

Remembering Mother : Strength and Sensitivity

Today is the eighth anniversary of Mummy's passing away. Had she remained alive she would have been ninety-five years old.

Time in its ever-widening wake leaves memories like islands in an ocean. We cling to them as without them our lives would be quasi-blank. Only a few years ago Mummy was alive, going on living in her characteristic stoic commitment to life.

On the fateful day of 23rd April, 2008, she was not feeling well while taking her ritual morning walk. A neighbor noticing that urged her to go home and rest. Which she did. Rest of the day must have been restless for her as her body was slowly crumbling. By about midnight she is said to have had a large dual cardiac and neuro attack, which rendered her comatose. She was rushed to a close by hospital emergency room. But in the subsequent two days they could not wake her up. Then on 25th April she was declared dead. It was good that she did not have to suffer too much while returning the gift of her life to God.

Who was Mummy? I am still uncomfortable with that name. Up to the age of about eleven Lalita and I used to call her Bhabi, as did the entire Kaul clan. With the arrival of Babu and Kaku our parents changed their names to Daddy and Mummy from Babuji and Bhabi. She was born as Aruna Kaul Karihaloo, her pet name being Bhenji. Coming to Kauls as a daughter-in-law she was called Savitri. But behind all these names who was she?

Mummy had a puritanical streak imbibed from her childhood, an osmotic transference of the prevailing Hinduism in Kashmir. In it God is the ultimate savior of a person. For good reasons women are more religious than men. Mummy grew as a sensitive but a highly protected girl. In part it was due to her personality luminance and physical beauty. Connected to those were her softness

in communications. But behind the external softness lay hardness of will and tenacity. Qualities that came to eminent use in her married life. Kauls were a good but proud and cold family given to practical joking, unlike Karihallowos who expressed their tenderness for each other easily. Mummy adjusted to the new environment quickly. But Babuji's job problems took her to Delhi. There the greatest test of her will and tenacity occurred. Raising four children, on paltry income, in dust and heat. And she did this with little complaints and chest-beating.

But this was not the only test she faced in her life. Babu's accident put her against a huge concrete wall, which she did not know how to surmount. She slugged on and sweated but the tragedy would not wilt. Ultimately, she learned to live with it.

I have never seen Mummy get crushed, though disillusioned and dismayed she would. Her strength came from a faith which was hard to fathom. Religious faith contributed to it to some degree but the bulk of it was sourced from somewhere else. It came from her sense that one should not crumble no matter what confronts one. Simple that it is but its power is great. Furthermore, her inner simplicity made her life easier.

After Babu's tragedy she leaned more toward religion. Became a follower of Guru Childivilasananda. She would get up in the wee hours of the morning to pray. She thought that I did not like her religiosity, so one day she confronted me suddenly, and stated that she was not religious but spiritual. I do not consider pursuit of religion a folly. The mental sources of one's life are not easy to find, so going to philosophy, art, religion, or some other mental arena to find them is perfectly valid for me. Her basic confidence in herself, as to who she was, and her adopted stoicism were her elemental sources of strength. I am saying adopted stoicism because basically she enjoyed pleasures of life but had learnt to live without them also.

Daddy's passing away in 1982, only at the age of 65, did not crush her either. It was a hard blow to her for sure but she never became despondent by it. She liked to arrange her things. Spending sometimes hours on it. She was a keen friend and socializing charged her life. Overall, she was psychologically an independent person. She knew herself and took good care of herself.

She came to this world as a sensitive child but matured to become a strong personality, by dint of her sense of perseverance, a good mental balance, and faith in goodness of life.

Today, I am putting an intellectual wreath on Mummy by this writing, expressing my love and admiration for a life well-lived. I have been inspired by what she was and what she stood for.

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