

The story behind the song 'Kiya Baha'

By Boro baski

It was January 1989. I was one of the members of the Adivasi Youth Team, selected from our Birbhum district to participate in the National Integration Camp in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, organized by Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Govt. of India. More than five hundred Adivasi youth from different parts of the county participated in the week-long camp.

We were ten male and female participants from our district who were good at sports, studying in high school or college. My childhood friend Kala Murmu from the neighboring village Bidapur was in our team. He was a well-known sportsman and musician.

The daily routine of the Youth Camp started with the morning run of three to five kilometers on road. Being a good sportsman, Kala would be the first to leave the tent to run in the cold and windy road along with other enthusiastic youth. Every time he returned from the run I noticed an inexhaustible joy and enthusiasm on his face. Initially, I thought it was the miracle of morning exercise. Later I observed his eagerness to run increased even when others had given up. I was inquisitive to know the secret behind it and asked him, "Kala, how come you are so enthusiastic to run in the cold every morning?" With a reluctant but smiling face, he said, 'I have befriended a Santal girl from Hazaribagh and we are running partners. She is very sporty and energetic.' He asked me if I would like to join them but I humbly declined and said, "you are so lucky, best of luck enjoy the new friend's companionship"

Finally the camp ended. Everybody was busy packing bags and boarding the bus to take us to the railway station. But Kala was missing. I thought he might be busy exchanging addresses with his new friends. Time passed, the bus was ready to leave but Kala had not arrived yet. Everybody was worried and started looking around for him. Finally, we found him sitting alone far down the campsite with his head on his knees. I ran to him and asked, "hey- Kala what has happened?" He looked devastated and started sobbing looking at me. I hugged him and once again asked, "what happened?" With a trembling voice, he said, "Baha has an Oran boyfriend, she introduced me to him this morning". I had no time to console him then and affectionately told him, "Kala, we shall settle that matter later, let us go now. All are waiting for you". His bag was already loaded on the bus. we hurriedly boarded and sat together with Kala on the window seat. The entire journey Kala was silent and kept looking out of the window displaying no emotion at all. I felt as though I was taking a dead body back home with me from the hospital. It was the first time at the age of seventeen I saw the devastating effect of a failed infatuated love.

After returning home I got busy with my studies and for several months did not receive any news of Kala. One day I heard that he was getting married. I was a bit disturbed with the news. I thought getting married at this age would ruin his career. I immediately cycled to his village but Kala was not home. His mother told me that after returning from the camp Kala had become indifferent towards studies and had failed in Class-XII examination. And now, everybody in the family wants him to get married. I met Kala at the end of their village while returning home. He was so excited to see me after such a long time. But when I confronted him on his decision of getting married, he became very defensive and warned me not to interfere in his marriage. I felt bad and got angry and said, "Kala, you are making a mistake by submitting to the situation. The villagers and even your family consider you a loser". He kept quiet and threw a disgusted look at me. Since then, I promised myself not to keep any contact with him as his path and mine were different now. I however attended his marriage and enjoyed thoroughly as we normally do in Santal marriages. The bride was an underage girl of sixteen or seventeen years old, tall and fair. She had studied up to class VII and seemed intelligent. Before leaving their house I said to the newly wedded girl, "Kala is a spirited boy and needs your support, may you both prosper in life". After that, I never met him nor visited their house for more than three decades.

My life was a bit different than a normal Santal boy of our village. After completing my masters I did my doctoral research on Social Work from Visva-Bharati University and founded a social organization with the youth of my village and some like-minded friends from Santiniketan. After completing higher studies I traveled extensively in the tribal populated areas in India and Bangladesh and even to Europe.

In these long years I however had been following Kala's development as well. After his marriage, he managed to complete his plus-two examination and took admission in Visva-Bharati university. He also completed his masters and Ph.D from the same university. Kala has two beautiful children and presently working in a teacher's training institute in Baharampur, Murshidabad. I could not resist meeting him personally after knowing the developments of his life.

We met on a Hul commemoration day on 30th June in their village which they organize every year in their football ground outside their village. A day-night program with various Adivasi sports and cultural programs have transformed the Hul program into a village fair. After spending some time at the Hul ground that day I visited their house in the evening. His parents were a little upset that I had not visited them these long years.

It was moon-lit night Kala and I were sitting far from the Hul ground in a rice field drinking rice wine and special chakna (special meat preparation taken with drinks) that his wife had specially prepared for us. We shared our years of untold stories starting from Bhopal to the time we parted to follow our own destiny. The sound of the Santali cultural program from the stage and the murmur of the hundreds of people sitting and roaming around the Hul pandel were heard faintly. It was early morning and people from the ground had begun to return home. I asked Kala, "will you please tell how come you bounced back in your life so successfully from the worst-case situation I had seen you in, what is your source of

inspiration?" I thought he would definitely point his finger at me and say, "it is you dear friend who inspired me to fight back". Instead gave me a shock saying, 'Baha'. I was taken aback and couldn't believe my ears and asked once more "who?". He replied clearly, "yes. It is Baha who has helped me become what I am today.

Then he went on saying, "after returning from Bhopal I was so depressed that once I even thought of committing suicide. I could not get her out of my mind and thought marriage might help me to forget her but all in vain. I drew her face in my exercise books and kept in my pockets. And gradually her thoughts gave me mental peace and energy. She became the inspiration". I listened attentively and said excitedly, "Shall we try to find Baha, today you can find anybody through social media?". He said "no" in a calm voice, "I do not want to spoil the sweet memory of the past by bringing back to the present. Love never dies, I was wrong and tried to kill it. I want to keep her as she is, so far from me yet so close to my heart". There was silence between us for a long time.

I dedicate this song 'Kiya Baha' to Baha- (flower-name of a girl.

Link of the song 'Kiya Baha'-

<https://youtu.be/1oi7JHVXK1s>