

## BABA BOLDA HAI - THE OLD MAN SPEAKS

**(The play is dedicated to those who consider it their duty to continue to fight against political corruption on the one side and religious fanaticism on the other.)**

*(The play is set in the greater India. The time is following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The subject of the play are the various violent incidents in Delhi and many other places in India after the Prime Minister's assassination when people belonging to a particular religion were murdered and raped, their homes were looted and their properties were torched.)*

A Newspaper Seller (N. S) Enters the stage.

N. S: Today's breaking news...which will not be making headlines tomorrow; will turn stale day after and will be forgotten on the fourth day. ... has been assassinated/killed.  
*(Three to four people buy the newspaper. Baba enters. He is holding some things in his hand and a bag is hanging from his shoulder. He seems to have come from a long journey. His shoes are laden with dust.)*

Baba: Has been assassinated?

Others: Yes, has been assassinated.

N.S.: Spend some money, buy a newspaper. A very big/well known personality has been assassinated.

Baba: A very well known personality?

N.S.: Yes, spend some money, buy a newspaper. A very well known personality has been killed. The country was known by its name.

Baba: The country was known by its name.

N.S.: *(Aside)* Baba is very cheap. He doesn't want to spend any money, but like to know all the news. *(To Baba)* Baba, a renowned personality has been killed, the country was known by its name, was killed in its own house.

Baba: Was killed in its own house, that is very bad.

N.S.: What is bad about it?

Baba: Was killed in its own house.

N.S.: Who was killed?

Baba: Whose name was known in the country.

N.S.: Whose name was known in the country?

Baba: The one who was a well-known personality.

N.S.: Who was a well-known personality?

Baba: The one who was killed.

N.S.: Who was killed?

Baba: This is what I am asking, who has been killed?

*(Others laugh)*

N.S.: *(Aside)* Baba is a real rascal. He wants to know the news for free, but he is not getting anything from me. *(To Baba)* Baba, government flags have been lowered.

Baba: Let them do whatever they want, how does it matter to us?

N.S. : Mournful music is playing on the radio.

Baba : Has some big man from the radio gone to heaven?

N.S. : It is not a he but a she that has gone to heaven. Television cameras are focused on her dead body.

Baba: As if television cameras are ever focus on living people.

N.S.: The workers are on strike in the market.

Bab: I don't need to buy anything in a hurry.

N.S. : Distinguish dignitaries are coming from all over the world.

Baba: Why, is it their mother that has gone to heaven?

N.S. : No, not their mother, the country has lost its mother.

Baba: What happens when a mother dies?

N.S. : The country becomes an orphan.

Baba: The country is already an orphan.

N.S. : What do you mean?

Baba : This country has been an orphan for centuries. Is there anyone to take care of her? That is why hungry and homeless die in hundreds of thousands. Those who are not hungry, just read the newspapers and fight among themselves (*newspapers readers frown at the Baba and leave the stage*). There is only one news here. It was the same news yesterday, the same news today and it will be the same news tomorrow. Now don't say, Baba is a miser, that he does not spend the money. Here take the money and put the newspaper in this bag.

N.S. : (*While putting the newspaper in the bag*) Baba, there are many newspapers in this bag already.

Baba : Not just newspapers, these are the essences of life my boy. Now tell me what is your news? They say a murder has taken place. Murder of a well-known person. A person by whose name the country was known by. She was killed in her own home. The flags have been lowered. The radio is playing continuous mournful music. Television cameras are focused on her dead body. The workers are on strike in the market. Distinguish dignitaries are arriving from around the globe.

N.S. : (*Loudly*) Baba, the Prime Minister has been killed.

Baba : (*Without showing any surprise*) So then. Now her son has become the Prime Minister.

N.S. : He has asked the people to remain calm.

Baba: And the people are setting fires.

N.S. : Baba you know all the news already ...

Baba : Because I know how to read between the lines.

N.S : How?

Baba : Okay, you read your news and I will tell you mine.

N.S. : (*Reading the newspaper*) the Prime Minister has asked the people to remain peaceful in the country.

Baba: It means that riots are taking place on a large scale in the country.

N.S. : The government intends to start a campaign against poverty.

Baba: It means that millions of people are dying due to poverty. (*Emphasizing*) listen to me, if the Prime Minister says that unemployment will be eradicated, then it means that the number of unemployed on the streets has increased. If the Prime Minister says that corruption will not be tolerated in the government then understand that corruption has peaked. if the Prime Minister says that the country's unity will be protected then the country is ready to split into pieces. (*Walking away*) now that is enough for today.

N.S.: No Baba. You have to tell me what is there in this bag?

Baba : (*Your mother's head - maa teri da sir*).(*Changes his tone*) There is the history of 1947,1964 and of 1984.

N.S. : Forty-seven,sixty-four, eighty-four? Tell me what is their relationship?

Baba: There were riots in 47. Houses were burned, innocents were killed, and children were orphaned. married women were widowed. There were riots in 84. Houses were burned, innocents were killed, and children were orphaned. married women were widowed. Those who ruled inforty-seven were white skinned. Those who are ruling in eighty-four wears the home spun white cloth. The wheel of time has come full circle. People are crushed, the rulers keep ruling.

N.S. : Baba, what is the relationship between 1964 and 1984?

Baba : In 1964 the father died and the daughter was enthroned. In 1984 the mother has died, the son is enthroned. A billion people ruled by one clan. All others are useless.

N.S. : Baba is very clever. He says one thing but means something else.

Baba : Son! I have suffered over and over again. In 1947, I lost my father. In 1984 I lost my son-in-law. My mother became a widow in 1947 and my daughter became a widow in 1984. In 47 a grandfather was orphaned, today a grandson has been orphaned. What a coincidence, then, a grandfather was ruling, today a grandson is ruling. Now don't say Baba makes up stories. Baba only narrates what he suffered.  
(*CHOOK, CHOOK. The sound of a train is heard. All characters line up as a train. CHOOK, CHOOK. Suddenly the train stops. Three passengers are pulled out and doused with petrol. Baba wants to extinguish the fire but he is pulled and thrown away. (When all this is being enacted the news keeps pouring in from behind).*)

1<sup>st</sup> News: Today's breaking news. Three passengers belonging to a particular religion, travelling by Rajdhani Express were dragged out, sprayed with petrol and burnt at Tughlaqabad station, outside Delhi.

2<sup>nd</sup>News: The railway minister claimed that there was no problem in railway operations. Everything was functioning normally as it should.

3<sup>rd</sup> News: The railway minister has assured that all rail passengers will be given full protection by the police and the army.

Baba: (*Picking up ashes from the burnt corpses*)Will be protected or turned to ash. (*A satirical laugh*) It will be turned to ash. No, already turned to ash.Yes, the law of the land, the conscience of the country and the constitution of the country, everything turned to ash. In this country everyone has the right to live honorably. All turned to ash.(*Changes his tone*)Sprinkle this ash over the Himalaya mountain and immerse it in the river Ganges. Take this ash to the deep sea of Kanyakumari. (*Changes his tone again*)From Kashmir to

Kanyakumari we all belong to one country. *(Rubbing it)* But we have become foreigners in our own country.

*(While Baba is speaking, the dead characters go out of the stage walking like Zombies. They repeat, we have become foreigners in our own country)*

*(A Congressman (CM) - a member of the leading political party - enters the stage from the other end, followed by a lumpen bully who is copying his gestures)*

CM: So Harichand (HC), what is the progress?

HC: The progress is remarkable sir. Dragged three turbaned Sikhs off the train and sent them to hell. Burnt four taxis and turned them to ashes. Torched eight houses and taught the Sikhs an unforgettable lesson.

CM: Well done. Now I can tell the Prime Minister that when a tree falls tremors are felt all around. Now what should we give you as a reward.

HC: Sir, there is no need for any reward today. I have done well already. A lot of looted stuff has come my way.

CM: What did you get? I will like to know that.

HC: Silk sarees, transistors, VCRs, steel utensils, gold ornaments and ten thousand rupees in cash.

CM: The policemen didn't stop you, did they?

HC: Not really. Superficially, they told us to go away. But softly they told us to burn them all. We provided the fuel and they lit it up. Even though the army was all around, still we had great fun.

CM: In other words, the army and police have done their duty as they were supposed to.

HC: Yes sir, done their duty and also lent a helping hand in looting.

CM: That was the expectation from them.

HC: Sir. What are the orders now.

CM: Wait for the signal. The next program probably be to hold a peace march.

HC: Peace march?

CM: Yes, a peace procession.

HC: How many people will be needed?

CM: You are responsible to get around one hundred. But they should all be innocent looking.

HC: Sir, we are always waiting for a signal from you. It will be the same people. Yesterday they took part in looting. Next they will participate in a peace march. Yesterday they were gangsters; today they will be gentlemen.

CM: How is that?

HC: Like this: he takes off the scarf from his neck, buttons up his shirt up to the neck, combs his hair. Takes out a cap from his pocket and wears it. Shouts the slogan: 'whoever incites a fight between Hindus and Sikhs will be called an enemy of the country. Hindu and Sikh are brethren.' Sir, you will lead the march and we will follow you.

CM: Very good. Okay now you leave.

*(Harichand prepares to leave but comes back)*

HC: Sir?

CM: What now?

HC : Sir, people of our constituency have come.

CM : What people?

HC : Those whose homes were looted yesterday.

CM : Okay you leave from this side. Our next programme begins.

HC : Yes Sir. *(He leaves)*  
*(The Congressman acts as if making a phone call. Baba and two men stand in the door)*

CM : *(On the telephone)*What are you saying? The mob has torched the shops of the Sikhs? Where was the police? Inform the S.S.P to send more forces. Suspend the S.H.O. Sikhs are pride of India. They have contributed immensely towards the Independence struggle. What did you say, the mob is enraged that two Sikhs have assassinated our mother Indira Gandhi. But they were only two, the entire community can't be blamed for this? Yes, yes, take full action. Peace should prevail at any cost. Depute the forces. Enough is Enough. Yes.Yes...enough is Enough. What happened so far is enough. Nothing more should take place. Few hooligans tarnish the image of India and we just sit and watch and do nothing. It is impossible. We will protect the people of our constituency at any cost. Even if we have to sacrifice our lives.  
*( He puts the telephone down and addresses the people who have been waiting while he was talking on the phone. He speaks in a clever way to outsmart everything they say. )*

CM : Come in. I am extremely sorry that some sociallymisfits have caused immense harm to people of your religion. Such wicked elements take advantage of every opportunity.

First : But the police...

CM : I know that the police did not do anything. These people do notrecognize their duty. They only know to live by cheating and deceiving. 'You bastards, homes of innocent people are being burnt in front of you. And you are just watching the fun. There has to be a limit to this wickedness.

Second: But even the people at the police station...

CM: Even the people at the police station did not do anything. Yes, I have come to know that they took the phone off the hook at the police station. I called there many times.There was no reply or the line was busy. When I walked down to the police station myself, the S.H.O. told me the phone is out of order but I could see that the phone was taken off the hook. Then I really took him to task. I am sure he will remember it for the rest of his life. Crooks , they play tricks with us, as if we are idiots. We ourselves do such acts*(Stumbling)*. I mean ... let's see what we can do.Bloody young rogues think they can take us for a ride*(Shifting)*. Well, tell me,what did you lose?

First: The loss...

CM: I know that enormous loss has ocured. They did not leave even a single thing behind. They took silk sarees, transistors, VCRs, steel utensils, gold jewellery and cash worth thousands. First they looted the houses, then torched them. But we will not sit still, these criminals will be forced to return each and everything. What do they think? Each one of them will be sent to jail. There is still a government in control in this country. Isn't it? I am meeting with the Prime Minister immediately today. I will demand that every thing, to a cent,should be returned.

Second: But we are absolutely homeless now.

CM: I know that you have become homeless. Your houses are no more. Winter is approaching. Where will you go. The government is setting up camps for you. After all the government also has a responsibility. The PM is giving five lakhs from his fund.

Second: Five lakhs? this amount is...

CM: I know that five lakhs is not much. But this is the first instalment. More funds will flow from World Red Cross, you will also get blankets. Tell me if there is any other issue.

First: Issue, you did not...

CM: I did not leave any issue untouched, I know, this is what you want to say. Now if I do not understand your problems who will? You people have elected me. I know that during the last election people of your religion were completely united and voted for me. You didn't vote for Bhartiya Janta Party. We all know that that is a sectarian party which guards only the interests of the Hindus. Their slogan is Hindi... Hindu... Hindustan... But our party believes in secularism. Mahatma Gandhi taught us - Ishwar, Allah tero naam, sub ko sanmati de bhagwan (*People call God by different names but God leads everyone towards the path of righteousness and virtue*).

Baba: (*He has reached a point where he can't control himself now*) What else did Mahatma Gandhi teach you?

CM: (*Shaken*) What do you mean?

Baba: He taught you to tell lies in front of people; fool them with your dramatic acts. We have not come to beg alms from you because we know that all that has happened, has happened because of your schemes and conspiracies. We have come to tell you that the PM has been assassinated. We are not happy about it. Some mean spirited people distributed sweets, which is not a good thing. The same way some stupid people distributed sweets during the action on Darbar Sahib, when thousands of innocents were killed. Deception and stupidity has become supreme in our country. On one side people are killed and on the other side sweets are distributed. Those who distribute sweets have not lost their sons. Their daughters have not lost husbands. Their kids have not been orphaned. (*Getting excited*) we condemn those who distribute sweets when others die. We despise the government, which is riddled with lies, killings and deceit. (*Saying this Baba turns. The Congress man gets very enraged. Baba turns again and says*) Damn you.  
(*Saying this in a loud tone he exits from one side.*)

CM: (*The Congressman leaves angrily from the other side while saying*) They have killed our beloved mother and they are also damning us.  
(*Jathedar, Baba and two other Sikhs appear in the next scene.*)

Jathedar: The Sikh Community is in a crisis. The religious order is in danger.

Baba: What did you say Jathedar ji?

J: There is danger to the religious order.

Baba: (*Sarcastically*) The religious order has always been in danger.

J: What do you mean?

Baba: Jathedar ji it has been 37 years since the country became independent. On one hand the government always kept saying that the country faces danger and you on the other hand kept saying that the religious order is in danger.

First: It is not the faith that is in danger now; it is we the people that are facing danger now. We have no good reason to stay in India.

Second: What sort of life is this. We are especially targeted and killed, our properties burnt. What have we not done for this country?

Baba: What did you do? No one did anything for the country, everyone looked after their own interests.

First: Baba ji you always take the opposite view. If we did not contribute anything then who did?

Baba: When did I say someone else did? No one did anything. Everyone looked after their own interests.

Second: What we need to think about is that what should be done now.

Baba: Ask the Jathedar. But, what will he say? His politics in the whole of twentieth century has always revolved around religion.

J: Politics and religion can never be a separate thing for the Sikhs. Our Gurus have said so and this is our history.

First: Jathedar ji is saying the right thing.

Baba: What is right? You and your Jathedar have become expert historian without reading or knowing a thing about history and are trying to fool people. Do you know why and when the Gurus gave this advice?

J: When?

Baba: At the time when Sikhs were selfless and fearless warriors. They were fighting against Mughal rulers' oppression and atrocities. Aurangzeb said that only Muslims will live in Hindostan. That time the fight was between religions and that is why the response was from a religious perspective.

J: So should we go against the teachings of our Gurus now?

Baba: The Gurus mandated us to stand firm against the oppression and fight for your just rights. We need to follow that order. But tell me what rights your wealthy Sikhs are going to fight for? They are the ones who rob others of their rights. What do they have common with ordinary Sikhs or other ordinary folks?

J: *(irritated)* People like Baba are always willing to divide our religious community, the Panth.

Baba: Yes, if someone suggests a sensible thing, it creates division in the Panth. As if Panth is a group of fools. You should know that the government under which the Sikhs suffered a holocaust, is headed by a Sikh. The city in which all this happened has a Sikh as its Mayor. Now go ahead and say that they are out of the Panth.

J: Yes, they are traitors to the Panth.

Baba: Yet you are the one voted for these traitors. Why? Because they are Sikhs. You garlanded them. Invited them to your gurudwaras and honoured them. Didn't you do that?

First: What is it that you really want to say?

Baba: I want to say that the time has come to stop this song of Panth being a separate entity. Be part of the main stream of the country and use the new political sense of the 20th century. Understand that the politics and the divisions are not based on religion but rather on classes. The wealthy classes of your Panth have been on friendly terms with the Congress Party leaders and on the other hand have been funding Sant Bhinderanwale in Amritsar. Someone gave you a slogan that such a country should be created where Sikhs were in power. Those Sikh feudal lords rob the poor agricultural tenants. Those Sikh factory owners live on the labor of poor workers. The capitalist Sikhs want to advance their own agenda by using you so that they can also grab a piece away from Birlas and Tatas of this land. They want to see a place where they are the Birlas and Tatas. There is nothing more to it than that.

J: But how can we live in this country now? Where we have been treated like this and so much loss has been suffered by us.

Baba: We should think about this. We need to think about it. We should have thought about it when the innocents were being killed in Punjab.

First: What should we do now?

Baba: What should we do? Search within for answers. Change your thought process. Figure out who is your friend and who is your foe in this country?

Second: Who is our friend? No one.

Baba: Well, if you keep thinking this way, then really no one will be your friend in this country. If you look to foreign countries for kindness, they will sympathise with you superficially but will laugh at you from within. What did America, Canada, England do when Golden Temple was attacked and destroyed in an army action? No one did anything and it wasn't their responsibility in anyway.

J: But we do not have a friend even in this country.

Baba: Why not. This is a country of seventy crore people and many people support you. When you were being attacked in Delhi or other parts of the country, who were the people who were raising their voice in protest? They were printing and distributing leaflets all around. Open Maharashtra's newspapers and see how editorials after editorials were being written. They were saying that one Nathu Ram Ghodse killed Mahatma Gandhi, that did not mean there was no place for all Marathis in India. Who were those people who have risked their lives in Calcutta to save the Sikhs? Yes, there are many enemies here, but at the same time people who have faith in humanity and democratic values are not few either. Recognise them. But you will be able to recognize them only when you change your own vision and have a more sensible approach to politics. This is the twentieth century, not the fifteenth or sixteenth. *(Taking out a newspaper from his bag)* Read this news. People's Union of Civil Liberties, People's Union for Democratic Rights, have called for a massive rally. For whom? For you? Why? Because they understand the character of the rulers. They know that the army boots who suppressed the Nagas and Mizos in the northeast yesterday are creating havoc in Punjab today. The only difference is that there the majority of army men were Sikhs and here they are

non-Sikhs. They know that the forces that do not let the Assam issue to be solved, will not allow the Punjab issue to be resolved either. They know that this country is ruled by plunderers who will never want that people united. These rulers will initiate riots and communal fights. But we should recognize the power of the people. They are emerging and are in the process of awakening others. Match your steps with them. Add your voices and words with theirs. Do not ask for a piece of land where Sikhs can rule, rather ask for the whole nation, where worker is recognized. The question is will you do so? leave it/forget it. What useless talk Baba has started.

J:

First: But Baba speaks the truth.

J: What truth? It's a sin to stand here even for a minute. *(Angrily)* Wahe Guru Ji ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji ki Fateh. Goodbye.

Baba: *(speaks after them)* Waheguru Ji ki Fateh. Go to the Singh Sahib and have Baba chastised of religious misconduct.

*The newspaper seller enters the stage. Pause a little. The same scene is repeated as in the first Act.*

*(Today's breaking news is ...which will not be making headlines tomorrow ... will turn stale day after and will be forgotten on the fourth day. Three people take the newspaper and start reading. The newspaper seller repeats 'today's breaking news').*

Baba: Stop this nonsense. What breaking news? There is no breaking news in this country. All news is stale. Hindu Muslim quarrels. News of hatred among Hindus and Sikhs. Lok Sabha elections. Same old news, same old abuse. The game rich play involves millions. The poor are used only to as a tool. News of torching dalit colonies. News of jobless youths committing suicides. News of sky rocketing prices. News of the leaders switching political parties. All stale news.

Others: *(lifting their faces from the newspapers)* Yes all stale news.

Baba: O dear newspaper seller, get some fresh news, at least sometimes. Tell us of a new sunrise on this land.

Others: New sun?

Baba: Yes. When the hard working people of this land will not be oppressed. Hindus will be there, Sikhs will be there, Muslims will be there and they will also be there who do not wish to side with any religion. The news of that sun is awaited by millions of Indians. *(Baba says these last words slowly. Then he looks to one side, as if seeing a sun in his imagination. Everyone looks to that side and become still).*