

Pulak's Mother

Debapriti Sengupta

Very early in the morning an old ailing person, Ritadebi - the resident of a quintessential small suburban town of West Bengal, India, has boarded the crowded local train that will take her to Calcutta. The railways are the cheapest medium that facilitates the transportation of thousands of commuters everyday to the economic hub of the Eastern state. Ritadebi's son, Pulak, is a resident of the city along with his wife, Niharika. Their three roomed flat was unable to spare a room for the 'unsophisticated' Ritadebi. She receives no financial help from her son and works as a household help in several houses and earns a meagre amount at the end of every month. She has a phone but that hardly rings - maybe once in six months. Her son is too busy to care about his mother.

However, yesterday has been an exception. Late at night, her phone rang. At first, the ringing tone of the phone had left the old woman startled. Immediately after that her motherly instincts triggered. Why is her son calling her so late? Has he fallen into any trouble? With trembling hands she picked up the phone.

'Hello ma, you have to come tomorrow at Sealdah railway station. I will meet you there and give you a packet. You will have to hand over it to a guy named Ratan who will meet you at Gede station', spoke Pulak in one breath without giving her a chance to speak. Ritadevi, being the motherly figure she is, was unable to refuse her ignorant son. So here she is, getting smashed in the ladies compartment of the train.

The train was moving past landscapes and so was her consciousness. She was thinking of all the bitter words she had to listen to when she asked for a day's leave from her masters.

"Do you think that I will give you money by only seeing your face?"- shrieked Mrs. Dutta. "You can go today but tomorrow you will have to do double the work.

In those households she is referred to as 'pulak er maa' (mother of Pulak); she doubts whether anybody in this world knows her real name. She was suddenly broken off her trance by the sound of hurrying footsteps hurling past her.

Oh! I have reached.'- she thought to herself. She slowly, bent in pain, de-boarded the train and tried to find her son amongst the sea of people.

Suddenly a man in a shining green coloured shirt and trousers was seen to approach her. She, at first, couldn't make out the face but the posture seemed familiar. Then she realised it was indeed her son in shining trousers. Pulak came and dragged her towards a deserted corner and without any greetings shoved a packet in her hand.

“The train is waiting at Platform No. 9...Go...hurry up. Don’t forget to get down at Gede station. There a man named Ratan will find you; he has your picture and don’t DOZE off...”

With these words Pulak hurriedly left and within few moments got lost in the crowd. Ritadebi was in a deep trance and few questions were troubling her a lot - how can an illiterate person like Pulak manage to afford such expensive clothes and mobile? And what is there in this packet?

She sat down on a bench and opened the packet - it was filled with a white powdery substance. Suddenly the television screen of the neighbourhood club flashed before her - is it what she is thinking? Does this packet contain drugs?

She decided that she will first verify that this is not something illegal and then deliver the packet. So she asked a hawker where the railway police station was and he showed her the way. She went there, and after initial rejections, managed to talk to an officer and narrated her whole story. She then boarded the next train accompanied by two police officers in civil dress.

At Gede station she stood in front of the railway ticket counter as instructed by the police and waited for Ratan to arrive. After ten minutes she saw a man approaching her. At the very moment he was caught red handed by the police. After initial interrogation Pulak was also caught.

Ritadebi was in the newspapers the day after that. She had managed to punish a whole drug dealer gang and has saved many people from this dangerous habit. On the following Republic Day she was awarded with a pension by the government. She sometimes laments about the fact that she might not get to see her son again but then her peace of mind is restored when she is reminded about the lives of numerous people that she has saved.

Oh! and for a matter of fact everyone in the neighbourhood now calls her by her name and not as ‘mother of Pulak’.

Debapriti Sengupta is presently pursuing her post graduation in English from The Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata.