

Flesh of Flesh

Short Story

Fiza Pathan

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*To those who suffer discrimination in society,
due to gender differentiation.*

Matthew 19:12 - *For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from [their] mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive [it], let him receive [it].*

—KING JAMES VERSION

Flesh of Flesh

Savitri opened her eyes slowly. The first thought that flashed across her drugged mind was that she was dead and had already entered the land of the immortals.

“Choudhary, are you there?”

Savitri shook her head gently, like a woman in a trance. Her senses were still dull and there was a sort of fog before her eyes. She wondered whether this eerie mist was acting like a Christian bride’s veil. Did it hide Indra, the vision of the Lord of heaven, that she was going to behold? It suddenly dawned on Savitri that she was not a Christian but a Hindu. Besides her husband, she had no other master.

“Choudhary, where are you? I need you to be here right now!”

The sound of sudden footfalls echoed in Savitri’s ears. She at once recognized one of those many steps as belonging to her husband, Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod, the firstborn son of the revered and wealthy senior Thakur Uday Chand Singh Rathod. In Hindu

society in India, it was customary for a wife to be very dutiful to her husband. Savitri, however, had taken a step even further than mere duty. To her, Thakur Singh, as she lovingly called him, was her god; the sun around which her whole existence revolved.

“She is awakening. I want no one in this room but family members. By Lord Shiva, where in the world is that damn Choudhary?”

Choudhary was Savitri’s elder brother. Although they were born as fraternal twins, Choudhary always treated Savitri as his own child calling her ‘beti’ (daughter) rather than the customary ‘behen’ (sister).

“What’s happening?” thought Savitri when she realized where she was. A small flicker of a smile appeared at the edges of her dry mouth. The footfalls began to increase in number while the translucent mist that had clouded Savitri’s eyes began to recede into nothingness.

Of course, she now knew where she was! She was at the maternity clinic in Dadar. She had been rushed there in the early hours of the morning when her labour pains began. She was at that time in the puja room burning a small steel tray full of jasmine incense at the idol of the god Vishnu when the steel tray fell from her sweaty hands with a loud clanking sound that could have awakened the dead. Savitri clutched her bulging stomach in genuine agony while her austere mother-in-law noted through the rim of her gold framed spectacles a few drops of bright red blood trickle down to the well-scrubbed marble floor from between Savitri’s legs.

The whole household, which consisted of a number of uncles, aunts, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, nephews, nieces, grandparents, great-grandparents, were all immediately geared up to

transport the sagacious wife of the affluent Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod to the nearest maternity hospital to bid the arrival of the very first heir to the ancestral legacy.

“She seems to be fine, but how will I do it?”

“Wake up, Savitri aunty, wake up!”

“Is she delirious? Then we mustn’t even try.”

“Oh Lord Vishnu who rests on the hundred-headed serpent, what have you done?”

Savitri’s eyes now opened wide. She realized that she was in a recovery room and lying flat down on a rather soft hospital bed mattress, but her head was rested on a rather hard and uncomfortable pillow. Her right hand was still attached to an I.V. and the liquid from the plastic bottle above her dropped slowly into her opened vein, sending a discomfoting cold sensation right across her right arm. Savitri licked her dry and parched lips as her eyes travelled along and around looking at all the people standing around her bed.

Her last fears of being no more at that moment immediately left her. Her mother-in-law, dressed in a starch white cotton sari with purple floral designs at the border, was sitting on her left while her younger sister-in-law stood beside the aged mother-in-law with an unevenly, awkward smile plastered across her wheatish face. The others that surrounded Savitri’s hospital bed were her two younger brothers-in-law, Thakur Arjan Singh Rathod and Thakur Jay Singh Rathod. Both of them were helping her husband in the family business and were the apple of her husband’s eyes. Next to them, slightly flushed and out of breath, was her twin brother Choudhary and beside him was her master and beloved husband. Her husband’s dark, brown eyes mellowed on seeing his wife trying to get

up to greet him. He immediately laid her back onto her bed. Savitri beamed with pride as she looked upon her husband.

He was dressed in his usual ancestral long robe with a thick silk scarf wrapped around his shoulders like a medieval English prince. The scarf was pinned to his chest with the aid of a jeweled brooch—a diamond brooch. His long, jet black hair was oiled thickly while his thick, black moustache was curled delicately at the ends. He smelt of sandalwood, which was the homemade paste he always bathed himself in. What added to Savitri's high opinion of her husband's regality was his silk turban which covered his head like a crown.

At the centre of this turban was the family's most treasured jewel—the 50 carat emerald that was the hallmark of the Rathod legacy. The green emerald sparkled brilliantly upon Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod's turban of yellow dyed silk. Savitri knew that today the emerald was upon her husband's brow because he was the first male born of his mother, but the next day it would adorn the silk turban of her own offspring who was born today in this maternity hospital.

“Thakur Singh, my husband, where is my newborn son?”

Instead of the usual assurances of patience that should be delivered to a mother at this point in her life, when she would wish to lay her gleaming eyes on the tiny body of her infant – instead of assurances and words of congratulations – came the ghastliest wail from Savitri's mother-in-law. The old lady burst out into a flood of tears while her frail hands clutched her daughter-in-law's mattress. The schoolgirl tried to calm her elderly mother but to no avail. Soon the young school girl too whimpered like a wounded puppy as she patted her distraught mother's grey head.

Savitri was petrified. She began to feel a tingling sensation behind her left ear lobe. She always felt this when danger was near. She had once been saved from the fangs of a vile krait in her maternal home by the prophetic warning of her trembling left ear lobe. She sat up in bed in a state of unquestionable anxiety. She looked up at her husband, but his gaze was motionlessly transfixed upon the hospital floor. Her brother-in-law, Thakur Jay Singh Rathod, was biting his lower lip in uneasiness while the other brother-in-law, Thakur Arjan Singh Rathod, looked the other way, unable to bear the emotional outburst of his aged mother.

Savitri was wild with apprehension. The tingling sensation in her left ear lobe began to vibrate her whole ear. Savitri held the ear lobe with her left hand and with pensive eyes looked into the only set of eyes that were gazing into hers with all the pity it could muster . . . Choudhary's eyes.

"Brother, what has happened? Why is my mother-in-law crying? What has happened, brother. Don't keep me waiting like this."

But Choudhary merely bent his head low and allowed a single tear drop to escape from his hidden eyes.

"WHERE IS MY BABY?" shrieked Savitri pulling at her long wavy, raven black hair. Her ebony eyes filled with hot tears and with her right hand she grabbed hold of her twin brother's shirt collar and shook him vigorously like an insane woman.

Choudhary tenderly held his sister's head and begged her to listen carefully to what he had to say, but Savitri now was in no position to be consoled.

"Where is the baby? Where is the child? I demand to know where you have kept the child . . ."

“What’s going on in here?” asked a bulky nurse who had stormed into the room on hearing the shouting.

“What are you all stressing her for? This is a clinic not your mansion. I’ve got some nervous patients on this floor.”

The nurse then moved the two brothers-in-law aside as she sat down on the hospital bed beside Savitri. Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod’s eyes blazed in anger at this sudden intrusion. His nostrils flared as he addressed the newcomer in his deep commanding baritone voice.

“I informed the doctor that I wanted no one to enter this room on any account.”

The nurse eyed the Thakur through the corner of her eyes.

‘Male chauvinist pig,’ she thought to herself as she held onto Savitri’s shoulders. The nurse was an African immigrant to India and an extremely devout Christian. Hanging from her fat neck from a silver chain was a dainty shiny silver cross. Savitri’s eyes immediately fell on the holy pendant. She at once took one of the nurse’s meaty hands in her own and placed the nurse’s fingers on the cross.

“Nurse, please, on oath of your prophet, tell me what has happened to my baby?”

The nurse looked on gravely at Savitri. The mother-in-law began to shake in terror while Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod’s eyes burned into the round face of the African nurse. Never in his thirty-seven years of living had Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod ever been disobeyed by a woman. He under no circumstance wanted any outsider to get wind of what he was going to reveal to his wife. He cursed the doctor whom he had warned not to allow any stranger to this private recovery room on the first floor of the posh clinic. He knew that only the doctor who operated on Savitri knew as well as

three other nurses, but he could seal their lips forever with his political power, but who was this obese, foreigner and why in Lord Vishnu's name was she staring so solemnly at Savitri . . . as if . . . as if she knew . . .

The nurse rested her free hand on Savitri's shoulder.

"Mrs. Rathod," said the nurse in a composed voice, "I need you to relax first."

"I'd rather you leave, woman!" ordered Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod in an angry tone of voice.

The nurse turned her head slowly and looked this time directly into the man's stern face. She knew the type well – the rich orthodox husband with a silver spoon in his mouth and a whip of thorns in his hand. She was not really sure what the fuss was all about. All she was aware of was that the famous Rathod parade had admitted Savitri as an emergency case several hours ago, when she was doing the paperwork of the previous night's emergency operation on a two-day-old baby boy. One of her colleagues, Sister Louisa, had burst the pregnant woman's water bag and the gynaecologist, Dr. Nagaraja, was to do the delivery. What became of the whole procedure was not yet known to her, but by the look of all the disappointed faces it seemed like Savitri either had lost her baby or that the firstborn had been a girl. Savitri, however, was frantic, and the nurse couldn't refuse a patient despite the queer behaviour of her in-laws.

The nurse turned her face back towards Savitri and smiled reassuringly.

"Mrs. Rathod, control yourself. To tell you the truth, by the Lord Jesus, I really have no clue about your case. If you will kindly wait a while, I'll go right downstairs to Dr. Nagaraja's office and request him to see you. He will explain everything."

However, as the nurse was about to leave the room, Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod, like a stealthy panther, sprang up in front of the door blocking her way out, his emerald dazzling her for a moment.

“You’re not going anywhere, woman.”

In his left hand was a Glock with a silencer, which was pointed right into the bulging stomach of the flabbergasted nurse. Savitri was about to scream but was muffled by the younger and alert Thakur Jay Singh Rathod. The nurse, after a moment of shock, blinked her eyes in amazement which soon turned to fear.

Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod was one of the richest political businessmen in Mumbai. In his hometown in Rajasthan, where he owned acres and acres of fertile land, which was very rare, he was treated like a prince in the Indian desert state. He could buy and sell anyone, and many a sordid tale was told of his wrath. The nurse backed away terrified.

“That’s more like it,” said Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod as he sneered into the horrified woman’s face, “I don’t know why that blasted Nagaraja allowed you to come up here, but you’re not going out that easily now that you are here. Arjan Singh, watch her!”

Immediately Thakur Arjan Singh Rathod held up another Glock at the African nurse’s head. He smirked as he saw her swallow the lump in her throat.

“Now as for you, Savitri,” continued Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod in a very saturnine voice as he put away his own Glock inside one of his long robe pockets. “Since you are so keen to know what became of your labour, well, it’s high time you knew before you scream again, allowing another pesky nurse or ward boy to enter this room.” Looking at Choudhary, he bellowed, “Tell her now before I lose my patience with you.”

Savitri's beseeching eyes fell heavily on her elder brother. Choudhary cleared his throat aloud and with a slight tremor in his voice began to speak.

"Bet, it's very, very unfortunate. You see . . . you see, the baby that was born was . . . not normal. In fact, I'm sorry to say that, we—we cannot make out whether it's a girl or a boy."

Savitri's eyes again flooded with hot tears while the young schoolgirl hid her oily head in her mother's grey hair. Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod motioned with his outstretched hand indicating that Choudhary should continue . . . which he did, with a lot of trouble.

"Dr. Nagaraja said that the baby outwardly looks like a boy and it does have a small penis, but the scrotum of the child has divided in such a way that – that it has formed more into a large labia. Like – like a woman. The penis also is too – too small and defective. The doctor – doctor then did a sonography on – on the newborn . . . he found . . . he found . . . a uterus . . ."

"ENOUGH!" cried out the mother-in-law cupping the palms of her hands to her ears, "Why don't you just tell this daughter-in-law of mine that she has rewarded our kindness with filth! The newborn is a eunuch—HIJRA."

The merciless word indicating the dreaded third sex of the Indian Society pierced Savitri's ears like a sharp needle. After all her prayers and supplications to all the Hindu gods and goddess – was this her reward, a child whom she would never be able to call upon as a proper human. Yet in the core of her heart, Savitri felt more secure that the baby . . . HER baby had survived. It hadn't died a cruel death before seeing the light of the world. Yet, could such a one be able to live a normal life like every human?

“This is absolutely ridiculous,” the African nurse interrupted in a cynical voice; “Absolutely ridiculous and we are supposed to be educated people of the 21st century!”

“Quiet, you silly, idiotic woman,” ordered Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod.

“I’m seriously telling you,” the nurse emphasized with a lot of conviction looking into Savitri’s eyes. “I can’t believe all this fuss is about a baby having a few . . . problems. Science and surgery have developed to a great extent. Such inconsistencies can easily be corrected if only everyone stops acting so juvenile and starts taking advice from a good doctor.”

In the twinkling of eye, Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod walked up to the nurse while she was reasoning her logical thoughts out and slapped her hard on the right cheek. The school girl gasped while a trickle of blood oozed out from the African nurse’s right nostril. When she raised her head up again, she was the very image of fury.

“You cannot call the child a eunuch,” the nurse said in a voice short of a scream. “It has every right to lead a normal life like you and me.”

Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod took a quick look at the African nurse’s ID card that was pinned to the left pocket of her white nurse’s uniform. The card showed her name to be ‘Kathleen Maria Lorenzo.’ With a swift move of his hand, he grabbed hold of Kathleen’s conservative bun and pulled her hair till she wailed in agony.

“So, you are trying to get me to adopt your filthy ideas, eh?” said Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod with an unholy sneer upon his face. “I am aware that there are surgeries that can correct certain ‘problems’ of gender as you call them, Sister Kathleen, but I am

also aware that many times such babies turn out to act peculiar in society. I certainly can't take such risks, now can I? You decadent and barbaric Christ-worshippers abroad tolerate these 'in-between' people roaming about the streets like demigods, but this is India in which the male gender is wanted, the female gender tolerated . . . and in-between abandoned."

Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod then let go of her hair with a grunt. Kathleen held her head in horrendous suffering while her oppressor continued to look towards his agog wife. "Such a child cannot produce a grandchild for the Rathod family. It's of the inter-sexed category and I don't want it."

Savitri pulled Thakur Jay Singh Rathod's palm from her mouth, breathing convulsively as she declared firmly.

"It's our child . . . our own child . . . I cannot abandon my child."

Kathleen, wheezing terribly from the pain in her head, agreed with Savitri.

"Gender, Mr. Rathod, is not everything in this world. HUMANITY is, and that child is a human."

Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod grinned menacingly.

"I know exactly what to do with that monster of a baby. Sister Kathleen . . . I know exactly what to do."

*

The mother-in-law sat outside the private recovery room counting the beads of her holy Rudraksha, repeating the name of the God Ram over and over again. The end of her cotton sari was wet with the tears she had shed. Although her lips were chanting, her eyes were fixed upon a transaction that was taking place in front of

her. Kathleen was leaning motionless against the hospital wall with Thakur Arjan Singh Rathod, whose gun was still aimed at her forehead. In front of them was Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod with a tiny newborn baby in his hands, wrapped up carefully in a white swaddling cloth.

“Eight pounds,” thought the vigilant nurse, “and so healthy . . . this is a shame.” A teardrop trickled down her right cheek, which was red and quite swollen.

Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod spoke in soft whispers to the people before him . . . they were three local Hijra’s. They stood before the Thakur. Two were quite young, almost in their early twenties, while their leader looked more than fifty. Their lips were smeared with blood red lipstick, and their eyes were shaped with a heavy dosage of eye shadow. They wore a lot of gold and smiled wickedly every time Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod began a sentence.

With her hip shaking invitingly, the eldest hijra took away the infant from Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod arms.

“Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram.”

The eldest hijra beamed tenderly at the infant in her charcoal black meaty arms.

“Don’t worry, Thakur Singh. I’ll look after this angel like my own child.”

Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod grunted in impatience.

“I don’t care what you do with it. Just take it away and never let me set eyes on it.”

The eldest hijra screwed up her nose mischievously. She then kissed the infant on the forehead and with her entourage began to leave the floor.

“Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram.”

Before disappearing, however, the eldest hijra turned back to the Thakur and said, “May the Lord of the heavens gift you with fertility.”

She then took out a lemon from her sari blouse and threw it down upon the hospital floor, squashing it with her right foot . . . the deal was made.

*

Time passed by like an unobtrusive cloud and Savitri gave birth to three boys, who were adored by Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod. They grew up in the midst of luxury and were always under the protection of their father and uncles. These three boys were given the best education and diamonds to bedeck themselves with as future lords of the Rathod family.

But there is no curtain that can hide the truth of this world. Greed begets greed and hate begets hate. The Rathod family began to disrupt from within. The words of Jesus Christ in the Bible seemed to come true in the lives of all the members of the well-to-do Rathod family. Family members started to argue with one another over money, property, emeralds. Arguments transformed into blows which in turn led to court cases and the un-business like division of agricultural land and property. The elders of the family died trying to bring back their children under one roof, to no avail.

Fate ultimately came down heavily upon Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod with a vengeance. His brothers deserted him, his close relatives spurned his beseeching pleas, while his own sons . . . blood of his blood and flesh of his flesh . . . whom he had cradled upon his lap and taught how to speak . . . these very same sons of his soil had one by one robbed Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod of all that he called

his own . . . all this in the name of greed which is the rich man's cancer.

Savitri was left desolate. The husband who once used to tower over her regally . . . was now in the King Edward Memorial (KEM) hospital in town fighting for his life.

As Savitri stood pensively outside the operation theatre, her grey hair tied untidily into a hasty bun, her eyes failed to produce any tears of sorrow. Time had already used up all her emotional outbursts leaving a torn feeling in her breast, which often ached in the dead of night while she used to lie awake in her bed beside her ailing husband. Would he come out alive? Would the other family members come to the hospital? Where were the sons of her womb when they had to do their duty on the oath of the milk she suckled them on?

These thoughts swam frantically through her head even when a doctor burst out of the operation theatre in his scrubs. On seeing Savitri in a trance-like state, the efficient doctor shook her awake saying, "It's his kidneys. He needs one organ immediately. Call your sons."

Savitri gazed mutely at the doctor . . . had it come to this that after having the whole world in his grasp, Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod would that day die of a kidney failure all because there was no one to donate him one?

"Mrs. Rathod, get them here now, you understand, NOW! We even need blood, and Mr. Rathod has one of the rarest blood groups that isn't in our blood bank at the moment."

Savitri sniffled a bit, fidgeting with her crepe bright red sari.

"My sons won't come."

"Mrs. Rathod . . ."

"No one will come."

“We have to save your husband, Mrs. Rathod!”

It is true that money and status can buy many things, but once they are realized for what they are really worth they are just broken mirrors, useless and often unlucky. A piece of paper with Mahatma Gandhi’s portrait could not right then be used as a kidney . . . status could not pour blood into the thirsty vein.

Savitri was about to accept the inevitable. She caught hold of her mangalsutra (a sacred Hindu necklace) made of black beads and gold, placed by her husband around her neck on her wedding day, to be worn till death parted them. She was about to break the necklace from her neck when suddenly a lot of shouts and screams arrested Savitri’s and the doctor’s attention.

“Who let that in here? Ward boy, get it out of the hospital!”

“Jagdish, Jagdish, call security.”

“Catch it, you fool, catch it!”

From the end of the corridor, ran a woman wearing a snow-white sari and an array of plastic bangles. She was running towards Savitri with a horde of enraged ward boys in pursuit of her. When the woman came right near Savitri, she ducked behind her, panting heavily. The doctor stared at the woman behind Savitri and immediately recognized her.

“Suraiya,” said the doctor, “What are you doing here? This is no place for your hijra tricks.”

Savitri turned to look at the person behind her. She immediately caught the sight of long, jet black wavy hair, left loose over a wheatish complexioned face, which had a strong almost masculine jaw and a beautiful pair of dark brown eyes.

The mob of ward boys stopped in front of the doctor stating angrily one by one that Suraiya, the eunuch, had just barged into the hospital. Till then, Savitri looked questioningly into the hijra’s

dark brown eyes and Suraiya looked back with tears filling her eyes.

“They, they told me that father was dying. So, so I . . .”

Savitri almost screamed but checked herself. A soft wail escaped her lips as she caught hold of Suraiya’s shoulders. Savitri, in absolute anguish, shook Suraiya’s shoulders to the astonishment of all who watched her. A multitude of thoughts and remembrances passed through the aged Savitri’s mind for those few seconds. The memory of a child she did not carry in her arms . . . of whose fate she had not held herself responsible . . . God’s ways were not human ways.

“Ma (mother),” choked out Suraiya, “God gives us only one father and only one mother. My duty towards father was to keep out of his sight but now . . . I know he is alone, so disregarding social barriers, I’ve come at last.”

Savitri beamed and to the amazement of all screamed to the doctor.

“Here is the blood you need, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, bone of my bone . . . Oh Lord Vishnu, forgive me my sins.”

*

When Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod opened his eyes after a whole day, he realized that he was in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) under observation. There were plastic I.V. bottles of blood attached to his veins while his wife, Savitri, smiled weakly at him from the foot of the bed.

Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod with his dark brown eyes smiled back at her.

“Savitri, I was a dead man. How was I saved?”

Savitri straightened her look as she proudly replied.

“Our child saved you with his kidney and blood.”

“Which of our three sons?”

Savitri gripped the handle of the bed tightly.

“Not the ones who abandoned you . . . but whom you abandoned.”

On her last word itself, Suraiya wobbled into the ICU, a bandage right around her stomach. Thakur Vijay Singh Rathod observed the tear-stained wheatish face, the ruby red lips, the womanly frame and hairy hands. He realized at once whom he was looking at. With anger, he scoffed Suraiya.

“I would have rather died than taken a kidney and blood from, from you!”

Suraiya smirked standing tall and almost, Savitri thought, like Thakur Singh himself.

“Father, you would have died rather than have taken my blood, but I would have died if you were to die due to lack of an organ or blood. Father, even hijra’s have feelings. I can’t be anyone’s wife, husband, sister, brother, daughter or son . . . but today I’ve proved to be a human being, and I think that is more important.”

Suraiya removed a lemon from her snow-white blouse and threw it upon the floor. She then smashed it with her right foot as she said:

“Hijra’s are also human . . . Hijra’s are also human.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Fiza Pathan has a bachelor's degree in arts from the University of Mumbai, where she majored in history and sociology with a first class. She also has a bachelor's degree in education, again with a first class, her special subjects being English and history.

Fiza has written twelve award-winning books and a short story, which reflect her interest in furthering the cause of education and in championing social issues. In more than seventy literary competitions, she has placed either as the winner or a finalist, chief among them 2018 DBW Award, Killer Nashville 2018 Silver Falchion Award, 2018 IAN Book of the Year Awards, 2018 Eric Hoffer Award - Montaigne Medal, Readers' Favorite Book Awards, Reader Views Literary Awards, Foreword Reviews Indie Fab Book Awards, Mom's Choice Awards, Literary Classics Book Awards, and Dan Poynter's Global Ebook Awards. More information is available at the author's website: <https://fizapathan.com/awards/>

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