

Short Story

The Buried Dream Under The Banner

Suba Rathi Rajagopal*

It's 7:20 am.

Her body lying on the back and face flicking towards the hues of the sky. Shivering. Shaking. Her voice is now fading out bit by bit. Those tiny squinting eyeballs are half closed still seeking for mercy. Her throat is constricted. Intolerance is her breathing through the beak. Her drooping wings flutter the dust particles away. The little sparrow doesn't have any of her family members here on her side. Incredibly harsh. But People with fierce holding placards are walking towards her. And the feathers from those wings are outspread there and then.

The City keeps herself busier. Citizenship Amendment Act doesn't let her to sleep. Protestors everywhere accuse Indian government for threatening the nation's secular democracy and marginalizing minorities by waving Indian flags, destroying public properties, shouting antigovernment slogans, keeping banners against this act and burning major politician's images. They oppose it through various violence and sound in furious "Save constitution, Scrap CAA". In fact the city is now on fire. Human protests for being Human. Sigh.

"Maa, its 7:50 now. What are you doing still?" Rahitya sounds in hurry since it's her visa interview today.

"Maa ..."

"I am shouting here and you are going as if you can't hear me", She rushes to the kitchen to get her breakfast.

"Upma? Ayye. Yuck. Even the beggar will get good food." Meera Janav, her mother heeds all her daughter's dramas.

She laments, "I thought she would not eat this and create a scene that probably make some delay which could bother her not to attend the interview now. But she is eating!"

She has started it again, the phenomenal Indian mother's dialogue, saying it under her breath, "Nobody will listen to me in this house", she makes a fuss and seeks how her daughter is reacting secretly.

"Maa oh p...please."

More espresso less depresso, the TV plays an advertisement at the right time.

"Ppp...pleeease. Not now. Don't start it again. I convinced you and Papa as much as I could."

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“Maa... I want just a cup of coffee again please!” she exhorts Meera and makes her face the cutest with her teeth biting the lower lip.

“What will I do Maa? I have got the slot for today’s date. And luckily I got it earlier. I am happy in that way. I cannot skip that now. They will not wait for me. Please Maa. Don’t be worried. I should attend the interview with all positive spirit.”

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“Maa... I am talking to you and see, you are not listening me now! You Hitler.”

“Here it is. Coffee!” Meera still remains zipped.

By tweaking Meera's nose and saying prepare the best lunch for me, she manages her temper.

“Good Amma. Smile now!” Pulling her cheeks both sides, she plays still like an innocent child.

And we know that Mothers can fake their smile better for their children.

Rahitya Janav who is just twenty years old, has finished her under grade in Geography. She wants to pursue her higher studies in a reputed institution. She has chosen one of the rarest courses, Geophysics. Apart from IITs in India, only few Universities offer this course which is integrated for five years. She opts for the foreign universities. After many tryouts, she has got an opportunity to pursue it in the University of Texas at El Paso. Her relatives and all the other family members are praising her for being more studious. But not her mother. She is not happy with this decision nevertheless she stops her doing. Being a single child is the hardest as much as it’s bliss. Her father Janav lets her to do all the things she wish to. He supports her every single time when her mother creates a dilemma.

Wrrroom wroom...

She starts off her scooter since she is getting late. The fuel meter in the digital meter starts blinking. Reserved.

“Oops. These all happens now only. Because of you it is”, She points her mother.

“What did I do? This happens due to the fate.”

“Fate does not draw my daughter's destiny. Only she can paint it as she wants”, Janav glorifies his daughter, just arrives back from the temple.

“Phoooooww...” she has felt the caress when he smears bhasma on her forehead.

“The path is wide opened for you”, his precept fingers direct her to the awaiting doorway.

“Petrol then?” Meera's strained voice is not dismaying her now.

“I will fill it on the way... Bye Maa. Bye Papa.”

She wanes and passes from their sight into the smog.

“She should return back soon, *Ente eeshwara!*” With folded hands, standing up in front of the Pooja room, Meera implores god; apprehensive; to her consternation Protest burns her heart now lively.

Red signal.

Rahitya puts the scooty off with a little jerk.

58 seconds...

57 seconds... 56

Her exasperating eyes bounce into the watch. It's 8: 10.

“Error 404. Democracy Not Found”, “We oppose CAA”. “Error 404. Humanity is Not Found. We oppose CAA”, to her left, students from the Engineering College blast into rage.

She rolls an inch back to get the clear picture. “Are they really raising their voice against this government?” She is astonished seeing an amped up crowd. She heads up slightly to see them. The huge marriage banner engraving the entire family faces added with some politicians; that ties from its up on the grossest iron gate of the nearest marriage hall, switches up and down, is concealing her.

“People at my age are more courageous. They do act as the part of this protest. But my Maa treating me like a kiddoo here, Pch!” She deems it. “Whatever! I should not think about this now.” Her mind doesn't want to react or think any of these things now. It soothes her. It is mad keen on getting Visa and only screens how she will be sitting in front of the interviewer and how to respond them. Growing as an adult, obviously narrow us to think about only us.

Her fingers tap the accelerator like blazes.

5 seconds.

She stares something in that marriage banner subconsciously and smiles.

2 seconds.

“I think... People not at all want to live in this country yet”, her mind yelling at the huge rush in the consular office.

“Mam... Have you done with your checking?” An instructor asks her to be ready with the essential documents like her I-20, all academic documents, proficiency certificate, SEVIS paid receipt, CA report, Bank statements etc. to get F1 Visa.

“Mam please do remove your watch and keep it in your file. Do you have your mobile? The instructor queries.”

“No. I don't have. Thank you.” She has replied with a trace of nervous.

Entering in to the first phase of the building, people stand in two queues. She observes the twelve to fourteen Chambers; the interviewer in the first chamber has denied the man's visa who wants to visit US to guide his friend with vastu details for his newly built home. The tall woman with high pony tail, stands third in front, keeps checking her documents again and again. The young handsome tall guy before her adjusts his sleeve often is unease.

After elapsing 45 minutes, the security has now assigned her to the second chamber of left corridor to stand behind the yellow marked line. The person leaves with the big thank you to the interviewer. The interviewer nods his head towards Rahitya.

“Hello”, the interviewer greets her with a smile.

“Hi. Good morning”, she is toned with low pitch.

“Hey please come little closer to the mike. You aren't audible”, the interviewer remarks.

“Su're sir' ”.

“What's the purpose of your visit to US? Why did you choose US specifically?” the interviewer begins with the basic questions.

“I want to pursue higher studies in a reputed institution. My course is one among those rarest. So yeah. I chose it. And after finishing the course, I will be back to India”, she assures.

“Geophysics?” his extensive eyes shrink his forehead.

“Yeah sir”.

“Good choice”.

“By the way, why don't you work there, why do you want to come back to your country? Is there any particular reason?”

“I wish to explore something new to break my comfort zone and I thought what if I am also the one who is the reason for degrading the Indian economy. That's why I wish to come back”, she demonstrates with her certainty.

“Good.”

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“And...Congratulations! It’s approved”, He smizes that says ' Our country needs you'.

“Thank you so much sir”, her legs are not on the floor now. Irresistible.

The final interview is done just in two minutes. And she wonders that her VISA is confirmed.

She flies to the parking area, picks her phone up and dials her mother.

“Maa. It’s all done. Visa is approved. I am coming back”. Her overwhelming happiness vibe even passes to the man and brings smile on his face, crosses her in a while who has been stood in the queue, adjusted his sleeve often.

“*Ithrem neram kondo?*” Meera utters in awe, broadening her brows.

“It’s good. And dear, I know that you will get on. Come home soon. “

“Yeah Maa. I will be there.”

“She has got it Janav...”

“Maa...”

She hears her Maa whispering to her Papa.

Hangs up.

Girrrrrr...

“What’s this feel? Why do I feel like am gonna miss everything? Why can’t I celebrate my success? This is probably the first time I am going away from my family. I should not be too sensitive. I don’t have any clue that how I am going to handle all the things. I don’t know how I will endure all things. Gosh. *Ayyo kadavuleh!* It is really scary. Hope My instinct will drive me to the best.”

Her mind pricks her with some sudden thoughts. The most dangerous conversation is having an intimate conversation with oneself. She has been thinking all over her ride which cannot change her life pattern now.

“Watching YouTube about US settled Indian students often wonders me. How they can even afford a car with in few months. I should join as a Research Assistant first with the concerned professor. Everything will be fine then. It will be a new exposure. As soon as I get paid Research Assistantship I should try to repay my loan. I should not return as a burden to Maa and Papa. I have only 13 days to go. I should buy sufficient things. Shop more. Ugh. What is this? This makes my spine down. Seems huge responsibility. But I really wanted this only. Become my own. And it happens. I have to spend more and more time with Maa and Papa. I can do Video call but how can I feel their presence near me. How can I kiss my Maa? Do I really need this? Do I have to go long from them?

Oh No. Big no. I should think like an adult. I should not think like these. But after all I am a human being. How can I dumb my emotions! This lets me down. Making me so emotional.”

Tears blurring her eyes.

“Error 404, Democracy Not Found. Error 404, humanity Not Found. We oppose Citizenship amendment act 2019”, the reverberation bashes her back to the present.

It's 10:20am.

The sun begins strengthening his rays. The breeze is hot that the solar intensity stings skins. The horn sounds of the vehicles like the buzzing bees around ear, add possible pressure to the people. There are fresh faces. There are rich faces. There are some brooding faces. There are some sleeping faces. Their hunting eyes do have the stamina to work for the whole day. But no faces hold a happiness on it. Except the woman. She is clasping her hands, tilting on her husband's shoulder, seems much happier on the fabricated banner of life insurance which is printed the statement, “*Because your happiness lies in the prosperity of your family.*”

May be.

“Oh no. What's that?” She stumbles.

Crash!

Microseconds.

“Error 404, Democracy Not Found. Error 404, humanity Not Found. We oppose Citizenship amendment act 2019”, the sound is now stopped. The courageous people run to the other side of the road. The lorry has just now thrown her over the water tank to the left of the Engineering College.

Her body is lifeless beneath the *huge banner*. The lorry driver hastes and takes off that covers her body. She is immobilized. Frozen. Her ingenuous agro eyes gone over with “*Why did you do this to me?*” contemplating the lorry driver. The words she wants to voice struggled indoors in her mouth. Tears trickles from her eyes down on the cheeks. The strong smell of her spouting fresh blood fusing in to the air seep into one's nose. Ladybug boasts in her wounds, sound off how virulent it is. Her darkest black hair is scattered in many places and stained with dried blood.

Curious on Lookers. Cruel yet disheartened. Surprisingly, a tough and stern looking young age man with steaks of greyish hair and teary eyes weeping silently and hide his sorrows by back-facing the crowd that is the queue man who adjusted his sleeve often.

Whaaaaaaaaah whaaaaaaaaah whaaaaaaaaah whaaaaaaaaah.

Wee – oww. Wee – oww. Wee – oww. The siren of the ambulance whizzing down. The curious onlookers give them a way. The boys try to place her on the stretcher, lift her onto the ambulance.

Shhh... The boy signals the other saying she is dead.

“But none can perceive she is dead at first glance. From her clothing she is affluent. Her shoes only fit for city”, someone empathizes.

In a glimpse of a second, while she takes her hand to wipe the tears out, *the loosely erected marriage banner* from the nearby gate hits her to the direst. The lorry that comes after her, cannot pull off the break suddenly has scribbled her destiny eventually.

“Hello...”

“Meera Janav? I am inspector Ragavan.”

“Raahityaaaaaaaa...”

It's 7:20pm.

Not all deaths can change the society. The girl has met with an accident today breaks down everyone in the city. The CCTV footage shows that the banner against CAA has taken her life. The students of the Engineering College withdraw their protest finally leading the city peacefully - @ the media.

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