

Train Full of Grapes



Harish Malhotra

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In 1955, when I was in the seventh grade, we lived in a town called Aligarh. It was a major town of Uttar Pradesh, seat of Aligarh Muslim University.

As I would step into the bazaar from my home, I would immediately see hawkers with their carts full of fruits. Most of them were selling bananas and guavas. They were the poor man's fruit because people could afford them. Bananas sold for six annas (one rupee = 16 annas) per dozen while guavas sold for four annas per *ser* (an old measure of weight, about 0.6 kg).

As I walked to school, I would pass through Sabzi Mandi, the wholesale market for vegetables. I would see lots of carts loaded with bananas and guavas. When I was early, I would see a fruit vendor on the side of the road who had more exotic fruits like grapes, large *bers*, *cheekus*, *ananas*, *anar*, *tarbooz*, *jamun*, *falsa*, and *litchi*.

Grapes were out of reach of the common man. They were very expensive, selling for about 12 annas per *ser*. That was a lot of money then. My daily pocket spending money was one anna. We had grapes in our home once in a while, and limited amounts compared to bananas, oranges and guavas, which we had in plenty.

Eating grapes seemed like a dream. I remember seeing scenes in a movie, [Halaku](#), where the *badshah* is sitting in a half-lying position with a big *takia* pillow. A dancer comes, picks up a bunch of grapes, and very sensually touches the lips and face of the badshah. He tries to catch the dancer, who runs to the floor and continues to dance sensually. The badshah continues to hold the bunch of grapes, inviting the dancer to come closer. Grapes had such an attraction that they could make a dancer come back to the badshah. Wow!

I'm sure there were thousands of poor people in Aligarh who had never tasted grapes in their lifetime. The hawkers would show their beautiful bunches of silky pale green grapes, and sing praises about how delicious they were:

ले लो अंगूर,
चमन के अंगूर,
बादशाहों के अंगूर।

चमन के खजाने
आओ बारह आने,
चमन के अंगूर।

आओ हजूर
चमन के अंगूर
खाओ हजूर।

In spite of the songs there were hardly any customers around the रेड़ी *redi* (cart) selling the grapes.

One day, as I was walking on my way home, I saw some carts loaded with grapes that were surrounded by many buyers.

Did you hear me?

Loaded with grapes!

Really loaded!

As I walked to school the following day, I saw multiple carts loaded with grapes. The wholesale vegetable market had tens of *redis* piled high with grapes. There were grapes all around.

By now, I was wondering, “What the hell is happening?” I asked a man who was eating grapes, “What is going on?”

The man finished chewing and swallowing that luscious mouthful he had in his mouth. In a dreamy voice, he said, “An amazing thing happened. Grapes are selling for two anna per ser. It is almost like ‘free.’ They are cheaper than guavas and bananas.”

I couldn't believe it. How could it be? *Angoor*, the fruit of the badshah, the one from *chaman*, the one from Pakistan and Afghanistan for two annas per ser!

News travelled swiftly. A railway bridge had broken due to floodwaters. A train from the Pakistan bound for New Delhi was stranded in Aligarh. Nobody knew how long it would take for the bridge to be fixed. Grapes coming from Pakistan and Afghanistan were unloaded in Aligarh to avoid spoilage. Grapes would have spoiled quickly in the absence of air condition and refrigeration units, which were not available in those days. So, the grapes were sold to local wholesalers for paisas per ser.

Grapes flooded the streets. People had a grand time buying and eating them. This was a blessed time in Aligarh, when the poorest of the poor were able to eat this expensive fruit.

I saw people in tattered clothes, holding a piece of newspaper with a few grapes on it. They would put the grapes in their mouths savouring the *badshahi mewa*. How the little angels, angours, slipped on the tongue, and then the gentle crunch by the teeth made them burst out with

that heavenly sweet juice. It stayed for few seconds in the mouth, and then gently went down the throat, leaving a lasting memory of that चमन का मेवा (fruit from the flower garden).

Today, I can say that once upon a sweet, sweet time, the unreachable fruit had been made affordable by the damaged railway bridge. How easily fate could twist a train to shower its good graces to the poor.

In two days' time, all the grapes were gone.

The memory of the flash flood of grapes on the streets lingers in me till today.

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Sample metaphor from Dr. Malhotra's book *Metaphors of Healing*

Get Out of Your Own Way

You wanted to leave; someone stopped you. They would not let you go forwards. How frustrating that was? Finally, this person had to get out of the way and you were able to start your journey.

That person who held you back could be you.

Do you recognize that you have stood in your own way? Moreover, if you could get out of your own way you could get on with your life. Have you noticed that you discourage yourself from doing something positive? You blame yourself for taking an action, and you frighten yourself when it comes to the future.

You stand there without wanting to start any journey because of your fear of what might happen. Get out of your own way and move on with your life.

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