

# Translation

---

**Kasai<sup>1</sup>**

**Butcher**

**Ramkrishna Mandal<sup>2</sup>**

**Translated by: Susanta Kumar Bardhan,**

Suri Vidyasagar College, Birbhum, West Bengal

Listening to his son's proposal Kestapada gets startled—"No, no, Nitai, we belong to Baistam Caste. To kill animal is a sin. Son, please don't do that deed". Nitai reacted with anger—"Born of Baistam caste family. To kill animal is sin. But isn't leading these eight lives to death by making them starve a sin? In addition, you are suffering from asthma; mother, pressure. Working tirelessly day and night and at the same time suffering from acidity, (my) wife has become skinny. Our children do not have a drop of milk--- who will manage these? By pulling rickshaw continually I have turned weak. Still can I sustain the expenditure of this family?"

Kestapada in a very lean voice said, --"I realize everything, son. If not, take any other work as a profession."

Nitai with strong determination expressed, --"Please, do come in the way. As it has struck in my mind, I will run a meat-shop". --Then Nitai left out swiftly.

Following his own plan Nitai sold his rickshaw and managed his capital. At the bus-stand one businessman was ready to sell his *gumti*<sup>3</sup>. Nitai bought that. From 'Asha Art Studio' he got a signboard painted and printed—HINDUR KATA MANSER DOKAN, Pro:-- Nitai Das<sup>4</sup>. Signboard was fixed on the roof of the *gumti*. Nitai bought two *khasis*<sup>4</sup> from the retailers. Then in one winter morning he inaugurated the meat-shop by chopped off the throat of *khasi*<sup>5</sup> and stripped off its skin.

Baistam-by-caste Kestapada's innermost heart got shaken on the very first day when Nitai's helper Janaa Mal was seen drawing the *khasis* by the rope to the gumti and Nitai with a chopper in hand was seen driving them. Even after invoking *Mahaprabhu*<sup>6</sup> in obeisance Kestapada cried out in an earnest voice, --"God, forgive me for the sin. I am very helpless. I cannot labour – dependent on my son's earning. *Thakur*<sup>7</sup>, absolve me of my sin".

On that day Kestapada's mind got depressed. Not a single day he could think that such innocent lives of animal would have been copped and killed for their survival. But the earlier part of his life was spent in great happiness. Poverty was very much present in his father's family, but happiness and joy was not less.

## Two

Kestapada's father Madhab Das owned two *bighas*<sup>8</sup> of farmland. It was a parental property. In different local bazaars he used to sell *pan* leaves for running his family. He was *Hari*<sup>9</sup>-devotee. In every evening he used to beat *mridangam*<sup>10</sup> and chant *harinam*<sup>11</sup> in the *atchala*<sup>12</sup>. The neighbours used to act as assistant composers. Child Kestapada used to be with him. During the month of Baishakh Madhab Das along with Kestapada used to carry on *tahal*<sup>13</sup> at every dawn. Madhab sang rhythmically beating *mridangam*; a pair of cymbals was in the hands of Kestapada. Hitting rhythmically the pairs of cymbals against each other Kestapada used to dance and sing in tune with his father's —Bhaja Gourangya, kaha Gourangya, laha Gourangyer nam re--. Following his father Kestapada at his very boyhood took the sacred rosary of beads and learned evening prayer.

Like his father Kestapada started the business of selling pan leaves. In the evening he used to sing *harinam* in the *atchala*. He became the father of a son and two daughters. Maintaining the legacy of Baisnab family Kestapada named his son Nitaipada. Poverty was very much present in the family as it was big.

Boy Nitai completed his primary education but was too naughty. He used to have mangoes from others' trees without permission and blame was targeted towards Kestapada. As his son's education was evidently stopped, Kestapada engaged his son in the works at the husking mill of the *Kamars*<sup>14</sup>. The boy was not consistent in his work. That job did not last long. Consequently,

for the purpose of earning livelihood Nitai went to the town a half mile away from their village to pull rickshaw.

At every 6 A. M., he used to come to town by bus and take the rickshaw from the owner's depot. He used to have his lunch at a hotel in the town. That was followed by gossiping with some friends, smoking bidi and then resuming the work of pulling rickshaw. At night paying the rent for the rickshaw to the owner, he left for home by the last bus. The daily travelling after doing hard labour was tiring one. So Nitai started searching for at least small house in the town.

Opportunity also came before him. At Bhagarpara<sup>15</sup> of the town about uprooted people of two hundred families developed a residential locality on the unrecorded land. That land was occupied illegally. Following his friend Atul, Nitai too occupied a part of that land and erected a thatch-and-mud-walled house there.

Kestapada did not have a single drop of relief in his mind. His son was now not coming home at every night. He started coming home once or twice a week. He became worried about his son's food and lodging.

Kestapada's anxiety was more for his two daughters than for his son. Horrible The worry snatched his sleep at night and suffocatingly troubled his thought. The daughters had now become young. The unruly young boys of the locality were seen wandering near his house. The thought of marrying the daughters was now consuming Kestapada.

At one point Kestapada determined to marry his daughters. Let him be in dearth of money. The farmland which he had would be sold to Fatik Morol. He engaged himself in searching for suitable groom. While doing so, he found a groom at Kharbona village five miles away from his own village. He sold Fatik the small farmland inherited from his grandfather through his father. Eldest daughter got married. He got rid of one big responsibility. Still he did not have relief. The youngest daughter was gradually becoming young. What would be about his fate? With greater force poverty tightened her grip on the neck of his family.

### Three

Nitai stuck to his point—"I won't pull rickshaw on rent. I've got fed up with the frequent replacement of axle, tire, and tube. The owner does not bear the daily maintenance cost. But he

collects the rickshaw rent everyday unfailingly. Hopeless, most portion of the earning is consumed by the person not involved in work. “Nitai paused a little. Looking at his father he tried to weigh the intention of his father.

Kestapada asked, “What will you do then?”

Nitai replied, “I will buy a new rickshaw.”

Kestapada hesitantly asked, “Where shall I get money?”

--“Mortgage this house.”

Kestapada got contracted and said in a low voice, “Father’s homestead, shall I mortgage?”

Nitai without inhibition said, “What is the matter with that? When I will have money, we will get back this property.”

Kestapada could not dare to say ‘NO - -’. In recent times his health was not going well. Asthma used to ail him. Now he could not go out selling pan. Total dependence on his son.

Therefore, rickshaw was brought in exchange of house and the adjoining land.

#### **Four**

So far Nitai had been earning the livelihood by pulling for seven years without any break. He, however, could not meet the family expenses with his earning. Nitai stayed at the town with his wife and their babies. His parents and sister, were at their native village. Nitai had to bear the expenditure needed for their food, clothing, diseases, etc. Nitai had already two daughters and a son. The moment the next issue came to the womb of his wife, Nitai thought— She is not a woman but a fertile paddy-seed-sowing land. Within a short time paddy seedlings get ready for plantation. He rushed his wife to hospital.

In order to lessen the financial burden of two families Nitai proposed, “Father, (you all) come to town. —expense will be lessened if food is cooked in one kitchen. I cannot meet the expenses any longer.” Kestapada sighed with a sound and he along with his wife and daughter came to town to stay with his son’s family.

But earning by pulling rickshaw day and night was not sufficient to fill the mouth of demon Want. Nitai stated thinking of other means. Through calculation Nitai traced the better profit in meat-shop keeping. Therefore, he decided to open a meat-shop.

### **Five**

In spite of his reluctance Kestapada had to go to his son's meat shop in order to have money. That money was needed to buy good from the ration shop, vegetables and grocery item. For this he was bound to go to the meat-shop every day. From the very morning rush of customers was before the meat-shop. That scene could be very much seen especially on Sundays or Saturdays. On these days of the week in-service people seemed to have become mad for eating meat. Kestapada was to found standing in one side of the shop. While standing there, he astonishingly observed the swiftness in Nitai's working hands. From the customers there were different demands for the different parts of the dressed body of the castrated he-goat—the hind leg, chest, or the neck, etc. his assistant Jana Mal cut the ordered parts from the body and handed that over to Nitai. Nitai put that on the wooden slab and rhythmically cut that into pieces. Sized pieces of meat were weighed, put in a packet made of sal leaves, and handed over to the customers according to their respective order. Then collection of money from them was unfailingly done by Nitai. The wooden plank in the gumti got reddened with blood. On that were laid the recently cut-off goat heads – their pitiful still look. Beside those, were laid the entails covered with the peeled-off skin. A heap of rejected parts of goat-legs was to seen in one side of the shop. By the side of the gumti a wooden stake was fixed on the earth for giving sharp blow on the neck of the castrated he-goats. That place turned red. Flies were gathering round that. Blood was streaming down to the drain.

At the initial stage Kestapada's head used to reel. Still he had to stand and see the event in the meat-shop. Because if he did not take money from his son, he could not do marketing. At the same time until Nitai could get some interval in his work, he could not hand over the money to his father. Standing there Kestapada felt the tremor in his inner self. By himself he prayed to Mahaprabhu—"Forgive me and others. Forgive my son Nitai".

### **Six**

For some formidable days Nitai had been sensing a pain in his belly. Assuming that it was the problem of acidity, he took homeopathy medicine. No alleviation was felt. Instead pain was increasing day by day. Gradually, the pain reached such a level that Nitai had to stop doing his works. Kestapada took his son to a better doctor. The doctor checked him and advised to have an x-ray photo of the belly. From that photo of Nitai's belly a tumour was detected. It needed immediate operation. In an unknown apprehension Kestapada sensed a sudden tremor in his heart. After thinking deeply Kestapada admitted his son in Mangalpahari Christian Hospital where doctors were all Sahebs. Those doctors had reputation in their treatment.

Operation was done by that time. However, patient did recover. On the hospital bed the young boy was gradually getting thinner and thinner day by day and was getting leveled with the bed. The hopeless condition of his son was haunting Kestapada at the core of his heart. Everyday money was getting drained. When the saved money got exhausted, Kestapada saw nothing but darkness before him. At this crisis moment, only hope lied with Fatik Morol<sup>16</sup>. To him Kestapada rushed. Helpless Kestapada's earnest entreaty to Fatik Morol softened the latter to buy the homeland mortgaged to him through registration. That way Kestapada got some amount of money. But to his utter misfortune, he did not have his son back to life.

The in utter sorrow, Kestapada felt the breaking of his rib returning town he always lay down on the bed. But just after elapse of two days his daughter-in-law informed, "Father, there is no rice at home. For the last seven days we have been borrowing rice from Anilda's wife. Today's food will be somehow managed. For this I can request no more. Moreover, how long will they lend or provide us? They are also having financial crisis."

He heard the words of daughter-in-law and resultantly, darkness rolled down before his eyes. – "What is the way-out now? What will happen from tomorrow? Six pairs of eyes of six hungry lives are staring to him. Let him leave aside his own hunger". Throughout the night he could not sleep. The wood-worms of thoughts were scratching and consuming his brain. His thoughts mainly concerned what he could do. He would resume his pan business. But he realized that he did not have that much strength to wander for that business purpose.

Kestapada uttered in a helpless voice, "O, Thakur, do me a favour with a means. Protect these orphan lives. I am now in deep fathomless distress."

Morning appeared. Day grew high gradually. There was nothing to chew. Starvation hit children were dry-faced, Tears rolled down from their eyes. Daughter-in-law collected some herbs and leaves, boiled those, added some salt to the boiled item and served that sauce to the children. They did not want to eat that. The little one was rolling the dust and crying, “I will eat rice. Give me rice. Where is rice?” the eldest granddaughter with his pity-marked face came before him, -- “Grandpa, will the rice not be cooked today in our house? Hunger is too much. A long time has passed after we took the sauce of herbs and leaves”.

It proved unbearable for Kestapada to listen to such cry. He shut his ears. The bites of thousand wasps caused severe wounds in him. Lying on bed with worry-ridden head Kestapada spent the whole day and whole night by groping in darkness to trace a means.

### Seven

It was next day morning. Jana Mal was seen fastening Nitai’s pet castrated he-goat to the wooden stake. The goat was restlessly trying to run away. By one side Kestapada was seen standing with his drawn bright chopper. His two eyes looked reddened. The rolled eyeballs were burning with brightness. Jana clasped the goat tightly. The entire surrounding was getting filled with the helpless *ma ma* cry of the goat. Kestapada tightly clutched the chopper in his hands. The veins of his hands swelled. Raising the chopper above his head Kestapada with whatever strength he had and with aim swiftly struck the neck of the goat with that.

### Notes

1. *Kasai or Butcher* is short story written by RamkrishnaMandal. It was published in *SukherKhonje (In Search of Happiness): A Collection of Short Stories*, in the year 2004. This anthology was published by Poorba, Kolkata.
2. RamkrishnaMandalis Retired Reader in Bengali, Suri Vidyasagar College, Birbhum. He did his Ph. D from Visva-Bharati, Shaniniketan, India. He has established himself as a literary figure in the Bangla. He has published several volumes of short stories, literary critical essays and humorous stories. He edits Abakash: SahityaPatra, a literary journal in Bangla.
3. *gumti*: a small make-shift shop made of wood and/or iron.

4. HINDUR KATA MANSER DOKAN, Pro:-- Nitai Das: Literally this signboard content means 'Hindu's pieced meat-of shop Proprietor: Nitai Das' meaning 'A Hindu Shop of pieced meat Proprieter: Nitai Das'
5. Khasi: a castrated he-goat.
6. *Mahaprabhu*: This title meaning 'The Great Lord' is addressed by the *Baisnab* community at Sri Chaitanya who is considered be one incarnation of Lord Krishna.
7. *Thakur*: God
8. *Bighas*: a unit for the measurement of land.
9. *Hari-devotee*: devotee to Lord Krishna
10. *Mridangam*: a drum-like musical instrument
11. *Harinam*: prayer song relating to Lord Krishna
12. *atchala*: an eight roofed open platform before a temple
13. *Tahal*: moving and singing song relating to Lord Krishna in the dawn.
14. *Kamar*: blacksmith
15. *Bhagarpara*: locality built in the area which was used for burial of carcasses.
16. *Morol*: main leader of the *mondal* (in Bangla) locality or village. The word *morol* has derived from *mondol*.