

# JAGIRO

Five days, day after day,  
Jagiro at the ration shop  
Hoped for five litres of kerosene...  
Now, in the long, long queue  
She stands, bowed, bent,  
As if that strength  
Pitted lifelong against this wild wolf of a world  
Is at last spent.

Her glance does not measure the queue  
Her smoke-filled eyes see  
A stove burning,  
A rice vessel bubbling...

The older one shrieks  
“Again, that wretched boiled rice?  
Today, I’ll have dal with rice  
Or else I’m not going to school.”  
“You with your daily complaints”, says Jagiro,  
“You’ll jolly well eat what’s cooked in the house—  
Oh yes, I’ll make spiced rice for you, fine sir,  
Fry your dal in butter!  
Why don’t you ever say a word to your father,  
Why do you have to keep tearing at me?”

Jagiro looks around,  
Hiding her face, wipes her eyes.  
‘Tearing’ is no mere word to Jagiro  
— The felt truth of her story,  
Deepest wound of her life,  
Inflicted by all, wolf and rabbit  
And in her heart hidden —  
Hidden from even the hut’s ragged walls.

Yes, even now it’s not her sorrows she’s thinking of  
Her smoke-filled eyes see  
A stove burning,  
A rice vessel bubbling...

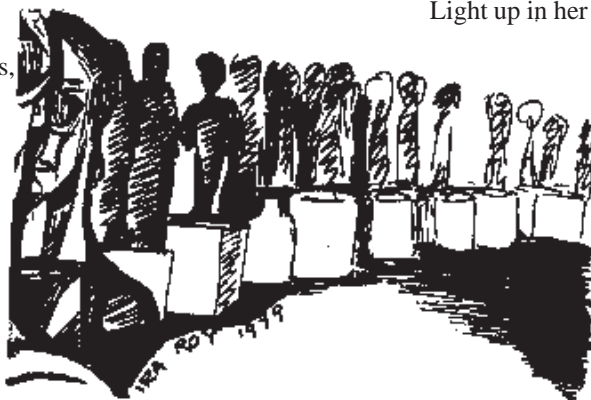
And the child’s father simmers,  
Grates out curses:

“That old cat somewhere  
Searching for scraps —  
Whore — must be busy mucking around,  
Casting eyes at some devil  
Today, I’ll muck *her* up,  
Break every bone in her body,  
Tear out her flesh and devour it...”

A shudder ignites her body  
The stove flares up, dies down  
It too is growing old  
All its parts worn out,  
But still she keeps lighting it,  
Cooking for a wolf and four rabbits  
And the wolf keeps growling,  
Scaring the rabbits,  
Tearing out her flesh,  
Devouring it...

The queue slides on, tin by tin  
But Jagiro stands still,  
Today she will not return home,  
Today she will not light the stove—

Sudden stir in the crowd  
A little girl crying  
Someone has stolen her tin,  
Beaten up her brother—  
And he’s disappeared.  
Jagiro picks up the little girl,  
Holds her close, strokes her cheeks  
“Listen, small Jagiro, your sorrows are small,  
Big Jagiro’s sorrows are big, very big.”  
The child’s eyes begin to shine through her tears  
As Jagiro’s strong hands  
Push the tin forward in line  
And all at once, many stoves  
Light up in her eyes.



**Kumar Vikal**  
*Translated from Hindi*