

## Why Mothers Are Called Mothers?

The big stream overflowed. When the surrounding fields went under water, our heart were filled with extreme joy because, without going to the school, we could set apart the whole day for rowing. When a powerful flow of water gushed down, the coconut trunk or the log of wood placed across the stream would be carried down stream. Till another coconut trunk was placed across the stream again and a guiding rope tied we were unable to go to school. We made rafts out of the trunks of plantain trees and rowed about in the water-filled paddy fields then.

At some places where the banks had given way and the water flowed out, Kelua or Bauria could be seen with their fish traps set. We go in that direction rowing our rafts. As the fish caught was placed inside an areca sheath, we were unable to see even that. Furthermore, neither of the two liked our coming in their direction.

"Children, what are you doing here? Go away." We get onto our rafts and go away with great fear. The villagers refer to them as the executioners. Those two who know no good or bad were branded as great sinners. We were more frightened of Kelua. We have heard that when he was angry he would pull out the knife used to cut flowers and spring towards the person who would annoy him. Knowing his malevolent ways, we still went towards him disregarding all what we have heard in order to see the fish, he had caught. I had a great desire to see the fish. Boys like Radhua and Bihari join me because of my pestering. When we return in fear after Kelua's growls Radhua and others scold me.

On some days when water had over flown, Meena'na would come to our place at night with Dama and call father to go spear fishing. Though father had not gone with them, to my knowledge, I think he would have gone with them previously. "Then can you lend us the two swords?" they would ask.

They borrow the two swords hidden in a corner of one of the inner rooms of the house and leave with the lift torch made of dry sheaths of the coconut inflorescence. When they step into water filled paddy fields and hold the torch up, it is said that fishes come to the surface. Then they spear the fish with the sword and kill them, I have heard. I am not aware at what time Meenana and the others return. I must be fast asleep then, I believe.

Though father does not go to spear fishing with them, I know that father's share of fish is received without fail. I get up early in the morning and run to the kitchen to see the fish brought in the previous night. When I see the fish in a large earthenware pan closed with another earthen vessel, I feel sorry for them and feel thoroughly disgusted. I cannot easily tolerate the fishy smell that emanates when the covering earthen vessel is removed. Invariably there were fish of various sizes and shapes; long ones, flat ones and fat ones, but the only ones that I recognized were 'Chenga' and 'Gadisha.' I have heard that Gadisha fish is tasty but I have never tasted it. I suspected that the fishy smell would be retained even in the cooked fish. Those days, I did not eat fresh water fish because of that. When I see the black congealed blood on the injured heads of the fishes, my mind shudders. Immediately I cover the pan and leave the kitchen.

When I go to Kusumi River to bathe, I could see the 'Chenga' fish on the surface with their fins raised. Today, though I feel like spearing them with the sword hidden in a corner of the

house, I can not get to them. The river is deep. More than that I go to bathe with mother who does not allow me to do a thing Eke that. In the small stream that flows across the bottom of our garden, I have seen 'Chenga' fish in the deeper places. When I get in to the water they go down so that they can not be found again. If these fishes are like that I can not understand how Meena'na could have such heavy catches. On some days I, get in to the stream with the cleaver and after waiting patiently for a long time climb out empty handed.

Saying that he had some hooks, one day Dama'na asked me whether I would like to do some fishing. That was not a thing to ask! I allowed my happiness to ferment within my heart and asked him where, when and at what time we would be going. I have seen *Oskar Miyan sitting* at the edge of the big stream with a rod in the water. But we were tightened to go even to that place because on days, the stream overflows, we have seen crocodiles coming on to the ridges and sun bathing. We thought that even when going that way they could harm us.

It was Dama'na who brought the rods and worms for the bait. We went fishing to the paddy field Kadua. How is the bait cast? How does one feel when a fish bites? After that how does one allow the fish to take the bait? I had no idea about these. I asked Dama'na about those that day.

After the baited hook was thrown into the water, in a moment, I felt as if someone was pulling it, I gave my hand a jerk and lowered the rod more and more till it could not be lowered any more. Then with a sudden jerk, at once, I pulled it on to the bank. Lo ! there was a black colored, not so big fish, hooked. I could not unhook it. I shouted out to Dama'na. "Babu, the fellow is dangerous, " he said, coming. Then controlling the fish that was jumping and wriggling in all directions, he removed the hook as if with considerable experience. The fellow was not dead and would still spring up suddenly. Dama'na caught it and dashing it on the ground went back to his own place. The fish wagged its tail vigorously and died gradually gasping for breath as I watched it. What cruelty was this that I did? But that compassion disappeared again.

Though large fishes were not caught, within a few hours, I was able to catch a pound or two. When compared, my heap of fish was bigger than Dama'na's. We passed a string through the gills and made a garland out of them. Shouldering the rod and taking the string of fish in the right hand we went to our homes, being highly elated. When we met someone on the way, the mind fills with a disdainful pride. I felt that both my mother and father would be happy at my smartness. As Dama'na took the rod back on the way, I went home only with the string of fish. When I got there, mother was sweeping the compound.

"From where is that?"

"We caught."

"Dama'na and I fished."

"You think you have done a clever thing?"

Keeping the broom down, mother came and took the string of fish. Actually I felt as if I had done a very clever thing. Have I not done something useful by contributing fish to the dinner tonight?",

"Your younger brother had gone for a big fishing expedition. Bring some ash on to the coconut sheath" said mother to my sister.

Elder sister who was inside the house stepped in to the compound. My mind swelled with naughtiness. But my sister is not pleased with my catch. As she does not eat fish or meat, she would not be pleased with this, I thought. Mother went to the backyard, cleaned the fish in the coconut sheath with ash and started cutting them. I watched her. Elder sister placed a pot of water and a pan near her. The stinking fish smell of the ash-smearred fish started spreading around the place. The dog came wagging its tail and stood a little beyond, looking towards the fishes.

Father returned back after dark. When he returned, the fresh water fish was cooked and removed from the fire. The pan was covered with an earthen lid. The pot of rice was on the big fire place boiling. I was very happy that mother gave first preference to prepare my fish.

"Today the son had gone on an expedition to bring food for the father"

"What sort of expedition?"

"He had caught some fish."

"What?"

It sounded as if that word had great depth. I could not see the place where father was. I did not see his face even. The day I climbed the coconut tree and scratched my chest badly, father spoke in this very same tone. So I somehow felt that a good cut from the mango tree growing behind the house could possibly descend on my back. I remembered vividly the day I climbed the coconut tree.

"Anyway, it must be the son's desire, I suppose." Father did not say anything. How kind is mother! Why did father speak as if in anger? When I had done such a clever thing, instead of being happy, why did he speak in anger? No, he was not angry. That is the manner in which he usually speaks, I assuaged myself. Serving a little rice on to a plate and covering it up with all the cooked fish, mother held the plate for me with eyes aflame.

"I don't eat fish."

"For whom did you catch? Eat".

Mother had a goad in her hand. From where did she get it? I am shivering now with fear. My eyes are filled with tears.

"Why are you waiting, eat," mother who came towards me with the goad thundered. I took a handful of rice to my mouth. The unbearable fishy smell escaped from my breath. I could not swallow the mouthful of rice. Because of the nausea I vomited it out.

"Eat, Eat."

Like a devil dancer in a trance, dancing with coconut inflorescence in hand, mother moved around me with the goad on hand, hitting me with it, till it broke in to two. Like a buffalo bellowing I jumped out of the kitchen to the backyard screaming, as I could not suffer the pain any longer. I got to the backyard without any definite idea where I should go. Then from the copse behind the house, an owl hooted and frightened me. I came back running quickly and got in to my bed.

I sobbed till my pillow was wet with tears and mucous from my nose. The aroma of father's dinner was spreading all over the house. My hunger became acute. As it increased, my sorrow too increased. I could not control my mind. After a while I fell asleep but it was not clear whether this was due to my hunger or else due to the tedium of crying and feeling sorry...

I awoke when mother, seated on the bed, was applying oil on the weal raised by the lashing I got from her. After hitting me left and right, now she is applying oil.. I got so angry that I felt like pushing her out of the bed, but I controlled myself and pretended to be fast asleep. "Have I ever placed a hand on this fellow? Today he is sleeping without food... hungry." I felt the tears rolling down her eyes on to my back. I wanted to embrace her and shout that I am not angry with her. Tears flowed from my eyes again and made the pillow wet.

"Son ... son 1"

"Did you get angry with me I did not speak.

"I punished you because you did something bad .... Come let's go and eat." She pulled me by my hand. I went behind her like being drawn by a magnet.

I came to Bhubaneswar for further studies, I believe that three to four years after this incident. Gradually, I got used to Bhubaneswar where one rarely sees a tree or stream. The daily routine of our monotonous life proceeds invariably in a lazy uniformity. To sustain life we engage ourselves on some pastime. What is now about it? We get in-to a route and travel in it forward; on the way back too we get into another route. This life has to change... these ideas and ideals have to change.

We go to Balighai on holidays and catch a fish or two. We could get imported rods for this purpose. We need not cut a bamboo tree for this. When we see people holding high positions in society here ' we wonder, whether we have the status even to fish. When I catch a big fish, with what wonder do they look at me. Then I am a hero. There is no one here who looks at me in disgust as in my village. No one says that fishing is a bad pastime. Thoughts like these continued coming to my mind for years. I didn't realize why mother prevented me from fishing till one day when father wrote a letter that Dama'na was taken away and killed by a crocodile while fishing ... at the place from where I started my success. Then only I realized why mothers are called mothers.