

# The Love and Its Labor : A Tribute to Aruna Kaul

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My mother, called Aruna by her parents, and Savithri by her in-laws, was known there informally as Bhabi, which later changed to Mummy for her children, after the birth of the younger ones. All her life she has remained an enigmatic figure to us. Where did her sheer goodness, charm, and indefatigable energy come from, has remained a question whose answer she has taken with her. She was a good mother, who taught her children to be good, to never give up, and to help humanity. Her vision was lofty, her ambitions were high. She did not want to annoy even a single individual, even if he or she was wrong. She found in her reserve yet another feeling of goodwill even for the guilty. Today, I stand here feeling bereft of the magic that she was. She was a human being who had touched the feathers of the fairies, but yet chose to remain on the ground. She thought doing good here on earth was a lot better than being in heaven.

Mummy was born in a sprawling household, carrying the families of five Karihallo brothers, living in some of the best of the Kashmiri Pandit traditions, in a downtown area of Srinagar, called Malik Angan. The number of children in the clan was so large that only the exceptionally good and the bad had the chance to be noticed. Because of Mummy's gracious personality and physical beauty, she came to be noticed and remembered. She became a darling of the clan and of the many outside visitors.

In 1936, at only the age of sixteen, she was married in her father's friend's family, the Kauls of Malikyar. The atmosphere there was more challenging to win the hearts and the minds of the people, partly due to the largeness of the family and partly due to her being a new daughter-in-law. But in time her perseverance and personality paid off. But Mummy had to adjust to a different culture and to

different personalities. For many a new daughter-in-law in Kaul clan, she became a role model. She introduced wool knitting to Kashmiris, which she had picked from her elder sister, while spending some time with her in Shimla.

But life turned out to be not always a bed of roses for Mummy. Daddy lost his job in New Delhi, forcing us, except for Daddy, to return to Kashmir. These were difficult times for us but Mummy was tenacious and realistic. After a year Daddy found even a better job than before and we returned to Delhi to a happier life. Within a few years Daddy was posted to the foreign countries and the fortunes of the family went up. From that time onward economic insecurity was not a factor in our family.

Mummy now became a sophisticated diplomatic spouse and a good support for her husband. Her basic qualities paved her way to success. She gathered many an admirer in different parts of the world.

In 1982 Daddy passed away and Mummy more energetically than before pored into the religious books. But she called her faith spiritual than religious. She became a follower of Gurumayi Chidvilasananda. She coupled the spiritual enlightenment with physical exercise. Her practical approach to life was as willful and energetic as was her spiritual approach to it.

As times passed, she and her home became a shining place of the family. Many people gathered round her to absorb her goodness. She was a healer as well a friend, a relative as well as a counselor.

Year after year she continued with her spiritual and physical regimen, defying time. She became an inspiration to many in her zeal to live and do good. She will remain a great mother and a noble light in our family and also in some other families. She fulfilled her mission here on earth.

Maharaj Kaul

Read on Shanti Path, at Sai Center, New Delhi, on May 2, 2008

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