

Don't Call Me Goobe

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ಸಮಾಪ್ತಿ

Introduction

In the sodden heart of Motihari, Bihar, where the monsoon rains turned the world a uniform, defeated brown, Chunmun Singh dreamed in Technicolor. At 25, his reality was the smell of damp earth and decay, the relentless drumming sound of rain on the tin roof of his family's hut—a sound that was less a lullaby and more a countdown to disaster. He knew the Gandak River not as a life-giving force, but as a vengeful serpent, its murky, silt-choked waters swelling each year to swallow the vibrant green of the rice paddies whole. The aftermath was a landscape of muted grays and browns, leaving families mired in a silence broken only by the whispers of debt to moneylenders, men whose smiles never reached their eyes.

His father, a man whose skin was as cracked and weathered as their parched fields in the dry season, would stare at the lapping water from their doorstep. The only light in their evenings came from a single, flickering kerosene lamp that cast long, dancing shadows on the mud walls, making the small room feel like a cage. In that dim, smoky light, the village elders would speak of Bengaluru. The name itself sounded like a promise, a bright, ringing bell in the suffocating humidity. They called it the Silicon Valley of India, a city of lights, where even the hum of electricity was constant. Their stories were painted in hues of hope: remittances arriving like bursts of sunshine, crisp new rupees that smelled of possibility, keeping roofs from leaking and the hearth fire burning.

Chunmun had listened, his imagination ignited. He pictured skyscrapers of gleaming silver and blue, their tops piercing a sky unclouded by monsoon gloom. He imagined the chime of a text message confirming a salary credit, a sound more beautiful than any temple bell. He knew the stories had a dark underbelly;

whispers of exploitation filtered back like the smell of something burning on the wind. Bihari migrants, they said, toiled under a sun that bleached the very color from the sky or under the sterile, white glare of fluorescent factory lights, their 12-hour shifts a blur of sweat and exhaustion. They sent home packets of cash to combat the floods, but they lived with the constant threat of unpaid wages and a vulnerability that made them easy prey.

Yet, hope was a more potent drug than fear. In the sweltering summer of June, with a battered tin trunk that held two changes of clothes and his mother's blessings, Chunmun boarded a train from Patna. The journey was a cacophony of screeching wheels, the rhythmic clatter of the tracks a mantra of *chalo-chalo-chalo*, and the intermingled scents of countless bodies, spicy lunches, and sweet, milky chai.

Arriving at Majestic Bus Stand was a full-blown sensory assault. The air, thick with the acrid black smoke of bus exhaust, was somehow also laced with the intoxicatingly sweet fragrance of jasmine garlands and the savory, spicy aroma of hot dosas sizzling on a griddle. The city's pulse was a deafening roar: a thousand horns blaring in a discordant symphony, vendors shouting their wares in a dozen languages, and the ceaseless shuffling of a million feet. Colors exploded everywhere—the brilliant saffron of a woman's sari, the gaudy pink and green of a movie poster, the iconic, bold red of a BMTC bus. This was Bengaluru, a linguistic cyclone where Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi swirled together in a chaotic, vibrant dance. But beneath the glittering surface, Chunmun could already feel a low, simmering hum of tension, the forgotten chai on the stove, ready to boil over. His 30 days in this city would become a satirical odyssey, a darkly comic opera where each note was a

bruise, and every act was a lesson learned too late. Kannada translation has been provided at the end of the book.

Chapter 1: Aarush the Bus Conductor – The Arrival Altercation

The red BMTC bus groaned to a halt, its brakes hissing like an angry cobra. For Chunmun, standing amidst the maelstrom of Majestic, it was a beacon. He couldn't read the swirling Kannada script on its destination board, a beautiful but alien calligraphy that looked like tangled jasmine vines, but the number '335E' was a universal language he understood. He pushed his way through a throng of people, the scent of sweat, dust, and cheap perfume thick in his nostrils. He clambered aboard, clutching a fistful of crumpled rupees, his heart thumping a nervous rhythm against his ribs.

The inside of the bus was a world bathed in a dusty, golden afternoon light filtering through grime-caked windows. It smelled of worn vinyl, coconut oil, and the faint, metallic tang of the handrails, polished smooth by a million hands. The air was heavy, stirred only by the creaking of the old fans on the ceiling. Chunmun found a sliver of space to stand, his tin trunk digging into his leg. The conductor, a burly man whose khaki uniform was stretched taut over a formidable belly, made his way down the aisle. His name tag read 'Aarush,' and his mustache, a magnificent black broom, seemed to twitch with impatience.

"Ticket! Ticket barli!" Aarush's voice was a gravelly roar that easily cut through the engine's rumble and the chatter of passengers. He stopped before Chunmun, his hand outstretched, a ticket machine clicking in his palm. Chunmun blinked, his mind still struggling to