



FICTION

Life's Invisible Battles

TOHON

This is a story without a beginning or an end. The story does not even relate to events that one can see. And yet, in some sense, there is a beginning and there is an end. There are events, too, surrounding a man. But the story is neither about the events nor about the man. It revolves around the battle the man fights in the depths of his soul.

It begins with a question: What is sin? Let us assume that a man makes his living and sustains his family by stealing; in plain words, he is a thief. He initiates his son to his doctrine and then trains him in his profession. With his passion, motivation and dedication, the boy excels in three things: love for his dad, obedience and theft. Now here is the question: Is the boy a sinner? If so, what is his share of the sin? Who is at fault? One may blame the father, but he is not the origin; he is only a link connecting his son to the countless events that preceded him.

The same questions may apply to a man who is meritorious, virtuous and holy. What

is his share of the merit? What is his share of the virtue? What is his share of the holiness? Does he possess it by acquisition or inheritance? Where is the origin of sin and piety? What is the source of good and evil?

I have learnt that a man has free will. He is endowed with abilities to pursue knowledge and wisdom, distinguish between right and wrong, and be righteous by doing right things. He is, in the words of William Henley's "Invictus," the master of his fate and the captain of his soul.

This sounds good, except that it appears to be flawed. When there is a competition, say a sprint, the referees on the ground make sure of three things. Firstly, they segregate the athletes by age, physical abilities and sex. For example, a child does not have to compete with the adults or a disabled person does not have to run against able-bodied men. Secondly, there is a predetermined starting point, finish line and track that applies to everyone. It would be unfair to have tracks of different lengths and with different hurdles on for

each athlete. Thirdly, the sprint starts with a whistle—that is, nobody starts earlier than another. Now, do similar rules apply when it comes to judging men, rich and poor, dull and sharp, honest and dishonest, kind and brutal, good and evil, holy and unholy? Yes, I have read and heard that all men are equal. But does it imply that all men are endowed with equal abilities, qualities, traits, opportunities, physique, environment or even consciousness and free will? Do they all start at the same point? Do they all start at the same time?

While I am contemplating this philosophical problem, I am distracted by a more pressing issue. I have recently taken up an overseas job with a good salary – a change for someone coming from a family of modest means. Baba is a retired school-teacher. *Boroda* looks after the family farm and manages his family, his wife and two sons. Dulal, my younger brother, did not make it beyond high school. Baba helped him with his pension fund to start his business. The business had a bad start and