

## Setakre Beret katet – When I wake in the morning

(The story behind the song)

It was a summer evening. There was a social gathering in our family. Most probably the date for my uncle's wedding was being finalized in the presence of the Mañjhi Parganas (cultural elders) of our village. I was a child then, sitting beside my grandmother having puffed rice with boiled ghaṅgra (bean seeds) in a khalak (leaf bowl) quietly. There were four to five village grandmothers too who were drinking rice wine in the pinḍa (high verandah) of our mud house. An oil lamp was burning near the doorstep of our main room. They were intoxicated and discussing among themselves in low voices. In the courtyard, the men folk too were drinking and talking in raised voices.

I was about to finish my puffed rice when my grandmother touched me slightly and asked me to bring a matchbox from the 'culḥa kuḍam' (from behind the clay stove) to light the 'cuṭi' in her hand. I immediately stood up and quickly brought the matchbox and gave it to her. She lit the match stick but as she was about to light the cuṭi with her left hand, she suddenly dropped the cuṭi on the floor and started crying looking at the matchbox. All the other grandmothers were taken aback! They thought that she might have burnt her finger. Immediately they said, "be careful". One of them said, "have you burnt too much?" My grandmother did not stop crying. Instead, she cried even louder. One of the mothers strongly rebuked, "Hedana lajao bam aḱaḱueda, baba hoṛ samañrem raraḱkana?" (hey you lady, don't you feel ashamed of sobbing in front of men?). She did not pay any heed to her words. Instead, she started crying even louder in a typical tune of 'goḱ rak' (a customary tune santal women use to grieve at the news of a death ).

The menfolk drinking in the courtyard stopped their loud conversation and started asking each other what had happened to her. The entire house was silent by then. My aunt who was serving the rice wine to everybody came to her and asked politely "henda go, cekaenam, laḱ hasuet mea?" (Mother, what has happened, is your stomach aching?) But she only nodded her head indicating a 'no' and sobbed. My mother, who was at the fireplace cooking, came hurriedly and asked "henda go, jāhāe jāhānaḱko roṛkeṭ bena?" (mother, did anybody say any harsh words to you?). She nodded a no and after a long pause, sobbing she showed the matchbox to my mother and said, "baḥu, miṭ bidaḱ aliñ hō noñkaliñ tāhēkana, nitok ceteḱa tale ṭhoḱok lekaliñ neḱok kana, cedaḱ baliñ raga, mase laiben?" (daughter in law, once I too looked like her and see, now I look like rotten palm fruit, tell me why should I not cry?), my grandmother said, pointing at the picture of a popular film actress that was printed on the cover of the match-box.

My grandmother is no more. She died before I was admitted to a village school. I had written this song a decade back, dedicating it to her memory, for our Santali folk group 'Kulhi Dhuṛi' (Dust of village road).

Link of the video –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xvCBLHImKM>

Boro Baski, in October 2020