

## RAHAT – RELIEF

*(As the play starts, senior officer B Singh is seen pacing around. Time and again he looks at his watch as if he is waiting for someone. A junior officer Bh Ram enters.)*

All : *(Including the cleaning woman they all say in a long drawn voice)* Sir...

Bh Ram : 'Jai Hind'<sup>1</sup> Sir.

B Singh : Are you aware, the Minister can reach any time.

Bh Ram : Yes Sir, his helicopter can land in the school's ground any time...I have personally supervised all the preparations there.

B Singh : And you are here all dressed up as if you are invited to a marriage ceremony!

Bh Ram : Sir I did not understand...this is my usual dress.

B Singh : *(Comes closer to him, grabs his shirt)* Do you dress in this shirt and pant every day?

Bh Ram : Yes Sir...you know how the flab grows around the belly with age...this shirt helps in hiding that flab...a man looks fit as a fiddle with it.

B Singh : *(Mockingly)* So you think you look fit as a fiddle?

Bh Ram : Yes, that's my attempt.

B Singh : We have a situation of flood on our hands, people are in distress and you are trying to look fit, whereas you should be trying to look exactly the opposite.

Bh Ram : I did not understand, Sir?

B Singh : That's what I am trying to say that you do not understand anything...if you did understand then your appearance should not be like this. When the Minister comes you should present yourself as if you have been up all night due to the flood, providing relief to people wading through the mud, with water up to your ankles, water up to your knees, water up to your waist, water up to your neck. That you did not care about your own life while carrying out your duty to reach out to those affected by flood and provide relief items to them. By the way where were you when the flood water was rising in your duty area?

Bh Ram : Sir, the flood water rose suddenly in my duty area at night and everyone was sleeping in their homes at that time.

B Singh : I asked, where were you?

Bh Ram : Sir, I was sleeping in my home.

B Singh : Then what did you do?

Bh Ram : What could have I done, I was sleeping!

B Singh : That's exactly what the newspapers are reporting that when the flood came the government was sleeping...But you have to prove that you were not sleeping but was active.

Bh Ram : Active?

B Singh : Active not in frolicking with your wife but active walking around, with water up to your ankles, water up to your knees, water up to your waist, water up to your neck. And even when the water was up to your neck you continued to walk, people had climbed on to the trees, snakes were hissing around but you were distributing bread and dry eating stuff to them...*(with stress)* Now go pour a bucket of mud on your clothes, roll up your pants to your knees...put some mud on your face.

Bh Ram : Mud?

B Singh : No blacken it, but why would you do it? People are already doing that...on your face as well as mine. Why do you stare at my face? Go, do as I told you. And yes dishevel your hair. Neatly combed won't do. People are dying and you care about your hair...and put some medicine in your eyes to redden them and give an impression that you did not sleep all night. *(To himself)* I should also do something similar. *(He takes out a handkerchief from his pocket, ties it up as a sling and puts his arm into it.)* This looks good...I went to the flood hit areas...I slipped and fell and broke my arm.

1. 'Jai Hind' is a slogan which means 'Hail India'.

*(Bh Ram enters with mud all over him. Now his appearance is completely dishevelled.)*

B Singh : *(Looking towards him)* Yes, now it is OK...your appearance is completely dishevelled, you look like a true representative of the government.

Bh Ram : But sir what happened to your arm?

B Singh : I slipped and it broke.

Bh Ram : But it was absolutely OK just a few minutes ago.

B Singh : A few minutes ago you were also absolutely fine.

Bh Ram : Now I understand, water was up to your ankles, water was up to your knees, water was up to your neck, you kept walking, people were perched atop the trees and roofs. Snakes were hissing around, you climbed a roof to deliver relief material and slipped and broke your arm. And now you do not have time to go to the hospital...get an x-ray done even when you are in pain. But you have forgotten your pain seeing the pain of the flood hit people.

B Singh : Yes...and now you stay here...*(Looking at his watch)* The Minister can come any time, I have to escort them here.

*(He goes.)*

Bh Ram : There you are, Bhagat Ram, you may have witnessed many a drama in life but today you have a chance to enact as well as see one . Water up to your ankles, water up to your knees, water up to your waist, water up to your neck, people were perched atop the trees and roofs, snakes were hissing around and despite that the District Collector was walking around and slipped....he broke his arm...wow!

*(B Singh enters escorting the Minister.)*

Bh Ram : 'Jai Hind'.

Minister : 'Jai Hind'..

*(He throws a questioning look at the senior officer as if asking who is the junior officer.)*

B Singh : Sir, he is my deputy and he is coming straight from the flood hit areas so that he can update you first hand on the relief work that is going on.

Minister: He did not get time to change his clothes?

B Singh : Changing clothes? Sir he did not get time to scratch his head...I mean to comb his hair too!

Minister: I can see that. Actually the government functions on the strength of such officers. People have suffered a heavy damage due to the flood.

B Singh : Yes, you would have seen that from your aeroplane.

Minister: I have been advised by the doctors not to travel in an aeroplane...I may have a heart attack any time...but I said that if people are in pain then what would I do by protecting my heart?

B Singh : Yes Sir, your heart should be where people's heart is...but people's heart says that the flood was not caused by rain but due to callousness of the government.

Minister: Nonsense...I am doing an aerial survey without caring for my life and they say we are callous! If they say so, let them and I don't care about it.

B Singh : Yes Sir, if the government takes note of everything that is said then it won't function beyond a day!

Minister: If they say, let them, if they die, let them, I don't care about it.

B Singh : *(In an inquiring tone)* Sir?

Minister: No, if they are dying then we will have to care about them since one day we will again need their vote. Why have you tied your arm in a sling?

B Singh : It's just a small injury, I slipped in the mud during the inspection. Just broke a bone.

Minister: Your bone is broken and you say it is a small injury! Breaking a bone is so painful and I know about it, since last year I slipped in the bathroom and broke a bone. I could not tie my pyjama myself. So many times I had to get it done from my steno who would feel shy doing so. But what can anyone do in such a situation! So yes according to your information how many people lost their lives due to the flood?

B Singh : *(Asking Bh Ram)* Bhagatram, how many people lost their lives?

Bh Ram : Sir, we have been able to count twenty dead bodies till now.

Minister: Declare twenty thousand rupees each for their heirs as compensation.

Bh Ram : But Sir, all the dead bodies are heirless.

Minister: What did you say? Heirless? Are you sure about it?

Bh Ram : Yes Sir, I am sure about it. I got their last rites done in my supervision.

Minister: If the dead bodies are heirless then declare one lakh rupees each for their heirs so that everyone comes to know that a government elected by them takes so much care of them. How much damage has happened to the cattle?

B Singh : Yes Bhagatram, what is the damage?

Bh Ram : Sir, we could not count them. Hundreds of cattle were swept away with the floods.

Minister: Declare one thousand rupees each to their owners as compensation.

Bh Ram : How will we find their owners, Sir? The cattle were swept away from distant places.

Minister: How does it matter, we just have to only declare the compensation.

B Singh: Yes, we just have to declare it.

Bh Ram : Sir, many animals died while they were tied to their peg. Do we declare compensation for their owners?

B Singh : Sir, do we give them compensation?

Minister: The compensation they deserve is to be publically flogged with shoes! They climbed on to the roofs to save their lives but the poor cattle tied to their pegs died in agony. People who torture cattle cannot be pardoned.

B Singh : No they cannot be, Bhagatram can they be pardoned?

Bh Ram : No Sir, they cannot be pardoned.

*(A woman enters from outside while making a noise.)*

Minister: What is the matter, woman?

Woman : The flood destroyed all my belongings.

Minister: Has your crop been washed away?

Woman : No Sir.

Minister: Was there any damage to your cattle?

Woman : No Sir, I own just one goat. I took her along with me to the roof.

Minister: See, people who love animals do exactly that.

B Singh : Yes Sir, they do exactly that. Bhagatram, they do exactly that.

Bh Ram : Yes they do, but Sir a goat can be taken to the roof, not a buffalo.

Minister: If man can reach the moon, they why can't a buffalo climb a roof? District Collector, can it climb?

B Singh : Bhagatram, can it climb?

Bh Ram : If you say so Sir, it can climb.

Minister: So what damage did you incur?

Woman : My four druggets, eight sheets, two shawls, two quilts were wet, that is all that I own.

Minister: Don't worry we will help you. District Collector did we have a sunny day yesterday?

B Singh : Bhagatram, did we have a sunny day yesterday?

Bh Ram : Yes.

Minister: District Collector, it is sunny today, would it be sunny tomorrow?

B Singh : Bhagatram, will it be sunny tomorrow?

Bh Ram : We hope it is sunny tomorrow.

Minister: So then dry the woman's drugget, sheets, shawls and quilts in the sun tomorrow at government's expense. It is the government's duty to provide compensation to the people.

All: *(Woman included, all in a long drawn voice)* Sir...

*(All freeze).*