

A WOMAN'S DEVOTION

Pages with reference to book, From 118 To 119

I was shocked to see her sitting on the road side. She had a small baby in her arms, who was barely covered with her chaddar. She looked pale and weak. I stopped my car seeing a familiar face. She was Razia who was my student earlier when I was teaching in a katchi basti. I saw her alter along time. She used to be a bright and lively girl. Now she had completely changed. Why are you sitting here? What is wrong with you? Are you alright? Is it your baby?" I was anxious to know everything about her and feeling my concern she started crying. I asked her to come and sit in the car. She could hardly walk. "Where do you want to go?" I asked her. "Home!" She said and started sobbing. After a few minutes she was quiet. It seemed as though she was struggling to calm down. Slowly she started talking. "You know my father did not let me finish my education and got me married to his nephew. For a few years, Khalid, my husband was very nice to me. We had two sons and we lived happily. Suddenly he lost his job and things started changing. He became a drug addict. When I learned about that, it was too late. He had no interest in the family, how we lived or what We did. All the savings were finished. My father is an old man. He could not do much, My brothers also got tired of looking alter me and my two children. Now I had this girl. My husband was so angry that he never came to see me, In fact none of my family members visited me since the time I entered the maternity home. My baby has been ill and I didn't have money to get medicines for her. For two weeks they kept me in the hospital but no one turned up to pay the bill. My brother came once but he. has gone to the village now and my sister-in-law is already taking care of my two sons. What else can she do? Of course, Khalid never came. My brother told me that he was annoyed when he learned that I had given birth to a daughter and he never returned home since then. In any case he was not bothered about us. He only came home for money." Razia kept on talking till we reached her home. We arrived there in the midst of a family feud. Razia's brothers and family elders wanted her to leave her husband and go to their village. Poor Razia, could hardly talk. No one even enquired about her health or the baby, who was crying with hunger. She could not feed her and had no money for milk. She thanked me for dropping her home and was simply overwhelmed when I gave her some money for the baby. Razia's story is not uncommon. But what is really unusual is the story of Razia's courage and determination. She refused to go back to her ancestral village. She lost her baby and got very ill and depressed. "No one came to my help. My child died of hunger and disease. Khalid came when she was running high fever. I begged him to get some medicine but he refused. He said, She is a girl. It is better for her to die now than to become a burden on me." Razia was helped by the women's group working in her area. Her rehabilitation was not easy. She picked up courage and started teaching in a Mohalla School. She told me later. "I worked hard day and night! I would sew clothes in my spare time and cook for my children. It was not easy but I could make it with the help of the women's group who were very supportive. But still believe me it was not easy. My feet would swell and! had perpetual hunger due to lack of food. I ran fever often but continued to work. I don't know how I survived. It was only my will to live and fight perhaps!" Razia was looking better and lively again. "Baji shall I tell you the most precious news. Now Khalid is no more an addict.! always told you he was a nice man and being jobless he was dragged into the habit. When he saw me toiling so hard, he agreed to give it up.! had to je very patient and firm with him. It was the most difficult 'task. When almost everybody amongst his family and friends had rejected him! continued to tell him, "You can still do it." Now he is back with us and we wish to have a daughter soon so! could lessen the sorrow of my little one's loss. Will you come to see our doll? Razia was beaming with joy and I nodded smilingly.

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