

Of human bondage

I woke up with a start. Someone was pounding my door. The anxious face of my elder brother looked down upon me as I opened the door. "Do you know where my tupi is? I can't find it anywhere!"

Of course I knew where it was- under the pile of clothes on his bed he kept last night. As he got out in a hurry, Baba stayed back for a few minutes. I smiled when I saw him with his little bottle of attar in his hand. He rubbed the tip of it behind my ears "Eid Mubarak my dearest" he said. Such a little thing to say to make me look forward to the day I've been dreading.

The men did not return after the Eid prayers but set out doing the slaughtering procedures. After a while, a scream from the sacrificed animal implied the end of its suffering. The men managed the butchers

downstairs, while my mother and the maid were in charge upstairs. I stayed clear of the kitchen and drawing space which soon became gory.

Morning turned to noon as everyone engaged in the chaotic process of the meat-distribution. Finally mustering some courage I got out of my room. Outside, my humble abode had turned into a battle zone; it was bloodied and full of rushing figures. The kitchen, however, was deserted. But before I could sneak kebab, I found myself cradling a cooking pot and raw meat. Ammu threw down on me. Before long, the stove was blasting fire as I busily stirred the curry on Ammu's directions while she multitasked all over the house.

Amidst all the pandemonium, we lunched together like a hungry lot, criti-

cised the cooking and praised the quality of the meat after which a little debate broke out between Bhaia and Baba about who first chose the cow out of so many and haggled like a pro and brought it home. Really, it seemed like they brought in a wife instead of a cow. Ammu kept fussing over us all; she was in her element since all of us were together which is rare nowadays what with the busy city lives of us all.

The distribution process resumed after that. Instead of sneaking inside my room again, I thought better of it and started helping Ammu. As the sun set and the sky grew darker, some relatives visited us. The kids played and the adults talked or helped dividing the meat. I kept running amongst both groups trying to manage one and socialise with the other.

At night when the guests left and 'meat works' were all done, we joined Baba as he switched on the TV and surfed through the channels. While we huddled together watching Ittadi and lauding the host, I looked at Ammu who looked positively radiant as she watched the show. I finally understood why she prepared for hours for the Eid days. Spending time with family was the very essence of Eid for her and it only came twice a year. I thought about the countless others like her and couldn't help but appreciate the prophets for starting it all. Although it was a day in which we were expected to find happiness through sacrifices, I found mine without giving up anything except for my will to isolate myself from it all.

"SubhanAllah" I whispered.

By Dania Manal



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