

## Bosom Friend

By Hira Bansode

Today you came over to dinner for the first time  
 You not only came you forgot your caste and came  
 Usually women don't forget that tradition of inequality  
 But you came with a mind large as the sky to my pocket size house  
 I thought you had ripped all those caste things  
 You came bridging that chasm that divides us  
 Truly friend I was really happy  
 With the naïve devotion of Shabari I arranged the food on your plate  
 But the moment you looked at the plate your face changed

With a smirk you said Oh My – Do you serve chutny koshambir this way?  
 You still don't know how to serve food  
 Truly you folk will never improve.

I was ashamed really ashamed  
 My hand which had just touched the sky was knocked down I was silent  
 Toward the end of the meal you asked  
 What's this? Don't you serve buttermilk or yoghurt with the last course of rice?  
 Oh My Dear we can't do without that...  
 The last bit of my courage fell away like a falling star  
 I was sad then numb  
 But the next moment I came back to life

A stone dropped in the water stirs up things on the bottom

So my memories swam up in my mind  
 Dear Friend – You ask about buttermilk and yoghurt

What/How shall I tell you?

You know in my childhood we didn't even have milk for tea much less yoghurt or buttermilk  
 My mother cooked on sawdust she brought from the lumberyard wiping away the smoke  
 from her eyes

Every once in a while we might get garlic chutny on coarse bread  
 Otherwise we just ate bread crumbled in water  
 Dear Friend – Shrikhand was not even a word in our vocabulary

My nose had never smelled the fragrance of ghee

My tongue had never tasted halva basundi  
 Dear Friend – You have not discarded your tradition

Its roots go deep in your mind

And that's true true true

Friend – There's yoghurt on the last course of rice

Today the arrangement of food on your plate was not properly ordered

Are you going to tell me what mistakes I made?

Are you going to tell me my mistakes?

1. Comment on the irony (“a situation in which something which was intended to have a particular result has the opposite or a very different result”) in the title of the poem. Is the poet's friend truly a “bosom friend”? 5
2. Who is the friend referring to when she says “you folk”? 2
3. What sort of a childhood did the poet have? 5
4. What is the poet's tone in the last two lines of the poem? 2
5. How are the words “sky” and “star” used to describe both the poet's happiness and her sorrow? 2
6. Comment on the “tradition of inequality” the poet mentions. 4
7. Comment in the change of the poem's mood during the course of the poem. 5
8. Use any 5 words to write a **descriptive** paragraph:  
memories, lumberyard, sawdust, smoke, sky, house, mistakes 5
9. Write an expository essay analyzing the current status of caste-based discrimination in India. What can we do to change things? 10
10. Write a persuasive letter to the poet's friend, explaining to her the problems in her casteist point of view. 10