

## *German's<sup>1</sup> Mother*

–By Anil Gharai

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“A son resembling his father and a daughter resembling her mother are ever unfortunate”.

*German's* mother had been a staunch believer of this popular saying. *German's* father had a different take. He yelled passionately, “I do not agree with you. These are figments of your imagination.”

However, his mother's concerns have come true. *German* resembles his father. Not only are the looks; his nature and habits too are like those of his father, *Faring*<sup>2</sup>. His father looked like a snake-gourd, and *German* is like a thin bamboo. When *German* walks he looks like a heron having one leg. His father was lean, yet steady like the grasshopper. So people called his father ‘*Faring*’. *German* is like the water hyacinth, a kind of glossy, leafy plant floating on water. He collects his food both from water and soil. He feels so hungry. He is a rough-skinned, thin and lean boy. His complexion is that of jute- stem. When he smiles, his eyes sink. He is a passionate foodie because of the demon of hunger.

The month of *Aghrana*<sup>3</sup> is a month of happiness. People enjoy marriage ceremonies and *mahotsav*<sup>4</sup>. The ovens are not lit up at home this time, yet the village people have full meals sitting on the threshold of the rich people. The days of the banquets are celebrated as the most joyful days in the village. *German's* mother roams about the entire village throughout the day. People call her ‘*Rambhadhai*’<sup>5</sup>. She can't run her life only by midwifery. Now people admit pregnant women to hospital in

the cases of labour-pain and *jal-bhanga*<sup>6</sup>. Standing on the dam *Rambhadhai* sees with her tearful eyes the village people who rush to the hospital. The time is utterly unfavourable for *Rambhadhai*. She has not a single piece of land; she completely depends upon midwifery but it starts decaying now. So she feels a kind of discomfort in her stomach even in this season of pleasure. A nauseating feeling fills her palate.

Like every day today too *Rambhadhai* has cried melodiously for her husband. Years passed, yet she can't forget the man for a single moment. The man, her husband, died untimely and the family had to pay a heavy price for it.

Then *German* was merely a boy of twelve. He used to hold the stick for tending the cattle of the Pal family. He earned ten rupees in a month and got food daily. The boy *German* now becomes a youth of twenty one years. But his stunted growth is a major concern. *Rambhadhai* looks plaintively at her son's gloomy face. She cries more loudly. Her cry is so melodious, so pensive. None can listen to it for long. Even the eyes of a stone-hearted man get moistened. She starts crying in the morning every day. Her heart palpitates if she does not cry. She cannot digest food without crying. She feels a kind of disturbance in the corner of the eyes. Her forehead seems to be heavy. Of course she has reasons for lamentation. Now the morning is so beautiful. The sun's face looks softer than the chickens just coming out of the eggs. The cluster of bamboos remains dark. Dew drops are seen in the cobwebs. Air is cold. The herd of cows can be seen coming out of the cowshed; the ducks are going to the pond. A few old men are seen in the lonely path of the village. The stars are seen indistinctly in the morning-sky. *Rambhadhai* considers this time to be the perfect time for lamentation. Why does not she cry? Menoka and Urvashi were her two immediate sisters. They got married. One of them died at the time of delivery and the other committed suicide taking the seeds of thorn-apple. These memories haunt her till today. She laments more plaintively at dawn if her sisters were there in her dream last night. The melody of her lamentation surpasses the flowing melody of the river. How can she forget her sisters? So she continues to lament.

Her husband too made her lament everyday in the morning. She starts reminiscing. Then *German* was a little boy. He could not speak well. One day that little boy, *German* came running and cried, "Mother, Hara Ghosh has stabbed father. Go and see how his headless body is tossing about in the field."

*Rambhadhai* rushed there at once. Her hands were smeared with turmeric -

water. *Faring*, her husband brought meat from the village-hat<sup>7</sup> and said, "Cook it with oil and spice. Today we shall enjoy meat to our heart's content. We have not consumed meat for a long time."

*Faring* could not enjoy meat that day. There was a conflict with the Ghosh family over the *Khas lands*<sup>8</sup>. *Faring* was innocent. The minister came from Kolkata to distribute lease for lands. As *Faring* Das was landless he got the ownership of six kathas of lands of Ghosh family. What was his fault? Why does not *Rambhadhai* lament so plaintively?

Even now everyone listens to her lamentation-- the Gram-panchayet, the members, the president. That is a history of stigma. *Rambhadhai* laments in the melancholy dawn striking her loosened breasts with her palms- "You will lose everything, you, the sterile fellows. You will die of cholera. You make me lament. You will be ruined. Your wives and daughters will be widows like me". At the end of her lamentation, her voice gets indistinct in excitement. Her sari gets disheveled; she perspires in such a cold morning. Her bulky figure seems to be a furnace. She nods her head. She stares at the house of Hara Ghosh with her fiery eyes. As the sun gets hotter the speed of her cry lessens. When she gets down the bathing place in the pond she looks a different woman. There is no trace of lamentation on her face. The other day she came across Kalu Shekh in the market of Lakhuria. He went to the hospital. His son of thirteen months was very sick. He had problems in his stomach and probably was crying ceaselessly. Kâlû got upset. Every year his wife conceived, yet her children could not survive. She was probably attacked by a *gin*<sup>9</sup>. *Rambhadhai* went to the hat. She needed kerosene oil and soda for washing clothes. Her son, *German* had fever. He needed *sago*<sup>10</sup>.

On her way back from the hat she came across Kalu Shekh. It was evening then. Darkness prevailed in the sugar-cane field of Poddar family. The birds stopped chirping; silence prevailed everywhere. Kalu Shekh was approaching with bottles of medicines and a torch in his hands. He had to cover a long path; there he might face danger.

*Rambhadhai* was in a hurry. As Kalu called her, she had to stop. She asked with pale face, "Where did you go, Kalu? Is everything alright?" Kalu told her, "My son is crying continuously. He may fall under evil influence. He vomits immediately after taking any food. His stomach gets swelled. I went to the doctor. He gave me medicine

worth. I'm returning home with the medicine.”

*German's* mother had information that Kalu earned well. Last year he built a new house which had a wavy tin shade on the frame of timber-wood. He was also popular in the village as a good thatcher.

*German's* mother has complete information about everybody in the village. Since *Faring's* death she has been continuing exorcism as well as midwifery. There is a hospital, but it's very far from the village. So people come to her for treatment. *German* merely grows in age, but he remains an immature fellow in every aspect. Now he is not able to work for his weak health. So *Rambhadhai* has to earn livelihood for herself and her son which is really a difficult task.

*Rambhadhai* stops walking suddenly and tries to console Kalu Shekh, “Don't worry for your son, I'll cure him. But you need to spend some money. Come to me tomorrow evening. I shall make him drink my enchanted water. He will be cured.”

Shivering in cold Kalu comes to her at dawn. The dam is not distinctly seen in the foggy dawn. *Rambhadhai* has reached to the river in this cold and foggy dawn wearing a sari only. Her eyes are sleepy yet she walks steadily. She wraps round her cotton sari on her breast. She cannot bear with this kind of hardship at this old age. *German* is sick now. He needs proper treatment. The village doctor can't cure him. They need to go to the town. They need money for his treatment. How can she arrange that? *German's* uncle has a business of microphones. He is a close fisted man. *Rambhadhai* seeks money from him. He refuses. From then on she never seeks help from her relatives. Really she is a distressed woman. Her only son, *German* is not an able-bodied youth. He has no control over his anger. Who will take care of her son after her demise? This anxiety haunts her day and night.

After walking a while she stands on the moistened grass of the ridge. This is a lonely place. Here is a livestock disposal yard on the mound at the left side of the sugar-cane field. Earlier *Faring* used to come here regularly. Now no one comes here except Ramphal. He is their relative. After *Faring's* death he met her and entreated her, “He will never return to you. Don't cry. You will fail ill. You have to live for the sake of your son. And you have to earn your livelihood by midwifery. You better leave the livestock disposal yard to me. You are a woman; you may face problems for this. You better leave it to me; I'll give you half of the profit.

Since then Ramphal never met *Rambhadhai*. He did not give her share of the profit from the livestock disposal yard for the last three years. He told her, “The livestock disposal yard remains vacant. The cattle do not die frequently nowadays. There are two veterinary doctors. They give medicines and push injections to the ailing animals. I am so unfortunate. I am looking to the sky and worshipping God; yet this place remains vacant. You can go there with me if you don’t trust me. You trust me when you see new grass in the ground of the livestock disposal yard.”

*Rambhadhai* knows that Ramphal is a great liar. Today on the way to the river he is caught at red-handed which is his beyond thinking. Drops of blood are falling from the packet in his hand. The livestock disposal yard is seen behind the *Babla-tree*<sup>11</sup> where the crows and vultures go in search of food. *Rambhadhai* sees a dead cow there- a blood-stained heap of flesh. She cannot stare at this for a long time. She starts shivering in fear. Raw blood reminds her of the dead body of *Faring*. She can’t forget the brutal scene which haunts her in her sleep and solitude. The brutal scene can’t be wiped out even after washing the eyes again and again. Till now she is getting restless when she thinks of the brutal scene. The wind is rushing over the sugar-cane field. The wild wind hits the river, becomes wilder, proceeds far away expanding the hood like a daring snake. She says Ramphal angrily, “you are cheating a widow. Almighty God sees everything. You have not given my share for last three years. Open your packet. I want to see it.”

Ramphal replies, a vulture was flying over the sky in the morning. Seeing that I come and find here a dead cow, I collect the flesh of the cow and go home. There are seven members in my family who are my liabilities. I am grateful to you for giving the livestock disposal yard to me otherwise we might have starved.” When he is about to go *Rambha* tells him angrily, “You are no longer a human, you are a vulture. Where are you going with the cow-flesh? Leave it here. Do you try to cheat a helpless widow?” Ramphal says, “Do justice with me. My family will be ruined,”

*Rambha* says, “I am not a Goddess to take care of your family.”

Now Ramphal starts reproaching her, “The place is yours, but I pay tax for it. You don’t pay that. You raise your voice only to demand the share of profit. Now this livestock disposal yard is mine. You can’t demand its profit. You have no right here.”

Keeping down her pot *Rambhadhai* is about to beat Ramphal wrathfully. Finding no other way to defend himself Ramphal escapes from there like a coward jackal. He

falls down in the slippery grasses, stands again supporting on his hands. He stares at her like a hanged heron. At last he pants like a goat-kid. **Rambhadhai** breaks into tears. Fresh morning air gets melancholy. She feels more helpless in the lonely field. Wiping tears she approaches towards the river.

It is not so easy to plunge into the river in this wintry morning and collect water. When **Rambhadhai** reaches the sand-dune filling river-water in her pot she shivers in cold. The sun shines in the sky, kisses the sands. The river-side air is violent. A flock of snipe birds can be seen sitting on the bank of the river. These emaciated birds look so bright wearing the necklaces of sun.

Snipe birds are tastier to eat than the doves. **Faring** Das used to roam about in the jungles and catch birds. **German** was his assistant. He remained so attached to his father. He passed the whole day on the bank of the river when he goes to visit the livestock disposal yard. During pregnancy **Rambhadhai** wished to eat the meat of snipe bird. **Faring** Das rushed to the jungle in search of the bird. In the evening he returned home back with two dead snipe birds in his hands. He told her with a smile, "Take the meat of your desired bird. Eat with your heart's content. My son must not be hungry."

That man is lost like a bird. Thinking this the eyes of **Rambhadhi** gets moistened. He died untimely. Hara Ghosh killed him. **Faring** tried to protect himself but could not fight against the **tangi**<sup>12</sup>. **Rambhadhai** reported against Hara Ghosh in the police station. Police came and arrested Hara Ghosh. They assured proper justice to **Rambhadhai**. Hara Ghosh was released just after a few months. People said that the case turned in the favour of Hara Ghosh because of money. Hara Ghosh was declared innocent.

From then on **German** is so outrageous. He shouts. "I'll take revenge against Hara Ghosh." He is such a lean and thin boy, yet roars like the tiger of **Sundarban**<sup>13</sup>. As time goes he gets more and more emaciated. How long a mother can bear with this? That is why she goes out to earn money in such a chill morning. **German** feels no interest about the livestock disposal yard. He does not like knives and razors. He gets sulky when his mother rebukes him. He tears his own hairs and reproaches his own fate. He says to his mother, "God has sent me to be so fragile. Yet I must take revenge." He can't forget the face of his father's killer, Hara Ghosh. He awaits the suitable scope to kill him.

Kalu Sekh is satisfied with the *jal-para*<sup>14</sup>. *Rambhadhai* is paid for that. When she is about to enter into her house Naran Morol calls her, "I am dying of tooth ache. Last night I could not sleep. I have brushed for ten times, all in vain. Salt fomentation gave me no relief. I rush to you. Exorcise the germs of tooth please. I shall pay you."

*Rambhadhai* moves to Naran Morol. She is so popular for exorcising the tooth-germs in the locality. But she is not well-paid for this trivial work. The villagers can't afford her treatment as they are very poor. Some people seek treatment on credit and *Rambhadhai* gets annoyed at this. Still she cannot ignore them as she has to live with them in the same village.

She can't change the customs and practices of the village. *German* gets angry with her. He says, "Your hands get blood-stained now. They will pay you after a year. Will you starve for one year? Why don't the people have concern for you?"

Truly says *German*. *Rambhadhai* gives relief to the village-woman. People came to call her when the pregnant women feel labour-pain. But they don't pay her. They say, "We can't pay now, *German's* mother. Later we shall send you bundles of paddy. Now please return home eating sweets only."

*Rambhadhai* says, "Sweets are not enough. God has given you a son. Give me a dish made of brass. I live depending on you. Who else give me?"

*Rambhadhai* finishes exorcising Naran Morol's tooth-germs. The sun shines brightly everywhere. Two goats are tied with a bamboo-post. They will rush to the corns of Hara Ghosh after their release. A few days ago she takes home back the full-grown she-goat from the pound. *German*, suffering from fever beats the goat badly. It may die. *Rambhadhai* rushes from the kitchen and tries to pacify him. *German* roars, "Why she goes there? I shall kill her. I beat her so much every day, yet she goes there again."

"That is why it is called an animal,"-*Rambhadhai* smiles. *German* now gets angry with his mother. Today *Rambha* needs to go to foment two people. There she may have some sunned -rice. She sheds tears to think about *German's* health. An ominous thought comes to her mind. Getting so scared she stares at her only son. She cannot recognize the boy born of her own womb. He looks so feeble nowadays. The vision of the sunken eyes looks like the retreating light. Getting so scared to lose her only prop she sheds tears. Flowing over the eyes her hot tears mark deep stains on the

cheeks and hang over the middle portion of her chin.

Now she stands in front of her son with a glass of boiled sago in her hand. She touches him and says, "Today your temperature is low a bit,"

*German* does not utter a single word. Winter-summer-rainy season all are same in the thatched house. He covers himself with bed-sheet and takes the glass stretching his hand.

A faint hope is seen in the eyes of *Rambhadhai*. She tries to make her son understand, "Please take it, son, and after recovery I shall give you rice with the soup of *shingi*<sup>15</sup> fish. If you are not well, sweet does not taste sweet to you.

Now *German* starts coughing. Keeping both hands on his chest *German* stares at his mother's face. He wipes the foams of mouth with his shirt and told in feeble voice, "I shall never recover from this disease. I know I am suffering from tuberculosis. Uncle had this disease. Surely I have this disease now."

*Rambhadhai* gets scared-"What kind of words do you utter? Never utter such words. Everyone suffers from fever. Your father suffered from fever every year. Yet he did not lose strength of mind."

*German* replies, "That was a different kind of fever. This fever attacks not only my physique, but also my mind. After recovery of mind my physique will be free from this fever". *German* stares at the distant fields surrounded by the ridges with his sickly eyes. In childhood days he along with his friends used to go there to collect oyster-shells. Then they rubbed the shells with the whetstone and made the clasp-Knives to peel mangoes. His friends said, "You are crazy about knives. You can cut a big banana tree at one attempt with your sharp bill-hook."

*German* was amazed to listen to that. Fire ran through his veins. His father's chopped head seemed to move instantly in his mind. That time his sunken-eyes did not look sickly. The throbbing light of the glow-worms seemed to emit from those sunken eyes. He was seen panting that time and started at the big brick-house of Hara Ghosh. He used to fume to take revenge against him. He used to roar grasping his own hairs, "You've killed my father. I won't leave you. Let me be grown up. I shall chop you as you have chopped my father."

*German* was growing up like a lean and thin timber-sapling with accumulated anger within his mind *Rambhadhai* got scared to look at him- such an emaciated boy.

Yet no one could stand against his anger.

She had to pass her days in a great crisis. She had earned livelihood with Jal-para and *jharphuk*<sup>16</sup>. She could not arrange rice for twice a day. *German* was a lean and thin boy yet could eat like an able-bodied young man. It was his growing period. He took rice of a full plate as his tiffin. The neighbours made fun of it. *German* was fond of eating. *Rambhadhai* could not give him enough food. Such a poor woman. There was a great flood in those days. People were passing days miserably in the village. She felt ashamed to seek help from other as she was an able-bodied woman. Her heart cried for her only son, *German*. The month of *Ashwin*<sup>17</sup> came next to it. Common reed flowers blossomed in the paddy fields. But water flowed in the river. There was abundance of crops in the fields which got fertile after flood. People started dreaming of happy days. In those happy days the Pal family arranged a grand marriage ceremony of their elder son. They needed people to collect the orts after dinner. *Rambhadhai* got the news and turned her responsibility to collect the orts there. She told, "I am passing a bad phase of life. My son is so importunate to eat meat. I wish to collect the orts after the dinner of marriage ceremony and give him some meat collected from the orts. He has been so lean and thin since birth. Taking the meat of the grand dinner his ill health may be improved."

They granted the proposal of *Rambhadhai* as she herself appeared to collect the orts without demanding money for it. She brought home the orts happily-bones of meat, curries-everything. She returned home happily. She was so delighted to see the orts of the so-called gentlemen of their village. She was so delighted to think that she could provide meat to his only son who had not taken meat for a long time. She could collect meat of a full bowl from the orts. She gave him that with six *Luchis*<sup>18</sup>. *German* got so angry to see that. He told, "You take these. You are so hungry. You collected orts in other people's home for the whole night. Didn't you feel shame? After all you're a midwife. How will be the babies whom you will bring in the world? Shame! Shame! You have lost your own prestige."

"Poor people should not be so cynical. Your father did not earn. He depended on his wife, yet always uttered so many big words."-*Rambhadhai* said.

*German* replied," My father was a snake, not an earthworm. Being his son I shall never take orts of Hara Ghosh. He joined the marriage ceremony, you collected his orts too. Please give me poison if you think me to be your unbearable burden. I

shall better take the poison and reach the cremation ground.

Getting your hands stained with blood of pregnant women and collecting orts of people you shall live happily and freely.”

**Rambhadhai** felt that his words were envenomed. She felt pain in her entire body caused by the poison. She threw the meat and luchis in the heap of garbage.

From then on she never goes to other people’s house to collect orts. **German** is happy to see this. He says “God gives us hands to do work and earn our livelihood. There is no sorrow in it. There is no prestige to live on orts of other people. It is better to collect the green herbs and leaves from the marshy lands and sell those in the village hat. That will be more prestigious for you.”

She sells green herbs and leaves in the village-hat. But she can’t go there at the time of reaping the paddy. That time she remains busy in bargaining with people. Those who are unable to pay in cash give the bundles of paddy-stalks. **Rambhadhai** carries those bundles on her head.

After giving fomentation to two men **Rambhadhai** goes to the field. Carrying a few bundles of paddy- stalks she has a kind of burning sensation in the neck. **German** is bed-ridden. Today the sky is cloudy. It is so cold today too. Returning from the pond **Rambhadhai** tries to lit the oven. She hears the groaning of **German**. She rushes to see him. She asks him anxiously, “What is the matter? Why are you getting so restless?”

**German** is perspiring. His shirt gets wet. The torn sheet made of husk is kept near his legs. He sees his mother and tries to sit. **German** says, “Mother, I saw father distinctly in my dream. He stood near my head. His eyes were full of blood. He shook me and told that my fever will never go. Temperature of his body is mixed with my body. Hara Ghosh chopped him up brutally in front of all village-people. He was not given punishment. Father remained distressed. He lamented for us. He told me to take revenge against Hara Ghosh and let him rest in peace. That is why my fever does not dip yet.”

Covering face with both hands **Rambhadhai** sobs and says, ‘Sometimes he comes in my dream too. I get so scared to see him. I can’t stare at his red eyes. He tells me to take revenge on Hara Ghosh. I can’t make him understand that it is a difficult task to take revenge on Hara Ghosh.

Now he shows his mother a sharpened chopper and tells wrathfully, “Look at it.

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I shall kill him with it.” Ramdhabhai springs up in fear, “Leave it dear. I have lost your father. I don’t want to lose you.”

Mother and son look at each other fearfully. The house remains dreadfully still. Cold wind from outside enters into the room and weakens them more. *German* says his mother, “The squirrel can build a bridge. Why can’t I do this easy job? Mother, you are a panic-stricken woman. That is why you always think of such ominous consequences.

Cold wind stops blowing in the afternoon. Clouds are floating in the evening sky. A vulture is seen sitting on the tamarind tree. Crows are returning to their nests. *German* remains delirious in the dark thatched house. The village doctor warns his mother, “He needs proper treatment immediately. Take him to the town. Blood test is a must.”

Ramdhabhai gets puzzled to hear this. She laments and reproaches her fate. She reproaches Hara Ghosh too.

*German* gets back his sense. He drinks water from the pitcher and lies in his bed. He can’t sleep. The bugs disturb him. Mosquitoes are flying. He lies like a dead man. He feels badly the absence of his mother. He feels afflicted. He calls his mother indistinctly. Thunder and lightning make him more scared. The waves of cold wind seem to come from the river. The leaves bathed in dew are shuddering. Two goats start calling in fear. Darkness prevails everywhere. Lightning is seen in the middle of the sky. The wind gets colder within a moment. Someone seems to wrap up *German* with wet clothes. Shivering spreads from chest to veins and subsidiary veins.

Now *German* sits on the bed wrapping himself with patched clothes. Still he shivers in cold. He can’t see anything in the pitch dark. He lights up a kerosene-Lamp. His mother has not returned home yet. She has gone to the dealer’s home to mortgage the brass-utensils. She has no other option. These are priceless to her in comparison to her son’s life. People gave her these utensils as an expert midwife. *German* tries to dissuade her but in vain:

A cat is crying. An ominous tune is heard in her cry. The cat’s cry resembles his mother’s cry. He has no strength to drive away the cat.

It is raining heavily. A cold wave seems to flow through the silent village. The raindrops fall through the thatched shade and *German*’s bed gets drenched. He starts

shivering in cold.

It has been raining for last two hours. Now their courtyard is full of water. Wrath of clouds haven't lessened yet. The heavy drops of rain seem to be the sharpened points of glass. The moment of rain drops turn away with the lashes of stormy wind. *German*'s mother enters into the house shivering in cold. The drenched currency notes of Rs.10 have inextricably gelled to each other within the clutches of her hand. Yet she tightly holds these within her grip. Tomorrow she will take *German* to the town by the bus at dawn. He needs proper treatment. The village doctor can't explain why he suffers from fever repeatedly.

*German* says, "This fever will never remission. This is fever of mind. When I see my father in nightmare my fever gets higher. I can't open my eyes, I suffer a lot.

"Stop talking like this"-*Rambhadhai* rebukes her son. She changes her sari and tries to make the currency notes dry with the heat of Kerosene lamp. *German* says, "Mother, I don't want to go to town. I shall never return from there."

Now *Rambhadhai* bursts into tears. It is lightning at the south-west in the sky. Heavy raindrops are falling at their courtyard. *Rambhadhai* closes the door. *German* leans on the bed almost unconscious. His eyes are moistened-with tears or with the rain-drops. He says indistinctly, "Mother, wrap me up with the patched clothes. I am feeling so cold."

Someone calls *Rambhadhai* piteously from outside the house. She opens the door and sees that Hara Ghosh stands there shivering in cold. *Rambhadhai* asks wrathfully, "Why do you come here?"

Hara Ghosh replies indistinctly, "My wife is suffering from labour -pain. Please come to my house. Now we can't go to hospital on such a calamitous night. Malati, another midwife of our village, has gone to her daughter's house." Hara Ghosh stares at *Rambhadhai* like a guilty person.

*German*'s mother stares at him wrathfully. She says, "I am in great distress only because of you. How dare you enter into my house?"

Hara Ghosh remains silent. He is trembling like tamarind leaves. He is going to be a father after ten years of marriage. People called him a barren man. To see his face was considered to be ominous. His wife is now tossing in labour-pain like a goat of sacrifice. There is no other woman in their house. He gets so scared to see profuse

bleeding. His wife says, "Call *German*'s mother." She faints. Hara Ghosh rushes to the house of Malatidhai. She is not there. Now he rushes to *Rambhadhai*. It is easier for him to walk on bare-foot on hot iron than go to *Rambhadhai*.

*German*'s mother shouts at him, "Get out from here. I don't want to see your face. Your hands wiped out my vermilion bindi and broke my conch bangles. I am passing days like a beggar."

Hara Ghosh stands there bending down his head. He says, "It was a mistake, *German*'s mother. Punish me. There must be a fish-knife in your kitchen. I stand here bending down my neck. Chop me with your fish-knife. People will see my dead body. Please go to my house. If you won't go there, both my wife and child will die. You better kill me."

Hearing these words *German* approaches Hara Ghosh with a chopper in his hand. His eyes are red because of high fever. His legs are trembling, yet he stands in front of Hara Ghosh. He roars, "Father failed but I must slay you."

*German* is about to kill Hara Ghosh. Hara Ghosh stood still there bending down his head. He told casually, "Why are you standing? Kill me. The quantum of my sin will be lessened. Come and kill me. I stand in front of you bending down my head."

*Rambhadhai* snatches away the chopper from *German*. She rebukes her, "He has come to our house. You are going to kill him. Shame! Shame! Don't you have conscience? My son is such a knave. It is beyond my thinking."

*Rambhadhai* turns out Hara Ghosh from her house. He returns to his home in the heavy rain. He told her before leaving. "Could you have ignored your daughter if she had suffered from labour -pain? I shall never come to you. I shall take my wife to the cremation ground." His last words pricked the conscience of *Rambhadhai*.

Now a kind of dilemma haunts her mind. As a midwife she is bound to give relief to the pregnant woman having labour-pain. After a great struggle with herself she decides to go to the house of Hara Ghosh. *German* asks her, "Mother, where are you going on such a calamitous night?"

*Rambhadhai* replies, 'House of Hara Ghosh.'" She goes out. She listens to the sounds of different insects from the bushes. She walks speedily through the muddy path. She has not come here for several years. Yet she doesn't feel scared. She thinks how to give relief to the unconscious pregnant woman and bring the tender baby from

the dark womb of his mother. Really it is not an easy job. It is a noble job. She feels proud of herself. She does not have sufficient food and clothing. Yet she can do a noble job. Immediately after birth a child can't see his mother first. Foster-mother is his first mother. Getting her hand stained with blood of ten months and ten days she shows him the first light of the world. A foster-mother can never be forgotten.

A lantern is lit up in the house of Hara Ghosh. He sits stooping his neck in front of the lantern. He called his wife several times; she did not respond. He is staring at her still face.

Seeing *German*'s mother he finds a faint ray of hope. He breaks into tears out of repentance. *German*'s mother rebukes him, "It is not the right time for crying. Go and bring hot water. Give me two old saris. Make fire for her immediately. She needs heat in this cold night."

*Rambhadhai* enters into the room. She struggles hard to take the baby out of his mother's womb. She succeeds at last. After delivery the baby boy cries out. His mother opens her eyes. She suffers a lot, but she smiles as well.

*Rambhadhai* returns home. *German* is sharpening the weapon made of iron. He looks at his mother. He taunts his mother, "Have you returned taking sweets at their home? Splendid! How can you kiss the snake which bites you? Are you a human-being or a goddess?" *Rambhadhai* says innocently, "I am *German*'s mother." *German* asks his mother, "Why could not you take revenge on my father's killer? Does the water of a river flow in your body instead of blood? Mother, I worshipped you as a goddess. Today you are nothing but a lump of earth that is beyond anger and hatred."

*Rambha* replies coldly, "I am a mother. Only a mother can understand me." *German* says, "Stop making riddles. What does Hara Ghosh offer to you?" *Rambha* replies, "He offered me the lease of his land. I refused."

*German* asked, "How could you leave the man who harmed you earlier? If I were there I would have killed the new-born baby. Many children die at the time of birth. No one could find out the cause of his death."

*Rambhadhai* tells her son, "I've tried to do so but I could not. The eyes of the new-born boy were like those of your father. My fingers got benumbed when I was about to stifle him. Suddenly the baby boy cried out. My fingers seemed to be the boiled stalks of plant." *German*'s mother is lost in her deep thought. She stares at the

field with expanded eyes. Rubbing the eyes she says, “Lord Krishna was born in the prison of **Kansa**<sup>19</sup>. Later Lord Krishna killed Kansa. Don’t worry, son. Those events happen in the **Kaliyug**<sup>20</sup> too.” After a while **German** says-“Mother, I’ve no fever now.”

(Translated from The Bengali Original Story ‘**Germaner Ma**’ of the book ‘**Germaner Ma**’ published by Amritloke Sahitya Parishad in 1991)

### *Glossary*

1. **German**- Name of a tribal boy
2. **Faring**- Grass-hopper. Here, it is the name of a man.
3. **Aghrana**-Name of a month in the Bengali calendar.
4. **Mahotsav**- A village-festival where all people join and enjoy.
5. **Rambhadhai**- Midwife; Foster- mother. ‘**Rambha**’ is a name of a woman.
6. **Jal Bhang**- Amniorrhesis (Known as breaking of water) is a term used during pregnancy to describe rupture of the membranes of the amniotic sac. Jal refers to ‘amniotic fluid’
7. **Hat**-Village market.
8. **Khas-land**-Land in the actual possession of the land-owner.
9. **Jin**-Spirit.
10. **Sago**- Sago is a starch extracted from the spongy centre, or pith of various tropical palm stems. People take it in ailment, specially in fever.
11. **Babla**- Babla or Babul (*Acacia Arabica*) is a medicinal tree which is found throughout the drier and sandy parts of India.
12. **Tangi**-An axe- like weapon.
13. **Sundarban**- A natural region comprising southern Bangladesh and a small part in the Indian state of West Bengal. It is the largest single block of tidal mangrove forest in the world where the Royal Bengal tigers are found.
14. **Jalpara**- Enchanted Water
15. **Shingi**- The Asian stinging fish. It is highly preferred in Assam, West Bengal and Bangladesh for its nutritional value and taste

16. **Jharphuk**- Charms and incantation.
17. **Ashwin**- Name of a month in the Bengali calendar.
18. **Luchi**- A delicious fried food stuff made of flour or ata.
19. **Kansa**- The tyrant ruler of the Vrishni kingdom with its capital at Mathura. He was the brother of Devaki, the mother of God Krishna-who killed Kansa.
20. **Kaliyug**- An age full of injustice and corruption.