

Chicken News

Malay : Consumer

Jhantu : Sanitary worker

Mantu : A vendor who is not aware

Bata : A vendor who has adopted safe practices.

Scene – 1

Sunday market. Teeming with noise and commotion. The vegetable vendors, fruit sellers and others are hawking their ware. In the corner chicken is being sold.....

A person enters. He is wearing a box of thermocol framing his face. A board is hanging on his mid-riff region. 'Jabar Khabar (Hot News) is written on the board. He is wearing a set of loosely fitted, uncouth coat and trousers of loud colour. The man starts talking simulating newsreaders in TV channels. He uses a dramatic tone and wears a stiff, fixed smile all along....

News Reader: Good morning Now it's the time for Jabar Khabar.... today's special headline is Elections is round the corner ...Voting will commence in April and will be held in five phases across the country. IPL is also scheduled to start at the same time. The home minister is worried about security and saying that two can not be held in parallel. Security of players is a concern after the recent incident at Pakistan where cricketers from Sri Lanka were attacked

(Malay) Buyer-1: *(looking at another)* What is IPL ?

Buyer-2: Indian Premier League – remember cricket matches played by players of different countries last year ?

News Reader: *(looking at them angrily)* News reading is a serious stuff.... I do not like to be interrupted in the middle by others.... If you are not quiet, I'll stop reading news.....

(People who have crowded around in the mean time, burst in to a roar)

Buyer – 3: *(Becoming irritated)* Nonsense..... If you want to gossip, go elsewhere.... Govinda always shares all the important news in our village... that's why I have come to the market place, otherwise I've to miss out his informative talks.

News Reader: No, no, Nagu uncle.... not Govinda.... I am, to be precise, the one and only *News Reporter* of this area.... Address me only as *Reporter*.... Disseminating information is my sole job.... News is the matter of my life and death.... I live on information only..... I want to help all the villagers, make easy access to the treasure trove of vital news.... do not disturb me, otherwise I'll stop reading news.

Buyer – 3: No, Govinda *(stopped... dropping the trail)*.... no, again I've made the same mistake.... *Reporter*, carry on with your news.....

News Reader: *(Changing modulation of his voice)* Sorry for the interruption.... we regret for the momentary network failure.....Recently there is news of Bird Flu at in the village of Sargampur, chicken are affected by Avian Influenza. Exposure to this virus may affect us too . So, those of you who sell chicken, bring them to the market, clean the market and all of you who *(smilingly)* love to eat chicken and egg, have to take precautions *(While adorning a typical smile of a newsreader)* Thank you. That's all for today's news. Next news will be cast at 7 PM in the evening at Mukundapur weekly market.

Malay: But Reporter ... I've never heard before anything like Avian Influenza Virus or Bird Flu.... I love chicken, I eat it almost every day. (smiling) My wife gets bored cooking chicken. Today she told me to buy eggs for making egg curry.

Reporter: So you can't decide which comes first ? Chicken or egg? (laughs) Order a tea for me Need a stimulant. Have been reading news in three places since morning...(then finishing off the tea, says) Well, hens, ducks and other birds get flu from the Avian Influenza virus.. The most important symptom is they die in large numbers.. Now if we humans come in contact with diseased or dead birds there is risk of exposure to this virus.... even coming into contact with mucus, saliva, droppings of such birds may affect a person.

Malay: Then, can't I eat chicken now?

Reporter: Well. There is no need to panic. .. Why do you draw such quick conclusions? There is risk if you eat insufficiently cooked poultry meat and eggs ... there is no risk if you cook your meat well or boil the eggs hard. Also, you just have to remember to take a few precautions while preparing and cooking poultry meat and eggs. First step, buy healthy and disease free chicken.

Malay: How do I ensure that?

Reporter: Trust me – *the Reporter* who knows. Go to Bata's shop. You will see the difference and know why you will not have to worry if you buy chicken there. Next step ,wash and cook carefully at home.

Malay: Cooking carefully, eh ...why am I cooking tiger meat that the forlorn tigress will pounce from behind?

Reporter: Okay - crack jokes if you want to. But I have learnt all this from Panchayat meeting. See, I go and talk to many people to collect news. When you clean and cut poultry, cover your nose and mouthdo not touch your mouth, nose or eyes while handling raw poultry. After handling eggs and poultry wash your hands thoroughly with soaps and water. Even after cleaning the residuals you've to do the same. Wash the knives, choppers and utensils that you use thoroughly with soap and water. If possible keep separate utensils for cooking chicken and egg.

Malay: I will tell my wife all this. As such she is very particular about hygiene. She is perennially washing and cleaning the house. Any way, thanks for telling me about Bird Flu. Let me now go and buy meat.

Scene – 2

(Jhantu and Mantu enter.... Their dress suggest that they earn their living from the market... Mantu is a poultry vendor... Jhantu is a sanitary worker... Jhantu is dressed up in funny looking Bermuda shorts and T-Shirt... has a big moustache... Mantu is dressed up with a long loin cloth and vest, with stale blood stains...)

Jhantu: Hello! My dear friend...how long will you put on the same vest... Got bored seeing those 'I love U's for a year ... you're married, as far as my knowledge goes,

almost for last eighteen years and how many more times would you utter the same 'I love you' ... Look the *Love* has a hole.

Mantu: What is left of love after 18 years of marriage? ... Life at large is a great void, the market is so dull... ... people are buying less chicken and eggs ... Small traders like us who collect birds from small poultry, cut them and sell ... our business is suffering loss.

Jhantu: Yes, I know that, it's because of Bird-flu... But have you seen Bata's shop – he is always doing good business.

Mantu : Wonder what makes him different. Last time there was an outbreak. So many birds died. Not his. He is always lucky...

Jhantu: Not luck - I know the reason. He was there in last week's market committee meeting. He was telling .. he does things so differently..

Mantu: Eh? Aren't we doing just what we are supposed to do? Look at me, I sell chicken . Spend hours in cutting and selling ... You sweep and clean the market... how can you do this differently ?

Jhantu: I will do things very differently from now on. Do you know that a meeting of market committee was held last week?

Mantu: Yes, I know ... as my son has been suffering from fever, I could not go...

Jhantu: In that meeting, Mr. Banerjee from Animal Husbandry office had come. He was telling how we – all of us - poultry vendors and slaughterers like you ...transporters sanitary workers like myself... all of us need to work together to prevent Bird Flu..

Mantu: This is always the case – these Government staff always passes the buck on the burdened shoulders of poor people like us and wash hands off their own responsibilities....

Jhantu: No, my dear friend, I too thought like you ... but now I understand better after attending the meeting Yes for our own safety we have to strictly follow some dos and don'ts... the officer said...

Mantu: (*With irritation...*) Come on my Mr. Know all... are you interested in candidacy in the next election.... I have no time for your lecture...

Jhantu: Boss, let me finish first.. Only then you do whatever you like...

Mantu: OK... carry on

Jhantu: (*Smiling – takes out a half mask and gloves*) Now I am using these when I clean poultry droppings and other waste to protect myself from exposure. I do burning or burying poultry droppings. Last time when there was Bird Flu and hens died, I used to handle the disease stricken chickens and the dead birds with my bare hands....You know I was putting myself at risk? I must wear gloves or at least plastic bags ... Also I have been told never to dump the dead birds any where

around... the birds have to be buried in pits so that animals can not reach them. All this will reduce the risk of spread of virus...

You see this (*pointing at his dress*). I have made this my 'Bazaar' dress. Before I go home, I wash hands well with soap and water, change clothes and footwear..That way I am safe and ensure others are safe too.

Mantu : And what about us vendors ?

Jhantu : Let us go to Bata's shop. You will see and learn , both.

Scene – 3

(*Bata is selling chicken. He is wearing gloves and half mask.. Malay enters.*)

Malay Bata , give me one kilo chicken. Will ask wife to cook chicken *korma* today.

Bata Don't worry. I only sell healthy and disease free birds. I get them from trusted and known sources.

Malay I love your shop. It looks clean.

Bata That's because I do not slaughter here. That way customers like you are not exposed to blood, feather and other parts. Besides, I regularly disinfect the cages and the place and wash the place with soap and water. (*notices Jhantu and Mantu who enter*). Hello folks? How are you doing ?

Mantu My business is so dull. You have so many customers. Thought of asking you the secret.

Bata No secret friend. Just a little change of habits. Last time when birds died, my business too had suffered. Then I learned to take a few precautions. So today my customers know that I will never sell sick birds. Also they can see how I take care to avoid spread of virus. I do not let my birds mingle with other birds in the market – that way they are safe. When I return home with unsold birds, I do not let them mix up with my home stock till at least two weeks. These gloves and masks are for my own protection. Last week Jhantu was at the meeting when Banerjee discussed all this. Why didn't you come ?

Mantu My son was not well. Jhantu was telling me about precautions sanitary workers have to take.

Bata We also have to take precautions. Never sell diseased chicken. When you slaughter kill the birds by dislocating their necks rather than cutting it off... then less blood will spill. Avoid slaughtering in public places. Clean with soap and water the knives and choppers you use to cut the birds and any thing which comes in contact. Before you go home, wash hands with soap and water, change your clothes and footwear..

Mantu: And so instead of my business.. I will spend the day in washing hands. Eh?

Bata: It's for your own good and every one else's. Exposure to virus may affect humans.

- Malay:** That's why I came to buy chicken from here. I heard that it is safe to buy chicken from him.
- Mantu:** But Bata , tell me one thing, what happens when we are affected by the virus?
- Jhantu:** I know. They discussed at the meeting. People then have high fever without remission....temperature more than 100° F along with coughing, sore throat, breathing problem...
- Mantu:** *(In a tense voice)* My son Pintoo is suffering from fever for last 7 days... with sore throat and breathing trouble....he is also coughing, ... but what you've said now makes me tense... I will take him to the doctor
- Jhantu:** Do it immediately... go to the doctor or health centre...
- Mantu:** Now I've to go.... Thank you Bata and Jhantu. You've done a good job by telling me all these things.... because of our fault the virus may spread in our locality... affecting all of us. What you've told right now makes me think all afresh... Gives me new hope. From tomorrow I will follow the precautions. I promise.
- Malay :** Good. Then I will buy from you too.
- Jhantu:** Do let me know how Pintoo is faring....

Scene – 4

(Informal meeting place for chatting out with each other in the village centre. Our News reader is getting ready to read out news)

- Reporter:** *(With intonation and modulation typical of news readers ... showing the same fixed smile)* Good evening, now it's time for news related only to villages of our region... head lines of the moment are... Tremendous success has been achieved by villagers of Charkasimpur. They are all proactive in preventing Bird Flu. Due to their support and collaboration, this uphill task has become an achievable reality now..... ... two persons have in a road accident at the village of Garshimpur.

(A commotion breaks out among the crowd gathered. One from the crowd cried out loudly)

- Malay:** We want to listen more about news related to Avian Influenza and nothing more on other issues and topics....*(looks at a person next to him and says)* See, I love to eat chicken.

- Reporter:** *(Looking angrily at the speaker)* Is it anarchy? Do I have to read only news you want to hear You've infringing on Journalist's freedom... go to hell. I'll not read news any more.... *(At once, he picks up a placard, on which it is written in bold letters "Sorry for the untimely interruption in this broadcasting" and he stands holding up the placard blatantly on the face of audience)*

- Malay:** What nonsense is going on...?

Jhantu: Let's go brothers to Nagu Uncle's place at Chanditala..... he knows more about this Avian Influenza business.....

Malay: Yes, let's go.....

Reporter: (*Noticing public sentiment, removes the board and begins*) Yes, that Nagu Uncle of Chanditala, he knows and understands nothing, news doesn't mean one or two cock and bull stories... but direct reflection of happenings..... Any way as you the public are demanding, I must return again to the same topic. All of you in the market have you noticed how everyone connected with selling, slaughtering and transporting poultry and also our sanitary workers are particular about hygiene and cleanliness?

Jhantu: (*looking at another*) Jitu, have you heard all that... It's true. You know even all the transporters who bring chicken, they all clean their cycle-vans , tyres, cages with soap and water. You will see everyone using gloves. We are burning all poultry waste at the end of the day.

(*Mantu enters*)
Hello Mantu ? Saw your son playing football.

Mantu : Yes thank God he is well. He had ordinary viral fever.

Reporter: I won't read news any more in this village...

Jitu: Why, my boy?

Reporter: You talk too much while I read the news... you do not concentrate and pay attention... I read news gratis, without demanding a single penny... I time to time demand only for some vegetables from your backyard garden... We survive on the income of my school teacher mother... Disseminating correct news amongst the fellow villagers is my sole pleasure...

Malay: I know this is your passion... you get pleasure in catering true news to fellow villagers...

Jitu: Had you not informed us how to fight out the virus of Avian Influenza, we would remain ignorant... we have been used to dump down the skin and feathers of birds to every where nonchalantly... we would have affected ourselves unknowingly by carrying out such practices... We would have eaten half boiled egg and chicken not very well cooked, we would not have washed our hands thoroughly with soap and all...

Malay: Do not stop your news reporting, my dear friend...

Reporter: OK then... if you're requesting me so earnestly, I will certainly continue my programme... HSSSS! There is an announcement, please listen, (*again with the tone and modulation typical of those to news readers*) If you hear about sudden death of a large number of birds, please inform the nearest veterinary hospital of Animal husbandry office. (*pause*) Due to special requests on behalf of the audience, tomorrow's program of news casting will be held as per schedule.

Jhantu: We promise you, we will not only listen to your news ... we will also follow your advice, as we did for combating Bird Flu ...(*looking around*) What do you think guys, shall we do so ?
(*Crowd in a loud tone*) Yes...Yes...

Reporter: (*Smiling*) Thanks. Glad to be of service. So Malay, shall I drop in tomorrow for lunch? Heard Bhavi cooks delicious chicken curry?

Every one laughs. Play ends with a song. People dance.