

The Banter and the Bond: A Tapestry of Tender Tales in *Din about Chins* by Santosh Bakaya

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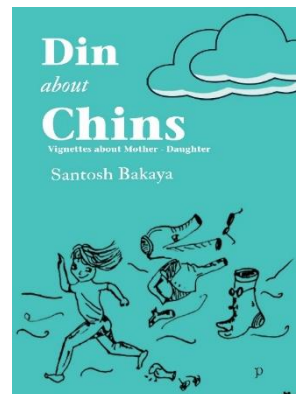
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“So many chunks of memories came jostling and elbowing from all sides, that I had a tough time ducking them.”

Santosh Bakaya

Santosh Bakaya's *Din about Chins- Vignettes about Mother Daughter* is a kaleidoscope of mother-daughter memories—each anecdote a fleck of colour on the tapestry of time, textured with tenderness, tickled by laughter, and tethered to truth. Rooted in the vibrant soil of Indian domestic life yet soaring in literary imagination, this collection of anecdotes revolving around her daughter Iha reads like a series of love letters — humorous, honest, and human. The title *Din about Chins* itself jingles like a nursery rhyme, suggestive of an inside joke — an onomatopoeic secret handshake between mother and daughter. This playful phoneticism signals what lies within: the lyrical wrapped in the laughable. The prose carries the melodic touch of one who has danced with words before — Santosh Bakaya, after all, is a poet at heart.

Much like Erma Bombeck, whose *If Life is a Bowl of Cherries, What Am I Doing in the Pits?* brought motherhood into the literary limelight with humour and heart, Bakaya's stories mix domestic drama with deft comic relief. In one anecdote, Iha declares, “You can smile and smile and yet be a villain. Villainy thy name is mom” — a Shakespearean snipe, cheekily revised for the breakfast table. The Bard meets brat, and comedy ensues. In “Of Teddy Bears, Calories and Clouds”, a teenager's deflection becomes a philosophical quip: “I was looking at the mirror, not in the mirror.” It evokes the introspective spirit of Virginia Woolf but is anchored

in hormonal angst and cotton-candy rebellion. When Iha protests, "Don't browbeat me with your knowledge," she voices a universal teenage lament — the desperate need to be seen, not sermonized. Like Sudha Murty, especially in her collection *Three Thousand Stitches*, Bakaya celebrates the extraordinariness of the ordinary. In "Want You to Have a Good Time", Iha orchestrates her mother's birthday with colour-coded kurtas and culinary delight — an act of love that mirrors Murty's belief that "compassion is not taught in schools; it's taught at home."

Another delightfully personified moment comes in *Love Never Dies — The Pizza*, where food turns feisty. "The pizza bit me back," Iha declares, licking a singed lip. It's culinary slapstick, yes — but also symbolic of love's bite: warm, sudden, unforgettable. The humour here is never slapstick for its own sake. It's a prism through which parental love refracts.

INCORRIGIBLE is perhaps Bakaya at her most Wodehousian. She can be found quipping -INCORRIGIBLE must be turning its head, in response to a daughter's sass, turning a vocabulary lesson into a comic opera. The word seems to don a monocle and protest from a dusty Oxford tome. Wodehouse once said, "To find oneself no longer a subject for conversation is a tragic fate." Bakaya ensures words never suffer that fate. In "The Flurry About Egg Curry", the poetic clash of "yummy and yukky, yolks and folks" spirals into a minor epic. Domestic negotiations become delicious dialectics. Bakaya excels in such oxymoronic juxtapositions: the comic undercuts the crisis, the trivial becomes tender. With "Oh, the Horrel of It!", she captures a moment of linguistic misfire — Iha's mispronunciation of "horror" becomes "horrel" — but it's more than cute diction. It's childhood defiance, dramatic flair, and droll delivery rolled into one. One is reminded of Roald Dahl's *Matilda* or *Sophie from the BFG*, who weaponize words with innocence and insolence.

"Come Listen to Me" takes a more contemplative turn. Iha's engagement with Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream becomes a mirror of awakening — not just social, but personal. "If he could dream that dream, why can't I?" she asks. It's not just rhetoric; it's resolve. The anecdote pulses with Maya Angelou's spirit — the belief that "We may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated." "The Inside Story", featuring Iha's first tattoo — a triangle symbolizing their family — unfolds as a tender tale of generational negotiation. The mother's apprehension dissolves into admiration. What begins as "a rash decision" ends as a "permanent mark of us." Here, Bakaya does what the finest memoirists do: reveals transformation not through epiphany, but through quiet acceptance. Bakaya's gentle jabs at digital vanity in "Selfie versus Self-Introspection" are reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's social commentary, albeit with a softer lilt. "I was caught with a grain of rice on my tooth, mid-selfie," she writes, mirroring Wilde's quip: "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances." Here, appearances are judged — but with affection, not arrogance.

In "Why Are You Teaching Her Urdu?", linguistic pluralism finds a poetic champion. As ghazals echo and Gulzar's lyrics colour the backdrop, language is not a barrier but a bridge. The spirit of R.K. Narayan, whose *Malgudi Days* showed the local as universal, wafts through this piece. Cultural rootedness here is never rigid; it's fluid, fragrant, and musical. In "Neither More Nor Less" and "Attention Class", Bakaya lends dignity to childish logic. Words like "shopners" (for sharpeners) are not errors — they're windows into a nascent world. The tyrannical *Gandi Madam* looms large, but not for long. The decision to pull Iha out of that toxic class is both protest and protection — the fiercest acts of love often look like quiet exits.

In “Yummy Mummy, Anything for a Hungry Tummy”, the generational axis tilts — Iha now nurses her mother. “Chill, bro!” she says, wrapping warmth in teenage slang. These moments are deeply reminiscent of Jhumpa Lahiri, who writes in *Unaccustomed Earth*, “The best journeys are the ones that answer questions you didn’t think to ask.” Bakaya’s anecdotes are not about answers; they are about evolving questions. From “You Are Incurable, Mom” to “The Squirrel”, from “I Am Jiggered” to “Minor Wars and the Corollary”, language transforms into heirloom. “Swatchescoollp” and “Whoopsy Splunkers” aren’t just made-up words — they are family myths, private shibboleths. Bakaya’s brilliance lies in transforming private jokes into public joy. “The Travails of Being an Adult” and “Cut, Cut, Cut” peel back adulthood’s glitter to reveal its grit. Iha’s grown-up decisions reflect maturity, yet her bond with her mother remains unsevered. In “A Mother’s Tremors”, as earthquakes ripple across geography and heartlines, the metaphor solidifies: maternal love is the Richter scale of the soul- Immeasurable!

The Last Word: A Tapestry of Tenderness

Santosh Bakaya’s *Din about Chins* is a literary embroidery — every anecdote a stitch, every pun a knot, every sigh a silken thread. Her diction dances with figurative finesse — personifications, oxymorons, puns, paradoxes — all woven into an idiom at once Indian and intimate. This collection sits on the shelf beside works like Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* — stories that celebrate the soft power of domesticity. But unlike many who romanticize motherhood, Bakaya illuminates its comedy, its contradictions, and its contagious affection. In a world rushing toward the sensational, *Din about Chins* invites us to pause, to savour the small: a daughter’s mispronunciation, a misplaced lunchbox, a mother’s bemused smile. These are not just anecdotes; they are lullabies of legacy.

In these pages, humour hugs pathos,
Wit waltzes with wisdom,
And every anecdote becomes a lullaby, whispered from one generation to the next.
Santosh Bakaya, like a bard with a poised pen,
Strings together stories that do not merely entertain —
They echo, endure, and endear.

Reviewer’s Details:

Dr. Ritu Kamra Kumar, Retd. Officiating Principal and Associate Professor of English at MLN College, Yamuna Nagar, is an accomplished writer, poet, and academician. With over 500 published articles, poems, and middles in leading national newspapers and magazines, she has also authored eight acclaimed books across poetry, essays, and fiction. Over 75 of her research papers appear in reputed national and international journals. A frequent resource person and panelist at national literary forums, including the 2024 Delhi Book Fair, she has conducted numerous creative writing workshops. Twice recipient of the Indian Woman Achiever Award (Asian Literary Society), she has been featured by *The Hindustan Times*, *The Tribune*, and *The Times of India*. Honoured by the District Administration (2023) and recognized internationally by Poetry Planet (Philippines), Dr. Kumar continues to inspire through her multifaceted literary contributions and scholarly achievements.