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## A WOMAN IN 'BURKHAH'

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Mumbai, a dream city of millions of people was sleeping in the starry night of bitter cold. There wasn't any rush of vehicles and crowd for which Mumbai is best known. The silence was spread on the roads. Mumbai was shining in the lights of electric poles on the roads and lighting on the skyscrapers. In the midnight of 26th December 1995, an ambulance with its typical horn entered in Mumbai carrying a little boy, Anmol who had met a massive accident in which his right leg was crushed by a truck. Anmol was only ten years old. There were four people including his parents in the ambulance with him. They had never seen Mumbai before. The driver was well known to Mumbai and the hospitals in it. The ambulance stopped at JJ Hospital which was one of the most famous and biggest hospitals in Mumbai. Anmol was immediately admitted in the accident ward. His physical condition was getting much critical. He had also got injury to the stomach which was too severe.

After completing the procedure of admission, Anmol was moved to the operation theatre. His parents and relatives were crying over his declining condition. Anmol was residing at Hansapur which was 350km away from Mumbai. After the accident, he was admitted in the civil hospital of Hansapur. But looking his critical condition, the doctor advised his parents to take Anmol to Mumbai's JJ Hospital. Therefore Anmol was brought to Mumbai. Everybody was praying to God to save Anmol's life. During the journey in the ambulance, much blood of his leg and stomach was flown. The doctors in Hansapur's civil hospital had warned Anmol's parents not to let him sleep in any condition. The locality where Anmol was residing was almost like a slum. But the people were so kind and cooperative. Anmol's father was a poor labor in the vegetable market. He had one sister who was married. His parents and relatives were very

anxious of Anmol's operation. They were standing out of the operation theatre without speaking with one another. The operation was over after 2 hours. Anmol was shifted to the bed in accident ward. Anmol's father said to the doctor with sad tone, how is my son? Don't worry, he will be alright', the doctor replied. One of the relatives of Anmol clearly asked the doctor about the amputation of Anmol's leg. The doctor had to speak truth with them all. The doctor said, 'We operated him to save his right leg. It's completely crushed. If something happens in coming two days, we will have no option except cutting his right half leg to save his life'. Anmol's parents began crying after listening doctor's views. The doctor advised them to think positively and not to worry.

Anmol got conscious after one hour. He was suffering from searing pains that he could not bear. He was continuously crying for relief of pains. The doctor came and injected him for getting bit of relief from the pain. After two days, dirty smell started coming from his operated leg. Anmol's parents got worried about it. They told the doctor about his severe condition. Then the doctor told them that they would have to operate Anmol for amputating his right half leg. His first operation got failed. Because there got gangrene. If it spread, there would be danger to his life. Anmol's parents and relatives gave their consent to amputate Anmol's leg for saving his life. It was really a horrible moment for Anmol's father to sign on the paper for the amputation of his son to save him.

Anmol was again moved to the operation theatre. His parents and relatives were sitting outside the operation theatre and thinking what would be the future of Anmol after being disabled creature in the world. He will be labeled as disable fellow. The operation got successful. He was shifted to the ward no. 13. Anmol's mother was anxious that what would happen to him when he came to know that his right is amputated. After some time, Anmol got conscious gradually. He opened his eyes and saw around him. He found his parents and relatives who were staring at him. His mother was sitting on the bed beside him. Anmol looked at his right leg and got shocked that it is amputated. He began crying and said mother, 'Where is my leg? How will I walk now and play with my friend?' His mother had no words to answer his questions. She hugged and calmed him saying that they would be with him forever.

Anmol used to suffer from his amputated leg a lot. He would cry many times. It was his parents who would try to distract his mind to some other things so that he would feel relieved from his pains. There were many nurses to look after the patients in the hospital. One day, a new nurse came and made dressing of Anmol's amputated leg; Anmol could not tolerate the searing pains and started crying loudly. His parents were trying to calm him, but failed.

Suddenly a woman in *Burkhah* appeared there. Her face was covered so no one could see her. She stood near Anmol's bed. She saw him crying due to the searing pains. She said to his parents, 'What happened to him. Why is he crying loudly? Anmol's father replied her with sad tone, 'His right leg is amputated due to a massive accident. The nurse just made his dressing. He is screaming with pains. The strange woman came to Anmol and sat beside him. She wiped his tears out and said, 'don't worry dear, you will feel relief soon. I call the senior nurse and tell her to make your dressing again so that you will get relief from the pains'. She went away and came back after ten minutes with an old nurse. The old nurse made Anmol's dressing again. This time Anmol got a bit of relief from pains and stopped crying. Anmol's parents thanked to the nurse and the strange woman in *Burkhah*. The nurse left as soon as she did dressing. The strange woman said to Anmol, 'How are you feeling now dear? 'Fine', Anmol replied her with a bit of shyness. She told Anmol that she would come next day to meet him and left.

Anmol was much happy on that day. He got relief from his pains due to the efforts of the old nurse and the woman in *Burkhah*. He was just thinking about that woman. Nobody had ever seen her in the accident ward no. 13. Anmol was curious to know about her and meet as well. He asked his parents about her. But they didn't know her at all. He was doubtful whether she would come next day or not as she promised. Anmol and his parents used to get meal from the hospital itself. Anmol didn't like the taste of meal due to the effect of medicines that he would take regularly. It was really astonished that he would be given 20 medicine pills in a day including syrups. He would avoid having meal. His parents would request him to have it for the medicines. The nurses and the compounders were really kind and cooperative for Anmol who would coddle him bringing something. It was not a hospital but a family for Anmol. He would feel comfortable after having conversation with the nurses. Anmol was a small, shy and cute boy. Therefore everyone would like to coddle him.

The next day the strange woman came there suddenly when Anmol was having his breakfast. He got surprised to see her. He didn't expect her to be there as she had promised the previous day. She sat beside him and said to Anmol, 'How are you, Anmol?' 'I am fine', Anmol replied with smile. She gave him some chocolates. Anmol felt very happy that she came to meet him. She opened her veil. Her face was little black. She might be around 35years old. She said to Anmol, 'How do you pass your time in this hospital? I am feeling so bored here'. I read Chacha Chaudhari's comic books', Anmol answered her with smile. She told Anmol that she would bring carom for him. She chatted with Anmol for some time. Anmol was a talkative boy. She liked his innocent nature. She was so kind and lovable woman. She was almost like an angel for him who came to reduce his pains. There got a good relationship between Anmol and the strange woman. Nobody asked her her name. She was just a woman in *Burkhah* for Anmol. She spent much time with him and left. Anmol would think of her and ask his parents that where does that woman live? Who is she? Why does she come to meet him only in ward no. 13? Neither his parents nor the other staff in the hospital had idea about that woman. Anmol would ask his father about his friends at his town. He had been in the hospital for more than a month. He would be soon shifted to the ward no.33 for plastic surgery. He lost many things in early childhood days. It was the days of playing games, making funs and enjoying childhood. But the destiny snatched everything from him.

The next day the strange woman came up with a carom and sweet carrot halva. Carrot halva was one of Anmol's favorite dishes. He was overjoyed seeing carom and halva for him. He thanked the woman with a smile. The woman took Anmol close to her and hugged him. Then she fed him up halva. Anmol had it happily. She began playing carom with him. Anmol was not good at carom. Due to the extreme poverty, he could not afford to get such sportive toys to play at his home. But a woman had brought a glimpse of happiness in his life. She taught Anmol how to play carom. It was an afternoon when a nurse came up with his medicines. Anmol denied her for having the medicines. The nurse was enough matured to understand the psychology and pains of a little boy. She tried to make him understand that if he took the medicines regularly, he would be alright soon and go back to his home. Then Anmol took the medicines. He was completely tired in the hospital. He was missing his friends and home. He had almost forgotten his pains due to the extreme affection of the woman in *Burkhah*. The woman advised Anmol to have medicines everyday without bothering the nurses or parents to get well soon. He promised her that he would never

deny taking medicines. Anmol said to her, 'If you don't come, I will not take medicines'. It shows the love of a little boy for a motherly woman. She replied him with a smile, 'Dear Anmol, you are a strong boy. You are like my son. You have to get well soon to go at your place. I work outside. If I don't come due to some problem, please take medicines. I hope you can understand being a matured and good boy'. 'Ok Amma', Anmol replied innocently. She was astonished that Anmol called her Amma. She was speechless. She told him that she would come the next day and left.

Anmol's right half leg was amputated but he had also got injury to the lap of same leg. The doctors had told his father that Anmol would be shifted to ward no. 33 for plastic surgery. He would be operated soon. His father didn't tell Anmol about his plastic surgery so that he would be hurt and scared of the operation. Anmol would remain in his childhood fantasy that he would soon go to his home. But he was still unknown and unaware about the calamity of the operation of plastic surgery. One day the woman in *Burkhah* said to Anmol's father, 'Uncle, did you ask the doctor about Anmol's discharge?' 'No', his last operation is remained', his father replied with sad tone. She said to him with concern, 'which operation'. Anmol's father replied her that he would be shifted to ward no. 33 for plastic surgery of his leg. She got completely shocked. She was just thinking that why God has put much pains in the life of a little boy who doesn't yet begin to live life. She felt very sad that Anmol would be operated again. She seemed to be upset on that day. Anmol said to her, 'Amma, what happened to you? Why don't you speak to me as usual?' She replied him with a faked smile, 'Nothing dear, I am worried of works in the office. Anyway you tell me what should I bring for you tomorrow?' She said to him with hidden sorrow. 'You bring as you wish, Amma. But come to meet me every day. I really feel happy to have you with me for long time', he replied her innocently. She kissed his head and went away without speaking to anyone.

It is said that everything is destined. We are the puppets in the hands of a supreme power, known as God. We are just born to die in the world. One should accept it without regretting and blaming to either destiny or God. Though it might be true but the children are much far away from such philosophical conception of life. Anmol was feeling uneasy because the woman in *Burkhah* has not come to see him since two days. He asked his parents about her but they didn't know anything about her. She came after two days. Anmol got angry with her due to not coming to meet him. She has brought a cake and a gift for Anmol. Being a child, he forgot his anger and became happy looking the delicious cake and gift for him. She fed up

two pieces of cake to Anmol. He was extremely happy after having cake. He opened the gift. He got surprised to see it. It was a small game of ring that could entertain Anmol and help him to distract from his searing pains. When Anmol was busy in playing the game, his father said to the woman, 'Anmol would be shifted to plastic surgery ward tomorrow'. She got shocked hearing it and replied with sympathetic tone, 'Don't worry, Uncle. He would be alright soon. Lord Allah is with him. He would soon go to his home. I would pray to Allah to bless him a long life.'

The woman was looking so worried for Anmol and he had no idea about the plastic surgery. The woman sat beside Anmol and said to him, 'Anmol, who am I? Anmol replied with surprise, 'You are Amma. You are like my mother'. She said to him, 'Will you listen to me and do what I expect if you consider me as your Amma?' Yes off course. You tell me', Anmol replied her quickly. She further said to him, 'I won't come here from tomorrow. I am going out of Mumbai regarding my official work for few days. Now you are a strong boy. Don't be afraid of anything that would come in your way. Lord Allah is with you. If you want me to come back soon to meet you, you should take care of yourself and not bother to your parents. 'Ok Amma, Anmol replied with sad tone. She hugged him and went away wiping her tears which were rolling down from her eyes while departing from Anmol.

The next day Anmol was shifted to ward no. 33 for plastic surgery. Anmol got shocked to know about his operation of plastic surgery. But he remembered the words of the woman in *Burkha*. So he determined to tolerate everything. Anmol got plastic surgery successfully. He had to face tremendous searing pains. He would ask his parents about the woman in *Burkha* many times. But they would tell him that she would come soon. Anmol would get angry with them because of his unbearable searing pains. He passed many days in plastic surgery ward. Later he was discharged. Yet he would miss that woman in *Burkha* who came in his life like an angel and reduced the pains.

After three months, Anmol went to Mumbai for availing of artificial leg at K.E.M hospital. He got completely surprised to see the persons with disabilities in the center whose legs were amputated like him. After taking the measurement of his amputated leg, his artificial leg was immediately manufactured. Anmol had never seen such leg. The trainer told Anmol to put on the leg and walk. Anmol was trying to walk but having pains to the knee. The trainer told him to walk every day. He said to Anmol, 'If you practise to walk



every day, you will soon walk independently without any support. You will have pains in the beginning, but you can learn to walk neatly later'. 'Ok sir', Anmol replied. When they were about to leave hospital, suddenly Anmol remembered the woman in *Burkhah*. He requested his father to go first at JJ hospital to search the strange woman. His father tried to make him understand that that woman didn't work there. Nobody knew about her. Anmol got upset. Later he came back to his home with his father by bus.

Many years passed. Anmol took higher education and got an officer in the department of law. His life was well settled. He had everything. He had an endearing nature. He would assist his disable friends all the time. But he could never forget the woman in *Burkhah*. He tried to search her in JJ hospital and almost all wards whenever he happened to go at Mumbai for his interview purpose many times. But the woman was lost somewhere in the crowd of Mumbai leaving unforgettable memories for Anmol. No one could find her.

A question always arises in Anmol's mind every day, 'Who was the woman in *Burkhah*? Unfortunately he could not yet get to know the answer. But he understood that humanity always remains at the peak more than caste and religion. No doubt. What she did for him in the hospital during his bad times irrespective of caste and creed, Anmol inherited her philanthropic perspectives and is trying to cherish it helping out the people like him. Really, humanity is the only religion in the world that exists. The world will be safe and beautiful so long as the people like woman in *Burkhah* are there to assist others with true humanitarian approach.

### **Glossary-**

*Burkhah*- an outer garment which covers the body and the face that is worn by women in some Islamic traditions.