

# LIFE AND LIVING



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## CHAPTER 1

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Mr. Mohanty was at uneasy with himself while he was taking an evening walk through the quiet park. The morning conversation he had with his lone visitor kept coming back to his mind again and again. The visitor was rough and violent, to meddle with his life so, he had been ungentlemanly too, thought Mr. Mohanty; what right he had to put forward such uncomfortable questions, questions no body would like, particularly at his age. It was becoming dark. How could he face the questions in the black and blank of night, that he felt so difficult to come across during the bright day light! he will hide his face on the pillow and think he was at peace and there were no daunting questions and it will be calm at his heart and that will take him through to sleep, determined Mr. Mohanty.

Times were so difficult now a days, even without unwelcome visitors who put such cold and unexpected questions and who felt the delivery of this heathen world to heaven lay on their shoulder.

“What is the goal of your life?”

“What ought to be the goal of human life?”

At his age, with his accumulated wisdom, one could attempt to answer these questions individually without thinking there to be any connection between the two. But to put these together as a bundle and throw so at the face, without any concern for the effect it might have on the victim, particularly

when one knows that Mr. Mohanty had already lived sixty and five years of his life, so nicely and so neatly. This is pure apathy. The visitor was thinking he was doing social work, a work he had carved out for him for heaven sake, for upliftment of human beings from their mundane existence, to take them towards divine grace. Least did he know, how unkindly and ungraceful he was - the visitor. He even left behind a book for reference where all the answers lay.

“Come to Krishna and Krishna will take you to heaven,” the book said.

What violence.

Where is Krishna to be found! If only Krishna could come and take him hand-cuffed to some place bound within four walls where questions did not collide with questions and answers will not collide with answers, where the heart did not tear apart for lack of answers and containment of questions.

“Surrender.”

“Surrender completely.”

Mr. Mohanty raised his hand up to the sky and thought,

Take me.

Suddenly aware of his activity, Mr. Mohanty felt even a little ashamed. Is there no body else in this garden, and he looked around, no body was there. Not even Krishna, at least not to be seen. Not even in the guise of some other creature. An animal or a bird or perhaps he was there, may be as some hidden insect. May be Krishna saw that he had raised his hands in surrender. He will make a note of it. Surely.

It is not that Mr. Mohanty was naive in matters religious. He was well through his religious education long since his middle age. He had read the scriptures, the mythologies, and the words of saints. And not only from Hinduism, he was knowledgeable about, Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism too.

But there was certain harshness, the way the visitor put the questions sharply cutting his mental poise, that had disturbed Mr. Mohanty. He knew he had lived a pious life and there were not many moments he could recall that would put him at remorse. Then why was he perturbed?

It is the bundle of questions, that asked him, are you ending a life? Or are you beginning one?

He thought of Darwinian Evolution of species and Sri Aurobindo's concept of spiritual evolution.

"We are constantly in a state of flux." Flux means flow-perpetual flow,

Oh, the violence of disturbance, can't you leave me at peace with my self?

He was looking for calmness, quietude.

## CHAPTER 2

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Mr. Mohanty was back home. Back from his evening walk. An exercise he undertook everyday since his retirement. They were a family of five. The eldest daughter Paro (32), was married, the other two children Sofi (27) and Tapan (20) lived with parents.

Mrs. Mohanty was in her middle fifties. The Mohanty's lived an ordinary middle class life in a small town in Orissa. The children were all educated in local schools and colleges. The town had a college offering courses only up to graduation. Paro had done her post graduation through distance education in political science. Sofi did her graduation in science and was now pursuing B.Ed through distance education. Since last three years she had been teaching at a local school for some meager salary. Once she completes her B-Ed she would apply for some government post, in case she was not married off before that. A groom was being sought. You would soon be married off and only I shall be at home without your supervising eyes on me, Tapan often teased Sofi. Because Sofi acted sort of matron, always after Tapan advising him to study well at his college. Tapan was in the final year of graduation in the science stream. He had chosen Botany (Hons). Since he was no good at Maths, Physics and Chemistry (Hons) were ruled out. And also there was a good future for Botany (Hons) it was said, now that there

was much research in Biotechnology and everywhere courses on Biotechnology were being offered. Everyone in the family wanted Tapan to do well in studies. They put their hope on Tapan's success for a good future for the family. He was the only boy who could earn and bring further prosperity to the house. As of now, the only source of income was Mr. Mohanty's pension. To add to it more than a thousand was added as rent from their house adjoining their own home. As a mark of foresight, Mr. Mohanty had built the house solely for purpose of renting so that an extra income could flow in. What Sofi earned from her schools was put in the bank as saving to come to use for her marriage. Marriage was a costly affair. Paro's marriage had drained a third of Mr. Mohanty's savings. In India every event was to be celebrated with pomp. Even death of a family member was not spared. In fact a death cost a family so much that you did not know for what to become sad for the loss of your kin or for the drain of your pocket. It did not matter if you are well to do but it cramped on you if you had meager means.

To some extent by celebrating death it lessened some what the grief and the celebration of marriage and birth, enhanced the happiness of the occasion by bringing into fold the other member of society related to you by blood or heart and often too by neighborhood or caste. All caste members must be invited, fed and taken care of during such intimate events as marriage and death for all the modernity and advancement of society the tradition had not given away its foothold through customs and rituals. The Brahmin may not know his subject so well, nevertheless, one such was indispensable for an occasion of celebration if only for some chanting of unknown Sanskrit slokas. He said what he knew and loudly so for our ignorance and lack of awareness of what he ought to be doing.

When Mr. Mohanty reached home Mr. Sahu his tenant was talking with Mrs. Mohanty, sipping his tea. Mr. Sahu was a lecturer at the local college in the science stream. He had been teaching since past twenty years. Quite an experienced teacher he was and popular too. Most of the students liked him. He often talked to his students at leisure and guided them through their career. It is at his advice that Tapan was put to Botany (Hons).

“How is Tapan doing at his studies now-a-days?” inquired Mr. Mohanty upon sitting down on his chair.

“Oh, he is doing fine” answered Mr. Sahu. “We are counting on you to make something of him, there is no one else to guide him you know”, said Mr. Mohanty earnestly.

“Yes, I will do all I can, I will make him more of himself”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean if I try to make him someone he is not, I will make a hypocrite of him”.

“Isn’t education all about making one, what he is not”?

“An extremely difficult question, Mr. Mohanty, I have been struggling with these boys and girls since last twenty years, to see if I can make them different, But you know, I can only add and remove like a sculpture carving on a piece of stone. I cannot make a marble statue out of granite.

“True, but then you do give the shape you desire don’t you?”

“I provide information, I enhance skill I even tell them what to do with themselves which is so very difficult. But you know, Time. Time is very powerful. It is like a stream with which one flows. And it indeed requires a lot not to flow with the current and even more so to flow against it.

“We are the common man I know, to change the course of the current requires a messiah, a mahatma and even he,

first learns his history before making his own imprint on it before turning it this or that way”.

“Only Krishna can stop the current or reverse it even as he did while meddling with time as he did for saving Arjuna after Abhimanyu’s death” interrupted Mrs. Mohanty.

“But even he could not stop the war Mahabharat in fact he did not, as you see, even God is humble when he is human” said Mr. Sahu.

“Indeed too human for not revealing Karna’s truth or Kunti’s secret, for not saving Ekalavya’s thumb for favoring Arjuna so as he did” said Mr. Mohanty remembering his mythology.

“I don’t know much about God, but you know Mahabharata some times gives me nightmares to know of teacher’s handicaps. Drona could not make Ekalavya son of a king, Parasuram taught Karna archery but did not teach him what to do of it. There is so much twist, so much contradiction that tells you, time can not be meddled with. When Drona and Parasuram failed, what are we, to make some body what he is not” said Mr. Sahu.

“Aren’t you becoming too fatalistic? Too cynic, Mr. Sahu? Questioned Mr. Mohanty.

“No, No indeed just practical, you see there is so little a teacher can teach and so much a student can learn, particularly in our age of mass education I sometimes feel guilty, I am not doing enough”. Said Mr. Sahu coming back to his own age from hypothetical imaginary stories of past.

“But surely, don’t do injustice to yourself Mr. Sahu, you do take personal interest in students, always guiding them, telling them what they ought to be doing.” said Mr. Mohanty trying to be honest. Just then Tapan came in from his evening outing as if to fill a gap between a parent and a teacher.

Seeing everybody so serious he directly went in suspicious that now surely they were talking about him and his studies.

Mrs. Mohanty followed him to give him his evening snacks.

“I too ought to be moving, Meera would be looking for me, in case she requires some help with her lessons” said Mr. Sahu, rising to take leave. He often came in for chat with the Mohanty’s, that he was their neighbor. Meera was his daughter, doing her first year in college in science. She was an intelligent girl, passed with very good marks from school. She was matured too for her age and had already developed a good personality. She participated in debate competitions held in the college and always managed to get a prize. Mr. Sahu also made her practice writing passages and pages from her own mind about current affairs, which will go a long way in developing an outlook about the issues facing society. Often Mr. Sahu would get into discussion and arguments with Meera about an issue where they came up with a difference of opinion which they often did to make their time lively and constructive.

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