

He can make us cry

No one notices ten-year-old Billu
But sometimes he can make us cry
Just for one rupee

A rupee can't buy anything anymore
And it is being phased out from paper money
To copper coins

A seven-billion-dollar expense on a new Space Station
somewhere
The splurge on atomic and non-atomic weapons
Foreign debt
Loan forgiveness documents on private accounts in banks
And a thousand such customs and practices
Have utterly ruined the rupee
And even beggars at traffic signals
Expect at least twice as much in alms

What does Billu receive
For serving burgers, sandwiches, samosas, and tea
We have never cared to ask
Our own problems are legion
We need several thousand just to get a young man
To study an American book on Business Management
And there are many other miscellaneous expenses
That keep us striving and busy

Usually, we take our evening tea
At places where a single cup costs around forty rupees
But our mid-morning tea at the hotel where Billu works
Costs only four

Perhaps Billu's master has forbidden him
Or, maybe, this is what his parents have taught him
Whatever the reason

When he refuses to accept the one rupee change
Which we, out of the goodness of our heart,
Wish to leave him as a tip
From the five we paid for the bill
It leaves us quite in tears

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translated from the Urdu by Waqas Khwaja

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