

**THE MADNESS**  
**By Neelam Chandra**

The smell of the *halwa* emanating from the neighbourhood,  
Makes me numb. I switch off my mobile,  
Turn the room dark, hoping to get some relief from the unease around-  
But the more I try to forget, the more I remember.

My father had schizophrenia, which was little understood at that time-  
I still remember the stigma that my mother always carried around!  
She was blamed and cursed for his madness-  
Everybody said, "He was so good till before the marriage!"  
No relatives or friends thought that showing him to a Physician could be an option!

I clearly remember the shrill wailing of my mom-  
After all, her grandfather had died that day!  
"I was too attached to him," she told me, "I want to attend his funeral!"  
I, an eight-year-old understood,  
And while I was trying to comfort her, he returned from the office.

My mom hadn't stopped crying and when he was told the reason,  
He grinned and then laughing loudly said, "Make some *halwa*!" to my mom.  
Till then, *halwa* used to be my favourite dish!

When she refused, he touched the naked skin of her face with cigarette butts,  
While I meekly prayed to him, "Please leave her *papa*!"

The smell of the *halwa* brings back that hidden memory  
From the crevices of my heart into the open and I feel exposed.  
I can feel the same madness of my father,  
I can feel the same helplessness of my mom!

If only my mother was well-educated, she would be earning her own money,  
Would have left him and his madness forever or might have tried to get him treated,  
And *halwa* would have remained my favourite dessert-  
But you can't change the past and I too have to live on with the memories!

Unable to bear the smell of the *halwa* from the neighbourhood anymore,  
I go out for a long drive and eat some ice-cream on the way.  
The taste and smell of the *halwa*  
Is forgotten as of now,  
Till some neighbour decides to cook it again

**NAMI NJ Dara Axelrod Expressive Arts Mental Health Poetry Contest 2021 - 7th Place**

Starting the same cycle of unease!

I still wonder if *halwa* remains my favourite dish  
I decide to get over my dark memories and taste it again-  
After all, my father is no longer alive!