

TWO HORIZONS



Binapani Mohanty

*Binapani Mohanty was born in 1936. She is a well known Oriya short story writer with several collections. She also won Orissa Sahitya Akademy award and Sahitya Akademy Award for **Pata Dei**, (1990). The present story is translated from Oriya by Jayanta Mahapatra.*

A. Answer these questions

Have you ever felt lonely ? What do you do when you feel lonely ?

MA,

I tried, my utmost to do as you said. Tried to change everything and build new dreams. But I did not get lost simply in my dreams, Ma; I indeed worked hard to fulfil those I had. The many sleepless nights, those innumerable moments which covered before pain, that I suffered without a thought. And you used to worry just because I laughed my way through life. Was it my own laughter, Ma ? This body is soaked in the consciousness of an ordinary human being of flesh and blood. It was only your existence inside my that made me laugh on, as if I had not a care in this world. Not only did I learn the secret of laughter from you; I also learned the mantra of loving pain and hardship, of loving life. Could you ever imagine how the river of blood flowed on inside when your ever-smiling daughter's lips opened with bursts of laughter ?

Ma, how without a word of protest I shouldered those responsibilities heaped on me. How I managed so well to overcome the grievances of the family - of both parents-in-law, of sister and brother-in-law, and of my husband and children. Nobody can ever tell you that you didn't know how to bring up your daughter! You must have heard praises, I am sure, as to how good a daughter-in-law I was! And how that must have made you happy!

But now, Ma, I don't wish to dream any more. Life has become so mechanical that my shoulders are weary with the loads I bear. I can run no longer, I have lost my quickness. Today I observe you, Ma, and see in spite of your advancing years the undiminished enthusiasm with which you have your early morning bath and worship the sun. Also how your zest for life scatters like abundant pollen everywhere, as you hold on those moments that have gone by in your routine-bound existence! I don't even know what nectar you spill as you circle round like a homing pigeon. I have never noticed your weariness nor have seen you anytime, downcast or sorrowful. Although I am unaware of what you do, secreted inside the puja-room. Not only I, but Father too, I feel certain, know nothing of those silent moments of yours, this moon's unseen face. And this other side is not just a matter of a few minutes. I don't know if you try to measure the depth of your fulfilment during this time, Ma! But afterwards, your fair and bright countenance splashes like sunlight around the house. And I, take my nourishment from it like a tiny, new sapling. Today, even if I don't see you, your face looms up in front of me, all the time. And that is enough.

I remember when I was leaving, you had hugged me and said, "Daughter, don't be afraid. No one can live on in this world in fear. One has to bring out that power from within oneself and face the world. Our ways are dark. It's only the light of one's own eyes which shows

the way. Can one live with another all his life? Still, my soul will always be there beside you, like your own shadow.”

Then you patted your moist eyes with your sari and in a sudden gesture took a little vermilion from the parting in your hair to put it in mine. Mothers ordinarily do not do this.

From that day on I tried to give shape to my dreams in plan and action through all these years. Now there seems to be a huge emptiness inside. But why? There are no great worries at home. Your son-in-law is and has always been a child, the grandchildren are no doubt insensitive, but they are not without reason or worth. I have earned a name in the work I do. And no one has ever pointed a finger at me for anything.

When these successes wave their flags of victory around me, I see no reason for this weariness I feel. Why don't I get the fulfilment you have? Why is there so much of restlessness, so much of emptiness in me? Has the sound of your anklets been lost in the body of the sea's sands or have you sat down somewhere, tired and weary? I don't know if I should look back or not, Ma. I cannot understand why the air outside is choked with suspicion and unbelief!

And I realise, Ma, if I look back you will turn into stone. And if I take a step ahead, I'll place my feet in fathomless deeps. I am unable to see my way. Yet, my whole being scents like the cluster of mango blossoms in a branch of the tree that embraces the earth. A storm seems imminent in the sky.

Can you tell me, Ma, why is it that I am not able to achieve your fulfilment in my consciousness? What have I done, Ma? Why can't I do as you? Why is this weariness of mine?

Your daughter.

The world appeared more blurred to Ma when she read the letter in the already-blurring light of her eyes. Her daughter's ruffled hair falling across her sweat-covered face suddenly danced before her. At times she had seen the glint of a tear in those eyes half hidden by the long hair. She had appeared not to notice it. A clay figure can be set right if the mind is torn apart by little things, not a being of flesh and blood. So she had accepted the ways of life and had remained silent. But what was this? Her daughter was never the one to be exhausted after these many years. What then had brought on this fatigue in her? And where did she herself have the strength, both in mind and body, that she would rush off, getting over a two-day-long journey! Couldn't her daughter understand how difficult it was for her to travel and be near her?

Ma wiped her glasses and read the letter again. Some concealed pain made her shiver. Time and again she went into the puja-room and shut the door, locking herself in. Her god's face was unchanged, as of everyday. Until today she had told him all now she had to tell her daughter a few things, sitting before him. Ma looked at her own face in the mirror. Nothing there, no beauty at all under the wrinkled skin and bone. None of the sunlight or pollen that radiated earlier from her eyes. She felt weary all of a sudden, seeing herself. She straightened herself and sat down. Had her daughter's weariness entered her somehow? She closed her eyes and looked at her god and saw her daughter's face float before her. The sweaty face of a child.

Dear Daughter,

I got your letter. I was delighted to receive a long one from you after so long. You don't have the time to come here, and I don't have the strength to come to you even though I have the time. Still, I am there by your side, like your own shadow.

You seem a little tired, me daughter. This happens. Who does not get tired? I was too, on life's long road. At times I have sat down under a tree, at other times waited in the harsh noonday sun by the road, my skin on fire. Sometimes blinded by sunlight, sometimes walked on fearlessly in the total dark of a moonless night. Laughing or crying. Then, living for a moment during the whole day, to die in the next, and be resurrected again. Do you know who made me fall and made me get up, who killed me and brought me to life again? I was I myself, the I who is only mine; nobody else was there with me. Nor was there anyone to whom I could turn for help at any time that I can remember. How very different the times are, that and this, like between heaven and hell! And so I couldn't have told anyone what I went through. Who would have listened to me?

Once, I remember, I had complained of something before your father. He was getting ready to leave for his office. It was as though he hadn't heard what I had said. When I repeated my words, he had answered gruffly, "I don't forget what I hear once. Is it necessary for you to remind me?" Suddenly how strange, how stern had this face of a man I'd known for years become - a man who usually smiled and was prone to light-hearted banter! It was as if my feet had lost their wings and had come down in unknown deeps. How could I have imagined I'd meet a stranger after so many years? From then on I never said anything to him, nor did I face that stranger again.

Another time, in the midst of some talk, your grandmother reproached your father. She never said anything to me about the dowry I had brought along when I was married; on the other hand, she extolled every virtue of mine. On that occasion, however, I had answered back in anger. Her face tore open in obvious irritation, it seemed as if every visage of motherhood had vanished in a moment. I was amazed,

shocked. The entire world suddenly appeared poor to me. And later, I began to ignore whatever she said, even tried not to go into the meaning of such words when I overheard them.

Have you observed the mimosa plant, my daughter? Seen the millipede of the monsoon months? How it curls itself into a tiny ball when touched? My whole life long I have been that. But now I feel certain of one thing, that all of them could not have gone on without my help. And so, like the new day, I was reborn every morning. I never found the time to look into myself. I wonder whether you have seen much of me, but I have never considered looking carefully at myself.

You speak of being whole, of fulfilment. Is fulfilment something which can be bought? Can it be gifted to someone if he wants to? You still remember, don't you, of the tale of the crocodile befriending a monkey! The more one comes closer to someone, the more one eats into the other. But can one remain conscious and alert at all times? I realise now how my insides must have been eaten up. Or, is it that I have thrown my heart away? Or else why should I be experiencing this vast emptiness after reading your letter?

If you think that I possess this deep sense of fulfilment, then I'd say it is but the simplicity of an innocent child. The companion of my joys and sorrows is only my god who is there before me. I have surrendered myself to him. To him my pain and tears, my losses and agonies.

But you will find no use for the key to my own fulfilment. You have to seek within yourself, find for yourself the key you need. You are knowledgeable and intelligent, and you possess the gift of searching for things, with the glittering world before you. Never try to become an innocent child. Your discontent will disappear slowly on its own.

A whole new world lies right before you. That god who kept my own faith alive will certainly keep your path clear for you. But remember, my child, the circle of fulfilment is always limited, while unfulfilment grows on, boundless. I do not know myself how far is the reach of that boundlessness. I believe you can touch the horizon of that infinite. The deeper the measure of unfulfilment, the closer to you will be your fulfilment.

Be well,

Your Ma.

Exercises

Let's Answer

1. Point out the features of the two letters in terms of their format, language and tone.
2. 'It was only your existence inside me that made me laugh on'. Why does the daughter say so? What does she mean by 'laugh on'?
3. Comment on the bond between the mother and her daughter.
4. 'Nobody can ever tell you that you didn't know how to bring up your daughter!' What does 'bring up your daughter' imply here?
5. Sketch the character of the mother. How far does your mother resemble her?
6. Why is the daughter filled with a sense of weariness and emptiness? Have you ever experienced like her?
7. What did the mother feel after going through her daughter's letter?
8. How does the mother analyse the situation? Do you agree with her analysis and the solution that she suggests?
9. What picture of the status of women in the family is represented in "Two Horizons"? Do you find any trace of generation gap in the

approach to life shown by the mother and her daughter?

Let's Discuss

1. "Circle of fulfilment is always limited, while unfulfilment grows on, boundless."
2. The deeper the measure of unfulfilment, the closer to you will be to your fulfilment.
3. Modern woman versus Traditional woman.
