

A Rose By Any Other Name

These days are unusual. A girl who was born and brought up in a city like Bhubaneswar feels that the city is unknown to her. It was evening. What time will it be? She looked towards her watch, almost six O'clock. Vanivihar bus stop was too much crowded. All the buses coming from Bermunda have to pass through this stop. Since the police are no more permitting them to enter in to the city, all the passengers have to come to this point to board the bus.

She was feeling little nervous. The people around her seem to be unknown. Nobody cared to look towards her. Still she can hear the sound of her heartbeat. This happens when somebody does a crime. Is she doing a crime? Is being in love a crime? Suddenly she felt restless. Let this world go to hell! If others cannot realize my problem then why should I care for them? She looked left and right. 'There was no sign of Bikash. He had promised to come to the bus stop by 5.30. What could be the matter ? Meeta was worried.

Other people have started looking towards her curiously. Meeta bit her lip anxiously and pushed away her straying hair. The bus to Rourkela will leave at 7 P.M. Bikash never makes this kind of mistakes. He comes always before the promised time and waits for her. Oh God! Let him be there as soon as possible.

As she glared towards the road coming out of the city, it looked like a river. A flow of human beings in all type of vehicles coming to the highway. The highway like an ocean has never complained. Whosoever in what size has come, it has accepted them. The darkness getting thicker from the trees looked like the bank of this human river. Suddenly her parent's words echoed in her ears: "Meeta! we do not object your marriage to Bikash. Bikash is also a very nice boy." her father said. "But nineteen is not the age of marriage my dear, Bikash is also studying. Let him to finish his studies and get a job' the mother spoke on a down voice. "Bou, how many times do I have to tell that there is no meaning for waiting? We want to struggle together against odds of the world" - Meeta's voice had an element of strength.

As she remembered this discussion, she felt more uncomfortable. What is the meaning of love for them? It is a magical touch, which takes you to the world of magic. This is a surging emotion that makes one to wait for the other for hours without caring for the summer of May or rains of August. It is like walking in the chariot of clouds among stars by holding hands together. It is like looking towards the point where the sky touches the lips of the ocean or searching the orphan crabs on the beaches of an unknown island for endless time. With Bikash besides hers, she can dare to challenge anything in this world. Why parents always try to bring you down from such high flying dreams to ruthless realities! May be it is because they have never experienced what love is all about. In arranged marriages, one is forced to settle down with someone, unknown earlier, and you are required to love the person. Is it real love or an adjustment or compromise?

She is always against this kind of selecting life-partners.

She has decided to marry Bikash. Does not matter what obstacles come on the way, they want to settle down forever. They had decided to elope to Rourkela to a friend's house. She was sure the parents would forgive her and accept Bikash after their marriage. Therefore, she was waiting for Bikash who agreed hesitantly for this sort of marriage. It is almost going to be 6.45 P.M. and there is no sign of Bikash. Meeta again gave a glance. To her utmost surprise, she found Ramakant uncle coming towards her. She could not escape. Ramakant uncle was waving his hands from --the top of a rickshaw calling out, "Meeta dear!" suddenly Meeta felt restless and a sense of frustration overruled her.

"Dear, it is nice to see you. It has been a long time that you have not talked to your old uncle", enthused Ramakant uncle. His volcano of emotions could not find the ill response of Meeta. She only threw namaskar and looked the other way. "Now tell me, how is your study going on?", asked uncle, "Daughter, I am very happy to see you. My bus is at 8 P.M. But I came little early. I was worried about spending this

pastime. It is good to see you here. Come let's sit in the bench of the paanwalia and gossip."

"But our my bus is at 7 P.M.," said Meeta.

"Don't worry. If you are travelling to Rourkela by 7 P.M. bus, it'll come at 8 P.M.," said uncle.

They were sitting over a mug of coffee in the shop. She was feeling very bad as there was no news of Bikash and uncle was around. She felt like being in deep sea in a ship whose captain is missing.

Ramakant uncle is neither a stranger to her nor does she dislike him. She has grown in front of him from a small child to this day. In fact, whenever the parents get annoyed of her, he comes to her rescue. He is always full of humorous anecdotes and affection. Yet this was not the right time for Meeta to have a chat with uncle. What kind of excuse should she plan in front of her uncle to provide reasons for her travelling with Bikash.

"Ma, are you taking care of your parents, especially your mother? Is she doing well at health front?"

"*Uncle*, Mother takes care of me. What about me taking care of her" she said with a smile.

"When you smile, you resemble a lot with your papa. When he came to our colony, he rarely laughed. Your mother was probably of your age. Life was a challenging task on their shoulders," uncle commented.

"What do you mean, uncle, "asked Meeta stunningly.

"Aren't you aware of that? Has not your mother told you? Well, their marriage was a love marriage. They got married against the wishes of your grand parents. They had to run away from home. Your mother was from a rich family whereas your father was from a poor one. The only asset he had was his knowledge and honesty. He was doing his graduation then. Your mother's family was totally opposed to it. One should also, because parents never want their children to suffer by a wrong choice. So they arranged the marriage elsewhere. Being a firm and strong woman, your mother had taken it to marry her love. So they eloped one fine morning and came to our colony looking for shelter. That was the time when Bhubaneswar was about to grow. The

rent of the house was only fifty rupees. I was the person who shared the room with them. I knew they were newly married. So I used to spend the night at friends place or in railway station waiting room to facilitate the young lovers, "uncle took a pause.

Uncle added with a sigh, "Ma, if only you could have seen your mother then. How hard she worked. The girl who had such a lavish living had to toil hard to survive. She worked from morning to midnight without complaining. She loved your father so much that in every piece of that small room her love was shone. They realized one day that dreams can not give you roti and rice. Your father was still in the college. He took up a job of part-timer in a Marwadi shop with a salary of hundred rupees per month, but then he could not find time to study. One day he told me that your mother was carrying the first child...

Meeta interrupted, "that must have been me." She was totally engrossed in the discussion. "No Ma. A boy died after three months because they didn't have enough money to provide medicine and treatment to the child. Your father felt miserable. I could not show my face to your mother for weeks. Yet she was silent, silent as before as if her sorrow has been deepened by that death."

"Your Aja (maternal grandfather) had no relation with your family and paternal grandfather was so poor that your dad had to loan from Kabuliwalla with a higher interest to feed the family in the village. Your mother was a pillar of strength to your father and motivated him to go for examinations. I borrowed a machine and she started sewing and doing embroidery work in the community to keep the fire in the kitchen burning. The old machine that you see in Your Puja Ghar (A room for Prayer) was the same that Your mother worked with."

"How many sleepless nights she had spent for designing dresses, sewing them, straining her eyes, her soft fingers turned red by the kiss of the needles. Uncles voice was choked with emotions and eyes turned misty. He was in the past, some twenty years before, with this little girl. Meeta wondered why her mother had never spoken about this to her.

"Then Ma, as there is a dawn to every dark night, an island to every rough sea, your father passed MA exam with a gold medal. He got the job of a lecturer in Government College. When your mother received this news, she came running to

me. Tears were tickling down her cheeks. By seeing her happiness, I also started crying. We did not speak to each other for some moments. I did not have any *of my* relatives nor do I intended to have someone. But by seeing the tears and happiness, I knew I got a couple very close to my heart for ever. The sweets she gave me on that day were sour-sweet with her tears. The scene still lingers in my memory.

"Your father also got a quarter and then you arrived bringing happiness to their life. They showered the toys, sweets and love on you. I saw them doing gardening for last nineteen years so that you have bloomed to be a beautiful flower, by protecting you from all problems".

"Uncle, why didn't *Bou* told me about their past?" She enquired in a complaining voice loaded with emotions.

"No, Ma, you have seen your mother to be a very quiet person. She also doesn't want to make you morose by talking about her struggling times."

Meeta took a turn. Her eyes were filled with tears and suddenly she found Bikash running towards her. "Oh Meeta, I am late. My professor held me up in the department. "He said and stopped midway by seeing uncle there.

"Uncle, he is Bikash, my fiancée", said Meeta.

"God bless you son!" said uncle, looking him in toto, "Look after Meeta well. When are you getting married?"

"We are..." initiated Bikash when a glare stopped him.

"We are waiting for Bikash to finish his research in two years time", said Meeta. Bikash gave a stunning look.

"Exactly, that is what I told your parents this afternoon when she came to me in tears", said uncle smiling "Your mother's tears are very precious, don't let them flow, Meeta, each drop of them is like a drop of blood." The bus had arrived. Arranging his luggage he said, "I said to them that Meeta is a sensible daughter. You have brought

her up in your garden like a pink rose. Can a rose spread bad odor?" He got into the bus by patting her head. Meeta stood silently, eyes filled with tears. Bikash did not know nor did the darkness about the why of tears.

Only Meeta knows it.

Do you know...?