



The Botanist's Resignation

- Sayantan Pal Chowdhury

Vivisection of the parts of plants and testing of the xylem and phloem tissues were the only important job to Dr. Maity in this world. It would rather not be justified to call it a “job”. One should call it his worship. He was a votary of Botany and the tests and researches related to it. Since 6 am to 12 am his only entertainment was to think about the new inventions in plants or tissues of plants. Sometimes though his wife tried to fall out on this matter, the votary remained silent lest his thought might be disturbed. He said to others, “We should not even eavesdrop in quarrels. It creates such a fear that new thoughts and ideas fear to come to our minds.” His colleagues and students also laughed at his “madness” as they called it.

He was so absorbed in Botany that one day in his childhood he revolted against consuming green vegetables as food. For two days and two nights he ate every possible thing except green vegetables. Being perplexed, his parents ran to the Science teacher in school. The teacher, a very humble man, called him. He patted Maity, as he was not a PhD holder then, on his shoulder. He took him to the edge of the balcony of the first floor of the school and asked, “My poor! Why don't you take green vegetables?”

Maity replied, “I can't, Sir. I know, green trees and plants have life. How can I kill them and devour them? I am not a monster. Am I?”

The teacher said, “Oh dear. You are quite right, but not totally. You don't know about food-chain.” At that Maity frowned. He continued, “Yes dear, food-chain. If we don't take these green vegetables, the chain will be broken and our creation will suffer. Later in your class I will give a detailed lecture on this. Do you want our creation to be doomed?”

Awestruck, Maity replied, “Not at all, sir. I will wait for the lecture on this topic.”

The teacher said, “OK dear. Now I think you have no problem in consuming vegetables.”

Maity sighed, “No sir.”

At this, his parents heaved a sigh of relief. In the next few days he acquired the knowledge of “food-chain”.

Such incidents were not rare in his life. He was not a peculiar man, but a man of sense, a peculiar sense and sensibility. His was a life of a saint. No days were wasted without practicing Botanical experiments. He made a small laboratory in his attic. Only his little son had the permission to go in there, but obviously in his presence.

Being a student of science, he had no faith in God. In his youth he once resigned from going outside during the Puja days. His friends came and coaxed him to go to a tour if he did not like to visit the pandals. But he rejected their proposal by saying, "Is it a time to celebrate? Why should we celebrate some days for some Gods who I don't know whether exist or not?" His friends had to give in.

When he grew up, his parents pressed him to marry which he would never accept. One day when he returned from college, his mother brought a postcard size photo of a young, slim and undoubtedly beautiful girl of about twenty-two. Maity was looking up a reference for his new project. He did not utter a word but directed his mother to the open door. His mother was adamant on that particular day when the sun rose high in the sky causing sweating; no birds sang on the tamarind tree peeping through the open window; no fish gave in in the fishing net. Maity was standing beside his book shelf and his mother was holding the photograph before him. At last when the wall-clock struck 3 in the afternoon, the first whistle of a bird was heard on the huge cactus, the grey clouds began to swallow the bright and pride sun, Maity resigned to his mother's arrogance. Without looking at the photograph he nodded.

On the marriage night after all the customs were done, everyone returned to their houses, the fire put out, the lights off, Maity returned to bed chamber with a sample of a herb. His bride was waiting for him on the marriage bed decorated with flowers. After a waiting for about one hour when his bride raised her eyes, she fainted. She remained unconscious for about half-an-hour but Maity took no notice to her. When she returned to her consciousness and assembled herself, she noticed that Maity was still busy with the sample. She got up, went to him, and came back to her bed.

After a year and a half Maity became father of a beautiful girl child. He stoically heard the news in his self-made laboratory in his attic and within a few moments he again became absorbed in his experiments with bunch of a grass. His girl grew up without knowing that her father had any other relation with them except supporting them financially. Her father came to her only at night after 12 in the clock. She felt so dizzy that she could not open her mind properly.

After another four years Maity became a father for the second time of a boy child which his wife had to deliver in their bed-room. It was a rainy night. It was raining cats and dogs outside. Maity was in his attic. When her pain reached to the utmost, Maity's wife shouted at him. Though he did not come down to the bed room, the neighbours rushed in. with the help of an old lady she delivered a young child boy. Maity got the news at 12 am when he came to sleep. He heard the news and went to sleep.

So, it was the story of a peculiar and particular man who could make every single day a story itself. Everyone's life is a collection of some short

stories and ultimately at the end a novel itself. But Maity's novel should be a bigger one. He had no attachment with friends and family. He could not take responsibilities. He could not move anywhere leaving his laboratory for a single day. He was a hermit who had shut himself in his own hut. But still he had no faith for God. He had never bowed before an idol. He thought, "It was a waste of time. Time is valuable and we should know the value of it."

But a single day changed his way of life when he became forty-five years of age. His deepest understanding of science and his total dedication had always kept him aloof from spiritualism. For him, spiritualism should be restricted to only a few people. It was not his cup of tea. Rather, he preferred to serve God, if there was any, by serving science. So did he. But one day the miracle happened for which he was never ready. He never opened his mind to any miracles or mysteries. So one day when he was on his way home from college cutting through the mists of a winter evening of December, he faced a woman who was in her mid-sixties. The woman suddenly came in front of him, and asked,

"Have you seen Him?"

Maity was hastily walking to reach his laboratory as early as possible. He was surprised without being frightened and replied,

"I don't know who you are looking for."

She asked again, "Has He gone this way?"

"I cannot understand you mother. Who are you looking for? Who is he?"

She said, "I have been searching Him since this morning but still He is missing. They told me that I will find Him this way but still I have no trace of Him. I cried a lot. Or you can say that I have been crying since this morning. I must not leave my search lest He leaves me alone here. Have you seen Him?"

Maity felt confused and pity for the woman. He said to her, "Oh mother! I don't know who you are looking for. But if you are not getting him here and if you are tired of searching him, please go back to your home and try to find him another day. You are already looking exhausted."

She said, "Home? I have no home now. I had one little cottage here where I lived with my only son and his wife. But now, since they have told me about Him, I have lost my home. I have left that cottage in search of Him. Only He can lead me to my real home. He is the source of my coming here and my going back also. I want to go back now. I want to go home now." Tears were falling down on her cheek.

Maity felt quite anxious about her. It was as if something in her was leading him to a dream which he had never had in his life. He felt curious about the identity of the "he". He asked, "Can you please tell me who the he is?"

She wiped the tears on her cheek with the loose end of her white sari and

said, "It is He who, they say, has created everything. You, me and everything is His creation. He is in everything and He is out of everything. He is in life, He is in death. He is in blessings, He is in curse. He is in virtue, He is in sin. I have never felt so relief after hearing that He forgives all our sins once we are dedicated. I don't know whether I am correct or not in giving Him the attribution of 'He', I don't know it might be 'She' or genderless, but still I want that person who can take me back to my real home."

Maity could not understand what she was saying. He rejected all his understanding of God or theism. He was more on the side of atheism. But why was he stirred by the woman? Was it for her deep understanding and faith on the existence of God whom he knew she had never seen or could never get? But where is God? No one had seen Him in his life. The only way to get nearer to Him was the ears. He was only heard and nothing else. Our eyes had no importance to Him. He gave importance only to the ears. But if the woman was looking for Him, why was she looking for Him here? He asked, "Why are you looking for Him here, mother? Go to the hills where people believe He resides."

She suddenly seemed to be more conscious. Her eyes looked brighter. She started to mutter, "Oh! I am sorry. They told me that He is everywhere. Still...still I am here in search of Him. They told me, He is everywhere. I forgot." She put her palm on Maity's shoulder, walked away and vanished in the mists.

Maity looked at her way of leaving. He pondered over her murmurs. "He is everywhere." He walked fast to his house when all the thoughts came to him, "Is He everywhere really? Is He here seeing both of us talking about Him? Is He there in my laboratory? Is He there in the plants I use as sample? Is He there in all the works I do?"

Maity reached home within a few minutes. Without talking to anyone he rushed to his laboratory. He opened the door, looked at everything he gathered throughout all his life. He opened the doors and windows wide. His mind was crowded with new ideas, new realization, "He is everywhere. He is here, He is there. He is in the plants, He is in my family. He is beyond time, or, time is immaterial to Him. He is always following us, whether we are awake or slept. He is xylem, He is phloem. He is stem, He is root. He is life, He is death. Even He is after this earthly life also." Maity sat on the easy-chair and went into the lap of sleep when a conquered smile marked on his cheeks.

