

Simma

(Opera)

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Simma – An Introduction

By Parijat

In countries whose people are not their enemies, in countries whose rulers are not their rulers, and in countries whose soil is not soaked with the sweat of their labor, in the soil of these very countries, Gorkhalis meaninglessly spill their blood. This export of Gorkhalis for meaningless sacrifice as the consequence of politics has become a national problem, an open wound paining the Nepali psyche. Packing up their economic disadvantage and youthful curiosity together, Nepalis head to Lahore, they disappear into Muglan as Gorkhe Bahadurs and Kanchhas.

“Those who we fight with in foreign lands were not our enemies,
Those lands in which we fought never belonged to Nepal.”

The progressive opera *Simma* rests on this ideological ground. Instead of examining it here from multiple perspectives, it will be good to view it as a whole and as an exemplar, after which we desire to say nothing more.

Blooming freely like rhododendrons in the forest and raised without restrictions in an open society, the Kirat girl Simma innocently loves a Kirat youth. The opera *Simma* begins with this love story, and the voice of her consciousness is naturally innocent:

“If we go to Burma, our karma is together,
If we go to Nepal, our heads are together.”

But consciousness develops, and sharpened by the burdens she has to bear, Simma's consciousness is honed, until she is confronted with one of the major problems of Nepali life; this confrontation and the resulting struggle are the soul of the opera *Simma*.

With houses on the steep hillside cliffs, Nepalis who dig and plow, whose fields never yield enough food no matter how much they scratch at them with their ten fingernails, to spend their lives in tattered trousers and vests, to suppress their desires to buy a *tilhari*, a gold marriage ornament, for the daughter-in-law brought into the house with love, to have the money for rice and meat on Dasain, the money covered in shame, go straight into the moneylender's account, to have the interest itself become principal and grow and grow, to have the house and land fall into the moneylender's hands, and terrified at the approaching possibility of becoming landless, Dengsu's macho masculinity fills his chest and he stands up tall, thinking, "I am the son of a real man." He is full of youthful indecision but he is not without kindness, and neither does he go whichever way the wind blows. Running away following Gallabal, he says,

"Don't sit in the forest crying with worry, oldest daughter,
Tightening my boots and shoes, I'll earn a nose ornament for you
Don't say that I was tricked into going to Lahore,
Remembering our love, my heart cries too."

Having said this much on this short chapter of this opera, let us look closer at the life of a lahure. This little bit of information is not the definition of a lahure; it is not his destiny. Not only the rhododendron trees, their branches red with blooming flowers, are waiting for him, but the fragrance of the earth also calls him home. The snow melts, becoming a river that flows, but separation and violence do not stop scratching at his dreams. Altogether, along with the lahure process, a powerful, homegrown anti-lahure sentiment enters into him. He must return, his rifle-bearing hands coming to fully understand who his enemies are, and marking the true ground where blood must flow.

On ideological aspects, it is adequate to say this much, for the reason that the opera *Simma* as a whole is a true ideological gift, beyond which it would be an injustice not to write a few words about its artistic aspects. While playing with iron and fire, the writer has not left out the tender image of a flock of sheep dotting a high pasture. He is of course aware of the ideological aspects, but the feelingful aspects are alive in the writing, emerging from his pen as if self-propelled. He never stops. While explicating ideology, he never fails to pick, choose, dust off and weigh his words. In fact, finding this balance is the primary test of progressive literature. Sometimes, the ongoing work of events and consciousness-raising feels unnaturally pointed, but we must make sure our understanding keeps up with the genre, for the reason that opera is a genre in which ideological explanation and character expansion and development must be compressed. The small must convey the large, the short must convey the long. In this genre the types of roles, character development, consciousness-raising, and the sequence of events toward the climax,

are artistically combined in an extremely pointed way. This is true for this opera, and in any case, it is true to its genre.

It is necessary to evaluate this opera, *Simma*, in cultural terms. Beyond reading, sound, music, vocal quality, acting, and staging must also be evaluated. The true reactions of readers, listeners, and viewers are anticipated, on top of which, I consider this to be a defining example of timely cultural expression on the side of the people.

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Simma: Some Comments

“The opera *Simma* has shown in a vibrant way how the grindstone of poverty that is exploiting village women must be evaded, and how we must all cry tears of blood...”

Jwala Weekly

“The success of *Simma* on the stage will not only be unforgettable, but has also brought a new dimension into the awakening of Nepali drama”

Charcha Weekly

A middle-aged female shopkeeper from Asan sat down next to me. She said, “We with our easy lives in the city should all see this kind of drama – so we can know how those in the villages suffer.”

Vidyadhar Gotame, *Manas* with *The Nepal Post*

Congratulations to the writer, composer, and actors of *Simma* for their success in presenting the inner poignancy of Nepali life in such a sensitive way.

Binod, *Chetana Weekly*

The opera *Simma* was performed – everyone liked it. Because it had the ability to touch upon the truths of the Nepali people’s lives.

A reporter, *Manas* with *The Nepal Post*

The opera *Simma* was very well-liked...

Gorkhapatra

This is a step up in Nepali literature, which Nepali literature must recognize.

Awaj, *Sanghu Weekly*

Cast of Characters

1	Simma	14 years old
2	Dengsu	22
3	Thule	21
4	Asyang (former soldier)	45
5	Sauni (shopkeeper)	42
6	Gallabal	40

Simma's Friends

7	Jal Maya	16
8	Phulmati	13
9	Jaisara	18
10	Masini	19

Dengsu's Friends

11	Gorja	20
12	Khambe	22
13	Jorbire	23
14	Ganba	21

Scene 1

Morning. The sky in the east is slowly turning red. A group of village girls of around the same age are getting their load-carrying baskets, tumplines, sickles, and waist-belts ready, heading from their homes toward the jungle. Simma is first seen on the road. She hurries along carrying her basket. A little way behind her is little Putali carrying a sickle and tumpline. She recognizes Simma and slowly comes up to her, gets behind her without her noticing and taps her on the back. Simma looks back, startled. Seeing Putali, she looks happy, and says, "I thought I was left all alone today, so I hurried and ran..." Talking in this vein, they continue on. At the next bend in the road Simma peers down the other path where her friends are approaching. Phulmati and Jaisara can be seen approaching from afar. She waits for them for a moment. Both friends arrive. The four friends walk ahead talking and joking. At the next intersection, they meet Jalmaya and Masini. They all stand still together for a moment, then head toward the jungle. When they get to the jungle, they all sit down for a moment. Some roll bidis with leaves and light them for their friends, and others pull thorns out of their feet. Some take out pocket mirrors and look at their faces. Some crochet handkerchiefs, others play mouth harps. Some take out their snacks and share them with their friends. Eating the popcorn a friend has given her, Simma comes close to all her friends and begins to express her heart's troubles in a song. All listen to her troubles and others also begin to express their own, while they gather firewood and cut fodder. The sun comes up on the jungle.

Unison Voices

To be born as a woman is a bad lot, hey middle sister, a flower blooms on the hill

Who understands the poignant feelings of the heart?

Moving the shawl aside, only dew moves

For daughter-kind, there is only work

A blister shouldn't be touched,

A woman's life shouldn't be this hard

What do we find this life of ours to be?

We find our love cannot endure

Wet and soaked, we cross riverbanks

One day, the world will end

What can we take with us when we die

It's not our lot to live with laughter

The courtyard where we were raised and grew up

One day

Tears in our eyes, our hearts burning

We have to survive, what kind of custom is this?

Praising God with the mouth, in the pocket a knife,
The custom of killing women still exists
Bearing things on our heads, burning our hearts,
Who made up this custom?

Taps of tears, nine taps flowed
Fate cheated women of their karma
They say what Fate writes can't be erased
If it were possible, I want to erase it.

When their loads are full, they all stop to rest at the chautari. The sun is peeking over the hill. Some take out bidis, some take out mouth harps. Some go to wash their faces in a nearby spring. From the other side of the chautari a group of boys comes out of the jungle carrying firewood and logs, and they come to rest at the chautari. When they see the group of girls they begin to joke around, and with the excuse of lighting a bidi or playing a mouth harp, they come and join the girls. As soon as the boys come into their group, the girls hurriedly get up, take their loads, and go on their way. Simma, returning from washing her face in the spring, sees her friends leaving with their loads and hurries to get hers. The boys also hurry after the girls. Simma, trying to lift her load, finds it stuck on something and removes her tumpline to look behind her. Dengsu is standing behind her, saying what is in his heart.

Dengsu: Hau Simma, at least a queen, in this place, the fragrance of mint

Simma: Hau Dengsu, at least you, in this place, the fragrance of mint

Dengsu: The sorrows of home, the sorrows of the heart, casting out the black and the dirt,
Will you rest at the chautari for one line of song?
Hau Simma, at least a queen, in this place, the fragrance of mint

Simma: If you see the moon, the moon is most beautiful, if you see the sun,
it's the sun,
Placating us with words, you run circles around us.
Hau Dengsu, at least you, in this place, the fragrance of mint

Dengsu: Half the boat is underwater, a bird perches on the other half
I have no one without you, who will pity me
Hau Simma, at least a queen, in this place, the fragrance of mint

Simma: At the top of the hill, the shade of an ash tree,
For what do you give this love, which will fade and go?
Hau Dengsu, at least you, in this place, the fragrance of mint

Dengsu: Those who have stopped to rest have left the chautari,
Either I am moved by longing, or I feel love for you

Hau Simma, at least a queen, in this place, the fragrance of mint
Simma: Down, down, below the rice fields, a bitter-leaf tree stands tall,
Rather than crying, lost in memories, it is better to forget
Hau Dengsu, at least you, in this place, the fragrance of mint

Dengsu: Hau Simma, at least a queen, in this place, the fragrance of mint

Simma: Hau Dengsu, at least you, in this place, the fragrance of mint

Dengsu: Simma – the fragrance of mint

[Both head down the road, singing]

Scene Two

Simma and Dengsu's meetings, conversations, and love have grown. To keep their love established, they get married. Many days after their marriage, they are returning home one day from the fields and stop to rest at the chautari. Dengsu asks for a snack. Simma gives all the popcorn and soybeans in the bag to Dengsu. Dengsu takes a handful and begins to eat, but stops when he sees Simma sitting there empty-handed. When he says, "You eat too," she responds, "No, I don't need any." "Why?" Dengsu asks. "That's all the snack there is," says Simma. Dengsu feels bad. Thinking, "I'm not able to do anything good for my wife, as beautiful as a flower. I can't even give her a good snack," he is overtaken by worry.

Dengsu: I'll enlist. I'll return with earnings, carrying gold and silver,
I want to see you, my sweetheart, with your chest covered with necklaces.

Simma: Sweetheart, don't talk of leaving our home, our village, these forests and fields,
When you come back that desire will be gone, this chest as blank as a sandbar.

Dengsu: Bind your heart for a few winters,
When going out, go out laughing,
Forget promises in order to remember,
Wait patiently through the days of waiting,
Through days and nights, sweetheart, keep your dreams tight within your heart,
Coming around nine bends in the road, sweetheart, I'll return, wiping away my sweat.

Simma: Sweetheart, don't talk of leaving our home, our village, these forests and fields,
When you come back that desire will be gone, this chest as blank as a sandbar.

If we go to Burma, our karma is together,
If we go to Nepal, our heads are together,
Don't go to India, let's survive together,
Let's spend this life together

We'll work together, the two of us, evening and morning, night and day,
We'll forget the sorrows, walking together, as if they were nothing

Dengsu: I'll enlist. I'll return with earnings, carrying gold and silver,
I want to see you, my sweetheart, with your chest covered with necklaces.

Simma: Sweetheart, don't talk of leaving our home, our village, these forests and fields,
When you come back that desire will be gone, this chest as blank as a sandbar.

Simma tries to get up with her carrying basket and tumpline. Dengsu helps her up. Simma walks quickly carrying her basket. Dengsu stands up, lifting his carrying pole. He goes over to Simma, and they stand and look at each other.

Scene Three

It is early evening and still light. Simma is sitting on the porch of her house mending a torn blouse. At the edge of the courtyard, Dengsu is splitting wood. Dengsu hears the sound of a madal drum along with singing from afar. Wondering where the sound is coming from, he puts his hand to his ear and listens. The song comes closer and closer. Dengsu leaves the wood and peers into the distance in the direction of the sound. Seeing that it is coming along the road to their house, he calls Simma over happily. Both of them go toward the source of the sound and look harder. When they get near, they see their friends from neighboring villages coming along dancing. Dengsu calls his friends over, bursting with happiness. The dancing men jump with happiness, clicking their heels together.

While still dancing, Khambe asks Simma for water. Simma goes to get water, and taking the opportunity, Thule whispers something into Dengsu's ear. Simma brings the water and gives it to everyone. Dengsu happily claps along with the beat. He looks at Simma, gets lost in thought, and comes out of his thoughts with a start. He looks at his friends. They're spinning around, dancing with happiness. He becomes lost inside himself. Simma is watching the dancers, smiling.

Group:

Galla came, *relimai*, finally, finally,
Shall I fly or shall I roll, I'm confused.

The bird in the queen's forest flew toward the ridgetop,
What is it to survive here, living on the edge of ruin,
The banyan tree gives shade at the hilltop chautari,
Who is there to stand in our way and stop us from going?

Let's go, past Tule and Mane Ridge,
We'll get to Dhopa Barracks and ride in a motor car,
We'll cross the Arun and the Tamur and the spinning Dudh Koshi,
There's nothing to eat and nothing to wear, what are we doing staying here?

Worrying in the queen's forest, don't cry, oldest daughter,
Tightening my boots and shoes, I'll return, bringing you a gold nose ring,
Don't say we were fooled into going to Lahore,
Remembering our sweethearts, our hearts will cry too.

When the men leave, Dengsu looks into the distance after them. Simma shakes him and startles him back into consciousness, and he goes back to his work. Bringing water in a small jug, he washes his hands and feet. His face is serious. He goes inside the house. Evening falls. The night becomes dark. Simma lights the lamp. After eating, she arranges the bed. She blows out the lamp. Both lie down to sleep. It is midnight. Dengsu slowly gets up. He puts on his hat that is laying by his pillow. He

takes a long look at Simma. He picks up his bag that is packed and waiting. He slowly strokes Simma's hair. Simma puts her hand where Dengsu has touched her. Dengsu slowly gets up and comes out to the porch, where he sits without being noticed. He looks all around the house, thinking. He sees poor Simma. He thinks some more. Simma covered in jewelry, ears full of earrings, chest covered in necklaces, dances before his eyes. He is despondent again. Again, he sees Simma in poverty. And he makes the decision, and gets up. He walks away slowly and cautiously. Somewhere, dogs are barking and crying. Owls and hoopoes cry, frighteningly. He walks fast. He gets to the edge of the courtyard. He looks back once more at the house, and hesitates as he is overcome by indecision. After a moment, he walks away quickly. He disappears into an orchard.

The next day, it is morning. A rooster crows. Simma wakes up and looks for Dengsu, and cannot find him. She gets the broom and begins to sweep. She thinks he must have gone to relieve himself. After a long time, he still has not returned. She begins doing housework. It is midday. Dengsu is still not back. She thinks he must have gone to the fields very early in the morning. And she also heads out to the fields. She arrives at the fields. She looks around, and Dengsu is not there either. Simma overturns her carrying basket at the edge of the field and begins to think, as she is immersed in the pool of evening.

With the rooster's crow Dengsu has arrived at the ridgeline and meets his friends. Once the friends have met, they move on happily dancing and jumping, a group of men in front of and behind Gallabal. When they get to the chautari, they set down their loads and begin to express what is in their hearts to each other while dancing to the song.

Group:

The railroad spins around, *relimai*, in the eyes of young men
The village is left behind, *relimai*, at the rooster's crow

If you walk far enough, you'll cross the thick forest
Leaving home and village, the heart does cry
I'll send a token, oldest daughter, to remember me by
If I die, I'll die, and if I return, I'll bring riches

When I come back I'll bring you a company necklace
A velvet blouse and a silk sari
I'll come flying over nine bends in the road, crossing a hundred hills
With boxes to open covering big winnowing trays

What will my fate be, what is my luck, I, this handsome young man
After my picture is taken on the first day of enlistment
I'll put it in an envelope and send it in your name, oldest daughter
Don't say he's become an Indian and forget me

[The group of boys continue on, dancing around Gallabal]

Here, Simma is despondent in her thinking. She blinks her eyes, and they run with tears. Drying her tears, she gets up. Wondering if he is home, she returns with a load of small sticks for firewood. She looks in the orchard, and doesn't see him there either. She looks all over and doesn't see him. She sits, lonely, in the middle of the courtyard. The memory of her natal home returns to her piercingly. She remembers her mother, she remembers her father. Like turning on a tap, her tears flow like a rising river. When she dries her tears, more tears well up and fall again. She looks down the path to the house as far as her eyes can see. She remembers her life before she was married, and longing overtakes her.

For a lark, for hunger, the one who flies beyond the sky,
Placing a noose and laying a net, for that fickle bird,
Catching me in the net of love, putting me in a bind,
He took this budding flower, wrapping it up with love,
The road was new, the village was new, the porch of the house was new,
I cried terribly for the courtyard of my father's house
The trees of the jungle were foreign, the house and the world were foreign,
I bowed upon meeting, I made promises to all the elders of this place
A pair of pigeons, a pair of ducks, a pair of oxen at the plow
We walked together, we lived together, without leaving each other for a moment
There was a lot of suffering, there was a lot of worry, and even so, in order to laugh,
There was a friend to share with, to survive with together
The pleasant sun of childhood days slowly moved far away
Staying here and passing the days, now this village became dear to me.

She wipes her tears with her shawl. She gets up. She goes inside the house. She lights the lamp, and a bit of its light spills through the open door into the darkness.

Scene Four

Simma comes outside carrying the lamp. She puts the lamp down at one side. She sees the ax beside the woodpile at one end of the porch. At this sight, she remembers Dengsu even more. She remembers the boys playing the madal and dancing in the courtyard. She remembers them laughing. She remembers calling Dengsu over and whispering into his ear, and both of them laughing. She remembers the song the boys were singing.

Galla came, *relimai*, finally, finally,
Shall I fly or shall I roll, I'm confused.

Worrying in the queen's forest, don't cry, oldest daughter,
Tightening my boots and shoes, I'll return, bringing you a gold nose ring,
Don't say we were fooled into going to Lahore,
Remembering our sweethearts, our hearts will cry too.

She becomes faint. She takes her head in her hands. She feels like she is going to fall. She remembers Dengsu even more piercingly. Evening falls. She comes to sit by the ears of corn, the broom, and the winnowing trays. Her tears begin to flow like a waterfall. While grinding corn, she expresses what is in her heart.

One evening a storm came, and a rumor filled the village
Enlistment is open down in the plains, said Galla
Desiring, loving couples, the saplings of youth,
They have to leave all of these, the fickle boys
Tying a knife in a red handkerchief, singing songs, *relimai*
They've left the village, leaving its women full of longing
In the morning, I look toward the fields for the song in my heart
Not finding it, I think of the dew, collected on the leaf of a flower
The wind blows away a daughter's beauty, spiraling it into the sky
Without seeing the song in my heart, I might become a wandering ascetic
The village is empty, the settlement is empty, the far cliffs are empty
Who will listen, and who will see, the worry in the suffering one's heart
My body is naked, my eyes the Ganga, my chest a blank sandbar
Desires to eat well, desires for good clothes, all of these have now died.

She gets up and goes to the hearth. She starts the fire. She puts the pots on the fire to cook food. She doesn't want to eat alone. She lies down on the bed without eating. The sound of a dog crying can be heard from afar.

Scene Five

After Dengsu runs away to enlist, the moneylender tallies up the loans from his father's and grandfather's time and takes his house and all his land, leaving him with nothing. As if that wasn't enough, he makes Simma work in his house as a servant as a payment for the interest. After she has finished all the work in his house, he sends Simma back to Dengsu's house which he now claims as his own.

The moneylender's wife is seated at one side of the courtyard combing her hair. Simma is at the other side washing dishes. The moneylender's wife comes over to Simma. She goes back to the other side. Simma continues to wash dishes without noticing. The moneylender's wife comes back over to Simma and shouts:

Does your father have property here so you can just sit pretty and eat?
Why are you messing around and not going straight to the fields?
You're still sitting there holding onto those dirty dishes
If you don't want to work to eat then fine, don't stay here
Who'll take care of you, tell me, who'll take care of you, without punishing
you
Have you brought your own son's earnings to keep yourself here?

Simma: (unable to bear it) Older sister....older sister....

Sauni: (getting even angrier, shouts louder)

You still yell loudly, running your mouth off, you'll be begging me soon
You answer back, and you'll be cowering and begging me soon,
The money from three generations back, who knows where it went,
Nobody paid even one rupee of interest
Your father and mother, your father-in-law and mother-in-law, understand,
in this house,
They were raised working, and they died, understand, all depending on us.

Simma, unable to listen anymore, picks up her carrying basket and tumpline and heads quickly to the jungle.

Simma arrives at the jungle. She sees a bare tree there. On one of its bare branches, she sees an empty bird's nest. Looking at that bare tree and empty nest, she begins to imagine. She sees riverbends and streams, and immerses herself in a pool of memory, flowing deeper and deeper. Somewhere a dog barks, and sheep make their noises. Memories come to her even more strongly. From far away, someone begins to tell their story.

The bird that played on the branch didn't remember the branch's love,
It didn't remember and return to the nest where it learned to fly.

When the flowers bloomed, the snow melted

It already became a river and flowed away, I hear
Red with the flowers it carries,
The bud has already returned, I hear

The bird that played on the branch didn't remember the branch's love,
It didn't remember and return to the nest where it learned to fly.

When it was time to go up to the sheep pastures
They began to climb up to the high pastures, I hear
Spreading the sparks of worry
Everything was shaken up, I hear

The bird that played on the branch didn't remember the branch's love,
It didn't remember and return to the nest where it learned to fly.

Simma is startled. She doesn't know what time the song stopped. She gets up with a start and begins to count in her head. As she counts on her fingers, she begins to sing:

Simma:

Days, weeks, months, years, now that I count,
Seven years finished, now almost eight years, as I think about it
Loans taken three generations ago were never finished
They took the rice fields and gardens, they even took the house, but the loans
were not reduced
The memory he left in my stomach for ten months
I carried him and raised him in my lap, since that year in the month of Jeth
I didn't get to eat well, nor did I have enough to wear, throughout my lying-in
Carrying him with a heavy heart to work in the moneylender's fields
A load of hurt, a tornado of worry, nine bushels of sorrow
He'll grow up eating by wandering through ten villages like a bumblebee
Hungry and sick, and lying in bed,
He asks, mother, where is my father?
What if the rain falls, what if the river flows, in the monsoon month of Asar
Becoming a waterfall, I'll flow myself, I'll have to fill him up
That sweet sound of him saying, "hey, mother," that promise flew away
It didn't break this chest, but spearing this heart, time pierced it and went
away
The picture of love in my heart is fading away
My liver splits into nine pieces, sir, thinking of my luck

Simma, singing and crying, comes to sit on a cold stone of the chautari. Her body has dried up until she has become like a toothpick. Looking at her face, she has become impossibly distant. The clothes on her body signal her distress and poverty.

On that road, an old soldier arrives, carrying some bundles of straw and bamboo, with whatever he is going to make out of them on his shoulders. Having lost a leg fighting in a foreign war, he has to use crutches to walk. The villagers call him Asyang. He is known by the name Asyang throughout the villages. Asyang comes to the front. He sees Simma on the chautari, fighting back tears with a tired face. Asyang is startled. Many things come to his mind. Coming close, he calls out "Simma! Simma!!" Simma is startled and lifts up her eyes to look. Seeing Asyang standing beside her Simma remembers with a start. Asyang is a *lahure* too; he would have to know about *lahures*. So she asks Asyang softly:

Simma: *Lau ni lau*, tell me, Asyang, what is it like abroad?
Is it really like heaven with no sorrow,
Asyang, is it really like heaven?

To stay there, not remembering the forests and fields, the roads, the soil of the village?
To forget the gods, the ancestors, the *chandi* dance, laughing?
To forget the shade of the pipal tree, the love of one's spouse, dancing?
Can *lahures* really survive, forgetting their villages?
Asyang, can they survive?

Asyang, hearing a question he had never thought of hearing, is surprised and confused for a moment. He thinks of what answer to give Simma. From one perspective, he thinks it would be a very good idea to tell Simma everything. To free her from her illusions would be very good. And Asyang tells her about the foreign land, just as he experienced it.

Asyang: Don't cry Simma, in the middle of the day, for this heart that remains sane,
It's impossible to survive, remembering your friend like that.
Simma, remembering your vows

Leaving home, crossing the border, seeing all the colorful sights,
Learning Desi language, joking around, boarding the long train
Seeing new lands, riding in a motor car, getting to the destination
What memories came of my house and village, there looking at the Seti,
Simma, watching the theatre dances

Don't cry now, make your heart hard, behave correctly,
The sons of poor men go to Lahure, understand this custom,
Simma, understand this custom

No time to breathe, no time to stay, swallowing our breath during the course,
Carrying guns, running in the jungle with our boots on,
No knowledge of whether we would live or die, jumping out of planes,
What was it like, surviving, crying and drinking tears of blood
Simma, surviving drinking tears

When living in the village we can't eat a full meal in a day,
Some die there, some go, crying, into India
Simma, some disappear

The poor tenants, who say, give us food, give us clothes,
The army and elephants that break houses and burn shelters
Those who were born and raised and want to die here,
Nepalis are forced to scorch others with bullets.
Simma, Nepalis

The poor of those places, are struggling for their own rights
People, trying to live as full humans, are dying in the struggle
Simma, they are struggling

Grenade, grenade, motor, grenade, setting off bombs and grenades
Now it's over, hey, he's dead, that's how this life goes
Surrounding the enemy, the sound of bullets, remembering that fort,
What happiness is there for oneself when one is killing people?
Simma, fighting a war

To go to Lahore is for ten hundred to be finished, why go to Lahore?
They should come back, all right away, getting their severance pay.
Simma, getting their severance pay.

Those with whom we fought in foreign lands, they weren't our enemies,
The lands where we fought, it wasn't Nepal's
Following the English or Indian sir's orders,
What did we get? We made our wives widows.
Simma, we made our children orphans.

Our enemies aren't in foreign lands, they're right here
We shouldn't be fighting in Lahore, we should be fighting right here.
Simma, it's right here.

Simma's eyes open. Her hatred for foreign lands comes on strong. Her mind whirls.
She returns home quickly. Her steps are purposeful. She arrives home. She places
the branches she has cut to the side of the courtyard. She thinks, and begins to hum.
Her humming turns to song:

Simma:

What is laughter, what is happiness, what is having enough?
There are probably the same kinds of laws, sucking away at the poor, in those
countries
There surely isn't a money tree, a mint plant that blooms with banknotes,
There, people must also have to let their tears of blood flow

The poor there must also have to endure oppression.
They take the Nepali poor to foreign lands to shoot bullets
Wherever there are poor, wherever there are suffering people, they must
have the same kind of worries
Remembering your own babies, don't aim your bayonets at them
Like a fish in the pan, placed over the fire,
That's how it must be for you, in a foreign land surrounded by bombs
Placing your hands over your heart, stopping your tears,
Why do you needlessly go into battle, tightening your boots?
You're giving your bodies and lives for others, you fight and die
Killing poor people like yourselves, you suffer losses
How many died in India? There is no count, the math has not been done
Come back, this is what I beg of you, ten *lakh* and ten times
If you have to fight wherever you go, fight here in this country
Shine warm sunlight here on the part of the poor, so that they may advance
Soldier middlemen of the English and Indian platoons,
Don't suck up to the foreigners, throwing away Nepali honor
Suffering the sticks of the English and Indians on our chests,
Don't leave the black marks of dishonor on the Nepali nationality.

Evening falls. Simma goes inside to do housework.

Scene Six

Morning, about 9 or 10:00. Simma has been ill for some days. Her hair is unkempt. Her face is drawn. With great effort, she is sweeping the courtyard. There are things lying messily all over the house and courtyard. At this time, one of the boys who had run away to India with Dengsu arrives at the house. His name is Thule. Thule, arriving at the house, looks around and sees stuff everywhere. He is shocked. Simma is sweeping. From behind Simma, he peers into the house through the open door. Seeing the pitiful state of things, his heart falls. And it is not just this house – seeing the pitiful state of the other houses in the village, his heart falls further, and he feels a pinching in his chest. Nevertheless, he pulls himself together and asks,

Thule: Brother's wife, god's greetings, are you well or sick?
You've lost weight, you've dried up and become like a toothpick,
The state of the house, I see it's unhappy
Oh no, I don't see anything good

Simma cries with heaving sobs. She looks at Thule's face once. She remembers her husband.

Thule: [going a little closer, reminding Simma with sympathy]
Oh, you're crying, why are you washing your heart?
Don't cry, brother's wife, listen to what I have to say
Squeezing one's heart, how can we survive
For this body, for one time in this life,
Dry your tears, brother's wife, and speak with a smile

Simma: [drying her tears a little with her shawl, she asks]
For my respected one, to lighten this heart,
Tell the truth, how are things there?
The thirst of my heart, forget about me,
Is he happy, or is he suffering?
Speak slowly, Thule, tell me slowly

Thule: [Screws up his face as if tears are about to fall from his eyes too. He can't look at his brother's wife's face. He turns the other way and gives his answer.]

He is not happy, he is suffering more than here
Some are in mines, some cry in barracks
Some are in alleys, begging and lost
Oh, calling ourselves Gorkhalis is eating us Nepalis
Our chests sunken, brother's wife, our tears constantly falling

[Moving to get up, putting on his pack, and touching Simma's knee, Thule says farewell]

I am going back to the barracks
I bow to you, brother's wife, do you have anything for older brother?
If you have news, I am here to carry it for you
After opening my ears, I will fly
Without letting your tears fall, brother's wife, stay well

[taking the end of her shawl, Thule wipes Simma's tears and gets ready to go]

Simma: [wrapping her unkempt hair up into a bun]
If you'll take news for me, an exchange of messages
Tell this high and low, without taking revenge

[Thule has already crossed to the other side of the courtyard. Hearing Simma's voice full of longing, he stops in his tracks, listens, and slowly comes back]

Simma: Take this, my news, to all who go to Lahure
Whether they're in the barracks or the mines, tell them to come home

Cows, buffaloes, calves, dishes, have all been taken as interest
House, garden, rice fields, now all belong to the moneylender

The oppression is extreme, the discrimination is extreme, the behavior toward us is extreme
For how long can we bear it, for how long can we live under this exploitation?

Tell them to come home, to look at the situation of the people around here
No, our country's not rich, so what could they be in foreign lands?
What would they hear of the poor innocent people's struggles?

Come back, a few things must be said, sitting down with the moneylender
It must be done, with determination
Tell them to come home, and fight with this bald old moneylender

Oh, Gorkhalis, oh, Bahadur Kanchha, they've heard these said as put-downs
Hungry and naked, sleepless and suffering
What do you stay and see, what do you stay and do, lengthening your time in a foreign land?
Come back, the lot of you, and claim your rights, carrying your energy, letting it resound
If they're men, if they have pride, tell them, come home
If they're in a hotel, or in a palace, tell them to come home.

Thule: [comes to both knees, in front of Simma, with both hands joined together]

Brother's wife, this is enough, you've opened up the darkness in your heart
I'll tell them all, I'll tell them all

Don't doubt, you can depend on me
I'll call them all, and bring them all back
Wait, brother's wife, we'll all return.

[Thule picks up his bag, bows to Simma, and leaves]

Scene Seven

A scene in the barracks. Dentsu is polishing his boots. Other roommates are ironing their clothes. Some come into the room from the showers and comb their hair. Some change their clothes to go on duty, and some are busy with their own work. When Thule comes into the room, all but Dentsu have gone out to do their work. Thule comes up behind Dentsu and taps him on the back. Dentsu looks behind him. Seeing Thule, Dentsu is happy, and turns around, joining his hands together, and asks:

Dentsu: When did you come, what news do you bring, how is life in the village?
Has anyone sent a letter in Dentsu's name, buddy?

Queen Simma, who blooms with flowers, who opens with the moon,
Did you see her in the rice fields, or in the house, the woman of my eyes?
How is she, the moon in my sky, is she crying with worry?
Does she ask for promises from me, wondering why I haven't come back?

When did you come, what news do you bring, how is life in the village?
Has anyone sent a letter in Dentsu's name, buddy?
Has anyone sent a letter in Dentsu's name, buddy?

[Thule puts his bag down on the floor and with a sorrowful face, tells Dentsu the news]

Thule: The news of your wife that you ask, Dentsu, will you cry when you hear?
Falling into worry, will your heart burn, and will you die?

[Dentsu's face falls]

Your wife made me swear to bring everyone this news
Whether they're in the barracks, or in the mines, tell them to come home
Whether they're in hotels, or in palaces, tell them to come home

[Khambe comes in from work. He listens and is shocked]

Cows, buffaloes, calves, dishes, have all been taken as interest
House, garden, rice fields, now all belong to the moneylender

The oppression is extreme, the discrimination is extreme, the behavior
toward us is extreme
For how long can we bear it, for how long can we live under this exploitation?

Tell them to come home, to look at the situation of the people around here
No, our country's not rich, so what could they be in foreign lands?
What would they hear of the poor innocent people's struggles?

Come back, a few things must be said, sitting down with the moneylender
It must be done, with determination
Tell them to come home, and fight with this bald old moneylender

Jorbire comes in, done with duty. He tries to understand what is going on in the room. He can't. He goes and asks his friends. His friends motion for him to come listen to Thule. Dengsu, unable to bear it, gnashes his teeth with anxiety.

Oh, Gorkhalis, oh, Bahadur Kanchha, you've heard these said as put-downs
Hungry and naked, sleepless and suffering
What do you stay and see, what do you stay and do, lengthening your time in a foreign land?
Come back, the lot of you, and claim your rights, carrying your energy, letting it resound
If they're men, if they have pride, tell them, come home
If they're in a hotel, or working as watchmen, tell them to come home.

Dengsu falls face down on the bed with anger and suffering. Other friends make their hands into fists and become angry, pacing back and forth in the room. Dengsu, unable to bear it, says,

Dengsu: Enough, enough, Thule, don't break my heart with the message you
My heart was already hurting and you've made it worse

Dengsu, crying, comes to hug his friends. His friends encourage him and try to make him get up.

Thule: Hearing only this message, your heart's in this state
Wait until you hear about what's happened to the village, it will be even worse.

[Everyone looks at each other]

The queen's forest where we cut firewood and fodder belongs to the headman now
The pastures where we graze cows and buffaloes belong to the tax collector now
The resting places and springs, even the chautaris, belong to the headman now
Now it's become a challenge even just to stay alive in the village.

They exploit, oppress, and suck the blood of the poor,
And not only that, they put them in jail, friends

[all become even angrier]

The village is sorrowful, the fields are sorrowful, the whole settlement is sorrowful
 The owners of large properties are the only ones who can enjoy themselves
 The dishonest ones have become untouchable in the village
 All working together, they are robbing the villagers
 Their houses and gardens stolen, unable to eat, they've become landless
 In our own courtyards, our wives have become foreigners

There is no one left to support the suffering in our village
 There are no dependable young men left in the village
 The ones with some sense and intellect are all living abroad
 To whose face can those living in the village look in order to survive, in whom can they place their hope?
 The poor, suffering, landless people have begun to come together
 Saying, how much more can we bear, the people have begun to rise up.

[The friends make fists and hit them into the palms of their other hands, expressing their anger]

If you all have love for your home, if you all have love for your country,
 Let's all promise that we'll go back, all leaving this foreign land
 It hasn't happened, brothers, what we all hoped for, coming to work abroad
 We have to go back now, to our own country, determined to make a change
 I decided I would go back while I was still in the village
 When I go back, I'll dedicate my life, in the name of the villagers
 Truly, in the name of the villagers.

[All of them look at each other with pride. They angrily beat their fists against their chests, some hitting their beds, some hitting their heads against the wall, raising their energy even higher. Here, Dentsu stands up and expresses his anger, suffering, energy, and rage.]

Dentsu: A chest of stone, and a heart of lead, thinking of them this way

[others add their voices to Dentsu's, and standing up, they also begin to express their anger, energy, and rage]

Did you think that the heart inside this chest lacks blood?
 Did you think that this Nepali heart belongs to a foreigner?
 Did you think we'd totally forgotten the suffering at home?
 Did you think we were heartless and would forget the place of our birth?
 Perhaps, going to India was a big mistake

Gorja and Dentsu: To give one's life for India is the wrong thing to do

[everyone in the room is pulling Thule around and telling of their own anger and frustrations]

Gorja: Once we thought we'd go abroad and find happiness
We waited, wondering when it would come, what Gallabal had said
We thought it would be great, we thought so many things, about this foreign land
If we'd heard it would be this bad before, we would never have come.
We would never have come.

[all show their hatred toward the foreign land]

Khambe: Not just dogs, they think of Nepalis as docile dogs

Khambe and Gorja: They go from village to village, choosing and taking us to bring here.

[all open their boxes and angrily throw their things away]

Dengsu: I don't need all this silver and gold, this raw company silver

Gorja: I don't need it either, this medal they gave me, for killing other men

Ganba: I don't need it either, this radio here, boots, shoes, or anything

Khambe: I don't need them either, all of these things that come from the foreign land

Thule: None of those things!

Dengsu: The clouds have opened, the net has been torn, that was covering my eyes

Jorbire: The rest of my life, I'll spend working for my home, my village, my fields
This foreign land is not ours, what hope can we place in it?
Lakhs of Nepalis have remained here for its sake
I find this foreign land hungry for the blood of young Nepali men
I find that it thinks that we are hungry for notes and coins
For notes and coins

Dengsu: Let no Nepalis come, let no one be tricked into coming to Muglan

Dengsu and Gorja: May all Nepalis fight for the right to live in their own country

[all raise their hands with energy]

Dengsu and Gorja: We left you in suffering, please forgive us

Dengsu and Khambe: We won't leave you alone in the village now, we are there with you

Dengsu and Jorbire: We'll come like a storm, we'll come like a wind, carrying our energy together, carrying our energy together

Dengsu: What do you think, brothers? What do you say, brothers? Get up, let's make a vow!

Group: Let's be determined, brothers, we'll go back, leaving this foreign land.

[All pick up their own bags. Vowing never to come back to the foreign land, they all decide to go back to their homes, and walk out of the room.]

The End.

Notes

First performed 1978. The original voice of Simma was Susan Maskey, part of the same cultural group as Ravi Vaidya. She is the mother of Astha Tamang Maskey.

Harikrishna Darshandhari directed it. He was the dance director, and directed dozens of operas.