

# **The Hidden Tears Behind The Water**



**The Hidden Tears Behind  
The Water  
Raviangelo Paragh**

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# Chapter 1

## Hamaara gaanv-Our village

Arjun sat with his mother Vanhi and little brother Harsh in his tiny hut in the Sunda Chainpura village of Kishanganj, India. He was playing rock-paper-scissors with Harsh. Harsh's lips were sticking out determinedly as he concentrated on the game. They both hit their palms at the same time, chanting, then discovered their signs with a grin, "Shoot!"

Arjun had rock, and Harsh had scissors. His little brother pouted, "Arjun, you won again! What's your tactic? Why do you always win against me?"

Arjun laughed and looked into Harsh's wide hazel eyes.

"I always win because I'm your big brother. Don't worry." He smiled at his little brother's glare. "It's not like you'll ever win against me anyways!"

Vanhi nudged Arjun's shoulder, giving him a 'play nice' look.

"Don't be so mean to your little brother, Arjun. He's still eleven years old, and you're already thirteen. As the eldest man of the house, you should be more mature."

Arjun stopped laughing. Yes, his dad was gone and it was now his responsibility to care for the family, but he didn't like being reminded of it. He was still a kid after all.

Harsh smiled at him when he noticed his silence and Arjun felt the corners of his lips tug upwards just watching him. He didn't mind caring for the family as long as his little brother was there. Vanhi looked at her sons and felt proud to have raised such good boys, yet she knew they couldn't continue to stay young forever. Their water supply was going to run out soon again. She had to send the boys to the lake immediately or risk having no water. When Vanhi swallowed, she felt the dryness in her throat. She licked her cracked lips looking down into her cup. There was no more water.

She tipped the cup on her lips and the last drop of water trickled down onto her tongue.

She looked at Arjun and gently caressed his mud-stained face.

“Arjun, can you please walk to the lake and get us some water for dinner tonight? I’m very thirsty, and it’s very important that we stay hydrated, especially in this warm weather. Please take Harsh with you,” Vanhi murmured.

Arjun and Harsh looked at each other and nodded. The boys stopped playing rock-paper-scissors and took their two buckets which they usually fill with water on their journey.

Arjun and Harsh began walking towards the lake which was ten kilometres away from their home. Every morning, they would fill their two buckets with lake-water, the one source of water which the village could get.

“Why do we always have to walk so far Arjun? This muddy water only makes ma sicker.”

Arjun looked towards Harsh. His large brown eyes squinted as he struggled to give his little brother an answer.

“Harsh, it may be dirty, but we can’t live without it. The reason why it’s dirty is that there is a lot of untreated sewage in our lake. Another reason is also that big grey factory with a lot of yellow flashing lights, widely opened windows and chimney having its waste products pollute our lake. Our only source of water...”

Once they started to approach their lake, the stench of cattle-excrements and moist earth welcomed them. The boys were used to the smell, or at least, tried to ignore it. Arjun turned a sideways glance at his little brother. Harsh’s face was flushed as he let out a ragged breath, sweat dripping down his forehead and exhaustion clear on his face. Arjun knew that Harsh hated his pity so with a heavy sigh, he playfully kicked Harsh’s ankles. “Slow down soldier. You’re walking too fast!” Arjun said before he mockingly collapsed on the ground, sticking out his tongue. Harsh’s face loomed above his. “You’re such a wuss,” he laughed before laying down on the ground beside his brother.



Harsh laid down on the ground and could feel how exhausted his body was. He was bleary-eyed and felt sleep deprived. He felt as if all of his energy had been drained, he didn't want to move nor talk. All Harsh wanted was to do was lay down on the ground and fall asleep. All he wanted was to be a normal child, a child who didn't have to worry about dying because he drank dirty water. All he wanted was to be a child that could be careless and have as much fun as he desired.

After laying down for 10 minutes the brothers stood up. Arjun saw how Harsh was struggling to stand up, so he walked over to him and gave him a hand.

“You seriously don’t have to do that Arjun. I’m eleven. I’m pretty sure I can take care of myself.”

Arjun contemplated. Harsh’s comment put him to thinking. He didn’t know how to respond to his comment so instead, he was reticent about it and only nodded.

Arjun and Harsh took their empty red buckets and started filling it up with the water. As they took the water, they saw how the factory’s waste products were polluting their lake through the windows and the large chimney.

“I hate that factory! I wish it would disappear forever!” Harsh shouted out loud. He was breathing heavily as his sweat slowly dripped off his head. As the sweat fell to the ground, he became more and more incensed. His heart was pounding, and his face was red as he tried very hard to keep himself from losing his temper. Arjun stood next to Harsh and held his hand tightly. He told him that everything was going to be alright whilst being unsure about it himself.

After five minutes of Arjun comforting Harsh, they proceeded to get the water. The lake was rather shallow and consisted of a minimum supply of water. It looked dark brown and contaminated. Arjun and Harsh were used to this water since they always drank this type of water since childhood. When the brothers collected the

water, Harsh looked into his bucket filled with water. “The water today looks dirtier than normal, I don’t think any of us should drink this!” Harsh said ambivalently as he picked on his fingernails. Arjun looked at his little brother, and a wave of empathy washed over him, “Look Harsh, we have no choice. We need water to survive,” even as he said this, his tone was hesitant.

Harsh struggled to lift the bucket because it was very heavy, Harsh felt weak. His arms and body looked thin and his face was pale as he attempted to lift the bucket with his arms. Arjun saw his little brother struggle and felt sympathy for him. He walked over to him and helped him lift the heavy bucket filled with water. Arjun lifted his bucket too, and they both started walking back home. As they walked back home, they saw the other villagers from their village walk past them. The villagers stared at them and looked at their water covetously. The villagers were mostly skinny, short and had a dark brown skin colour. Whenever the brothers would pass, they always looked at them from top to bottom and stared at their water. “Why do they always stare at our water like that?” Harsh asked Arjun.

“We always get the water first Harsh, and at the end of the day, there is not a lot of water left for the villagers to drink. That's why they stare at us,” Arjun replied.

As they walked, Arjun could feel the tension. He could feel the villagers staring at them as they walked. Instead of creating a conflict, Arjun told Harsh to walk fast, and so they did. As the boys approached their hut, they could hear a beautiful voice in the distance. They could hear a beautifully soothing voice singing as if she was calling the angles to resemble.

“Wow! Is that ma again singing, Arjun?” Harsh asked with a huge smile on his face.

“I think so!” Arjun replied with excitement. He felt great pride when he heard his mum sing. Vanhi loved singing. She would sing whenever she was cooking or happy. She would also sing Arjun and Harsh’s favourite songs when they were having a bad day.

When they entered their hut, they saw that their mum sat on the floor and sang whilst making Arjun's favourite meal, Aloo paratha. Arjun's face enlightened because of the delightful smell of the aloo paratha. His eyes opened up as a smile appeared on his pale face. He was suddenly reminded of the past as he smiled. He saw his father in front of him, a rather unpleasant memory that he would like to forget but struggled with. He saw his father, Mr Bhatt happily making aloo parathas with his mum on the floor. He remembered how the two of them would always smile and sing songs together with great joy. He could still remember how Harsh and him would always join in. Arjun could still remember how happy their family used to be. Arjun frowned. His wide smile grew small as the sides of his lips curved down, and his face became pale again.

"What's wrong Arjun? Why are you so unhappy?" Harsh asked. "Mum's making your favourite food, aloo paratha!"

Arjun looked towards Harsh and said, "Nothing important Harsh. I had a disturbing memory of our father!"

Harsh looked at Arjun as his face fell with disappointment. He started stuttering and looked towards the ground. He picked on his nails as he became nervous. Harsh loved his father a lot. After his father left them, Harsh would always think of how their lives would have been if their father stayed. The boys tried to ignore the disturbing thought as their mother greeted them.

"Have you brought some water for tonight boys?" Vanhi asked in a slightly concerned tone.

"Yes mum, although I do have to say it looks rather dirty," replied Harsh in a tremulous tone.

Vanhi walked over to the boys and asked them to put down their buckets. With great relief, Arjun and Harsh dropped their buckets on the floor. Harsh's forehead was dripping with sweat as he tried to clean it with his mud-stained T-Shirt.

"Are you okay Harsh? I'm sorry that you have to walk so long every day to get water. It's not my fault that there isn't any other water source in our village that would mean that you wouldn't have to walk to the lake every day and get water," Vanhi said. She felt