

**High Impact Factor 8.1458** ISSN



**Vol. 12, No. 4**



**Double-blind  
peer reviewed**



**Referred Journal**



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## Hindu Scented Shirt

### Nishanth K

Hyderhaji and his wife Biyumma entered the veranda of the high school drenched in heavy rain. They too stood behind the people standing in a row. They looked for familiar faces but saw nothing, perhaps because all the people standing drenched had the same face. It was silent in the pouring veranda. The remnants of the rain were dripping through the clothes of those who stood wondering what to do next. People came behind the queue. Continued .In the light of the candle Officials and volunteers writing something. Some people are running with rice, clothes and other things. It is still raining.

It took an hour, and by the time he reached the officer who was writing, saw him writing something by asking for his name and address. Some of the young people behind took them to the next room. There people were being given clothes.

Haider Haji got the above-mentioned shirt from the pile of clothes. Among the clothes brought by people from many places, a young man extended the shirt to Haider Haji. It is not clear what caused Haji to think that it was a Hindu shirt.

He don't know whether it had any smell of attar or sandalwood color. In any case, it was a cleanly washed, ironed and polished shirt. A saffron stalk was also found with it. Haji asked the young man.

"Do you have another shirt and cloth?"

It seemed that the young man had not heard it in the rush.

Someone else from behind led Haji forward. Biyumma had been shifted to the women's side before that. Haji stood there wondering what kind of shirt she had got. He has performed three Hajjs, has a 20 acre coconut grove and a two-story mansion, and someone has given him an old shirt.

"Go to room number 15.." said the young man who came after.

"Dude, shall we go to our relative's house. It's 6 kilometers away. If anyone got a car, I would pay any amount of money."

"There is water on all four sides of our village. There is no way without it coming down. If the water comes down tomorrow, we can go."

Muttering something, Haji moved towards room number fifteen with that Hindu shirt and saffron coloured mundu.

The classrooms are square in shape and are spread over three floors.

Each room is full of people. All the benches in the classroom are moved to one side and the mats are spread out. They must

be long mats brought from some mosques. Those who were changing their clothes, those who were sitting on the bench looking anxiously outside, those who were standing on the verandah talking to each other.

It started raining yesterday and it has been raining non-stop. The water is entering the river and the stones have broken somewhere. Leela, the maid, said this but did not care for her words. She can't come to work because of rain. Haji's phone was switched off because there was no electricity. Biyyumma said that the water was coming through the kitchen area while she was watching the water flowing down the trunk. She said that the remaining parts of the soil in the back were starting to peel off. Later water started entering the house.

When the member and two young men came, both of them were on the upper floor. Ground floor got water in the flood. They crossed the yard by sitting on a big copper. When he reached the upper road and looked back, one side of the house was washed away. That happened to haji today. Flood everywhere in the village. This school is a rescue place and a lot of people gather here now.

There were about fifty people in classroom number 15. The room was lit by three candles burning on the desk. Haji stood in a corner and started changing his shirt and body. He felt something changing as the sandal colored shirt touched his body. He thinks whose shirt is this?

Any government officials, or temple committee members, or anyone with a big job..

Anyway, this is a Hindu shirt ..an ordinary shirt without its smell and bright color ..I don't remember that Murikayyan shirt was worn before this.

Even though it was worn on the left, this saffron color mundu is not ours. Haji felt that the clothes and himself were in two worlds. A sandal-coloured shirt and saffron mundu were between him and the others, naked.

Someone in the room also gave him a Towel.Haji sat on the nearby bench with his head open and remembered his children in the Gulf and his wife who was sitting like this somewhere on the other side.

"At first I thought it was the sound of the helicopter. The sound of the rain was terrible. It must have been eight o'clock at night. When I went out, I saw...."

Raman was speechless for a while

He was sitting in a corner of the room and talking. A few people were sitting around him curiously.

Raman,a young man, was sitting in a corner of the room and talking. A few people were sitting around with curiosity. The day before, he had heard a crash somewhere. He must be the person there,Haji thinks

"We couldn't see anything in the dark. It was raining. But those sounds were scary. The sound of something falling and flowing. You can see it almost half a kilometer away from the house. It was that mountain that you always saw in the morning. And the people there."

He covered his face in both hands and cried.

The whole room went silent. Only the moans of the man echoed around the classroom. Those standing around stood with their heads down, not even to be comforted. The screaming rain hit the asbestos sheets and rippled around them.

"Are you and your family safe..?"

Someone asked

He raised his head and his eyes were full of tears.

"A hundred houses are buried under the soil, my friend.

And the people in those houses. Aarti Mol, who used to bring me milk. She is studying in the 3rd standard with my younger son.

Shameer, a 10th class boy who brings the newspaper.

In place of these people we used to see every day is now a huge mound.

Some JCB hands are searching there...

It's still raining..

In the meantime, let me and my family be safe.

I could not save even one person ..couldn't even get close to that area .All within seconds ...”

Haji's eyes filled with tears, he got up and went to him and stroked his head. Haji was sitting next to him. Haji realized that he was sitting next to the wall that was drawing water when the coldness seeped from where he was sitting. Haji thought deeply and patted his head. Haji's mind flashed through his mind the quarry run by his son-in-law at Bhutathan hill. JCBs climbing up through the swaying trees and the flowing soil. They are on their way to the top of Bhutathan Hill. Beyond them, people line up to buy shirts. From shiny silk shirts to dull ones. Someone throws them up from the JCB. Lake is mud .But they must be longing for a shirt without mud .I wish I had a good shirt too ..Haji stood ready to run with the people.Someone from a distance shouts something through the mike.People scatter.

Haji woke up when someone called on his shoulder. Haji was sitting on the bench then

"It's a call for food..go eat and come. You won't get it after a while. People keep coming. It seems like this school will be filled with refugees today."

The young man said while extending a steel plate towards him. His whole face was tight.

"Did you eat?" Haji asked

He mumbled something so that it was not clear whether he was yes or no.

Where is the place to get food .Is she eating or not .Haji started walking with the plate, immersed in such thoughts.

"It's very busy there. Can you stay longer, 'Acha'..?"

The young man asked.

Don't you see the cost of this shirt? He called me 'Achan' after performing Hajj so much. But the love in that call touched Haji's heart.

He thinks so because that word is used by hindu people for their father

"Come with me. Just sit on that veranda, I will buy food" the young man walked in front with a plate.

Haji sat on the bench in the veranda. For a while there is light in the restaurant. Everywhere else is dark.

In front, the basketball court of the school is almost knee-deep in water. The classrooms that can be seen in the candlelight are not refugee homes anymore. The school gate can be seen in the distance. ?

After some time, the young man arrived.

Haji didn't bother to wash his hands because he was hungry. Although he couldn't see anything, he realized that it was rice and curry. The first piece he stopped put into his mouth. It was matan. A food that was avoided from his daily routine for fear of gastric upset. By the time he finished eating, the young man had filled a steel glass with water.

"Which room are you in?" Haji asked the young man who was sitting with his head down.

He raised his head and looked at Haji. Although it was not obvious, Haji saw that there was a tear in those eyes.

"In which rooms are the people at home?"

He sat silently leaning against the wall.

"Until now, I was on a tour, father. I'm sorry. you are just like my father. That's why I'm calling you like that. 'Mom told me not to go then. But I left. Every time I go to tour , Mom says, 'So it's okay. But this time...'"

He burst into tears and hit his head against the wall.. not once but many times. Haji tried hard to stop him but could not stop his strong actions.

Haji felt like saying, "If you are one, there will be a way for everything."

What way..?

.When I called at home yesterday, my sister-in-law told me to evacuate the house and that there is a threat of landslides. We stayed in the camp for two weeks for the last two years.

I reached here after this afternoon.I can't reach the village.A new river has formed on the way.

Its flow is two days high. I looked for other ways and walked for a short distance. That's when I heard someone there telling me that the whole Bhutathan hill had been taken by the river..

I went to all the camps to meet them ..finally reached here ..though I knew no one came out but just a hope ..

Haji's hands, which were on his shoulders, came down from there and gripped one end of the bench. Haji felt that the strength of those hands was losing.

"Father, mother, grandmother, sister-in-law ... all are now under those mounds. I am the only one here..

I didn't listen to my mother's words. If not, I too."

Haji was exhausted without words to comfort him. His eyes filled with tears. Haji smelled that smell again as he wiped away his tears with his left shirt hand. It could be the smell of sandalwood. Or ...

A suppressed laugh rippled somewhere.

In this case, where there is nothing to laugh at, where can such a smile be? Haji looked around.

And that young man who was leaning on the wall and crying, his name is Aditya. Haji got the nickname sometime during the conversation. It was raining in front. People who started sleeping in the back rooms...

Meanwhile, this smile..?

As Haji walked through the veranda holding Adityan's hand, he thought about his state of mind after losing all the closest people in his life in a matter of seconds.

The one who is only the age of his grandson .His future life ..Maybe if he hadn't gone on that tour he would have...

How many views are still left?

This rainy season..?

When Haji was walking to room number 15 holding his 'grandson' Aditya, the machines were looking for people from among the mounds of Bhutan Hill. Even then, that smile was still in Haji's mind. Who would be here watching his actions.

## **Nishanth K**

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Nishanth K (42) hails from Nilambur Kerala state, India. He works as an Assistant Chief Manager with Unimoni Financial Services Limited at Calicut. He writes stories and poems in Malayalam language which have been published in Kerala magazines and newspapers. He has got two books published till date.

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