

## THE DIFFERENT NORMALS

By Frederika Menezes

Oh, when you see me  
What do you see...  
A broken winged  
Featherless bird  
Trapped where it is ?

And what crosses  
Your mind  
When you hear my  
Unsteady voice  
Speak...  
Do you try to understand  
My say  
Or simply shake your head  
Waving it away?

When I cross your path  
Unseeing  
Uncomprehending  
Hard of hearing...  
What is your reaction then  
Is it pity or indifference ?

And last but not the least  
When you read  
These lines  
Do you think to yourself and say  
"Oh, this cannot be  
From a hand  
That's unsteady,  
From a mind belonging  
To one of those  
Who aren't ' Normal' like me !"

If that is so  
You know nothing of  
What you need  
To know  
About the different normals  
That make up the world...!

Find out:

1. Mention the names of institutions in the state of Goa that you know of that enhance the development of the skills of special children.
  2. What should be the outlook of people towards special children?
  3. List different ways in which special children are gifted.
  4. The Paralympics and the performance of Indian players .
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1. What do you infer from the title 'The Different Normals'?
  2. What imagery does the poet use in the first verse?
  3. What does the poet say in verse iv to emphasize the sameness of special children and 'normals'?
  4. In the last verse, how does the poet use her anguish to awaken the consciousness of 'normals'?
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\_\_\_\_NOTES\_\_\_\_

The poem is autobiographical in nature.

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## THE LEGACY OF LOVE

Laxmanrao Sardesai

It had just struck midday when my daughter informed me that Shivram had called and desired to see me. I hastened to the lounge.

Indeed, it was Shivram, and at the very sight of him my heart went out to him. He appeared weary and his countenance reflected harrowing distress, akin to that of a motherless child, but his clear and unfathomable eyes radiated spiritual strength.

"I have just come from Collem," he said simply and softly.

"Indeed, I presume then that you have seen my estate."

"Oh, yes, and I have been so happy since then."

"How so? Until now nobody had anything good to say about it ..... only that it is barren and ungrateful. "

"Alas, for the cruelty of men. The earth is never ungrateful, and your land is a honeycomb...it has no equal in the entire Taluka."

"You amaze me. Would it interest you to know that many have refused to have anything to do with it .... and still others gave it up as a thankless task? Of all men, you feel attracted to my land. Parched land. How I wish to see its sods turning."

"If you permit, I shall till it with these hands of mine," he whispered.

"You, at this age? Do you realize the difficulties?"

Pain showed on his face, but he went on, in a plaintive voice: "My shoulders, it is true, already bear the weight of more than sixty years and my head is now grey, but I still possess the vigour of youth.... and an unconquerable will". Noticing disbelief in my eyes he hastened to explain.

"My entire life has been spent in the closest contact with Mother Earth and I am hopeful that, in less than a year, I shall turn your fallow land into a blossoming garden. I would be grateful if you would come with me to your estate today."

"I will, most willingly. You have aroused my interest."

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Within half an hour we were bound for Collem. The train rumbled through golden paddy fields, crossed swelling streams, fringed with coconut groves and climbed hills covered with lush vegetation. Now and then we could see in the offing the seashore, only to lose sight of it at the next turn.

And all through the journey Shivram went on talking in this soft tone, only pausing, to take deep inhalations of snuff which he carried in a pouch.

“What is your occupation?” I asked, to begin some conversation, and he seemed to be taken aback, but went on slowly.

“My ancestors have always been attached to the soil, and from my tender years, I felt likewise the irresistible call of Mother Earth. I could at that age, tell exactly how many banana and areca nut trees our farm had. I could tell how many bananas there were in each bunch. In short, I was an inseparable part and parcel of our land.

“My mother warned me to become a Pandit. I sought neither wealth nor glory nor fame, I was wholly engrossed in my land. How wonderful it was! The water rushing in torrents from the mountains filled the canals, meandering through the farm land. From any end I could count the banana trees, the areca nut palms and the fruit trees planted in rows.

“As I grew up my parents insisted that I should take a wife, but how could I having completely identified myself with the trees, offering myself wholly to the farm –my only love, perfect and disinterested? It was not the prospect of a good yield that tied me to the land. If I watered it with the sweat of my brow, it was because it sustained me. Far from it life for me would be meaningless without devoting it to my land. Fully occupied with the numberless chores of the farm, I was oblivious to the world. The farm was my world...it was my life.

“Perhaps you think me insane for loving the land as none else. Well, love is returned in the same measure as it is given. The trees spoke to me and I understood their moods, their fortunes and misfortunes.

“Are you sure that animals do not speak to us? Are we really convinced that children cannot express themselves to us? They speak indeed. When our heart goes out to them they understand. How do children live and grow up? From what do they derive their vitality, their life blood? Not from food and clothing surely. The mother will tell you that it is her love that nurtures them. She knows.”

“It is the same with land. Our love and care are far more powerful than the best fertilizers. Tend a plant daily; water it with your love and you shall see it blossoming and at the same time you experience strange feelings of exhilaration. You grow from strength to strength and your ambit of happiness widens.

Shivram continued.

“I lost my father...and then my mother. Up to the age of twenty-eight the thought of marriage had not entered my mind. One day I fell ill. I could not bear the thought of my land being left uncared for. Moreover, what would become of my areca nut palms in case I died? Marriage was the only solution.... my wife and children would live and grow up in an atmosphere of love and devotion to the land. If I could not leave behind me worldly possessions at the end of my days I might atleast leave them, as legacy, this unending love. Did not my ancestors do the same? Indeed, they toiled on this land for centuries. They passed away, yes; but the land they bequeathed to me is eternal. Is it not therefore right for me to pass on this legacy to my children?

“So I took a wife, and eventually my home echoed with the joyful peals of laughter of new beings. Life crowded me with bliss, and my land with greater bliss still. My land was reputed to be the most rewarding in the whole of Goa. My farm was the symbol of kindness and generosity of our country.”

“ Days passed on blissfully, until I reached the age of sixty. They might be sixty days. One day an official called on me bearing evil tidings. The land no longer belonged to me. I appealed to the Court of Law, but to no avail...My soul seemed to have departed from my body. Life without my land was impossible. My wife and children left the farm, but I could not tear myself away, and wandered aimlessly for three days and three nights amongst my trees like a madman. On the fourth day, however, forced to leave, I clung to my trees in farewell embrace and wept.”

“In my despair, I rambled through the country-side in quest of a new plot of land, and I found it in Collem. My heart seemed to burst with joy at the sight of this black soil which begged me for help.”

“I felt drawn irresistibly towards it. I held a handful of soil and rubbed it between my fingers; I inhaled deeply its scent, and fell into a reverie.”

“I was again in communion with the land. Everything seemed to have wafted away – my troubles, my old age. I felt the strong call of this land which hankered for human caresses. It was an answer to my prayers. I longed to create in this thirsty and arid land a new kingdom where flowers might blossom and fruits ripen. I longed to quench the thirst of its wrinkled furrows and invite the birds to build their nests there. I could already visualize a tiny paradise....”

Shivram was still talking when the train stopped at Collem. We alighted and proceeded to my estate. The desolate condition of the land filled me with distress. But my companion was as excited as a small child at the sight of a new toy.

“Can it be that he is not in his right mind after all,” I wondered. I could not help laughing at his antics. How could he turn this rocky soil into an orchard?

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Three years elapsed, and my own affairs kept me very busy, though at times I had a desire to see my estate again. Every year Shivram called on me with the rent, and renewed his request that I should see the farm.

In the fourth year, however, I noticed a great change in him. On handing over the rent he entreated; “Sir, I pray you see your land at least this once. I admit, I do no longer feel the same. My task has completely sapped my strength. I can already hear the call of Death.”

His words made a deep impression on me, and on the spur of the moment, I decided to leave everything aside and accompany him.

A few hours journey found us again in Collem. On going down a hill, I noticed that my companion was eager to show me his achievement. On seeing us, Shivram’s wife and four sons hastened to meet us, their faces reflecting the same unstinted joy, and their eyes, the same love for the land.

“Shall we go round the farm? ---invited Shivram, and continued: “It would be difficult to assess the efforts which the farming of this land has cost me. There was neither water nor a roof to shelter us you know. Water and labour are the life blood to land. “When

I dug the first canals in this hard soil, my joy knew no bounds at the sight of the soil drinking deeply of the first gushing torrents.”

As he talked, we entered the banana plantation, and were immediately sheltered by a vast canopy of green, made up of long leaves of hundreds of trees, standing in long unending lines.

Time seemed to stand still, while we wandered through every acre of the farm, stopping at every spring and at every green tree with luscious fruits. I ate bananas and other fruits which Shivram picked on the way and offered me. But more than anything else I was so spellbound by his eloquence, tinged by his passionate love for the land, that I forgot we had been talking for two hours.

When I finally decided to depart, Shivram saw me off at the fence which enclosed the farm. My heart went out to him full of gratitude and admiration, on taking leave of him. This simple being, so ignorant and ignored, so oblivious to learning and to world glories had created a world. He had settled his debt with Mother Earth.

A few days later I received a telegram summoning me to Collem.

As I approached my estate, I could discern a pall of smoke ascending the skies. I ran like a man possessed. Soon I was to know that my beloved Shivram was no more.

The fire had already consumed his mortal remains. I fell down upon my knees, under the strain of an emotion which could not be denied an outlet. I walked slowly to the house, shrouded in silence. The entire household was bathed in tears of sorrow, and I felt so small before their grief, that I could hardly speak.

“From this day,” I said falteringly, “this land is yours, my children. It is a legacy of the great soul that tilled it, made it fertile, and died for it. Keep it, my children; treasure this legacy---the legacy of love for the land.”

The smoke soared higher and higher, spreading through the skies, the sublime message of Shivram.

### Reading with Insight

- 1.The narrator describes his land as “barren and ungrateful” but for Shivram it was a “honeycomb”. Which view do you agree with and why?
- 2.What made the writer doubt the condition of the mental health of Shivram?
3. Does the story remind you of any contemporary issue faced by the people of Goa? Elucidate .
- 4.Shivram’s aspiration was to till the land that he loved. After reading about his experience do you agree that the common man can live up to his personal aspirations?

