Dr Manjubala Panda is an Epidemiologist of unparalleled fame. She is known for engrossing readers in the pages of her book redefining the world of literature. She has been the proud author of a millennium of books written in an ingenuous way. Her book “Saunta Katha” (Assembled Tales) has been published in three different editions, 2011, 2018 and 2022, the latest by Paschima Publications (Mob-7008221789). The book embodies characters, based on the true world experience of Doctor Ma’am, who demolished the barrier between reality and fiction.

The story, “Bana Tulasi” (Wild Basil), adapted from this book, revolves around a boy, Bikash, who inverts the stereotypical mindset of people, revealing the hardships faced by some sections of society.

Aadityaamlan Panda is a poet, writer, critic and literary translator by passion and is obsessed with words. He prefers writing texts embedding hidden messages for society. He is an ardent nature observer and loves thinking deeply even on miniature visions of nature.

**BANA TULASI (WILD BASIL)**

**Original Manuscript (Odia): Dr. Manjubala Panda**

**Translation (English): Aadityaamlan Panda**

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(A tale of my experience, quite an old one)

Whatever official work was left in Bhubaneshwar, was sorted out soon that day. We were left with four to six hours in hand. My husband said, “Shall we travel to Puri?” I looked at my husband and smiled biting my lips for he calls himself an atheist most of the time. What he says, he is never that; what he is not, he claims that. Lord Jagannath’s summon is rare. Hence in no frame of my mind, I had to let go this opportunity.

By the time we reached the suburbs of Puri, a heavy downpour had already drenched our way. Still, the sky lay overcast with thick clouds. We resolved to approach the beach during this hiatus in rainfall. Then to the Grand Temple, the Supreme Lord.

Puri sea beach has truly idiosyncratic fame. Who else other than the sea possesses the potency to captivate every sense!! A single visitation to the sea relieves me of earthly depression, grief etc. Like a girl of tender age, wearing a frock, I earnestly felt to step cautiously over the shallow crests and troughs of the blue sea upon its return. I went sea-minded resting on the beach.

“Cotton wicks, will you buy cotton wicks mother?”

Of the several cries made by street hawkers, this was one. Many a time we need to be insensitive to these, even after hearing them.

“Will you buy cotton wicks, mother? I will sell them at a cut price.”

This time it sounded from little near, a little clear, still, I did not feel the necessity to turn around and see. But if I do not respond then he will keep on reverberating the same statements!

“No. I have a lot of candle wicks. I do not want to purchase them now.”

“Mother, these are good ones. Do you think that I have purchased these from shops along the Grand Truck Road and selling them here? My mother has spent hours spinning these threads with utmost care. A bundle for a rupee but seven for five rupees. Still, I will sell it cheaper to you, at ten for just five. If not, then eleven… twelve… thirteen!!!”

As if he called for an auction, he had stubbornly knelt beside us. My kind and possessive eyes reverted to him. A tall but thin boy of ten-twelve years of age, dressed in old, demi-torn but neat clothes. On his left shoulder, lay a bag of candle wicks. Along with its handle, the sleeves of his half shirt had got hinged to his shoulders.

“Give son, cotton wicks of five rupees”, my husband said.

“Do you think I am fabricating? Really, I have ample wicks. Every year, when my mother comes to Puri for Havisha during the month of Kartika, she carries cotton wicks for us. I retain only that much I need, the rest I distribute among my friends. What will I do with these?”

“I am not buying for I need them. His negotiation technique is quite impressive.”

“I too agree on that. They why five rupees, we shall lend him ten. Besides, let the wicks remain with him. At least he can sell them to somebody else in need.”

We were conversing in English so he cannot cogitate. But he amazed me when he bit his tongue upon hearing our words. Sadly he expressed, “If you will not buy the wicks why will I accept their cost? Then what dissimilarity would exist between begging and earning?”

I was astonished. My husband said, “I can relate to Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar on that”.

My opinion about the boy had got transformed. Many like me, who proudly consider ourselves educated, implausibly misconstrue others! I subdued myself. I called him nearer and asked him tenderly, “What is your name? Are you studying?”

“Is this to be inquired!!? Should I have been a dullard without studying!!!? I am in standard sixth. My name is Bikash.”

His loquaciousness made him utter four phrases when asked one. I could not hold back my laughter. I felt a higher affinity towards him.

“School mentee. Laying your learning aside why are you engrossed in this business, son?”

“Then. The school was closed soon due to the dissolution of the effigy of Lord Ganesh. On holidays, instead of wasting my time on sports and merriment, I labour for this. With this income, I purchase the requisite books. My father is no more. If my mother is managing my studies by spinning wicks, why cannot I study more by selling them?”

I was getting enchanted, captivated by the fragrance of this wild basil. Suddenly a blanched spot on his left cheek could not escape my doctor’s eyes

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“You seem to be an adorable kid. Clever too. Why is that large whitened mark present on your left cheek?”

“Oh great, is that still present? I see you are not aware. Don’t you watch T.V. ever? Amitabh Bachhan says, “M.D.T. Khao, Kusta Hatao (Consume M.D.T., eliminate leprosy)”. However, I am afflicted with a normal disease. Being administered the medicine for just six months would heal me completely. I have already taken it for five months. Absolutely free of cost. Only a month more. Of course, Doctor Sir has said, “Even after taking the complete dose, the marks would persist for some more time.”

Meanwhile, Bikash had already placed on my hands, candle wicks carefully wrapped in a paper container. He was a boy of dignity and self-esteem. Hence, though we had wished to pay more, we paid only the cost of the wicks.

“Oh my God, I got stuck with you completely. If I do not return afore dark, my mother will be tensed then. I will go.”

“Listen Bikash! Keep my address and phone number with you. You would surely become a good human in future. Call me in between. I know you will never petition. Still, someday if you require any kind of assistance urgently, do remember us.”

Bidding farewell, he went off leaping like a crane. The time to visit the temple had come. By the retreating path, I do not know why my eyes, floating over the waves of devotees, kept on seeking him.

Even now, upon watching candle wicks, the memory of Bikash flashes over my inner mind.

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Disclaimer: The preceding story ([#ବଣ](https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/%E0%AC%AC%E0%AC%A3?__eep__=6&__cft__%5b0%5d=AZXzR0c8-9RGBoM2xcgNEW4D1pxSl8X04EsDFrJjzhThtIUB4QUg9HhEhsCc2krrVw5n6N5E05X2pv2V91R8uSBmRKcqyUXdV5CWSx-rEFroRg&__tn__=*NK-R) [#ତୁଳସୀ](https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/%E0%AC%A4%E0%AD%81%E0%AC%B3%E0%AC%B8%E0%AD%80?__eep__=6&__cft__%5b0%5d=AZXzR0c8-9RGBoM2xcgNEW4D1pxSl8X04EsDFrJjzhThtIUB4QUg9HhEhsCc2krrVw5n6N5E05X2pv2V91R8uSBmRKcqyUXdV5CWSx-rEFroRg&__tn__=*NK-R)) was originally written in Odia by Dr Manju Panda and has been translated to English by Aadityaamlan Panda. To read the original manuscript please refer to the link: <https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid024msMQhWkY64ytyGnqTfFCrgmebiBzEwJgn7bpFw6KzcgSCNn7PrQsFYNJPE6pK1ol&id=100003073180643>