

# Barren

*by* Rushwrites

Venka had not slept all night. He had been praying for a way out of the mess he was in. There was no divine inspiration. His God had forsaken him. He wondered what Appa would have said if he saw him now.

Appa had been the village's panchayat head. Everyone called him Appa (Father), as a sign of respect and affection. Every morning he had listened to the villagers' problems and gave them advice, or mediated as necessary. Marital conflicts, property disputes between siblings, cases of petty theft or doling out crop advice, no problem was too big or too small that couldn't be taken to Appa. He had hoped that his son would have the same care-free upbringing that Appa's city bred grandson did. "You always have big dreams" his wife had said, smiling. She never said that anymore. She didn't smile much either.

He knew the roosters would wake the village up soon. He crept out of his straw filled mattress laid out on the floor, without waking his wife. He paused at the door, to look at his family, peaceful in their sleep. He would never know what could have been.

The bottle was dusty. The warning said: Poison! in a bunch of languages. They had said he wouldn't need it anymore. They had said a lot of things. He had believed them. He laughed bitterly. It was his own fault. He had believed them.

Appa had not warned them all against trying GM crops. "Its not nature" he had said. His word always carried weight. He had been the first person to buy a TV in the village. After the sun set and wolfing down food, everybody crowded around the TV at Appa's house. The living room, where the TV held center of place, was large. Some people walked in and sat in the living room, on the floor,

while some stayed beyond the wooden door sill, depending on their caste. He shrugged to himself, there are some things you accept without questioning.

He looked back at the bottle. His crop had failed for two years in a row. It was a painful shock the first time. When it happened a second time, his world came crashing. He had never had problems before. Even when there were poor monsoons. He was the second person in the village to buy a TV. He had been so proud. "Big dreams" said the image of his wife, softly, as she had teased him. Only now, the image taunted. He had heard about the GM crops at the local agriculture office. He had ignored it after Appa's warning.

And then Appa had died. His eyes misted over when he thought about that day. He blinked to clear his eyes. Lured by the promise of yield and profits, he had taken out loans to try GM seeds. And now he sat, contemplating a chemical pesticide bottle that could kill him within minutes.

It was the coward's way out, to commit suicide. And yet, one had to be brave to attempt it. Life is full of contradictions and choices. Only now, he didn't have any. "What about your son?" Appa's voice seemed to ask him, "doesn't he need to learn that you cannot run away from your problems?"

"I am a failure" he whispered.

"You have never been, Venka. Don't start now."

He thought about the mounting debts. And he thought about the 'compensation' his family would receive. He had written a letter, to provide his family with additional proof. He unscrewed the Endo Sulfan bottle.

He didn't notice the taste as he swallowed the poison. Instead, he thought of the first time he had walked on the fields with his father. He had jumped in the foot-wide irrigation canals that snaked around

and had squealed in delight. He had known right then, that he wanted to be a farmer. Be one with the land. His land. He gulped. He would be one with it very soon now. He remembered his wife's shy smile when she had first seen him. He shuddered as he remembered the first time his son's tiny little fingers curved around and held tight to his finger.

He shoved cloth into his mouth. He didn't want his family waking up to the sound of his screams.

He shut his eyes as his body began convulsing.

