

Roopawati Kaul Muthu - Pride and Sorrow

She was known to us as Bengashi, a woman of intense emotions and deep sentimentality.

As the first daughter of the family she moved with verve and aplomb. These qualities were interspersed with streaks of pride and sorrow.

In the cloistered families of that era life was lived more as a group than as an individual. She could, at times, be vivacious. Kauls' favorite joke-making pastime would catch her in full swing. Her laughter was hearty.

There is a little story about her when she was a pre-teenage girl. One day she was found at her home, in front of people, without her trousers on. The elders pleaded with her to put them on, as it looked awful. But she would not budge. Then someone thought of a different strategy to make her put on her trousers. He told her that she should not put them on. This triggered her to put them on.

She was married, at a young age, to a scion of Muthu family, Dwarikanth. He was a physician. But much more than that he was a saintly fellow. He would sometimes not charge his patients his fees if he thought they could not afford it. Other times he may have even provided them money. A man of principles, he did not go with the flow of the world. This and other situations in his life kept his worldly status at a level which was lower than what could have been. He was called by some people as a *satyayogi* (spiritual) doctor.

Here is a picture of her: sitting in her Ganpatyar residence wut (living room),

reclining against a duffle pillow, with a blanket over her legs, in a semi-reflective state of mind. She would ruminate over the state of her life. Her thoughts would be basically anchored in her past. She would in a stream-of-consciousness state think of what became of the glory of Kauls. She would think of her brothers and sister and other family members who were not with her at the moment, especially Baitoth, her elder brother, the person she loved the most. This echo of the past, and the imperfection of the present, were her ever-present haunt. While Jehlum flowed by her window, she did not pay much attention to it, but would be possessed by the flow of her memories. This was the defining aspect of her personality.

She was affectionate, gracious, friendly, and proud of her heritage. Her need for the company of people was great. She was a less than a full housewife, as her mind was elsewhere. She cooked well. She was religious, as people at her time were, but not overly.

Bengashi doted on her two sons, Nanaji and Saiba, to the extent that they could do no wrong. Here was a maternal love that was unconditional and irreversible. But she did not live long enough to see the bliss of their worldly successes.

My bond with Muthus was strong, and Bengashi was fond of me, which made me spend a great deal of time at their home. Once, during the intermediate college examination preparation time, which fell in winter those days, I stayed with them for some two months. I was close to Nanaji and Saiba, especially to the former.

With the retirement of her husband she plunged more in her sorrow. Feeling of loneliness became her durable companion. If these were not enough burdens on her, she contracted a kidney disease, which shadowed her for a long time. She died in a New Delhi hospital. She was only 52.

Today I miss Bengashi's pleasure at meeting people, her pride in her family, and her sorrow for life.

Suffern, New York, January 31, 2015.

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