

AADHA SATYA

(The Half Truth)

Rajan Khatiwada

Sijan Dahal



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Playwrights : Rajan Khatiwada and Sijan Dahal

Editor/Translator : Viplob Pratik

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About the Process

Mandala Theatre has been organizing different events to mark the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearance (30 August) every year since 2015. Artists and the families of the disappeared along with activists collaborated to design and organize these events. Performances, poetry recitals, music and other artistic expressions were organized to commemorate the day and keep the memories of the disappeared alive. The events try to depict how the uncertainty around the disappeared persons' fate continues to affect the lives of family members socially, economically, legally as well as of course emotionally. Family members are living in the limbo of 'ambiguous loss' with 'unsettled memories' due to the lack of confirmed truth. These commemoration events try to provide a space for these memories and attract broader public solidarity and recognition for the issues of disappearances.

In 2016, Mandala Theatre decided to develop a play based on experiences shared by the families of the disappeared. Rajan Khatiwada and Sijan Dahal from Mandala Theatre, accompanied by team members from NEFAD and GIZ-ZFD Dealing with the Past thematic team, visited and talked with five families living in the Kathmandu Valley to hear their stories. After these conversations, Rajan and Sijan prepared the

script, selected the artists and directed the play. The play was first performed for the family members who had shared their stories. Their feedback and concerns were incorporated and the play was then premiered on 30th August 2016 at Mandala Theatre. After requests from family members, activists and other communities, Mandala's mobile theatre bus 'JUNKIRI' went on tour taking the play to different conflict affected communities in Bardiya, Kailali and Dang.

The tour was coordinated by the family members of the disappeared in nine different places. The play was well received by the audiences and family members since it raised the issues of continued hardships for family members and how disappearances continuously affect their lives. It was impossible for us to do as many performances as they wished due to the lack of resources and time. That is why we are publishing the script as a book so that artist groups in other locations can produce and perform this play.

The play production process was a collaborative effort from which we have learned a lot. We are grateful to the people and organizations who were involved in this process. We want to dedicate this book to all of them.

Publishers' Note

After the establishment of Mandala Theatre- Nepal, we have frequently worked with different kinds of plays, ranging from our own stories to adaptations of foreign plays. We have always been trying to create timely and relevant dialogue between our audience and us (the artists) about our contemporary work, style, skills and consciences.

We came to realise that we needed to publish the plays we have written and staged, so that they can reach a wider audience. This is the beginning of that process and we are committed to continuing this.

We extend our special thanks to GIZ-ZFD for their support in this publication.

Dayahang Rai

Chairperson

Mandala Theatre-Nepal

Writers' Notes

Rajan Khatiwada

Playwright/Director

I never thought that I would write a play myself, but I was tired of talking about the 'lack of playwrights in Nepal' and so decided to give a try myself. I wrote Maatha Panchar in 2015. Then the following year I was given the responsibility to write and direct a play about the issues of families of disappeared people. For me, the responsibility was not only an invitation or opportunity but also the ground that will keep me connected with my society I am living. Before I was surrounded by the challenges of writing, I was joined by Sijan Dahal, who was practicing very well in playwriting.

It is a very tough task to write about those families who were affected by the civil war. I didn't have any idea about how to write the stories of those who have been wounded by the state, when there was no possibility of a cure. When we started the process of interviewing the real victims' family members, they easily shared about different aspects of their life-experiences, and the play got its structure. I give all the credit for this to those families.

From a writer's perspective, the play is written in a simple storytelling format. With the use of multipurpose stage props and a simple narrative, we prepared a play with a series of simple stage settings. We tried to communicate the story in simple words through different characters. That's why the actors have important roles in the play. I would like to thank the entire cast and crew of the play and those who have supported the play to be published.

Sijan Dahal

Associate Playwright/Assistant Director

It's been two years since we wrote and staged this play. Seniors from Mandala and Mr. Ramesh Adhikari encouraged us to publish the play as a book from right after its first staging. Their constructive feedback created a kind of creative pressure for me. I had not had the courage before to publish a script I had written.

Sometimes, we write for ourselves and sometimes to prove ourselves. Sometimes we do it out of need and even sometimes for ambition. When Sir Rajan Khatiwada proposed me to write this, it was an opportunity for me. I did research for it and met with family members of the disappeared. As our meetings with family members increased, my confidence to write faded. But at least, I could empathise with the experience of family members by converting the conversation into a play.

When I first met, I was afraid of talking with the families: I didn't know what to ask or how to talk. During the last couple of decades they must have shared their story with the media, political leaders, NGO and INGO representatives, but had they got what they wanted? Now I was asking them to repeat the same story. How ethical would this be? Yes, I was afraid, but I had to write. But despite my fears, they trusted us. They even generously shared their deep feelings and internal affairs too.

I didn't know how important this play would be for Nepali theatre. But the important thing for me was that at least I could share some of the sorrows of the victim's community, especially while traveling with this play in the western districts of Nepal. I don't know how many people have understood their stories through what we have staged? But, for me, the play is an attempt to lend our solidarity to their voices.

Translator's Note

Theatre supports us to look at the mystery of life; it helps us to absorb the nectar of life. And for me theatre is a tool to detoxify one's ego and jealousy. If there were no theatre in this city, the rainbow of my life would have missed a significant color. The theatre is a quiet refuge for me in this bizarre city. Whenever I am around the theatre and artists I reach the height of happiness, I find myself intoxicated with joy.

This is the reason I happily do anything that I can do for theatre. And this was the reason I couldn't say no to to translate this play written by Rajan and Sijan.

This play recalls a tragic period in the lives of Nepali people. I myself witnessed that time, so my heart was heavy while working on this. I am grateful to Rajan and Sijan for their efforts to record the nightmare Nepali society passed through.

Long live the theatres of the world!

Viplob Pratik

Poet/Lyricist/Novelist

Note from Family Members

The pain caused by my fathers' disappearance was with me and my family only. Only a few people knew about the things that happened to us and among them, even fewer were ready to listen to our stories. Those who have not experienced the direct impacts of the war can feel that 'the past is past', but for us it's the source of our ongoing difficulties and pain. Through the play 'Half Truth' our experiences and stories have reached the wider public. Mandala has helped us to speak up and brought our hidden emotions out. I think Mandala became 'the voice of the voiceless'. Those who have watched the performance should realize the fact that the issue of disappearance is not just an episode of history but is still affecting hundreds of families and the nation as a whole.

The play helped me to connect with many other members of society who have gone through my fate. I never thought that my story would reach out so powerfully to the audience. I would like to thank Mandala Theatre, writers and the actors of the play. Let's not forget the past, rather let's learn from the past to create a better future.

Nagma Mali

Family member of the Disappeared

On Stage

Manu: Prakash Gandharva

Soon Kumari: Ranjana Oli

Narrator: Jiban Bhattarai

Juna: Vijaya Karki

Juna's Daughter/Rupa's Sister: Binita Gurung

Neel Kumari's Father: Ingi Hopo Koinch Sunuwar

Juna's Son/Government Staff: Rohit Poudel

Juna's Husband/Rupa's Father/Rupa's Teacher: Shakti Rai

Neel Kumari: Neel Kumari Chaudhary

Sirjana/ Rupa's Grandmother: Sirjana Subba

Soldier: Umesh Tamanag

Rupa: Akanchha Karki

Off Stage

Props: Shakti Rai

Costumes: Akanchha Karki and Vijaya Karki

Light Design: Umesh Tamang

Technical Assistance: Anil Karki and Suresh Karki

Music: Nimish Kattel

Poems: Tirtha Shrestha and Saurabh Karki

Poster/Brochure: Ingi Hopo Koinch Sunuwar and Sijan Dahal

Playwrights: Rajan Khatiwada and Sijan Dahal

Assistant Director: Sijan Dahal

Design and Direction: Rajan Khatiwada

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Cast

Manu	- 28 years (Male)
Soon Kumari (Manu's wife)	- 22 years (Female)
Juna	- 39 years (Female)
Juna's Daughter	- 23 years (Female)
Juna's Son	- 18 years (Male)
Juna's Husband	- 40 years (Male)
Neel Kumari	- 24 years (Female)
Father of Neel Kumari	- 70 years (Male)
Guest 1	- 70 years (Male)
Guest 2	- 27 (Male)
Sirjana	- 27 years (Female)
Soldier	- 30 years (Male)
Rupa	- 22 years (Female)
Government Staff	- 45 years (Male)
Jagat Bahadur (Rupa's Father)	- 35 years (Male)
Rupa's Sister	- 15 years (Female)
Rupa's Grand Mother	- 80 years (Female)
Shyam Lama (Rupa's Teacher)	- 35 years (Male)
Journalist (Narrator)	

The stage is completely dark. The light spreads slowly. On the stage is a local teashop. There are some people moving around. They are not familiar with each other. The sound of a cuckoo calling is coming from upstage.

[Set/stage props - Two windows and a gate, supported by an iron frame currently make up the tea shop. As the scenes change, these windows and a gate will become a home, a bus, a government office and finally, a school.]

Soon Kumari enters from the audience, walking towards the stage. She has a bundle of clothes in one hand and a wooden box in her other hand that looks like a backpack. She is carrying a silhouette picture and heavy baggage with the support of a stick. The stick is on her shoulder. While walking to the stage, Soon Kumari is humming a melody. Manu, the husband of Soon Kumari is walking behind her. He is trying to stop her. He is also carrying a heavy bag along with a Sarangi (a Nepali stringed folk instrument).

Soon Kumari - [Starts singing a folk song from Mid-Western Nepal. The song is about questioning someone's fate who is trying to find his/her beloved.]

*Kaile paune hola maya
bhagi janya afnai chhaya
main mori ki karima...
dailekh deuta kohi gaya
rat gedi bhuinbhari bhai gaya
main mori ki karima...*

Manu - Woman, quiet... be quiet! See, there are many people around. You can't sing whenever you want. You must look for a quiet place first.

Soon Kumari - [**Stops singing.**] Who said so? Can't I open my heart and find some relief through singing?

Manu - [**He tries to go back.**] Don't try to be over smart. You should check the place and the people first before you do anything.

Soon Kumari - [**Smiles and enters the teashop.**] What else can I do my dear? I shouldn't have come, but I came. And, I shouldn't have sang, but I did...

Manu - [**Gets a little angry**] Everyone has their own painful story. They aren't gathered here just to listen to you. This is a big city. Got it?

Soon Kumari comes to the front of the stage and starts talking to the audience by herself.

Soon Kumari - Gentlemen, I want to share something with you. Let me ask something first...

[**We hear the sounds of cuckoos calling all around the stage. Manu is a little shy but returns to the stage again.**]

Soon Kumari - They have not found their family yet. Am I right, dear?

Manu - Yes. Before their daddy flew away, he said he would return when the monsoon starts. He has not returned yet, so these cuckoos are still waiting.

Soon Kumari looks at the cuckoos and, lost in thoughts, she starts singing the same song.

- Manu** - [As Soon Kumari starts to repeat the song again, he pulls at her] Let's go.
- Soon Kumari** - No! Who knows... we may find your father in this crowd. He may not recognize us, or we him, but he may recognize our melody and the Sarangi. [Manu and Soon Kumari keep silence for a while. Soon Kumari breaks the silence.] And see, there are so many people around. Someone must have seen him.
- Manu** - As if! Just move. Our friends are already on their way.
- Soon Kumari** - There is no harm to ask. We may find some clue.
- Manu** - Hmm! You are right. But I doubt we will find a clue.
- Soon Kumari** - He must be old. It will be difficult to recognize him.
- Manu** - It makes no difference whether he is old or young. Trust me, I will recognize him if I get a chance to see him just once. By the way, who knows, perhaps he is searching for me like I am searching for him?
- Soon Kumari** - I have seen him only in a picture. How could he recognize you? You said you were very young when they took away your father.
- Manu** - You are right. Maybe, he is trying to find me in a group of small children. How would he know that I am married to you already?
- Soon Kumari** - That's why, I'll sing father's melody and you better play the Sarangi your father left behind.

Manu - [**He starts tuning the Sarangi.**] Now stop. Okay, I will sing. But I will blame you if someone gets irritated.

Soon Kumari - You can get whatever you want if you just ask. I trust no one will stop me singing. [**Speaks to the audience.**] Am I right?

Manu - [**He is ready to accompany Soon Kumari. But before he starts, he addresses the audience.**] Which song shall I sing? Shall I sing about this country, this society or shall I sing a song of emotion, of the sarangi? [**Starts singing. The song is about a long, sad and heart-wrenching story.**]

*Piuna mithi mero hazoor gaun gharako paani
nasau manko byatha, sunau joog jaani.*

Manu and Soon Kumari move upstage. The song continues...

The Narrator enters. He is holding a newspaper. He talks to the audience.

Narrator - Did you read the newspaper today? Who read it and who didn't? No worries, it's not a problem if you've not read it. [**He is a little excited. He shows the newspaper to the audience.**] Here is an article. I want to read it for you.

Oops, I'm sorry. Let me introduce myself first. I am a student of journalism. I am not published much. I prefer to write human interest stories, but editors usually reject them. Finally, today my story has been published.

This story is special for me in many ways. Firstly, because I tried to help someone as much as I could through my story. Secondly, because, I am glad to say, I fulfilled that responsibility. And thirdly, because, on the basis of this article, I managed to find my identity in this crowd. But the editor edited this story a lot. Many lines are missing. Maybe, they found the sentences insignificant, which were so important to me. No matter! Everybody has different opinions. Anyway, I will read it for you all, and introduce my characters.

[He starts to read the newspaper] The story I am going to tell you happened a few days ago. I was in Parajuli tea stall near the eastern side of *Singhadarbar*¹ in Anamnagar. It was raining outside and the sky was dark. Some people rushed into the tea stall with heavy luggage on their backs. It seemed that their hearts were heavier than their baggage. They looked tired and yet one of them asked us with a smile about the main entrance to Singhadarbar. I gave them directions, but they did not set out. They couldn't leave because it was raining outside. I invited them to have a seat. The shopkeeper wondered if they would like to have some tea. They shook their head hesitantly, but it was a sign of consent. I tried to listen to their conversation until the tea was served. I was interested to listen. I asked them a few questions. They had had a long

1 'The Lion's Palace' - the central government buildings of Nepal.

journey from the western part of Nepal. It wasn't just a simple journey. It was a quest to discover something.

Then the tea was on the table. I tried to keep control of my curiosity as I asked a few more questions. After our short conversation, I already felt warmly towards them. They shared their story with me while they were drinking tea. And their story goes like this...

Melodious music starts playing from backstage as the light goes off slowly.

There is a small house on the right of the stage. Manu and Soon Kumari reach the front of the house. People inside are crying and both Manu and Soon Kumari are curious about the reason. The door is half open. They put their baggage nearby and sit down. The curtain of the window shakes. Juna comes near the window. She looks outside and then slowly walks out of the door. She enters the courtyard. She is smiling but it is a smile mixed with pain. Her daughter follows her. Juna takes her daughter's hands and circles around with her in happiness. She stops after a few rounds. Then Juna suddenly starts staring ahead.

Juna - You were telling me something yesterday, and you asked, "Why are you scared? See, I am here now..." I couldn't even feel your warmth, before you disappeared again. If you were here right now, I would have showered all my tears on you out of happiness. See, your daughter has conquered the world. She has passed her master's degree.

But it is useless because I am sharing this moment alone in your absence. Shedding these tears of joy doesn't have much meaning for me. Ah, if only you were here to embrace this little girl now, the joy of her success would have been double.

Juna throws the certificates in her hands upwards. They fall to the ground. She starts picking them up again. While she is collecting the last one, her daughter dashes to her shoulder. Juna looks at her daughter. She is surprised.

Manu - Honey, it seems we will get shelter in a good place tonight. The people here seem to be very happy.

Soon Kumari - So, let's start singing then.

Manu starts to tune the sarangi. The daughter consoles Juna who is crying. Manu completes the tuning and starts to play. Now Juna and her daughter notice Manu and Soon Kumari.

Daughter - Who are you looking for?

Manu - It's almost dark. We are looking for shelter.

Soon Kumari - We don't need much; just a small corner will be fine.

Juna - It is not as scary as it used to be before. Why shouldn't I let you in for one night? So, tell me where are you from and where are you going?

Soon Kumari - Who knows one's destiny? We may end up anywhere, but our plan is to reach the city. We come from a remote place, madam.

Juna - You must have some big plans, because you are laden with these heavy bags.

Manu - What to say? Actually we are in search of our father.

Juna - In which city does he live now?

Soon Kumari - We don't know. We will just keep searching.

Juna - How can you be sure? Could he not be found in some village also instead of a town?

Manu - I was a little boy back then. A group of three people came to our house. They were carrying guns. They said they would take my father to Kathmandu. They assured us, he would be back in a week. It's now been almost twelve years that we have been waiting. Neither has he returned

nor have we had any news of him. That is why we are going to the city to search for him.

Daughter - Hey, brother! Get me a jar of water. [**She rolls out a mat.**]

Juna - Come, have a seat. [**All of them sit on the mat.**] So, how will you start to search for him? The city is so big.

Soon Kumari - [**She points to Manu.**] His best friend has given his word. He will help us to search for him. And, they say there are many concerned agencies. They will also help us to find him.

Juna's son brings a jar of water and gives it to Soon Kumari.

Manu - So, how many people are there in your family?

Juna - My son, daughter and myself. My daughter has just passed her master's this year. She received her certificate today.

Manu - That's great news. You must all be very happy then?

Juna - [**She speaks with much pain.**] Yes, brother. We all should have been very happy. [**She starts sobbing.**]

Soon Kumari - [**She picks up something and moves close to Juna. She gives her a small packet of *shilajit*².**] Sister, Take this! It's shilajit, a wonderful healer. [**Juna continues to cry.**] What happened, sister? Today is a day to celebrate. What makes you cry?

2 A gift of herbs from their region.

Juna - If you are standing on a bank of sorrow, even the ocean of happiness cannot reach you with its happy wave. It has no meaning. [**Soon Kumari and Manu are surprised. They look at each other.**] Yes, it's a moment of joy now, but I can't be totally happy.

Soon Kumari - They say you must not share your sorrow, but I say you have to share it instead of giving yourself a hard time.

Manu - You always try to be smart. [**He gestures to Soon Kumari to keep quiet.**]

Juna - Yes, I can tell you, because you also have been carrying the same pain. But, you know, I haven't shared this for ten years... My husband's fate is the same as your father's. He has been disappeared for thirteen years. I kept silent for so many years. I thought it's meaningless to share my sorrow with others. I waited for his return so fondly, but there has been no sign of his reappearance. I lied and kept this secret from everyone, from my neighbours, my friends and my family. But today I couldn't control myself.

[**She stands up and walks a little closer to the audience and talks to them.**]

He loved to eat meat so much. Sometimes we used to cook together. That day, we were cooking meat together. [**Juna keeps telling the story. Her story is now being performed on the stage.**] He went out to the courtyard with a jar of water to wash his hands and feet. As he was washing one of his friends came over and told him that other

friends were waiting down at the river. I became a little suspicious. [**Her husband comes closer to Juna and gives the jar to her.**] And then he passed me the water jar.

Juna - The food is ready. It's not ok to go with an empty stomach.

Husband - When the meat is ready I will be back.

Juna - Please, don't go! At least sometimes, do listen to others as well. You don't know who is waiting there and what their intentions are.

Husband - Don't worry. I have not done anything wrong. I hope they will understand.

[**Her husband leaves.**]

Juna - [**To the audience.**] He left without eating the food we cooked. I felt bad, so I followed him to the bank of the river, but by that time, they were out of sight.

When I came home, the meat was already burnt. Since then my heart has looked like that burnt cooking pot. Many times I have sat on the river bank and gazed down the river. The river never stopped running, but I have stopped. I turned on my radio hoping to hear news about him, but it has never uttered a single word about his disappearance. Instead the people who took him away have got rewards, and there was news about them on the radio several times. So, I stopped listening to the radio. I have never turned it on since then. I still think of my kids as small babies, but they have already learned to fly. At

times, I feel like putting *sindoor*³ in the middle of my forehead, but I can't. I feel like my life is worthless. But it's not so easy to quit your life.

Soon Kumari - Sister, don't worry? He will return someday. That day, you will find the meaning of your waiting.

Juna - I don't know... [**There are sounds of barking dogs and crickets.**] It is already midnight. Let's go inside.

The lights go off.

Ambience of the Morning. Manu and Soon Kumari pick up their bags and get ready to leave. They turn to Juna to say goodbye.

Manu - It would have been better if we could go together.

Juna - I would love to go with you both, but I cannot leave my children behind. If you find your father or any truth about him, let me know while you are returning. You will be taking this path again, I guess?

Soon Kumari - Sure. Now let us go. We will see you. [**Soon Kumari takes a few steps forward and then stops, as if she still has something to say.**] If you can manage, please let's go together.

Juna - I would like to go, but I can't. You go ahead.

Juna stands alone. She is staring ahead and her mind is blank. Her shadow is seen in the backdrop of the stage. The shadow of Juna starts a heated conversation with Juna herself.

3 Vermillion. Most of the married women in the villages of Nepal put it in middle of their forehead.

- Shadow 1** - Your kids are grown up now. They can take care of themselves. You can leave them and go.
- Juna** - No, I can't. I know the pain when the head of the family goes absent. If I go, my kids will go through the same pain I went through.
- Shadow 2** - You better go. You should go for your sake also. No matter what result you get, you will feel lighter afterwards.
- Juna** - Hmm, light! I think it's not in my fate. Even their father was light-hearted before his disappearance.
- Shadow 3** - Can you answer your children, if they ask you one day about your husband, their father? Can you tell them he was light-hearted?
- Juna** - No, I can't. I can't give them any answers. And I can't go either.
- Shadow 1** - You may not give them anything, but you can give them an answer. That is what is significant now. Go for yourself, please!
- Shadow 2/3** - **[They begin to shout out loudly.]** Go, right now. You must leave. Go, you have to, now, right this moment. Go!

And the light goes off.

The light slowly increases on the stage. Soon Kumari, Manu and Juna are on their way. They have their baggage. There is music playing backstage. After some time, groups of people dressed in black come onto the stage. They are marching together and Manu's group is blocked. They are blowing *Shankha*⁴ loudly and singing a traditional song.

Marching team - We can understand your problem. If you are hurt, we can feel the pain. So, calm down!

Manu - Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches. You can only guess, sir!

Marching team - We will be in the government very soon, and we will certainly hear your voice. Trust us. We will bring all the truth to the table.

Manu - We don't care for a new government. We need our people to return home. We don't care about your promises, we need results.

Manu, Soon Kumari and Juna ignore the Marching team. They pass them and move further on.

Their journey from the mountains comes to an end and they arrive at the Terai (the plains), in the south-western part of Nepal. They reach a crossroad i. From backstage someone is

4 A conch shell used in some rituals in Nepal.

singing a traditional song about a girl's love for her father and her beloved. She sings in the regional language Tharu.

Muriyala hana gayenu, baba ke sagaraaba re ha
Muriyala hana gayenu, baba ke sagaraaba re ha
Shakhiye ho, sindoor chhutera panighat
Shakhiye ho, sindoor ch hutera panighat

Juna - I am so thirsty.

Soon Kumari - We may find water a little further on. Let's take rest here for a while.

A cuckoo is singing. Everybody is looking towards one corner. It seems the sound of the cuckoo is coming from that direction. Meanwhile a girl enters. She is carrying water in a vessel. She is humming a melodious song.

Manu - Hello sister, can you give us some water to drink?

Neel Kumari - [To the audience in a monologue] They are asking for water to drink. How could I say no to them? But I brought this water to worship god, the peepal tree. I pray to god everyday pouring this water on him and asking him to favour me by returning my brother.

Urgh! I can't even offer water to thirsty travellers? Shame on me! I will bring more water to shower the peepal.

But, I have already dedicated this water to the peepal.

No, the thirsty people must come first.

Neel Kumari takes out a bowl and serves them water. Juna, Soon Kumari and Manu drink the water.

Manu - You must have gone a long way to bring this water. I felt close to you, so I asked without hesitation. I hope you don't mind?

Neel Kumari - I felt the same, so I offered you the water. We are like family now. We don't have to be formal.

Soon Kumari - He doesn't have sisters. So, he becomes emotional when he meets girls. What is your name, sweetie?

Neel Kumari - Neel Kumari!

Manu - [To **Soon Kumari**] Don't try to be smart! [To **Neel Kumari**] I don't have sisters. But I guess, you must have?

Neel Kumari is speechless. Everybody looks at her. In the meantime, Juna stands up and come towards the front of the stage. A spotlight is focused on her.

Juna - [To the audience] While we were drinking water, a thread was drawing us together. It took us to the home of Neel Kumari. When we reached there, we heard that someone had come to her home with a marriage proposal. Neel Kumari's father was happy, but Neel Kumari didn't want to accept. She didn't want to leave her father behind in his old age.

The stage is bright now- there are lights all around. Neel Kumari's father is sitting in the courtyard. There are two strangers sitting beside him. They are here with their marriage proposal. Neel Kumari reaches the house. She is angry with her father.

Neel Kumari - Daddy, please send them away before I do something bad. I am not interested in getting married. Don't you have enough space for me?

Neel Kumari's father apologizes to the strangers. But the strangers get angry and leave. Neel Kumari and her father are both upset. Juna, Manu and Soon Kumari come around them. They find a place to sit. There is silence for a while.

Father - No wonder, I have a headache. Everybody has their own opinion. **[Short pause]** Children should never be a burden for their parents. Your brother was also not a burden for me, but he took his own way.

Neel Kumari - My brother didn't leave this house. He was taken away without his consent.

Father - Whatever! The fact is, he went. And, your mother? She also left this world. Now, you are the only one left. If you want to leave, I will console myself.

I am drowning in grief these days. These worries have taken my strength away. Otherwise, I could still have done so many things.

If you get married I would be so happy. You would have children. **[Pause]** I was born alone, I'm still alone and when I die, I will be alone. But before my death, I dream of a new life coming through you. That's all I wish. **[Starts sobbing.]** If your brother were here, I wouldn't have asked you to do me this favour.

[Short pause] I don't know what kind of situation he is dealing with. He who used to show the way to others, has forgotten his own way home.

Neel Kumari's father goes inside his room in a bad mood. He leaves the door half open. Everybody looks at Neel Kumari.

Neel Kumari - [Talks to the audience. The light is focused on her.] My brother used to teach in a school. He used to go to school early each morning and come back each evening. I used to wait to hear the bell of his bicycle. I prepared food for him every day. That day too I was waiting for him, waiting to hear the bell of his bicycle. I planned we would eat together. But he didn't come. I got news when it was almost dark. Some people had come and taken away a few teachers including my brother. Who they were and where they took them were unanswered questions. We had no idea. My parents and I waited for his return, but alas!

There is a little light on the stage. As Neel Kumari is telling her story, what she describes is acted out in the background. Two people enter and give a gun to Neel Kumari, and take her with them. They are wearing bandanas.

Neel Kumari - After a few weeks, some people came and took me away with them. They told me that I would see my brother. I trusted them, so I followed them. I obeyed them. Whilst staying with them in the jungle, I got news that my mother had passed away. They brought me home. [A man comes and puts a shawl on her shoulder and takes the gun away.] I did my mother's funeral rituals myself. If I hadn't been able to come to my mother's funeral, I wonder where I would be wandering these days. Nowadays, when I go to search for grass and firewood in the jungle, my worries carry me away somewhere else. I used to go to the jungle with my brother when I was

young. The jungle was very familiar then, but now it is not.

There is silence for a while. The stage is bright now. Manu, Soon Kumari and Juna are listening. Their luggage is set aside.

Now I live here with my old father. He always says - "I am an old man like a log. You don't need to look after me. Go, marry someone, go." I am human and I have my desires. I also want to lead a happy life. But I cannot follow my desire and leave my old father alone. Now, he has given up hope, but I still wait for the sounds of that ringing bell on my brother's rusted bicycle, to cook food for him and to eat together again.

Soon Kumari - Oh, we are sorry. We've hurt you by digging up your past. We didn't mean it. But, you know what? We carry the same pain as yours. We are on our way to the city and are hoping to find our disappeared relatives. We met you on our journey and shared some close moments. We appreciate your warmth. Now it's time for us to move on. If we don't leave right now, we will miss the bus.

Neel Kumari - You must be tired. You can stay here and rest for tonight.

Juna - It will be too costly for us. Our priority is our journey, our search. If you like, you can join us? **[Short pause]** If we don't search for an answer, we will never know.

Neel Kumari's father comes out from the house. He is a little angry.

Father - Yes, you should go too. Just leave!

Neel Kumari - No! I am not going.

Father is still angry. He goes back into the house. The door is half open. Manu gets emotional, takes out his sarangi and starts singing. The song describes a brother's heart touching expressions to his sister, because he couldn't see her at the time of their special festival.

*Kattika maina
Hey meri baina
Mala ooini na royidiye
Ma aauna paina
Ahile ko barsha...*

While Manu is singing, their journey begins again. Neel Kumari is watching them walking away. When the team reaches the main road, it's already dark. We see headlights of a bus. It comes closer and stops. All of them step into the bus. Manu continues the song. The bus moves ahead. Sirjana is listening to the song and shedding tears quietly.

Sirjana - Your song is quite heart-touching. [She gives Manu some money.]

Manu - [He feels a little awkward.] Oh no! I am not singing for money. Money cannot heal my pain and find my lost happiness, my dear.

Sirjana - [She also feels awkward.] Oh, I didn't know. Please don't take it badly.

Soon Kumari - No problem, my dear. No worries!

Manu - Can't you shut up? You should know when to speak?

Soon Kumari - As you like!

Soon Kumari takes out cereal and gives it to Sirjana. She says she doesn't want it. Then Soon Kumari offers it to Manu. Manu chokes while eating it. Sirjana gives him some water. He is hesitant but takes the bottle and drinks.

Juna - Where do you live, dear?

Sirjana - I live nearby.

Juna - Are you going far?

Sirjana - I don't know whether it's near or far, but I am going to the city. .

Soon Kumari - Oh what a coincidence! That's our destination too!

Manu grimaces at Soon Kumari.

Sirjana - It seems you have some serious work to do in the city.

Juna - Yes dear, we are going to the city to find our relative.

Soon Kumari - And what takes you to the city?

Sirjana - How should I explain to you? Actually, it has been 13 years I have been running back and forth.

All the characters look at each other with curiosity.

Manu- That long? Can you share what kind of work takes that much time?

Sirjana - [**Becomes emotional**] I don't know whether I should tell you or not! They took away my husband. I still hope to find him.

Juna - We all have the same story, my dear. Everybody notices the rolling tears, but nobody notices the pain inside. We too are on the same journey as you.

Soon Kumari - [**She is in a hurry to share.**] Yes, and our father is missing too.

Manu - No, he is not missing. They took him away, he was made disappeared. And what about your husband?

- Sirjana** - He used to work in a health post. My families' tea stall was nearby. He used to visit our place daily. Eventually he started staying more at our teashop than at the health post! I didn't realize when it was that I fell in love with him while serving tea. We were from different castes, so we had to marry secretly. We settled together in a new house. It was about one month after our marriage that four wounded people came to our house. My husband gave them treatment. They stayed the night and left the next morning with their friends. That week police officers came to our house. They blamed my husband for giving shelter to the rebels. I don't know what happened to him after that day. I went to many places in search of him. But instead of finding him, I just heard that they kept moving him to different places. I searched all the possible places I knew and asked others for favours. I begged at the party offices, the government offices, and those offices that were 'seriously' working for the rights of the people. But I have no idea, where he is! Once I find the truth, I will go to my parents place and his home and share the real answer.
- Juna** - You have to make your heart strong sister. That's all I know.
- Sirjana** - I have tried that too. But the times we live through makes my heart weaker. I had just taken the first few steps of married life. I had woven a few dreams for us. I left my family and ran away with him. But he was disappeared.

Manu - Don't give up, my dear. We have miles to go before we sleep. If we give up now, how can we find the truth, the real answers?

Sirjana - I found him after a long devotion. I was just feeling my new wings and learning to fly, but the storm that came that day broke my wings and washed away my dreams.

How long do I have to wait to get him back? And how long will it take until I can dream happily again? I don't know when. But I want to find the answer and share that with my parents and his family.

Everyone become speechless. The bus is moving ahead and it is now going through a jungle. Suddenly, the bus stops! Everybody panics when a soldier wearing old attire and holding a gun steps into the bus.

Soldier - [To the driver.] Didn't you see I was giving you a signal to stop? Are you trying to ignore me?

The soldier scans the passengers.

Soldier - Get up, all of you! I need to check things.

Manu tries to go out. He reaches in front of the soldier.

Soldier - Don't you understand English? Should I say this in Chinese? I didn't ask you to go out. I asked you to stand where you are. Go and stay where you were.

The soldier starts checking each individual. He doesn't care about their bags and luggage, he is just checking each passenger's face. Everyone is a little scared. The soldier looks at everyone with much curiosity. Finally, he stops his checking and stands still.

Soldier - [To the driver] Now you can drive ahead.

The bus moves on. There is silence inside the bus. The soldier is standing in the passageway.

Manu - [A little scared.] You seem to be in trouble?
Where are you going?

Soldier - [Looks at Manu seriously.] Narayanghat.
Where is the last destination of this bus?

Juna - Kathmandu.

Soldier - I don't care where it goes. Narayanghat will be
my stop.

Soon Kumari - No problem! You stop where you want to.

The soldier looks at Soon Kumari.

Soldier - Are you migrating to Kathmandu?

Sirjana - No, we're just going for a few days.

Soon Kumari - And are you in the army?

Soldier - Why do you want to know? [Everyone keeps
silent.] I was in the army.

All the passengers pay attention to the conversation.

Sirjana - Was in the army?

Soldier - Should I say this in English again? I was, and
now I am not.

Sirjana - You stopped our bus in the middle of the jungle
and started checking us. Did you find anything?

Soldier - If I had, you would have seen it. And I wouldn't
be travelling together with you.

Soon Kumari - Did you do some big crime to leave the army?

Soldier - [**Gets angry.**] Keep quiet. She didn't do anything wrong. She became a victim, just because I was in the army.

Juna - What a pity!

The soldier stares at Juna.

Soldier - Where do you come from?

Soon Kumari - [**Without breathing.**] We came all the way from the west. We are searching for our father. [**Looking at Sirjana.**] And she came to find her missing husband.

Manu puts his hand over Soon Kumari's mouth.

Soldier - [**To Manu**] Why do you do that? Let her speak. [**Silence.**]

So, you are all here looking for disappeared relatives? Do you think you will find them easily? Do you think they were taken with much care and kept in the parliament?

Manu - How would we know? They told us he would come back in a week, but many weeks have passed. We searched for him everywhere except Kathmandu. That is why we are going there to submit all the documents.

Soldier - Do you think they will find him after you submit the documents? You did this before also. Did you get any results? Listen, I was serving in the government too. I was punished for my service: they took my beloved. That's why I am also searching for my wife. I still have a hope that she is alive. If not, I am sure I will kill them.

Listen, the documents will not help us find what we need: our disappeared ones.

[He looks at his gun.] I have a gun but I still couldn't find my beloved.

Hey! Stop the bus.

Sirjana - This is not the place you wanted to go.

Soldier - It may not be, but I know where to take a ride and where to stop. Hey, driver. Don't you understand my language? Stop the bus.

The bus is stopped.

Soldier - Thank you. Be safe.

The soldier steps off the bus. The passengers look at him. Music starts playing from backstage. The lights go off.

It is a sunny afternoon. Manu, Soon Kumari, Neel Kumari, Juna and Sirjana get off the bus and continue on their way. The Marching team crosses their path again. The Marching team have caps on their heads, shaped like horses and coloured black. They start singing in a loud voice a ritual song sung by Shamans to control demons coming from all directions.

*Aakashai badhau, paatalai badhau
Khali kheli hidne, dulera hidne pichashai badhau
purabai badhau, pachchhimai badhau,
uttarai badhau, dakkhinai badhau...*

Marchpass team- You shouldn't have come now. This is not the time. We were planning to send relief and support to your doorstep.

Sirjana - We are not here for any relief and support. We need the truth about what happened.

Marchpass team- You will have to wait a little for that. We have to manage a few things and fix some systems. We can feel your pain, but for now you should go back your home. We will come and discuss things with you there.

Juna - You didn't discuss anything with us while you were taking our people. And nobody needs to feel our pain. Whatever you do we don't care. We will not go back till our demands are fulfilled.

Manu's group ignores the Marching team and walks on. They go slowly towards the back of the stage and exit.

The Narrator enters.

Narrator - When I listened to their story in the teashop, I remembered Rupa. Rupa used to live in a small room in a tiny house near me. She was the only person who was supporting her little sister, and her granny, who was on the threshold of life and death. Rupa's life was tough. I could see glimpses of her struggle through my window. I knew clearly about her situation and her daily chores, but I could not help her. In the tea shop, I was curious to know and understand these people's stories because I knew about Rupa's story. They all have different stories but the same pain.

... And then, the next day I took Rupa to meet **Manu's** group.

A government officer is on duty. Rupa is in front of him with a file of her documents. The Officer does not pay any attention to her.

Rupa - Sir!

The Officer is busy with his own work.

Rupa - Sir! How long should I wait?

The Officer stares at Rupa and picks up a file from his table.

Officer - Your name?

Rupa - Rupa Tamang.

Officer - Your age?

Rupa - Twenty-one.

Officer - Your father's name?

- Rupa** - Jagat Bahadur Tamang.
- Officer** - His occupation?
- Rupa** - He is a sculptor.
- Officer** - Where is he now?
- Rupa** - I don't know.
- Officer** - What about your mother?
- Rupa** - She passed away.
- Officer** - If so, I can't issue a citizenship card for you. You can only get it if you come with your father.
- Rupa** - Sir, actually I was not looking for a citizenship card. I came in search of my father.

Rupa walks away without saying anything. She comes to the front of the stage and talks to the audience.

- Rupa** - I was seven years old back then. I went home after school one day. My father was making a sculpture in our courtyard. A little distance away my little sister was lying on a mat. She was looking up at the sky, as if our mother was watching us from there. Whilst my father was working, he was teasing my little sister. He was sweating as he hammered the statue. .

The light goes down slowly and the stage becomes dark. Rupa's house is seen on the stage as the light rises. Rupa is just back from school. She runs towards the courtyard. She puts her bag down and starts playing with her sister.

- Rupa** - Hello! Oho! La la! See how happy she is!
- [Talks to the audience.] She was so happy and wanted to come close to me as if I was her mother.

[Talks to her sister.] You want to go to school with me? Okay, cool. You grow up a little and I will take you with me.

Jagat - [With a smiling face.] Okay, now go inside and have your tiffin. Don't forget to help your granny to cook dinner.

Rupa - You went to the market, didn't you. Tell me, what did you bring for me?

Jagat - [Smiles.] I thought I would bring two chocolates for my sweetie, but the shopkeeper was sick and the shop was closed. I will bring them tomorrow.

Rupa - [To the audience.] My father never lies to me. I became angry with the shopkeeper. Why should he have fallen ill?

Rupa is upset. She goes inside the house. She leaves the bag inside and comes back out again. She sits on the threshold. Her face is sad. Jagat looks at her, smiles and starts sculpting the statue again.

Jagat - You seem so upset today, like a cloud in the sky? Does that mean it will rain today? [Rupa is much annoyed. Jagat laughs at her.] Come here. [Rupa goes to her father. Jagat fastens a watch around Rupa's wrist.]

The light dims. Rupa comes towards the front of the stage. Now the light is focused on Rupa.

Rupa - [To the audience.] Hmm! See! I feel the touch of my father's soul.

Yes, this is the touch of love. I got to feel this touch after eight long years when a new sir was

appointed at our school. He was a maths teacher. When I saw him, I kept looking at him.

Who was this? The new teacher was no-one else but my father. I became confused. My father had disappeared eight years ago. He was not a teacher. So, how could he be here now? I started wondering- could he have become a teacher after he disappeared? My father buried all his revolutionary books in his land according to my father's friends. But, if this teacher was my father why didn't he talk to me? Why didn't he ask me anything? No, maybe he didn't recognize me, because, when he left I was a small child.

The lights rise slowly on the stage. We can see a schoolroom. Rupa is staring in one direction. Shyam sir moves closer to Rupa. He takes Rupa's book and puts her hand on a particular page. Rupa remembers her father. Shyam sir introduces himself to the class.

Shyam sir - I am Shyam Lama. I will teach you mathematics.

Rupa is lost in her thoughts. The light focuses on her. The other actors are in the shadow.

Rupa - [To the audience.] All my happiness turned to sadness and my dream turned to ashes, because my father's name wasn't Shyam Lama. Time stood still in that moment. My eyes were full of tears, like an ocean. I looked at my watch. I felt like the watch seller cheated my father. It didn't show the right time. Suddenly I remembered that my father's wrist must be empty. He had given his watch to me. He doesn't know it's time to return home, because he doesn't have a watch

to check the time. The day he gave me his watch, the bad times started.

I work now. Everyday when I return home, the same fears repeatedly trouble me. Has my granny's oxygen cylinder lasted or has it finished? Has my sister come back home safely or not?

Rupa enters the house. She stands still for a while. Her sister is looking at a map and murmuring.

Rupa - What happened, dear?

Sister - I had the same dream, sister. The soldiers were taking our father away. Can you tell me where the army lives?

Rupa is stunned to hear her sister's question.

Sister - Sister, I will join the army when I grow up. I will find our father and bring him back home.

Rupa embraces her sister and turns towards the audience.

Rupa - I couldn't answer her. She has seen her father only in pictures. Like me, she keeps searching for him amongst people who are our father's age. If you wish for something from the bottom of your heart, they say the universe conspires to help you. But neither has my sister found our father by looking at the map nor have I found a smile on my sister's face.

And I remember my granny also. She is not concerned when the needle of her oxygen cylinder reach the red zone and still blesses us for our long life.

Grand Mother is knitting a sweater for her son. Rupa moves close to her.

Rupa - How many times should I tell you- don't do this knitting, you need to rest now. You can do whatever you like after you become healthy again.

Grand Mother- Winter is at the door. What if your father arrives? He may not have warm clothes. All his clothes have become old. Who knows, he might have put on some weight. If I complete this on time, he will have something to wear.

Rupa - He's no longer a child. If you know, he must also be aware that winter is coming. He may not know the time, but he must have a sense of the seasons. Now come on, rest!

Grand Mother- You are just like your father. He used to take care of me a lot. He always forced me to have a rest. He used to get angry like your sister and he used to please me like you do.

My time has passed from minutes to hours, from days to months and from months to years with this knitting. Don't stop me.

I am restless waiting for your father's arrival. Someday, if your father arrives, I will leave all this and rest forever.

Somebody backstage plays the sarangi. Manu, Soon Kumari, Neel Kumari, Junaand Sirjana, are all sad. They are listening to Rupa. Rupa continues to tell her story.

Rupa - Granny has already knitted fourteen sweaters. Most of them have become old. Her eyes are weak now, but she still has not forgotten how to knit smoothly.

[To the audience] My uncle and my relatives disrespect my Granny's innocence. They want to take our land in a cunning way. And in my neighbourhood there are some people who look at my body with bad intentions. I am struggling to survive alone. Instead of supporting me, everybody seems to give me a hard time. I get cross with them, when I discover their mean intentions.

[Rupa cannot control her anger.] Sometimes, I feel like I want to be the hero of a film driving at full speed on a motorbike, who stops in the middle of the village and screams out loud. I want to get rid of and break away from all the fears, frustrations, unwanted instructions and useless burdens given by the so-called 'system', the society. Yes, I want to challenge all of you. Come on! Look into my eyes and see if you have enough courage to stop me! I am here to break all these hopeless rules and the bad character of this society! **[She starts to cry out of anger.]**

[To Manu's group.] If my father was with me, I wouldn't have this destiny.

There is a silence for a while.

The Marching team arrives shouting loudly. Half of them are wearing red hats and half of them are wearing black hats in the shape of horse's head. Both groups surround Manu's group. The sound from the Marching team is very loud, but Manu's group's voices still dominates. They break through the Marching team's barrier and come to the front of the stage.

Manu's group recites a poem:

We have written our names in the snow.

If the sun shines, our names will vanish in a while.

If the snow falls again, our names will be buried.

We exist, but our names are temporary.

So, if our names vanish, how will their names remain forever?

The stage becomes dark. The music from backstage goes silent.

Silence for a while! The Narrator enters and comes to the front right side of the stage.

Narrator - This is the unfinished story I wrote, which was published today. But their journey is still going on. If my article has helped them to travel further and if I have done justice to their lives, I will definitely be motivated to write more. If someone asks me what I did for those people who suffered the cruelty of ill-fate, I can answer that I have done something little, as much as I could do.

Why did this happen? Who made the plot of this story? Who has won and who has lost? I do not know. I know only that I am a **Narrator**, the **Narrator** of this story.

Manu's group enters the stage from the audience. They stand beside the Narrator. The cuckoo is chirping from backstage.

Manu - [**Looking at the cuckoo.**] Let us put down our luggage for a while.

Soon Kumari - It's not because of its weight, but we want to rest for a while.

The cuckoo is still chirping. All the characters look at the cuckoo.

Manu - [Looking at the cuckoo.] We have the same sorrow my dear. You are in search of your loved one, everybody knows it, but nobody is concerned about your sorrow.

A melody comes from backstage and the rest of the characters also put their luggage down. They look at the cuckoo.

Sirjana - I don't know whether I will be reborn or not. And I don't know how many more rivers I should cross in this life?

Juna - Nobody will answer me either. I don't know, what is the color of my sindoor and how should it be?

Rupa - And I don't know how long I have to wait for my father's arrival?

As the light slowly fades a poem is recited from backstage. All the characters take their luggage and place it in front of the audience. There are pictures of the disappeared and some of their belongings. A silhouette outline of a picture is clearly seen above the box.

Poem

On my watch

The time of life is running backward, why?

Let someone show me

The colour of life.

Children like birds

Return from their school

With gloomy faces.

Let someone tell me

The colour of the knowledge they carry in their school bags.

*I want to know the colour of an era,
And the colour of those fragile young dreams
Which have disappeared with time.*

*A father is waiting
For his disappeared son to come back,
I want to find the colour of this old father's eyes.*

*And what is the exact colour of the rhododendron?
Is that colour different from the face of a teenage girl?
I need to know the colour of the dried lips
Of a widow and the song she sings.*

*Please let me know the colour of our heart,
And what is the colour of the dream
We used to dream every day.*

*A group of political leaders
Just came out tipsy from a liquor store,
What is the colour of their intention?*

*Why? Why, is nobody
Answering my question?
Tell me the colour of lost dreams?*

*Thank god!
We all know the colour of our national flag,
Yes, it is red and its border is blue.*

**Manu's group is standing behind their luggage and the boxes.
The lights completely go off.**



