The Triumph in Defeat — Sudarshan (1896–1967)

English translation of Hindi original Hār kī Jīt हार की जीत *written by Sudarshan – A. Avtans, Leiden University (2026). (This translation tries to preserve the integrity of the Hindi text.)*

[Sudarshan, born Badrinath Sharma in 1896 in Sialkot (now in Pakistan), was a prominent writer who worked in both Hindi and Urdu. Known for his powerful storytelling, he is often placed alongside the renowned Hindi author Premchand. His works are marked by a strong sense of realism, reflecting social conditions while also promoting idealism and reform in Indian society. Sudarshan spent his later years in Mumbai, where he passed away in 1967. The story Hār kī Jīt was first published in the year 1920 in the Hindi literary magazine Saraswati.]

The joy that a mother feels on seeing her son, and a farmer on seeing his flourishing fields, that same joy Bābā Bhāratī felt on seeing his horse. Whatever time remained after *Bhagavad-bhajan,* it was devoted to the horse. The horse was very beautiful and very strong. There was no other horse like him in the whole region. Bābā Bhāratī called him "Sultān." He groomed him with his own hands, fed him grain himself, and felt happy simply looking at him.

He had renounced money, property, attachments, land, everything he had. So much so that he even felt out of place in the city. Now he lived outside the village in a small temple and spent his time in the *bhajan* (singing devotional song) of God. "I will not be able to live without Sultān," such a kind of delusion had taken hold of him. He was enchanted by the horse's gait. He would say, "He walks as if a peacock were dancing on seeing the rain-clouds." Until he mounted Sultān in the evening and rode eight or ten miles in a round, he felt no relief.

Khaḍagsĩh was the famous bandit of that region. People trembled on hearing his name. Gradually the fame of Sultān also reached his ears. His heart became restless to see him. One day at noon he came to Bābā Bhāratī, greeted him, and sat down. Bābā Bhāratī asked, "Khaḍagsĩh, how are things?"
Khaḍagsĩh bowed his head and replied, "By your grace."
"Tell me, how did you come here?"
"The desire to see Sultān drew me here."
"He is a strange creature. You will be delighted when you see him."
"I have also heard much praise of him."
"His gait will enchant your heart!"
"They say he is also very beautiful to look at."
"What can I say! Whoever sees him once has his image engraved upon his heart."
"I had long desired it. Today I have been able to come."
Bābā Bhāratī and Khaḍagsĩh went to the stable. Bābā showed the horse with pride. Khaḍagsĩh looked at it with astonishment. He had seen hundreds of horses, but never had such a splendid one passed before his eyes. He thought it was a matter of fortune. Such a horse ought to belong to Khaḍagsĩh. What use could such things be to a sadhu (ascetic)? For some time he stood silently in amazement. Then his heart began to pound. With the impatience of a child he said, "But Bābājī, what if I do not see his gait?"
The heart of Bābā Bhāratī grew eager to hear praise from someone else's mouth. He untied the horse and went outside. The horse began to run like the speed of the wind. Seeing his gait, a snake seemed to roll over Khaḍagsĩh's heart. He was a bandit, and whatever object pleased him he considered his own right. He had immense strength and men with him. As he departed he said, "Bābājī, I will not let this horse remain with you."
Bābā Bhāratī became frightened. Now he could not sleep at night. The whole night passed in guarding the stable. At every moment the fear of Khaḍagsĩh haunted him. But several months passed and he did not come. Eventually Bābā Bhāratī became somewhat careless and began to think of that fear as false, like nightmares.
It was evening. Bābā Bhāratī, mounted on Sultān's back, was going for a ride. There was a sparkle in his eyes and happiness upon his face at that time. Sometimes he looked at the horse's body, sometimes at its color, and in his heart he could hardly contain his delight. Suddenly a voice emerged from one corner, "O Bābā, listen to this poor man."
There was compassion in the voice. Bābā stopped the horse. He saw a disabled person lying under the shade of a tree, groaning. He said, "Why, what trouble do you have?"

The disabled person folded his hands and said, “Bābā, I am miserable. Have mercy on me. Rāmāvālā is three miles from here. I must go there. Lift me onto the horse. God will bless you.”
“Who is there for you?”
“You must have heard the name of Dugārdatt Vaidya. I am his step-brother.”
Bābā Bhāratī dismounted the horse, seated the disabled person upon it, and himself held the reins and began to walk slowly. Suddenly he felt a jerk, and the reins slipped from his hand. His astonishment knew no bounds when he saw that the disabled person was sitting upright on the horse’s back and was galloping away. From his mouth burst a cry mixed with fear, amazement, and despair. That disabled person was the bandit Khaḍagsĩh.
Bābā Bhāratī remained silent for some time. After a while, having made some resolve, he shouted with all his strength, “Stop a moment!”
Hearing this voice, Khaḍagsĩh stopped the horse and, stroking its neck affectionately, said, “Bābājī, I will not return this horse now.”
“But listen to one thing before you go.” Khaḍagsĩh halted.
Coming close, Bābā Bhāratī looked at him with such eyes as a goat looks at the butcher and said, “This horse has become yours. I will not ask you to give it back. But, Khaḍagsĩh, I make only one request. Do not refuse it, otherwise my heart will break.”
“Bābājī, command me. I am your servant. Only I will not give back the horse.”
“Do not speak of the horse now. I will say nothing about it. My only request is that you do not reveal this incident before anyone.”
Khaḍagsĩh’s mouth remained open in astonishment. He had thought he would have to flee from here with the horse, but Bābā Bhāratī himself had asked him not to reveal the incident to anyone. What purpose could be achieved by that? Khaḍagsĩh thought much, puzzled his mind greatly, but could understand nothing. At last he fixed his eyes upon Bābā Bhāratī’s face and asked, “Bābājī, what fear do you have in this?”
Hearing this, Bābā Bhāratī replied, “If people learn of this incident, they will stop trusting the poor and suffering.” Saying this, he turned his face away from Sultān as though he had never had any relation with him.
Bābā Bhāratī went away. But his words kept echoing in Khaḍagsĩh’s ears. He thought, what lofty ideas, what pure feeling! He loved this horse. His face blossomed like a flower on seeing it. He used to say, “I cannot live without it.” He had spent many nights without sleep guarding it. Instead of *bhajan-bhakti*, he kept watch. Yet today not even a line of sorrow appeared upon his face. He was concerned only that people might not stop trusting the poor and suffering. Such a man is not a man but a deity.

In the darkness of night, Khaḍagsĩh reached Bābā Bhāratī's temple. Silence lay everywhere. The stars twinkled in the sky. At some distance the dogs of the villages were barking. No sound could be heard inside the temple. Khaḍagsĩh held Sultān's reins. Slowly he reached the gate of the stable. The gate lay open. At one time Bābā Bhāratī himself used to stand there on guard with a staff, but today he had no fear of theft or robbery.

Khaḍagsĩh went forward, tied Sultān in his place, and coming outside carefully closed the gate. At that moment tears of goodness were in his eyes.

The third watch (1 *pahar* = approx. 3 hours) of the night had passed. As soon as the fourth watch began, Bābā Bhāratī came out of his hut and bathed in cold water. After that, as if someone were walking in a dream, his feet moved toward the stable. But upon reaching the gate he realized his mistake. At the same time deep despair made his feet as heavy as if weighed down by many *mans (1 man* = 37.32 kg) of weight. He stopped there.

The horse recognized the sound of his master's footsteps and neighed loudly. Now Bābā Bhāratī, with astonishment and joy, ran inside and, embracing the neck of his beloved horse, began to weep as a father weeps on meeting a son long separated from him. Again and again he stroked its back. Again and again he patted its face. Then with satisfaction he said,

"Now no one will turn away from the poor and suffering."