

Tanga - Poems from an
Indian village

Tanga

By Harry Jivenmukta

Tanga

A tanga is a horse and simple carriage that were common in India up until the end of the 1970s. When we went to India in 1969 we went from the village to town in a tanga. This is the story of the tanga owner.

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Sweeping

The most satisfying sound
To reach his ears.
The brush sweeping quickly
In regular no nonsense sweeps.
She is dedicated to him
By her strokes.
He could listen to her
Every morning at 4am
Forever.
The practicality of a woman
The dust of yesterday
That returns every day.
She is single minded
For the few square yards
That no dust will
Arrive uninvited.

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The splash of water

The splash of water

In the bucket

The slapping of cloth on stone

As she washes

Her husband's outfit

From yesterday.

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Cooking

The aroma of cooking
Of simple things.
Just flour and water
And a stuffing of
Cauliflower and potatoes
Left over from yesterday.
The few less mouthfuls
She ate, to leave
Enough for his breakfast
This morning.

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Breakfast

He stretches into
Wakefulness
And rises immediately,
Pats his pony
An old and faithful friend.
His breakfast is there
Simple but good
And creamy curd
To accompany searing chillies.
She sits cooking on the
Side
Her face veiled against
The smoke of the fire.

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Tea

As he drinks his tea
His pony sucks up
Water from the trough.
She noisily washes the
Plate and the tray,
Always efficient,
Never letting the grass grow
Under her feet.

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The Cart

His bones and flesh
Take up the familiar place
On the cart that
Will transport people,
Shopping and sacks for
The day.
He doesn't need to urge
His pony to walk.
They both know the
Routine
By heart.
If he wasn't there
The pony probably
wouldn't notice.

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A Side of Time

Baskets of cauliflowers
To go to the market
So that the women can
cook them into tasty food,
And breakfast with the
Leftovers for the next day.
Clogging along in a
Side of time.
Not like the taxis
And trucks.
The pony plods along
In a different time
And place.

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Old bones

The heat of every day
That sucks the moisture
Out of his body.

He stops by the stream
And drinks with his
Hands

And the pony drinks
For relief.

Scabby skin and dried
Out old bones
Both of them.

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Silence of the Heat

She works away
Silently and veiled
From the occasional
Stare
Of a passing peasant.
She keeps the gate open
So that her world
Is expanded
Out of the confines
Of the yard.
A tinkle of a giggle on
The breeze.
A distant call of a
Tradesman.
The silence of the heat.

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Banquet

Smoke gets into her eyes
Through the veil of her
Scarf.

She scoops and mixes
Caresses and pounds
The ingredients,
Poor people's ingredients,
That will energise his
Muscles.

The pony, like her
Dreams of his kindness.

No matter what she
Puts in front of him
He thanks God and
Eats it as if it were
A banquet.

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Love

He holds her simply.
Hard hands that have
Worked all his life
Gentle on her curves.
She lets him.
She can't help it.
She has filled him
With a sustenance
And he is
Mindful.

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Night

A brief snort of the pony

Saying goodnight.

The fire dying down,

The last twigs giving

Up their struggle.

She lays to one side.

He needs more room

To rest his bones.

She will massage him

Gently

In the night.

He will moan in his sleep

But not when awake.