

APPENDIX II

Aaimoni's Mother

(Translated from Purabi Barmudoi's original Assamese "Aaimonir Maak" by Afrida Masooma)

Every mother in this world is only a mother; children, however, are different. Two mothers are exactly the same, two children are different. Two mothers from two different places, sitting face to face, look like one identical picture of two faces. Two twin babies, on the other hand, belong to two different poles. Mothers are connected by motherhood. Mothers clad in the dresses of motherhood appear to be the same. Same only in appearance? Do they wrap themselves in the dresses of motherhood or shield themselves in it? Yes, yes, motherhood is a shield, but the shield is also a dress. A dress impenetrable by enemies. No one can pierce through the shield of motherhood and that is why every mother remains a mother to every child. Motherhood is beyond decay and disintegration. Immortal and perpetual it is.

Does mother have her own children? Yes, yes. A woman gives birth to one child or to many children or she does not and yet she becomes a mother. By giving or not giving birth to a baby she becomes a mother, she becomes a mother of every child of the world. She blesses everyone of them. By showering blessings on everyone she herself becomes the blessed soul.

Is this nature of mother a matter-of-fact reality or an idealised trait in her identity? Who is upholding such an ideal in front of us? How many of them do I really know? Or how many mothers do I get in touch with to observe them closely and find out whether those women's nature can match with the glorious images of mother. Are they bound to love and bless their children only because they have brought them to this world? Their love seems to be spontaneous and natural but can it be only a commonplace truth for that reason? If the matter is as natural as the growing of new leaves in the trees during springtime then it is better not to glorify motherhood. My personal experience is like this:

We then used to stay in the first floor of a two-storied house. As the balcony was facing the east, the veranda was flooded with sunlight at the time of sunrise. Even before the sunrise a flock of Indian mynah, sparrow and whisker bulbuli used to come, settle there and the whole place was filled with their chirping. They wanted biscuits. Two or three amongst them were so daring that they used to squeak sitting on me even when I was asleep. There were some mast trees beside the house where the whisker family built their nests. The babies also used to come along with their parents. They could not pick up grains on their own; opening their mouth they

keep on tweeting. These hungry babies were tended to by one or two mother mynahs supplying specks of grain in their open mouth. These mother mynahs also knew how to shower the gift of motherhood on others' babies. They gift motherhood to babies of whisker bulbuli. By feeding the babies of bulbuli if a mynah can be the mother of all birds, then a human mother can also be the mother all children and her being a blessed figure is also a natural and normal matter. There may be exception in some cases. As every maternal uncle is not Kangsha, every mother is also not Kunti.

In the context of glory of motherhood our Mamoni told us a story. A story more true and interesting than a novel. The son of a poor and lonely woman who supports her family by working in others' houses passed matriculation examination by securing seventh position. The mother herself was illiterate. In the light of the single lamp of the kitchen, to say, of the whole house, the boy studied and the mother kept listening. The boy's father had died during his childhood. The mother, being the sole parent, got tired after working for the whole day in others' houses but she kept sitting beside him listening to his lessons. She had even got by heart many of his lessons of the lower classes. His success was all due to his mother. His mother's way of teaching mathematics in his childhood was wonderful. The boy solved a sum so quickly that his mother had to say: Do not look at the answer, solve it on your own. He did and told his mother that the answer was the same. Mother responded: your solution is correct, now check the answer. In various contexts, Mamoni had told me the story and everytime she gave one of her own interpretations: we learn more by means of sympathy rather than through our mind. The mother could teach her son something that she herself did not know for she had the ocean-like sympathy for her son. In case of learning, the place of our heart is superior to that of our mind. By means of her heart and sympathy, a mother could secure a glorious position for herself. Mamoni told us another story.

Long back an accident happened in our neighbour's house. Baruah's elder sister-in-law died after giving birth to a child. The father, grandmother, aunt and other members of the family looked after the baby girl. But when she grew up and learnt to talk, she began to ask for her mother. No one directly explained before her how she had lost her mother. Holding this motherless girl close to her bosom at night, the grandmother used to tell her many tales. The 'daughter of the kite mother story' had a very strong effect on the little girl's tender mind. The daughter of the kite ! If she could call her mother like the kite's daughter, her mother would also come down to her aid, she believed.

The sky was clean blue in the afternoon during the month of May. There was a kite flying very high in the sky. The grandmother of the girl was sleeping. Without letting the grandmother know she tiptoed out of the house and stood under the pomelo tree near the backyard and started to sing - "aagloti kolapat lore ki sore silani aai mur aagote pore". The clear sky was not very visible from the backyard. Through the gaps in the trees she could hardly see the bird. When the bird vanished out of her sight, the girl imagined that her mother would swoop down to her in an instant stretching out her wings. She kept gazing at the sky even while singing out those lines and she felt good when she lost sight of the kite. Her mother is coming, she will meet her mother, she thought. She had got so many things to tell her mother! No one had ever asked her to cook or to weave clothes in the loom. She would learn these works from her aunt and grandmother. On meeting her mother, she would only try to know where her mother roamed around leaving her daughter alone. Did not she miss her daughter? Where she stayed and what she ate? The grandmother told her that her mother stayed with the forest, river-falls, sky, air, earth and water. The grandmother, however, never saw her as the daughter of the kite. After listening to the tale many times, the little girl herself began to imagine and call her mother 'kite'.

After singing the song for long, when the kite did not appear in front of the little girl, she started another journey searching for her mother. There was a big area of *futukani* shrub near the river behind their house. There were *nal*, *ikora* and *khagori* shrubs. Some shrubs of *kutkura*, *bihmura* were also seen here and there. Under a thicket beside the bank of the river there was a make-shift bed of dry grass and leaves. Probably this was a handiwork by some fishermen or cowherd to take rest or sleep for sometime. But the little girl would like to imagine it in a different way. As her grandmother had said earlier that her mother was mingling with the soil, water, river, forest, sky and air, surely it must be her mother's bed to take rest at night. Till then she could not trace out her mother, her mother also could not find her out. Today, since she found her mother's bed, she would definitely find out her mother.

The girl lay down in the bed. She got a peculiar smell. What smell was this? She felt as if she had been born with this smell at the core of her heart. She got this whiff whenever she went to the riverbank. While sleeping with the grandmother at night, again she got the feeling that the air in the room was filled with that peculiar scent. However, that did not belong to her grandmother. She could recognize the smell of her grandmother's body. In grandmother's *riha*, *chadar* and *mekhala*, the smell remained all the time; sniffing once is enough. It was

unmistakeable. This smell was not that smell. Then, was it her mother's? May be. Not may be; it was. Now she was to meet her mother!

Not now, not now. The girl heard that her grandmother was calling her loudly. Aaimoni, Oh Aaimoni where are you? She heard that she was being called but she decided not to answer from the midst of the thicket. She would respond from a corner of their orchard after coming out of the wild thicket. She came out of it as quickly as possible. She did not want to lose the mark of her mother's bed out there. In her own mind, she drew a picture of the narrow track that led to the bed near the shrubs. If it did not rain she would come at night. Tonight she must meet her mother. How much happy her mother would be on meeting her! And she? That smell would take her to her mother.

Running a few steps and then hopping the next few, the girl reached the pomelo tree at the corner of the backyard and called her grandmother: 'Grandma, I am here'. Seeing her, grandmother could at last take a deep breath of relief. Cuddling her she gave her a warning that one should not go to the river during the mid day time. That might offend the water nymphs. Aaimoni also hugged her grandmother with her tiny little hands and patted her cheek with her own, which made grandmother believe that her grand daughter would no more go to the riverside alone. However, that evening itself, leaving her grand mother and aunt in unfathomable mystery, she disappeared.

After seeing the bed, Aaimoni became desperate to meet her mother. It was not that she loved her grandmother less, but she loved her mother most. She also had a whole world to know from her mother. She knew that her aunt and grandmother would be anxious at home. However, her mother's call was irresistible. How could she afford to ignore her mother's call? She could easily reach the bed of grass and dry leaves beneath the shrub following the narrow strip of track near the shrubs of *nal*, *ikora*, *khagori*, *kutkura* and *bihumura*. She felt as if just after she had crossed the orchard, someone was guiding her on the way even in the midst of darkness: Aaimoni this way, yes, yes go on that way, now you turn a bit left, okay, okay, not towards the river, go straight. Done, done, almost done, just a few steps remain. See, you have reached that tree! Who was this? Was it her mother? She felt as if she was under the spell of that particular smell. But did she really get that smell? Yes, she got, her grandmother never lied to her. Her mother was hiding herself in the midst of earth and water, sky and air, trees and grass, rivers and lakes and light and darkness. Her mother would not always play hide and seek with her. Tonight her mother would surely come to her and she would meet her mother.

Her mother came and communicated only with her. She was tired. Going to bed early just after having her meal was her habit. After lying on the bed of grass she felt drowsy. She was not at all afraid. She was so sure of her mother's visit that she was not scared of anything. The stronger the smell of her mother the more irresistible was the spell of slumber for her. The voice of her mother was resonating in her ears. Oh dear! She is asleep. Oh! Look at the red mark in her cheek. May be mosquito bite. Keep asleep dear. I will keep looking at your face to my heart's content and then I will sleep beside you. The bed was not broad enough to accomodate the mother-daughter duo. Her mother somehow adjusted herself in the bed and lay down beside her. Sleeping on her back needed more space; so she turned to her daughter and held her close to her bosom with one hand.

The whole night Aaimoni got the soft touch of her mother. The jungle, river, reeds of ikora-birina, shrubs of kutkura-bihumuna, the nocturnal birds and the fireflies - all these emitted a special smell in the air and wrapped in that magic spell, Aaimoni was fast asleep in the bed of dry grass and leaves. She had met her mother. In the wee hours of morning, she found that her mother had already gone for her day's work.