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Anandi*

THE MEETING OF the Municipal Council was at full boil. The assembly hall was packed nearly to bursting, and contrary to normal, not a single member was absent. The issue under debate in the Council was the expulsion from the city of the *zanaan-e baazaari*, the “women of the marketplace,” for their very presence had become an unsightly and intolerable stain on the skirt of humanity, nobility, and culture.

One Council member, an imposing man, generally considered a true and sympathetic benefactor of the nation, was holding forth with great eloquence:

“... And gentlemen! Let us also not forget that their place of residence is located in a portion of the city which is not merely a primary thoroughfare, but indeed also constitutes the city’s greatest commercial center. Consequently, every honorable man is compelled perforce to pass through that bazaar. Furthermore, the chaste daughters of our noble citizenry are forced, by dint of that bazaar’s commercial significance, to come and transact their purchases there. My colleagues! When our noble daughters see the finery and embellishments of these ill-reputed, half-naked seductresses, it is only natural that there arise in their hearts as well newfound desires for the trappings of ornamentation and allure. They then begin to demand of their poor husbands all manner of rouges, lavenders, gold-embroidered saris, and costly jewelry, resulting in their tranquil homes, their abodes of comfort and ease, being reduced to the very model of hell on earth!

“And my colleagues! Let us also not forget the budding youth of the nation who are now obtaining their education in our schools, and upon

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whose future advancement are pinned the very hopes of the nation! Reason dictates that it will be their collective head on which one day the garland wreath of this country's salvation will be placed. They too are compelled perforce each morning and evening to commute by way of that bazaar. These strumpets, done up in their myriad jewels and ornaments, ceaselessly rain down on each innocent wayfarer the arrows and spears of their provocative glances, issuing open invitations to the worship of their beauty. Seeing these harlots, can our simple, inexperienced adolescents, steeped in the intoxication of youth, unconcerned with profit and loss, keep their emotions and thoughts, their noble pedigree safe from the venomous effects of disobedience and sin? Mustn't the ascetic-seducing beauty of these fallen women lead our budding entrepreneurs to stray from their path of righteousness? Mustn't they stir in these young men's hearts the temptation to sin's innermost delights, produce in them a restlessness, an agitation, a *passion!*?"

At this a member of the Council who had earlier in his life been a teacher and who held a keen interest in statistics spoke up:

"Friends, may it be clear: the proportion of students failing their exams is half again what it was five years ago."

A bespectacled member of the Council, the honorary editor of a weekly newspaper, rose to give his speech: "Gentlemen! Our city is daily witnessing the flight of honor, nobility, masculinity, beneficence, and abstinence, and in their place dishonor, effeminacy, cowardice, villainy, theft, and extortion are gaining dominion. The use of intoxicants has increased greatly, and instances of murder, suicide, and bankruptcy continue to rise. The simple cause for this is the polluting presence of those women of the marketplace. Becoming ensnared in their tangled tresses, our innocent citizens simply lose all sense and judgment, and proceed, by any means legal or otherwise, to procure the exorbitant funds necessary to gain access to these pleasure palaces. Occasionally, these efforts lead them so far as to cast off the garb of humanity altogether and to commit exceedingly vile and disgraceful deeds. The inevitable result is that they wash their hands of their precious lives, or indeed, they lie rotting in jail."

Another member of the Council, an aged pensioner who was the patron of an extensive family and who had by now already seen the hot and cold of the world, who now had become weary of life's struggles and who desired only to relax for his remaining years and to see his family prosper under his benign shadow, rose to speak. His voice was tremulous and tinged with lamentation. "Gentlemen, all night every night, the

banging of these people's tablas, their caterwauling, the fist fights of their amorous customers, their swearing, their cursing, their noise, their uproar, their ha ha ha, their hoo hoo hoo—I tell you, the ears of the gentle people living nearby have *cooked!* Life has become pure vexation. If sleep at night is ruined, then what hope is there for peace of mind by day? Furthermore, the evil effect wrought by their proximity on the morals of our daughters—this every gentleman with children can estimate for himself....”

Uttering this last sentence the elderly man became choked up and could say no more. All the members of the Council felt the deepest sympathy for him, for by a cruel twist of fate his ancestral home was situated precisely in the middle of that beauty market.

After the elderly gentleman came a Council member who was a standard-bearing advocate for the antiquities of civilization, a man who held archaeological remains more dear than his own offspring. He too rose to speak:

“Gentlemen! When travelers from outside, or indeed our own friends, come to see this famous and historical city of ours, when they pass through this bazaar and inquire about it, then you can be assured, we almost die for shame.”

The President of the Municipal Council now rose to give his speech. Though he was small of limb and stature, his head was nonetheless quite large, which made him seem gentle and forbearing. There was a degree of somberness in his tone. “Gentlemen, I am in complete agreement with you in this, that the very presence of this social stratum is for our city and for our civil existence the source of a hundred disgraces. The problem remains, however: How is the situation to be remedied? If these people are forced to abandon this despicable profession of theirs, then the question arises: How will they eat?”

One gentleman spoke up: “Why don't these women get married?”

At this there was an extended outburst of laughter, and the mournful atmosphere of the hall was suddenly infused with mirth. When the assembly had quieted down, the President again spoke. “Gentlemen, this suggestion has been presented before these people time and time again, and their answer is always the same: our well-off and respectable citizens, out of concern for the dignity and reputation of their families, won't let them through their doors. And as for the poor and lower classes, well, these women won't give them the time of day, since they're out to marry them only for their money.”

One of the members spoke up: "There's no need for the Municipal Council to get mixed up in the personal affairs of these women. They can go to hell for all we care. The sole issue for the Council is that they vacate the city."

The President said, "Even this is no simple task. There are not just ten or twenty of them; they now number in the hundreds. And on top of this, there are many women among them who own their own private houses."

The issue remained under debate in the Council for nearly a full month; in the end it was settled by consensus of all the members that the personal houses owned by the women of the marketplace should be bought up, and that they should be given a separate and discrete area far from the city in which to live. The women protested strenuously against the Council's decision. Some women simply refused and endured heavy fines; some even went to jail. But ultimately there was no gainsaying the will of the Council, and the women were left helplessly to forebear.

For a time after this, lists were made of the houses owned by the women, floor-plans were drawn up, and potential buyers were looked for. It was decided that most of the houses would be sold at auction. The women were permitted to remain in their houses for a period of six months, so that during this time they might have new houses built in the area that was set aside for them.

The area selected for the women was six kos from the city. A properly paved road extended for the first five kos, and beyond that there was an unpaved, rough, dirt path. There had apparently been a settlement there in an earlier age, but now nothing remained but ruins, which served as a home for snakes and bats, and where owls hooted in broad daylight. In the environs surrounding the area there were several small villages comprised of small mud huts, but none of these villages was less than several miles from the site. The peasant farmers inhabiting those villages tilled their fields by day, or they just knocked about, turning up occasionally at the ruins. But for the most part the place remained a desolate ghost town, where never so much as a human face was seen. Sometimes even jackals wandered about the area in the bright light of day.

Among the somewhat more than five hundred prostitutes, there were only fourteen who, either out of obligation to their lovers, or out of their own hearts' attachment, or impelled by something else entirely, had in any event found cause to live openly near the city. Now, however, relying on their wealthy lovers' continual material patronage, they had readied themselves and their unwilling hearts to settle in their new area. The

remaining majority of women had decided that they would either make the city's hotels their homes, or that they would take on the outward garb of chastity and abstinence and dwell in the obscure corners of the city's noble neighborhoods, or indeed that they would give up the city altogether and set out for parts unknown.

These fourteen prostitutes had already been particularly well off. On top of this, they received handsome prices for the houses they owned in the city; the cost of land in this new area was nominal, and more than anything else, their lovers were only too prepared to provide them with financial assistance. And so, putting their trepidations aside and throwing themselves fully into their new situation, they firmly resolved to splurge and have great, grand houses built for themselves. Just a short distance from some broken-down, ramshackle gravesites, they selected an elevated and even parcel of land. They had the individual plots cleared away, they had nimble-fingered draftsmen draw up blueprints, and in just a few days the actual construction work began.

All day long bricks, mortar, lime, beams, girders, and other construction materials were hauled into the settlement on lorries, on bullock carts, on the backs of mules and donkeys, and on the backs of men. The munshis, with their account books pressed under their arms, had it all counted and duly recorded the figures. The foremen called out orders to the builders, the builders harassed the petty laborers, and the petty laborers ran from pillar to post, shrieking at the female laborers to come give them a hand. In short, the entire day consisted of one single commotion, one single tumult; all day the neighboring farmers in their fields and their wives in their homes listened to the faint sounds of distant construction borne to them on the gusts of wind.

In one place amid the ruins of the settlement were the remains of a mosque, and directly nearby was a well which lay sealed. Partly out of the desire to find some water and relax a bit, and partly with a mind to facilitating the worship of their prayer-reciting brethren and thereby earning some spiritual reward, the master masons first of all repaired this mosque and well. Since the work was both humanly beneficial and spiritually meritorious, no one objected, and so in just a few days the mosque was ready.

At noon as soon as it was time for lunch a couple hundred masons, laborers, foremen, munshis, and those relatives or representatives of the prostitutes who were entrusted with the oversight of the construction would gather at the mosque, making it look for the entire world as though they were having a regular fair.

One day a rustic old woman who lived in one of the nearby villages showed up having heard news of the settlement. She was accompanied by a small boy. Under a tree near the mosque, the two of them set out a tray laden with cheap cigarettes and biris, and sweets made of chickpeas and gur. It hadn't been even two days since the old woman arrived when a similarly old farmer brought a large earthen water pot from somewhere, constructed a small brick platform near the well, and began selling glasses of sweet *sharbat* two for a penny. A greengrocer who had heard the news brought a large basket full of melons and setting his wares near the old woman with the tray began to call out, "Get yer melons here! Sweeter than honey, get yer melons here!" And another, what did he do?—He went home, cooked up a dish of brains and feet, put it in a pan, got some rotis, a few earthen bowls, and a tin drinking glass, loaded it all on a tray, brought it all back, and began to give the workers at that settlement, out in the middle of nowhere, a taste of some good home cookin'.

When it came time for the noon and afternoon prayers, the foremen, the builders, and the rest could be seen making their ritual ablutions, having had bucket after bucket of water drawn by the laborers. One person would enter the mosque and issue the call to prayer, another would be made the prayer leader, and the rest would stand behind him and recite their namaz. A mullah from one of the surrounding villages one day heard tell that a certain mosque was in need of an imam, and so the very next day, wrapping the Holy Qur'an in its green protective cover, and gathering his *panj-sura*, his Qur'an stand, and a few theological pamphlets, he too appeared at the settlement and was officially installed as the imam of the mosque.

Every day late in the afternoon a kebab seller from one of the villages would arrive bearing on top of his head a basket filled with his gear. On the ground next to the old lady with the tray he would build a small brick stove and would then put the bits of kebab, liver, heart and kidney on his skewers, which he then proceeded to sell to the settlement-*wallahs*. The wife of an oven-keeper saw all this going on and came with her husband in tow; in a field in front of the mosque she set up a rough thatched roof to protect her from the sun, and began to fire up her tandoor-oven. From time to time one could see as well a young rustic barber making his rounds, the tools of his trade in a beat-up old belt around his neck, kicking rocks and other debris from the unpaved dirt roadway.

Of course the prostitutes' relatives or their business representatives were overseeing the construction of the houses, but on occasion, having finished their lunch, the women themselves would come accompanied by

their lovers to see their houses being built, and they wouldn't leave before the sun set. On such occasions band upon band of wandering mendicants, male and female, would show up from God knows where, and until they were given their alms they would go on with their calls and cries, raising such a ruckus that the women couldn't even carry on a conversation. On occasion as well the idle, dissolute, good-for-nothing hoodlums of the city made their way on foot in order to see what was happening in this new prostitutes' settlement. And if by chance on such a day the prostitutes too should show up, well, then it turned out to be a regular holiday for the hoodlums. Taking a step or two back they would encircle the women and walk around them, hurling jibes, laughing uproariously, making faces at them, and moving their bodies in lewd, insane ways. On such days the kebab-seller did tremendous business.

In an area where just a few days earlier there had existed nothing but wasteland there was now commotion and activity everywhere. The dread the prostitutes felt at the idea of coming to live in such desolation had, to a large extent, vanished; the women now gleefully took every opportunity to press upon the builders their ideas about the decorations and color schemes of their new houses.

At one place in the settlement there was a decrepit old tomb which, from all indications, appeared to be that of some revered holy man from long ago. One morning when the construction of the houses was more than half completed, the masons saw a peculiar sight—smoke was rising up into the air near the tomb. A large, tall, intoxicated fakir, wearing only a loincloth, his eyes blood red and his face and eyebrows shaven clean, was walking around and around the tomb, picking up rocks and stones and casting them aside. In the afternoon the fakir brought a water pot to the well; filling it again and again he headed back to the tomb and gave it a proper washing. As it happened, there was one occasion when a few of the masons were standing around the well. In a state of equal parts madness and sagacity, the fakir began to address the men: "Do you know whose tomb that is? It belongs to Karak Shah Pir Badshah, that's who! My father and grandfather were the attendants at his shrine." At which point, unable to suppress either his laughter or the tears welling up in his eyes, he began regaling the masons with tales of Pir Karak Shah's awe-inspiring miracles.

By evening the fakir had somehow managed to beg two earthen oil lamps and some mustard oil to fuel them; placing one at the head and the other at the foot of Pir Karak Shah's grave, he lit them both. On occasion

late at night intoxicated, mystical chants of “Allah hu!” rang out from the tomb.

Even before the six-month period had elapsed, all fourteen houses were completed and ready to go. They consisted of two stories each, and they all were essentially of the same design. There were seven on one side and seven on the other, with a broad street down the middle. The lower level of each house consisted of four shops, and on the upper floor facing the street there was a wide verandah on each. The forward part of the verandahs had been constructed with a kind of bench, boat-like in appearance and fit for a king, at the ends of which were depicted either marble peacocks in mid-dance or carved statues of water nymphs, their bodies half fish and half human. Inside each house in the sitting room behind the verandah were delicate pillars of marble, and the walls were done in beautiful mosaic. The floors were made of brilliant green stone, and when the marble pillars reflected in their emerald sheen it seemed as though luminous white-winged swans were dipping their slender necks in some magical lake.

The auspicious day of Wednesday had been fixed for moving into the new settlement. All the prostitutes gathered together and had a solemn consecration ceremony performed. The ground of the settlement’s open field was cleared of debris and a large pavilion tent was erected there. The clanging of pots and pans and the aroma of meat and clarified butter drew fakirs and dogs from miles around. The charitable distribution of the food was to take place at Pir Karak Shah’s tomb, and by the time noon rolled around there was a greater throng of fakirs gathered there than one might witness even on Eid at the congregational mosque of a large city. Pir Karak Shah’s shrine had been scrubbed spotless, and a sheet of flowers had been laid over his grave. A new suit of clothes had been stitched for the intoxicated tomb attendant, which he ecstatically tore from his body as soon as it was put on him.

In the evening a bright milk-white sheet was spread out on the ground under the main pavilion tent, cushions and bolsters were neatly arranged, paandaans, spittoons, hookahs, and rosewater shakers were set out for the guests’ convenience, and the assembly of song and dance got underway. Many other prostitutes too were invited from far away, being either friends or relatives of the ladies of the settlement. They brought along with them many of their patrons and customers, for whom seating had been arranged in a separate pavilion, and in front of whom, for their privacy, had been hung bamboo screens. Countless gaslights had transformed the place into an abode of pure brilliance. The prostitutes’ dark-

skinned, pot-bellied musicians were strolling about, twisting their moustaches, dressed in fine brocade sherwanis, fragrance-soaked wads of cotton tucked discreetly into their ears. Alluring women too were coquettishly strolling about, immaculately made up, and dressed in sparkling gold-embroidered finery and saris more delicate than butterfly wings. All through the night it was a convocation of music and dance: an improbable island of revelry out in the wilds of nowhere.

A few days later, after the inevitable fatigue that follows such celebrations wore off, the prostitutes began busying themselves in the procurement of all their houses' furnishings and decorations. All manner of household items were brought in—chandeliers, lamps, crystalware, full-length mirrors, cotton tape-strung beds, gilt-framed paintings and calligraphy—all of which were then neatly arranged in their proper rooms. In a matter of some eight days the houses were ready to go, right down to the last nail in the wall. The women passed the greater part of their days taking music and dance instruction from their venerable teachers, or memorizing love poetry and songs, or studying their lessons, or practicing calligraphy, or sewing and embroidering, or listening to the gramophone, or playing cards or carom with their teachers, or amusing themselves with clever word games, or simply sleeping. In the late afternoon they proceeded to their bathrooms to take their baths, where their full tubs awaited them, their servants having already hauled bucket upon bucket of water from the hand pump. After their baths they busied themselves at their *toilette*.

Upon nightfall the houses shone with the illumination of gaslights adroitly concealed in half-open lotus blossoms carved from marble, and from a distance the tiny glimmering rainbows of light, refracted in the floral etchings of the windows and door panels, made for a wondrous sight to behold. The perfectly made up prostitutes sauntered back and forth on their balconies, giggling and carrying on with others nearby, and when they tired of standing they headed back into the house where they took their seats on the moon-white sheet spread out upon the floor, regally reclining on bolsters and cushions. Their musicians went on tuning their instruments, while the women themselves cut betel nut into fine pieces. As the night wore on their patrons would show up, arriving with their friends in cars and two-wheeled horse carriages, bearing baskets filled with fruit snacks and bottles of liquor. A special sort of commotion and bustle commenced as soon as these men set foot in the settlement. The melodious singing, the dulcet notes of the instruments, the jingling of the tiny bells strapped to the ankles of the ravishing dancers—it all

mingled with the gurgling of decanting wine flasks to produce an atmosphere of delicious, exquisite delight. People lost themselves in these assemblies of revelry and intoxication, and the night passed on, unnoticed.

The prostitutes had been living in the settlement for only a few days when tenants for the shops beneath their homes began to appear. With a mind to populating the new settlement, the rent had been set very low. The first of the new shopkeepers was that same old woman who had earlier set up her tray under the tree in front of the mosque. In an effort to complete the look of her new shop she and her boy gathered up many empty cigarette packs and carefully arranged them in all the niches of the platform on which she would sit and transact her sales. She filled bottles with colored water so that they would appear to be bottles of *sharbat*, and to the best of her ability she spruced up the shop with hanging streamers she had made from paper flowers and empty cigarette packs. She cut photographs of actors and actresses from old movie magazines and pasted them to the walls. The actual inventory of the shop, however, consisted of no more than three or four packets each of a few brands of cigarettes, eight or ten bundles of biris, a half-dozen boxes of matches, a small bundle of paan leaves, three or four cakes of smoking tobacco, and half a bundle of wax candles.

In the second shop there came a petty merchant, in the third a sweet-maker and a milk-seller, in the fourth a butcher, in the fifth a kebab-seller, and in the sixth a greengrocer. The greengrocer would buy up several kinds of vegetables from the neighboring villages and sell them in his shop at a tidy profit. He also kept half a basket of fresh fruit for sale. Because there was no dearth of room in his shop, he took on a flower vendor as his partner. Throughout the day he sat making garlands, bracelets, and all manner of flower ornaments, and in the evenings he put them all in a basket and visited each house in turn, stopping not just to sell his flowers but to sit for a few minutes, chatting with the musicians there and taking a few pulls on their hookahs. If, as happened some days, a group of libertines arrived to take in the prostitutes' show and ascended the stairs while he was still there, then, as soon as the music started up, and despite the musicians' turning up their noses at him, he would stay for hours on end planted right where he was, joyfully beating his head in time to the music, staring like a fool at each of the musicians. And if, as also happened some days, the night passed and he had a garland left over, then he would put it around his own neck and wander about outside the settlement, singing at the top of his lungs.

The father and brother of one of the prostitute's, who both knew the tailoring business, brought a sewing machine and set themselves up in another of the shops. Soon a barber too arrived, and he brought along a cloth dyer. The brightly colored, fancifully dyed dupattas waving in the wind on the clothesline outside his shop made for a wonderful sight.

With the passing of just a few more days there arrived as well a petty merchant, down on his luck and nearly bankrupt. It had become nearly impossible for him to extract enough from his meager profits to pay the rent on his shop in the city, and so unable to make a go of it there he turned his attention to this new settlement, where he was welcomed with open arms and where he found a brisk market for all his assorted lavers, his various powders, his soaps, combs, buttons, needles, threads, his laces, ribbons, aromatic oils, his handkerchiefs, and his tooth powders.

The thriving patronage of the settlement dwellers spurred a procession of other similarly down-on-their-luck shopkeepers: a cloth merchant, a vendor of spices and herbal remedies, a hookah-maker, a bread-maker—troubled by the depressed market and high rents of the city, they all sought refuge in this new settlement.

Having become fed up both with the dense population and with the excess of pharmacies in the city, a venerable old master apothecary, who was also proficient in the traditional Greek arts of healing, gathered his apprentices, left the city for the new settlement, and rented a shop there. All day long the apothecary and his apprentices arranged packets of medicine, bottles of *sharbat*, fruit confections, and jars of chutney and pickle, setting them all in their proper places on the shelves and in the cabinets. They placed the *Tibb-e Akbar*, the *Qaraabaadiin-e Qaadirii*, and other medical books on a shelf of their own. They wrote large, clear advertisements in heavy black ink for their most excellent proprietary medicines, stuck them to pasteboards, and hung them both on the insides of the cabinets' door panels and on the empty spaces that remained on the walls. Every morning the prostitutes' servants showed up, drinking glasses in hand, and would take back home *sharbat* made of seeds, *sharbat* made of violet flowers, *sharbat* made of pomegranate, and other such pleasure-giving and spirit-enhancing concoctions, in addition to herbal pastes and special strength-producing confections covered with silver leaf.

The prostitutes' musicians and hangers-on brought their charpoy and set them up in the shops that remained unrented. All day long these people played cards, *chausar*, and chess; they had themselves rubbed down with oil; they held quail and partridge fights in a ring; watching the birds

fight they'd call out "Praise be to God's power!"; and improvising a beat on an earthen pot they'd sing to their hearts' content.

One of the prostitute's musicians saw an empty shop and set up his brother there, who was skilled in the construction and repair of musical instruments. Pounding nails into the walls of the shop he hung up all the sarangis, sitars, *tamburas*, *dilrubaas*, and other instruments that were broken and in need of repair. This man was himself also very skilled at playing the sitar. He would play in his shop in the evenings; hearing the sitar's sweet sound all the neighboring shopkeepers would leave their shops one by one, and sitting around him still as statues would go on listening to his music. This master sitarist had a student, too, who was a clerk in the railway office, and who possessed an eager and zealous desire to learn the instrument. The moment he finished work at the office he'd fly on his bicycle to the settlement, sit down inside the sitar master's shop, and practice his exercises for an hour or two. In short, thanks to the sitar master, a delightful kind of vitality was sparked throughout the settlement.

While all the construction was going on, the mullah of the mosque would head home in the evenings to his village. But now, inasmuch as he had begun to receive more rich, savory food for his two meals a day than he could eat, he began spending his nights, too, right there in the settlement. Gradually children from the homes of the prostitutes began coming to the mosque for their schooling, and the mullah began earning a modest income from the small fees they paid.

When, by virtue of both excessive land rents and their own insignificance, an old-fashioned, third-rate, itinerant theatrical company could find no venue in which to perform in the city, it turned its attention to the settlement, and in a field some distance from the prostitutes' houses it erected its big-top pavilion and set up camp there. The company's actors knew nothing of the art of theatrical performance. Their costumes were old and worn out, missing many of the ornaments that once had adorned them, and the shows they put on were old and worn out as well. But despite everything this company caught on, the reason being that the tickets to their shows were very cheap. The menial laborers of the city, the factory workers, and the poor and destitute, wanting to compensate some for the daily rigors of their strenuous toiling with a bit of raucousness, lasciviousness, and debauchery, would band together in groups of five or six, hang festive garlands around their necks, and would make their way on foot from the city to see the company's show, laughing and joking with each other, playing impromptu songs on their flutes, taunting and jeering

at their fellow travelers, swearing and cursing and carrying on all along the way. And as long as they were there anyway, why shouldn't they take a stroll through the prostitutes' beauty market as well? Until the show itself started, a clown stood on a stool outside the pavilion, by turns making provocative hip thrusts, blowing exaggerated kisses, and winking lewdly at the passersby. Seeing his strange and wholly immodest gestures the people laughed uproariously and showed their approval in the form of the filthiest curses.

Gradually other people too began coming to the settlement. The drivers of the two-wheeled horse carriages began calling out at the city's largest and busiest intersections, "New settlement, new settlement, come see the new settlement!" Arriving at the paved road that extended five kos out of the city the carriage drivers, at the request of their passengers or out of greed for the tips they might receive, began to race each other. They'd make honking horn sounds with their mouths, and when one carriage overtook another its passengers raised an ear-splitting uproar of taunts and encouraging cries. The racing took its toll on the horses, and instead of any fragrance coming from the flower garlands around their necks, there was only the odor of perspiration.

And the rickshaw drivers were hardly lagging behind the carriage drivers. Taking passengers at rates cheaper than the carriage drivers, they too began to head out to the settlement, going full tilt and ringing their bells all the way. Every Saturday night high school and college students as well, loaded two to a bicycle, would band together and come take a tour of that secret marketplace—something which, to their minds, their elders had unreasonably forbidden them from doing.

Over time the settlement's celebrity spread far and wide, and there developed a large demand for houses and shops there. Witnessing its prodigious growth, the prostitutes, who earlier dreaded the very idea of moving there, now began to regret their foolishness. Several women immediately bought land and started having houses built right next to the prostitutes of precisely the same model that they had had built. Further, some of the city's financiers too bought up much of the land around the settlement and quickly had many small houses built from which they could collect the rent. It followed that those harlots who earlier had disappeared into the city's hotels and noble neighborhoods now emerged from their hideouts swarming like ants and locusts to inhabit these new houses. And some were occupied by those shopkeepers of the settlement who themselves had families and who could not, therefore, spend their nights in their shops.

The settlement had become quite populous indeed, but still there was no electricity. So a petition was sent to the government on behalf of the prostitutes and all the settlement's other residents, which was approved in just a few days. Right on the heels of this a post office was opened as well, and very soon an elderly scribe appeared outside it with a small trunk full of envelopes, postcards, pens, and ink pots, and began writing letters for the people of the settlement.

It so happened one time that two groups of drunkards in the settlement came to blows, during which incident soda water bottles, knives, and bricks were freely employed, and several people were badly injured. It occurred to the government that perhaps a police station too should be opened.

The theatrical company stayed for two months, and when they left they took with themselves a healthy profit. Upon their departure the proprietor of a cinema hall in the city wondered why he shouldn't open a cinema in the settlement as well. No sooner did the idea occur to him than he bought up a parcel of land and had the construction work started immediately. The cinema hall was ready in just a few months, replete with a small garden outside. Should the cinemagoers arrive before the bioscope began, they'd be able to sit in comfort in the garden. Of course the people of the settlement too began to come, just for the chance to sit and relax a bit, or to take a leisurely stroll. Indeed, the garden became *the* place to come and take a stroll. Eventually water bearers showed up in the garden as well, banging their metal cups to announce their presence to any parched people who might want a drink of their water. Men trained in the art of oiled head massage came as well to offer their services to any headache sufferers they might chance upon, calling out "Massages! Massages! Get yer relaxing, invigorating massages here!", their waistcoat pockets stuffed with small bottles of exceedingly cheap and caustic aromatic oil, their grimy, tattered towels draped over their shoulders.

The cinema owner had a couple of houses and several shops built outside his cinema hall. A hotel was opened in one of the houses where rooms were available for the night, and the shops were occupied one after another by the owner of a soda water factory, a photographer, a bicycle mechanic, an owner of a laundry, two paan sellers, a boot shop owner, and a doctor with his own pharmacy. And soon permission was granted to open a tavern in another shop nearby. A watchmaker gathered all his equipment in a corner outside the photographer's shop, and with his jeweler's loupe permanently glued to his eye he remained absorbed in the minute components of his trade.

Just a few days later official arrangements were made for the settlement's sewage, public lighting, and trash removal. Government surveyors arrived with their red flags, their measuring chains, and their transits, they took their readings and did their calculations, they marked out the boundaries of the streets and lanes, and a steamroller began to level the unpaved streets of the settlement.

It's been twenty years now since this all took place. The settlement has since become a thriving city, with its own railway station and its own town hall, its own courthouse and its own jail. It's home now to some 250,000 people. There's a college in the city; two high schools, one for girls and one for boys; and eight primary schools, where the municipality provides education for free. There are six cinemas and four banks, including branches of two of the world's largest banks.

Two daily, three weekly, and ten monthly periodicals and newspapers are published in the city, among which are four literary journals, two spiritual and ethical journals, one industrial journal, one medical journal, one women's magazine, and one children's magazine. There are twenty mosques in the various parts of the city, fifteen Hindu temples, six orphanages for Muslims, five for Hindus, and three large government hospitals, one of which is reserved especially for women.

In the beginning, for several years, in keeping with the people who lived there, the city went by the name "Husnabad"—that is, The City of Beauty. But later this was considered inappropriate, and so the name was modified slightly; instead of "Husnabad" people started calling it "Hasanabad"—that is, the city named in honor of Hasan, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson. But this name didn't catch on, because the people just didn't distinguish between "Husn" and "Hasan." Finally, after going through many thick, decaying old books, and after investigating many old manuscripts, the city's original name was discovered, the name by which the settlement was known hundreds of years earlier, before it was ruined. This name was Anandi, the City of Bliss.

And so now the entire city is thriving, clean, and attractive. But the most beautiful, most vital, most commercially important point in the city is that very same market in which the *zanaan-e baazaari* live—the women of the marketplace.

*

The meeting of Anandi's Municipal Council is at full boil, the hall is packed nearly to bursting, and contrary to normal not a single member is

absent. The issue under debate in the Council is the expulsion from the city of the women of the marketplace, for their very presence has become an unsightly and intolerable stain on the skirt of humanity, nobility, and culture. One eloquent scion of society is holding forth: “It is simply not known what the policy might have been on the basis of which this polluting class of people was given permission to live in the precise center of this ancient and historical city of ours....”

This time, the area selected for the women to live in was twelve kos from the city. □

(1940)

—*Translated by G.A. Chaussée*