . . . understand.

Pause.

BHARATI (*suddenly*): Do you have a VCR at home?

ROOPA (*puzzled*): Yes?

BHARATI (*disappointed*): Oh. And you see a lot of films?

ROOPA: Not a lot. My mother only allows me to watch a movie on Sunday afternoons.

BHARATI: So, there must be a lot of films you are dying to see.

ROOPA: Yes. Plenty.

BHARATI: You can see them here any time you want to. No restrictions.

ROOPA (*guardedly*): I don't know what my mother would say.

BHARATI: How will she know?

ROOPA (*thinks about it, then*): Can I watch *Fatal Attraction*?

BHARATI (*sharply*): You can watch whatever you want! (*More subdued.*) Just be my Tara's friend.

ROOPA: Yes. May I go now?

BHARATI: Yes. First promise me that you will be her friend.

ROOPA: I don't know. Can I think about it?

BHARATI (*hissing*): Promise me now!

ROOPA: Look. I—I will come back later. Okay?

BHARATI (*recovering*): Yes. Of course. I'm sorry I didn't mean to . . . force anything on you.

ROOPA (*backing towards the door*): It's okay. I understand. I will come again.

BHARATI: Yes. Please! Do come!

ROOPA: I will. Bye.

She scoots down to the street. Spotlight on the street and on Bharati in the living room.

ROOPA (*calling to her friends urgently*): Prema! Premaa! Come quick! Where's Nalini? Never mind, you come here! My God! Oh, my God! Guess what? I went to her house! Yes. Right inside! I met everyone there. She is a real freak of nature all right, but wait till you see her mother! Oh God! I can't tell you—she is *really wandh tarah*. Oh God! I'll never go there again.

Spotlight off on the street and Bharati. Cross-fade to Dr. Thakkar who is still in the middle of his interview.

DR. THAKKAR. The parents were warned of the odds against survival. They were, understandably, totally disheartened in the beginning. But, soon, even the remotest chance for survival was received with hope once they were made aware of the facilities offered by modern technology. I had a conference with the resident doctors at the Victoria Hospital. A very efficient and competent team of doctors. I was shown the test reports, X-rays, scan results from the Bangalore Hospital. There were many points to be reconfirmed and further observations were necessary before any decision on surgery could be taken. The twins were flown in from Bangalore and were moved immediately to the intensive care unit for observation and tests. It was two weeks of exhaustive work. The results were encouraging.

The twins did not share any vital organ. There were two hearts clearly indicated by two electrocardiograms. There were two livers, although joined. Each twin would have one kidney—all this meant that there was a very strong possibility of both twins surviving. What we needed to know more about was the pelvic region and the extent of conjoinment there . . .

Lights cross-fade to Patel on the phone. Bharati is tense and listens to him intently.

PATEL: Yes, Dr. Kapoor. I am happy to hear that . . . Indeed, she is a very lucky girl . . . Yes. As soon as possible. Well, after what she has been through so far . . . Anyway, she will be glad she won't have to go for her dialysis after the surgery. Don't worry, doctor, she is a very high-spirited girl. Knowing her, she will probably joke about it. And her brother gives her enough moral support. Yes, I will call you tomorrow. Thank you, doctor. Thank you. *(Hangs up.)*

BHARATI *(excitedly)*: So? Everything is all right? We are compatible? I think God wanted it this way . . .

PATEL *(quietly)*: Bharati. You cannot give her your kidney.

BHARATI: But just now—on the phone—you were making preparations.

PATEL: Tara is very lucky. She has found another donor.

BHARATI: A commercial donor?

PATEL: Yes.

BHARATI: Why? What is wrong if . . . Why can't she have mine?

PATEL: You can't, that's all.

BHARATI: You won't let me! I am going to call Dr. Kapoor right away and tell him to make the . . .

PATEL: It's no use, Bharati.

BHARATI: You can't stop me from doing what I want! (*Dialing.*) 6438...

PATEL: Bharati, put down that phone!

BHARATI: How dare you run my life!

PATEL: Oh, for God's sake! You are getting out of hand!

BHARATI: Oh, God! What's his number? 64 . . .

PATEL: Bharati, calm down.

BHARATI: His number! (*Hysterically.*) Give me his phone number!

PATEL: I will not.

BHARATI: Very well. I will look it up in the . . .

PATEL: You don't even know his full name.

BHARATI: I—I can call . . .

PATEL: Who? Bharati, stop pretending. You are in no condition to be taking major decisions.

BHARATI (*quietens down*): Give me his number.

PATEL: I can give you his number. But I will not let you donate your kidney to her.

BHARATI (*crying*): The tests showed that I could do it. There . . . there is nothing wrong in it.

PATEL: Yes. It is wrong. Now that we have a donor, I will not let you do it.

BHARATI: Think of the expenses involved.

PATEL: When have expenses ever bothered you? Your father's wealth has always been your strength against me. Don't talk about expenses to me!

BHARATI (*pleadingly*): Why won't you let me do it?

PATEL (*controlling*): Because . . . need I tell you? Because I do not want you to have the satisfaction of doing it.

BHARATI: I will do it!

PATEL: You will have to obey me. It's my turn now.

BHARATI: I want to give her a part of me!

PATEL (*holds her roughly*): Now listen! You need help. I'm going to arrange for a doctor to examine you thoroughly.

BHARATI: I am fine. I don't need a doctor. My blood pressure is under control and...

PATEL: I mean a psychiatrist.

BHARATI: I don't need one!

PATEL: It can't do you any harm.

BHARATI: I tell you I don't need one! You . . . you are wasting your time. Think about Tara and Chandan.

PATEL: I am thinking about them. That's why I need to make you more stable.

BHARATI (*calms down*): Look, don't worry about me. I am perfectly all right.

PATEL: I cannot handle your moods any longer. Have you looked at yourself recently? Look at the way you behave; the way you react to...

BHARATI: I promise to control myself in future. Just . . .

PATEL: I know you want to, but can you?

BHARATI: Just... just let me do what I want to.

PATEL: Anything but allow you to . . .

BHARATI: Who are you to stop me? Just who do you think you are?

PATEL: Sit down, Bharati.

BHARATI: This is no way to treat me.

PATEL (*pushes her down*): Sit down. Now listen. I am going to fix an appointment for you and you are going to see that doctor.

BHARATI: I don't want to. I don't need to!

PATEL: You will. I demand it from you.

BHARATI: All right! You want me to be all right? Yes, I will do it.

PATEL: Good. I will call him right now.

BHARATI: I will tell her.

Patel stops.

I will tell them everything.

Patel goes to her and slaps her. The moment she recovers, Bharati looks at him with some triumph.

PATEL: You wouldn't dare tell them. Not you. Please, don't! Not yet!

BHARATI: Then let me do what I want to do.

PATEL (*defeated*): You cannot tell them. For their sake, don't! (*Looks at her suddenly with determination.*) If at all they must know, it will be from me. Not from you.

Cross-fade to Dan who is busy typing. He stops and reads out his last line.

DAN: 'If at all they must know, it will be from me. Not from you.'

Dan continues to type as the lights cross-fade to the living room. Roopa, Tara and Chandan are watching a movie. Bharati is knitting as the movie ends.

ROOPA: Oh, that was wonderful! Wasn't it? I love surprise endings.

CHANDAN: It was very predictable.

TARA: I didn't think so. I feel sorry for that woman.

ROOPA: What a nice title! *The Mirror Cracked*. Very dramatic.

TARA: Imagine not being able to have children because somebody gave her German measles when she was pregnant.

ROOPA: How does the poem go?

CHANDAN: 'The curse has come upon me! Cried the Lady of Shallot.'

ROOPA: I feel sorry for the Lady of Shallot. Locked up. Not being able to see the world, you know. Just sitting and weaving a tapestry or something. And having a cracked mirror.

TARA: The mirror cracks later.

ROOPA: But still. Seven years' bad luck and all that.

BHARATI: More coffee for you Roopa? (*Picks up their mugs.*)

ROOPA: No, thank you, aunty. (*To Chandan.*) Your mother's coffee is really something.

Bharati exits to the kitchen.

CHANDAN: Ida makes it.

ROOPA: Really? But it has that typical Southie flavour. I think it's the—you know—concoction.

CHANDAN: Concoction?

TARA: She means decoction.

ROOPA: Decoction—yes, of course! How silly of me. A concoction is something you have when you get hit on the head. Anyway, I'm glad I can have coffee here. My mother only gives me milk. (*To Tara.*) You would have had plenty of milk being a Patel and all that. (*Laughs as if she has made a joke.*)

TARA (*to Chandan*): Did you get that?

CHANDAN: No. Did she?

ROOPA: You mean you don't know about Patels?

TARA: Don't know what?

ROOPA: Oh, so you don't know!

CHANDAN: Unless you tell us what it is, how will we know whether we know?

ROOPA: It's probably not true. It's just an old saying. Prema told me when she came to know you were Patels. It's about milk.

Bharati enters.

TARA: What is?

ROOPA: They drown them in milk.

BHARATI (*tense*): Are you sure you wouldn't like another cup of coffee?

ROOPA (*in Kannada*): *Beda*, aunty, thanks.

TARA: They drown what in milk?

BHARATI: Well then, don't you think it's time you went home? Your mother might be worried.

ROOPA: Oh, I don't think she will be.

BHARATI: She might be concerned about how much video you are watching here.

ROOPA (*understanding*): Oh. Yes, I didn't think of that. Well, I'd better go home then.

TARA: I'll come out with you.

They both move to the door.

ROOPA (*to Bharati*): Well. Thanks for the coffee, aunty, and the movies.

BHARATI (*loaded*): Don't mention it!

ROOPA: Bye, Chandan. Let me read your story some time. I hope I'm in it.

CHANDAN: Don't worry. You are.

Tara and Roopa go out to the street. Bharati joins Chandan on the sofa.

BHARATI: Chandan, what's your story about?

CHANDAN: It's called 'The Ogler Next Door'.

BHARATI: It's . . . it's not about anything else?

CHANDAN: Like what?

TARA: Well, Roopa, what's all this about drowning them in milk?

ROOPA: Oh nothing. I don't think I will tell you.

TARA: Well, all right.

ROOPA: Aren't you dying to know?

BHARATI: I wish your father would pay more attention to Tara.

CHANDAN: He does. He doesn't like to show his affection.

BHARATI: Don't tell me about your father. He is more worried about your career than hers.

CHANDAN: That's because I'm more sure of what I want. She is just...playing it cool.

TARA: Yes, I am. But you don't have to tell me if you don't want to.

ROOPA: I don't want to!

TARA: Rubbish! You are dying to tell me.

BHARATI: It's time Tara decided what she wants to be. Women have to do that as well these days. She must have a career.

CHANDAN: She can do whatever she wants. Grandfather's trust will leave us both money, isn't it?

BHARATI: Yes. But she must have something to do! She can't be . . . aimless all her life.

CHANDAN: There is nothing aimless about Tara's life.

TARA: Go home! It's probably something you haven't fully understood yourself.

ROOPA: I beg your pardon! Don't think you are very smart.

TARA: Only in comparison.

BHARATI: It's all right while she is young. It's all very cute and comfortable when she makes witty remarks. But let her grow up. Yes, Chandan. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God!

CHANDAN: Mummy, Tara is my sister. Everything will be fine.

ROOPA: Since you insist, I will tell you. It may not be true. But this is what I have heard. The Patels in the old days were unhappy with getting girl babies—you know dowry and things like that—so they used to drown them in milk.

Pause.

TARA: In milk?

ROOPA: So when people asked about how the baby died, they could say that she choked while drinking her milk.

Pause,

TARA (*laughs suddenly*): How absurd!

ROOPA (*laughing*): Silly, isn't it?

TARA (*laughing*): Absolutely hilarious.

ROOPA: What a waste of milk!

TARA: Is that what mummy was trying to stop you from telling me?

BHARATI: Your father has a lot of plans for you.

CHANDAN: I have a lot of plans for me.

BHARATI: And Tara?

CHANDAN: I'll always be there if she needs my help. But I don't think she will.

BHARATI: She will. She doesn't know it but she will.

CHANDAN: Do you have plans for her?

BHARATI: Yes. I plan for her happiness. I mean to give her all the love

and affection which I can give. It's what she . . . deserves. Love can make up for a lot.

TARA: Mummy is so cute—sometimes.

ROOPA (*disagreeing*): Yes.

TARA: When we were young, I used to be quite a sick child.

ROOPA: What with all your problems.

TARA: And it was always I who got her attention and care.

ROOPA: That must have made Chandan quite jealous.

TARA: A little bit, I suppose. But he has always been so . . . He has never really asked for much. He is so happy with so little. I have always demanded more and more.

ROOPA: It pays sometimes to be the sickly one.

TARA: I really used to play hard to get. Sulking all the time. And when I smiled, it made everyone quite . . . relieved! As if . . . if I didn't smile I would just curl up and die! Mummy said my eyes really twinkled when I smiled.

ROOPA (*not happy at hearing such a cheerful story*): Twinkle Tara—that's really cute. And what about your father? Did he spoil you just as much?

TARA (*after a while*): I don't remember.

Spotlight fades out on Tara and Roopa.

CHANDAN: Is that a sweater you are knitting for Tara?

BHARATI: Yes.

CHANDAN: You've dropped a stitch.

Lights cross-fade to street. Roopa has gone. Tara talks to Patel as they come home.

TARA: Oh, nothing much, we've been watching movies the whole day.

PATEL: The whole day? And Chandan?

TARA: Him too.

PATEL: And your mother?

TARA: Well, you know how she is. You can't tell exactly what she is doing.

They enter. Both Bharati and Chandan are busy unravelling the knitting. Chandan is trying to keep the wool in order. Bharati is a bit more frantic.

PATEL: Hello.

CHANDAN: Hi, daddy.

PATEL: What are you two doing?

CHANDAN: Mummy's knitting and I'm helping her sort out her mistake.

PATEL: Let Tara do it.

CHANDAN: It's okay.

PATEL: Give it to her.

CHANDAN: Why?

BHARATI: It's all right, I'll manage. Leave it.

CHANDAN: I will just roll all this and . . .

PATEL: Chandan, leave that damn thing alone!

BHARATI (*frantically*): Go! Chandan, just go!

PATEL (*to Bharati*): How dare you do this to him?

CHANDAN: Wait a minute, daddy, she never asked me to do any . . .

PATEL: Can't you even look after the children?

CHANDAN: Look, daddy, it's . . .

PATEL: What did you do the whole day, huh? Watch video?

BHARATI: I can't think of things for them to do all the time!

PATEL: But you can think of turning him into a sissy—teaching him to knit!

CHANDAN: Daddy, that's unfair.

BHARATI: Chandan, please go to your room!

CHANDAN: All I'm doing is helping mummy to . . .

PATEL: I am disappointed in you. From now on you are coming to the office with me. I can't see you rotting at home!

CHANDAN: I don't want to go to the office!

PATEL: You will come with me to the office until your college starts.

CHANDAN: I don't want to go to college! (*Fighting his tears.*) Not without Tara! If she is going in for surgery, I'll miss a year too!

PATEL: You will not. I won't allow it.

CHANDAN: I will not go to college without Tara!

PATEL: That would make me very unhappy.

CHANDAN (*shouting*): Well, that's too bad! (*Backs to his room.*) That's just too bad! (*Exits.*)

BHARATI: Say it! Go on, say it—that it's all my fault! That I am turning the children against you.

Tara stands back, frightened.

PATEL: You are turning them against the whole world.

BHARATI: I am doing that?

PATEL: Yes! Look at the way you treat Tara. As if she is made of glass. You coddle her, you pet her, you spoil her. She's grown up feeling she doesn't need anyone but you!

BHARATI: What d'you want me to do? Just tell me in plain simple words what you want me to do and I'll do it!

PATEL: Let go. Just let go. And let me handle them.

BHARATI: All right. You stay at home then! You stay at home and watch what they can do and what they can't. You remind them of what they can't be. It's easy for you to talk about their future and your plans. But tell them what they should do now. This day, this hour, this minute. Tell them! I want to hear!

PATEL: Chandan is going to study further and he will go abroad for his higher studies.

BHARATI: And Tara?

PATEL: When have you ever allowed me to make any plans for her?

BHARATI: I'm stopping you from making plans for my daughter?

PATEL: Don't lie, Bharati! You don't want me to, and you know it. You have told me so a dozen times.

BHARATI: That's not true!

PATEL: You have to face it. You want her to believe you are the only one who loves her!

BHARATI: Why? Why would I want that?

PATEL (*quietly*): You don't want me to say it, do you? And you threaten me that you will tell them. But you won't. You can't. You don't know what you want.

BHARATI: Just leave me alone with my daughter.

PATEL: Is that what you want? To love her. You said your love will make up for a lot, didn't you?

BHARATI: Ask her! Ask her what she wants and give it to her!

PATEL: You know she loves you. You're sure of that. Don't make her choose between us, for God's sake! You're ruining her life because you are sick. I want to help you, Bharati, please allow me to help you.

BHARATI: I don't need your help.

PATEL: Look at you. Do you ever go out? No. Have you made any friends? We've been here for two months and you haven't even talked to anyone. You just sit here rotting.

BHARATI: I don't need anyone!

PATEL: Exactly! That's what I want from you. Don't make my children say that.

BHARATI: I'm not doing that! I've always made sure that Tara has had friends. I go out of my way to . . . Why that Roopa . . . she . . . she...

What you're saying just isn't true! You—you can't lie about me like that in front of my children. Now that they are at an impressionable age and might take your words very seriously.

PATEL: Oh! How deviously clever you are! I'm the liar and I'm the one who is feeding them with lies when they're at an impressionable age? I am the violent one and you are the 'victim' of my wrath. You don't go out because I don't let you. Go on, say it.

BHARATI: Stop it! Stop this madness and let me live in peace!

PATEL: How can I? Not now, when you are turning my own children against me.

BHARATI: You said it! (*Laughs.*) I knew you would say it! Say it again. I don't care—after all these lies you've said about me!

PATEL: Yes, call me a liar, a wife-beater, a child abuser. It's what you want me to be! And you. You want them to believe you love them very much.

BHARATI: Yes!

PATEL (*grabs Tara*): Look at her, Bharati. And tell her that you love her very much.

BHARATI: Tara knows it. Leave her alone!

TARA: Daddy . . .

PATEL: Tara, please believe me when I say that I love you very much and I have never in all my life loved you less or more than I have loved your brother. But your mother . . .

BHARATI (*hysterically*): Stop it! Don't fill her with nonsense about me.

PATEL: But your mother would like you to believe that it's not true. I love you. (*Looks at Bharati.*) We both do.

TARA: I never doubted it, daddy. I . . . I don't feel too . . . (*Slumps like a rag doll into Patel's arms.*)

PATEL: Oh God! Her insulin. No! Get the sugar!

BHARATI (*rooted to the spot*): She is dying! My Tara is dying!

PATEL (*shouts*): Get the sugar! (*Bharati doesn't move.*) Didn't you hear me? Get me some sugar before she . . .

He realizes he will have to do it himself and carries Tara to the kitchen. Bharati sits on the sofa and sobs. Spotlight on her.

The spotlight on Dan fades in as he unwinds the sheet on his typewriter.

DAN (*reads aloud*): 'Bharati sobs. Patel brings in the revived Tara. Patel picks up the phone and dials the hospital. The act ends with the explosive opening of Brahms' First Concerto.'

Dan stretches himself while the concerto plays. Slow fade out on Bharati.

ACT II

Spotlight on Bharati and Tara. Music. There is a certain beatitude in Bharati's demonstration of affection for Tara.

BHARATI: Tara! My beautiful baby! You are my most beautiful baby! I love you very much.

TARA (*enjoying this affection*): Yes, mummy. I know that.

BHARATI: I want you to remember that, Tara.

TARA: I will.

BHARATI: Everything will be all right. Now that I am giving you a part of me. Everything will be all right.

TARA: Do you really want to do that, mummy?

BHARATI: Very much.

TARA: Because you love me so much.

BHARATI: Yes. That's why. Don't worry. You will be fine. After the operation, we will all be happy together. And I will make up for . . . for . . . your father, and I will make up for all the things God hasn't given you.

TARA: I have plenty. I have you.

BHARATI: Yes. Thank you, Tara! Thank you.

Bharati is overwhelmed and they embrace. Cross-fade to Dan, who is looking at a book.

DAN: I was looking through this old scrap book. A present daddy gave me just before I left. It's got all our news cuttings. Dr. Thakkar is in the headlines. Then there are interviews with my mom and dad. And worst of all a hideous photograph of us. Before and after. I don't think the Elephant Man got so much publicity . . . Two tiny smaller-than-life babies, hugging each other. Only a closer look . . . Here's the one I'm looking for. 'Patel twins still twinkling. The Patel twins made medical history today by being the longest surviving pair of Siamese twins . . . Tara Patel, who underwent her seventh prosthesis and a kidney transplant in the same month, was smiling and jovial within hours of a complex surgery. "Surgery for us is like brushing our

teeth," joke the twins. Tara Patel, whose recovery was nothing less than a miracle, states that her source of strength was her mother, and of course, her brother and father. Mrs. Bharati Patel, however, was too indisposed to give an interview. A distraught Mr. Patel explained that this has been a trying time for her. For, in spite of the brave facade put up by her, Tara has far too many complications to be completely out of danger. However, the will to survive has proved to work more miracles than the greatest of science' . . . etc., etc. (*Thinks about it.*) Poor Tara. Even nature gave her a raw deal.

Cross-fade to Dr. Thakkar.

DR. THAKKAR. Complications were expected. Our team of doctors were aware of that. The pelvic region, as I had mentioned before, was a problem. There was only one bladder and it belonged to the boy. So did the rectum. We would have to have an artificial one made for the girl. Later on, when she grows up, we can fashion one from her intestinal tissues. And the boy's lungs aren't fully developed.

However, considering the magnitude of the work involved, this was a minor detail. The prognosis, on the whole, was favourable to both. Nature had done a near-complete job. Medical science could finish it for her. Theoretically, the separation was possible.

The second movement of Brahms' First Concerto starts. The lights come up on the street as Patel slowly walks in with Tara. The beauty of a special bond between parent and child is created by their movements, the lighting and the music. As they enter, their living room is flooded with light and Chandan and Roopa Spring from behind the sofa. They have modest bouquets with them. The music stops.

CHANDAN: Welcome back!

ROOPA: Welcome back, Tara!

They give her the flowers. She accepts grandly.

TARA: Thank you, good people. (*Imitates an Oscar winner.*) First of all, I would like to thank my agent. And those wonderful people, my mum and dad. And my wonderful brother (*hugs him*) without whose glorious presence this operation would never have been made.

ROOPA (*gleefully*): How true! How true!

TARA (*turns to Roopa*): And to my friend out there, Roopa. (*Waves the bouquet.*) I am winning this Oscar for you!

PATEL: Careful! I have an allergy to your Oscar!

ROOPA: As a special treat for you, I got *Children of a Lesser God*. I'll go get it.

PATEL: Oh, no, thanks. Video services have been terminated . . .

ROOPA and CHANDAN (*disappointed*): Oh!

PATEL: For the day.

CHANDAN: Oh, great! We'll watch something better tomorrow, like *Twins*.

TARA: Where's mummy? Still after Ida, I suppose, making something special for us.

PATEL (*gives Tara her bag*): Now take this to your room and wash up. You can chat with your friend later.

TARA: My, oh-my! You sound just like mummy! (*Goes towards her room.*) You men can imitate us so well if you want to. Pity we can't return the compliment. (*Exits.*)

PATEL: We'll tell her after she settles down.

ROOPA: Oh! You mean she doesn't know?

CHANDAN: We haven't told her yet.

ROOPA: Surely she must have asked for her.

CHANDAN: It happened while she was undergoing surgery.

PATEL: Roopa, I think it will be better if you left. Just for now. You are most welcome to come back later.

ROOPA: Oh, sure! If she needs my company, just give me a shout. Or send her over, I'll comfort her.

CHANDAN: Thanks.

ROOPA: Bye. (*To Patel.*) Bye-bye, uncle.

PATEL: Bye.

Roopa exits. Street lights. She scoots towards Prema's house.

ROOPA: Psst! Prema! Are you there?

TARA (*coming out*): Oh, this is terrific. Mummy doesn't even come to say hello.

PATEL: Tara.

Patel leads her to the sofa. She sits down. Spotlight on them. Their conversation and Tara's reactions are mimed over Roopa's speech.

ROOPA (*as if to Prema*). Yes. She is back. Can you believe it? They haven't told her about her mother yet. Well, they are telling her now.

Tara looks up at her father. A look of pain.

I tell you that whole family is crazy. And I always knew that mother of hers was bonkers. They say she had a nervous breakdown. I think she has finally gone completely loony. Stark naked mad.

Patel comforts Tara. Chandan sits beside her.

This is no surprise to me. I had told you she was really *wand tarah*.

Spotlight on Roopa fades out. The spotlight on Tara lingers just a little longer. The spotlight on Dr. Thakkar fades in.

DR. THAKKAR: It took us a further ten days just for planning. We couldn't afford to make any miscalculations. There would be separate teams for each twin. Two operation tables were to be joined together. When the separation was done, the tables would be pushed apart and each twin was to receive individual attention.

Cross-fade to the living room. Tara is seated, looking very depressed. Chandan is trying to cheer her up.

CHANDAN: And then this socialite lady at the physio tells me that she had worked with mobility-impaired children before. 'Mobility impaired?' I asked. She pointed to my leg and shrugged her shoulders. And you know what I said? (*No response*) Come on, take a guess! (*Taps her*) Go on, guess.

TARA (*irritated*): I don't want to guess,

CHANDAN: I said, 'Well, I haven't worked with brain cell impaired people, so I'm sorry, we cannot have a true cultural exchange.'

(Laughs)

Tara remains silent. Chandan shrugs his shoulders.

PATEL *(enters from the kitchen)*: Tara, what would you like for dinner? *(No response)* Will Kanchipuram idlis do? *(No response)* Tara! Ida is waiting.

CHANDAN: Knock, knock!

TARA *(suddenly acting cheerful)*: Right! Let's get the act going. Come on, Chandu, let's hear some more of your gags. I promise to laugh at all of them, even if I've heard them before. I promise to be cheerful all the time. I promise I will eat whatever Ida cooks for us, and I promise, I promise not, to mention mummy at all.

CHANDAN: You don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

TARA *(in tears)*: Very well. I don't want to go to college. I don't want to listen to your wisecracks. And I don't want to eat dinner. All I want is to stay with mummy at the hospital.

PATEL: No.

TARA: Why not?

Pause.

PATEL: There will be no more discussion on that. Now, I do hope you plan to go to physiotherapy tomorrow.

CHANDAN: If she isn't, I'm not going either.

TARA: It doesn't make any difference to me whether you go or not.

CHANDAN: Very well. *(Gets up and goes to her.)* We will both stay at home as usual. Watch video and turn into blobs of nothing. Or maybe the body-snatchers will invade this house and get our bodies.

TARA: They won't get much, will they?

PATEL *(to Chandan)*: You filled up your forms?

CHANDAN: Tara?

TARA: Of course not. There's no point in my going to college if I have to drop out halfway through or stay away for days not knowing when . . . No!

PATEL: I understand. (*Goes to Tara.*) But we have a problem here. Chandan refuses to join college without you.

TARA: Look, I'm not going to go to college for his sake. So tell him not to not go to college for my sake.

CHANDAN: Don't be ridiculous. I just don't feel like joining without you. I'm not doing anything for your sake.

TARA: Oh, for God's sake!

PATEL: You two are old enough to sort this out amongst yourselves. I won't interfere. But this is certain - Chandan has to join. I have plans for him. Your Praful uncle will help him get into a good university in England. I know he can get a scholarship on his own if he tries. But Praful will take care of the . . . special requirements for him. With a solid education you just can't fail. Not to say that Chandan will have to work for a living. Your grandfather has left all his wealth to you. Since your mother was his only child, you and Tara inherit their home in Bangalore.

CHANDAN: That huge house. It gave me the creeps, I remember.

PATEL: He left you a lot of money.

CHANDAN: And Tara?

PATEL: Nothing.

CHANDAN: Why?

PATEL: It was his money. He could do what he wanted with it.

TARA: And the house? Are we going to live there later on?

Pause.

PATEL: Do me a favour. Both of you. Don't ever go there. Just lock it up. Or better still, burn the whole place down! (*Exits to his bedroom.*)

CHANDAN: Poor daddy.

TARA: Chandu. Why?

CHANDAN: He must have had some misunderstanding . . .

TARA: No. I mean, why don't you join college?

CHANDAN: Without you?

TARA: Yes!

CHANDAN (*gets up*): Goodnight.

TARA: You're scared. You're scared you'll find out you can't do very much on your own!

CHANDAN: Nice try.

TARA: Oh, you can't hide behind your jokes all the time! Face it. You're a coward.

CHANDAN (*angrily*): Well, I'm sorry. Not everyone has your strength!

TARA: You are *afraid*. Afraid of meeting new people. People who don't know you. Who won't know how clever you are. You are afraid they won't see beyond your...

CHANDAN: That's not true . . .

TARA: Who do you know in this city? Except that silly Roopa?

CHANDAN: Who do you know?

TARA: I don't. It's all the same. You. Me. There's no difference.

CHANDAN: No difference between you and me?

TARA: No! Why should there be?

CHANDAN: That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me.

TARA: I'm scared as hell too! I wish I was back with our schoolmates. It took me years to show them how stupid they were!

CHANDAN: So we'll start all over again in college! You will join!

TARA (*laughs*): Bastard!

CHANDAN: Vulgar girl! Calling yourself names!

They both laugh. Chandan moves towards the main door.

TARA: Where are you going?

CHANDAN: Come!

TARA: You're going out?

CHANDAN (*goes to her and takes her hand in his*): For some fresh air.

He takes her out on the street. The lights cross-fade.

TARA: You might get an infection. Wear a muffler. (*He leads her down the street.*) At least take your bronchodilator.

CHANDAN: If I need it, you can run and get it for me.

TARA: Very funny.

They stop, facing the audience. Spotlight on them.

CHANDAN: The oglers are all asleep. Nalini, Roopa, Prema.

TARA: Oh, quite a clear sky. No moon, no . . .

CHANDAN: No shooting stars to make wishes on!

TARA: How true. Oh, I wish there was one!

CHANDAN: Make your wish anyway.

TARA: What would you wish for?

CHANDAN: Oh, I would wish for the stars! And you?

Music: Chopin's Prelude No. 2 in A minor.

TARA: Me?

CHANDAN: Yes.

Pause.

TARA: I would wish for both . . . I would wish for two of them.

CHANDAN: Two Jaipur legs?

TARA: No, silly, the real ones.

Pause.

CHANDAN: Tara?

TARA: Yes?

CHANDAN: Don't cry.

Pause.

TARA: I miss mummy so much.

They stand with their arms interlocked while the spotlight slowly fades out. The music carries on, while the spotlight comes on Dan.

DAN (*making notes*): Chopin's Prelude No. 2 in A minor. If possible Dinu Lipatti's version. (*To audience.*) People who know they are dying have such a deep understanding of life. And a sense of attachment to it.

Music stops. Cross-fade to Dr. Thakkar.

DR. THAKKAR: The separation itself was quite complicated. The pelvis had to be fractured in several places to facilitate separation. Cutting the two livers apart was an extremely delicate job. We had to be careful not to damage the bile ducts. We had had about six rehearsals with dummies to make sure that every detail was considered. In terms of the physical movements of the surgeons during the operation as well as surgical procedure.

Cross-fade to Chandan listening to music. Roopa is at the door. She steps in very slowly, watching Chandan lost in the music. She has a video cassette with her. She sneaks up behind him.

ROOPA: Boo!

CHANDAN (*looks up at her in mock-horror*): Aaagh! The ogler has come to get me! Help!

ROOPA (*annoyed*): Very funny!

Chandan turns down the music.

It's okay. Listen to your music. I'll go if you don't want me around. (*Pause.*) But since you are all alone, I'll stay and keep you company.

CHANDAN: Where would we be without you?

ROOPA: I'm glad you appreciate my coming here. Nalini and Prema always crib that I spend less time with them now.

CHANDAN: How heartless of you.

ROOPA: Anyway, who cares? I've got a lovely film we can watch. Don't

worry. It's not *Fatal Attraction* or anything like that. It's one of those class films with Meryl Streep.

CHANDAN: *She-Devil?*

ROOPA: No, one of her older ones. *Sophie's Choice*. Have you seen it?

CHANDAN: Yes.

ROOPA (*disappointed*): Oh! You don't mind seeing it again?

CHANDAN: I do.

ROOPA: Oh. Well, tell me what it's about.

CHANDAN: I can't remember.

ROOPA (*brightening*): Then shall we see it? Just to jog your memory?

CHANDAN: No, I think I remember. It's about this Polish immigrant.

ROOPA: Sophie.

CHANDA: Yes.

ROOPA: And?

CHANDAN: That's it.

ROOPA: Well, what's her choice?

CHANDAN: She didn't have a choice, you see.

ROOPA: Oh. Then why is it called *Sophie's Choice*?

CHANDAN: It sounds better than *Sophie Had No Choice*.

ROOPA: Yes, I see what you mean. But what was the choice she didn't have?

CHANDAN (*thinks about it*): Actually, she did have a choice. (*Suddenly.*) What would you do if you had to choose between a boy and a girl? Who would you choose?

ROOPA: A boy definitely!

CHANDAN: Definitely?

ROOPA: Yes. It's bad enough studying in an all-girls' school. I would

definitely want a boyfriend.

CHANDAN: No, No. I didn't mean that!

ROOPA: Then what did you mean?

CHANDAN: I meant a son and a daughter.

ROOPA: Oh, boy child and girl child. Say that!

CHANDAN: What would your choice be?

ROOPA: Mmm . . . I would be happy with either one.

CHANDAN: That's not the point. In the film, I mean. The Nazis will only allow her to keep one child. The other one would be taken away to a concentration camp or something.

ROOPA: How nasty of the Nazis!

CHANDAN: Would you send your girl child to the concentration camp?

ROOPA: Definitely not! I think it's more civilized to drown her in milk, if you ask me. Anyway, there's plenty of time to think about all that. I'm only fifteen, you know. For now, I would settle for a boyfriend. Chandan, do you have any girlfriends?

CHANDAN: No.

ROOPA: Would you want one?

CHANDAN: I don't know. What will I do with one?

ROOPA: I don't believe this! Didn't you go to a co-ed school in Bangalore?

CHANDAN: Yes.

ROOPA: Well, wasn't there any one girl you were close to? Someone whom you shared homework with? Or someone you sat next to in class?

CHANDAN: Yes.

ROOPA: Yes, you did?

CHANDAN: Of course, Tara!

ROOPA: She doesn't count.

CHANDAN: What did you say?

ROOPA: I said she doesn't count. She is your sister. What I mean is she doesn't count in this department.

CHANDAN: I understand.

ROOPA: For a minute I was wondering . . . *(Pause.)* Where is she?

CHANDAN: She has gone for her physiotherapy.

ROOPA: What about you? Don't you need to go as well?

CHANDAN: I do. But I don't.

ROOPA: Why?

CHANDAN: I just don't, that's all *(Pause.)* Hospitals depress me. *(Goes to the music system.)*

ROOPA: I know what you mean. My cousin Saraswati had her appendix removed. I had to spend the night with her at the hospital, you know. Her mum was tired and that's the least I could do. God! The smells! The chloroform and D.D.T. and what not. I just threw up. Poor Saraswati, she had to help me go to the bathroom. After that, I swore I will never go to a hospital.

Chandan inserts a cassette and plays it.

How's your mother?

Chopin's Prelude No. 25 Opus 45 in A flat plays halfway through.

When is she coming back? *(No reply.)* Is she going to be all right?

CHANDAN *(vaguely)*: I hate hospitals. The smells. The people. The sterility.

He lies on the ground or on a gadda near the music system. He is soon engrossed in the music. Roopa slowly comes to him and lies down or sits beside him. She slyly looks at him. He feels her presence. He looks at her. She pretends to be with the music. He cannot ignore her now. He slowly puts his hand on her shoulder. She freezes. He very awkwardly moves his hand till it is almost on her breast. The music ends.

ROOPA (*rises immediately*): Aagh! Stay away from me! Stay away from me, you horrible thing!

CHANDAN: You led me on!

ROOPA: How dare you say that!

Tara enters in the street.

CHANDAN (*fighting tears*): You were leading me on all the time!

ROOPA: You actually believe that I would want you to . . . You have some hopes!

CHANDAN: You are a cheat! A fraud!

Tara is at the door.

ROOPA (*tearfully*): Oh, Tara! You've come just in time!

CHANDAN: Tara, don't listen to anything she . . .

ROOPA: Oh, my God! How can I even begin to . . .?

CHANDAN: Shut up!

ROOPA: Your brother is a real . . . a real monster!

CHANDAN: Stop cooking up lies!

ROOPA: He . . . he . . . Why he practically raped me! He's a raper.

TARA: Rapist.

CHANDAN: Don't listen to her. She's lying!

ROOPA: How dare you call me a liar!

CHANDAN: How dare you call me a rapist!

ROOPA: You are. You . . . you creepy thing!

CHANDAN: Get lost! You wanted me to do it!

ROOPA: What rubbish! I only wanted to keep you company but you took advantage—you . . . you . . . (*At a loss.*) Oh! All men are like that.

TARA: Like what?

ROOPA: Like that! You know—after one thing.

CHANDAN: I wasn't after one thing.

ROOPA: Well, I'm sorry. I'm just not that type. And personally, I don't think we are—you know—compatible. If you get what I mean.

CHANDAN: You're right we aren't . . . compatible.

ROOPA: And if you really want someone who is—you should meet Freni Narangiwalla. I think you will get along fine. She is mentally retarded!

Pause.

TARA: You are right. They would be quite . . . compatible.

Chandan, who has been suppressing his laughter, giggles a little. Roopa looks at him, then at Tara. Tara giggles. Chandan bursts out laughing.

Tara laughs too. Roopa thinks it is another joke she has missed. She shifts uncomfortably.

ROOPA: Well, I better get going.

TARA: No, stay. Keep us company.

CHANDAN: Yes. Please stay.

ROOPA: Well, if you need me, how can I say no?

TARA: Sit down.

ROOPA *(sits down)*: What shall we do? See a movie? *(To Tara.)* I've got this great cassette . . .

TARA: No. Let me tell you a story, about my friend Deepa.

ROOPA: Deepa?

TARA: My classmate in school.

CHANDAN *(to Roopa)*: Standard VIII. Her best friend.

TARA (*with a harshness she has not shown before*): Not in the beginning, she wasn't. Used to sit next to me in class because Mrs. Ramanathan, our science teacher, told her to. Never talked to me. Until Ratbag—Mrs. Ramanathan—paired us off for some stupid project. Wanted us to make a model of the solar system or something as our homework. I decided I would rather go over to her house than call her home. She didn't like the idea, but Ratbag decided for us. So, Deepa had to take me home with her. We sat on her bed, making our model with rubber balls and wires. Her bed felt different somehow. I put my hand under the cover, and guess what?

ROOPA: What?

TARA: There was a rubber sheet underneath! Imagine. Thirteen years old and she was wetting her bed. I laughed. I laughed out loud. She went red.

ROOPA: And she became your best friend?

TARA: I never told anyone at school. But she knew I could easily have done so—at the slightest provocation. I soon had her doing all my homework.

ROOPA (*uneasily*): I don't think that's . . . why are you telling me this.

TARA (*looks at her*): It's good to know what hurts other people.

ROOPA (*laughs nervously*): I suppose so.

TARA: Comes in handy.

ROOPA: Well—yes.

TARA: Knowing their secrets is useful.

ROOPA: I suppose so.

Pause.

TARA: So how does it feel having one tit smaller than the other?

Roopa is stunned. She rises, her mouth open.

Don't worry—it's not very noticeable, except from a certain angle. Then it's very noticeable.

ROOPA: How dare you! You one-legged thing!

TARA: I'd sooner be one-eyed, one-armed and one-legged than be an imbecile like you. An imbecile with uneven tits.

ROOPA: And to think I pitied you! Oh! I think you are disgusting! I only come here because your mother asked me to. No, she didn't ask me, she bribed me to be your best friend. Yes, your loony mother used to give me things. Charlie bottles, lipsticks, magazines. Now that she's finally gone crazy, I guess she won't be giving me much. So goodbye. (*Exits.*)

TARA (*shouts after her*): Get lost! And please ask Nalini and Prema to come here. I have something to say to them—about you! Oh, wait till they hear this! They will love it. They are going to look at your tits the same way they looked at my leg! Let me see how you can face them ogling at you! You won't be able to come out of your house, you horrible creature! You are ugly and I don't want ugly people in my house! So get lost! (*Moves to the sofa, gasping.*)

Pause.

CHANDAN: They are not the ugly ones. We are. Horrible one-legged creatures.

TARA (*angrily*): Yes, but you don't have to say it!

CHANDAN (*moves to her*): I'm sorry. You mustn't mind very much.

TARA: What?

CHANDAN: Being one-legged.

TARA: What makes you think I mind?

CHANDAN (*softly*): I feel your pain.

TARA: Yes, I do mind. I mind very much.

Cross-fade to Dr. Thakkar.

DR. THAKKAR: That's a very interesting question. You see, due to the complex conjoinment at the pelvis, it is very difficult to say how their reproductive organs will develop. A lot depends on the hormone levels their bodies will be able to produce. Imbalances are highly

probable. But enough research has been made on the subject. With the necessary supplements it isn't unreasonable to expect them to have a fairly normal growth otherwise. Of course, it would be impossible for either of them to be able to reproduce. They are completely sterile.

Cross-fade to Tara and Chandan.

TARA: Oh, what a waste! A waste of money. Why spend all the money to keep me alive? It cannot matter whether I live or die. There are thousands of poor sick people on the roads who could be given care and attention, and I think I know what I will make of myself. I will be a carer for those people. I . . . I will spend the rest of my life feeding and clothing those . . . starving naked millions everyone is talking about. Maybe I can start an institution that will . . . do all that. Or I could join Mother Teresa and sacrifice myself to a great cause. That may give . . . purpose to my . . . existence. I can do it. I can do it, can't I? I will be very happy if I could, because that is really what I want. That is really . . . *(With emotion.)* Oh, bullshit! I don't care! I don't care for anyone except mummy!

Pause.

CHANDAN: It's somehow wrong.

TARA: I don't care!

CHANDAN: You should. You should care . . . for people around you.

TARA: How do you expect me to feel anything for anyone if they don't give me any feeling to begin with? Why is it wrong for me to be without feeling? Why are you asking me to do something that nobody has done for me?

CHANDAN: I don't know. Somehow, it is wrong, to be so . . . selfish.

TARA: Selfish? Yes. I am. I have the right to be selfish, like everyone else!

CHANDAN: No, you don't! We don't. We are not everyone else.

TARA: I think that bothers you more than it bothers me.

CHANDAN: I'm not being bothered by anything.

TARA: But it bothers me to hear you preaching to me what's wrong and what isn't.

CHANDAN: All right, I won't! You can do whatever you want and . . . just . . . maybe . . . I will help you do whatever you want. Okay?

TARA: Oh, don't bother. You're not my big brother, okay? I can teach you

a trick or two if I want to.

CHANDAN (*annoyed*): Oh, sure! Women mature faster!

TARA: Yes! We do. We do! And we are more sensitive, more intelligent, more compassionate human beings than creeps like you and . . . and . . .

CHANDAN: And?

TARA: Daddy!

Cross-fade to Dan, who is on the telephone.

DAN: Hello. (*Louder*). Hello, Dad? Can you hear me? Dad? (*Dials again.*) Hello? Operator, I'm having trouble getting to Bombay. Could you give me India 0226574423 please? . . . I will hold, thank you. (*Pause.*) Hello? Dad? This is Chandan. Praful uncle called me. I believe you had called him . . . Yes, I received your letter. Mummy was admitted again, I know. If you have anything to say to me, you should call me and not uncle . . . Well, sometimes I take it off the hook, when I'm writing . . . What is it, dad? How is mummy, now? (*Pause.*) How? . . . (*Pause.*) When was this? . . . Oh, was it . . . sudden? . . . I'm sorry, dad. But I can't help but feel . . . relieved that it's all over . . . No. No. I don't think I can come. I'm sorry. Look, I can understand how you feel and I know I should be with you now—but please dad, don't ask me to come back . . . Well, I'm in the middle of writing something, but that's not it. It's just that I don't think I can face life there anymore . . . Why don't you come here? . . . I just thought that now since you are all alone. You've got your brothers over here. And me. Not that I would be able to give you much. I never was a giver . . . You misunderstood, dad, I never held you responsible for what happened . . . How can you feel that it was your fault? No. Don't talk about her. It's not fair to me . . . Tara has been dead for six years and now that mummy has gone as well, there's nothing left for me to come back to . . . Yes, maybe I'm hurting you deliberately, I don't know why, but I can't help the way I feel . . . Either you come here or you live in Bombay all by yourself . . . Well, that's too bad!

That's just too bad! (*Hangs up.*)

Cross-fade to Tara and Chandan.

TARA: When did you last visit mummy? You didn't come with us last Sunday.

CHANDAN: I don't like hospitals.

TARA (*sarcastically*): I know. They depress you!

CHANDAN: I'll go. Soon.

TARA: You've only come with us once.

CHANDAN: I will come this Sunday. She isn't any better, I know. You can visit her more often if you want to.

TARA: I want to.

CHANDAN: Who's stopping you?

Pause.

TARA: Daddy.

CHANDAN: Why? (*No reply.*) I think you're being unfair.

TARA: You are always defending him.

CHANDAN: I'm not. He's not what you make him out to be.

TARA: You say that because he's nice to you.

CHANDAN: He's nice to you.

TARA: He talks to you more often.

CHANDAN: All right. He talks to me, but he's nice to you.

TARA: I tell you, he hates me!

CHANDAN: Nobody hates you.

Pause.

TARA: I hate him.

CHANDAN: Why?

Pause.

TARA: Chandan, I did not go to the physiotherapist today.

CHANDAN: Where did you go then?

TARA: To the hospital.

CHANDAN: What? Why didn't you tell me?

TARA: I just decided on the way. I asked the driver to take me there instead . . . I wanted to meet her. Alone.

CHANDAN: Well? What happened?

TARA: Chandan, I must meet her alone.

CHANDAN: Didn't you meet her?

TARA: They wouldn't let me!

CHANDAN: They who?

TARA: The hospital staff. At the reception, they asked me who I wanted to see. I told them. They asked me to wait. One of the nurses passing by recognized me. She drew the receptionist aside and spoke to her in a low voice. She thought I couldn't hear what she was saying. But I heard! She told her that she had received strict instructions from our father that I shouldn't on any account be allowed to see mummy on my own. *(Pause.)* Now tell me I'm imagining things. Tell me that he doesn't hate me!

CHANDAN: Don't be stupid. There must be a reason. Maybe he feels that your presence upsets mummy some way . . .

TARA: I would upset mummy?

CHANDAN: Just a possibility. I didn't mean . . .

TARA: Oh, so it's me, is it? I'm the one upsetting her. Your daddy is blameless. Maybe I am stupid. I must be, complaining to the allied party!

CHANDAN: Maybe you should be the writer, with your wild imagination!

TARA: Chandan, I need your help.

CHANDAN: Don't expect me to take your side and quarrel on your behalf. I don't think I should encourage you.

TARA: Okay, don't believe me. All I want is your help in getting me alone with mummy so I can talk to her!

CHANDAN: How can I do that?

TARA: I don't know, maybe next time we visit her you could distract daddy. Pretend you are getting another attack or something.

CHANDAN: Hmm. And then she will disclose her dark secret to you. What do you think she will tell you?

TARA: She will tell me about him.

Pause.

CHANDAN: I don't think I can do it. Maybe it's all for the best.

TARA: What?

CHANDAN: If daddy wants to stop her from saying something to us, maybe it's not good for us to hear it.

TARA: And who decides what's good for us to hear and what isn't?

CHANDAN: Whatever it is, if at all it exists, he will tell us himself when he thinks we are good and ready.

TARA: Will he?

CHANDAN: Trust him. He will.

TARA: What if the secret concerns him? Will he tell us then? Chandan, she is desperately trying to tell me something, and I want to know!

CHANDAN: I don't understand. It's not like daddy to withhold anything from us. I think, you are just . . . well, making a mountain of it.

TARA: I don't think you care for us!

CHANDAN: Wait a minute. That's silly!

TARA: You don't care about me, you don't care about mummy. You don't even want to see her. As far as you are concerned, she is already dead!

CHANDAN: That's not true!

Cross-fade to Dr. Thakkar.

DR. THAKKAR: Post-operative care needed just as much planning. Other

operations may have to be made when the twins grow up. But the important thing is . . . the separation was a complete success.

Cross-fade to Tara and Chandan. Patel is coming up the street.

CHANDAN: Not now please, we will ask him tomorrow.

TARA: Tomorrow may be too late!

CHANDAN: Don't. He's disturbed enough by mummy's . . .

TARA: I'm disturbed! How dare he stop us? *(Patel enters.)* Daddy . . .

CHANDAN: You look tired, dad.

PATEL: Oh, it's just the heat, and the traffic . . . Nothing to . . .

CHANDAN: Are you feeling all right?

PATEL *(sits down)*: Oh, don't worry about me. Did you two go to physiotherapy?

CHANDAN: Well, I didn't. Sorry.

PATEL: And Tara?

CHANDAN: She . . . she did go. I think.

PATEL: Did she or didn't she? I had sent the car for both of you.

CHANDAN: Oh, yes. The car came, she went.

PATEL: What's wrong with her? Can't she speak for herself? *(No response)* Did you go to physiotherapy? *(No response.)* Tara, I'm talking to you.

TARA: No, I didn't go. I went to the hospital.

PATEL: Don't ever go there without my permission.

TARA: Very well. I'm asking for your permission to go tomorrow.

PATEL: We will all go.

TARA: On my own.

PATEL: Never.

TARA: Oh, it's no use! I'm going to hate you anyway!

Lights on the street. Roopa is already there.

ROOPA: Prema! Nalini! Are you ready? Let's teach that bitch a lesson!

The lights on the street remain low in intensity, perhaps from only one side, creating a grotesque shadow of Roopa.

TARA: We will go without your permission.

PATEL: You will not!

TARA: Chandan, will you come with me?

PATEL: Chandan, you can't!

TARA: Chandan?

PATEL: No! Don't go!

TARA: Will you come with me or do I have to go alone?

Pause.

CHANDAN: We'll both go.

A very low light on Dr. Thakkar, which remains till the end.

DR. THAKKAR: Our greatest challenge would be to keep the girl alive. Nature wanted to kill her. We couldn't allow it.

ROOPA (*shouting*): Tara! Come on out! We want to talk to you!

PATEL: All right.

CHANDAN: You mean we can go?

PATEL: No, I don't want to give her the satisfaction of confessing. Oh, why didn't I have the strength to stop her then?

ROOPA: What's the matter? Are you scared? Come on out!

PATEL: I suppose we were both to blame. Your mother and I. And your grandfather. Her father was a wealthy man. An industrialist and an MLA. He might have become Chief Minister if he had lived. He had power. My parents were more . . . orthodox, and didn't approve of our marriage. I broke away from them. Ours was a happy marriage. We were all overjoyed when we came to know Bharati would have twins. Until certain tests revealed the . . .

complications.

ROOPA: You can't hide in your house forever! You have to come out!

PATEL: We didn't expect you to survive. But you did. When I first saw you . . . you looked like two babies hugging each other. It was only at a closer look . . . We were now prepared for the worst. Until we came to know of Dr. Thakkar who was visiting India. He had done research abroad on such . . . cases. I came here to Bombay to meet him . . . and discussed your case. There was hope.

DR. THAKKAR. Both twins have only one leg each. The artificial limb centre at Jaipur will be contacted and suitable flexible legs will be provided when they are slightly older. They will have to be changed from time to time as the twins grow up . . .

ROOPA (*shouting*): What's the matter, you freak? Are you deaf as well?

PATEL: Your grandfather got involved personally in our discussions with the doctor. The separation would be done in Bombay, it was decided. Some tests had to be carried out immediately. There were problems, you know them. But there was one complication which hadn't been discussed. There were three legs.

ROOPA: All right. Stay inside! We're going to get a present for you!

(*Exits.*)

The street lights fade out.

PATEL: A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl. Your mother asked for a reconfirmation. The result was the same. The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive . . . on the girl. Your grandfather and your mother had a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar. I wasn't asked to come. That same evening, your mother told me of her decision. Everything will be done as planned. Except—I couldn't believe what she told me—that they would risk giving both legs to the boy... Maybe if I had protested more strongly! I tried to reason with her that it wasn't right and that even the doctor would realize it was unethical! The doctor had agreed, I was told. It was only later I came to know of his intention of starting a large nursing home—the largest in Bangalore. He had acquired three acres of prime land—in the heart of the city—from the state. Your grandfather's political influence had been used. A few days later, the surgery

was done. As planned by them, Chandan had two legs—for two days. It didn't take them very long to realize what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh which could have—might have— been Tara. Because of the unusual, nature of the operation, it was easy to pass it off as a natural rejection. I—I was meaning to tell you both when you were older, but . . .

A special spotlight on Bharati. Music.

BHARATI (*as if to an infant in her arms*): Tara! My beautiful little girl. Look at her smile! Smile, Tara. Smile again for me! Oh! See how her eyes twinkle. You are my most beautiful baby!

The spotlight fades out with the music. Silence. The street area is lit. Roopa has brought on a poster, saying 'We don't want freaks', which she places prominently against a wall or post.

ROOPA (*shouting*): There. At least you are not blind! Do you get the message? Freaks. (*Exits.*)

Tara stands alone in a spot, in a daze. Chandan moves to her and gestures to her to hold his hand. Tara turns away from him. Chandan is crushed.

TARA: And she called me her star!

Lights off on Tara, Patel and Chandan. The poster remains lit.

DR. THAKKAR: Yes. Indeed, it was a complex case. But modern technology has made many things possible, and we are not very far behind from the rest of the world. In fact, in ten years' time we should be on par with the best in the west.

Dan's area is lit. He applauds mockingly.

DAN: Thank you very much, Dr. Thakkar! It has been a real pleasure. Now go, just . . . go away. (*Breaks down.*) Get out of my mind, you horrible creature! You are ugly and I don't want ugly people in my memories! (*Pause. Dr. Thakkar's spotlight fades out.*) Give me a moment and the pain will subside. Then I can function again. (*Pause, more controlled now.*) Yes. The material is there. But the craft is yet to come. Like the amazing Dr. Thakkar, I must take something from Tara—and give it to myself. Make capital of my trauma, my anguish, and make it my tragedy. To masticate them in my mind and spit out the result to the world, in anger. (*Slowly, as if*

in a trance, picks up his typed sheets and starts tearing them as he speaks.)
My progress so far—I must admit—has been zero . . . But I persist with the comforting thought that things can't get any worse. All I find every day is one typewritten sheet . . . with the tittle of the play, my name and address, and the date. Nothing changes . . . except the date . . .

His voice-over fades in as the spot fades out.

(Voice-over.) Someday, after I die, a stranger will find this recording and play it. The voice is all that will remain. No writing. No masterpiece. Only a voice—that once belonged to an object. An object like other objects in a cosmos, whose orbits are determined by those around. Moving in a forced harmony. Those who survive are those who do not defy the gravity of others. And those who desire even a moment of freedom, find themselves hurled into space, doomed to crash with some unknown force. *(Pause.)* I no longer desire that freedom. I move, just move. Without meaning. I forget Tara. I forget that I had a sister—with whom I had shared a body. In one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out . . . and separated.

A spot fades in—empty

But somewhere, sometime, I look up at a shooting star . . . and wish. I wish that a long-forgotten person would forgive me. Wherever she is.

Tara walks into the spot without limping. Dan also appears without the limp.

And will hug me. Once again.

They kneel, face to face.

Forgive me, Tara. Forgive me for making it my tragedy.

Tara embraces Dan as the music starts. The explosive opening of Brahms' First Concerto. They hug each other tightly.

Slow fade out.

Glossary:

Bedsitter – A single-room dwelling combining bedroom and sitting space.

Prosthesis – An artificial device replacing a missing body part.

Masticate – To chew food thoroughly.

Peristalsis – Involuntary muscle contractions that move food through the digestive system.

Conjoined – Joined together physically, often used in reference to twins.

Pelvis – The bony structure at the base of the spine.

Decoction – A concentrated liquid made by boiling substances, often used in medicine or beverages.

Facade – A false or outward appearance intended to conceal a truth.

Sterile – Incapable of reproducing or being fruitful.

Physiotherapy – Physical treatment to restore mobility after injury or surgery.

Appendix – A small, tube-shaped organ attached to the large intestine.

Rectum – The final section of the large intestine, ending at the anus.

Post-operative – Occurring after a surgical operation.

Hormone – A chemical messenger in the body regulating functions like growth and metabolism.

Reconfirmation – Verification of something already confirmed.

Distraught – Deeply agitated or upset.

Indisposed – Slightly unwell or unwilling.

Magnitude – The great size, extent, or importance of something.

Sublimation – A psychological defence mechanism that redirects unacceptable impulses into acceptable activities.

Catharsis – Emotional release through art, expression, or experience.

Conflict – A struggle or clash between opposing forces or ideas.

Bladder – A sac in the body that stores urine.

Repression – The act of blocking unpleasant thoughts or feelings from conscious awareness.

Dilemma – A situation requiring a difficult choice between undesirable alternatives.

Typewriter – A mechanical device used for writing text on paper.

Sublime – Of great excellence or beauty; often used to describe intense or elevated emotion.

Concoction – A mixture of various elements, especially used humorously or critically for odd combinations.

Decorum – Behaviour in keeping with good taste and propriety; used when discussing social expectations.

Malformation – An abnormal or faulty formation, especially of a body part.

Hypothetical – Based on a suggested idea or theory; not real but imagined for purposes of argument.

Recalcitrant – Resisting authority or control; stubborn and uncooperative.

Melancholy – A deep, persistent sadness or gloomy state of mind.

Vindication – The action of clearing someone from blame or suspicion.

Dissonance – A lack of harmony or agreement, either in sound or in relationships.

Vicarious – Experienced indirectly, through the actions or emotions of another person.

Comprehension:

I. Answer in about a page each:

1. Write short notes on

- a) The Siamese twins: Chandan and Tara
 - b) Mr. Patel
 - c) Bharathi
 - d) Dr. Umakant Thakkar
 - e) Roopa
 - f) The Grandfather of Chandan and Tara
2. According to Dr. Umakant Thakkar how did the Patel twins make medical history?
 3. The movies being watched by Chandan, Tara and Roopa reflect the situation of the members in the play. Elaborate
 4. Examine the difference in treatment towards Tara and Chandan by the parents.
 5. What are the aspirations of Mr. Patel for Chandan and Tara and what steps does he take in making them true?

II. Answer the following in about two three pages each:

1. Discuss the significance of the title Tara. How does it reflect the central issues addressed in the play?
2. Analyse the central theme of gender discrimination in Tara. How does the play portray the societal preference for male children over female children?
3. Examine the character of Tara in the play. How does she cope with the challenges posed by her physical condition and societal biases?
4. Evaluate the impact of societal norms on individual lives as depicted in Tara. How do these norms shape the characters' destinies?
5. Examine the character of Chandan/Dan. How does his transformation reflect the play's exploration of guilt, identity, and the search for redemption?

SUGGESTED VIEWING:

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKlnkaBZLX0> (Tara, Part – I)
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vdBUEQRXuA> (Tara, Part – II)

WATER: THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

C. V. Raman

Pre Reading Activities:

- Have you ever seen a place transformed by the presence or absence of water?
- Discuss what role does water play in agriculture and the economy in India.
- In what ways is water both a life-giving and a destructive force? Can you give examples?
- How can science and technology help in solving the problem of water scarcity?

About The Author:

C. V. Raman (Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman) was born on 7 November 1888 in Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India. He was a renowned Indian physicist best known for discovering the *Raman Effect*, which explains how light changes when it passes through a transparent material. This discovery earned him the *Nobel Prize in Physics* in 1930, making him the first Asian to receive a Nobel Prize in any branch of science.

Raman completed his education at Presidency College, Madras (now Chennai), where he showed exceptional talent in physics. Initially, he joined the Indian Finance Department, but his passion for science led him to pursue research. His major work was conducted at the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS), Kolkata. In 1928, he discovered the Raman Effect, which provided important insights into the scattering of light and the molecular composition of substances. This discovery laid the foundation for Raman spectroscopy, a widely used tool in scientific research today. Later, Raman served as the Director of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, and founded the Raman Research Institute in Bangalore in 1948. He continued his research there until his death on 21 November 1970.

C. V. Raman's work significantly advanced the field of optics and earned him numerous honours, including the *Bharat Ratna*, India's highest civilian award, in 1954.



About the Essay:

In *Water: The Elixir of Life*, C. V. Raman discusses the vital importance of water for all living beings and the environment. He explains how water is essential for the survival of plants, animals, and humans, calling it the true "elixir of life." The article describes the role of water in agriculture, as it nourishes plants and sustains crops, making it crucial for food production. Raman also highlights how water shapes the Earth's landscape through rivers, rain, and erosion, and how forests help in conserving water by absorbing rainfall and preventing soil erosion. He emphasizes the need to use water wisely and conserve it for future generations, warning against the dangers of water scarcity due to careless human activities.

Humankind has always searched in vain for an imaginary elixir of life, the divine Amrita, a draught of which was thought to confer immortality. But the elixir of life lies near our hands. For it is the commonest of all liquids, plain water! I remember one day standing on the line which separates the Libyan Desert from the Valley of the Nile in Egypt. On one side was visible a sea of billowing sand without a speck of green or a single living thing anywhere visible on it. On the other side lay one of the greatest, most fertile and densely populated areas to be found anywhere on the earth, teeming with life and vegetation. What made this wonderful difference? Why, it is the water of the river Nile.

Geologists tell us that the entire soil of the Nile valley is the creation of the river itself. Egypt, in fact, was made by its river. Its ancient civilisation was created and is sustained by the life-giving waters of the Nile.

This common substance which we take for granted in our everyday life is the most potent and the most wonderful thing on the face of our earth. It has played a very significant role in shaping the course of the earth's history and continues to play the leading role in the drama of life on earth.

There is nothing which adds so much to the beauty of the countryside as water, be it just a little stream trickling over the rocks or a little pond by the wayside where the cattle quench their thirst. The rain-fed tanks that are so common in South India are a cheering sight when they are full. They are, of course, shallow, but this is less evident since the water is silt-laden and the bottom does not therefore show up. These tanks play a vital role in South Indian agriculture. In Mysore, for example, much of the rice is grown under them. Some of these tanks are surprisingly large and it is a beautiful sight to see the sun rise or set over one of them.

One of the most remarkable facts about water is its power to carry silt in suspension. This is the origin of the characteristic colour of the water in rain-fed tanks. This colour varies with the nature of the earth in the catchment area and is most vivid immediately after a fresh inflow following rain. Swiftly flowing water can carry fairly large and heavy particles. The finest particles, however, remain floating within the liquid in spite of their greater density and are carried to great distances. When silt-laden water mixes with the salt water of the sea, there is a rapid precipitation of the suspended matter. This can be readily seen when one travels by steamer down a great river to the deep sea. The colour of the water changes successively from the muddy red or brown of silt through varying shades of yellow and green finally to the blue of the deep sea. Great tracts of land have been formed by silt thus deposited. Such land, consisting as it does of finely divided matter, is usually very fertile.

The flow of water has undoubtedly played a great part in geological processes. The same agency, however, under appropriate conditions, can also play a destructive part and wash away the soil. The problem of soil erosion is of major significance in various countries and especially in many parts of India. Soil erosion occurs in successive steps, the earliest of which may easily pass unnoticed. In the later stages, the cutting up and washing away of the earth is only too painfully apparent in the formation of deep gullies and ravines which make all agriculture impossible. Sudden bursts of excessively heavy rain resulting in a large run of surplus water are the principal factors in causing soil erosion. The slope of the land, removal of the natural protective coat of vegetation, the existence of ruts along which the water can flow with rapidly

gathering momentum, and the absence of any checks of such flow are also causes for soil erosion.

Soil erosion is dangerous to agriculture. The terracing of the land, construction of bunds to check the flow of water, the practice of contour cultivation and the planting of appropriate types of vegetation are the measures that can be used to check soil erosion.

Water is the basis of all life. Every animal and every plant contain a substantial proportion of free or combined water in its body, and no kind of physiological activity is possible without water. Water is, of course, necessary for animal life, while moisture in the soil is equally imperative for the life and growth of plants and trees. The conservation and utilisation of water is thus fundamental for human welfare. Apart from artesian water the ultimate source in all cases is rain or snowfall. Much of Indian agriculture depends on seasonal rainfall. The problems of soil erosion and of inadequate or irregular rainfall are closely connected with each other. It is clear that the adoption of techniques preventing soil erosion would also help to conserve and keep the water where it is wanted.

Collection and utilisation of rain water is, therefore, of vital importance. Much of it flows down into the streams and rivers and ultimately finds its way to the sea. Incredibly large quantities of the precious fluid are thus lost to the country. The harnessing of our rivers, the waters of which now mostly run to waste, is a great national problem which must be considered and dealt with. Vast areas of land could be turned into fertile and prosperous country by courageous and well-planned action.

The systematic planting of suitable trees in every possible place is one of the most urgent needs of India. Such plantation would directly and indirectly prove a source of untold wealth to the country. They would check soil erosion and conserve the rainfall of the country from flowing away to waste.

In one sense, water is the commonest of liquids. In another sense, it is the most uncommon of liquids with amazing properties which are responsible for its unique power to maintain animal and plant life. The investigation of the nature and properties of water is therefore, of the highest scientific interest and is far from an exhausted field of research.

Glossary:

elixir: a drink that is believed to keep you healthy and alive for years

draught: a serving of a drink

teeming: in large numbers

sustained: to maintain at a certain level

potent: strong

immortality: the condition of living forever or being remembered forever

geologist: one who studies rocks and soil that make up the earth

suspension: the act of stopping something from continuing

momentum: the ability to keep increasing, developing or being more successful

gully: a small narrow valley, usually formed by a lot of rain flowing down the side of a hill

ravine: a deep narrow valley with steep sides

rut: a deep narrow track left on soft ground by a wheel

erosion: the process of being gradually destroyed by rain, wind, the sea etc.

harness: the control and use of natural force or power of something

physiological: concerned with the science of the body.

Comprehension:

I. Answer the following in a page:

1. Discuss the writer's views of the rain-fed tanks found in South India.
2. Explain why C. V. Raman calls water "the elixir of life." Discuss its role in sustaining life on Earth.
3. How does water shape the Earth's landscape? Give examples mentioned by the author.
4. Discuss the role of forests in conserving water and preventing soil erosion as explained in the article.
5. What are the dangers of water misuse and scarcity? How can we prevent these problems according to the author?
6. How is water important not just for agriculture but also for maintaining the balance of nature?

Suggested Reading:

Read the essays:

- "A Drop of Water" – Walter Wick
- "The Uses of Water" – Rachel Carson (from *The Edge of the Sea* or *Silent Spring*)
- "Water" – Ralph Waldo Emerson
- "The Ailing Planet: The Green Movement's Role" – Nani Palkhivala

There Will Come Soft Rains

Ray Bradbury

Pre-Reading Activities:

- What would life be like if technology could take care of all your daily needs?
- How do you feel about the idea of a “smart house” that operates on its own without human help?
- Do you think people’s over-reliance on technology could backfire?

About the Author:

Ray Bradbury (1920–2012) was an iconic American author and screenwriter best known for his imaginative and thought-provoking works in science fiction, fantasy, and horror. He had a unique ability to blend futuristic technology with deep human emotion and timeless themes.



Bradbury is most famous for his novel *Fahrenheit 451*, a powerful critique of censorship and the dangers of a society that stops reading and thinking. He also wrote numerous short stories, including “The Veldt,” “The Pedestrian,” and “There Will Come Soft Rains,” which explore the impact of technology, war, and societal choices on individuals and humanity as a whole. Even though he often wrote about the future, Bradbury wasn’t focused on predicting technology, he used science fiction as a mirror to reflect our present behaviours, fears, and hopes. His lyrical style, rich imagery, and moral questions have made him a beloved voice in literature and a key figure in 20th-century American storytelling.

About the text:

In a post-apocalyptic future (August 2026), an automated house in Allendale, California, continues to function perfectly making breakfast, cleaning, and reciting poetry despite the fact that its human family has been obliterated by a nuclear blast. The house’s silhouette, burned onto the wall, hints at their sudden demise. As the day progresses, the house’s futile routines highlight the emptiness of technology without humanity. A fire eventually breaks out, and though the house fights desperately, it succumbs to the flames, collapsing into ruin. The story ends with the voice of the house’s system repeating the date into the silence, underscoring nature’s indifference (“soft rains” will come regardless of human extinction) and the fragility of civilization’s achievements.

In the living room, the voice-clock sang, *Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o 'o'clock!* as if it were afraid that nobody would. The morning house lay empty. The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into the emptiness. *Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine!*

In the kitchen, the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunny side up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.

"Today is August 4, 2026," said a second voice from the kitchen ceiling, *"in the city of Allendale, California."* It repeated the date three times for memory's sake. *"Today is Mr. Featherstone's birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita's marriage. Insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills."*

Somewhere in the walls, relays clicked, memory tapes glided under electric eyes.

Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one! But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels. It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: *"Rain, rain, go away; umbrellas, raincoats for today..."* And the rain tapped on the empty house, echoing.

Outside, the garage chimed and lifted its door to reveal the waiting car. After a long wait, the door swung down again.

At eight-thirty, the eggs were shrivelled and the toast was like stone. An aluminium wedge scraped them into the sink, where hot water whirled them down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea. The dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged twinkling dry.

Nine-fifteen, sang the clock, *time to clean.*

Out of warrens in the wall, tiny robot mice darted. The rooms were a crawl with the small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal. They thudded against chairs, whirling their moustached runners, kneading the rug nap, sucking gently at hidden dust. Then, like mysterious invaders, they popped into their burrows. Their pink electric eyes faded. The house was clean.

Ten o'clock. The sun came out from behind the rain. The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night, the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles.

Ten-fifteen. The garden sprinklers whirled up in golden founts, filling the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness. The water pelted window panes, running down the charred west side where the house had been burned, evenly free of its white paint. The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down.

The five spots of paint - the man, the woman, the children, the ball - remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer.

The gentle sprinkler rain filled the garden with falling light.

Until this day, how well the house had kept its peace. How carefully it had inquired, "Who goes there? What's the password?" and, getting no answer from lonely foxes and whining cats,

it had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old-maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on a mechanical paranoia.

It quivered at each sound, the house did. If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up. The bird, startled, flew off! No, not even a bird must touch the house!

Twelve noon.

A dog whined, shivering, on the front porch.

The front door recognized the dog voice and opened. The dog, once huge and fleshy, but now gone to bone and covered with sores, moved in and through the house, tracking mud. Behind it whirred angry mice, angry at having to pick up mud, angry at inconvenience.

For not a leaf fragment blew under the door but what the wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out. The offending dust, hair, or paper, seized in miniature steel jaws, was raced back to the burrows. There, down tubes which fed into the cellar, it was dropped into the sighing vent of an incinerator which sat like evil Baal in a dark corner.

The dog ran upstairs, hysterically yelping to each door, at last realizing, as the house realized, that only silence was here.

It sniffed the air and scratched the kitchen door. Behind the door, the stove was making pancakes, which filled the house with a rich baked odour and the scent of maple syrup.

The dog frothed at the mouth, lying at the door, sniffing, its eyes turned to fire. It ran wildly in circles, biting at its tail, spun in a frenzy, and died. It lay in the parlor for an hour.

Two o'clock, sang a voice.

Delicately sensing decay at last, the regiments of mice hummed out as softly as blown gray leaves in an electrical wind.

Two-fifteen.

The dog was gone.

In the cellar, the incinerator glowed suddenly and a whirl of sparks leaped up the chimney.

Two thirty-five.

Bridge tables sprouted from patio walls. Playing cards fluttered onto pads in a shower of pips. Martinis manifested on an oaken bench with egg-salad sandwiches. Music played.

But the tables were silent and the cards untouched.

At four o'clock, the tables folded like great butterflies back through the panelled walls.

Four-thirty.

The nursery walls glowed.

Animals took shape: yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers cavorting in crystal substance. The walls were glass. They looked out upon color and fantasy. Hidden films

clocked through well-oiled sprockets, and the walls lived. The nursery floor was woven to resemble a crisp, cereal meadow. Over this ran aluminum roaches and iron crickets, and in the hot, still air butterflies of delicate red tissue wavered among the sharp aroma of animal spoor! There was the sound like a great matted ye low hive of bees within a dark bellows, the lazy bumble of a purring lion. And there was the patter of okapi feet and the murmur of a fresh jungle rain, like other hoofs, falling upon the summer-starched grass. Now the walls dissolved into distances of parched grass, mile on mile, and warm endless sky. The animals drew away into thorn brakes and water holes. It was the children's hour.

Five o'clock. The bath filled with clear hot water.

Six, seven, eight o'clock. The dinner dishes manipulated like magic tricks, and in the study, a click. In the metal stand opposite the hearth where a fire now blazed up warmly, a cigar popped out, half an inch of soft gray ash on it, smoking, waiting.

Nine o'clock. The beds warmed their hidden circuits, for nights were cool here.

Nine-five. A voice spoke from the study ceiling: "*Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?*" The house was silent.

The voice said at last, "*Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random.*"

Quiet music rose to back the voice. "*Sara Teasdale. As I recall, your favourite...*

*There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;*

*And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white;*

*Robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;*

*And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.*

*Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly;*

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn

Would scarcely know that we were gone."

The fire burned on the stone hearth and the cigar fell away into a mound of quiet ash on its tray. The empty chairs faced each other between the silent walls, and the music played.

At ten o'clock, the house began to die.

The wind blew. A falling tree bough crashed through the kitchen window. Cleaning solvent, bottled, shattered over the stove. The room was ablaze in an instant!

"*Fire!*" screamed a voice. The house lights flashed, water pumps shot water from the ceilings. But the solvent spread on the linoleum, licking, eating, under the kitchen door, while the voices took it up in chorus: "*Fire, fire, fire!*"

The house tried to save itself. Doors sprang tightly shut, but the windows were broken by the heat and the wind blew and sucked upon the fire. The house gave ground as the fire in ten billion angry sparks moved with flaming ease from room to room and then up the stairs. While scurrying, water rats squeaked from the walls, pistolled their water, and ran for more. And the wall sprays let down showers of mechanical rain.

But too late. Somewhere, sighing, a pump shrugged to a stop. The quenching rain ceased. The reserve water supply which had filled baths and washed dishes for many quiet days was gone.

The fire crackled up the stairs. It fed upon Picassos and Matisses in the upper halls, like delicacies, baking off the oily flesh, tenderly crisping the canvases into black shavings.

Now the fire lay in beds, stood in windows, changed the colors of drapes!

And then, reinforcements. From attic trapdoors, blind robot faces peered down with faucet mouths gushing green chemical.

The fire backed off, as even an elephant must at the sight of a dead snake.

Now there were twenty snakes whipping over the floor, killing the fire with a clear cold venom of green froth.

But the fire was clever. It had sent flame outside the house, up through the attic to the pumps there. An explosion! The attic brain which directed the pumps was shattered into bronze shrapnel on the beams.

The fire rushed back into every closet and felt of the clothes hung there.

The house shuddered, oak bone on bone, its bared skeleton cringing from the heat, its wire, its nerves revealed as if a surgeon had torn the skin off to let the red veins and capillaries quiver in the scalded air. *Help, help! Fire! Run, run!* Heat snapped mirrors like the first brittle winter ice. And the voices wailed. *Fire, fire, run, run*, like a tragic nursery rhyme, a dozen voices, high, low, like children dying in a forest, alone, alone. And the voices fading as the wires popped their sheathings like hot chestnuts. One, two, three, four, five voices died.

In the nursery the jungle burned. Blue lions roared, purple giraffes bounded off. The panthers ran in circles, changing color, and ten million animals, running before the fire, vanished off toward a distant steaming river.... Ten more voices died.

In the last instant under the fire avalanche, other choruses, oblivious, could be heard announcing the time, cutting the lawn by remote-control mower, or setting an umbrella frantically out and in, the slamming and opening front door, a thousand things happening, like a clock shop when each clock strikes the hour insanely before or after the other, a scene of maniac confusion, yet unity; singing, screaming, a few last cleaning mice darting bravely out to carry the horrid ashes away! And one voice, with sublime disregard for the situation, read poetry aloud in the fiery study, until all the film spools burned, until all the wires withered and the circuits cracked.

The fire burst the house and let it slam flat down, puffing out skirts of spark and smoke.

In the kitchen, an instant before the rain of fire and timber, the stove could be seen making breakfasts at a psychopathic rate, ten dozen eggs, six loaves of toast, twenty dozen bacon strips, which, eaten by fire, started the stove working again, hysterically hissing!

The crash. The attic smashing into kitchen and parlour. The parlour into cellar, cellar into sub-cellar. Deep freeze, armchair, film tapes, circuits, beds, and all like skeletons thrown in a cluttered mound deep under.

Smoke and silence. A great quantity of smoke. Dawn showed faintly in the east. Among the ruins, one wall stood alone. Within the wall, a last voice said, over and over again and again, even as the sun rose to shine upon the heaped rubble and steam:

"Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026, today is..."

Glossary:

Post-apocalyptic: denoting or relating to the time following a nuclear war or other catastrophic event.

Obliterated: destroy utterly; wipe out.

Silhouette: the dark shape and outline of someone or something visible in restricted light against a brighter background.

Fragility: the quality of being easily broken or damaged.

Eggs sunny side up: eggs fried without breaking the yolk or being turned over, with the yolk remaining visible

Shriveled: wrinkled and shrunken

Wedge: a piece of wood, metal, etc., having one thick end and tapering to a thin edge, that is driven between two objects or parts of an object to secure or separate them.

Warrens: a hidden or secret passage, or a maze-like area within a wall or building

Titanic: of exceptional strength, size, or power.

Incinerator: an apparatus for burning waste material, especially industrial waste, at high temperatures until it is reduced to ash.

Picassos and Matisses: rival painters of previous decades

Baal: ancient Semitic fertility gods

Bridge: card table

Patio walls: the walls that enclose or partially enclose a patio, which is an outdoor space usually paved and used for recreation or dining.

Cavorting: jump or dance around excitedly.

Linoleum: strong, shiny material used for covering floors

Comprehension:

I. Answer the following in a page each:

1. What is the main idea of "There Will Come Soft Rains," and how does Ray Bradbury use the setting and events to show this idea?
2. What does the dog represent in the story? What does its appearance and death tell us about survival after an apocalypse?
3. Does the story warn us about depending too much on machines?
4. List the events that happen in the house in the order they occur.
5. Why is the poem "There Will Come Soft Rains" by Sara Teasdale important in the story? How does it connect to the story's meaning?

Suggested Reading:

- Read the stories:
 - "The Last Question" by Isaac Asimov
 - "The Machine Stops" by E.M. Forster
 - "By the Waters of Babylon" by Stephen Vincent Benét
 - "A Sound of Thunder" by Ray Bradbury
- Watch the movie *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)

An Old Woman

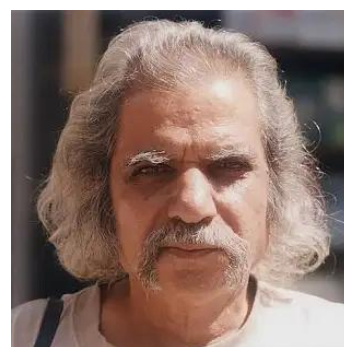
Arun Kolatkar

Pre-reading Activities:

- What are your views on Modernity vs Tradition?
- When you hear about an old woman asking for money, what kind of emotions or thoughts come to mind?
- Have you ever encountered someone asking for help unexpectedly? How did you react?
- What images or feelings do you associate with hills or shrines?

About the poet:

Arun Kolatkar (1932–2004) was a significant bilingual Indian poet known for his innovative contributions to both Marathi and English poetry. Born in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, Kolatkar was trained as an artist at the J. J. School of Art and worked as a graphic designer and art director in Mumbai's advertising industry. His poetry is noted for its sharp wit, surreal imagery, and commentary on everyday life, often blending humour with a dark, experimental tone. His first English poetry collection, *Jejuri* (1976), won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and became a landmark in Indian English literature. In Marathi, he was deeply influential in the 'little magazine movement' and produced groundbreaking collections like *Bhijki Vahi*, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award posthumously in 2005. He was influenced by Marathi devotional traditions, European modernism, and American beat poetry. His later works like *Kala Ghoda Poems* and *Sarpa Satra* reflect a matured, socially aware voice. Though reclusive and hesitant to publish, his legacy continues to shape Indian poetry, with posthumous collections edited and celebrated internationally.



About the poem:

The poem is a powerful, realistic poem that portrays the resilience and dignity of a marginalized woman in a bustling urban environment. This poem explores the complex nature of poverty and human dignity. The old woman's persistence in seeking charity forces the reader to confront the uncomfortable reality of her situation. Kolatkar's minimalist style highlights the woman's plight, leaving space for the reader to draw their own conclusions about the social and economic inequalities that have led to her hardship. Compared to Kolatkar's other works, this poem stands out for its directness and its focus on the individual's experiences within a larger societal context. It also reflects the bleak and disillusioning atmosphere of post-Independence India, where the promises of equality and prosperity remained unfulfilled for many.

An old woman grabs
hold of your sleeve
and tags along.

She wants a fifty paise coin.
She says she will take you
to the horseshoe shrine.

You've seen it already.
She hobbles along anyway
and tightens her grip on your shirt

She won't let you go.
You know how old women are.
They stick to you like a burr.

You turn around and face her
with an air of finality.
You want to end the farce.

When you hear her say,
'What else can an old woman do
on hills as wretched as these?'

You look right at the sky.
Clear through the bullet holes
she has for her eyes.

And as you look on,
the cracks that begin around her eyes
spread beyond her skin.

And the hills crack.
And the temples crack.
And the sky falls

With a plate-glass clatter
Around the shatterproof crone
who stands alone

And you are reduced
to so much small change
in her hand.

Glossary:

Grab: Snatch, take hold of, Seize

Horseshoe Shrine: Decorative element within a shrine associated with good luck

Hobbles: Limp, walk with difficulty, Walk awkwardly

Burr: Whirring sound

Farce: A ridiculous act

Wretched: Deeply afflicted, Distressed, Miserable

Clatter: Continuous rattling sound

Crone: An ugly woman

Comprehension:

I. Answer the following in a page each:

1. Describe the old woman's request and her promise. Why do you think she offers to take the speaker to the horseshoe shrine?
2. How is the plight of the old woman depicted in the poem? What does the old woman's action of tightening her grip symbolize about her character or situation?
3. How does the Speaker's attitude undergo a change?
4. How do you relate the 'cracks around her eyes' to the cracking of hills and temples?
5. How does the poem end in terms of the relationship between the speaker and the old woman?

Suggested Reading:

1. "*The Beggar*" by R. Parthasarathy
2. "*The White Tiger*" by Aravind Adiga
3. "*Coolie*" by Mulk Raj Anand

When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

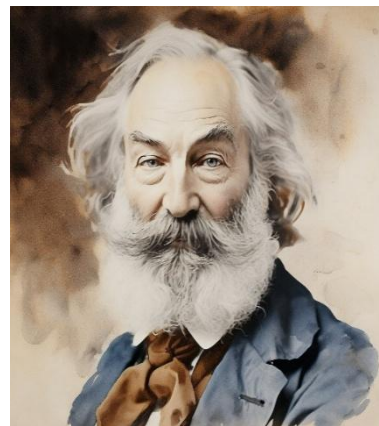
-Walt Whitman

Pre-reading Activities:

- Have you ever heard of an astronomer? – Narrate and discuss your experience in the class.
- Have you ever been bored while listening to someone talk for a long time? What made it boring?
- What do you think is more fun: looking at stars or learning about them in a science class?

Note on the Author:

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) was a pioneering American poet, essayist, and journalist, often hailed as the father of free verse and a central figure in American literature. Whitman incorporated both transcendentalism and realism in his writings and is often called the father of free verse. Born in West Hills, New York, and raised in Brooklyn, Whitman left formal schooling at age 11 to work, gaining experience in various trades, including printing and teaching. His early exposure to the printing press significantly influenced his later literary endeavours.



During the American Civil War, Whitman moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked as a volunteer nurse, providing comfort to wounded soldiers. These experiences deeply influenced his poetry, leading to the creation of *Drum-Taps* and the poignant elegies ‘*O Captain! My Captain!*’ and ‘*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d*,’ which mourned the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Whitman's most renowned work, *Leaves of Grass*, was first published in 1855. This groundbreaking collection celebrated individuality, democracy, and the human body, challenging conventional poetic forms and themes. In his later years, Whitman settled in Camden, New Jersey, following a stroke in 1873. Despite health challenges, he continued to revise and publish *Leaves of Grass*, solidifying his status as a literary icon. Whitman's legacy endures, with his works translated into numerous languages and his influence evident in the works of subsequent poets and writers. Whitman's poetry remains a testament to the power of the individual voice and the enduring spirit of American democracy.

About the poem:

Walt Whitman's poem ‘*When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer*’ offers a poignant meditation on the contrast between intellectual analysis and personal experience. In this brief yet impactful piece, Whitman critiques the reduction of the universe to mere data and celebrates the profound connection found in direct, silent engagement with nature.

The poem explores themes of knowledge versus wisdom, the limitations of scientific analysis in capturing the essence of nature, and the value of personal, intuitive understanding. The poem explores the idea that while scientific analysis can explain the mechanics of the universe, it may not evoke the same sense of wonder and appreciation as experiencing nature firsthand.

When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

Glossary:

Learn'd: An archaic or poetic spelling of "learned," meaning scholarly or educated.

Proofs: Mathematical demonstrations or evidence.

Figures: Numerical data or diagrams.

Ranged: Arranged or organized.

Unaccountable: Inexplicable or not easily understood.

Rising and Gliding: Moving upwards and smoothly.

Wanders: Moved aimlessly or without a fixed course.

Mystical: Spiritual or otherworldly.

Moist: Slightly wet or damp.

Look'd: Archaic spelling of "looked."

Comprehension:

I. Answer the following in a page each:

1. Why does the speaker feel tired and sick during the astronomer's lecture? Explain with reference to the poem.
2. Describe the contrast between the setting of the lecture-room and the natural night sky. How does this difference affect the speaker?

3. What message does the poet convey about learning and experiencing through the speaker's actions?
4. In what way does the poet present a contrast between scientific knowledge and personal experience?
5. What does the poem tell us about the difference between learning from books and learning from real-life experiences?

Suggested Reading:

1. *Dead Poets Society* by Peter Weir.
2. *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman.
3. “*A Noiseless Patient Spider*” by Walt Whitman.

**SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT
QUESTION PAPER PATTERN
III Semester B.Sc./B.Sc., (FAD)/BVA., and other Programs under
the Faculty of Science**

Time:3 hours

Max.Marks:80

Instruction: Read the instructions

Answer all the questions

**UNIT – 1
LITERARY SKILLS
(PLAY)**

I. Answer in a page (Two questions out of Three) 2x5=10

II. Answer in about 2 – 3 pages (One question out of Two) (Play) 1x10=10

(PROSE AND POEMS)

III. Answer in a page (Four questions out of Five) 4x5=20

(Answer from all the three literary texts)

**UNIT – 2
COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS**

IV. Presentation Skills 1x5=5

V. Comprehension Passage 5x1=5

VI. Para Jumble/Para Completion 1x5=5

VII. Story Writing 1x5=5

VIII. Correspondence

a. Resume and Cover Letter 1x5=5

b. Formal Letter 1x5=5

c. Business Correspondence 1x5=5

IX. Commercial Writing 1x5=5

MODEL QUESTION PAPER
III SEMESTER B.SC/BSc (FAD), BVA. Degree Examination
GENERAL ENGLISH
ELOQUENTIA -III
(SEP SCHEME)

Time:3 hours

Max.Marks:80

Instructions: 1. Read the instructions
2. Mention Question Number

SECTION - A
LITERARY SKILLS- 40 MARKS

I. Answer in a page (Any TWO) 2x5=10

1. Write short notes on

- a) The Siamese twins: Chandan and Tara
- b) Mr. Patel
- c) Bharathi

II. Answer in about 2 – 3 pages. (Any ONE) 1x10=10

- 1. Discuss the significance of the title 'Tara.' How does it reflect the central issues addressed in the play?
- 2. Analyse the central theme of gender discrimination in Tara. How does the play portray the societal preference for male children over female children?

III. Answer in a page each: (Any Four) 4x5=20

- 1. How does the poem 'Old Woman' end in terms of the relationship between the speaker and the old woman?
- 2. In 'There Will Come Soft Rains' list the events that happen in the house in the order they occur.
- 3. What does the poem 'When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer' tell us about the difference between learning from books and learning from real-life experiences?
- 4. Discuss the role of forests in conserving water and preventing soil erosion as explained in the article.
- 5. Does the story 'There Will Come Soft Rains' warn us about depending too much on machines?

SECTION – B
GRAMMAR COMPONENT- 40 MARKS

COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

IV. Presentation Skills 1x5=5

V. Comprehension Passage 5x1=5

VI. Para Jumble/Para Completion 1x5=5

VII. Story Writing 1x5=5

VIII. Correspondence

- a. Resume and Cover Letter 1x5=5
- b. Formal Letter 1x5=5
- c. Business Correspondence 1x5=5

IX. Commercial Writing 1x5=5
