

Translations



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The Unborn

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Meanwhile the town was enveloped in clouds. An unclear haziness of fog hung all around. Some tiny droplets fell on my face and eyes. Yet I stood and remained there in the balcony. It is not winter now, rather it is the last days of monsoon. But clouds come down hanging around any time in this hilly town. The wind blowing outside hits the door again and again stirring me inside. Yet nothing could move me! The cold wind, nor anything else.

An ardent desire rose to light a cigarette. Just three weeks ago it was confirmed that a little one has rooted inside me. Despite this knowledge is it right to do this? Nope, nothing will happen! I whispered to myself. One, just one!

But where is the lighter? Where is the cigarette?

Switching on the light of the room I start looking for it frantically. Right then Purnendu arrived and stood at the door.

I am taken aback, surprised.

Purnendu looks disappointed and annoyed.

I don't know what makes me fragile again and again in front of his sharp sight. It was as if all my desires turned off instantly and the lights too turned off. Me, who was looking for myself in the dark, a while ago, now looked for a candle desperately.

A clear sky, A clear heart.

Wearing a bright tinted dress, humming a song I was coming down from the house on the hilltop. I was just wandering around on the dry and small hilly roads of the town. I had picked up some wild flowers. Suddenly, I noticed a dead snake lying in front. Someone had smashed its head too brutally. What if an artist had painted this as a picture? I wanted to walk over the surprisingly beautiful snake with its smashed head lying on the grey road drenched in blood. I tried to hum a song but could remember none. To escape from the thoughts of the snake, I started running towards the city. Panting and gasping for breath I stopped after hitting at something. My right foot had hit on a soft and small body of a baby turned blue and lying dead, whose umbilical cord had not been detached yet from the mother's body. I screamed at this dreadful sight. As if the dry umbilical cord between the two dead bodies would wind me up right there. Holding my breath I started running. I kept on running. For a time I remembered the baby inside me. The running slowed down without my knowledge. I roved my hand over my belly. But where is my child? I couldn't feel it's existence at all.

I woke up sweating from the dream. As I moved towards the bathroom getting up from the bed I spewed up. Startled at the sound of my spewing, Purnendu got up and came running to me. Anxious and squeamish I hugged him tightly.

---Honey... my honey... our child... our child... please take me home... please take me to my home at the village.

He couldn't make out what it was! Rather he was anxious and terrified at my condition.

---You seem to be seriously disturbed. Nothing has happened to our child. Everything is going to be alright. Have patience. You have to be patient.

I kept sobbing the whole night. And Purnendu held me fearlessly in his embrace like a father throughout that night. I kept shuddering in the thoughts of the dream again and again. I felt partially asleep in the later part of the night. I murmured in my sleep.

----- Please take me home... to my old home... my old village.

The whole period of winter has passed by.

My mother and I knitted tiny colourful woollen socks, caps and sweaters. We recalled the hill town of winter times where we had inhabited once; listened to my father's amusing narration of memories from my days of infancy and childhood. We walked on the dried leaves and heard them rustle; sat by the pond side, fishing using red ants as bait; I cooked my favourite dish of wild plants. This old home was always filled with commotion. The uproar of laughter tends to blow away the roof of the house. It was as if I rediscovered the old *me*.

Closing the door of my room I touch my belly. I talk to myself.

---- How are you doing my sweetheart?

The little one stretches inside. Sometimes it moves its hands and feet. My heart is filled with a strange sense of motherhood making my eyes moist. Slowly, my child is growing inside my belly. And I count the days on my fingertips.

---- Not many days are left... not many!

I whisper to myself again and again. I want to keep within myself these days, these times and these excitements. Just talking to my little one quietly and writing my diary. I got so lost in the dreams of my child that I forgot about everything else.

I stopped reading daily newspapers and watching news channels too. Just because the news reports don't let me sleep. I kept the mobile phone switched off considering that the radiations might be harmful for the child. I sidelined myself completely away from all these. And I tried my best to keep myself happy just for the baby to be born. As the sun shines in the morning I open the window and take the crochet hook for knitting. Or I remain sitting, caressing my mother's orchids blooming in the yard outside near the gate. Purnendu visits sometimes. We talk nonsense. We fall on each other rolling in laughter. Just like this I wanted to make things flawlessly complete, preparing for the child to come.

I wanted to show a beautiful picture of the world to the child to be born. I wanted to keep it away from all the vice and ugliness. I never wanted my child to grow up listening to the

scream of weapons. I never wanted it to grow like me seeing at an innocent age the lifeless bodies of relatives shot dead. I had heard from my mother that on the day I was born five dead bodies were found in a village at a distance. The youths returned home as lifeless bodies anytime.

From that ambivalence of things being perceived or not, we began playing a new game of terrorism with nation's machinery. We used to spray red ink on our dresses and pretended to be those dead people. Closing our eyes, when we laid on the sand and dust, this thought never came to my mind if we were dead and pretending to be alive or pretended to be dead when alive. But the same thoughts came to me now. During those days of our childhood, we collected and read news only about people dying. As I grew up, the editorials of a newspaper called *Budhbar* became my favourite. Beginning to read poetry with great love, the poet whose poetry made a thousand horses run in my blood, that poet was murdered just two miles away from our residence. His body was shattered by seven bullets.

With all my might I spat on such a coward world that killed an unarmed revolutionary with seven bullets while happily cycling along the river dam.

When memories of those days visited me in my nightmares, I shut my eyes. I am tense beyond measure. My heart is crowded with outcries. And a strange crisis. I don't want the child to come to be a part of this. Never!

While at home, one day I happened to meet Robin; and was fortunate enough to see his wife too laden with jewelleries and ornaments. Karuna, is my classmate from college days. Robin was my adolescent love. Those games we played together, of state machinery of terrorism during our childhood, where we used to be the dead spraying red ink on our bodies. Every time during the game, Robin would take the role of a killer holding a branch of a tree as a gun. Currently, he is a middleman and a sycophant of the ruling party. He is a journalist in name, as everyone knows about the primary source of his income. It is needless to say that he knows very well the strategies to make money. The sheer arrogance in Robin's words and the gaudy expressions on his wife's face irritated me. It was as if a smell of fresh blood hit my senses. Nauseous, I left the place as soon as possible. That night I had the nightmare again of the dead child turned blue, with its umbilical cord attached uncut. That dead child delivered by Karuna

during college days. Was that Robin's child? I woke up tense. Drinking few sips of water from the glass on the table I tried to go back to sleep again.

Our child will be called *Azad* or *Swadhinata*.

The excitement mixed voice of a would-be-father float through the virtual third space. I am pleased.

Swadhinata, our child will be free like his name. His name won't carry any markers of community, or any surnames of the parents' identity. If our child desires to be a violinist, I would take him there holding his finger. If he desires to be a naxalite, even then I would encourage him being so. And if he says that he wants to be just a writer writing only in his mother tongue, even then I would encourage patting his back.

- But what if our child becomes a bribed officer? Society's dirt?
- *Swadhinata* will be our child, Krishna. Our child. Don't you have trust in yourself?

A smile illuminates my face. Yes. Dream of a society free of caste, creed and class that stands above all sorts of narrowness ... we have to take up the responsibility of moulding our next generation as efficacious citizens. If Robin was the father of my child, what would he had to say at this moment?

Just as before I knitted sweaters with colourful wool and stored them carefully in a box, and praying for the good of my child I went to bed. Right then I could hear the sound of news from the television from my next room - thousands of children are dying under Israeli attack in another part of the world. This saddens me, making me anxious. I think there is none else as selfish as us in the world. After many days I logged into social media. I was surprised to see that a woman had planted tiny plants of purple flowers in grenades she had picked up from the war field. At the end of everything, amidst that debris, it appeared as another form of preparation of life. This sight brought peace to me. I place my hand on my belly, and without me knowing, tears flowed down. From that day onwards, I stopped thinking only about our child to be born. I began to lull the blue turned dead babies who came to my dreams every night, I composed some crazy songs and verses for them, which were perceivable only to me and them.

I began telling them stories whenever I wished, of a world devoid of the creature called humans. The sleepless nights turned priceless to me. I kept my slowly teeming breasts bare for them throughout the night; despite knowing the fact that they will never open their eyes. Throughout the night I caressed their insensitive, immature and lifeless bodies. They never smiled at me moving their tiny lips. This fact made me cry till dawn making my pillows soaking wet with tears.

I remain dismayed. I lost all the strings between my past, my present and the future. I just kept knitting sweaters madly at the end of the sleepless nights. Not just one, I needed many sweaters. Sweaters of all the colours on earth. Purnendu rushes to me knowing about my madness. But I have no time to raise my head and look at him.

-----See, what you have done to your fingers! Hands. Do you know how much I love your hands? You are even getting dark circles around your eyes.

----Because you aren't around Purna. To take care of me!

I utter softly. He becomes busy with me. He forces me to drink a glass of pomegranate juice. He tries to take me to the doctor. And strangely I calm down and get cuddled in his bosom. Without any objection, I obey his every word, his demands and affections. At night after retiring to bed I wish to tell him about the dead blue children, about their never opening eyes. Right then, he would put his finger on my lips and say,

----Sssh... No more talking.

I am disappointed. I am filled with distress for the dead children. Turning and moving has been difficult for me with my heavy belly. Above all, the baby inside never forgets to keep kicking declaring its existence. As if it would come out tearing everything right now. A low outcry leaves my lips. Purnendu is disturbed; he begins caressing my belly gently.

-----Do you know my beloved wife, our Swadhinata can hear us now! His brain has fully developed; it is only the heart that is still weak. Listen, the little one to come, has already learnt to respond to any kind of light, sound and touch. You always used to talk about gifting our child with a safe and beautiful world worth living. You think about me, think about our child. Don't harm yourself and the child to come with unnecessary thoughts.

I didn't say anything. Maybe Purnendu is right. But I couldn't sleep. At the middle of the night looking at my husband's face I murmured,

-----How come I am so selfish, Purna? How? I am going to be a mother. How can I forget the innocent dead children who had left their mother's bosom bare and never saw the light themselves? How?

I lay almost unconscious for hours. A crushed body under a terrible tiredness. As if I am a worn out soldier after the end of a war. My body felt too strained and stiff. Suddenly I began losing all faith in the whole world. All these days I hadn't been just carrying a child in my body, but a live dream. I am absolutely unhappy of being ridden of the load all at once. All the joys of carrying another body inside a body have ended. Days of my dreams have ended.

But I didn't see my newborn baby beside me.

I didn't know if the baby was a boy or a girl, I didn't know like whom his nose, eyes and lips looked like. With the remaining energy in my body, I screamed. Receiving no response, I reached for the glass close at hand and threw it away in annoyance. Somewhere there was a smacking sound of hitting. The sound occurred as if inside my body. I felt like dangling in the air. Someone whispered from the other side of the door – “Baby blues after pregnancy.” Right at that time Purnendu entered rushing. I had been fantasizing of this moment in various ways since the last few days. How would we see our child face to face for the first time, how would we touch the child for first time. But I saw even Purnendu's hands were empty. Owing to my sheer weakness, I lost my consciousness again.

As per the language of medical science, I had suffered from postpartum depression. Once again we returned to that hilly town. Strangely, my sleep had reduced. I lost appetite and while sitting unmindful tears would roll down from my eyes very often. I had completely lost my desire of staying alive. I forgot everything. My old habits - gardening, making embroidery - a thick layer of dust had accumulated on the top of my books. But there was no pause to just one thing. Amidst all these, I had shifted and laid my bed in a separate room with the excuse of my sleeplessness. The number of dead children was rising day by day. I noticed one of the children with a nose like Purnendu's. The eyes of the dead children never open, their lips don't move,

they cannot crackle and gurgle moving their hands and legs. Still I tell them stories every night, I keep my breasts bare for them as before.

About the Author

Bipasha Bora (1986)- is a contemporary short story writer and novelist who lives in Guwahati, Assam. She was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar in 2018 for her debut collection of short stories titled, *Moumakshi Samrajya*.

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