

EK KURSI, EK MORCHA AUR HAWA MEIN LATAKTE LOG – ONE CHAIR, ONE THRONE AND PEOPLE LEFT IN THE LURCH

(As the curtain rises, a voice emerges in the background – this play belongs to an era when the land of five rivers, which now is reduced to three, was on the boil. This play has three characters – one sitting on the ruling party chair, the second occupying the throne and the last are, metaphorically speaking, common people hanging in the air. The first one is the main character, he can be the Chief Minister or the chief administrator or the chief ruler. The second one is the key character because the one sitting on the throne considers himself to be the representative of the God, believed to be the main director on this earth. The key character sitting on the throne has a grouse against the main character sitting on the ruling chair, of discrimination. The chair and the throne are at war with each other and that is why their faces are away from each other – the acting space for the play is the vast earth which now is represented by the stage.

No doubt nowadays the main and the key characters are sulking with each other, in reality their relations are very strong. Both are like brothers, one elder and the other one younger. Their bodies are alike, form and shape is the same, their habits are similar, none of them actually works, both are freeloaders and dependent on others hard work.

Note: While this is being explained, two fat men enter the stage. One with a white turban and wearing 'khaddar-dhari'¹ clothes and the other one with a blue turban 'Gyani'² respectively sit on the chair and the throne, both agitated as if they are raging bulls. This play has one more character – common people hanging in the air. In normal circumstances these people walk on the land, but due to the tensions between the chair and the throne they are left hanging in the air. Today there is a lot of tension here. A man hanging in the air is in anger. He is complaining to the person in the chair.)

- One : But you are sitting on the chair that rules us, we have to tell our problems to you only.
- Khaddar-dhari : I am sitting on this chair, this does not mean that I am contractually bound to any Tom, Dick & Harry!
- One : I have studied up to class sixteen, I do not have a job....you have to give me work...you are responsible for it.
- Khaddar-dhari : Did I tell you to study till class 16...you should have studied less...what says you Gyani?
- Gyani : I am not on talking terms with you, I am on strike!
- One : When I had studied less you only said that as yet I am not good enough to take any responsibility, hence study more.
- Khaddar-dhari : What do you want now?
- One : Either leave this seat of power or get your governance right.
- Gyani : This is exactly what I have been telling him to leave the chair and handover the rule to us.
- One : Then will you give me a job?

¹ 'Khaddar' is a hand loomed plain woven cotton fabric produced in India. 'Khaddar-dhari' is a person wearing clothes made of this fabric.

² 'Gyani' is a honorific Sikh title used for someone learned in Sikh religion.

Gyani : We may or may not give you a job...but we will teach you how to live with the hope of 'Wahe Guru'³ and one who learns to live with the hope of 'Wahe Guru', what troubles would he have?

One : There is not one issue, but many...there is illness but no medicine to cure, there is hunger, but no food for the stomach, there is unemployment, but no avenues for employment...these are not small issues, it's a matter of life and death for the people.

Khaddar-dhari : There is a lot of need for death on this earth, here less die and more are born!

One : This is not you speaking but the chair of power on which you sit.

(One exits.)

Gyani : The chair itself does not talk but makes you speak.

Khaddar-dhari : And what do you think about your throne...it speaks or makes you speak!

Gyani : It neither speaks nor makes one speak, it goes on strike and creates a nuisance for the enemy!

Khaddar-dhari : We will see.

Gyani : We will see.

Khaddar-dhari : You are a 'halva'⁴ gobbler.

Gyani : You are a 'khaddar-dhari'.

Khaddar-dhari : We don't care about anyone.

Gyani : We won't allow anyone to proceed!

Khaddar-dhari : We will create a stampede!

Gyani : Anyone stubborn, will see his downturn!

(Postured to fight, they become silent.)

A voice from the backstage : Just like this many stick to the chair and many to only be on a strike...but how does the world go on! People who sit on such chairs and thrones, where do they earn and eat from?

Now one more character is entering, a simpleton who would like to meet you.

(A hardworking person enters.)

Two : What say, are you OK?

Khaddar-dhari : I am OK...with God's grace...I was waiting for you, get me a glass of water, I am thirsty since morning.

Two : Why did you remain thirsty...you could have got up to drink.

Khaddar-dhari : *(Distraught)* How could I get up?

Gyani : Yes, how could he get up...can he leave aside the allure for the chair?

Two : O Gyani, are you OK? Is 'degh tegh fateh'⁵ on track?

Khaddar-dhari : Right now seems like victory to 'degh' only.

Gyani : O Khaddar-dhari, we will show you 'tegh' also!

Two : Here Gyani, here is a tenth of my earnings today...do make a prayer offering for us.

Gyani : Keep up the devotion...one day we will keep an 'akhand path'⁶ for you.

³ 'Wahe Guru' is referred to the Supreme Being or creator or God in Sikhism.

⁴ 'Halva' is a sweet confection made of semolina, sugar and ghee.

⁵ 'Degh tegh fateh' is a Sikh slogan which means victory to "degh and tegh". The word "degh" means "large cooking pot" or "cauldron" or an "offering". The word "tegh" means "sword" or "kirpan". The term "degh tegh" refers to the concept of "degh" which is the serving of food to the community; and "tegh" which is the protecting the liberty and rights of each member within the community.

Two : OK brothers, stick to your positions...feed on our hard work and be merry.

(Exits.)

Both : He is a kind soul.

(Both become silent. A labourer enters – he can be One also or any other character. There is a noise outside. Voices can be heard – stop the practice of laying off, exchange one job for another.)

One : You still are stuck to your chair?

Khaddar-dhari : Yes, as of now I am sitting on it.

One : I am here as a representative of the workers who have been laid off.

Khaddar-dhari : This means you are also interested in becoming a leader and occupying a chair.

One : You keep the lure of the chairs with yourself.

Khaddar-dhari : Yes, what do you have to say?

One : I have come to say that the laying off of workers should stop...they should be given alternative jobs.

Khaddar-dhari : But why are the workers being laid off?

One : We were recruited to build a dam...but now it is being said that we did not get money from the World Bank...resulting in workers being laid off.

Khaddar-dhari : Yes, if there is no work then should the workers be hanged? Obviously they would be laid off.

One : But the officers recruited for the construction of the dam are not being laid off?

Khaddar-dhari : Brother, they are officers...permanent government servants.

One : What will they do?

Khaddar-dhari : What they normally do, make plans on paper!

One : You can feed them for free?

Khaddar-dhari : That's our compulsion, why don't you understand?

One : We too have a compulsion of our stomach, why don't you understand?

Khaddar-dhari : But the government does not have money.

One : Whatever is there, lets distribute it.

Khaddar-dhari : As of now this country does not have that convention.

One : Seems like the convention here is that some people live merrily while others go hungry....What says you Gyani?

Gyani : *(Startled)* What did you say?

One : What kind of convention is that some people live merrily while others remain hungry?

Gyani : Yes, the convention is not good...but as of now I cannot do anything about it.

One : Why?

Gyani : Because I am on strike right now.

One : What is this strike?

Gyani : The strike is what you see me on.

One : But why?

Gyani : We have made a proposal.

One : What kind of proposal?

Gyani : We should get more power.

One : If you get more power, will it stop my laying off?

⁶ 'Akhand Path' (akhand = uninterrupted, without break; path = reading) is the non-stop, continuous recital of the Guru Granth Sahib from beginning to end normally completed within 48 hours. This "ritual" is considered a holy practice and is said to bring peace and solace to the participants and the passive listener of the recitation.

Gyani : Can't say.
One : Then what can you say?
Gyani : Only that we are on strike, anyone stubborn, will see his downturn!

(One exits, angrily.)

Gyani : He was in anger!
Khaddar-dhari : He will cool down on his own.

(Both become silent. A poor looking man enters.)

Poor man : Owners of the chair, I have to submit a petition.
Khaddar-dhari : I am here to hear petitions.
Poor man : I have been robbed.
Khaddar-dhari : Here everyone is robbing others, everyone is being robbed.
Poor man : My honour has been compromised.
Khaddar-dhari : There is no such thing as honour left in this country, so how can your honour be compromised?
Poor man : My daughter had gone to the fields to work, the sons of the village chief molested her.
Khaddar-dhari : Nowadays people have started forcing, everyone is forcing on the other.
Poor-man : Out of shame she has committed suicide.
Khaddar-dhari : I will make a statement to the newspapers that committing suicide is against the law.
Poor man : I went to the police station.
Khaddar-dhari : You did the right thing.
Poor man : They refuse to file a complaint.
Khaddar-dhari : Why?
Poor man : Since they got money from the village chief.
Khaddar-dhari : Is that so!
Poor man : The police inspector has threatened me that if I raise this issue then he will file a case against me.
Khaddar-dhari : It's the police inspector's job to threaten, but what case will he file against you?
Poor man : He said that my daughter had illegitimate relations with the village chief's son...I saw them flirting...in anger I choked her to death and threw her body into a well.
Gyani : This is not a threat but legal proceedings. Since the rule of this Khaddar-dhari, it is a routine matter for the police inspector to carry out such 'legal proceedings'.
Poor man : O people sitting on the throne, please help.
Gyani : Kind soul....I could have helped but I am busy right now in this strike.
Poor man : What are you on strike for?
Gyani : We should get Chandigarh.
Poor man : If you get Chandigarh, will the honour of my daughter be saved from the village chief?
Gyani : That is not the demand of our strike.
Poor man : So what is your strike for?
Gyani : A strike is a strike... anyone stubborn, will see his downturn!

(The poor man retreats, helpless.)

Khaddar-dhari : O Gyani.
Gyani : What is it, Khaddar-dhari?

Khaddar-dhari : We are a wonderful combination...as long as you are on strike, work goes on fine.
Gyani : How is that?
Khaddar-dhari : People ask us questions, we give them a reply and since they are not satisfied they reach out to you. Once they are not satisfied with you they are left hanging in the air...

(Both laugh. Some voices come from outside, 'O I have been crushed by these oppressive people, God's curse should befall on them, they should lose everything they have'...and a farmer enters.)

Farmer : Sirs!
Khaddar-dhari : What is it, kind soul?
Farmer : I am a farmer.
Khaddar-dhari : That I can make out from your face...farmers are pride of the nation, our food providers, tell me what service can I do for you?
Farmer : Keep the service aside, show some kindness, I am very sad.
Khaddar-dhari : You order...
Farmer : We have become slaves...we have been robbed in broad daylight.
Khaddar-dhari : How come?
Farmer : We grow crops.
Khaddar-dhari : That is your duty.
Farmer : We need good seeds for it.
Khaddar-dhari : We have arranged for it in farmers fair.
Farmer : Only those with good contacts get it there.
Khaddar-dhari : You should also develop such contacts.
Farmer : We need fertilizers.
Khaddar-dhari : We have arranged for that too, we have opened co-operatives stores in many places.
Farmer : One has to make umpteen rounds of such places to get fertilizer from there.
Khaddar-dhari : Life is full of making rounds, nature's universe is making such rounds, moon is rotating around the earth and the earth is going around the sun!
Farmer : If by chance we do get fertilizer it is adulterated with soil!
Khaddar-dhari : This soil is very expensive, everything on this earth is supported by this soil.
Farmer : But sir, this is dishonesty.
Khaddar-dhari : Dishonesty? Who is honest? All this is wishful thinking.
Farmer : When our crop is ready, the water supply stops. There is a electricity power cut too.
Khaddar-dhari : We will tell the electricity department...they should not cut power supply.
Farmer : But they cut supply for an illegal levy.
Khaddar-dhari : Why do they ask for a levy?
Farmer : They say they are forced to have a levy.
Khaddar-dhari : Why are they forced?
Farmer : They say they have to make a monthly contribution to the officers who in turn have to bring it to you.
Khaddar-dhari : Then it is OK...see this chair, there are many expenses associated with it.
Farmer : But why do you have to recover such expenses from us?
Khaddar-dhari : Because you are the food providers for this earth.
Farmer : When our crop reaches the grain market we are not treated properly.
Khaddar-dhari : Your crop is not treated properly or you?

(...and starts feeling drowsy.)

Farmer : Neither us nor or crops...the inspector kicks our crop. The hard work of my sons and daughters is not respected.

Khaddar-dhari : *(Almost sleepy now)* OK, they kick your sons and daughters...but why do they go to the grain market? They should remain at home and play.

Farmer : *(Exasperated)* I was talking about my crop.

Khaddar-dhari : But I heard something about some sons and daughters.

Farmer : Are you sleeping?

Khaddar-dhari : You had a lot to say...that's why I felt drowsy.

Gyani : This was not drowsiness...the power of the chair has gone to his head.

Farmer : Gyani Sir, you only address my concerns.

Gyani : Brother...what can I do? I am sitting on a strike.

Farmer : What strike?

Gyani : To construct a radio station.

Farmer : To construct a radio station.

Gyani : Yes, we would like the whole world to listen to what we say, our pronouncements should reach our devotees.

Farmer : I have been hearing you since a long time. Whatever you have pronounced I have accepted it. You only help me out.

Gyani : I could have helped you but I am sitting on a strike... anyone stubborn, will see his downturn!

(The chair-person and throne-person freeze.)

Farmer : Someone sits on a chair,
Someone sits on a throne,
The world is going to the dogs,
But they don't care....don't care.

(And he exits enacting it.)

Gyani : *(After he goes)* The poor soul was sad.

Khaddar-dhari : Yes he was sad...but his attitude had become a bit different...he seemed a bit aggressive...we will have to do something about it.

Gyani : Yes we will have to do something about it.

Khaddar-dhari : So did you think of anything.

Gyani : I have a time tested recipe...if someone opens his mouth to speak then we tell him – kind soul, don't be sad and become God's devotee, he takes care of everyone.

Khaddar-dhari : And we too have the same recipe. If anyone speaks, first try and make him understand...if he refuses to understand then threaten...put him in jail...gag him. Shut his mouth...if he is still vocal then along with his mouth choke his breathing also...this is the golden rule to protect the chair.

(They freeze.)

From outside : Breaking news – terrorists kills 6 people in a bus. Killer absconding...killer absconding.

One : Are you listening?

Khaddar-dhari : Yes, I am listening.

One : People are being killed.

Khaddar-dhari : Then what should we do?

One : You are the chief ruler, you only have to do something. You are responsible for the life and property of the people.

Khaddar-dhari : India's population is 1.25 billion...how do we take care of everyone?

Gyani : They find it difficult to take care of even those who elect them to power. Someone is made a complete minister, another one an incomplete minister, some big minister, some small minister, some is a chairman of a society, another one that of electricity board or khadi board.

Khaddar-dhari : You don't have a right to say this. When you were in power, you made your family members chairman, gentleman, lieutenant and what not...you have a habit of provoking others to initiate a riot.

Gyani : *(Whispering)* When do I get a riot done? In this matter both of us are in the same boat. It's best to keep such matter under the wraps.

One : Then who is getting the killings done?

Khaddar-dhari : Gyani is getting it done...who else?

One : Police is in your control, why don't you catch the culprits?

Khaddar-dhari : We can catch them, but this Gyani shelters them under his throne.

One : You catch them from under the throne.

Khaddar-dhari : No, our police cannot do that. We cannot defile the sanctity of his throne.

Gyani : He is lying. How can they mysteriously appear under the throne. The killings are done by his people only...he does not arrest them and pins the blame on us...in reality he is out to defame our strike.

One : *(Angrily)* But in your game of one-upmanship, this land is going to the dogs! Innocent people are getting killed routinely...for centuries people were living together in harmony, now are becoming enemies. Who is responsible for it?

Gyani : This person sitting on the chair.

Khaddar-dhari : This person sitting on the throne.

Gyani : Him....with darkness under his chair.

Khaddar-dhari : Him...on the throne for his own welfare.

Gyani : Him...thief in white dress.

Khaddar-dhari : Him...blue peacock, oh yes.

Gyani : Him...who is a 'khaddar-dhari'⁷.

Khaddar-dhari : Him...who is a 'katchcha-dhari'⁸.

One : Shut up, both of you are thugs and thieves...now we will not listen to you, your lies will be made public.

(Goes in anger. Both look at each other, silently.)

Khaddar-dhari : O Gyani...matters have come to a boil.

Gyani : Don't worry, it will cool down.

Khaddar-dhari : Think of something to do.

Gyani : *(Scratching his head)* We can do one thing...if you are willing to listen.

Khaddar-dhari : Tell me, I will listen to anything...I feel this chair rocking.

Gyani : That's why I am saying.

Khaddar-dhari : What are you saying?

Gyani : All this while when you were occupying this chair, I have served you. Whenever people have marched towards you, I have been distracting them thus saving your chair.

Khaddar-dhari : Your throne has also remained safe.

⁷ 'Khaddar-dhari' – a dress normally associated with the politicians, especially Congress.

⁸ 'Katchcha-dhari' – Katchcha is one of the five Ks, the articles of faith, in Sikhism. 'Katchcha' is the cotton underwear, part of a baptised Sikh's attire.

Gyani : I have served you so much, now let me occupy this chair for some time.
Khaddar-dhari : Are you ready to occupy this chair?
Gyani : You come and occupy this throne, stretch yourself a bit and relax!
Khaddar-dhari : Oh, this is no big deal. But do agree to one thing – for the honour of the chair it is important that you wear a white turban.
Gyani : For the honour of the throne it is important that you wear a blue turban.
Khaddar-dhari : So why not exchange our turbans...as is we are like brothers with different turbans.
Gyani : Then get up.
Khaddar-dhari : Beware, no one should be looking at us.
Gyani : If anyone does see what the hell can they do to us.

(They take off their turbans. While they are wrapping the turbans, one character hanging in the air enters.)

One : Oye hypocrites, Oye back stabbers, those sitting on chairs and thrones, this much treachery? You are two sides of the same coin and all this while you led us to believe otherwise!

(He wraps the turban around their neck, as if to drag them.)

Gyani : At least respect our turbans!
Khaddar-dhari : Don't drag them in the mud!
One : Why should I care?
Now to disrobe your turbans
We now have a right
For long we have seen you claw our skin
We now have a right
To hurl your turban
You held no bars to claw our skin
We now have a right
We now have a right

(Both characters raise one hand and pull one end of the turban with the other and become silent. Slowly, the curtain drops.)