

HUMAN SADNESS

Preface

'If you haven't got the time, don't start reading.'

'Why not?'

'I'm writing about the forgotten Gudamakari Gorge. For a long time, I've wanted to write a novel about the people from Gudamakari, but I haven't been able to start for a while. However, I'm only twenty five and I've only been writing for three years. But it's felt like three centuries have gone by rather than three years and I still haven't been able to write something appropriate about Gudamakari.'

Until now, I'd thought that it would be a big book about the Gudamakari Gorge with lots of stories in it. But no, that wasn't right! There's definitely something ~~is~~ wrong with me. I don't look at people in the same way I did three years ago. Now every person seems to me to embody stories and I look for names for all of them. For example if I meet you somewhere and you start talking to me, I'll immediately imagine that you are a story and will find a name for you. I don't know what the reason is for this. At first, it was only Gudamakari people who seemed to me to be stories, but now, whoever it is, whatever nationality, I think they are a story. If up until today it was only the Gudamakari Gorge that was a book full of strange stories, now I think that the earth is a huge book, illuminated by the sun and moon, where lots of living stories are walking. Oh, you can't imagine what a splendid book it is, can you? The stories themselves erect monuments to good stories, an invisible creator's hand writes and erases in this book. I wish I knew what's happening to me. I'm now imagining that the earth is a page in the book with the title of 'Universe'. I wish I knew where to find that blessed writer whose hand is writing this great book. Or where to find the beginning of this book, or the end. Or, perhaps, it has neither of these. The earth is its one and only page and Gudamakari Gorge and perhaps others are the subtitles of many short stories.'

'Me?'

'Who am I?'

'Perhaps I am a story too.'

'But what have I got to do with the stories around me?'

'Do you know what I want?'

'What?'

'When I told you that I wanted to write a story about Gudamakari, well, just let me get on and write it.'

'Perhaps you can't imagine how I suffer. I cannot not write it but as to what to write, how to write, well, the thing is that I will write anyway, I won't miss anything, but I find it difficult to begin. Perhaps the creator also found it hard to begin when he started writing the book of the universe ~~book~~. I want to begin in exactly the way he did but never finish. I want to speak about everything as I see it and experience it. Don't get angry with me if

I don't follow any order in my book. Order is not my business at all, it depends on the stories, and they have an odd habit of not asking me about anything.'

'I've bored you, haven't I?'

'What can one do? I couldn't find the beginning, I don't know where to start with nor how to put so many stories together. Look out of the window, I can see three drunken stories walking along the road, singing. They've got their arms around each other and are staggering. Let's begin with something else, or they'll hassle us. They come from the village where all the crazy stories live. Some time ago I wrote about their village and since then I've been in turmoil. Look, they've turned towards my house. I already know that they want to pick a fight with me. I'm used to arguing with them. Not just them but all my stories quarrel with me.'

'What about?'

'They ask me why I kill them at the end? I kill them because I love them. They don't believe me, they can't bear the thought of death.'

'No one can stand death.'

'I can. I love it when my stories finish with death. Death enhances the life of stories just as the sun and moon beautify darkness.'

'But, can you bear your stories to die?'

'I can't spare them, but I have a rule. I don't write about things I don't love. I imagine them at the moment of death and later I regret that I've killed them and this regret makes me think about life. As for the people of Gudamakari, they come to me and quarrel with me.'

'What do they say?'

'They tell me, 'We're still alive so why have you killed us?''

'I tell them it isn't real.'

'What's not real?'

'Everything a human sees and experiences is an invention and death is necessary to put an end to this ghost, but why do I deceive them? Actually, nothing is a ghost, and everything is real and life is very beautiful. As for me, I kill off people from Gudamakari far too early, so it's no wonder they get upset, is it? What would be the outcome if everyone committed a suicide on one day, the same day the rest of them were carrying one of my stories to bury it. It was hot, there are some mausoleums up there on the mountain, and that's where they were carrying it to. Somehow, everyone was staring at me. I killed that woman earlier on and she argued with me immediately. She asked ~~was~~ asking me why. This time, though, she really had died and everyone looked at me as if it was my fault. For some reason, I looked at the dead person and thought:

'What does it matter when you die, whether it's early or late? When I killed her, she objected so much, as if nothing's happened. Has anything really changed?'

'It probably does matter, something probably has changed.'

'In any case, I didn't want to begin writing in that way. I blame it on those three drunkards. They came, quarrelled with me and left. Even though they were staggering along in such a pitiful manner, they argued with me about the reasons I'd written about them. They're saying, 'We won't die'. Well, that's not interesting so I'll try to begin writing with something else.'

Beginning

The sun decided to set and I felt the urge to write. It wasn't dark in the room, but before I started writing, I decided to light a candle on my writing table.

I lit a fire and used it to warm a candle. I shaved off its sides with a knife and kneaded it in my hands in order to soften it. Then I remembered I needed some string to use as a wick. I looked for one but could not find anything so, I threaded it onto some wool. I went up to the writing table, stood there and began to light the candle. Every time I lit it, it went out. The woollen wick wouldn't catch light. Then I started looking for some cotton wool, but I couldn't find any. Somebody called from outside. I went out. A story from Gudamakari had arrived from Tbilisi and come to see me. We sat down. I immediately started looking for its title. It had no intention of leaving and eventually, I think I stopped listening to him and didn't notice when he left. I went back to the house and continued looking for something to make a wick for the candle. I found a thick bundle of paper, tied up tightly, in one of the chests of drawers. It was tied up with waxed string. I didn't pay any attention to the papers and immediately threaded the candle onto this wick, lit it, stood at the table again and began to pray.'

'God, great writer of the universe, wherever You are and however You are, glory and strength be unto You. I know that You found it difficult to begin writing but it could not be otherwise, nothing happens without effort. But You invested so much grace in your book that is difficult for a man to understand where the beginning is. Grace is the instrument at work here and, at the same time, it's there. It's in me and it's in those three drunk stories who staggered down the road. It is in the dog, in the cow, in the water, in the air and in the earth. You write magnificently, about so many things and so freely. I want to write freely too, to move from one story to another as if nothing has happened. You manage to maintain an underlying order. When I threaded the candle on the piece of wool, it wouldn't catch light, in your book things are written differently. A candle with a woollen wick won't burn and a human with a dog's heart isn't a human being.

Meanwhile the candle burnt down and I went back to the chest of drawers for a second time to take ~~get~~ more cotton waxed string. I took some of it and somehow my attention was drawn to those papers.

I read some of the pages and was overjoyed. I discovered that those papers carried the story of an amazing campaign which the inhabitants of village Chokha arranged in Gudamakari. My grandmother participated in the campaign and since she was famous for keeping secrets, she was given these papers for safekeeping. My mother didn't take part as she was ill that winter and my sister and I were sent somewhere else, because there was no school at our place. For that reason, I've always felt regretful when my peers tell me about that campaign.

And now, destiny has taken me to the precise place where I need to begin from and since the notes are messed up, I will try my best to sort them out, a little bit at least, and present them like that.

The notes are wrapped in a thick cover and there are big letters written on it:

Campaign in Gudamakari

On the first page is the list of the names of the participants of that famous campaign:

Guy Gogi - Commander-in-chief.

Bibgai - Dean (or banner carrier).

Sebai – Bell ringer.

Samkharauli - Historian and geographer and campaign chronicler.

Kimbari - Philosopher.

Chagi – Campaign writer.

Zinai - Doctor.

Gamikhardai - Collector of sorrows.

Salome – Keeper of Secrets, in case it's necessary to hide the notes.

Shete - Bridegroom.

Elenai – Housewife, bread baking, cooking and other duties.

Tatia.

Tashkentai – Spy.

Garakhtinai.

The following should help Elenai and Salome in case of need:

Sophiai.

Katushai.

Martai – Screamers.

(Their job is to frighten the enemy's army by screaming, they are good screamers.)

Ketuai.

Ninuaia.

Siduai - Ordinary campaigners.

Tasai.

The Kotoraants' woman.

The Sharvanians' woman - secret unit.

The Shijanats' woman.

Kaltamze - Naval unit (because there is no sea in Gudamakari, their duty is to stay alongside the Aragvi river, they must patrol the Aragvi river until the campaign is over).

Tebruai.

Dariko.

Lelai.

Tamarai.

Galilei.

(They have to stay in the village of Chokhi and supervise it, feed the cattle, take care of the birds and look after bedridden old people).

This is just about the full list of famous campaigners and brave warriors, most of whom are women, because in the winter men go to the mountains to shepherd sheep, young people head for the town, and only women and children stay in Gudamakari.

From the Author

Before I tell you about the other notes, I would like to introduce you to some of the participants of the campaign listed above.

Guy Gogi (Commander-in-chief)

It is winter. The Gudamakari Gorge is covered in snow. It's warm. On the eastern slope of the mountain, the village of Chokha spreads out. Smoke writhes like a snake here and there from the chimneys of the houses. The sun has risen slowly and its rays shine down on the village. The village is still snuggled down. There's no barking dog to be heard anywhere. Then, gradually, the old people who remained in the village started coming out of their houses. They drove the cattle out, let them drink at the spring and allowed them to stand under the sun. The cows warmed their chilled backs in the sunshine with pleasure.