

Prateek Kanchan

## **Stories as experiences-making life meaningful**

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## Preface

Experiences in life teach a lot provided one learns and is willing to learn continuously. This small book narrates experiences which may occur in the lives of people infrequently or rarely, but impact their whole life as every experience carries enormous learning. It is often said that people learn a lot in the classroom. It is true. Also true is that there is a lot of learning and unlearning outside the classroom. Even if we assume that most of us study from Kindergarten(KG) to Post Graduation(PG) and some go further to do Ph.D, and even beyond that, but regular classroom based learning goes from primary to secondary, and then to Higher Secondary, and then further Higher studies leading to Under graduate(UG) and then Post Graduate(PG) qualification. Maximum time which any such person puts into classroom based organized learning does not exceed 17 or 18 years provided he or she has consistently studied without failing any time in between .It clearly indicates that there is a whole lot of time outside the classroom where experiences make us learn as well as unlearn a lot. These short stories comprise a bouquet of such learnings which appear to be small but have far reaching implications in every one's life.

Any book which is written involves a lot of support from a host of important people in the life of the author. I strongly feel that this book would not have come out without the support and constant motivation of my father, mother, my wife, and my brother. My extended family members including elders and cousins also played a role in contributing towards the book. On the professional front, Gujarat University in general and B.K.School of Professional and Management Studies, in particular played a very positive role in making me find time for this work. I also feel indebted to the entire editorial team of Kindle publishing for their guidance from time to time in making the book see the light of the day. However, any error found in the book will be completely unintentional, and I offer unconditional apology for the same, in advance. Happy reading to one and all.

Dr Prateek Kanchan

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### Chapter 1. Friendship

I was getting late which was worrying. As I peeped from the balcony, I could see a drenched street dog lying down miserably near the gate, and nobody else was anywhere in site. Rain water had puddled under the lamp post. A strong breeze ruffled the mango tree in the courtyard resulting in a few twigs falling and breaking. I could see thunder rumbling at a distance. Suddenly I heard a soft knock at the door. I turned back and proceeded towards the door. It was a pleasant but a puzzling surprise as I saw her in her natural beauty say, "Good morning". I also replied in the same way and did not know how to proceed further. She went further and said, "shall we go together to our chartered bus as our offices are in the same building". I accepted her suggestion asking her to wait till I got my bag. I locked the door of my one room apartment which had separate entry and exit as part of the big 4 room flat of my landlord. She also lived in a similar situation on the same floor of the building in a separate house. About a week back, while boarding the same chartered bus from IP extension, Patparganj, East Delhi, we introduced ourselves for the first time to one another. We could only talk about our respective offices, and our jobs and nothing more as we could not get place to sit in the heavily congested bus during the whole journey that day from IP extension to Nehru Place in South Delhi, which was our work place. Air conditioning in the bus was a consolation which kept us level headed. Apart from that interaction a week ago, we never talked to one another after that although we were boarding the same bus regularly



from the same stand.

Figure 1: source: [www.truershayari.in](http://www.truershayari.in) accessed on 18 February 2019.

It was really puzzling as to how after a week she felt it so important knocking my door for a joint commute. We were walking towards the exit gate of our apartment building, from where the bus was to pick us up. We boarded it in time and proceeded to find a seat, which always remains a big deal. Ironically, we got two adjacent seats and we sat on them. I was feeling as if she had fixed the whole thing because getting a seat from our stand was almost impossible, and that time we got not one but two seats. The commute for around 15 minutes did not entail much talk except for the weather condition which was a cloudy but humid atmosphere in the rainy month of August. Then came the real discussion. She asked, "you must be guessing why I specially knocked your door and asked to board the bus together instead of our usual boarding." I said, "yes". She continued further, "I actually observed you for a week before deciding to ask you for a friendship and here I am asking you to be my friend." I was surprised as to what to say and what not to say. I asked her, "what did you observe about me?". She went fast as if she was waiting for this question, "I saw that you just ignored the females boarding the bus although they must be of your age only. Moreover, you were very dignified in your conduct with

other passengers. All this made me feel that you are not a womanizer but a one woman person whenever you feel the need of a woman as a companion." I got irritated, "There are other young males similarly built like me boarding this bus regularly with almost similar behavior pattern. What made you feel that I can be the right person for your friendship." She replied, "my heart could not help me but my mind made me decide upon you". My agitation grew further as her friendship offer included more of mind than heart. I did not say anything further and she also waited for my response. The destination stop arrived and we started to move along with others and came out of the bus. We did not interact while walking towards the building where our offices were located. As soon as the lift came on the ground floor, we entered along with a host of others working like us. She went out on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor and I stayed on as my office was on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor of the 14 floor building. I entered my office with a baggage of anxiety in my mind. I was moving towards my workstation and thinking whether I should ignore the



whole thing or give it a serious thought.

Figure 2: Source: [www.flipkart.com](http://www.flipkart.com) accessed on 18 February, 2019

I started concentrating on my work and tried to get it out of my mind. It worked very well and I was able to do lot of work till the lunch break. Bur the thought came back again as I went about having lunch with my colleagues in the designated area of the office. I tried to hide my hidden anxiety from my colleaues but one of them got some hint which got proved as we were walking back to our workstations. Sachin

said. "Nikhil, are you OK." I nodded my head and continued walking. He did not say anything further and we walked to our respective workstations. I again continued with my work and found solace in busying myself. After about half an hour, my intercom rang and it was Sachin on the other side, "I'm not a psychologist but I am also not a fool to not realize the difference between your normal self and the other self. Instead of bottling up anxieties within, open up and feel light at least by sharing them." I said, "You come to my cabin and I will share it all." Within minutes, he was sitting with me. I narrated him the whole story in next 10 minutes. He paused for a while and said, "It appears she wants to go cautiously for a new friendship implying either a failed earlier friendship or a here say based intuitive approach towards first friendship. In any case, you also explore the reasons for the same before jumping to any conclusion vis-à-vis her approach. But do not let it affect your work as your career has just begun." He then left for his cabin and I felt slightly better. I could actually concentrate on my work till the end of the day.

As I was moving towards the bus stand after the days work, I was thinking how to find the truth as Sachin suggested and at the same time ensure that the work did not suffer. I boarded the bus back home at 7 PM that day and while getting a aisle seat, I was looking whether she was also in the bus or not. Then I realized that as per our discussions earlier, our return timings did not match. After freshening up at my room, I prepared tea for myself and thought what to do further. I continued with my routine chores in the evening just like any young bachelor before going for dinner in a nearby hotel as a routine. After coming back, I completed some office work on my laptop and brushed myself up with some current news on television before going to sleep. Next morning was slightly different as she did not come to accompany me but joined me while I was on the way to the stand. We boarded the bus together, but did not get a seat in the beginning. Almost till New Friends colony, we were standing. In the meanwhile, she asked, "did you give a thought to my friendship offer"? I said, "Yes and I have yet

not arrived at any conclusion". She said, "I am in no hurry and you take your time". I was thinking for a rejoinder, but before that she said, "when I took a week of analysis before offering my friendship, you must also take time before arriving to any decision". I was not prepared for it but nevertheless I appreciated her approach. Our stop came and we went to our respective offices. I again talked to Sachin during lunch and he said, "It is good that she respects your decision for which she is not in a hurry. It appears that she is very methodical even in matters which are primarily emotional but having far



reaching implications in the whole life."


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Figure 3: [www.shutterstock.com](http://www.shutterstock.com) accessed on Feb 20, 2019

I felt relieved when Sachin also felt like me and now it depended upon me to take it forward. I was sure that this time I was to take initiative to explore this possible friendship in my own way. I needed to show some boldness now in the same manner in which Anita(her name) showed when she approached me first time to commute together. I called her up and she picked up the phone instantly as if she was waiting for it. She said, "What a pleasant surprise Mr Serious!! How come you called, but nevertheless I like the gesture. Tell me what you have to say". I said, "Can we go together back home today?". She said, "Wonderful, but my office gets over at 5:45 PM, and I board the bus at 6 PM. Will it be fine with you?" I said, "I become free by 6:45 PM and then proceed but today I will take permission of leaving

early." She said," Great and thanks for the same, I will be waiting for you at the bus stand. I must say that you are a caring person." I replied," Thanks. I will be joining you. Bye". She also said the same and hung up. I took special permission from my senior and left early. She was waiting for me at the stand and I joined her soon. I told her that bus would be too congested for a discussion and suggested for a nearby coffee shop. She agreed and then we proceeded. We made ourselves comfortable and she started by saying," so you felt to talk it over a cup of coffee.". I said," not only coffee but I have ordered snacks also. We need not worry about reaching home late as after this we will take a cab so that we are not too late for home. By the way you need not worry about the cab as I 'll pay for it." She looked me with piercing eyes which made me feel that my words had offended her. She said," You appear to have heard lot of such friendships wherein the payments are always done by the males and females take advantage of males. Let me make it clear that we will share all the expenses due to this unusual evening for both of us. I strongly believe that the foundation of a strong friendship is honesty and it includes

honesty in money matters."



**Friendship** is when  
people know **all**  
**about** you but like  
you **anyway**.

GH

Figure 4: [www.goodhousekeeping.com](http://www.goodhousekeeping.com) accessed on Feb 20, 2019

I smiled as an indication of thanks to her for her straightforward and frank approach. We talked about our families, cities, ambitions, future plans etc in a casual manner and tried to come closer to one another. In fact, at the end of our discussion I strongly felt that I need to give a chance to this friendship to grow and it appeared that she also felt the same. When I reached home, it was an hour late from the scheduled time but I felt a completely different person vis-à-vis the person who I was till a day before. I hoped that all the developments of the day and earlier would make my life better at the personal front and it would also add value to my profession.

## Chapter 2. Official experiences

None of us can come out of his or her past. As a matter of fact, we allow our past to determine our future. At the same time, there are some like me who make all efforts to shrug the past in all aspects. With this constant belief in myself, I decided to start working in my new organization in New Delhi from the very first day and decided to make myself comfortable with time. I was introduced to my department colleagues by Mr Rajesh Seth, Purchase Manager who was heading the purchase department of the retail outfit where I started my job. His line of introduction was, "Hi all, here is Samir Shukla, our new colleague to liven up our department further. I hope, you all will make him comfortable by imbibing our culture of cooperation with one another." I was overwhelmed by this gesture of Mr Rajesh while introducing me to my two colleagues like me, wherein all three of us were reporting to him. The reality of junior and senior was not forced down your throat and a commitment of equal treatment was demonstrated right from the beginning when at the same time, the new entrant also realized his or her position and everyone's expectations. After having served for three years as Purchase executive in a garments export firm, joining as Assistant manager-Purchase in a retail outfit gave me a lot of confidence, and the beginning of the first day excited me more. I moved to my work station, a cubicle from where I was to direct and control my work to the expectations of my colleagues and my immediate boss, besides my juniors reporting to me. Three purchase executives reported to me and they introduced themselves to me explaining the product categories, the purchase for which they were handling. So far so good as the whole system looked more or less satisfactory, if not perfect.

I was sitting in my cabin, two hours in the new job, with introductions over, sifting and surfing the files related to my job on my computer, trying to understand the work culture of my retail outlet. Although my manager told me to take it easy, but I wanted to grasp things as early as possible so that all the

things which should be in my control were in my control as soon as possible.



Figure 5: [www.alamy.com](http://www.alamy.com) accessed on Feb 21, 2019

Just then, Sanjiv Kumar, one of my purchase executives looking after cosmetics and children products knocked my cabin door, "may I come in Sir". I nodded in approval and asked him to go ahead with what he had to say. He said, "Sir, Rajiv Pillai, my colleague, who looks after purchase of packed and frozen foods will always try to con you in ordering procurement from suppliers predominantly from South India, as he has a bias for such suppliers. Please be careful." I patiently heard him, thanked him for his advice, and became curious to know whether such an allegation was true or not. He went away and I continued to study the whole system of supply chain of my retail outlet. But my mind was constantly



getting diverted towards a disturbing aspect of regionalism which I felt prevailing in the organization. After an hour, having interacted with colleagues of other departments like accounts, audit, personnel, security etc, while working on my profile, the time for lunch break came, and I was having lunch in my cabin. Rajiv Pillai, the so called biased executive as mentioned by Sanjeev Kumar in the morning, came in and asked to be excused. I signaled him to go ahead. He said, " Sir, please take this confidentially.



Figure 6: [www.yourstory.com](http://www.yourstory.com) accessed on Feb 21, 2019

Sanjeev Kumar, my colleague looking after cosmetics and children products is heavily biased towards suppliers from Central India which is his native. He approves bad supplies at his level for further acceptance in the outlet. Please give your approvals on the basis of your judgment ". I told him not to worry. He went away but my mind wandered confusingly while I had my lunch. I felt that in a small retail outlet with a total of 30 employees from the CEO to the peon, how can two important purchase executives be so parochial or regional. On the other hand, both might be true. I decided that without

making my work suffer, I wouldn't jump to any conclusion, and find out the truth in my own way. This development was the only negative experience in the entire gamut of otherwise positive knowledge which I acquired in the first half of my first working day. After lunch, I sifted through the files of suppliers handled by both my so called regional or parochial purchase executives in the words of one another. The files literally certified their allegations on one another. I decided to carefully share this development with Mr Rajesh Kumar, my boss. While I narrated this experience to him, he patiently heard and said, " Samir, I don't think so these allegations are correct as your predecessor never came to me with such instances/experiences. Either he handled such things on his own or such things were not worth giving importance as these never hindered the work culture really.



Figure 7: [www.workplaceinsight.net](http://www.workplaceinsight.net) accessed on Feb 21, 2019

Moreover, if all the stages in the purchase process are followed properly for all purchases, no element of doubt should be there about suppliers and executives handling them. It is good that you mentioned your experience to me, but such aspects of politicking, complaining behaviors are always there in every organization. We cannot change them, However, we have to move forward along with these without letting our work suffer."

I was somewhat puzzled by what my boss said. According to him, as long as the company did not suffer in financial terms, it mattered least whether there was any regionalism prevailing in the organization.

Now, as far as I was concerned, it was important for me to ensure that regionalism did not exist and if that was not possible, at least I was not to be a part of it. That was the best I could do. Moreover, my boss as well as myself along with Sanjiv Kumar were all from Central India and that demanded extra care so that Rajiv Pillai's allegations were never true. In other words, three-fourth part of my first working day was almost over and apart from gaining considerable knowledge related to my work, I was also having a knowledge of my department and the whole company which I never expected to be existing. I felt that in my previous organization, either such a situation did not exist or I could not make out that it existed. I felt a strong urge to handle it professionally as best as possible with my limited powers alongside my work as I strongly believed in cooperation between human resources inspite of personal differences at same or different levels as an essential aspect of individual as well as organizational growth. After having enlightened myself with so much of knowledge about my organization, I left for the day at 6:30 PM to catch the nearest Metro to my paying guest accommodation in East Delhi. I was wondering while commuting that I joined this organization to shrug the past of my previous organization for the problems associated with it, but on the very first day of my new organization, that so called unjust past comparatively appeared far better. The higher designation with a much decent compensation in the new job suddenly appeared insignificant in comparison to the problem of regionalism and parochialism which I was to experience with my subordinates. After reaching home, I came face to face with the good reality that out of four of us as paying guests in the 3 BHK flat, two including myself came from Central India and remaining two from South India and nothing regional or parochial existed among all of us. After freshening up and having tea, I decided to go deep into my two subordinates psychology through Facebook. I opened my account to make friend request to both of them and I was literally for a shock. Both of them had already sent similar requests to me. My curiosity grew more and I immediately accepted their requests. So far so good. When I went deep into their friends list, I found that Sanjeev Kumar was having lot of South Indian friends in his list and Rajiv Pillai

had almost similar, if not less Central Indians as his friends. Moreover, posts and likes in their accounts hinted that personally both of them were not parochial or regional at all. After having this important information, I logged out and allowed my mind to move away from it. I had dinner with my fellow paying guests along with the usual chatter which young, somewhat experienced bachelors have while dining together as paying guests.

While trying to sleep , I wondered whether the regionalism or bias factor in my subordinates really existed or the real motto was rising in the company through criticizing one another . Moreover, another point of concern was why was it narrated to me on the very first day of my working in the organization. In other words, lots of confusing thoughts had already played a role in the first 15 hours into my new job. All these thoughts were boggling my mind till it became tired and forced me to sleep.



Figure 8: [www.brainleaf.com](http://www.brainleaf.com) accessed on Feb 21, 2019

After getting up in the morning and finishing routine chores, I was ready for the commute to my workplace again. This time the journey in the metro was appearing more clear and soothing as I was arriving at conclusions of the previous day while nearing the office. While walking from the station to my retail outlet, I decided that I have to be very careful in handling bickering between my two subordinates so that it did not become big and spread to others in my department as well as beyond it. I was also sure

that at that point of time, the central-north India divide was just fiction to be used for personal growth at the cost of harmonious organizational health and I would never allow that to happen. Just then, the gate came and I punched my card, the timing on which was exactly 24 hours from the entry timing of the previous day. Oh My God!!!! 24 hours did teach me a lot of things and I appeared to be more wise. Did I ??????. Only time was to tell.

### Chapter 3. Room partner

I could not ignore observing as he was walking to the exit of the room. It was clear that time was not in my hand and I could not muster the courage to look at my watch. I just prayed to God that this moment should never happen and with closed eyes expected it. However, it was not in my hand He was nowhere to be seen and the door of the room was open wide. I had to believe that he had gone and either I forget him or make every effort to bring him back as my room partner, which was the reason for me to be in this city

Ever since I landed in this city of dreams, I was awed by its sheer size, dimension, spread and diversity. Moreover, this pomp and show right from the point of alighting at the Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) Station took me completely by surprise. Coming all the way for the first time from a remote town of a quiet city in Eastern Uttar Pradesh to Mumbai the financial capital of our country, was like a dream come true. But this dream started moving into a reality when I found him in a similar situation trying to gauge the reality at the bus stand outside the CST station early in the morning. Out of curiosity, I asked him the purpose of his being there and lo behold it came out to be exactly same as my purpose. The only difference was that I was having a reference with me to start living in the city whereas he did not have it. I suggested to him the practicality of living together and sharing the room rent in this city of

dreams and he got convinced.



Figure 9: [www.shutterstock.com](http://www.shutterstock.com) accessed on Feb 21, 2019

I felt relieved to find someone of my type to share living space with me and understanding my expectations whereas I promised myself of a similar approach towards him. Both of us started to the place of my reference in the Vile Parle area. During the long journey in the local train, which is the lifeline of Mumbai, both of us literally acquired the bio-data of one another. He was to join the next day in a garment export packaging unit as a packing assistant and I had to join a garment showroom as store assistant on the same day. However, one thing was different in us and that was our native place. He came all the way from Orissa and I from Eastern Uttar Pradesh.



Figure 10: [www.istockphoto.com/in](http://www.istockphoto.com/in) accessed on Feb 21, 2019

During the local train journey, both of us were awed by the sheer number of people boarding as well as alighting at various stops on the way. Moreover, it all looked very mechanized as if people were pushed inside by some invisible force while boarding the train and a similar force pushed them out while alighting the train. Whether one travelled for the next station or beyond that, he or she was lost or found in his or her own world and not bothered about anything else except where to get down. It was a clockwork precision in their approach. Both of us were completely new to this world and so were awed by its sheer dimension. Eunuchs, small time sellers of cheap wares, beggars etc were also boarding and

alighting already packed compartment as per their own plan and people by and large were not having any problem although it was very humid inside even though the windows were open and above all more than half of the passengers were standing at any point of time. By the time we reached the house which was referred to me by my relative in my native place, it was almost afternoon. I knocked on the door of the flat which was on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of a 15 floor building and all the floors were having 6 flats each. In the jargon of our native place, the building surely was cramped. The land lord and land lady resembled a couple in late 60s living alone in a 3BHK flat out of which one room with attached bathroom cum toilet with a separate entrance was available for rent. The husband and my relative at my native place worked together in the same factory earlier. Even though I came with a reference, but an interview session followed which was nothing less than a police interrogation and both of us tried our best to answer questions to their satisfaction. At the end of it, rent was agreed and we were asked by the couple to start living with all the conditions finalized.

The ritual of living and working in Mumbai started from the next day and on the very first day I confirmed whatever was told by my relative back home as well as my new landlord. Life there was completely mechanized at least for people like us starting a career with a job that was not on a higher intellectual and financial level. We also realized the same when we were back from work and were discussing our first day experience while cooking food for the night. Only a day before when we settled down, we organized our cooking arrangements with essential articles etc and agreed upon the financials of running the show of living together by choice as well as compulsion. We also agreed that if at all we needed to live separately, we would share this at least one month in advance so that the other of the two was prepared to bear the total rent after one of us leaves or finds a new tenant acceptable to the land lord to live and share the rent.

A week passed and both of us almost settled in our new found home as well as in our jobs and the ritualistic, mechanized life of Mumbai, the city of dreams. Actually speaking, we also started dreaming of making it big. In the evening, both of us shared our experiences of the day, the role of money in making it big in Mumbai, and the crass commercialization which was on open display in this city. Our parents in our native places were informed about our living together and they were also happy that their children were having someone from their own background living and sharing a lot in a place where money making was almost the first preference of everyone. Life appeared to be moving smoothly for both of us and In fact we even accepted so called hardships as a learning for a better life in future. After almost one month of our working, my room partner told me of a possibility of his company putting him at a different work unit in Thane, which might require him to shift to the company sponsored bachelor accommodation in Thane itself, for the sake of putting more time to work and less on commuting . I felt happy for him but at the same time, I also realized what it meant in monetary terms. Till the time I got a new room partner, which was not a joke, I would have to shell out the whole rent from the day my current room partner would leave. I knew that the landlord was concerned with rent and as long as that flow was maintained, he was not bothered who lived and who went. I prepared myself for the day when I would have to manage the show myself. One day he told me that he would be required to attend to the Thane unit from the beginning of the coming week and that required him to move and settle down there a day before in the evening. I had one week with me to find out another room partner from next week or be ready to shell out full rent till the new partner comes and started living. My friend went up into winding up mode while working for the remaining week and I spent time after work finding another room partner in his place. When I could not identify anyone for three days, I decided to share my concern with my landlord late in the evening. During these three days, me and my room partner just wished in the morning while going to work and said goodnight before going to sleep in the night. He was completely immune to my anxieties. Within three days , I could see him change into a complete

professional from a simple, dreamy, and innocent young boy from a quiet place far away from Mumbai. Although, his honesty in financial matters remained intact but on an emotional front, I could see the change in him. May be ,I would have shown similar behavior had I been in his place. I started believing that there was no difference between him and our professional landlord. With this heavy heart and the last three days of rent sharing remaining with him, and no scope of any other room partner visible in near future, I decided to share my anxieties with my land lord. I went to him and narrated him the whole story going on since almost a month now and its forthcoming climax with no solution in near future as far as alternative room partner was concerned. After giving a patient hearing to me, he put his hands on my left shoulder and said that I should not worry. I need to pay only half the rent till I get a new partner after the current one leaves. I felt so relieved and literally started crying as suddenly the whole world appeared very light and I took a very deep breath. I thanked him and came out to have a walk before going to dinner with my room partner. That day I decided to intensify my search of room partner and make sure that my landlord does not suffer due to the insensitivity or reality of my current room partner as well as my financial problem. I also realized that not all people coming to Mumbai from different parts of India were caring and concerned and at the same time Mumbai also has its fair share of caring and concerned people.

Chapter 4. Career crossroad imagined.

The email message on her computer was puzzling and confusing her and no words or expressions were appearing to her as she found herself in complete disbelief. She tried to make sense of what it was conveying but her worry was overpowering her not to apply logic. The message was of only three lines, but it was enough to make her life appear at crossroads. The email mentioned that from next financial year, the company will be a part of another company as corporate reorganization is to take place. On the onset, it appeared a normal business decision of which she is a seasoned employee, but at a personal level, she can visualize the turn which her life will take in the next couple of years.



Figure 11: [www.womenrestart.com](http://www.womenrestart.com) accessed on Feb 24, 2019

The change may emerge as a watershed decision for her life professionally as well as personally. Expectations from her will be more intense as she is the Vice President-Human Resources (HR) of the company and her profile requires others in the company accept such decisions and she is the main person motivating others to do so. Now, in her case, there has to be a default inbuilt motivation factor. It may be a transfer within the country, or even abroad or something else also as anything is expected in

corporate reorganization. After the days work, as she was moving to home in her car, the confidence with which she used to drive back everyday took a back seat and she felt very low trying to figure out as to how to overcome this situation. After having a cup of tea with her 10 year old son, she asked him about the days school activity. He was studying in standard 5<sup>th</sup> and his school was nearby. She was lucky that he was a smart boy and academically his performance was always decent and she and her husband have been free of any worries in that direction. However, her concern centered around the possibility of her transfer outside Mumbai, in which case her comfortable family life would require drastic turnaround due to the job responsibilities of her husband as well as their son's education. She decided to discuss it with her husband in the night.



Figure 12: [www.careerattraction.com](http://www.careerattraction.com) accessed on Feb 24, 2019

After having dinner and their son moving to his room for the night, as she prepared to start for the discussion, she was surprised to hear from her husband, "Do not hide if anything is troubling you and speak up. It will make you feel light." She said, "How come you know that something is troubling me?" He smiled and said, "There is no need to ask that question as we are married for 11 years and we should be able to read one another's face at any time. Come on, tell me what is puzzling you." She hugged him and narrated the development of the whole day to him. When she was finished with her narration, he said, "Where is the problem if you are not asked specifically to relocate to some other city or country. However, it is very much expected of you as a senior HR person to walk the talk in the form of setting an example to others. Moreover, the point of time of relocation will be sorted out if at all that situation arises. It may so happen that this reorganization may change your profile as well as role but not your location, in which case it will all be fine. No need to panic now and sleep in peace". He hugged her after the discussion and both of them went to sleep. The reassuring words from her hubby made

her feel light and she could go to sleep without any disturbing thoughts.



Figure 13: [www.illustrationsource.com](http://www.illustrationsource.com) accessed on Feb 24, 2019

The next day started as usual with her son leaving first and then her husband leaving after essential morning chores. When he left, he again told her that be strong and brave and need not worry about any possibility and everything would be managed. While on the drive towards the office, she tried to feel confident due to her husband's motivation as well as her own strength, but somewhere inside, she was feeling uncomfortable. She started working and there was nothing unusual happening that day as compared to the previous day's email which literally made her very week. Her husband also called up to find out whether she was normal or not. She told him not to worry and her husband again reiterated the same motivating words. She tried to immerse herself in work and carried the whole day in the most productive way possible. She had a chance of interacting with fresh management trainees from a



leading Mumbai based B-School for their initial training posting at the headquarters and there enthusiasm made her feel happy. She also remembered her days as fresh management trainee in a different company with similar enthusiasm which has not remained with her as she has gone 15 years into her job starting as HR trainee to the current high profile job. She wished all of them well in her career and they proceeded to their training schedule. She forced herself to think why the enthusiasm wanes as a person grows emotionally and financially into his or her career. Moreover, as a senior HR person, she should not be having such a dilemma as she is responsible in removing or solving such dilemmas in other people of her company. She also found that her colleagues in different departments or cells of the company office also did not show any panic or anxiety as she was showing or experiencing just because of an email, which was sent to all concerned and not just to her. She felt that she should concentrate and forget about it at all till it actually happens.



Figure 14: [www.daisyswan.com](http://www.daisyswan.com) accessed on Feb 24, 2019

In due course of time, as days and weeks passed, the so called 'panic' email started becoming history and no any sequel to it happened. Her curiosity made her decide to talk it over with her immediate senior who was President-Human Resources of the company. After giving a patient hearing to her, he smiled and told her, "nothing of this sort is going to happen, so you need not worry." She was surprised and asked, "then why that email was sent at all?". Her senior replied that it was sent just to test the confidence level of employees and how they react to such developments." Her curiosity increased and she said, "Please tell me what are your findings." President-HR replied, "I am surprised that except you, no one has come with any concern about it till now." She was not knowing whether to laugh at herself or to learn from this experience. Her senior continued, "Neerja, you are one of the most bright human resources of our organization and you are doing your job fairly well. Had this anxiety come from a person junior in hierarchy, or a fresher who is recently appointed as a trainee or in any other position, it would have been understood. But, you becoming anxious and spreading anxiety in your family and taking such stress for weeks is really not digestible. In fact, you have turned around many weak employees of the company across disciplines and made them strong assets for the company as well as for their respective families. I have always felt proud of you and will like to feel the same in future also. In fact I appreciate your husband who is not in HR field and than too he took it confidently and tried his best to make you confident. Anyway, this experience should be taken by you as an important learning for all times." I thanked him, got up, shook hands with him and left. On the one hand, I was feeling happy and relaxed, while on the other hand I was feeling ashamed of myself for the way in which I handled a strategic intervention of the company. When I was at home with my husband and shared the day's experience with him, she laughed louder and jokingly said that he deserved a higher designation than mine in HR even though he was not an MBA-HR. I really felt emotional and not just hugged him but promised him that such childish behaviors will never happen again from my side. While going to sleep, I

resolved to myself that I am not just a senior HR executive in my official capacity, but I also need to show strength in my personal life so that unnecessary stress does not take its toll in future.

#### **Chapter 5. Friendship with Business Associate: OK or not OK**

His search for a girl has brought him here, although it is an official gathering, wherein one is expected to keep personal interests secondary. He is trying to be as official as possible but something is making him expect some important development related to his personal life in the midst of all possible company stakeholders assembled here. As he is observing the golden banquet hall from a corner, all over there are people with refined bodies in saris and jackets, and beautiful young women with straight hair never making any facial expression. However, he feels that these expressions will come any time. As he is moving further inside, he is sensing the aura of a corporate evening where his CEO (Chief Executive Officer) is hosting a get together of the entire staff across the hierarchy as well as other stakeholders viz., suppliers, other agencies etc to be followed by drinks and a gala dinner. Customarily, he comes closer to

his CEO and wishes him to which the CEO reciprocates warmly.

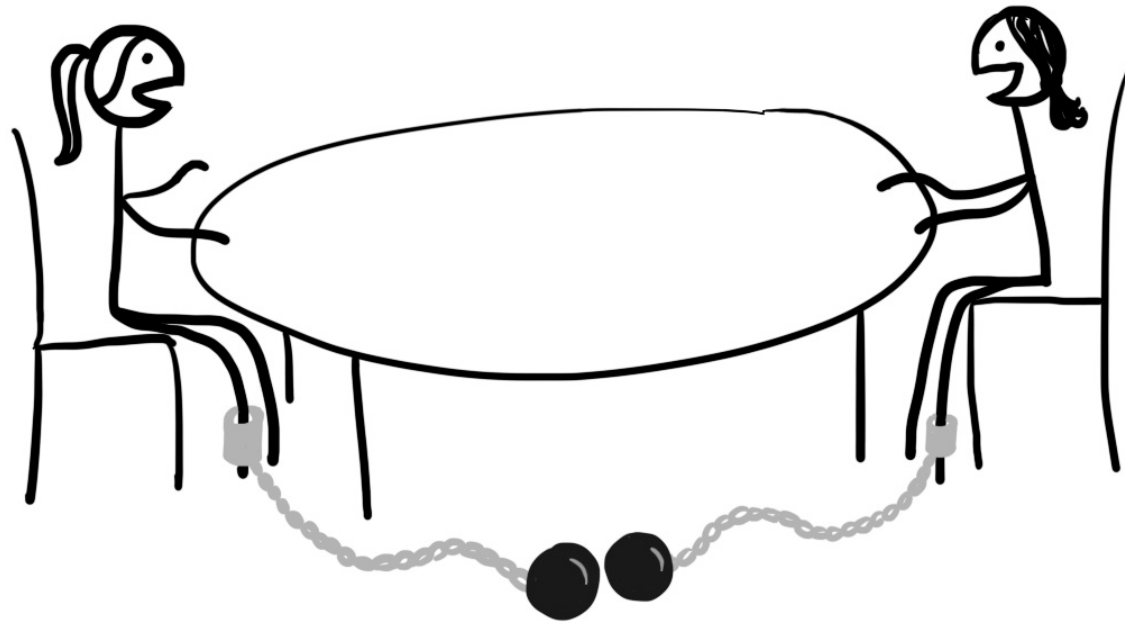


Figure 15: [www.waitbutwhy.com](http://www.waitbutwhy.com) accessed on March 09, 2019

After making himself registered in the eyes of his boss, he again looks in all directions for that still elusive girl in the huge banquet hall. While his search is on with a glass of Vodka in hand along with his colleagues, he gets a pat on his back. He turns around to find a young, beautiful but unknown girl in a beautiful saree which is making her svelte figure more attractive. He greets her with a handshake and all his colleagues wish her the same which she acknowledges and also reciprocates. She then requests him to help her locate the host of the party i.e., his CEO. His friends ask him to do the favor. He asks her to accompany him to his boss. As he approaches his boss with this angel looking girl, his mind wonders about the whereabouts of

the girl as she is not working with him in the Delhi office. After coming very close to his boss, he tells him that the lady is looking for you. After this, she introduces herself as Radha Chatterjee, representing Printopack suppliers Owner Mr Hemant Parker. Mr CEO accepts her introduction and requests her to make herself comfortable in the party. Moreover, he asks him to do this favor. Ravi Shukla is just not able to digest the fact that his CEO is asking him to make a beautiful lady comfortable in the party.



Figure 16: [www.theodysseyonline.com](http://www.theodysseyonline.com) accessed on March 09, 2019

According to him, it is appearing as a boon being granted from heavens where his boss is the God, he the believer and the girl, the boon. He escorts her to a nearby table. When the waiter asks for their requirement, she asks to bring a large drink of Vat 69. As he is trying to grasp the situation she asks him his drink. He also asks for the same as his Vodka is already over. He starts thinking whether it is usual or unusual for a young female executive of a supplier company to have hard drink in the company of her buyer representative. At the same time, he is also

thinking that it is perfectly usual for him to have the same hard drink in her company. He is sensing that even after accepting her modern thinking and approach, her attitude towards life at a very young age, her ambition to participate in business life with utmost confidence as is getting revealed by being with her only for about half an hour, he is thinking that she should not be doing all this. Is he appearing possessive towards her or is it something else. As he is trying to get answers to these questions, she asks, 'What happened?' He nods as if it is usual and as drinks and snacking proceeds, he asks her about her experience. She says that after completing her MBA, she is working with her current organization as Business Development Executive. He complements her for what she is and in turn tells her about his MBA getting over also three years back and also working in his current organization as Executive Secretary to the

CEO.



Figure 17: [www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com) accessed on March 09, 2019

She expresses happiness about almost same timings of everything both of them have accomplished. He is also feeling relaxed as the conversation is moving from official to personal domains. Still, he is finding himself uncomfortable in directly asking her to be a friend. However, something is making him feel possessive about her although she is not giving any such indication of possessiveness towards him. As he is trying to make out the next move, both of them have finished two drinks with support of snacks and her confidence in dignified talking only increased. He is finding himself adjusting many times to keep pace with her level of confidence. On the one hand, he is thinking of making friends with her at a personal level as

both of them are almost in the same age bracket, single, and are having the whole world in front of them. On the other hand, his thoughts are veering to another direction which says that professional associations should remain professional and should never become personal. As he is trying to find a way out, she whispered, 'are you thinking of making me an offer of friendship?' He is not able to digest the fact that she is also good at face reading even after having two loaded drinks. He immediately replies, 'No, I am thinking something else'. She asks about what is going on in my mind. He says, 'I am thinking whether we can be friends or not. Only if I am able to arrive at the answer to this, I will be in a position to decide whether I should ask you to be my friend.' She said, 'OK, you take your time. I have decided to make that offer. Will you be my friend?' As the party is in full swing, she asks him over for a couple dance after the announcement by the anchor to assemble at the center of the hall for the dance of couples after explaining that any two persons of same or different gender can be a couple. He is again taken by surprise that before he can even think about it, she asks her for the dance. Reluctantly, he moves along with her on the dance floor which starts seeing couples coming over and start dancing on mild Hindi movie tunes. At the same time, the lighting on the floor starts blinking to give the floor a complete discotheque aura and the music also moves from mild towards rock side which requires faster steps. Just then, he experiences a surprise. He can surely feel her hands going down his waist to areas where it will appear inappropriate in the first couple dance. He is certain that such liberties can be taken only after a degree of understanding and mutual acceptance of a relationship is there. Before he can think of reacting, she whispered in his ear, "you appear hot, what do you feel about me now?" He replies in a whisper, "I am not in a frame now to answer your question". She again whispered, "By the way,

on a dance floor, after having four large drinks with an attractive lady who is also your dance partner, which frame you are in?". He says, "How can I be in the frame which you expect after our first meeting even though we are slightly drunk?". "Stories can start right in the first interaction, if one wants to. Otherwise, nothing happens even after many meetings", she again whispered. While this whispering and counter whispering is going on, her hands moved up from my discomfort zone to the comfort area realizing that I am not in a frame in which she expects me. After the party, he is feeling relaxed and she comes closer to him. Both of them exchange smiles and she indicates her desire to move. He makes a move towards the host, his CEO for registering his leaving. His CEO accepts it and waves him to leave. She also takes the leave of her host and leaves the venue.



Figure 18: [www.spokesman-recorder.com](http://www.spokesman-recorder.com) accessed on March 09, 2019

As both of them are coming out towards the parking, she tells her, "I will be waiting for your answer to my friendship offer and there is no pressure on you to accept it. I like to have friendship without any encumbrance or pressure". I replied, "I will see to it that you get a definite answer as soon as possible." Ravi is feeling on the way home as to how to handle this situation because on the one hand she wants a girl in her life who will respect her and who is also respected by him and on the other hand he is feeling uncomfortable by her fast approach in the first interaction. He explains this dilemma to his CEO, the next day. His CEO tells him bluntly, "It is your decision. I have no problem as long as the professional relationship between our organizations does not suffer". He is realizing that now only he has to take the decision balancing so many aspects.

## Chapter 6. My own story

I was trying to connect the story which I just saw with the life which I was leading, and then asked myself whether it was just a film or a reflection on me. I was driving back after seeing the movie with my wife on the basis of rave reviews about it in the newspapers as well as television programs. Even after five days of the release, this Hindi Movie was attracting that much rush and I was surprised by the number of people waiting while we were coming out of the lot who had already seen the film. The main protagonist in the film was an upright police officer who is young, feels strongly for his country, and wants to control crime in his jurisdiction through a combination of tough as well as light measures depending upon the nature, and age of the person committing the mistake or crime. In the entire journey back home which lasted for half an hour, I felt that how come a corporate executive like me has any similarity with the lead character portrayed in the film. In the night, when we were preparing to sleep, my wife lying next to me asked, "Ravi, what happened? Are you OK". I said, "Ya fine". As I was trying to sleep, the thought of the movie made me think of my office and my position among my colleagues and my persistent feeling that I have always been a loser in political games being played in the office and one of my colleague who actually did politics never suffered in any way, whether

monetary gains or otherwise.



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Figure 19:www.shutterstock.com accessed on March 09, 2019

My wife could sense my discomfort and coming close to me said, " I am observing that you are disturbed from the time we came out of the movie hall and something is troubling you. Please share it with me. I'm sure that it will make you feel light." I just narrated the whole story to her. She said, " We will talk over it tomorrow in the evening once you are back from office." After that, I felt calm and relieved which helped me over to have a relaxed sleep. After she has left for the school the next day, where she teaches to keep herself busy, I had my breakfast, and took my lunch along with the office bag towards the chartered bus stand, with the keys of our house, as the house was locked. My commute towards the office was only 30 minutes just like any other day, but I could think about my anxiety and the hope generated by Madhu, my dear wife about it getting solved. At office, I tried to concentrate about my work and did succeed to some extent in doing so. However, the bother was not gone completely and I found myself mentally drifted to that anxious thought from time to time. As the day got over, and I was moving back home and thought how my wife would help me in overcoming my anxieties when she

actually knows very little about the problem. I reached home and found her ready to relax with me over a cup of tea and snacks, as was a routine with us. I explained her how one of my male colleague was having an affair with a female supplier and even though supplies were not up to the mark, he ensures that orders go to that supplier regularly. Moreover, my superior to whom my colleague also reports does not know this whole nexus. Madhu thought about it and then said calmly, ' You need not worry, keep doing your work and it will get solved automatically.' I could not make it out. I asked,' How come automatically?' She said,' There is a theory called 'karma' and I firmly believe in it and you must also believe in it.' I replied, 'You mean to say that I should allow this to continue and leave it on the theory of



karma for culprit to be caught.

Figure 20: www.alamy.com accessed on March 09, 2019

How will I be able to work honestly seeing gross dishonesty happening around me and ultimately harming the company in the present and may be in future also. To this argument, Madhu said, 'OK fine, then what do you suggest to be done?' I said, 'Had I known the answer to your question, I would not have got stressed on it for a long time.' 'Exactly', she said,' this is the situation in which you have landed yourself. Something unethical is happening in your office which you know, which may or may not be known to others, and you alone are stressed on it and others are least bothered about it. As a result of this situation, you are feeling disturbed, uncomfortable and not able to concentrate on your health, thereby making me also worried. I am not saying that you should kill your conscience, but at the same

time, if you do not find any solution to it, at least do not stress on it.' I was aghast at her statement as I was expecting an appreciation from my wife. Instead, she advised me to let it be as long as my job and career were secure. I told her, 'Is it not selfishness which you are advising me to follow?' She retorted, 'How ? Please explain'. I explained that according to her as long as work went on smoothly across the office and my career and job looked progressing, no need to bother, even if the company suffered. She said, 'What makes you feel the company is suffering?'. 'Madhu', I said, 'When I am clear that inferior raw material is being supplied which is compromising with the finished product from our company, it will eventually make our quality finished product go down in the eyes of the end customers, and in this competitive world, our company will eventually suffer, which will make everyone like me in the company suffer'. 'Are you there to start a revolution in your company?', Madhu retorted, 'in which case, I need to gear up for a difficult life, which I never wanted in the first case, but I will have to as I love you and I do not want to make you feel frustrated'. I hugged her for her support but I realized that although she was with me but her approach appeared to be different. She kissed me lightly and I could feel tears in her eyes. I wiped her tears and asked her how to go about it. She gave me a very strong piece of advice by saying, 'I suggest that you make this corruption in your office obvious slowly and gradually, but certainly to all others in a manner that everyone reaches a point wherein all feel that it

should come to the notice of the right people at the top, and consequently acted upon.



**Figure 21:** [www.apimages.com](http://www.apimages.com) accessed on March 09, 2019

As a result of this, a collective complaint in words or in writing will reach the higher ups and then the culprit will be brought to book. In this way, the purpose will be get served without you coming in the limelight. After all, you are interested that the corruption ends which alone will give satisfaction to you. What do you say?' Without battling an eyelid, I gave a very emphatic nod to Madhu, along with a genuine smile. This time, she hugged me and I felt very strong and ready to take on any challenge in my



office, or anywhere in the world.



Figure 22: [www.livinginperu.com](http://www.livinginperu.com) accessed on March 09, 2019

I found the world at my office moving along ,slowly and gradually. Slowly and gradually,I could make almost all my colleagues, seniors and others, realize the unethical practices going on, and I became sure that day would come when the issue gets resolved, and my anxieties in that direction would also come to an end. My interactions with my wife at home also improved and both of us started enjoying more, and she also did not ask much about the issue as she was sure that I was handling it in the correct way. Eventually, it got resolved to my satisfaction, without myself at the center and the entire staff feeling that all have made it happen. The culprit was also not fired but reprimanded to correct himself forever in future with a stern warning. That day, when I narrated the outcome to my wife in the evening, she felt very happy and told me ,’ Ravi, although your office knows that they collectively solved the problem,

which is correct, but the two of us know from the bottom of our heart that you have been a catalyst to this whole development, and more than that, our God almighty knows it clearly. What is the big deal that you did not get the limelight in the office or in some media ? You are blessed by God, and my love for you has multiplied.’ This time, it was my turn, to have tears in my eyes, which she wiped away, which made me feel very light that day. I could distinctly feel that satisfaction is important, limelight is not.

## Chapter 7. Love while working

My experiences in my love life made me resolve to never fall in love again. It is a common refrain for all folks who go through a heartbreak. At the same time, I firmly believe that I'm not heartbroken. Neither am I cynical, nor pessimistic or sad. I am just like any other human being who once felt at the top of the world due to a very pleasing experience and when I lost it, I took it as my destiny to never have it again. However, I was 22 then and life is long. Currently, I'm feeling things that I have not experienced in a long, long time. At such a young age with the whole world in front of me, I don't want to be labelled a loser just because a girl whom I felt loved me, actually made a fool of me. I have strong faith in myself as well as future, but I do drift back in time which is human. Getting into the first class compartment of direct local to Churchgate appeared mechanical just like any other day except for the fact that I was not dreaming of plans with my ex girlfriend after office which was a routine dream till the previous day. However, mind is not a machine and feelings are not possible to be ignored always. As I took my seat in a corner of a long local train journey in Mumbai, the financial capital of our country, memory took me to that stroll on Marine Drive only two years back.

I was taking a relaxed bachelor stroll on the Marine Drive after my work got over at my office, which was nearby. No one can ignore this motivating and enchanting of locations going right up to Nariman Point as it gives a high to the most dumb person in the world. The waves of water lashing regularly, with small cold droplets hitting you here and there and a continuous cool breeze made me feel happy and relaxed as it was early evening, not yet dark, and for the first time, I got free so early from work. I could see couples of all age groups, including gays and lesbians, having fun time unmindful of the world around them and the world also was not interfering with them and their priorities. It definitely is a plus in Mumbai, which never disturbs you, as long as you are not creating a law and order problem. I was not that lucky to have a girl friend with whom I can also sit and have a casual free flowing discussion on

one of the most romantic locales of our country. With a resigned acceptance of my fate, I was just looking at the merger of man made and scenic beauty of the location while sitting on one of the many rocks there all alone as I felt a gentle pat on my back. I turned back and saw an attractive young female of almost my age. 'Hi all alone' she said, 'will mind if I sit with you'. I was not prepared of this sudden offer of a possible friendship and before I realized what was happening, I said 'Why not'. I was not knowing what was going to happen as courtesy overpowered me. She was wearing a green and white salwar suit and her accent made me feel she belonged to New Delhi as it was like my accent. As I was about to start a conversation, she lost no time in doing the same. 'You work here', she said. I replied, 'Yes, with Oberoi Hotel in housekeeping as Food and Beverages executive. What about you? She blurted out fast, 'I'm working as a copywriter with McCann Eriksson, the ad agency, at its office nearby.' Good, you must be very creative,' I said as a compliment. She smiled with a blush and said, 'You must be also a creative person in the kitchen coming up with new recipes from time to time to make your guests delighted.' This time it was my turn to smile and blush which I did. We kept on talking further and never came to know when it started getting darker. I said, 'I need to move to reach home in time before the landlord gets panicky.' She replied, 'Oh yes, I also need to go fast before my warden starts yelling on phone.' We walked upto the nearest local railway station after realizing that we were to catch the same train back home. She was to get down slightly earlier and I was to get down at the last stop. The arduous and packed journey allowed us to talk more about our new possible friendship. It was all innocent at that time and there was no any air of boyfriend or girlfriend type feeling on that first day of our interaction. Almost the same thing happened the next day and it continued regularly for months except when I was to leave office late or in her case it was a similar situation or it happened with both of us. In such situation/s both of us took care to inform one another about the late leaving from office. I realized that it was becoming more of an attraction and both of us started missing one another when we were not together. It was a good feeling as in a city like Mumbai, far away from one's native place, if one

finds someone to share one's thought, hopes, likes, and dislikes and finds the other person comfortable, nothing like it. I could see that it was moving from knowing one another to romancing one another and that too not in the evenings but also on off days as well as conveniently planned leaves by both of us. Both of us were equally qualified and were earning decently to handle our singlehood status after sending a decent amount back to our respective families as responsible young adults. It was appearing a perfect setting to plan for a sound future of togetherness. I was completely unaware of what was in store for me. 'What is your caste?'. I was totally surprised when she asked this pointed question after almost two years of our dating and romancing. In an annoyed voice, I asked back, 'Does it matter?'. 'Yes it does matter', she said, 'I don't want complications later on after coming this far in our case.' Almost about to finish my fruit beer on one of the rocks at Nariman Point, our favorite joint, I gulped the remaining of it very fast and looking straight into her eyes, I asked, 'What do you mean by complications as long as we have love at the center of our relationship?'. To this, she replied like a thorough professional by saying, 'See Rahul, this dating, and romancing is fine, but when the question of marriage and physical relationship comes, compatibility in all aspects is very important and we have to be practical. I do not want to hurt you, but these things cannot be brushed aside. Is it wrong to be practical in love instead of living in an imaginary fairy tale world which actually does not exist. I am sorry to say all this. I do not want to hurt you'. On the one hand, I was taken aback with this sudden rush of my caste inquiry and at the same time I felt that in current times one has to be practical also. Giving the benefit of doubt to her, I told her of my caste and she told hers and it did not generate much of a problem. Again many days passed, and it appeared all smooth. By this time, as I experienced a level of comfort, she came up with another question amidst our another round of fruit beer, this time at Borivili National Park, on a toy train. 'What if one of us gets transferred to another city after marriage?'. I replied, 'No big deal, the other one will adjust and move along with the transferred person'. I was expecting a smile from her but there came another shocker, 'What about collective money to be made

by both of us for our future.? I think both of us should continue working in different locations and meet at weekends to be together before starting the week of work again. What do you say ? I retorted, 'You leave no scope for me to say anything and you just announce and expect me to follow. By the way, is sex the only thing to do when we meet and separate for the new week.' She said, 'I never said that'. 'Then what did you mean by suggesting a coming together for 36 hours after a separation of 132 hours and then separating again for 132 hours.' She felt my fury and tried to calm me down, 'I mean to say that living in cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata etc requires this type of economic considerations for a secure and peaceful future.' I said, 'I will think about it as I do not have any readymade answer to that.' On the very next day, while moving in the fast local back home, she gave a flying kiss to which I did the same to her as we not like many other people on local trains kissing openly and least bothered about others. It made me feel light but then I realized the real reason for that show of affection which came in the form of her question as soon as the train started, 'Did you think on our discussion yesterday'. I said, 'I could not as I was very tired. I will do it today.' Almost in a fit of controlled anger, she retorted, 'Fine, in that case, let us not meet till you are ready with an answer to that.' This time, I also said a firm yes.

Today, I could see her deliberately avoiding this train and waiting for my train to pass. I realized that the gist of my experience is that either I had to say yes to her or my opinion did not matter. I felt surprised as my own sister is having a boyfriend in New Delhi and she respects him and his views and never imposes anything on him. By the time, I reached my home station, I realized that it is difficult to read the mind of every girl but yes one day I will be able to find that one who will be able to understand me just as I will try to understand her.

## Chapter 8. Nostalgia in play

I was seriously thinking that I go back to the past and live the school life again . It is 2017 and Sunday afternoon .It is a pleasant drive on my scooter after lunch through the roads of my native place Jhansi in Western Uttar Pradesh where I was born and studied till graduation before moving out of Uttar Pradesh for doing Post Graduation. After leaving Jhansi in 1991, I completed MBA in 1993 and then started working in New Delhi. Off-course, I did my Ph.D from Jhansi during 1997-2000 and that required me to come regularly for the purpose of attendance, but that did not give me time to explore my Jhansi of the period 1969-1991, the most happening period from my birth till I started my MBA in 1991 which I completed in 1993. As I was driving past the Cariappa Marg in the vast Jhansi Cantonment, I could feel the memories of my childhood unravelling.



Figure 23: [www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com) accessed on Feb 27, 2019

Early in the morning, I used to get ready willingly or unwillingly under the guidance of my father and mother and wait for the tempo to start from our ancestral house in Jhansi city along with my younger brother and cousins, all numbering five in total. The tempo run by a family friend of ours after picking us all up from our joint family house moved to other stops picking up more like us from nearby stops towards our school and other schools on the way. The care and warmth which our parents showed in seeing us off for the day and the fun in the tempo ride with some stops in between were very joyful as we never felt the struggle of being packed like sardines till we used to arrive at our school/s. There were no anxieties in those days as compared to current times where you have all material comforts but anxieties are an integral part of life. The perennial fear factor of the teacher was there in every class and in some classes it was more than some other as everyone of us was not good in every subject of our respective classes. That fear factor has paid us well later on. The morning assembly starting with the prayer made us all feel highly disciplined and a small PT(Physical Training) immediately after the prayer really felt rejuvenating before going to the class sharp at 8:30 AM. After four continuous periods of total 2 hours, we used to break for recess and it was sheer joy with all of us opening up our tiffin boxes with a set of friends developed over time in the class. Innocent discussions over tasty breakfast for half an hour helped all of us come close to one another even when we got promoted to the next class every year. We brothers rarely met during recess but we all shared our stories on the way back home in the same tempo. Sweet memories of the games period thrown in between the time table goaded me to think about the football field while I was passing through the road dividing the junior and senior section of my St Mark's High School where I spent almost 9 years of my life during 1975 to 1984. On either side of the elevated road was a slant way to the ground on which our school stood as majestic as it was when I finally bid adieu to it in 1984. From the road I could not see almost anything inside the junior section as its boundary wall was raised but the memories of the sweet childhood of those days played back into

my

mind.



Figure 24: [www.shutterstock.com](http://www.shutterstock.com) accessed on Feb 27, 2019

At the same time, I could see the inside of the senior section of the school as its raised boundary did not hinder its internal view. Memories of verandah assemblies in the beginning, recess enjoyments, classroom seriousness as well as childhood quarrels played in my mind and I could also remember the times when I and many of my friends expressed the desire during recess to move out of the school at the earliest feeling dejected for some small reason or the other during those days. But, now when I was remembering all those memories, I felt the value of those innocent moments which taught so much besides giving a firm foundation to my life. One such memory which I could feel at that time was of the annual sports day wherein all the students of all classes were enjoying and cheering their houses namely green, blue, red and yellow for individual as well as team events and that day there was no any division of classes.



Figure 25: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) accessed on Feb 27, 2019

The divisions were of the houses. Along with us, teachers also motivated players from our houses to excel in their respective sports. All the boundaries of the class or grade of studies did not exist on that day and everyone immersed themselves in house colors. It was a great and innocent play of group dynamics. As I was standing on the main gate of the senior section of the school, I allowed my memory to pass to the times when our tempo arrived in the morning and we all came out one by one. It was my responsibility to ensure that all of us got down from it and moved in the right direction to be ready for the morning assembly in time. That care for one another is still remembered by all of us after so many years even though we all are currently in different parts of the world. A smile passed on my face as I could recollect the rainy day situations in those days. In times when there were no mobile phones and land line phones were also a luxury, it was not possible to find out whether the school was closed or not while it rained. Instead of that, we were having an extra attire of an attractive raincoat along with rain shoes and water proof bags just for such days. There was an extra joy while moving towards the school at such times and the joy multiplied when we were told to go back at the school gate as holiday was declared on account of rains. Such innocent laughter and joy of those times was a stark contrast to the laughter and joy of current times which is more artificial than real. As I turned more on the right side of the school gate, I could see the church at a distance of less than 500 meters and my memory made me

smile again as the thought of founders day celebrations came to my mind.



Figure 26: [www.hippocard.com](http://www.hippocard.com) accessed on Feb 27, 2019

Our school founders day was celebrated annually and it was done with an impressive sequence of activities. After the morning assembly comprising of the morning prayer and PT, we all students of the school marched past under the guidance of our teachers and National Cadet Corps(NCC) commanders to the church and sat there in proper discipline and participated in various activities like sermons, songs, teachings, and addresses of dignitaries as well as other special guests. After all these activities were over, we marched back to the school in the same discipline with which we came to the church. We all really enjoyed the event and looked forward every year for the event. I cannot stop mentioning here that most of us as children were non-Christians but that never came in the way of our respect towards Christianity as a religion and at the same time there was no any less respect for our own religion in those days and such mutual respect has continued till date and will continue till we live. More so, our teachers in St Marks College made us feel that all of us are citizens of this country and religious or cultural differences among all of us never divided us on such lines. The pleasant breeze blowing at that time accompanied with complete silence all over made me feel that times have definitely changed but

fundamentals of school education will and should remain the same. I could also see the motto of my school 'Be of good courage' firmly embedded atop the wall under the engraved carving of the name of the school. Although 33 years have passed since I left the school and 23 year have gone since I am working, but my respect for teachers has only increased with time as many members of my family including my mother worked as teachers in higher education and I am also working as Professor in Higher Management Education in Ahmedabad, Gujarat currently. It was getting dark and with teary eyes, I bid adieu to my school and started back to my ancestral house in the city. As I was passing through the busy roads, lanes, and by-lanes of my place of birth, I felt a surge of emotion in me as 33 years have definitely changed the city, but the love for the city of my childhood remains and it will never come down. As I parked my scooter in the parking area, I felt that those days will never come back but I will always be indebted to God almighty and my parents for giving me sweetest memories of my school life which will always help me to come out of the biggest challenges of life till I live.

## Chapter 9. Mother's dilemma

As his mother walked into the room , he was about to apply her new lipstick. She felt dismayed. He was also speechless as if he has committed a crime. She inquired as to what was he up to with her lipstick as it was new and she had not used it till then. She also asked the reason for such a hurry. He tried to calm down the situation by smiling and handed it back to her. He then told her that he was to perform Draupadi in his college production for which the rehearsals were to start that evening. Every time she sees her son doing something feminine shocks her for an instant but then the motherly emotion overpowers her and she gives into it. She is caught in a dilemma whether to encourage her son in his pursuits or to counsel him to move away from imagining, thinking and behaving as a female believing such a behavior as harmful in the long run . She kissed him and wished him well for the rehearsals. On the one hand, she proudly claims to be a progressive woman and on the other hand she is scared of her son's interest in everything associated with the opposite gender. She knows that his classmates tease him for his feminine habits and tastes and every time they do it, he feels awkward. At 19, he should not be left alone to defend himself as none of the people around him are like him. Moreover, as a mother she felt it her duty to make him comfortable in his present and at the same time motivate him carefully so that he can come out of this obsession behaving as a female from time to time. One thing was clear that although she claims to be a progressive woman, her concern for her son's unusual behavior makes her doubt her progressiveness. Many times, in social gatherings, he has behaved in manners which generated queries from people close to her about his feminine instincts, although in hushed tones. Uptil now she has been able to handle it with confidence in public, although in private she literally cried many times and being a single mother, there was no one to share this emotional trauma with. One fear which always makes her uncomfortable is the possibility that one day her son may come and tell her that he wants to go for sex change and she should bless him.



Fig27:<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj48X84KrnAhUozDgGHSIPCfw49AMQMygsMCx6BAGBEFo&url=https%3A%2F%2Ffamil.momspresso.com%2Fparenting%2Fperspective%2Farticle%2Fa-mother-s-dilemma-a-short-story&psig=AOvVaw37xfSnsKpwf-Wei4R8ziwR&ust=1580453863885377&ictx=3&uact=3> accessed on January 30, 2020

As she was driving to work, she was feeling confused as to how to handle this situation. Howsoever progressive she claimed herself to be, she always dreamt of her son getting a decent job on the basis of a decent higher education through his own efforts thereby making her proud. She wished him to do MBA and then work in an MNC of repute in her very own city Mumbai, where work culture is very progressive. Even though she wished all this, but never forced it on her son, but made sure that he gets inclined to Commerce stream in UG level which may generate an interest in MBA at PG level. She has been successful to this point as her son is in SY BCom and doing well academically. All in all, everything appears to be moving properly as planned, but under this cloak of confidence lies a potential volcano of emotions and she does not know how to come out of it. As she parked her car before entering the office located at the plush Nariman Point, she could feel the breeze and also the inner turmoil which she is undergoing. After completing the starting greeting formalities with some of her colleagues, she settled down at her work station feeling that immersing herself in work will take the disturbing thoughts away from her at least till lunch break. Every day she consoled herself with this thought that many of her office mates must be having some or the other problems in personal life but in office everyone tries to come out of it at least temporarily. Her thoughts kept on thinking that her son will be rehearsing for the



role of Draupadi after the classes and will share all his exciting thoughts in the evening when both of them will be together. She will be expressing her joy for his sake and internally she will be feeling shattered as it always happens. After having a hectic day at office which included meetings, reporting, as well as interacting with foreign buyers, she winded up to leave and while the lift was taking her down to the basement parking, her anxieties were multiplying. Normally, when one moves from office to home, a feeling of relaxation takes over as one expects moving in a comfort zone, but here the case was different and she was getting ready to become artificial in front of her own son. As soon as she knocked open the door, her son opened it and she could see the smile on his face. They both went inside and then he shut the door from inside and hugged and thanked her for supporting him in performing the role of Draupadi. He narrated how everyone in the rehearsal were praising him for his performance and the team leader motivated him to keep on improving. All this was making her express happiness on the exterior but she was getting disturbed inside. As she was sipping tea with him while sitting in the balcony of the house overlooking the vast expanse of the South Mumbai skyline, her son said, " Mom, you look disturbed, are you OK." She said, "I am fine and it is some office issue as usual but it happens and it gets resolved normally. You need not worry. "



Fig28:<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiJkZjK36r nAhVTIbcAHX9cAVYQMwigASguMC4&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.momspresso.com%2Fparenting%2Fmommy-musings%2Farticle%2Fa-mothers-dilemma&psig=AOvVaw37xfSnsKpwf-Wei4R8ziwR&ust=1580453863885377&ictx=3&uact=3> accessed on January 30, 2020

On the periphery, everything appeared to be very normal, but a volcano seemed to have formed on the issue and as a mother, she has no one to share it with. Her son went into his study and started to concentrate for the forthcoming exam to join her later on for joint television viewing from 9 PM onwards. She also did some cooking for the two of them and opened up the laptop to do some office work. Once she was through, she felt that instead of bottling herself up, she needs to talk to her son soon and put her apprehensions clearly and then be prepared with whatever comes out of it. The two were having dinner on the dining table and the discussion was happening on the current political climate in the country and as usual it went on for around 15 minutes till the dinner was over. She felt that it would be right to talk the next day on dinner and remove all apprehensions permanently.

The time came very soon which she has decided to be a very crucial time for an important discussion. At the dinner table, she opened the discussion and said, " Varun, I wanted to share a concern since a long time but was not sure how to start." Varun replied, " Mom, you need not find time for any concern you have and you can go ahead with it straight away. Please tell me what is troubling you." Now she felt that there is no scope of behaving diplomatically and the time has come to do the plain talk. Never before she felt so stressed in front of her son. She just put it straight, " Varun are you going to go for a gender change ? " "No way Mom. How come you arrive at this thought ?" She went further by saying, " your continuous role plays of female characters at your college dramas and concerts etc have started getting me worried since long." Varun replied, " Mom you need to have faith in your son. Just because I am interested in playing the female character in college dramas, concerts etc does not make me look for gender change eventually. You should have thought before asking me a very shocking question. She immediately sensed her son's mood and pacified him by playing the emotional card, " You put yourself in my place and think about it and you will realize the seriousness of the problem. My intention of putting it straight is not to shock you but to remove my apprehensions and doubts just as you do the same

whenever you have any doubt on any topic in this world. Moreover, when there is no other outlet except one another, then we need to lessen one another's burden by talking it out. " She also made her tears visible to him. At this point, Varun hugged his mother and tried to pacify her. He said, "Mom, it is just that I like to play a female character and you should not in any way take it beyond that. I promise that I will complete my studies and work hard in getting a result oriented job and bring you a beautiful, intelligent and professional daughter-in-law who will respect you as well as earn your respect. " These reassuring words made her completely recover from a huge burden and she felt very much relieved. Both of them had a quiet dinner and life moved as it used to move then on. The next day was very normal as both the mother and son went ahead with their routines and the whole atmosphere appeared very light as compared to heavy feelings of the past days.

#### Chapter 10. Chauvinism and Love

There was a couple sitting in the cafe when I walked in. As the light was low, I didn't know who they were until the woman turned around, and I saw it was my wife. It was surprising as well as puzzling for me. However, before I could say anything, my wife invited me to join them saying, ' Hey Raghu, meet my research respondent Sandeep. I am interacting with him as part of my office's survey research activity on studying loneliness and reasons for the same. ' I proceeded to join them and shook hands with Sandeep who also was perplexed as he was also told by Neeta that I was her husband. After that, we chatted generalities and thereafter I told them to continue with their assignment and I left. Neeta came with me till the exit gate and saw me off. As I was driving off towards a client for a meeting, my broadmindedness and my conservativeness were clashing with one another. As a young couple in our mid 30s, I have always taken pride in my wife working in a decent marketing research firm on an executive position requiring to coordinate various survey research activities directly as well as indirectly through a team of dedicated young researchers like her. My meeting with the client was OK and as desired. Thereafter, I headed back home, a long drive from Nehru Place in New Delhi to Gurugram, our residence. I was feeling puzzled just because I came face to face that day with the reality of my wife's job, which otherwise was very normal, but I could not accept it as normal. I decided to make every effort in ensuring that the uncalled for abnormality in my thinking did not make my wife suspect my discomfort. In the meanwhile, she did call me about her work in progress, feeling very happy for it and promised me to share all the experiences that evening. She reached at 8 in the evening, and I hugged her as was a normal practice and expressed my happiness in her joy as she was very happy that day. While we were having dinner that evening, she was narrating her experiences of the day and how she learned a lot about the

subject on which the survey started that day. She also told me that she was sure to learn a lot more in the remaining 14 days as the whole exercise was of 15 days total. I told her how happy and proud I was in her happiness and willingness to learn. I tried to match my words with my facial expressions, but I was not sure whether it worked. After all, we loved each other so much that we could read one another very fast. After dinner, when we were in bed and were having usual discussion, she put a straight question to me, " why are you trying to hide your reservations with my work profile ?".I said," I am not having any reservations. What made you feel like that ?" She said in a very sweet tone," Listen dear, for me your happiness is and will remain top priority, and in order to ensure that, I can go to any extent. I have a strong feeling that you are finding it difficult to adjust with my work profile and especially with today's experience, I could feel your discomfort." I was taken aback at her sudden show of confidence as well as concern for our collective happiness. I was not ready for it as I never imagined that scenario. I told her," It is not a question of discomfort but more to accept my comfort to the reality of your working to which principally I have no problem". She then said," Than what is the problem." I told her," My male chauvinism is uncomfortable with your work related happiness although my love for you is immense and unmatched." She was literally shocked upon hearing this and made a clear statement." If that is so, I will leave my job and take care of household responsibilities as I did not enter job life for money when you motivated me to join." I immediately retorted," Nothing doing. You are my pride and if your working makes you happy ,it makes me happy." She said." Then how do we resolve this confusion which may lead to sleepless nights for both of us having the potential of destroying our peaceful life." I said," Time will resolve it and let it go like that. However, I promise that I will work overtime in removing my own chauvinism as it is the biggest culprit of all this." She said." Are you sure you will be able to handle it." I replied in the affirmative. We kissed one another and went to sleep

very well aware of a hectic day ahead. The next day was as usual running through morning chores till both of us hugged one another before departing in different directions towards our respective offices. All throughout my drive till my office at Nehru Place, I was feeling sorry for implanting an unnecessary hurt in my wife's mind whose love for me knew no bounds and who always felt proud of my broadmindedness. By the time, I reached office, I could see the Whatsapp message from Neeta, " Are you OK ? Keep calm. You will always be my priority". As I was moving up the lift, I replied," I am lucky to have such a loving wife. Keep up the good work. I am always with you."



Fig29:<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiylPb84arnAhW4xzgGHTiZBGMQMwiSASgkMCQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Ftimesofindia.indiatimes.com%2Flife-style%2Frelationships%2Flove-sex%2FHow-to-recognise-a-Male-Chauvinistic-Pig%2Farticleshow%2F37176644.cms&psig=AOvVaw1lGoO-EUAdd3eUSeKyfJYd&ust=1580454507103172&ictx=3&uact=3> accessed on January 30, 2020

I immersed myself in my tasks related to my senior as well as my colleagues and tried to come out of my self created nonsense. In between, whenever I got some me time , I felt so bad that on the one hand, I claimed to be very modern, one who always believed in gender equality as well as an equal opportunity world for both genders. However, on the other hand, in those 24 hours I showed a behavior which was completely opposite of all that. Moreover, my wife,

instead of arguing with me as a modern, young and dynamic woman, was actually going out of the way to cater to my ridiculous level of ugly male chauvinism. I was feeling shocked at my foolishness and hypocrisy and at the same time tremendous respect and love for my wife. I could imagine how she would be feeling that day while at work as compared to the previous day when her joy was not having any bounds. She must be feeling guilty of hurting misplaced sentiments of her hypocrite husband and that must have severely brought her morale down that day.



Fig30:[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwi\\_xtqh46rnAhXNxDgGHATyDt84yAEQMygbMBt6BAGBEDc&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D3vQaoNyvGYA&psig=AOvVaw1IGoO-EUAdd3eUSeKyfJYd&ust=1580454507103172&ictx=3&uact=3](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwi_xtqh46rnAhXNxDgGHATyDt84yAEQMygbMBt6BAGBEDc&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D3vQaoNyvGYA&psig=AOvVaw1IGoO-EUAdd3eUSeKyfJYd&ust=1580454507103172&ictx=3&uact=3) accessed on January 30, 2020

I decided that in the evening I would be apologizing to her and make her feel light for all times to come thereby bringing the cheer back to her face and life. In the evening, she pretended to be normal like everyday, but I could sense her hurt just as she could sense my misplaced anxiety a day before. By the time, we reached bed after dinner, I told her " Neeta, I am sorry for whatever has transpired since yesterday which must have made you very uncomfortable." She coolly replied, " In fact, you need not feel sorry as you were frank enough in admitting it and I really love your frankness." I said. " In that frankness was hidden my male chauvinism and

instead of arguing against it, you accepted it just because you love me so much." Neeta said, " I never took it as male chauvinism, but a feeling of concern for me as I am required to move out and travel due to my work profile." With tears in my eyes, I said, " Neeta, please do not be so good by misreading my chauvinism with concern." She came closer to me, kissed me, and said, " Then what should I do my dear husband." I kissed her back and told her, " Just forget last 24 hours as a bad joint dream and participate in this world of challenges with renewed vigor and enthusiasm." She gave a mischievous smile and said, " OK. But before the night comes to an end, can we show some enthusiasm in bed as we have not enjoyed since many nights." I laughed and said, "Done". The next morning was very different and it appeared almost as a re-birth to both of us. Instead of going to office, we both decided to take leave that day and enjoyed a real quality time with one another.

It is rightly said by someone that at times, real bliss comes after extreme stress.

## Chapter 11. Tolerance

The strangest thing about this strange journey is that it began with a word. The word was tolerance. It was mentioned by me in a context wherein everyone is expected to believe in the word for orderly co-existence. However, the one and half hour evening flight from Lucknow to New Delhi literally proved to be an eye opener to me as well as my fellow traveler next to me. By the time the boarding gates were closed for the flight to start taxiing on the runway, we had exchanged our cards and I was knowing that he was a highly qualified successful Muslim entrepreneur and he was knowing that I was a Senior Vice President-Marketing of a leading multinational FMCG firm looking after the North and Central Indian Market, besides being a Hindu. One common thing emerged was that both of us belonged to Lucknow. As the customary safety instructions were being poured out by the air-hostesses, both of us like many other flyers were ignoring the same as it was a routine exercise. He glanced at me and said.”



Figure31:[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.shutterstock.com%2Fsearch%2Ftolerance&psig=AOvVaw04I8QEccvSjL\\_EGxZi51JJ&ust=1580520540117000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=2ahUKEwiy-oz816znAhV4CrcAHYtiAmkQr4kDegUIARCRAg](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.shutterstock.com%2Fsearch%2Ftolerance&psig=AOvVaw04I8QEccvSjL_EGxZi51JJ&ust=1580520540117000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=2ahUKEwiy-oz816znAhV4CrcAHYtiAmkQr4kDegUIARCRAg) accessed on January 31, 2020

What is your opinion about the Supreme Court judgement dated 09/11/2019 on the Ram Temple issue ?”. I said,” How does it matter?”. “ It matters”, he said,” as both of us are in their mid-40s and we have lived our whole life through this issue and now we should have an opinion when the final verdict has come out. “ “I think that it should rest the matter for ever and both the parties, Hindus as well as Muslims, should move on towards a bright and prosperous joint future for the sake of this great country” I said,” but by the way, what do you say about the verdict?”. Zafar replied.” Well Ravi, I strongly feel that a closure has come from the Supreme Court and now people from both the communities should ensure harmonious co-existence” On that count, we smiled and felt a degree of relief on our faces because both of us appeared on the same wavelength on a very important but sensitive issue. After the flight has reached around 30000 feet height, and things became a bit relaxed there, both of us have had our snacks and it was still one hour to New Delhi. Zafar initiated another discussion.” How do you feel that the harmonious co-existence between our two communities can happen in the current times of suspicion and animosity?”. I retorted.” What animosity and suspicion are you talking about? “ He replied” The ghettoization of our living spaces wherein either there is a Muslim society or there is no Muslim household in an otherwise non-Muslim society. Same goes with Hindus.”

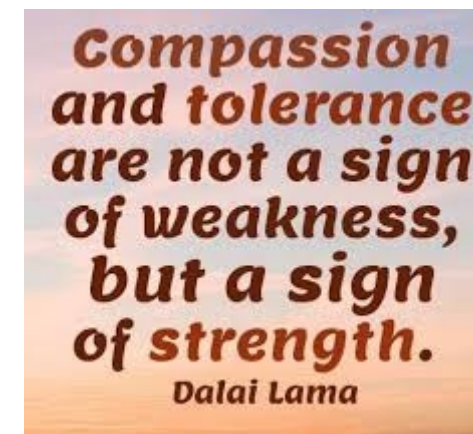


Figure32:[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.coolnsmart.com%2Ftolerance\\_quotes%2F%3Ffilter%3Dimages&psig=AOvVaw04l8QEccvSjL\\_EGxZi51JJ&ust=1580520540117000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=2ahUKEwiyoZ816znAhV4CrcAHYtiAmkQr4kDegQIARB9](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.coolnsmart.com%2Ftolerance_quotes%2F%3Ffilter%3Dimages&psig=AOvVaw04l8QEccvSjL_EGxZi51JJ&ust=1580520540117000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=2ahUKEwiyoZ816znAhV4CrcAHYtiAmkQr4kDegQIARB9) accessed on January 31, 2020

I was not prepared for this line of discussion but it was certainly true and no one can deny it. I told him, "That is a fact, but it is not our creation." Zafar replied, "Yes, we never created it but it is there for all of us to see all around in every city, town, district and metropolitan of our country. Unless and until this unwritten but implied suspicion between communities goes away, real harmony will not come." After that, both of us started reading our respective books and got engrossed in our own things, when some other routine announcement was made. It allowed us to continue our conversation from where we have left it. This time, it was my turn, "Zafar, what is your idea of removing this suspicion between our communities?" He said, "I strongly feel that with us who are in our 40s, as well as those who are younger to us, should motivate their children who must be very small, or in pre-teens to mingle with the other faith children while in school so that they motivate their parents like us to meet in the evenings for social gatherings on a regular basis. It may not be easy but someone like us have to take an initiative. Otherwise, we will continue to live in animosity and turmoil and will leave this disturbed legacy for our children. What do you say?" I nodded in an affirmative manner to what he has said. However, I added, "That goes well with motivating our children and motivating ourselves towards more inclusive and adjusting behavior with the other community at a social level outside the workplace. The problem is also prevalent at our myriad workplaces where the situation is no less ghettoized than our neighborhoods. For example, I will not be comfortable with many Muslims in my organization and you may not be comfortable with many Hindus in the organization which you are running." He said, "It is not an example, but it is true. I do not

discriminate my employees on the basis of their religion, but not many are like me in this world. But don't you feel that this prejudice is more against Muslims than people of any other religion. I have many close Hindu friends and I am sure that you will be added up to that list from now onwards, but deep down there appears sheer hatred to people just because they are Muslims." I told him, "Well Zafar, I agree to what you say and there is a logic to that. The narrative of Muslim rulers invading India since centuries and subjecting Hindus to various degrees of torture of all types has taken a large section of Hindu community in its fold and our elders and their elders have held this narrative very dear to their psyche. As a result of it, majority of our generation of Hindus have a strong malice against Muslims." Both of us took a deep breath as the announcement was made of our landing soon at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi. He told me, "Ravi, I am sure that our friendship will not end with this flight and in fact, we can spread our positive views within and beyond our communities, thereby contributing towards lasting harmony among all people of our different faiths." I replied as we were moving out of the aircraft towards the waiting bus, "Certainly Zafar, we have our contact details with one another and we should work in that direction." We both boarded the bus and after getting down at the arrival terminus, we waved towards one another as we exited in our different directions from the airport late in the evening. As I was moving towards the hotel, I was wondering that education makes all of us sensible towards all others provided we practice the education which we have acquired. 90 minutes Lucknow-New Delhi flight has given me an experience that learning can happen at any point of time, and we only need to keep our eyes and ears open for the same. Supreme Court verdict on decades old Ayodhya issue has brought the entire country face to face with the word tolerance specially in the context of Hindu-Muslim unity. As I got down from the taxi at my Vasant Kunj Hotel where I was to stay for the next one week, and control my territory operations in Delhi, I could see the Whatsapp message from

Zafar informing me his safe arrival at his hotel which was at Connaught Place. I replied with thanks as well as informing him of my safe arrival too.

Next three days were very busy in the hotel via meetings as well as touring different warehouses of lots of distributors as well as retail points where our products were sold across the National Capital Region of Delhi. Only in the late evenings and the night, I could relax and socialize through social media and talk home at leisure and keep up with the home front. I could also talk to Zafar during that time only as he too was busy during the day time in meeting with his buyers, prospective buyers as well as government functionaries for necessary approvals and permits related to his business. Both of us were looking forward to wards our return flight to Lucknow as we were to go in the same flight back one week from our landing in New Delhi. He appeared very keen to take our new found friendship to a different level through regular interactions, family visits and mingling of our children with one another before we can think of enlarging this activity in a larger group. At the end of the week, when the outlined work was over, I got ready to leave, and boarded the taxi to the Airport. I was looking forward to another round of meaningful and interesting discussion between the two of us. I felt happy when I saw him at the airport and this time we hugged each other in contrast to not knowing one another a week back. I asked him, "How was the week Zafar?" He replied, "Fantastic. All my buyers as well as distributors are doing a wonderful job and have great ideas to expand the business and contribute towards the success of my business as well as their growth. It was a very productive as well as a motivating week. In fact, many of them also felt relieved because of the resolution of the Ayodhya dispute as according to them, the topic will not be discussed any further at the cost of more important things to do. " I replied "Great and I feel happy for you." After boarding the plane, we found that we were having same seats in a different row this time, and there was

no need to request anyone for seat exchange. We made ourselves comfortable. Zafar said, "How about you? In your meetings, did the Ayodhya verdict come up?" I said, "It did come, but it was appreciated by all and many of my distributors who are Muslims, also appreciated the same. I was elated by the bonhomie present across the board. " He smiled and expressed his happiness for the same. This time, the entire evening flight went smoothly with an air of emotion as we were both going towards our hometown after hectic visit to one of our many workplaces especially after the Supreme Court of India has given its verdict on an issue through which people like me and Zafar have lived their childhoods. After getting down at the Lucknow Airport, both of us were delighted to have our respective families come to receive us. We introduced one another to our families, and we could not control our emotions in the new found love between people who were unknown till one week before. Elders of both the families were trying to connect with one another through some link of colonies or people of the past as all were from Lucknow. Any neutral person from outside of both the families could never have realized that who was a Hindu and who was a Muslim in that entire gathering. The word tolerance became more celebrated that day and I felt assured that this tolerant tribe will never allow our country to fall apart.

## Chapter 12. Bonding

She decided on a whim, as she got off the Shatabdi at Dehradun that while in Mussoorie, she was not going to bond with Ruskin. With James maybe but definitely not with Ruskin. A cold winter afternoon at 12:40 PM after starting from New Delhi Railway Station at 6:45 AM made her nostalgic about a glorious past full of childhood. However, coming to Mussoorie, her hometown, never tires her. In fact, it removes all her fatigue every time she comes. Whatever happened with both of her college time friends during their last visit to Mussoorie was difficult to forget, although all of them have moved along very far in their respective lives. As she found her way outside the Dehradun Railway station, she could recollect old times when everything was very relaxed and quiet as compared to the cacophony of current times. In a cold December afternoon, as she was approaching nearby pre-paid taxi service counter, she was imagining the beautiful journey about to be taken to Mussoorie. That journey has never tired her even though it had always come after almost 6 hours journey from New Delhi to Dehradun. Now, even the taxi persons remember her and they need not be told the destination to go. Everyone knows the beautiful house set in serene Mussoorie surroundings atop a hill.



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[organisations%2Fcross-cultural-bonding-leads-to-higher-creativity-5896&tbid=6PzIvHm2maTBUM&vet=12ahUKEwiq8oCn-u3nAhXc7TgGHd1JAn8QMyg6egUIARCqAQ..i&docid=gEgV6THhcWXUJM&w=1255&h=836&q=bonding%20images&ved=2ahUKEwiq8oCn-u3nAhXc7TgGHd1JAn8QMyg6egUIARCqAQ](https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fknowledge.insead.edu%2Fsites%2Fwww.insead.edu%2Ffiles%2Fimages%2F2017%2F04%2Fcross-cultural_bonding.jpg&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fknowledge.insead.edu%2Fleadership-organisations%2Fcross-cultural-bonding-leads-to-higher-creativity-5896&tbid=6PzIvHm2maTBUM&vet=12ahUKEwiq8oCn-u3nAhXc7TgGHd1JAn8QMyg6egUIARCqAQ..i&docid=gEgV6THhcWXUJM&w=1255&h=836&q=bonding%20images&ved=2ahUKEwiq8oCn-u3nAhXc7TgGHd1JAn8QMyg6egUIARCqAQ) accessed on February 26, 2020

The picturesque journey of about 35 Kms which was to take around 90 minutes gave her a respite from the stressful thoughts of the last visit. A beautiful journey through the mountains and sceneries all along the curved road with hair-pin bends here and there made the cold December afternoon colder. The pleasant journey itself removed her stress and came up with various ideas for handling possible conflicts with her friends during her stay at Mussoorie. By the time, she alighted from the Taxi and completed all formalities, her mother was waiting to hug her and take her in. Mothers always have that strange sense of locating their children whenever they are nearby without any sound or any other visual or audio indication.

She just threw herself on the bed visualizing the ten day winter break without any office pressure or deadline to worry her and it will be herself, her mother and her father and their beautiful and private world with their equally and beautiful city Mussoorie. Her father came into her room and hugged her with tears in his eyes although he should get used to seeing her once in a year since last three years ever since she has started working as an editorial assistant in a publishing house at New Delhi after completing her Masters in Journalism. But, parents are parents and no one can stop them from expressing their emotions in front of their children. Her mother collectively hugged both of them and this emotional family bonding of the three could have melted the hearts of the most stone-hearted person in the world. It was getting dark as winter evenings and in the hills get darker fast as compared to the plains. While she was preparing for her reading room after dinner, where she spends time always whether at work in Delhi or during vacation at Mussoorie, her mother asked her.” When are you going to catch up



with your friends?”. Without facing her, she said, “Are you talking about friends or a particular friend whom you want me to meet?”. Taken aback at this rare retort, her mother said, “Why are you sarcastic today?”. “I am not sarcastic,” she continued, “in fact, you are asking something for the first time as you never ask such questions normally when I come on vacation”. She kissed her mother and after wishing her good night, her mother left the room and she closed the room from inside. Tired, she just tried to sleep without even checking her social media account, as was the normal practice. Within minutes she was fast asleep and the night moved into a dream. In the dream, she was with Ruskin during her last visit, as both were walking in one of the evenings, in the serene setting of Mussoorie, the previous winters. Everything was fine until the point when he proposed to marry her just casually and she was taken aback because of that. She just refused the proposal politely and thereafter both of them walked back to their houses which were nearby, silenced in their own worlds for their obvious reasons. Luckily it was the last day of the last visit. Only when she was to depart to New Delhi via Dehradun, she told her mother about it. Instead of supporting her, her mother casually said, “What is wrong in that?. After all, he is your childhood friend”. Priti was taken completely by surprise. She said while sitting in the taxi, “So you are also involved in this planned exercise”. “Anyway, I will not fight at this time, her mother said,” but you will understand all these aspects when you become a mother. Good

bye and have a nice journey.” She waved her hands as the taxi started and moved towards the



Dehradun Railway station to catch Shatabdi to New Delhi in time.

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The dream ended there. After fidgeting in the bed for some time, she finally went to sleep hoping that the new harassment of marriage would not hang on her in the morning for her stay this time. It was the same beautiful first morning of vacation, cool, dry and pleasant which was a marked contrast from the Delhi mornings which were always mechanized in the direction of completing ‘n’ number of morning activities of any working bachelor before starting in one of the chartered buses towards work. It was leisurely getting up, giving a hug to both the parents, getting ready after morning chores, feeling fresh at the breakfast table. It proceeded well and just when she was enjoying crisp paranthas prepared by her mother along with traditional

home made pickle, it happened. While my father was engrossed in the morning paper and trying to frame his opinions on national and international matters, my mother said.” Did you get time to think about Ruskin’s proposal ? “ She just nodded in negative and continued with her hot and delicious breakfast. Her mother expected some words but got only nod, which offended her somewhat although she controlled her feelings. She asked again,” When will you think about it?” Priti retorted.” Is it a time bound examination wherein I have to reply by a date or time? If he is in a hurry for my answer, let him take his own decision as I am not even interested in the proposal.” Saying this, she just got up and walked in the drawing room with the latest issue of India Today. She could hear her father saying to her mother,” Madhu, why are you pestering our child. Now a days, children are having their own thought processes and we at the best can advise them only when they ask for it, otherwise not. Cajoling them will backfire. You be careful in this sensitive matter.” Her mother just moved to the kitchen while the maid cleared the table. Everyone was engrossed in his or her work when her father came to the drawing room and asked.” Priti, what about a walk in the evening to the Lal Tibba?”. She replied,” Sure Dad. Are you moving somewhere now?” He replied.” Yes, I have joined an association of retired Government officers who pass some time sharing one another’s thoughts while they are free between breakfast and lunch and at the same time giving some free time to their wives, so that they also do not feel so called demotivating thoughts of their husband’s retirement.” Priti nodded for the evening walk and continued with her reading session on the sofa while her father moved out for his get-together. In the meanwhile, her mother again prodded her. “ There is a whole lot of time from now till evening and you can utilize it productively”. Priti took her cue and responded after putting down the magazine.” Mom, I am expected to be productive in office, which I am. At home, and on vacation, I am ready to do any household work and make both you and Dad relaxed, whenever you require me. Apart from that, I am relaxing after having

morning bath and breakfast. Do you require me in the kitchen for preparing lunch? I can help you out”. “No that is not required”, her mother replied, “ I will do everything in the kitchen.



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I mean you catching up with your friends while you are here as they must also be here”. Priti tried to control her anger and said,” I know Mom what you are indicating”. To this barb, her Mom said,” Let me know what I am indicating. I can talk straight to my daughter without using indications”. Equally furious, Priti also confronted her mother without taking her eyes away from India Today,” You want me to call Ruskin and plan for a date with him immediately so that my prospect of becoming his wife in future gets materialized”. Taken aback by this rare confrontation from her daughter, her mother said,” If I say yes , do you have any objection?” “Yes, I have strong objection”, Priti retorted,” and I need not explain everything to you. Out of respect and love for you which will always remain, I assure you that I will call him and meet him to sort it out but may be in a day or two, and certainly not today”. Her mother nodded in approval and moved over to the kitchen with a consolation that all is not lost. She has accepted the fact that children in their 20s are definitely different than when she was in her 20s and

nothing can be forced on the current generation. She decided that she would not ask anything to her daughter till the next day. Priti took a shower, changed and called James, ensuring that her conversation was inaudible to her mother. " You have come yesterday and you are calling me today. Why?" James retorted on phone. Priti felt like yelling back, but toned down her voice," Why should I call you immediately after landing at my house? You are not the most important person in my life. By the way, how is uncle and Aunty ? " " They are fine", James interjected," you will not come to meet them". Priti said," I will come soon and will let you know about it .How is your tutorial going on ? Did you not find any stunning young teacher to fall in love and settle down?" " Priti, I cannot focus on anyone other than you and I am telling you that no one appears any younger than you", James quipped. Priti replied." Are you flirting with me?" "If I say yes", James teased"than what will you say". Priti replied,"I will say that you carry on, I don't care". "I am fine with that approach, James said," as long as you are Ok with it. By the way, shall we go out today in the evening for a walk". Priti replied," Today evening ,I am going for the same with Dad, and that is committed. So ,sorry it cannot be with you". James said," OK, today with Uncle, than tomorrow with me. Will that be fine". Priti said," I do not plan vacations as I do everyday at work. So I can't say about tomorrow. I will let you know tomorrow morning". James



expressed his approval and the talk ended.

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[6.jpg&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.haaretz.com%2Fus-news%2F.premium-netflix-s-bonding-50-shades-of-cliche-1.7206391&tbnid=vOctyZrHPhIO-M&vet=10CEcQMyjrAWoXChMIsPjglft5wIVAAAAAB0AAAAEAM..i&docid=ukqOYq8GhCseBM&w=609&h=343&q=bonding%20images&ved=0CEcQMyjrAWoXChMIsPjglft5wIVAAAAAB0AAAAEAM](https://www.haaretz.com%2Fus-news%2F.premium-netflix-s-bonding-50-shades-of-cliche-1.7206391&tbnid=vOctyZrHPhIO-M&vet=10CEcQMyjrAWoXChMIsPjglft5wIVAAAAAB0AAAAEAM..i&docid=ukqOYq8GhCseBM&w=609&h=343&q=bonding%20images&ved=0CEcQMyjrAWoXChMIsPjglft5wIVAAAAAB0AAAAEAM) accessed on February 26, 2020

Priti decided that she will have a light but serious conversation with her father during the evening walk that day. As she was walking in a cold but pleasant evening with her father, she narrated the whole sequence of events to him, starting from Ruskin's proposal during her last visit till the happenings of the current visit. Without showing any sign of unnecessary worry, her father said," Priti, I have always maintained that working youngsters like you who are making efforts to establish themselves in their personal and professional life have to take their own decisions and elders like me can advise, if required, but should never force themselves on their children like you. Let me ask straight. Do you require any advice from me on any of these matters ? ". Priti replied," No" . Her father continued," Then it is OK. I will maintain the same cool throughout your stay as I always do and will also advise your mother to do the same." Priti smiled back and said," Thanks Dad". Her father nodded in approval and continued the walking. She felt very relieved on the second evening of her vacation and also realized that many times, fathers can be real friends as compared to mothers without expecting anything in return.

### Chapter 13. Refugee or immigrant is just a frame of mind

"I'm not a refugee. I am an immigrant." This curt statement from my colleague Ashvin on phone to someone, while working on his personal computer(PC) appeared piercing but it also carried a pain in Ashvin's voice. Although I heard it but I pretended ignorance and continued working on my office PC. However, I decided to actually find the difference between these two words. After a considerable part of the day's work was over, and some formalities remained, I just opened Google on the PC to find the difference between 'refugee' and 'immigrant'. As per Google, refugee means a person who has been forced to leave his/her country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. On the other hand, Google says that an immigrant is a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country. I was having some clarity in my mind and kept on thinking on the way back to my home from Connaught Place in New Delhi to Sector 21, Noida in my chartered bus.



Source: [refugeesmigrants.un.org](https://www.refugeesmigrants.un.org) accessed on 10 May 2020

The 60 minutes journey gave me time to understand Ashvin's logic and context in which he gave that big statement, "I'm not a refugee. I am an immigrant." Ashvin and myself are MBAs, in our mid 30s, single, and working for last 10 years in different organizations in the Corporate sector, and both of us joined the purchase team of this company around two years back. Both handle different set of suppliers for our company's procurement activities. Our work stations including PCs etc are adjacent to one another. Both of us are living in separate bachelors accommodations away from our families. I live in Noida and he lives in East Delhi. While working, we do get time to talk about our families, our joys and sorrows etc. Upon return from office that day, and after having freshened up at home, I had tea in my small accommodation, and then did some house work, before moving out for dinner at the hotel with which I have tied up on a monthly basis. After having dinner, it was a natural walk of half kilometer to my residence. On the way back my landlord wished me and I also reciprocated the same. My mind was only thinking in the direction of Ashvin's statement of the day. At my room, I slipped in my night suit, saw the news on my laptop via mobile hotspot wifi, had my regular hot milk glass and tried to sleep. As I was trying to sleep, I felt that Ashvin is neither a refugee nor an immigrant, just like me. We both have moved from Bihar to New Delhi for work and are trying to build our foundations in our jobs emotionally, financially, as well as practically. I decided to sleep and take this up with Ashvin the next day. Next day started as usual and as we were having some free time at work, I just asked him, "Ashvin, I felt puzzled by your statement on phone yesterday when you said to someone that you are not a refugee but an immigrant. I could hear that as you were loud enough for me to hear, although I should not have heard it. After that, both of us went ahead with our works. Moreover, you appeared puzzled also at the same time. Is anything troubling you? As bachelors and co-workers, we can share our anxieties and try to lessen them somewhat." Ashvin took a deep breath and said, "Mohit, it is very personal and I do not want

that you get troubled by it. After all, you must also be having some or other anxieties in your life.” “Its OK. I am opening up on that so that I can lessen my burden when I come across something like this.” I said. He laughed and said,” Actually, I was talking to my mother who called from Patna about a marriage proposal for me from a girl who also is a native of Bihar and working in Delhi itself like us..” I said, “Then why were you explaining the difference between a refugee and an immigrant and that too to your mother.” Ashvin said,” My mother was saying that the girl’s father was OK with everything except the fact that I am not having a house of my own in Delhi even after working for 10 years in this city.



Source: cbc.ca accessed on 10 may 2020

In a way, he thinks that 10 years is enough time for a bachelor to have his own house in Delhi.” I tried pacifying him from the angle of the girl’s parents who must be concerned for the future of their daughter and son-in-law from a long term perspective. Ashvin argued that being happy was more important whether one owns a house or lives in rented premises. He also said that in the current times of work pressures, even married couples spend only the night in their houses and bachelors like us spend even less than that. Along with these arguments, he recited a self-made Urdu poetry.” Woh aashiyana kis kaam kaa jo dharamshala ban kar rahe jaye( What is the

purpose of a house which continue to remain a motel)”. I praised him for his sense of poetry and requested him to think about a house seriously. I also tried to convince him that all the hassles which one undergoes to own a house will minimize all possible hassles in the future. Ashvin said.” I understand what you are saying. However, the girl’s father is interested in all these details before even thinking whether his daughter is keen on this or not. Moreover, he is pressurizing my mother for a commitment of owning a house in near future before proceeding on this marriage proposal. It is also worth mentioning that in the matrimonial advertisement given by him, this house ownership condition was not mentioned. “ I said,” You tell your mother that the house may come eventually as time passes by but it cannot be a condition for marriage. If the girl’s father is to continue insisting for the same, he is free to look for other proposals.” Ashvin replied,” Actually Mohit, yahaan gairon ko kya dosh dein jab apne hee doshi dikhtey hein( Mohit, how can I blame outsiders when our own people are faulty).” I said,” You mean to say that aunty is at fault more than the girl’s father,” Ashvin nodded in affirmation by saying that his mother is equally keen and literally putting the same pressure on him for buying a house. He also said that when he reminded his mother that she and his father were not having their own house when they married and there was no issue of it. His mother brushed aside this argument by saying that the times were different. Ashvin is fighting on two fronts and one is her own mother. On the one hand, the girl’s father was not dropping the proposal and on the other hand, he is putting pressure on him through his mother. I felt concerned with the dilemma of Ashvin but at the same time, I cannot blame the girl’s father entirely for it. Just like Ashvin, I also felt a poetry in my thought process,” Kisko dosh dein, samajh mein nahi aata, kabhi apna dost sahi lagta hay to kabhi who jo dost nahi hay( It is difficult who to blame for, sometime my friend appears right and sometimes the one who is not my friend)”. Just then, an Idea clicked in my mind and I decided to share it with Ashvin. I asked him,” Will it be OK if you talk to the girl

directly ? By the way, is she working ?". Ashvin said," Yes she is working and her office is in Nehru Place only. Moreover, as our parents are talking already, I did not consider it OK to talk to her directly. But now, as this is going to my nerves, I strongly feel that let there be a straight talk between the two of us. No wonder, the girl may not be having any pre-condition like this and it is only her father who is beating his own drum. " I also nodded in approval to his suggestion. After the routine office work, we left to board our respective chartered busses to our rented accommodations. I felt that today in the evening after having discussed with his mother the way out of the confusion, Ashvin will at least have some clarity. I looked forward to tomorrow's interaction with Ashvin.

As we entered the lift together for our office along with some other people.



Source: nadministerial.com accessed on 10 may 2020

I looked curiously towards Ashvin and he replied by nodding with a pinch of happiness. I looked the other way round and felt happy for him. I was excited that he has something positive to share with me. Without talking anything on the matter, we both just concentrated on our work for the day till the lunch time, and then while we were having lunch the information explosion took place. Ashvin said," Yesterday the girl called me up and said that we can meet coming

Saturday if it suits me and I ignore the pressure being put by her father about house ownership".

I said," What was your reply ?".Ashvin said," I told her, I also felt like that and it will be nice to talk as this issue is causing me lot of anxiety since days. To this, she said that she only came to know about it yesterday when her father talked on phone and she made it very clear to her father that no pressure whatsoever should be put on any side by any other side.



Source: nwaf.org accessed on 10 may 2020

If at all , there has to be any condition, it has to be of a decent job which both of us are having and that is very important for a respectable living in a Metro city like New Delhi. Moreover, we have seen one another's photos and we felt interested in taking it further. If all this OK with me, both of us can plan to meet coming Saturday which is 3 days from now. I told her I will plan it accordingly, and we can meet at a common place to discuss it further". I smiled as we were having lunch and told him that she took a bold initiative in clearing big pressure from his head and now it is up to him to have a frank discussion with her. I could see a feeling of relaxation on his face and he appeared more involved in his work that day. After going back to work post-lunch break, his involvement in work was more obvious as he has shared all this to me. While

we were about to leave after work, he asked me if I could accompany him to his place, have dinner with him, and thereafter I could go to my place in the night. I accepted the same, and called up my hotel for no dinner that evening. As we were commuting in his chartered bus that evening, he asked me, "Mohit, what could have happened between the father and daughter that changed the entire situation. I forgot to tell you one thing that my mother called me up late in the night and said not to worry about the house as communicated to her by the girl's father. In fact, he also told her philosophically that let the children meet and take their own decisions and they as elders just support them." I said, "Ashvin, this was unimaginable when our parents were of our age in 1980s but in 2020, it is very much possible. The girl must be having very professional relationship with her father and her mother must be having no say in it. On the other hand, in your case, your father rarely talks to you on this issue and your mother is involved in all the aspects. Whether our parents accept our decisions or not, they rarely confront us in the current times. 1980s and before were times of preserving and maintaining relationships at all costs and current times imply convenience, strategy, financial angles etc and we hear jargons like contract marriages, separation, divorce, live-in relationships, break-up, and patch-up etc as common parlance. Moreover, young boys and girls who are party to all this are very cool and are not at all worried. Jo rishtey janmon janmon key hotey they, who ab hafton, mahinon or varshon me khatm ho jatey hein (relationships which used to be for many births earlier are now a days over in weeks, months, and years). " Ashvin said. " Are you scaring me or are you comforting me?" I said, " I mean to say that you both should talk on your jobs, career expectations, and possibilities of life with an open and responsible mind instead of an empty mind." Both of us reached his one room attached apartment in Mayur Vihar Phase-III after leaving the bus and walking thereafter for 5 minutes. Ashvin has organized his room very well and it cannot be classified as a typically unorganized room of a single bachelor. His landlord

passed by and he introduced me to him. After exchanging pleasantries, we came inside and closed the room. After using the washroom, both of us sat on the mattress on the floor, which was there in the room other than a single bed, and a table chair besides a gas stove and other essential items in the corner for essential cookings. We had tea and then we relaxed for a while. After feeling fresh, at around 6 PM, Ashvin said, let us have a walk and talk for an hour. While walking, he said, " Mohit, it appears that the girl is dominating kind". I said, " Ashvin, I feel that she is not dominating, but concerned about the future in a very unpredictable world, to which all of us belong". He heaved a sigh of relief and said, " To what degree I should be honest in my face to face discussions with her?" "Complete honesty should be there in your talks," I said without waiting, " as she has defied her so called dominating father in matter which concerns her future as well as yours in case both of you marry." After having a decent walk in the gardens near his house, we came back and updated ourselves through our mobiles, checking out whatsapp and emails. Ashvin showed me the girl's whatsapp message which carried the address where she had suggested to meet and asked him if it was OK with him. I asked him to reply with acceptance or some other suggestion. He messaged that he had no problem with her suggestion and accordingly okayed the same to her. She promptly thanked Ashvin. He also smiled and felt relieved. I told him to discuss with his mother about all possibilities before meeting the girl, so that the meeting itself takes place in a very relaxed and responsible manner. After having dinner at a nearby hotel to which he has tied up just like me, he hugged me and thanked me for advising me regularly on a very crucial and tricky situation in his life. I expressed my pleasure to him and took his leave from the nearby bus stand towards my house. The 30 minute journey made me realize that one may not be having any property in his/her name but a genuine help to a fellow human being gives a lot of joy which is much more than any property in this material world. I prayed to God for all happiness for Ashvin.

## Chapter 14. Unexpected reunion

It was still dawn when I stepped out of the cab and walked towards the entry gate of the Delhi airport. The early morning February air was pleasantly cold.

I was travelling to Bengaluru to attend a college friend's wedding. It had been four years since we graduated from the same college. This wedding was also going to be a reunion of our batchmates. But what I didn't know was that the reunion would begin much ahead of time; right in the queue in front of the airline counter.

I was almost sure it was she. Same height! Same long hair! Same complexion! Curiosity had my eyes glued to her. And then about 60-odd seconds later, when she turned, she proved me right. My ex-girlfriend stood two places ahead of me in that queue. We had never met after the college farewell.

I was wondering what to do as like it or not, I have to be there on the same flight for next 2 hours till Bengaluru and another shocker was troubling me. It was the possibility of the two of us getting seats next to one another. All this was making me literally sweat in the perfectly air conditioned environs of the Delhi Airport. Moreover, all this has crept in my mind even though she was blissfully unaware that I was behind her in the same queue. As the formalities of boarding were over and all of us moved towards the waiting for the final security check and boarding, the two of us came face to face. I could see the sudden flash of surprise, a dash of disbelief, and a sense of curiosity, all rolled together making a strong presence on her face, and I could feel the same in me. But, within a second, she walked towards me and held out her hand with complete confidence. I had no option but to shake it with mine and bring a plastic smile on my face. She also did the same and was first to exclaim 'Great, what a pleasant surprise'. How do you do?'. I retorted immediately, 'I am fine, what about you? how is life?'. She replied as we were boarding the aircraft, 'Cool. By the way, you

are also going for Anuj's wedding?' I replied in affirmative without asking the same question as it would have been foolish. As we were walking in the queue, I felt that had we been simple batch mates of our MBA times, it would have been fine. But, we were a boy friend-girl friend pair of those days, which was making me uncomfortable. Moreover, if it was going to come out that she was also unmarried like me, the focus of the Bangalore visit for two days was certainly going to shift from the main purpose to a new purpose for at least we all batch mates who were expected to be present there. Another pointer in that direction was the fact that Anuj was marrying Shivani, also from our same batch. I was preparing to be a part of a typical Hindi film plot which got conceptualized by default and certainly was to be enacted at Bangalore. The moment we were near the aero bridge, she turned around and asked my seat number which I told. She immediately said that hers was far away, and she would make efforts of exchanging it. I had no option but surrender in the name of civility, decency and what not. We both entered the aircraft and went to our respective seats. However, she started negotiating with my co-passenger, a decent looking middle aged male, who was all alone. He readily agreed as he was to exchange an aisle seat with an aisle one. With myself in the middle one and she at the aisle, it was a setting which was to take us to Bangalore. Shweta helped my co-passenger in settling his luggage at his new place.



Source:<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.isobelewing.com%2Fblog%2F2019%2F9%2F28%2F2sdajvbwh79fil0jpkzyo3sx6y2axp&psig=AOvVaw367aI358UekAb63mfl9epZ&u>



st=1595157687402000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=2ahUKEwj8xujL19bqAhXxNLcAHf5MAcsQr4kDeGQIARBr accessed on 18 July 2020.

Eventually, with our luggage safely stashed above our heads, we sat next to one another. The taxiing was yet to start and safety instructions were given which no one cares to listen. She looked at me and said, "Am I forcing my self?". I turned around and said, "What made you ask like that?". She said, "All the excitement is oozing from my side and it appears that you are just not interested". I retorted with a controlled anger, "What do you want? Shall I start dancing. We were not in touch ever since 4 years after completing our MBA as both of us have been busy in establishing a sound career and I think there is nothing wrong in it. Just because we were in a good friendship during those days, you mean to say I should burst with delight. Am I ignoring you?". "Shirish, I am not saying that you are ignoring me", she said, "what I mean that the excitement which comes when two lost friends meet is not showing on your face. OK, sorry, if I hurt you. Relax. Just enjoy the journey and let us talk about coming together of Anuj and Shivani, a lovely couple. What do you say?". "Yes certainly", I added, "both of them were real friends during our MBA days, and their friendship is culminating in a life long relationship and I feel so happy for them". Shweta glaring asked, "Were we two also not a similar pair?". I almost got angry, but I did not say anything as the flight was just taking off the runway into the sky. She realized that I was not interested in answering the question as both of us kept looking outside the window at our beautiful National Capital New Delhi becoming smaller and smaller as our plane was rising higher with time. Eventually, we were surrounded by the clouds as the plane appeared stationed floating in air.



Source:[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmajor.fandom.com%2Fwiki%2FEp68%3A\\_Unexpected\\_Reunion&psig=AOvVaw367al358UekAb63mfl9epZ&ust=1595157687402000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CEYQr4kDahcKEwjo6urn19bqAhUAAAAAHQAAAAAQCC](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmajor.fandom.com%2Fwiki%2FEp68%3A_Unexpected_Reunion&psig=AOvVaw367al358UekAb63mfl9epZ&ust=1595157687402000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CEYQr4kDahcKEwjo6urn19bqAhUAAAAAHQAAAAAQCC) accessed on 18 July 2020

Opening our seat belts, we felt slightly relaxed and heaved a sigh of relief. I was impatient and asked her, "What made you ask this ridiculous question?". Without looking at me, she casually replied, "It is ridiculous or relevant depends on the way you look at it. For me it is not at all ridiculous". I turned my head around and said, "OK, I assume that it is not ridiculous. Even then, what is the point of discussing it now when we have been away from all that for almost 4 years". "Shirish, there is a point," she interjected, "if both of us are still unmarried then something of that beautiful past is still trying to become our present and future. By the way, I am yet to marry. Where are you on the marriage front?". Without looking at her, with a straight face I said, "I am also single." "Really", she almost interrupted, "waiting for me to propose you". I did not reply. In the meanwhile, the airhostess came with the pre-booked food packets. We both have pre-booked non-veg as our meal option. Looking at that again made her ask the next question." Shirish, you converted me to non-veg during our MBA days and now I prefer it on veg food any time. Thanks for introducing me to an alternate way of eating." I did not reply to this unnecessary compliment and started to eat while she also proceeded similarly. While we were eating, I said, "Shweta, I never converted you. It was just a suggestion to an alternate way of eating which I perceived good. You accepted it and adopted it. Do not say that I converted you as the word 'converted' is very harsh." "Oh dear, I am just passing a

comment to test your patience and I am finding that as our discussion is proceeding, I am enjoying and you are becoming defensive”, Shweta said with a mischievous glance at me. I replied with the coffee coming to an end,” Oh, so you mean to say that I should enjoy all this talk without taking anything seriously. By the way, your unmarried status revealed just now is also a joke to be ignored or that is real.” “It is real,” she exclaimed laughingly,” and I am very much single interested to mingle and that too with someone whom I know”. I said, “ You sure that you know me as in this dynamic world, things change very fast and were together 4 years back. I can tell you that I am not the same person who was your boyfriend.”



Source:<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.blogwithbenefits.com%2F2013%2F03%2Froshambo-love-story-free-people.html&psig=AOvVaw367al358UekAb63mfl9epZ&ust=1595157687402000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CIIBEK-JA2oXChMI6Orq59fW6gIVAAAAAB0AAAAAEak> accessed on 18 July 2020.

“ I am still open Shirish although if you are ready too to give it a try”, she said with some seriousness this time. I took a deep breath and replied,” OK, we have 45 minutes to land. Is it sufficient time for such a serious discussion or not”. Shweta almost interjected,” Why not and even if it does not end in that, we may continue in the cab as it will take another hour from Bangalore Airport to Electronics

City Phase-II.” I replied smilingly,” OK, let us start”. ‘Why did you not contact me even after knowing that I am in Delhi ? Don’t tell me that you did not have my number. Our Whatsapp group created in 2016 still exists and we all are members of the same”. Shweta literally interrogated me. I replied,” I felt that we all were starting in our new jobs and all will like to work without distraction so I decided not to communicate on an individual level although group talks were on”. “ Is it easy,” she said,” to cut off from someone suddenly for 4 long years after having good friendship for 2 continuous years?”. I replied,” I could do it, is itself surprising, but I am ready to take it further from here. What do you say?” Shweta replied.” But, do we know whether we have changed or we are the same as we were during our MBA days”. I interjected, “How should we go about it?”. “By re-starting our friendship and let it move on its own till we decide to settle down with one another permanently”, she said very fast. “ Not a bad idea”, I continued,” once we are back from Bangalore, we will plan it out”. She smiled and nodded in favor.



Source:<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tvguide.com%2Fnews%2Fapartment-23-dawsons-creek-reunion-1054972%2F&psig=AOvVaw367al358UekAb63mfl9epZ&ust=1595157687402000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CBQQR4kDahcKEwjo6urn19bqAhUAAAAAHQAAAAAQcw> accessed on 18 July 2020

As both were relaxing, announcements of Bangalore landing in a short were made and we started preparing for it. It really was proving to be a very different flight as it appeared to be bringing about an unplanned reunion for two almost lost friends.

#### About the Author



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Dr. Prateek Kanchan is Professor and Director, B.K.School of Professional and Management Studies, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad. His specialization areas include Integrated Marketing Communications, International Marketing, Marketing Management and Consumer Behavior. Dr. Prateek Kanchan has two years of industrial experience and twenty four years of experience in teaching at PG level. He has also presented Thirty One papers at national and international conferences, many of them held at various institutes like IIM-Kolkata, Kozhikode and Indore, to name a few. He also has to his credit **an** edited book on 'In-Film Advertising-Brand Positioning Strategy' and **three** reference books titled as 'Contemporary Marketing Promotions', 'Dynamics of 21st Century Marketing Communications', and 'Writings on Marketing: Research Journey of an academician from 2002 to 2015'.

He has to his credit thirty three articles and papers published in various souvenirs, journals, newspapers and newsletters. Under his guidance, 9 Ph.Ds have been awarded and 8 scholars are pursuing Ph.D. He has taken a number of sessions as Key Note speaker, invited speaker and session chair at various academic conferences and seminars nationally and internationally, besides being external examiner to many Ph.D Theses outside Gujarat University. He is always there to motivate teachers and students in higher management education.

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