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**Bastard**  
**(A Play in One Act)**

**P R Gopalakrishnan**  
**Kerala**

*SCENE 1*

*It's 6 pm of a Sunday. SHANKAR and his friends F1 and F2 are having drinks sitting at a table inside a bar. After half an hour SHARAT, who lives in SHANKAR'S neighbourhood, enters and sits at a nearby empty table. A BOY comes to SHARAT.*

BOY: What should you have sir?

SHARAT: A bottle of whisky. Also, soda and chips.

*After a few minutes the BOY enters with the order and places it on SHARAT'S table. SHARAT pours whisky and soda into a glass, sips the contents and chews the chips in between the sips. By now SHANKAR, F1 and F2 are on booze. SHANKAR watches SHARAT carefully. But SHARAT fails to notice SHANKAR'S presence.*

SHANKAR: I will tell you a story. A woman loves a man. But she fails to marry him. Then, even after her marriage with another man she is in liaison with her paramour until her husband detects the treachery.

F1: Then?

SHANKAR: Her husband leaves her and she marries her paramour.

F2: She has children?

SHANKAR: Yeah, a boy and a girl.

F1: Do you know who fathered them?

SHANKAR: How could I? God alone knows.

F2: If I could see them, their mother and the two men, I could have the answer based on the people's physical features.

SHANKAR: You will fail on the test, for both the children resemble their mother.

F1: Thank God. It's a blessing for the innocent children, for there are no chances for them to be called bastards.

F2: Do the children know their backgrounds?

SHANKAR: They may not, for they were too young to understand such things.

F1: How old are the children now?

SHANKAR: The boy is now a professor and the girl a school teacher.

F1: That's good.

F2: Will you please say who the people are?

SHANKAR: I should only say that the professor is now having drinks at a nearby table here.

*F1 and F2 look around. SHARAT, who has so far been listening to the conversation, is taken aback and he starts perspiring. Soon he gets up, pays the bill and exits.*

## SCENE 2

*An hour later. SHARAT enters his bedroom and lies in bed with a sunken face. His wife MIRA enters and stands by the bed.*

MIRA: What happened? You straightaway enter the bedroom.

SHARAT: There is nothing.

MIRA: I feel a sadness about you.

SHARAT: No.

*MIRA sits by him on the bed.*

*Pause.*

MIRA: I feel something holds you.

*Pause.*

*MIRA lies by his left and affectionately holds him with her right hand. She then kisses his right cheek. SHARAT feels irritated.*

SHARAT: I don't feel well. Please leave me alone for a while.

*SHARAT closes his eyes.*

*MIRA sits up. Her face exhibits her mental pain. After a few minutes she exits into the kitchen and when he knows she has exited he opens his eyes.*

SHARAT (*aside*): Am I born of my mother's sin? My God! Why did you bring me into the world as a bastard? If I were not a human being my bastardry wouldn't have affected me. Everyone who knows my background must be taking me as an unwanted being on the earth. How horrible it is? The life of an ugly-looking low creature is far better than that of mine.

*SHARAT closes his eyes.*

*After a few minutes MIRA returns and sits by him on the bed with her eyes set on him.*

MIRA (*aside*): My God! What happened to my man? No doubt, something stings him. What shall it be? Oh God! Help me.

*MIRA'S eyes are filled with tears and she wipes them with the bottom of her skirt.*

*Pause.*

*MIRA exits into the kitchen and returns soon without having supper. Seeing that SHARAT is asleep she lies on the bed by his left.*

### SCENE 3

*Early next morning. Though awake SHARAT remains in bed with a hollow face. MIRA enters and sits by him on the bed.*

MIRA: Why not get up?

SHARAT: I am too tired.

MIRA: I am sad.

*Pause.*

*SHARAT sits up with a sad face.*

SHARAT: Yesterday I heard what a man would never in his life like to hear.

MIRA: My God! May I know what it is?

SHARAT: I don't know how to utter it with my mouth.

MIRA: Don't worry. Tell me whatever it is.

*Pause.*

SHARAT: I was in a bar for a draught.

*Pause.*

As I had sipped a little of the stuff, one Shankar, who lives around here and was having drinks with his two friends at a nearby table, had, upon intoxication, a story in a bad light on my mother to his friends. He said my stepfather was my mother's paramour for years and that no one knows who of the two men, i.e. my father and stepfather, fathered my sister and me.

*Pause.*

I couldn't withstand the situation. So I left the scene without finishing the draught.

*Pause.*

MIRA: See, a man on intoxication makes a story on your mother? The facts in the story need not be real, but false or imaginary. Then, why should you lend your mind to it?

SHARAT: In case the story is true, who are my sister's and my biological fathers? Doesn't the question affect us?

MIRA: The question can be solved through DNA tests. But is it possible to have such tests on you, your sister, your father and then your stepfather?

*Pause.*

SHARAT: No.

MIRA: Then leave the question aside and march on in life.

*Pause.*

You see no living being on earth has any say on its birth or choice of parents. So no man is in any way bad or sinner on account of his birth, even if it happens to be illegal.

SHARAT: Still the question?

MIRA: Which question?

SHARAT: How people take me?

MIRA: A man may take another man according to the former's likes and dislikes for the latter. Why should you take such judgments to your heart?

SHARAT: Still, if I am a bastard?

MIRA: Please desist from using the word for it frightens you.

*Pause.*

I won't mind if someone throws the word at me.

SHARAT: It won't drag you out of your senses?

MIRA: Why should I allow someone to play with my senses?

*Pause.*

SHARAT: Am I not one with a bad tag?

MIRA: No, an emphatic no.

*Pause.*

SHARAT (*sadly*): Your logic fails to convince me.

MIRA: See, you are taken over by the rights the others believe they have on you, rather than by your very right to existence.

SHARAT: So no one can question my right to live in dignity even if I am born illegally?

MIRA: Why not, for you have a legal father.

*Pause.*

*SHARAT is drowsing.*

MIRA: You like to sleep?

SHARAT: I feel like.

MIRA: You don't want food?

SHARAT: Let me sleep for a while.

*SHARAT lies down and closes his eyes. MIRA is in confusion over SHARAT'S sudden change of mood. After a few minutes MIRA exits into the kitchen.*

*SHARAT fails to get up in time to attend office. MIRA enters and sits by him on the bed.*

*Long pause.*

MIRA: You are on leave today?

*SHARAT opens his eyes.*

SHARAT: I am too tired to take classes.

MIRA: Shall I inform the professor?

SHARAT: You may.

*MIRA picks up SHARAT'S mobile phone from the table and dials a number into it.*

MIRA (*over the phone*): Sir, I am Mrs. Sharat. . . Mr. Sharat is not well. . . He has headache and slight temperature. He is unable to attend office. . . Thank you very much sir.

*MIRA cuts the call and places the phone on the table.*

SHARAT: You lied to the professor that I am unwell?

MIRA: What else can be the reason for the leave?

SHARAT: Something else.

*Pause.*

MIRA: Come. Please take bath.

SHARAT: What if I don't for a day?

MIRA: Why do you think like that?

*Pause.*

SHARAT: I feel like taking a long leave from office.

MIRA: For?

SHARAT: I have fairly long been teaching. Why not have a respite to think on myself?

*MIRA is taken aback.*

MIRA: Think on yourself?

SHARAT: Yeah. About my life.

MIRA: Your life is not fully in your hands. It depends on many factors beyond your control or knowledge too. Then, why should you think long about it?

SHARAT: Any thought brings enlightenment.

MIRA: As a university teacher and otherwise you are a voraciously read man and all along you have been acquiring knowledge and thinking on and analyzing them.

SHARAT: They were on anything but me. And it's time I devoted a little time to think on myself.

MIRA: Will your thoughts cover me too?

SHARAT: It depends on the flights of my mind.

MIRA: Am I not part and parcel of you? Then how could your thoughts leave me behind?

SHARAT: I should put it to my mind.

*MIRA has an anxious face.*

MIRA: Can you think of a life without me?

SHARAT: I don't know.

MIRA: My God!

SHARAT: Why should you call God?

MIRA: Fear grips me.

SHARAT: Why and how when I go for a lonely mental picnic?

MIRA: Do you think I could go without you?

SHARAT: I don't know.

*MIRA is shaken.*

MIRA: My God!

SHARAT: Again you call Him off his work. It's selfish for He is for the whole universe, not to run after your calls.

MIRA: As He is for all, I have the right to call Him for my aid.

SHARAT: Can't you go without His aid?

MIRA: How, when I feel you are getting off me?

SHARAT: I am not getting off you, but taking leave to think of me.

MIRA: Is it that necessary?

SHARAT: Yes, because I feel I am losing anchor.

MIRA: How?

SHARAT: My very existence is shaken. Do I have the right to existence?

MIRA: Again the issue pulls you up.

SHARAT: No. So far I believed that I was in the real world. But the incident shattered the belief and revealed that so far I was in an illusory world. Now I should move into the real world.

MIRA: Are you not now in the real world?

SHARAT: Please don't try to confuse me. When I try to move from darkness to light you pull me back to darkness. It's cruel.

MIRA: My head swims.

*MIRA sits down on the floor and then lies down. Soon SHARAT leaves home.*

#### **SCENE 4**

*SHARAT returns home, a broken man, after ten days.*

.....

*The bedroom. It's early morning. SHARAT gets up, exits into the bathroom for toilets and returns in half an hour. MIRA enters with tea and sits by him on the bed. After having tea SHARAT lies in bed and closes his eyes.*

MIRA: I can't bear it.

*Pause.*

*SHARAT opens his eyes. MIRA lies by him and holds him with her right hand. Tears come off her eyes.*



MIRA: Where have you been?

SHARAT: At a temple.

MIRA: How did you live there?

SHARAT: I had food at the temple.

MIRA: And where did you sleep?

SHARAT: By the temple.

MIRA: On shop verandas and pavements?

SHARAT: Yeah.

MIRA: Did you think of me then?

SHARAT: Only God was there in my mind. I was cursing Him for the meaningless life he has extended me.

MIRA: How could your life be meaningless? You are well educated, has a good job and until the other day was leading a happy life.

SHARAT: I feel I don't deserve such things, for I have no right to existence.

MIRA: Why do you think so? You are great for me and I can't exist without you. Without you I will be in a no man's land.

*Pause.*

If you ever again leave home I will do the same and wander around for you.

SHARAT: I am shaken. I don't know what to do.

MIRA: I don't think anything has happened to you. Something unwanted stole into your head. That's all. Why should you allow it to remain there?

SHARAT: Still?

MIRA: As I told you earlier you had no part at all in your birth. And, even if you were born out of wedlock why should you worry about it? Many bastards have occupied high positions in the world. And, they did not at all feel that they were ignoble human beings for that.

SHARAT: Still the tag on me?

MIRA: No. There is no tag on you. And, even if someone thinks or propagates that you are born out of wedlock why you should worry about it when I am not at all concerned about it? And, despite anything like that, I will hold you high as my respectful husband for you are great for me in every respect. Then, why you should worry about any bad feelings some people may have about you?

SHARAT: Then, I may leave the question for ever?

MIRA: Not leave but throw it away to the wind as if you have nothing to do with it.

SHARAT: Then, I may live in peace?

MIRA: Why not?

*SHARAT has an uneasy smile on his face and MIRA watches him with an anxious face.*

### ***CURTAIN***

#### **Third-person Biographical Note:**

P R Gopalakrishnan was born at Mulanthuruthi, Travancore-Cochin (now Kerala), in 1950. He had BSc (Mathematics) from the Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, Kochi, and a Post-graduate Diploma in Journalism from the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. For 28 years he was on the service of the erstwhile State Bank of Travancore. He resides at Chottanikkara, Kerala. Some of his writings have been published in 'The Criterion'.