

DILARA HASHEM

## The Immersion

Badal was walking: alone.

He was wearing a new *lungi*; over it was the new polyester shirt his father had bought him before they had left the city.

Badal was walking; tripping and running – *lungi*, shirt, trousers – these meant nothing to him. To be unfettered – without clothes – felt most natural to him. This was especially true when his mother tried to pull him away from the windowsill at dusk, when she lit the low-powered bulb in the westernmost room of his grandfather's old, decaying, three-storeyed house in the narrow alley in Narinda. It felt as if the mellow light was pouring a burning liquid over his skin. He would snatch his shirt and *lungi* – wildly tear his shirt, open his *lungi*. His naked shadow on the wall would make him burst into rollicking laughter.

His mother, agitated and sorrowful, would cover her eyes with both hands and plead with him, 'Oh my lovely son, my golden boy, my precious! You cannot take off your clothes now, dearest. You are a big boy now.'

Badal hadn't the faintest notion what growing up meant. He only knew and recognized the sudden fire that blazed between his thighs.

Pressing with both fists that fierce flame, he would stare at the reflection on the wall and burst out in excited and uncontrollable laughter. Exultantly, Badal answered his mother, 'See, Ma – how big I have become.'

As the animated shadow of his penis spread from his fists on to the wall and became bigger and bigger, Badal, in his new untasted ecstasy, stood and trembled with mirth. His mother covered her welling tears with her sari and rushed out, closing the door behind her, mumbling, 'Allah, Allah! Give my child some peace, O Lord.'

Badal could never understand why everyone was so concerned about his peace. He knew where peace was. Peace reigned only in himself.

Through the window of the house he would gaze at the sky all day long. He would see birds flying, clouds, the sunshine; a convoy of ants on the window hinges, squabbling doves, sparrows coming and going. Bubbles of colours would play within him. He would drown within a melancholy tune that would carry him over the vast open wilderness. It was then that Badal would take the charcoal, or bits of broken red brick, and scribble and draw – higgledy-piggledy – many weird strange shapes and forms on the floor.

As a child, Badal had lived by a river. The memory of the golden stretch of the river would sparkle in his breast, and whenever he strained his ears to hear the splashing laughter of the river, Badal too, without any reason, would burst out in merriment. At such moments, if his mother, father or sister Rebecca saw him, their faces would cloud over with sorrow and they would look at one another, exchanging sad and sombre glances. The younger brother and sister playing near by would stop midway in their games, and stare with startled gaze. And at that moment – suddenly – Badal would become aware of their presence, a solemn presence that overwhelmed him with grief. Agitated, he would stare vacantly, and the laughter would come to an abrupt halt, as Badal became absolutely silent.

They did not understand that it was the colours of happiness that sparkled in Badal's soul. It was those colours that he tried to resurrect on the walls of his room with bits of charred wood or pieces of brick. It was only when friends and relatives of his parents stood at his door and stared inquisitively, stifling their sighs, that Badal became enraged. He would stop his laughter and begin to break and smash objects around him.

His mother, anticipating such outbursts, kept the room almost bare. But if Badal could not get anything to smash, he would dash his head against the wall, in an attempt to break and smash it. His mother would come rushing in and, holding him tightly, would offer him an old butter can full of pebbles and marbles. Badal would fling the can on the floor. The metallic clang amused him enormously, and Badal would burst into rapturous laughter, his demon of anger vanishing in an instant.

In that house his 'Ma' alone knew what would make Badal happy or keep him content. The discovery that a can of pebbles could produce such joy was his mother's insight, and she kept this can handy for such violent moments.

Stopping his head-banging, Badal would pick the marbles and stones with both his hands and, placing them on his mother's palms, would say, 'Ma, see, what gems and pearls I have collected! Wait and see what a beautiful necklace I will make for you. Shall I keep these with me, Ma?'

But Ma would never keep the can in Badal's room. She would collect all the stones and take the can with her as she left. Badal's sorrow was that his joy could not bring a smile to his mother's face. Ma would bite her lower lip and with a wan face try to curb her emotion, but tears would spill out and drench both her cheeks. Mother would dampen the *anchal* of her sari and, pressing it on Badal's swollen forehead, intone, 'Allah, transfer my child's suffering to me, give some peace to my little one!'

Badal would press his face against his mother's soft supple breasts, searching for that peace. The mother's body would stop trembling and become rigid and motionless, as she whispered, 'Badal, my love, my dearest boy, you are a big boy now – you don't do that now. Listen Badal – Badal, good boy ...'

Badal wondered where his peace lay and how he would get it. Where would he get respite from the flames that covered his whole being? Would the waters of the golden-etched river provide him with the desired peace?

Twice a day the fierce-faced servant Abdul would march him to the bathroom and pour buckets of water over him. One tub of water was never enough to cool his steaming head and body. Returning to his room, he would once again sprawl naked on the floor and start drawing.

There was so much sky, so many birds, trees and yet more trees that he

could draw, as well as the golden gliding river.

The river he had drawn had no water. It only twisted and turned in dark lines. Staring at the barren river – that charcoal-etched river with no water – he would dribble urine over it and be overcome with joy. He watched his pee winding its way, like waves of the river, rolling across the floor. Truly it seemed that the golden river had found its flow. Badal clapped his hands and danced with joy.

But this happiness too made his mother cry. Badal could not understand why his joy made her weep.

On days when his rage went beyond all control and he had broken lots of things, his mother would make the maidservant grind bunches of henna leaves. Carrying this finely ground paste of *mehendi* in a bowl, his mother would come and say, 'Baba Badal, come – let me colour your hair. You love colours, don't you, darling?'

Badal truly loved colours. But if his mother said, 'Come let me put some oil in your hair,' Badal would shake his head obstinately. He hated oil. Once a herbalist had concocted a special oil for him: the oil had a horrible smell. Moreover, the barber, according to the herbalist's instructions, had shaved off a patch of hair from the top of his head. Abdul had slapped on and massaged in the oil on that clean-shaven spot. The stink of the oil had made him throw up all over the floor. The odour of the oil and vomit filled Badal with immense fury. He had lunged at the long mirror on the wall. The splinters of glass cut his hand, and blood spilt all over the place. Ma and Baba, hearing the sound of smashed glass, had run into the room, looking at each other in dismay at the sight. Baba's face was ashen as he asked, 'Shireen, why didn't you remove the mirror from the room?'

Ma, tearing off a corner of her sari with which she tried to stave off the gushing blood, answered drily, 'Badal loves sitting before the mirror. He has never attempted anything like this before.'

Baba's orders were clear. 'Don't keep anything in the room that he can break.'

But Ma knew that Badal needed to smash things occasionally or else his frustrations would ferment. The can of pebbles was her remedy for his distress – no doctor had prescribed it. Every time Badal was enraged, the can of pebbles did not fail to soothe and calm him down.

When Ma was mopping the vomit off the floor, Baba suddenly came

close to Badal and gazed directly into his eyes. Badal wanted to hide from his father's gaze. Something turned off inside him, and, as Baba's piercing look penetrated him, Badal wanted to escape. Badal did not want anyone to trespass into his joyous, many-hued, colourful world that he alone inhabited. They would not understand his joy. They only wondered and looked at one another – perplexed, saddened and disturbed by his presence. Badal had seen this happen time and again and had wanted to escape from these searching eyes.

When Badal finally turned his face away, Baba called him in a husky voice, 'Badal!' Badal turned towards his father with anxious eyes. 'Are you in pain, Badal?'

Badal did not speak, but shaking his head said, 'No.'

'What will make you happy, Badal?'

Badal stared out of the window and pointed outside with his fingers. The *jamrul* tree stood against the barred window. Next to the tree was the high wall, and on the other side of the wall was the road. The narrow Narinda lane snaked between the old houses, travelling into the far distance.

Badal gestured with his fingers towards that road.

'You want to go out? I'll take you – you want to go?'

And suddenly as the sharp, putrid smell of oil filled Badal's nose, he started to tear his hair with both hands. He tried to bash his head against the window bars. Baba reacted swiftly and caught and restrained him. Baba seemed extremely distraught and helpless, not knowing how to cope with Badal. With his thin hands, he tried to pull Badal away from the window, and, calling to his mother, said, 'Shireen, come and take over – I can't seem to ...'

Immediately his mother leaped to her feet and came to Badal. Tearfully, but with great tenderness and love, Ma asked, 'Badal, shall I wash your hair? I know and understand how much you hate the smell of the oil.'

Ma was the only person who understood Badal – his likes and dislikes.

Baba interrupted, 'But the doctor has recommended the oil for him.'

Ma never raised her voice in protest. She merely replied in a sad, subdued tone, 'Ask Abdul' to bring a pail of cool water. You can see for yourself what sort of help the oil is. Hurry up – go and fetch the water!'

Baba rushed off to get hold of Abdul.

From then on, the sight or mention of the oil would make Badal want to run out of the room.

But he loved having his mother smear henna paste on his hair. The henna cooled his fevered brain, and as his brain cooled, the heat of his body also seemed to subside. Sometimes the *mehendi* would make him fall asleep, and in this sleep he would dream the strangest dreams. He particularly dreamed about the river. He could never see the banks of the river – the river was too wide, an extraordinarily large expanse of water. Badal would see himself drifting on the crest of its waves as the beams of the sun transformed the water into molten gold. Badal felt like a king astride the throne of golden waves as he sailed into the far horizon.

Perhaps it was because he was not usually allowed to go near the water that rivers attracted him so much. He did not like ponds or lakes or enclosed bodies of water – natural, gushing, flowing water had a magical hypnotic effect on him.

But there were no rivers in Narinda. Only the narrow lane outside the window stretched out like a river. Badal spent his days gazing at the road, which seemed to beckon him relentlessly with open hands.

Badal had, on several occasions, managed to slip out of his room, especially when somebody had left the door ajar. He had crossed the lane and walked along it, and once he had become so tired on this clandestine journey that he had fallen asleep in front of a printing press. On another occasion, his frantic father and Abdul had discovered him dozing in front of a sweet shop. No one approved of these outings. Bringing him back, Baba told Ma, 'Shireen, you don't want him locked up because you love him. But do you want to lose him totally because of your love? The streets are full of traffic – what does Badal understand of safety? Imagine if he had fallen under the wheels of a car ...'

Before Baba could even finish his sentence, Ma excitedly held Badal's hands and implored, 'Badal, my Badal, why did you go out without telling anyone, dearest? Why didn't you tell me you wanted to go out? Abdul would have taken you out.'

Baba interrupted her pleas in a voice that echoed with helplessness and dismay, 'No, Shireen, no – do something now! We can't keep a constant watch over him. Don't ever make such suggestions ...!'

Ma silenced Baba. 'Of course he understands – Badal never disobeys me. You are the one who doesn't understand him. Please leave the child in peace! I'll look after him – no one has to worry about Badal.'

Peace! Peace! Peace!

Everyone in the house was so concerned with keeping Badal in peace that they lost their own peace completely!

Lots of friends and neighbours had gathered in the house a few days before. The house overflowed with girls, who flocked together, grinding henna and turmeric into a paste. Badal wondered why they were making the paste. Were they going to smear him with that? He'd like that – he loved being smeared with henna paste.

But no one called him. Outside his closed doors hordes of girls were wandering to and fro, going all over the house. He had not seen so many girls ever before. He wanted to join them – to fix his eyes on their faces, on their breasts, to stare at their bodies.

But for the first time Badal's door was locked – firmly shut. This was the result of an incident in which he had been the central player.

One afternoon, on finding his door open, Badal had wandered into the bride's chamber where a bunch of girls were present. He had crept in and stood right in the middle of the room. The girls had been talking and giggling – the sounds of their laughter reminded him of the gurgling, flowing water sprouting from a fountain. But the minute they spotted him in their midst, the conversation and the laughter stopped abruptly. Stricken faces exchanged glances, and their faces took on an inhuman look, like the faces of lifeless mannequins that Badal had seen in the windows of big shops. Badal felt like smashing these lifeless forms into smithereens. Badal suddenly became excited as he stood amidst these silent wooden puppets.

As long as the girls had been laughing and talking, they hadn't noticed Badal. Badal had also watched them silently – content – as if in a darkened auditorium or a cinema hall, or as if watching a play being performed. But now Badal gaped at a young girl who was standing just next to him. Her sari had fallen, revealing the warm quivering twin orbs of her breasts. Seeing this, something started to tremble between his thighs – he was entranced, enraptured. And it was just at this moment that the laughter and conversation stopped, and the girls gaped at him.

Badal felt as if the dark, congenial, shaded, consoling room had suddenly been flooded with glaring lights. All eyes were on him – how awkward he felt! The girls' looks seemed to fell him to the floor. He pounced on the girls next to him and started to pull them towards him. At once there was pandemonium! Girls ran out through the open door, a cacophony of sounds accompanying them. Abdul, looking like a thug, appeared from nowhere and planted himself in front of him. He was pushed into his room and, for the first time in his life, the door was locked from outside.

Badal could see coloured tents in the courtyard from his window. There was an endless procession of people entering and leaving. A special gate was being prepared. He could see his father with his forlorn face moving from place to place. Ma was so busy in the kitchen that she could not come to see Badal even once. And in the bridal chamber flocks of butterfly-like girls were dressing his sister Rebecca, hennaing her hands.

Badal gazed at his image in the mirror in his room all day long. The mirror showed him a figure with a dark, wavy mane of hair, limpid eyes, aquiline nose, chiselled cheekbones. He kissed this reflection – Ma was right, he really loved the mirror. He had no other companion in the room besides his image in the mirror, who rose with him, laughed and talked with him. The mirror was his friend, his comrade. And if he could love what he saw in the mirror, why could they not love what they saw in him? Why did their faces lose all expression – turn to stone – when they beheld him? Their fear of him, their pale bloodless faces made Badal want to crumple the window bars, break down the door and rush outside and destroy the whole world.

In the evening, Badal saw the girls going for their baths, having spent the day smearing and massaging his older sister – Rebecca Bu – with the henna and turmeric paste. Rebecca Bu was being led from the open courtyard back to her room. Clad in a freshly starched yellow Dhaka sari with a red border, Rebecca Bu seemed to be floating on air. Her hair had been treated with spices, and the smells from her open tresses wafted in the breeze. The aroma intoxicated Badal. Rebecca Bu was the centre of attention – Ma, the maids, the servants, the relatives – everyone was attending to her as though she had suddenly become a queen. No one seemed to remember that there was someone called Badal in this house – even his mother had forgotten him.

What was keeping Ma so busy the whole day? She had not come to see Badal even once. Usually she brought him his lunch, feeding him herself, mixing the rice and curry with her own hands and putting them into his mouth. The delicious smells from the kitchen wafted into his room – but there was no Ma bringing him his lunch. Abdul too was late in bringing his food. His stomach pinched and churned with pangs of hunger, but he was locked inside his room and unable to get out.

There was a bathroom next to his room but in his fury he pissed on the floor. Not finding anything to break in the room, he tore the mattress into shreds, covering the room with flying cotton.

Badal snatched the plate from Abdul when he finally brought his lunch, and flung it on the ground. He hurled the brass glass of water in Abdul's face, which cut his forehead and made it bleed. Abdul ran out of the room, again locking it from the outside.

A small crowd had gathered outside the door. Those bright-faced butterfly-like girls stared at him as if he was a chimpanzee or a baboon. Tearing at his hair, Badal started screaming in a hideous voice.

Finally Ma appeared. She ran in, her hands still smelling of garlic and onion. Badal could see his thin and helpless father go up to his mother and say in a low voice, 'Shireen, the house is full of relatives and neighbours. Tomorrow the bridegroom and his party will be here. Badal is in a terrible condition. We shall lose dignity and face. What will they think? They do not know about Badal. Our daughter's position will be totally degraded in her in-laws' house.'

Baba stopped, and Ma didn't say anything. An elderly man came up and said to Baba, 'Send Badal to the village home for a few days. He will be quite comfortable there. When you have finished with the wedding he can then ...'

Ma interrupted, 'No, never! That's not necessary – I'll control Badal. Ah! I did not feed him this afternoon. He did not see me the whole day, that's why ...'

Baba cut her short, saying, 'You could not look after him today, and tomorrow and the day after will be even more difficult for you, Shireen. Will you look after your son or attend to your guests? Do as the gentleman says.'

The old man went on, 'Don't worry, Badal won't disturb anyone. I

will take him to the village myself. It is only a two-hour journey anyway. He will be quite happy there.'

Badal was quite happy to be released from his locked room. Baba first took him to New Market and bought him a polyester *lungi*. He asked Badal anxiously, 'Do you like these, Badal Baba?'

Baba was afraid that Badal might not like the clothes, but Badal nodded firmly in assent.

'You won't take these off and throw them away, will you?'

What did they think of him? Badal felt like throwing his clothes off only when he was locked inside a room, when he was part of his surroundings. Otherwise, would he want to tear off his clothes? He didn't feel that hot then.

On the train, Badal was overcome with joy, even though he had cried when his father hugged him goodbye. Badal was amazed as he had never seen his father cry. Baba's face usually had a sad, pained look, but a half-smile hovered around his eyes. The smile wasn't exactly a smile – it was more like an effort to smile through his grief. Badal was astonished to see, for the first time in his life, this thin, worried, tearful yet smiling man break into tears. His father's face seemed to break into pieces as the tears came into his eyes, just as a reflection on the river broke into a myriad pieces with the stirring of a breeze or the ripple of a wave.

Something stirred in Badal as he hugged his father and started howling himself. His changing adolescent voice came out as a discordant, cracked howl. Wiping away his tears tenderly, Baba spoke as if to himself, 'Baba, I have to send you far away on this joyous day. Be well – you will come home next week, Baba.'

Badal, however, wasn't that eager to return. His room had become a prison, and, now that he was away from it, he felt that he was holding heaven in his hands. Badal wouldn't have cried at all if his father had not collapsed in tears. As the train puffed out of the station, Badal saw his father's figure grow smaller and smaller until it vanished. Badal turned his mind to the scenes around him and forgot all about his father.

This was the first time he was seeing a village.

Everyone craved peace in his home in Dhaka. But peace reigned over the village – why hadn't they sent him here earlier? The cool earthen walls of the mud huts were ventilated with a constant flow of breeze, touched

by the surrounding vegetation. Badal fell asleep within these cool and pleasant rooms. He slept deeply for a whole day. When he awoke, he saw a woman, someone who reminded him of his mother. She had a plate with mangoes, puffed rice and sugar cookies. Peeping from behind her was a girl, rounded like a ripe mango. She didn't pucker her face when she saw him, unlike the colourful Narinda girls. She had a little golden ring dangling from her nose over her lips. A black string with an amulet was strung around her neck. She was clad only in a striped sari. Her black, curly, untamed tresses meandered down her back. Her hair looked as if it had never been oiled.

The woman began saying, 'Moina, leave us! Go and tend to the rice on the stove.'

Moina went away but returned immediately, being immensely curious about what was happening in that room. Badal stared at her, mouth open. His eyes scanned her from top to bottom – staring at her healthy, glowing face, her rounded buttocks draped lightly in a neatly tied sari and her heels peeping through the hem of her sari.

Moina's mother continued, 'Badal Baba, come – have a wash and come to eat. Come, let me wash your face.'

Before he could get up, the girl was at the door with a container of water. Without saying a word, she beckoned with her eyes, pulling Badal to the door like a magnet. Badal obediently went up to her and washed his hands.

Moina's mother repeated, 'Moina, give me the pitcher, I'll help him. You go and see to the paddy in the yard. Go and shoo off the birds.'

Moina looked sharply at her mother, and, refusing to hand over the pitcher, she retorted crossly, 'Why should the birds peck at the paddy, Ma? I have kept the stick there.'

Her mother's face clouded at the girl's disobedience.

As Badal washed his face with the water that Moina poured from the pitcher, a tremor of joy ran through him, and he grasped her wrist, which was encircled by a silver bangle. Moina giggled, seductively pushing him off with her elbows. Instantly the heat in his body again concentrated between his thighs. Unlike the other girls, Moina did not freeze at the sight of Badal, and the monster that resided within him did not break its fetters and awaken with its terrible fury. The blazing heat remained

imprisoned within him, and he felt agitated. For the first time, Badal tried to control himself, biting his lips in the process. He heard the woman say, 'I am your *chachi* – your father's brother's wife. If you need anything, Badal, just ask, won't you?'

When Badal returned to his room and sat down on the leaf mat, he could see Moina standing at the door. His eyes appealed to her to relieve him from the agony of his pent-up desires. His aunt, understanding the look, glared at Moina, who promptly disappeared from the doorway. Badal was at that moment just about to taste some puffed rice. He hurled the *muri* away and turned his face. His aunt watched these actions and called out to Moina in an anxious and distressed voice, 'Moina, oh Moina, where are you? Come here for a moment. I am in such a mess. Badal Baba, eat up. How will you live if you don't eat? Moina, where are you?'

Badal quietened down and resumed his meal the minute Moina returned. Triumphantly and mischievously, Moina stared back at him. Her mother sighed heavily.

Four days later, the old man, Dada, came to take Badal home. But Badal was determined not to go back and wouldn't budge from the doorway.

'You won't go?'

Badal shook his head vigorously while his aunt stared imploringly at Dada.

'It's not safe to keep him here much longer,' she said. 'I can't control him and look after the house as well, can I?'

There really wasn't much work in the house, and Moina was an efficient helping hand for her mother. But Dada understood the tenor of her objection.

Calling out to Badal he said, 'Hey, Badal, if you don't go, won't your mother cry? Come, let's go to your mother.'

Badal stared at the schemers. Before Dada could complete his sentence, he cried out, 'No!'

'OK. Then I have to leave. I'll go and send your father. He will have to fetch you himself. I have taken the responsibility of taking you back.'

'I won't go! I won't – I won't!' screamed Badal.

Gnashing his teeth, he broke Dada's walking cane into two. Both

Chachi and Dada went pale, scared at this new bout of temper.

'All right, don't go,' said Dada, trying to appease the boy. 'Stay here if you like it here – that's no problem.'

But his aunt's face wore a very worried look.

As the sun reached the meridian, the village lay in a stupor. Sparrows played among the paddy sheaves in the courtyard. Moina guarded the paddy with a stick, waving it and swinging her legs at the birds. Badal tossed and turned restlessly on the mat in the room. No, the fire was not burning through his body – the heat of his flesh did not make him tear his clothes off. But there was another fire, just as fierce, like the fire in the brick-kiln. He wanted to cover the flames of this fire with a coverlet. He wanted to cool the flames, with a nice cool coverlet. His desire for a cool coverlet was beginning to overwhelm him.

Moina peeped into the room just at that moment. Badal felt her like a cool breeze flowing over his body. But he lay still, not even opening his eyes. Moina muttered as she entered the room, glancing at Badal to see what was the matter with him. Her eyes glinted like diamonds in the stillness of the room.

All was quiet – silence everywhere. Badal lay on his mat, tingling with desire, prickly with heat. He could sense Moina as she entered the room on tiptoe, closing the door carefully behind her, coming to stand beside him.

His aunt seemed to be out on an errand. Unguarded as he was for the time being, Badal became as still as a corpse.

A violent, joyous, dream-like feeling seized him. He felt that the slightest breath – a touch – would make him invisible. And Badal held his breath in the stillness of the room.

Moina slowly tickled his back, with the stick to begin with, and then bending lower, she gently caressed his back with her hands. Her warm breath, her soft touch, drew languorous patterns on his skin and inflamed him with desire.

The fire inside him was rekindled and increased in intensity. His body could not contain or restrain the rising flames, which burst and spewed out of him. He could no longer bear the agony. He crushed Moina against him, tearing open her sari and exposing her breasts. He stopped Moina's mouth with his own burning lips. Moina's body felt soft like a pillow, and

as lifeless. It was only her mouth that was struggling, trying to cry out – her voice came out strangled but somehow clear. Badal thought that he had finally found the cool shade that would quench his fire. This feeling lasted only a few seconds – and suddenly there was an explosion!

Moina shook herself out of his grasp. Her face was aflame – like a burning stove. She was panting and, without warning, she slapped Badal repeatedly. She hissed out at him, 'Lunatic! Deranged madman! You horrible man! Dwarf – how dare you reach out for the moon?'

With these disdainful words she ran out of the room.

Badal too sprang out of the room like a meteor. His whole body was on fire – his head, his face, his whole being. He remembered his mother – if only she had been here to douse his heat with the henna, if only Abdul had been here to drench the fire with buckets of water. He would have been soothed, the leaping flames of his fire would have been quenched.

The narrow village lanes were beckoning him with both hands, as Badal flew like the wind. He left the neighbourhood behind, passed the bamboo groves, ran through the paddy fields, over the canals, across the holy man's tomb and past the banyan tree. Badal raced on. But the wind only fanned the flames in his body – intensifying them, making them rise higher. He finally reached the banks of the river.

Agony – agony – agony!

Badal flung himself into the waters of the river. And finally, as he had always dreamed, Badal was floating and drifting on the waves. His *lungi* ballooned like the sails of a boat. He tried to grasp the wind with his excited hands. And a voice came out from his innards screaming, 'Moina!'

Calling Moina – and not Ma – Badal surrendered the desires and yearnings of his youth to the depths of his beloved river.

Baba and Dada arrived the following day from the city. Badal was no longer wearing his new *lungi* or his Terylene shirt. He was attired in peace, in quietness – finally at rest. He was adorned in the beautiful robes of peace.

*Translated by Saeeda Karim Khan*