

THE WHITE BEARDED MAN

AND OTHER

SHORT STORIES

BY: K. SARAVANAPPERUMAL



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Man and other
Short stories

By
K. Saravanapperumal

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This book *The White Bearded Man* and other Short stories is
written K. Saravanapperumal

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

K. Saravanapperumal is an avid reader and writer who loves reading and writing and his other interests include research, history, cricket and psychoanalysis. His favourite authors are Charles Dickens, R.L.Stevenson, Jules Verne and the Tamil writer Kalki Krishnamurthy. Swami Vivekananda, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and the famous broadcasting journalist Edward Murrow are his role models in life. He was born in Singapore and now resides in Madurai, India with his parents.

He had completed his undergraduate degree in Communicative English, Political Science and Economics(CPE) from St.Joseph's College, now St.Joseph's University, Bangalore and a postgraduate degree in Media and Communication Studies with a specialization in Multimedia Journalism from Christ(Deemed to be) University, Bangalore. He is aspiring to pursue and complete a doctoral degree in Journalism and also become a journalist or academic working in the field of journalism research.

Dedicated to
To my parents, teachers and friends...

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Preface

“A dream is not that which you see while sleeping,
It is something that does not let you sleep.”

-Dr APJ Abdul Kalam (1931-2015)
Former President of India

It is always my dream to become a writer and to write and publish books and the writing and the publication of this book is certainly a great and significant step in this direction. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Monomousumi for providing me the opportunity to publish this book. I always loved to read stories and novels since my childhood. This has also led to the nurturing of the desire within me to write and publish stories and join in the big league with famous writers such as Charles Dickens, JK Rowling and Sidney Sheldon.

Interestingly I remember writing my first short story which was a fantasy based short story when I was about 9 or 10 years old and showing it to our family doctor when I went to visit him with my mother and father. From then on, I started writing short stories whenever the idea for a short story clicked and I began to write them down and also show them to my parents, teachers and friends. Then I listened to their feedback and comments about my stories in order to improve them. I have written short stories from a variety of genres such as crime and fantasy and my mother and father have always been very supportive of me writing short stories and always encouraged me to write creative and amazing short stories. I also would like to thank them a lot for being a constant

source of support and encouragement for me during my short stories writing endeavour.

Actually, the seed for writing this book, which is collection of short stories written by me was sown two years ago when I had finished my undergraduate degree and was on a vacation. It was then an idea struck me that why shouldn't I look up and read some famous short stories written in English, observe how they are written and structured. Then I could also write short stories based on the knowledge gathered from reading them. Another reason for embarking on this new venture during that time was that there was a flurry of ideas for short stories coming to me. Thus, I decided to utilize this opportunity and write down as many short stories as I could. As I read some of the famous short stories and marvelled at them, I gathered more knowledge about the genre of short stories and also learnt how to write short stories. It was a great learning process for me as I learnt the basics of writing short stories.

Most of the short stories in this book such as *The Secret*, *Genie in the Lamp*, *Rising from the Ashes* and *Danger* are what I had written during this time period and I had also rewritten and fine-tuned them in order to make them better during the process of editing this book. While some of the other stories such as the *White-Bearded Man*, *Alternative* and *Connections* are interesting short stories which I have written and posted it in my blog and thus I have decided to include them in this book also. While another short story, *A strange and interesting journey* was a short story which I had written and submitted for a creative writing competition organized by an association in my university while I was pursuing my postgraduate degree. Interestingly, I had not planned to publish these short stories which I had written down two years ago as a book, but when I received an opportunity to write and publish a book, I eventually decided to write and publish a collection of short stories including those which I have written earlier after much thought and deliberation, as writing short stories was what I was very comfortable with.

The sources of inspiration for my short stories are the twists and turns that we experience in our daily lives and some interesting and

peculiar incidents and events which I have seen and heard. The basic premise of the story *The White Bearded Man* was inspired from the classic poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* which was written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge while the short story *Alternative* was inspired from the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles and its film adaptation. My short stories are from various genres such as satire, science fiction and drama.

I had also created fictional countries such as Cook City and Animal Land, the latter being a country in which anthropomorphic animals and humans reside together as I thought that these fictional countries could be perfect locations for my short stories to take place and to convey the essence of them. My decision of creating the fictional country Animal Land was inspired by the famous classic novel *Animal Farm* by the famous writer George Orwell. In addition to this, I was also inspired by the short stories written by the famous American short story writer O. Henry. I hope that you all would enjoy reading my short stories.

K. Saravanapperumal

Unless otherwise indicated, all the names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents in this book are either the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

The white bearded man

Wow! First-class! This article is brilliant! Fantastic!” said Mr. Chandrakanth, holding up a page of the newspaper, in which a large photo of the revenue minister and some high-ranking IPS officials, red-faced as they had been caught red-handed for their role in the fake-encounter case. With a broad grin on his face and by adjusting his spectacles, he just scanned the whole article from top to bottom and was very proud of Mukesh, who had gone undercover and written this article.

He patted Mukesh and praised him, “Well-done! Mukesh! Amazing job! This is the way to go forward!”. Mukesh was in sky high and his excitement knew no bounds, that he didn’t know how to express it and simply stood there, smiling. He felt a huge sense of satisfaction and relief that the amount of hard-work that he had put in for writing this article, by even risking his life and working as a servant in the Minister’s house had simply paid off. And on top of this, his article was going to be published in the front page of the newspaper tomorrow.

After the meeting with Mr.Chandrakanth was over, Mukesh thanked him and left from his room. He resumed his work in the office and left for home in the evening. As he was leaving from his office and walking towards a nearby park, he was suddenly drawn by a hand into the bushes. Mukesh was startled and didn’t know where he was, until the hand let go of him and he found himself in front of a tree. He was wondering who had dragged him inside these bushes when he felt a hand on his shoulder and he turned around. He was shocked when he saw an old man with a big, fluffy and white beard and a face with a pimple and wrinkles.

However, Mukesh felt that his glittering black eyes had a charm that attracted him to this man.

When Mukesh was about to open his mouth and ask who was he, the man closed his mouth and said, “Hey! Listen ,” he spoke in a low voice, “I have been following you for some time now !” he revealed to a surprised Mukesh. He didn’t even have the slightest knowledge that this man was following him, all this time! Then, he added with a smile and a glitter in his eyes, as he stared at him, ” Shall I tell a story for you! It is a very interesting story and it will be great scoop for you !”. Mukesh too became interested in what he was saying and decided to listen to what he would be telling. He felt that the glittery eyes of the man attracted him and he couldn’t even open his mouth to say “yes.” He just nodded his head and they both underneath the tree and the old man begun to tell his story.

Before the old man begun to tell his story, he told Mukesh, “Please take your phone and record whatever I am telling. It will be of great use to you!” Mukesh was very surprised and when he asked the man why was he asking him to record this story, he simply replied that he would answer all his questions after when he had finished telling his story and urged him to simply record what he was saying. The man began telling his story while Mukesh began recording and was simply staring at his eyes...

“The protagonist of this story is Muthusamy, who was born in a village in the Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu, in 1938. His father, Rangaswamy had migrated to Malaysia during his adulthood and had worked there for some time, as an accountant. He had returned back to India, with the money that he had earned there and settled in his native village, brought some land and started farming. Muthuswamy was the eldest son of Rangaswamy and his wife, Gandhimathi. When Muthu (Muthuswamy) was 10 years old, his father passed away, due to a heart illness. “. Mukesh felt very sad that such a tragedy had struck Muthuswamy at his young age. Then, however, he had a strange feeling that he had heard of the town, Tirunveli somewhere recently.

The man with the white beard, paused and stared at Mukesh with a sad look. He then continued with his story,” When Muthuswamy’s father passed away, the whole family was devastated and full of grief. They didn’t know what to do. However, Muthu became determined and saw the enormous potential of their land which they were cultivating and knew that if they cultivated their land successfully, they could lead a comfortable and successful life. He told his mother and slowly they started working on their land. With hard work and determination, they started to buy a tractor and also started getting big harvests from their field. They also managed to run their family with their income from their land and they were happy for a while. However, the worst was still yet to come...,” Oh! My God! Why didn’t their worries end?” as Mukesh suddenly interrupted him and asked. The man, now gave him a smirk and resumed his story.

“After 5 years after his father’s death, due to the lack of rain, their crops failed and they incurred huge losses on their land. They had to borrow money to manage their family and they borrowed money from Manickam, the wealthy landlord of their village. Muthu and his mother began doing some extra jobs to earn money to repay Manickam. Muthu was very interested in studies and he started to study under the moonlight in the night, while he was working in the day. He had dreamt of studying very well and becoming a collector. However, fate had something else in store for him...” “Oh no! What happened to him?” asked Mukesh with concern.

The man flashed a smile and continued, “Unfortunately, after one year after they had borrowed money from Manickam, when he suddenly turned up one day with some men and demanded that they leave their house and lands and hand over them to him. When they protested, he showed the documents that Muthu’s mother had signed when she had borrowed money from him. He read out that she had promised to hand over her house and lands, if they failed to repay him within one year.

Dressed in a white shirt , yellow bordered dhoti with a gold ring, he flashed a sly smile and threw Muthu and his family out of their house. Muthu too was thrown out by Manickam and he fell in the

sand, with Manickam smiling at him arrogantly. He came closer to him and sneered, “Hey young chap! What can you do to me? ” I am the landlord of this village and am a very rich man. You don’t have money or status and without that, you are a helpless man! You can’t even stand up against me!”. Muthu never forgot the humiliation that he and his family was subjected to, by Manickam. When his family was leaving with tears, he turned back and stared at Manickam, with red eyes that were full of vengeance and anger...” Mukesh was feeling very sad when he heard of the sufferings of Muthu’s family and was particularly very angry with Manickam. “How much had they suffered! It’s all because of that landlord!” he said, grinding his teeth.

The man just stared at him with that silvery glow in his eyes and flashed a magical smile at him. Mukesh was wondering why was he always smiling at him while telling his story. He went on, “Muthu never forgot that incident and it left a deep scar in his heart. He and his family had to go and stay in a hut. That night, he came and stood in front of his father’s photo , which had been placed in his new house. He started speaking to the picture, “Dad! You passed away peacefully, leaving us all behind in agony! See how much we are suffering! It’s all because of that rich and arrogant Manickam! He took advantage of the fact that Amma was uneducated and cheated us and threw out of our house! He also took away the land that you had brought with your hard earned money, that you had earned by going to Malaysia!”. He then took a vow, with anger and fury gleaming in his eyes, “Dad! He behaved like that because he was rich! He said that we didn’t have education and wealth and can’t stand up against him, didn’t he? I will work very hard and become very rich and earn a lot of power and influence! I will take my revenge against Manickam and make him repent! This is my vow!” he thundered.” Mukesh was feeling very sad for Muthu, as the old man was telling the story...

” After that incident, Muthu’s mother wanted to leave the village and go somewhere else. However, Muthu was adamant and reminded her of the humiliation that they had suffered. He insisted that they should stay in this village and lead a happy and successful

life, that too in front of Manickam. His mother also agreed and started a small shop, cooking and selling food as per Muthu's advice. Muthu also began to do small jobs to earn money to support his family, while also helping his mother in the shop. Slowly their business grew and it became famous...," the old man suddenly paused and asked Mukesh, "Mukesh! What do you think might have happened next?" Mukesh, who was very engrossed into the story, felt that he had been woken up from a deep sleep.

"Hah! He and his mother must have worked very hard and their business must have developed and they might have started a chain of restaurants. Muthu must have become a millionaire and went and stood in front of Manickam," he replied. Hearing his answer, the old man again smiled and said, "Hmm! Interesting! You will see what happened next..." "Aiyah! He is smiling yet again. I don't know what twist has he in store for me in the story next," sulked Mukesh as the man continued...

"While he continued to work and earn money for his family, Muthu also on one hand, become very worried that his future might be confined to him, taking care of his family and sacrificing his life for him. So, he wondered what might happen to his life and so..." he paused while Mukesh was staring at him, and then he continued, "So, he slowly started to brainwash his second elder brother Sakthivel, into taking over the mantle of taking care and managing the family from him. He used to tell him stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata and brought him books, about family, love and affection. He also empathized to him repeatedly about the greatness of running their own business and so, in due course of time, Sakthivel was ready to take over the responsibility of running the family," the man was telling the story with a smile on his face, while Mukesh was very surprised as he could not believe that Muthu had changed so much that he had brainwashed his own younger brother.

"Meanwhile Muthu also continued to get books and study in the night, while he was working in the day, for his education. He had a great wish to study and acquire more knowledge. He read Gandhi, Nehru and Karl Marx and also loved the novels of Alexander

Dumas and HG Wells at the public library in the nearby city whenever he had time . Meanwhile, he got to know that the landlord Manickam had a daughter called as Kasturi. So, slowly he started going to her school and becoming friends with her. Then, as time passed by, they became close friends and this resulted into love...,” “My Goodness! What a cunning and shrewd person he was?”, said Mukesh as he abruptly interrupted the man , who was telling the story. The old man just flashed his routine magical smile along with that silvery glow in his eyes and continued the story...

” As years passed by and when Kasturi returned from Trichy after finishing her college education, Muthu met her and told her that they should tell her father about their love. When Kasturi hesitated and wondered how her father might react to their love as Muthu’s family as they were poor, Muthu said that they should get married and stand in front of their father. Then he would have no other choice, but as to accept them. Kasturi hesitated a bit, eventually agreed because of her love for Muthu. So, they married secretly and came back to their village. Both Manickam and Muthu’s family were shocked and Manickam shouted at them very badly when they came to their house . He also refused to allow them inside, but within a few days he calmed down, changed his mind, and allowed them inside their home.” Mukesh could not believe all this and he was so surprised, that he just was staring at the old man with his mouth wide open as he was listening to this story.

“Muthu gradually begun to be on good terms with his father-in-law and he also started a rubber factory in Tirunveli , with some money from his father-in-law and gradually expanded it . It became successful and Muthu became rich, within a few years. Seeing his success in business, his confidence in Muthu grew and he soon bequeathed all his wealth to him. Muthu too was waiting for this opportunity for so long and he chased his in-laws out of the house. Kasturi protested, but he did not listen to her. When Manickam and his wife had stepped out of their house, with their belongings, Muthu called out, “Hello! Mr. Manickam! One minute!” and he came out, dressed in a white shirt, yellow-bordered dhoti and wearing a ring.

Manickam was stunned. “Son-in-law! are you calling me by my name? I am like your father! I was the one who gave you money to start your business and I treated you like your son. How you could do this to me?”, he asked sadly. However, Muthu gave an evil smile and begun laughing loudly. He retorted sarcastically, “My dear father-in-law! Feeling very hurt and humiliated because I deceived you and chased you out?”, then his tone changed and his eyes became red. “Then think about how this man, Tirunveli Ramaswamy Muthusamy, alias T.R.Muthuswamy, son of Gandhimathi Ammal must have felt ,30 years ago when you deceived us, grabbed our land and house and chased us out! It was on that day, I made up my mind and I took an oath; I will become very rich and will take my revenge against you! Now my revenge is done! Go Mr. Manickam! Get out!” he smirked and left. Manickam then remembered what he had done back then and he was stunned, ” Mukesh also was stunned as he was listening to the man but something had hit upon him. He seemed to have heard of the name T.R. Muthuswamy somewhere but he could not remember where he had heard it. He tried hard to remember but he could not remember it.

The man went on with his story, ” After his in-laws had left their house, Muthu and Kasturi had a huge argument. Kasturi questioned him loving her and asked him whether he married her to get all the wealth from her father and chase him out of the house. She accused him of cheating her and called him a liar. Muthu became angry and he slapped her. He replied that although his intention behind loving and marrying her was to avenge her father, he still loved her sincerely and took good care of her. He asked her if she can deny that. Then Kasturi became silent and she couldn't reply.

“After some years, Muthu saw that the agricultural products could be a huge market and he could tap into this market by exporting and importing them, he and his family soon moved to Coimbatore where Muthu wanted to start an imports and exports business. He soon brought some land and wanted to build a large office and a

procurement centre when the agricultural products could be stored before they could be exported. However, Mr. Sathyamurthy, the government officer who came to survey his land and verify his plans, expressed some reservations about the plan to Muthu, about the plan and refused to it. When he left, Muthu cunningly began to hatch a scheme to coerce Sathyamurthy into approving his plan.

“He invited Sathyamurthy to his home for dinner and then secretly mixed some alcohol into what he was drinking. He then filmed the ruckus which Sathyamurthy had made after being drunk and then showed it to him the next day. Sathyamurthy was furious and he grabbed his shirt and demanded him not to show the video to anyone. Muthu just smiled and he took off Sathyamurthy’s hands off him. He just told him if he agrees to his two conditions; he should marry his younger sister and he should approve his business plan, then this video will not be shown to anyone else. Being cornered, Sathyamurthy had no choice but to agree to his conditions. He approved his business plan and Muthu started his imports and exports company,” Bharatpush Imports &Exports” ...”. “Eh! Sir!” Mukesh abruptly cut him and said, ” I ...I have definitely have heard of this company! It is such a big and famous company! I also know its founder! It’s there in my mouth, but it’s not coming!” He started becoming tensed and started fidgeting.

The man simply held his hands and calmed him down. “It’s ok my boy! Cool down! Cool down!” he told him. He continued,” Muthu’s imports and exports business became very successful and he soon became a millionaire soon. Now, besides his imports and exports business in Coimbatore, he now wanted to start a business in Chennai and establish himself there as well. He also changed his name and went to Chennai.

“He wanted to start a commercial bank in Chennai and he started to look for a place, which was situated in the centre of the city, which was suitable for his business. He then finally selected Ganesh Stores, in T.Nagar and came there...,” he had stopped there and his tone had changed and the glow in his eyes had disappeared. “Ganesh Stores was very big and it was very famous and successful. It was run by two brothers; Mahalingam and

Kasilingam. They had named it after their father. This man came there and negotiated with Mahalingam and Kasilingam... He offered them a lot of money if they sold their property to him... They refused and sent him off... So, that man in anger...”, the man’s voice begun to break down and he was about to cry. His eyes became red but still, he controlled his tears. Mukesh wanted to console him but the man simply waved his hand and indicated that it was okay.

Mukesh also wondered why was this person getting so emotional suddenly and whether did he have a connection with Ganesh Stores. The man continued,” So, he sent rowdies to abduct Mahalingam’s wife and young daughter and he used them to threaten Mahalingam and Kasilingam. Eventually they also had to give in as they were worried about their family and so they signed the documents, thereby selling their property to him. However, Muthu, that cunning and sly demon! He had deceived them and his men killed Mahalingam’s wife and daughter brutally! With an evil smile on his face, Muthu killed Mahalingam with a gun...” He could not control his feelings now and tears begun to flow down from his eyes. Mukesh placed his hands on his shoulders and was about to console him, but the man wiped off his tears and continued with the story.

“Seeing his brother and his family killed in front of him, Kasilingam became furious and he rushed towards Muthu, thrashing all the rowdies. He also beat up Muthu badly and kicked him. When he was about to give him another thrashing, one of Muthu’s henchmen hit him behind, on his head and he fell down unconscious. Feeling humiliated by Kasilingam as he had assaulted him, Muthu wanted to keep him alive and torture him throughout his life. So, after Kasilingam had recovered, he arranged for him to be imprisoned in a small house in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which had no facilities and he was kept in darkness. Meanwhile, that wretched guy, T.R. CHAKRAVARTHY started his bank, “Progress of India Bank” in 1988 and as years passed by, he also grew in wealth, influence and power. He eventually became of

India's richest men," the man's voice was now marked with anger and vengeance.

Mukesh could not get over his shock. He could not believe that one of India's leading industrialists, T.R. Chakravarthy, alias Muthuswamy was such a criminal and a ruthless person! He had made so many people's lives miserable, in order for him to become wealthy. As he was thinking about this, another thing had also hit him and he asked the man. "Sir, are you...". Before he could finish his question, the old man nodded his head and said, "Yes, My boy! I am Kasilingam, one of the owners of Ganesh Stores and whose family was killed by Chakravarthy 30 years ago. After that, I was imprisoned for 30 years till recently in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, till I found a way and escaped from there, by boat. I came to Chennai." Mukesh was stunned! He could not believe that this man was held in captivity for so many years.

"I came to Chennai and I did a haircut and made myself neater. The main thing I came here, is for REVENGE! The desire to take revenge has been burning deep inside me for the past 30 years and I wanted to show the world his true colours and send him to jail. That is why I had spent the two years in Chennai and the other towns, meeting people and gathering evidence about him," he finished and he also handed over to Mukesh, files containing documents and pen drives consisting of evidence against Chakravarthy. He continued, "My boy! I had observed you working undercover in the fake encounter case and so I enquired more about you and found out. I also read some of your previous articles and they convinced me that you are the man for me to tell my story." He then held Mukesh's hands and stared at him closely and asked, "I have spent most of my life in darkness and torture. Now I have told you, my story. Will you bring light into my life, again?". Mukesh too made up his mind and stared back at Kasilingam; having made his decision.

“Oh my God! My life is gone! What is the use of having thousands of crores worth wealth? Nothing came to my rescue! My honour, prestige, power and influence are all gone! How will anyone respect me now? I deserve this! I deserve all this and much more for all what I have done! My Goodness!” cried Chakravarthy as he was banging his head behind the bar in the Central Jail. He was sentenced to double life imprisonment for all his crimes, after the report by Mukesh about his life and how he had become wealthy, had been published in the newspapers and everyone had come to know about it. One of the school kids who had come to the jail for a school excursion saw Chakravarthy, banging his head in the bar.

Connections

We often don't understand what is happening in our life and we often blame ourselves if anything unexpected and bad happens in our lives. However, interestingly life is a connection of events. Whatever happens in life happen for a purpose and all these are interconnected. We can never predict what happens in life.

It was the winter season in Bengaluru. Mist would be covering up the sky and even the water which was coming out of the basin was so cold. On an usual winter morning, at 6.30 am, Muthu got up and bathed . He also wore his school sports uniform and got ready. At 7, the morning news was happening in Polimer TV and Muthu, being an avid reader of news, was listening to every news item intently while eating his breakfast. So, he was getting very late and didn't even wear his socks. His mother got very angry and shouted at him, "Muthu! Why are you wasting time so much? I am not dropping you to school if you miss the bus! Change the channel!" A frightened Muthu, did so and wore his socks and he rushed down the stairs, as the time was 7.35am . His bus would be come at 7.40am sharp.

It was 7.45am. Krish was rumbling around in his bed, feeling lazy to get up even though he couldn't sleep any longer. At 7.50am, " Krish! Get up! How long would you sleep? You would be late to school! Sitting up late at night and watching movies and not getting up now! Oh god! "His mother started shouting at him. " Ok! Ok! Mom! " grumbledKrish as he got up and again buried himself in his pillow.

"Hey Krish! Wake up! It is going to be late! " His mom again shouted in a loud and booming voice." " Arrgh! Fine! " sulked Krish sluggishly as he moved slowly from his bed to the bathroom like a robot. "My school bus comes at 8.30 and my mother is not letting me sleep in a hot morning in Chennai! "He grumbled. Then he bathed and got ready for school. Then Krish, a cute, energetic

boy with dark eyes and perfectly silky hair, sat in his sofa to relax. He picked up his bag and left when his bus arrived at his house.

"Aiyaah! Give my spectacles back, Krish! Please, dude, I can't run!," shrieked Gopal, a short and a bespectacled guy, as Krish had suddenly snatched his spectacles while he was sitting in his table and reading a book in their 9th standard classroom. Krish, being his usual self, did not listen to him and started running across the class, between the tables. Gopal huffed and puffed, struggling to catch him. When he had finally caught him, however, the spectacles had changed hands, as Krish had thrown it to his friend Mahesh. The chase had started all over again.

It was an usual and scorching day at Kavithalaya Public School. Their classroom was a yellow, large and wide classroom with benches arranged in straight and neat columns. Their chemistry teacher, Veena Maam was absent and all the students were very happy and were having fun. The tall and muscular Stephen was next in line. Stephen was a very angry boy and thus was one of Krish's favourite targets. Krish instantly raced to the end of the class and jumped up high. He banged Stephen nicely on his head and "Arrgh! Who did that?," shouted him and "Hey! Macho! I did it and catch me if you can!" replied Krish and he fled from that place in a jiffy. This time, the chase was even as Stephen too ran very fast. Krish ran like lightning without looking back, as he didn't want to be caught by Stephen. Then, suddenly when he looked front, he was to collide with a person.

And when he looked up, he saw a huge, tall and intimidating figure with a big face, a short moustache in a formal shirt and pant. Krish flashed a meek smile and stood aside as he had realised that his strict history teacher, Vardharajan Sir had come. His teacher was angry and was staring at him with a grim expression in his face. Krish quietly went back to his seat and stood up with the class to wish him and sat down. Still, Vardharajan Sir's glare didn't evade him. That day in class, Sir was taking a class on how the colonialism in India had its effects on its environment. He was talking about the tribal communities and the jhum cultivation.

Krish was not that much interested in history. He was sulking and made a frowning expression with his hand in his face, while staring at the teacher and his book, simultaneously . " He is telling the same thing again and again, forest and communities and stuff... Boring!" . After the class, the bell rang and Krish and his friends ran to the library in the 5th floor as they had the library period now. In the library, they all greeted the librarian and ran. Krish picked a magazine and sat in the large and cosy seats to actually talk with his friends! Krish loved the library periods as it provided me an ideal time for him to chit-chat with his friends under the pretext of reading a book! While he was talking with his friends, he was surprised to his friend Aishwarya reading a book which had a red cover and a picture of a young girl smiling at the back.

"Hi Aishu! What book are you reading?" He asked her. Aishwarya, a fair, calm girl with long hair and blue eyes, "Oh! I am reading the Diary of Anne Frank!It's really a very good book! " "Really?' he asked and "Yes! She says about her experiences during the Second World War and her views on films and politics. But you don't read books, don't you?" she teased, with a naughty smile . "who said so? I mean..., if the book is interesting, then I will surely read it!" he countered, with a stern stare in his face, at her. "Then here, read it and give it back to me after you have finished reading it," she said smilingly, placing the book in his hands. "Um! Ok! " He said, looking at the book .That night , at home, when he started reading the book while lying in his bed, he found that the book was very interesting and he was soon completely engrossed in reading it. He soon finished reading the book in 9 days and gave it back to her. "Reading books actually is fun and so from on, I have a new hobby, reading books," he said, making up his mind.

It was a big and huge football field and on the opposite side, an equally large basketball court with two towering red and blue basketball nets. On the left, there was the sprawling office of the Bangalore National School.

Muthu' friends were busily running around in the field and having a gala time as this was their PT class. Most of the boys and girls were engrossed,kicking and passing around the football , while a few

boys were playing cricket in the small nets besides the football field.

Muthu was just sitting in the bench and watched his friends play. He was staring at them intently and thinking about how he couldn't play with them as he was a bit unwell. After sometime, Somu came to Muthu and said, "Come Muthu! Let's play cricket!". Muthu didn't even know how to play cricket. Although he refused, the fat and chubby Somu, forced him to play and took him to the nets. His classmate, Mayank bowled and Muthu couldn't hit the ball.

Immediately, Manas, who was standing behind Mayank, shouted at Muthu, " Hey Muthu! See and hit man!" Muthu immediately became furious. A skinny and short boy was shouting at him, as if he was a great batsman! Being a tall, lanky, bespectacled lad, Muthu gnashed his teeth and murmured, " I will hit him in his face with this bat!". Muthu took a vow that he would observe the next ball and hit it properly. Next Somu bowled and this time, Muthu hit it hard and high. The ball went outside the nets. Immediately, Muthu's PT sir, Shiva sir clapped and appreciated him, saying that the shot was good and he could become a good player .

That made Muthu to think over deeply. He had not played any sport actively, but Shiva sir's comment made him to think and he decided to take up cricket . From that day onwards, he practiced regularly at home by watching videos of Virat Kohli and Chris Gayle batting. He also learnt a lot about cricket. He also practiced with Shiva sir whenever he was free and perfected cricket shots such as the sweep and the square cut. Shiva sir was also the coach of the school cricket team. Months passed by and Muthu impressed everyone with his timing and big hitting abilities. However, he could not play for his school team. But he was kept in the team as a reserve batsman.

It was another morning. Muthu had gotten off his bus and had just stepped into the school, when Somu came shouting, towards him. " Hey Muthu! Come fast! We need your help! Please!" Muthu was clueless and stood rooted to the ground in shock, when his coach told him that he was going to play in a tournament, because of an

injury to a player. Muthu was clueless and kept staring blankly at him. He had not practiced much batting during the training sessions and so he tried to explain it to Shiva Sir. But Shiva sir remained firm and persuaded him to play. In the end, he was in the bus with his cricket team, clad in his cricket attire to play in a school level cricket tournament.

The tournament was in the Twenty 20 format. It was their third league match and their opponent team, DPS East piled up a massive 180 for 3. In reply, their team was in a dire position as they were 100 for 4, until Muthu came in. He was still very nervous. He saw the crowd and told to himself, " It is no use being nervous. Be cool and play."

Then he started to play with his friend Manas. They both complemented each other very well and Muthu scored 45 off 34 balls. There was loud cheers and celebration from his teammates when Muthu had hit the last ball for a six and sealed the win. They came and hugged him. Muthu could not believe his eyes and he felt like a hero. He had turned out at the last moment and played well! That knock earned him a permanent slot in his school cricket team.

High-rise buildings, clean and well-laid roads, state of the art infrastructure and a variety of cuisines of different races and green trees-That was Singapore for Krish. For him, an exhausting and huge task was over; he had written his 10th std board exams and passed in flying colours. His parents had to decide whether to continue in his current school or switch to another school. Krish liked the school in which he was studying very much and preferred to study in it. But now this was a great moment in his life: the fact that he did not have to touch his books or get up early and go to school made him very happy. Moreover, he was overjoyed when his parents told him that they would be going to Singapore for the vacations. Now, here he was, enjoying in Singapore!

At last, the year was over. Finishing assignments, scoring very well in the school exams and studying day and night for the board exams... Muthu was not able to be calm and lead a free life, when he was preparing for his Board examinations. At last, it was over

and he had done very well. he had got an 8.2 CGPA in his exams. Although he felt that he could have done better in Mathematics. But brushing that aside, he was enjoying a well-deserved break in Singapore. He savoured his traditional Tamil foods such as hot and steamed idlis and long and roast dosas in Indian restaurants, worshipping Lord Muruga with uttermost devotion in the famous Dhandayuthapani temple and admiring and sometimes, even getting scared at large and majestic animals such as lions and tigers in the zoo. Muthu was amazed at the normal, relaxed and routine lifestyle of the Singaporeans. He was surprised at how people go out in the morning and come back in the night, at a fixed time. He also liked it because its uniqueness of how different cultures co-existed peacefully and happily with each other; Tamils and Malays mingling with each other very friendly and respecting each other's cultures.

Krish had a strong urge to visit the Universal Studios in Singapore. Ever since he had heard of it, he was very determined to visit it and enjoy the thrilling and fast rides and see his favourite Hollywood stars in action at the live shows. He had been forcing his parents to go there and at last, his parents took him there. When he first arrived there, he was fascinated by its appearance. It was like the huge larger than real life movie sets that he had seen in films. He was enjoying moving around fast and bumping onto other peoples' bumper cars in the Accelerator ride in the Sci-Fi City. While he was standing outside and waiting for his parents, "Hello! Excuse me?" said a voice and he was startled and turned back.

Krish was surprised to see a very tall, bespectacled and slim person of about his age standing in front of him. "Hmmm! Do you know where the New York Park is?". He thought that this guy should be a very studious person and he replied, "Oh yes! Of course!" and he gave him the direction. The person thanked him a lot and left.

Then, Muthu started walking very fast to join his parents whom were waving at him. "Thank goodness! At least that boy knew where New York Park was" he exclaimed. Muthu was having a great time at the Universal Studios and he especially wanted to go on the space ride at New York Park. After a fun-filled day, he and

his parents brought some souvenirs at the gift shops there to remember their visit to this theme park.

After his vacation from Singapore, Krish spent the rest of his vacation, playing video games and also football and badminton with his friends. Then the new month of June ushered in and Krish began his 11th new school stream in a new school called Bharathiyar Vidayashramam. He had chosen the commerce stream and his subjects were accountancy, business studies and economics. His new school consisted of two large buildings. It had a large space for the school buses and the main campus was besides that and it had four floors and two lifts. The school had a dense forest outside the forest. Opposite the main campus, was a large and tall building which was the dormitory. At the ground floor, there was the visitors' room. The parents, whom had come to see their children in the dormitory would have to wait in this room for their children to arrive. Krish found it initially hard to adapt to his new surroundings as his classmates were all looking very matured. However, as time passed by, Krish too started loving his new school and enjoying with his friends.

His teachers were also very nice and taught very well. He also didn't feel much pressure to study as all his subjects, except accountancy, were not too hard to study. He actively participated in sports and played with his friends a lot. One day, while during a free period, he and his classmates were happily skating in the basketball ground. They had a competition to see who could skate the fastest among all of them. All of them, in their skates and helmets, were moving in all the directions and going in the shortest ways possible to win this race. However, Krish, too enthusiastic and very determined to win this race, suddenly started to go at a very high speed. So, this led to him knocking his friends out and they fell on their faces and got injured.

Currently, Krish was going on without caring for anything. He saw that there were only two people who were ahead of him. Krish began to accelerate and soon he zoomed past them. He then looked back and flashed a huge grin at his friends who were staring at him in shock. His friends were shouting very frantically, "Hey

Krish! Be careful You might hit on something!". Krish just smiled and turned to look in front of him. However, it was too late by then. He had banged on the wall and fell. "Aaah! Aiyoooh! " Krish was screaming in pain as blood was trickling down his head as he was lying on the floor. His friends immediately rushed to him and took him to the school nurse for some immediate first aid. He then was taken to the hospital.

After spending a week in the hospital and with bandages on his head and legs, he was advised to take rest by the doctor at home for another week, so that he could recover fully. Even at his house, his mother was scolding him very much," How many times have I told you not to be so fast? Have you at least paid heed to it? No! Now you got hurt and you are staying at home!". She was very worried and concerned and yet at the same time, she took utmost care of him. Krish also regretted what he had done and promised to be more careful in the future, as he was lying in his bed. Four months had passed away. Krish had a classmate named, Mukund. He was a shot, plump and brown skinned person who was always silent in his class but, he used to study very well. Krish tried his best to make Mukund speak by teasing and sometimes playing pranks on him. However, even then, Mukund only frowned and did not say anything. He would go and complain to the teacher at the extreme cases. Krish got fed up with him.

One morning, they all were in their classroom when Mukund got up and went in front of them . He was looking very sad and then told all of them that since his father's job was transferred to Bangalore, they had to relocate there and he would be changing his school. Krish was surprised that at last, Mukund spoke with all of them. Krish felt sad for him, but he felt that they would never have the chance to meet again in life as Mukund would be going to Bangalore.

Muthu had decided to study his 11th and 12th std in the same school and he chose the pure science stream which included as physics, chemistry and biology as he wanted to become a doctor. He had always wanted to become a doctor from when he was young, because he had wanted to save lives and be of a service to

the humanity. Muthu always loved English both as a subject and loved to read novels. His hobbies were reading books and writing stories. He had written a few short stories but he became older, due to some reason, Muthu slowly began to not to write stories that frequently. His English teacher, Lakshmi Maam was a great teacher and her classes were always very interesting. Her explanation of the poems and stories were so good that Muthu would pay close attention in her classes. As a result, Muthu always continued to do very well and Lakshmi Maam would praise him a lot. Once Muthu had written a diary entry about a football competition in the school and since he had written it very well, Lakshmi Maam read it out loud in the class to everyone and they too appreciated it. Muthu too felt very proud of himself and she always encouraged him to write more. Muthu begun to write more, not only his school assignments but also short stories. Lakshmi Maam read each of his works and gave him feedback for them. This helped Muthu to write even more well.

Muthu was also very good in Biology, except that he wasn't good at drawing and his diagrams weren't too good. He even did quite well in Chemistry but he struggled a lot in Physics. He found it very difficult to solve sums in Physics which involved large numbers. He also couldn't memorize the derivations and do them without a single error in the exams. Therefore, he couldn't score as well as in other subjects in Physics. However, his biggest problem was in the practical component of his subjects. He was extremely nervous while doing the experiments in the labs because he didn't have the knack of handling things as he wasn't used to handling objects that much since his childhood. Therefore, he would struggle to complete his experiments in lab and his teachers or his friends used to help him out. Therefore, his teachers also used to scold him and advised him to buckle up. His parents too very concerned regarding this matter.

Then, before his semester theory examinations, his practical examinations were held . The chemistry practical exam was held first. Muthu had measure to an acid and pour into a flask and

perform the experiment However Muthu absent-mindedly forgot to put a white paper in the tunnel and adding to this, he did not see while pouring the acid in the flask, so the acid exceeded the limit which was required for the experiment. Later on, Muthu, without realising his errors, was very tensed as he didn't get the desired results and so in that tension, he poured a lot of acid in the flask. When he found out that this too didn't work out, he became very sad and he buried his face in the table and sat down.

Later on, when his chemistry teacher, Vijayalakshmi Maam, found him like that and went to him and Muthu told her all that had happened, she went to his table and found out what had gone wrong. She told him about his mistakes and patiently advised him not to be nervous and be calm. Muthu felt very embarrassed on that day and very angry on himself. He then realised his mistakes and made sure that he would not be nervous again in the future. After that incident, Muthu worked on his practical skills a lot and never became nervous again during the experiments. When he didn't know a step during the experiment, he paused and thought for a moment and then he would remember it and then he continued with his experiments. A year soon passed by, and soon Muthu wrote his 12th std board exams and as waiting for the results. Then on May 25th, the results came.

He passed in his Board exams with flying colours and secured 86%. However, something unexpected happened! While he did very well in Physics and Chemistry, his marks in Biology were much lower than expected. He only scored 79%. Muthu became very disappointed and couldn't figure out the reason for his not-so-good performance in Biology. His parents also were not happy with his biology marks and scolded him a lot. They then realised that a medical seat was impossible, as the biology marks was one of the most important requisites to get into a medical college. They were very puzzled and were wondering what do could they do next. Then Muthu got an idea. He quietly went to his mother and expressed his desire to do a degree in journalism as he loved writing and English. Muthu's mother also liked this idea a lot and she told this to his father. Although he was quite reluctant in the

beginning, then eventually he too gave his consent. They had applied for journalism courses in a few very famous colleges in Bangalore and Chennai and to the surprise, Muthu passed the entrance exams in most of these colleges.

Muthu also wrote an entrance test for a journalism course in the famous Prince College in Bangalore and was waiting for his results. He did not do quite well in the entrance test and was unsure whether he would get the admission or not. His parents also felt the same. However, on the day when the results were published in the college website, he and father were scrolling down the list of the students who had been selected and when he saw his name in the list of students for the journalism course, Muthu's joy knew no bounds. He jumped in joy and was very happy to get an opportunity to study in Prince College. His parents also were very delighted and congratulated him. Muthu found himself enjoying a lot in the college. He was very interested in the course and this spurred him to study. His lecturers were very amazing and they always encouraged him to read and write. Muthu also blossomed as a writer after receiving feedbacks from them about his writing tasks. He also began to read a lot.

Krish couldn't believe himself when he got admission in the B. Com course in the famous Prince College! He had scored very well in his 12th board exams and had certainly wanted to study commerce. He had applied for the B. Com courses in some colleges, including Prince College in Bangalore. Although the entrance test for the B. Com course was quite difficult, Krish was quite confident that he had done well. Moreover, his results also spoke for him eventually and therefore, his joy knew no bounds when he knew that he was going to study in a such famous college! However, he was very sad as he had to be away from his parents and live in an unknown city like Bangalore, for three years! His parents were also sad, but they told him that it would soon be alright soon and they would visit him often whenever they could! Krish found a PG to stay which was besides his college! He had a roommate named Harish, who happened to be his college mate. Harish was from Mumbai and loved music and movies.

Initially Krish found it hard to adapt to his new place, however he managed to do it, successfully as time passed by. He was enjoying his college life a lot! It seemed so relaxed and free! He also made good friends with Harish. He was enjoying his new, independent life a lot! However, he was in for another big surprise in college! One day, while he was walking through the canteen, he saw a short boy talking and laughing very loudly with a group of boys and girls! Krish thought that the boy was familiar to him and when the boy turned around, he couldn't believe himself! He was very surprised! It was the same, silent Mukund whom was his classmate in his school! " Oh goodness! Is it him? How lively he is ?How he changed so much?". He wondered.

Eventually he got over his shock and went to Mukund and talked to him. Mukund too was happy to see him! They talked to each other for a long time! From then onwards, they became close friends and started to roam together in the college! Krish loved quizzing and he was an active participant in the quizzes held at the college. However, during the college fest, he was going to participate in a quiz with his friend. At the last minute, when the quiz was going to start, his friend had told him that he was unable to come for the quiz. Krish was very angry with him, but now he was worried about how he was going to get a partner.

Mukund understood his problem and told him not to worry. Then he took him and introduced him to his classmate, Muthu. He told him that Muthu was going to be his partner. Krish couldn't believe himself! They introduced themselves to each other and Krish asked him whether he had seen him in Singapore. Muthu too nodded. Krish was very happy and could not believe himself! Then they both participated in the quiz and did very well. They advanced to the finals and finished sixth. From then now, Muthu and Krish became friends!

That is life! It always has some twists and turns for you! You would not know what would happen in life ! The events that occur in life might seem random but they are connected somehow.

Sumathi

“Do you have any sense, Sumathi?” Ashok was scolding Sumathi in front everyone in the office, with red and angry eyes and holding a file in his hand. Sumathi was standing, her eyes facing downwards and unable to face him. She was feeling both very sad and embarrassed, as she was being scolded for an offence that she did not commit. She did not know how did the papers about the contract with the CMR constructions, which was in the file given to her, went missing yesterday and she was about to email it to that company today. However, Ashok did not believe her explanations and started scolding her. She did not know how to convince him about her innocence to her boss-cum-lover. Memories of them romancing in the beach a few days before flashed as a black-and-white sequence before her eyes and she kept on weeping uncontrollably. Meanwhile, staring at the weeping girl in the blue and white chudhidar, was Natasha with a nasty and hidden smirk and cunning eyes, who was standing besides Ashok.

She said to herself, “Urgh! Hey Sumathi, you are the daughter of an ordinary clerk. However, do you want to marry Ashok and become the famous industrialist Kamala Devi’s daughter-in-law? NOPE! That won’t happen till I am here. See what I did to you by using this file! ASHOK, MY COUSIN IS MINE and I will definitely marry him! This is only the beginning Sumathi! I will gradually separate you and Ashok from each other! Wait and watch!”.

“Oh, my goodness! How cunning is she? She purposely took the papers from the file and framed Sumathi! Ashok also should not have believed her as he had scolded her a few days ago when she was arguing with Sumathi in the office!” exclaimed Raja’s mother. “Yes Aunt! I wonder how will they reconcile after this! Ashok should find that she was the one who did this and give her a tight slap!” Raja’s wife also joined in as she was sitting in the sofa with her mother-in-law watching the serial “Sumathi” from 6.30pm,

with their eyes wide open and laughing and crying with the characters in the serial.

Raja who was sitting in the single sofa, besides them, sighed and frowned. “Oh my God! This serial started only recently and yet they have become so hooked with it! I can’t even watch the news right now!”.

Raja was unable to control his laughter, as he was playing carrom with his son and daughter in the living room as he saw Sumathi wearing a mask and crying, while standing a distance of six feet from Ashok in their room in Kamala Devi’s huge bungalow. They were both wearing masks and Ashok was asking her what had happened and she also was telling him how his mother had scolded her very badly in the morning when she had spilled the food during breakfast in the dining table. She also wept and added that her dislike for her would have increased even more after this incident and wondered how would she accept her as her daughter-in-law. Meanwhile, Natasha was now dressed in a dark green saree and wore a mask and was standing at two rooms after their room and over-hearing their conversation by inserting a small camera in the wall in their room. She had now married Ashok’s younger brother, Akilan and had also become Kamala Devi’s daughter-in-law. His wife and mother were still glued to the serial and wide-eyed since it started and its tile card read, “Episode-595”, resuming after about four months after the COVID-19 lockdown. Raja burst out laughing and thought, “COVID-19 has not spared the production of serials also! Nowadays serial actors must wear masks, stand at a distance of six feet from each other and talk to each other and have to listen to other’s conversations through cameras in their room so as not to violate social distancing norms! Oh, my goodness!”

Complaints

“Thank God! At last, Chandran Sir, Lakshmi Maam, Shruthi and Karthik finally left for Madurai after more than one year! We are at last free! I could just stand there and watch every day while Maam, the children, Sir and the maids were using me a lot for washing and cleaning the plates, bowls and other kitchen utensils. I became very fed up and waited for this day of independence!” said the wash basin, while heaving a sign of relief and tears of happiness rolling down its cheeks.

All the appliances and furniture in their house finally came to life earlier in the night after Chandran and his family left for their native place following a significant improvement in the number of COVID-19 cases in Bangalore recently. They were also very happy that they could now be free for at least for a couple of weeks.

“Yeah! Wash basin Brother! All the others at least could rest for a few hours in the night and early morning until one of the members in the family starts using them. However, both of us were working overtime for the past one year with Sir, Maam and the children using the wash basin to clean the utensils and also me for preparing food and snacks. They would also use me for heat their food which they have eaten the previous day, and again eat them for another day. I could only sleep for a few hours late in the night after Maam would clean me after finishing all the work in the kitchen and go to sleep. And my day would start again very early next morning at about 6.30am when Sir would wake up and use me for boiling the milk for coffee! I had yearned for this for such a long time now!”, moaned the stove as she started crying.

She continued, “I used to look very clean, white and beautiful before the pandemic as Maam would not be using me so much as she does now. BUT nowadays I do not want to look at myself before Maam cleans me in the night as I would be very dirty with food stains. Now during the pandemic, besides Maam, Shruti and

even Ram and Sir also started to use me for making noodles and other small snacks. Shruti at least does not dirty me so much, but this Sir and Ram literally split powder and other substances and made even more dirty with their random cooking experiments!”.

All the other furniture in the house, except some of them immediately came to the kitchen and although some of them laughed out a bit after hearing her, the others sympathized with her and felt sorry for her. The kitchen now seemed like a mini supermarket with all of them gathered in.

One of the chairs in the dining table also came to the kitchen, placed his leg on the stove and patted her. He consoled her, saying, “Don’t worry Sister! We all are just like you; becoming very fed up with our owners using us a lot during this pandemic. Our situation is worse than yours; at least they use you for cooking and other purposes related to it. However, we are being used by everyone in the family not only during breakfast and dinner, but also at any random time when they feel like coming and sitting on the dining table. In addition to this, they also drag us before sitting and when they are putting us inside the table when after getting up, they make such a loud and screechy sound! . Urgh!Oh, my Goodness! I totally hate that sound.”

“Yes! Yes! Table chair brother! When the family sits for dinner and for eating snacks, they sometimes fuss around and rearrange all of the items in the table. They also would spill food on me and the chairs. Thus, we would also become quite dirty and would have to wait to become clean again till next week when Maam or the maid cleans us.”, sulked the dining table.

The sofa also spoke loudly from the hall, “Yes Table brother! Even they are also using me a lot daily during this past one and a half years. Oh my God! Early in the morning when Sir sits on me to watch the news at 7am, I would be free only at 10pm in the night after Sir and Ram have finished watching cricket. Instead of using the dining table and chairs for eating, this Ram sits on me daily for eating during all the three times a day and he would also spill food on me sometimes! Doesn’t he know that he should sit on the

dining table during eating? Oh, my goodness! I was waiting for the day when all of this would be over!”

The bathroom taps also joined the conversation and aired their views, “The owners have also used me a lot daily whenever they open their door, take the milk and newspapers and then would wash their hands due to the risk of viruses during the pandemic. They would again use me for washing their hands, toes and most importantly, their masks whenever they go outside and come back. I simply got fed up by seeing the number of times in which the mask would be washed by using me! In addition to this, the maid or Maam would also use me for filling up water for mopping and cleaning the house! I was also waiting for this moment for a long time! Now it’s fun time for us and let’s enjoy it !”.

All the other furniture and appliances which were gathered in the kitchen and which were standing in their respective places also laughed and nodded in agreement. “Urgh! All this furniture started piling up their complaints about the owners once they have left. The owners are so pitiful! They would have to use us a lot since they are at home to fulfil their needs during the pandemic. Even they are using me daily to take the milk and newspapers and when they would be going out and returning home! Am I complaining? I cannot bear to hear these rants and complaints!” frowned the main door of the house.

Vivek

Vivek was going to school from his house as usual in his school bus. He was a tall, bulky boy with short hair and a mole in his face. He was currently studying 9th standard in Manmadurai International School in Chennai. His bus was almost nearing the school when it was stopped by a police vehicle and the policemen called the driver as they wanted to talk with him. Vivek was both shocked and surprised as it was the first time that he was seeing the policemen for the first time in his life. Prior to this, the only time which he had seen the policemen was in the reel-life: that is, in the movies, the television series and TV programmes.

Meanwhile, after talking to the driver, one of the policemen entered the bus and said, “Students, we have received information that someone from this bus is in possession of illegal cocaine. However, all of you do not need to panic. We are going to check all your belongings and so each one of you must get down and give us your bags.” Hearing this, all the students got scared and wondered who was the black sheep.

Although Vivek was scared, he had a firm and unshakable belief that he was not the culprit. Then, all the students got down from the bus and lined up in a queue to show the police their bags. The police too began checking their bags one by one, until it was Vivek’s turn to show his bag. The police began checking his bag while Vivek was very sure that he was innocent. Then, when the police got two full bags of whitish substance from his bag, they gave him a fiery and angry look while Vivek himself was aghast! His unmistakable belief was broken! The students whom were standing around him, stared at him and some of even scorned at him while whispering among themselves.

The policemen, still giving Vivek that glaring look, looked and nodded to each other and arrested Vivek. “Hey! You are not even 18 years old and are still studying in school, but you are having

illegal cocaine at this age! Rascal! Get into the van! We will deal with you at the police station!” They dragged him to the police van and put him inside it while Vivek was shouting and still begging them, “Sir! Sir! Please Sir! I am innocent! I swear that I don’t know how these bags of cocaine came into my school bag! Please leave me Sir!”

The next day, this incident about Vivek was the front-page story in many of the major daily newspapers in town. After hearing about this, his parents became so embarrassed and grief-stricken that they did not know how to deal with this situation. Their friends, relatives and acquaintances began calling them and asking them loads of questions about this incident. Some of them were even censuring Vivek about this incident. Therefore, they could not even step out of the house.

“Sir! Please release me Sir! I really do not know how the cocaine bags came in my school bag!” Vivek was ailing and screaming at the top of his voice and pleading to the judge, in a crowd-filled courtroom, which also consisted of his parents and others the next day. The case was going on and when it was during the turn of the public prosecutor, he asked him, “Master Vivek! Didn’t you have discussions with your friends in school that like everything has both a good side and a bad side, using drugs also has its positive and negative side effects? Moreover, didn’t you also add that we should only keep the positive things and sun away the negative things?”.

His parents were shocked after hearing this. The public prosecutor continued, “Master Vivek! Didn’t you and your friends used to have conversations about and also used to admire famous men who led luxurious lives and also had drugs?”. Vivek had no other choice and he eventually agreed that he and his friends used to have those conversations.

However, he also added that his statements about drugs and the conversations between him and his friends were only for jovial purposes and were not talking about it in a serious manner. However, this fell on the deaf ears of the public prosecutor who

eventually dismissed it. His parents could not believe themselves and stared at Vivek with eyes which were glowing red in anger.

The public prosecutor then finished his arguments by saying, “Your Honour! As you might have already observed, the accused Mr Vivek had a balanced viewpoint about drugs and also most importantly he has also admired celebrities who had used drugs, then why couldn’t he have thought that he too could try to use drugs, by following in their footsteps? Therefore, he must have gone secretly to a drugs dealer and brought these bags of cocaine without anybody’s knowledge. Then, he must have kept them in his school bag and then must thought of bringing it to school on the day which the incident took place. So, therefore Your Honour! I request you to grant him the maximum punishment possible for the crime that he has committed so that it reforms him and also serves as a deterrent for the students for committing such crimes in the future! That is all your Honour!” and sat down.

After hearing both sides, the judge pronounced the verdict, “Based on the evidence that have been submitted and the testimonies of the accused and also of the witnesses in this court, it is proven beyond doubt that Mr Vivek has brought cocaine illegally and also hid them in his school bag and also brought them to school. Therefore, this court sentences him to ten years of education in the boys’ reformatory school in the jail and also a fine of Rs 40,000!”

....

“Noooo!,” screamed Vivek as he had woken up from his sleep and while he was very terrified, then tears began rolling down profusely from his cheeks when he thought of the dream which he had. Then, he wiped his face and he prayed and thanked God as it was only a dream. He thought, “Oh my goodness! What a dream that it was! It was clearly the worst dream which I ever had! Sometimes even the dreams seem like they are happening in real life!” Then, he went to sleep after some time.

The Thief

It was a normal day for Vijay. He, as usual got up, bathed and changed into his clothes for going to office. Then he went downstairs where his landlord Mr. Mohandas and his family were living, to have his breakfast. Ever since Vijay had moved in to the upper portion of the house, Mohandas had told Vijay to come down and have breakfast and dinner with them. Although Vijay had declined this initially, but eventually he had to give in due to the persistence of Mr. Mohandas and his family.

However, as the days passed, he came to love Mrs Uma Mohandas' cooking. Today also was a very sumptuous breakfast of hot pooris with steaming and red channa masala. He ate to his heart's content and then also followed it up with a cup of coffee. Then when Mr Mohandas asked him when would he pay the rent as it was already the tenth day of this month, Vijay replied that he would pay it as soon when he gets the cash in his hands as he did not have enough cash with him currently. Then, he left for his office. He was working as a receptionist at a construction company for the past four months from 9am to 6pm. After office, he left and went to Adyar Ananda Bhavan in HSR layout to have his evening tiffin and then he came back home at 7.30 pm. He read for some time, ate dinner and slept peacefully as tomorrow was a Saturday and it was a holiday for him.

The next day morning, the sound of loud chattering and laughing made Vijay to wake up from his deep slumber. He heard a loud baritone voice and wondered, "Mr. Mohandas does not have such a baritone voice and none of his family members also have this kind of voice. Then, whose voice can it be? I don't know? Let's go down and check." He then got up, got ready and went downstairs. Seeing him, Mohandas reckoned him to join him and the new guest in the living room. Mrs. Mohandas too gave him a cup of coffee while Mr. Mohandas began to introduce his guest to him. He said, "Mr. Vijay, meet my brother Mr. Chinnadurai. He is a lawyer who

is appearing as the public prosecutor for the Chennai police department in the 50 lakh Jay jewellery robbery case.”

Listening to that, made Vijay to stop drinking for a moment. He froze and he started thinking and he also stared at Mohandas and Chinnadurai for a moment. He came to his senses only when Mohandas shook him. “What, Mr. Vijay? You suddenly froze and did not speak anything,” he asked. Vijay managed this by saying, “Ah! Yes Sir! I had started to think about the robbery case when you had introduced your brother. It was such a high-profile case and the robber stole so many lakhs worth of jewellery from the store.” “Yes! Mr Vijay!” said Mr Chinnadurai. He went on, “The robber was so smart that he chose to enter the jewellery store in Adyar, Chennai in the early morning and he also very smartly made sure that he almost did not leave even a bit of evidence behind. Then, he also did his work smartly and he also got away with such a huge amount of jewellery. However, still we have gotten a huge lead about the robber because of him.”

Vijay was very shocked and puzzled as he could not understand what Chinnadurai was saying. Why did he use the word almost while referring to the fact that the robber never left behind a tiny bit of evidence? Does that mean that the robber had left behind a piece of evidence by mistake for the police? Why does he say that they had gotten a huge lead about the robber due to the robber himself? I can't understand anything. Still let us listen to him and find out. “How did you manage to get a lead of the robber despite him leaving almost no evidence, Sir?” Vijay asked Chinnadurai.

The latter replied, by laughing out loud. He explained, “Mr. Vijay, the robber was so smart in planning how to and where to rob and also, he was so smart to leave after a day after the robbery had occurred on 14th October 2019. However, he was also at the same time foolish to notice he had left his SIM card behind during the robbery! As the police had spotted it in the shop while checking the shop after the robbery has occurred, they were able to trace the robber through by checking the SIM card. They also found that the robber had left from Chennai through train and had fled to

Bangalore.” Hearing his brother speak, Mohandas also joined his brother in laughing out aloud.

Vijay became shell-shocked and cursed himself. How could a robber be so foolish not to notice about leaving behind such an important item such as the SIM card during a robbery? Moreover, because of that mistake, the police had found that the robber is in Bangalore right now. His face had turned white and suddenly started to feel nervous, although he had managed to conceal it from others. Chinnadurai resumed talking and told them, “That’s why I am here. We will definitely catch the robber, bring him to Chennai and throw him in jail. It might take many days, but I will leave from Bangalore with him only. I will apprehend him, even if he is in front of me!”, he finished aggressively with a sense of determination in his face.

Vijay again plunged into shock, after hearing him and gasped. Now serious trouble had started for me, he thought. However, he had managed to put on a smile in front of everyone and pretended to be normal. Chinnadurai then went inside to have rest and the others had also left. However, Vijay could not sleep during afternoon, as the words of Chinnadurai continued to haunt him and he was not at peace. So, he decided to call his accomplice and caution him. He locked his room, called his friend through Skype on his laptop and began talking with him.

His accomplice asked, “Hey Pradeep, how are you?”. However, Vijay alias Pradeep snapped and cut him by saying, “Hey Somu, I am fine. However, I have not called you to exchange pleasantries, but to warn you. A lawyer has come to my house and told that they have found out that the robber in the Jay Jewellery case is now in Bangalore. He is so firm that he would leave from here only after catching the robbers. So, it is we who should be careful, to avoid any further danger!”. “What danger, Mr. Vijay?” asked a familiar voice and Vijay turned around in shock. He then ended the call and closed his computer and went to the door and asked, “Yes?”. “It is me, Mr. Vijay! Lawyer Chinnadurai!” Vijay stood like a tree rooted to the ground in shock and did not know what to do. Must he have

heard everything which we spoke? Would I be going to jail? Oh, my goodness!

“Mr Vijay! Please open the door! How long should I be standing outside? I have come to ask you something!” shouted Chinnadurai and only then Vijay came to his senses. He then managed his fear and opened the door. Chinnadurai strode inside and asked smilingly, “Actually Mr Vijay, my brother had told me that you love reading books. Since I also love reading books, I also thought of borrowing a few good books from you to read. However, I had heard you speaking with someone and said that we should be careful to avoid any danger. So, I became concerned. Are you both caught in any big problem? Would you like me to help you in any way?”

Vijay managed to put on a faint smile and managed him by saying, “Ah yes Sir! Me and my friend had borrowed some money from someone some time back and but now, he has been calling repeatedly and started pestering us about when we would be repaying him. Thus, I was speaking with him regarding this on Skype in my computer since my friend’s phone is not working and alsomentioned that we should be very careful while dealing with him.” He also added, with huge smile, “We will manage this problem and find a way to repay him! Thank you so much for asking that if you could help us in any way.”

Chinnadurai too smiled and acknowledged that and he was talking with Vijay for some time. Then, he left from the room along with some books given to him by Vijay. As soon as he left, Vijay collapsed on his bed, closed his eyes and heaved a sigh of relief. “Oh, my goodness! I now feel that I have now taken a rebirth! - especially during those moments when Chinnadurai was asking about my call with Somu. It was really a problem of life and death for me as I thought if he had completely heard what we were talking about. However, I was so lucky that he only came towards the ending of the conversation. For a second, I really thought that I would be going to jail for the Jay Jewellery shop robbery case along with Somu, who had helped me to plan and execute the robbery!” said Vijay as he was talking to himself silently.

The C-L-Bag

Professor Prajapati was staring at Mr Dhanpal very meekly and gave a sheepish smile as Mr Dhanpal was standing in front of him. Mr Dhanpal, the owner of the house very infuriated and he, a small and stout man with black and curly hair and with a strict demeanour was staring at him right in his eyes and waved his hands over him, "Hello! Mr Prajapati! The great scientist! Why are you staring at me like a kid who is lost in a crowd? Where is your rent for this month? You had told that you would pay me today, about ten days ago as you needed to speak with your company INCORP after creating your new inventions and also that you would receive some money after this has been done! However, today is already the fifteen day of this month and still I have not received my rent. I am not leaving from the house till I get my rent!" he shouted as he went and sat angrily on the sofa in the living room of the house.

Professor Prajapati, a bearded and brown-skinned middle-aged person with big face with pimples but with an inquisitive and kindly demeanour, was clearly helpless and did not know how to come out of this tight situation in which he was in right now. Although he had thought of the various ways of giving Mr Dhanpal shrewd answers and escaping from him, but he could not. However, he tried to calm him down as he said, "Eh! Em! Dhanpal Sir! I have raked my brain very hard and tried brainstorming and thinking of various possible inventions all this while. However, my efforts were not successful and still I have not started work on my new invention. I seriously do not know why am I suffering from this mind block and so,".

However, Mr. Dhanpal did not allow him to complete. He became irritated, got up from the sofa and went to him. He also repeated the last word which Professor Prajapati had said by raising his hand, "SO? So, until you get out of your mind block and invent something and earn money, I would have to wait patiently for my rent. And how long might it take? One, three or even ten years? Imagine what will be my state if every tenant tells me the same

thing? NO! I will not accept any more excuses and I will not also compromise for anything less than my monthly rent!” he declared decisively and went again and sat on the sofa, moaning. “Oh, my goodness! What will I do? It seems that this man will not go from here without getting the rent and I also do not have enough cash to pay him now. What will I do?” pondered the scientist as he began to think about how could he pay the rent to his landlord.

At last, he seemed to be relieved when he seems to have thought of a solution to this and he thought to himself, “Okay! Now I do not have any choice but to write and give him a cheque for the rent. I have not also received the salary from my university this month also. However, I know that I have enough money in my bank account but I am not quite sure of the exact figure. Is it fifty thousand or eighty thousand? It is surely more than fifty thousand but I do not remember the exact figure” he asked himself. Dr Prajapati continued and rued himself, “My goodness! I am having this problem of memory loss for quite some time now! I need to consult Dr Gajendran when I visit him for my next medical appointment. Okay! I will go and get the chequebook now! I hope that Kamakshi or my eldest son Suresh will not be angry with me for withdrawing money from the bank account unilaterally for paying rent to Dhanpal Sir! I should convince and placate them when they return from Kamakshi’s hometown a week later!”

Then he went upstairs to his room and took his cheque book from there and he came downstairs and wrote a cheque for the rent amount and handed it over to the grumpy Mr Dhanpal who was sitting in the sofa. As soon as Dr. Prajapati handed over the cheque to him, the latter immediately got up and snatched it angrily from him. “My God! How much do I have to shout for getting my monthly rent from you, Dr. Prajapati? I hope that I will have a much more convenient and pleasant experience of receiving my rent next time onwards, without these kind of ordeals!” he said with a huge frown.

“Of course! Surendran Sir ! I will definitely pay the rent for the mansion promptly next month without any delay!” said Dr Prajapati, with a gentle smile on his face. “What Surendran?

Scientist Sir! You have changed my name itself due to your absent-mindedness! My goodness!” groaned Mr Dhanpal as he placed his hands on his head. “Oh! Shit! Have I told your name incorrectly! My goodness! What could be your name? Paramsivam, Brahman and Vishnu... Ah! Now I remember that it is something connected with Shri Narayanan and Srimati Lakshmi. Thirumoorthy, Madhavan, Krishnan, Kuberan... Ah!” he exclaimed as he hit upon his head and now, I remember, Dhanpal Sir!” as he finally remembered his landlord’s name.

The landlord heaved a sigh of relief and said, “Thank you for finally thinking and coming up with my correct name after such a long thought process! I might even lose my wits if I stay here and talk with you for some time! So, I am leaving! Goodbye Sir!” and he left. Dr Prajapati said, “I am sorry Sir!” but the landlord did not hear it as he had already had gone too far quickly by this time.

Dr Prajapati started musing after Mr Dhanpal had left and sat on a sofa while trying to think of a new invention to add to his kitty. It was precisely at this juncture when a voice was huffing and panting and saying, “I wonder how people manage to carry their suitcases having so much of weight and travel from countries to countries. Travelling within or without the country and then going to our destinations is not a problem. But phew! Then carrying these suitcases inside our houses, itself is a big problem!”

And by the now, the voice was now coming from the footsteps of his house itself. Then immediately, Dr Prajapati felt like as if a thousand lights had been lit up within his mind as he finally came up with an idea for his invention. He immediately ran to the entrance of his house, eager to see who was his new visitor who was complaining about his or her suitcases. He was surprised to see a tall, young and brown skinned girl with long and black hair and with an inquisitive and bubbly look on her face as she looked up to the middle-aged scientist.

“Yes! Who are you?” queried Dr Prajapati and the girl replied enthusiastically as she greeted him, “Hello Uncle! I am Meenakshi, your niece-I am your brother-in-law Sathappan’s younger daughter

and I have recently completed my postgraduate degree, specialising in chemistry. I am on the hunt for a job now. Since I am very interested in science. I had heard that you are an inventor and scientist and thus I wanted to come and work with you for some time; assisting you during your scientific pursuits. Can you kindly permit me to stay here and work with you, Uncle?” asked Meenakshi with a small smile and also with a sparkling look on her face.

Professor Prajapati told her to come inside the house and waved her to a sofa. Meenakshi’s curious eyes scanned the whole living room and the house eagerly and asked, “Uncle, where are Auntie and my dear cousins?”. Professor Prajapati also smiled as he also sat on the sofa and replied, “They have gone to Kamakshi’s hometown, my dear and they will be back in a week’s time.” Meenakshi listened to him and nodded her head.

Then, Professor Prajapati took out a wallet from his pocket and he appeared to have forgotten something and stared at it for quite some time. Then, something clicked upon his head, he remembered what was he looking for and then took out a small and white yellow shaped badge from his pocket with the letter ‘C’ inscribed on it. Then he flung the badge from the living room and then immediately a robot appeared from the kitchen came and stood before him. However, Meenakshi stood astonished for a second when she saw the robot as it resembled exactly like a well-built human cook dressed in a blue shirt and black pants with a big apron and a cooking hat upon its head. Only when she had looked closely at it and saw its eyes and hands that she was able to tell that it was a robot.

When she stared at Professor Prajapati in astonishment, the latter smiled and explained, “Well dear! He is Chef Napal, a humanoid robot created by me to take care of the cooking of our house. He is a part of a series of robots which I had created to take care of our house and they are other robots such as Nakul the gardener, Sumathi the house-keeping maid and so on. As Kamakshi could not do all the tasks in the house such as cleaning, cooking and washing the clothes by herself, I invented these robots so that she

could be relieved from all of these physically exertive tasks in the house.” When probed by Meenakshi further about how the robot immediately came to him when he had thrown the badge to the kitchen, he explained that these robots were invented along with micro nano chips which were enabled to respond whenever the respective badges indicating their duties were thrown to them by any one of them in the house. Even these badges have the same micro nano chips to ensure proper synchronization between them and the robots.

He also added that every person in the house had a collection of badges in their wallets to call and use the robots as per their convenience, except for his grandchildren who were too young to handle such type of devices. Then he asked Napal to prepare two cups of coffee and after asking Meenakshi about what type of coffee would she prefer, he asked Napal to make a strong coffee with the Bru coffee powder. Then within few minutes, Meenakshi could smell two delicious and strong coffees as Napal had prepared them and came to the living room and served them.

After Meenakshi and Professor Prajapati had finished drinking their coffees, Meenakshi remembered about her request to her uncle to allow her to work with him and when she was about to open her mouth to ask him about it, then Professor Prajapati appeared to have remembered something. Then he quickly drank his coffee, kept it on the sofa and then reckoned Nalan to pick them up as he quickly went out of the house to his laboratory which was located besides the house in a huge shed.

Then time passed by and Meenakshi kept staring at the entrance of the house waiting for her uncle to come, but it was of no use at all. Then she also grew hungry and she also ordered some food online and ate it and also kept some food for her uncle who might feel hungry. Eventually, she felt tired and soon dozed off in the sofa and she only woke up when she felt like someone was holding her shoulder and telling her to wake up. When she woke up and saw the clock, she was surprised that it was a quarter to seven in the evening. She had slept for so long without even realising it while she was waiting for her uncle and she attributed this to the fatigue

that she had while travelling from Coimbatore to Chennai this morning.

She was surprised to see Professor Prajapati beaming at her, with a sense of both a child-like curiosity and pride and holding a small and black bag along with some in-built buttons. When she asked him about what was it, he smiled as he held the bag in front of her and said, “Here is my brand-new invention: The C-L-BAG, an abbreviation for the Customized Luggage Bag and I had got the idea for this invention from you this morning as you were complaining about the weight of your bags as you came to visit me. This bag will be certainly by loved by you and everyone as they will be able to carry any type of heavy luggage without any pain or difficulty, with the help of this bag. I will demonstrate this to you!” he said eagerly as he pressed a small red clip within the bag and immediately expanded portions of the bag quickly sprang in front of Meenakshi.

Meenakshi became scared after seeing this, but Professor Prajapati soothed her. He said, “When people press this red clip inside the bag, then big compartments will come out of it and people will be able to store how much of luggage as per their wish in it. Similarly, there are also similar clips for placing and carrying liquids and also foodstuffs. After they have placed their luggage inside the bag, the compartments will again shrink back to their original size and the bag will resume its original size. These bags will not be heavy as they are made from a combination of tungsten and brass, which are strong and durable and elastic elements respectively. People will be able to carry these bags anywhere with them whenever they are travelling.”

Meenakshi could not control her excitement as she was very carried away by this invention and she held her uncle’s hands and started to shake them profusely, “There is only a word which I can use to describe this invention: Marvellous! This customized bag is awesome and you are really a genius, Uncle! Hearty congratulations Sir!” as she appreciated Professor Prajapati. Professor Prajapati smiled back at her gently and then when she was about to ask him whether she could work with him, then her uncle remembered

suddenly again as he asked her to wait for some time, Then, he called someone from his phone and talked with him for some time. He ended his call with a happy and satisfactory look on his face.

When he saw Meenakshi, he scratched his head as he realized that she had waiting for him for a long time and he explained to her why was he calling someone, “I am sorry, dear for having kept you waiting for so long. I forgot to tell you that I am also serving as a head of the Science and Technology Division of the SVR Corp and I do not have to do much work about the business and administration as I am not too comfortable with these kinds of work. My work is usually associated with research, design and creating new products for the company. I also sometimes arrange for my inventions which I have invented to be manufactured in huge quantities at this company so that it can be used by the people easily and comfortably .”

As Meenakshi continued to stare at him, Professor Prajapati continued explaining, “I owe this job to my best friend from childhood, Mr Senthil Subramaniam, who is the MD of SVR Group of Companies who appointed me to this position, after having recognised my passion for science and inventions. In addition to registering my patents in the name of the company, I also give my written consent to them to have the manufacturing and selling rights of my inventions in return for a lucrative deal and the company also pays me a hue monthly remuneration in addition to this. That’s why I had to speak with him immediately after I had invented a new product.” Meenakshi smiled and said that it was alright.

Finally, Professor Prajapati asked her, “Ah! Dear! Finally, I remember that you had asked me if you could work with me for some time as my assistant when you came in the morning itself. However, the only reason which I am hesitating is that it might be too hectic working with me...” as he began to have immersed in deep thought.

However, he flashed a smile as he remembered what Meenakshi had told him and said, “I remember you saying that you had

finished your postgraduation in chemistry. That's also my field of interest as I have also done my higher studies in this subject also. Besides this, you seem to be a very enthusiastic and passionate girl. So, we can discuss and work things out so that it will both be productive and at the same time, not so stressful for you. Yes! Tripura Sundari! You can start working with me in my lab from tomorrow onwards!," as he finally agreed to Meenakshi working under him.

While Meenakshi felt like she was flying in sky high after her scientist uncle had consented to let her work with him for some time, she had also had a huge shock at the same time when her uncle had said her name wrongly. She corrected him, "Uncle! Thank you so much for letting me to work with you! However, I would like to remind you that my name is MEENAKSHI, not Tripura Sundari!". Her uncle smiled slightly and bit his tongue when he realised his mistake and apologized to her, "Very sorry Meenakshi! I forgot your name as I am a bit forgetful these days as I am getting older!". "Oh my God! A BIT forgetful? He is VERY forgetful! I do not know how will I manage my uncle in this aspect when I start working with him!" thought Meenakshi when she had learnt of his forgetfulness.

Rising from the ashes

That day was still afresh in his mind. It happened about 8 years ago but it seemed like it had just happened yesterday. His eyes glittered, his face had lit up like a light bulb and he flashed a smile as he began to reminisce of that day. It was November 13th, 2034 as Ananda Krishnamurthy walked triumphantly onto the cricket field, clad in the dark blue and red jersey of the Cook City Cricket team, during the second ODI match against England. He was all in smiles and yet at the same time, he had butterflies all over his stomach as it was the first time that he was going to represent his native country, Cook City. He had been selected for the ODI for the home series against South Africa due to his consistent performances for his state city Sompatsam, during which he had scored over 500 runs during the past few seasons.

That day also, he had not deceived the selectors and had shone with 84 runs over 48 balls, that too in his trademark aggressive style, by sending the balls for sixes and boundaries outside the stadium. That too, he had done it against a powerful pace attack which boasted of the likes of Steven Jerkings, Mallis Derkins and Peter Samson. Cook City, in the end, won the match quite convincingly. Campbell then played all the remaining matches and scored 240 runs, including 3 half-centuries. Soon the short, stout and fair Campbell with powerful arms and well-built body had become the centre of everyone's attention and he was predicted to become a batting superstar in the future.

However, till 2011, he was in and out of the national team frequently due to his ability of not capitalizing on his starts and failing to build upon them. But his turning point was the ODI series against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates, where he scored 443 runs which included 2 centuries and 2 half-centuries. Through this performance, he had proved that he had ability to succeed in the overseas conditions and also that he could play the role of both the anchor and aggressor, according to the situation.

He was in the form of his life during the ODI series against Australia at home-where he had accumulated 538 runs. Following this, he had immensely successful year in 2012 where had scored 1230 runs in 24 matches.

His meteoric rise as a batsman coincided with the rise of the Cook City Cricket team becoming a powerful and dominant team and a force to reckon with, especially in the white ball formats, and which consisted of star batsmen like Frederick Humphrey and Harry Johnson and also match-winning bowlers such as Jason Lee, Asim Khan and Murali Ratnam. They had beat teams such as Sri Lanka and New Zealand in their home turfs and defeated Australia and South Africa at home...

Remembering these evergreen memories had made Krishnamurthy to burst out in laughter, like pearls falling out from his mouth. He had only come back to his senses when his teammate Thomas Thrope shook him and asked him, "Hey Krishna, what happened? Why are you so happy?" Krishnamurthy just smiled sheepishly at their star all-rounder and replied nothing. They were coming back home, in a flight from the Australia where they had recently won the World Cup 2047 and thus, they had fulfilled one of the biggest dreams of the country and their fans- a limited overs trophy which was still a glaring and big omission from their trophies cabinet.

They were basking in the glory and accolades and appreciation poured in for them from all quarters. Krishnamurthy too was basking in that glory when he looked through the window of the plane and saw that some clouds were blocking a cloud in the sky. As soon as he had seen that, he closed his eyes angrily, banged his head in his seat and had also grunted angrily. It reminded him of the huge dark cloud in his life- the accident saga in 2043, which he had wished to forget, but it was deeply entrenched in his mind like a permanent scar and dark spot...

On that fateful day, he was returning home in his car, with his friends after going to a restaurant in the night and returning home, when his car had unexpectedly crashed on a person who was coming in a cycle and the person had died on the spot. Campbell

and his friends were arrested by the police and charged with driving under the influence of alcohol and intentional murder, although they strongly denied those charges and argued that the accident was not done intentionally. However, from then on, Campbell's life had turned completely downhill. The Cook City Cricket Board (CCB) banned him from international cricket until further notice, till further notice.

Krishnamurthy felt like an eagle which was soaring up high in the sky but whose wings had been cut down and it had also fallen unexpectedly. Although he deeply regretted crashing unexpectedly on the person which had led to his death and had been ruining himself on one side that if he was very careful on that day, this whole incident could have been avoided and the life of a person could have been saved, he also felt very angry on the other side that he was being very penalized and criticized by everyone for the accident. For many days and months, he could not even get out of his room and meet his family and friends both in the fear and apprehension that they will ask or talk to him about this incident which might also hurt him. He was also feeling very dejected and depressed.

He had also become the subject of the newspapers and television channels and people had also begun to criticize him for his misconduct and advise that cricketers should be well-behaved both on and off the field. Seeing and reading all of this, Krishnamurthy was filled with so much of agony and misery that he was cursing himself for his ill-luck and he did not know what to do and he was so affected by it that he had to consult the doctor regarding his mental health and also had to take tablets. During those hard times, Krishnamurthy was very grateful that he had his wife, Sandhya and his family besides him for support and for reposing faith in him.

Then following the advice from Sandhya, he had met the family of the deceased person and expressed his deep regret about the incident and sought forgiveness from them for the accident. He had also taken on the responsibility of educating the person's children and settling them in life. It was only after them forgiving him that he felt that a huge burden in his life was lifted and he felt

that he was now at peace with himself and was able to smile. Then after he had been acquitted by the court in the accident case and the Cook City Cricket Board had also subsequently lifted his ban in 2045, his happiness had increased even more.

As he was thinking about how to resume his cricketing career and practice after this huge controversy, suddenly all the sadness, misery and humiliation which he had suffered due to this incident had flashed in his mind and plagued him. Then as a phoenix rising from his ashes, Krishnamurthy made up his mind that the best way for him to come out of this controversy and also to silence the criticisms levied against him was to let his willow do the talking and establish himself as one of the finest and best batsmen in the world. He would prove the people that he was even an even better batsman than he ever was two years ago and that this controversy had not crushed himself and instead it had enhanced his cricketing prowess for the better. After that incident, he had a fire within himself to prove and establish himself as a great cricket player. He had thus channelled the sadness, misery and humiliation into willpower, determination and perseverance. Now, two years ago, Krishnamurthy flashed a gentle smile as he saw the sun slowly emerging from the dark clouds.

Therefore, during the first ODI series that he had played after the incident, he played like a man who was reborn and reaped rewards. He had performed well in that series and slowly carried that form to continuously churn out consistent performances. This, in turn had led him to play a key role in the biggest moment of his career—the ICC world cup trophy 2047. He had scored 315 runs in the tournament, including an unbeaten 80 in the finals to help his side to chase down the target.

This victory, he believed was as much as his personal triumph as was his team's triumph. Thinking about it, his face began to brighten up and his eyes now reflected a feeling of both pride and achievement. This time, when he looked outside the plane, the sun had emerged from the dark clouds and it was glowing bright in the sky, as the epicentre of the sky.

Background

It was the year 1952. A short 5-year-old boy, who was in a tattered shirt and an ordinary khaki pant, received a breakfast of idlis and sambhar, from his mother, wrapped in a newspaper. She had given it to him in newspapers as they did not have even a simple tiffin box in their house, to put the idlis inside. He too received it and left from his house in Summit Road, Acropolis the capital of the Cook City walking under the hot and blistering sun to give it to his father, who was a trade union leader in the cotton mill nearby. His father was on a strike for the past few days against the management of the mill, demanding for better pay and working conditions. The boy too had been giving him breakfast at his mill and then leaving to school for these three days. Today too he went to the large tent outside the mill where his father was seated, along with thousands of workers; raising and shouting slogans.

The police had come to control the strike and disperse the protesters. Firstly, they had announced loudly in a loudspeaker that the protesters must disperse or else they would resort to lathi charge and even to opening fire against them. The protesters did not pay heed and then the tent was soon turned into a battlefield full of stones thrown at each other, lathis and blood all over the place. When the situation went out of control, the police started to fire at the protesters. A few protesters, including the boy's father were shot at by the police and they died on the spot. Seeing his father lying in a pool of blood, the boy started crying incessantly and placed his hands over his eyes. He was so sad and felt that this tragedy should not happen to anyone. The boy was no other than Anbuarasu Rajaratnam, who would go on to become the Prime Minister (PM) of Cook City.

After his father's tragic demise, Anbuarasu studied hard and gradually became one of the finest lawyers in Cook City. He had also eventually made his foray into politics by joining the National Party of Creek land in 1980. He soon rose through the ranks in

both the party and the government and served in different capacities. The pinnacle of his political career came in 2014 when he became the Prime Minister of the country. This was a very happy and proud moment for everyone in his family. During his regime, there was law and order in the country and infrastructural and economic development too taking place in a rapid pace.

However, on the other hand, his government had also announced the tightening of the rules and regulations of the labour unions of workers in the factories and also the relaxation of the rules about the maintaining of the environment by the companies.

These measures of the government attracted criticism and debate from all the sectors of the society. However, one of the criticisms came from the Prime Minister's house itself, an elderly woman dressed in a yellow bright saree and wore a diamond necklace, sulking and resenting. She was Lakshmi Rajaratnam, the wife of the deceased labour union leader Rajaratnam. Mrs Lakshmi could not digest that her son who was the son of a union leader who had fought and died for the welfare and labour rights of the workers in the factories, was now on the other side of the spectrum and was bringing in laws that was both detrimental to the workers and also for the natural environment of the country. Workers would clearly suffer a lot if the laws changing the rules and regulations of the labour unions are implemented and thus, she decided that she would have to oppose these laws as the wife of a labour union activist.

When Mrs Lakshmi was thinking about how to vent her opposition to these new laws, she then thought of an idea and thus she wrote a very detailed and attacking article in the editorial page of the newspaper about these new laws. When this article was published, it was both appreciated and gained a lot of traction as it was written by the mother of the Prime Minister of the country. When Anburasu heard of this, he exploded like a volcano and asked his mother in the house, "Why are you doing like this, Mother? I am your son who is the Prime Minister of the country but you are writing an article in the newspaper opposing the labour union laws which are going to be implemented by my government soon. Why?"

Why are you bringing embarrassment to your son and his government?”.

“Because I am totally against these laws and as I have the habit of always calling a spade a spade, I have vented out my opposition directly in this issue! As I was born as the daughter of a labour union leader, then married and lived with a labour union leader for whom the welfare of the workers was always paramount and who had also sacrificed his life for this cause, I understand their hardships and travails and I will do my best to oppose any law which is harmful to them, even if it is a law which is going to be implemented by my son who is the Prime Minister of the country!” Mrs Lakshmi thundered, like a lioness with rage flaring in her eyes while replying to her son.

Hearing his mother, Anburasu grew perplexed and he was shocked. “Why Mother? Why? ” He asked desperately and his mother replied firmly but defiantly as a person who had made up her mind, “As I am always on the other side of the labour union workers, Anburasu! Moreover, I am always first and foremost the daughter and the wife of the labour union leaders than the mother of the Prime Minister of the country and I also cannot be an ungrateful person who has forgotten her humble background!” finishing exasperatedly and also delivering a symbolic decisive blow to her son. The whole family was very shocked after hearing her and especially Anburasu, who felt like as someone had knocked him very hard on his head and brought him to face the reality, after hearing what his mother had told him...

Revenge

“How nice is it to have this tea? I missed this tea after so many years in England,” said Parameswaran Bear as he was sipping tea prepared by Muralitharan Elephant’s wife, Yamuna Elephant as he was sitting with his friend, Muralitharan in the living room of the latter’s house and was chatting with him. They both had met up after so many years in his house in Amazonapolis. They both had studied together in the famous Sylvester University but went on their own ways after completing their undergraduate degree. Parameswaran went to England after completing his higher studies and had worked there. He had returned to his hometown only recently when Muralitharan chose to remain in his native town.

Parameswaran was very happy and beaming with pride as he saw numerous awards and plaques being awarded to his friend for his work in the field of astrophysics. Muralitharan had also been a professor at various universities and colleges in Animal Land while pursuing his research. It was while he was looking at them, that this question hit his mind and he was also baffled by it. So, he decided to ask to his friend and clarify it. He asked his friend, “Hey Murali, you were the director of the National Scientific Council (NSC) of our country for the past four years since 2020. However, I was surprised when I heard that you were not being chosen for another term as the director of the NSC and instead another person has been chosen as the director of the NSC.”

Muralitharan laughed out loudly after hearing Parameswaran and he replied, “Okay Parameswaran! I will tell you the truth since we are in our house and only, we both are here. Actually, a week back before my term as the director was going to be completed, the management board of the National Scientific Council had gathered for a review meeting and all of us had come very early for the meeting, which was presided by the Federal Science and Technology Minister. The Federal Minister of Science and Technology and I had finished our respective opening speeches for

the meeting and were seated besides each other. The Federal Minister of Science and Technology, Arcus Giraffe was wearing a black coat and a red shirt and he had asked me how was it. I being a very frank person, openly stated to him that it was not looking good for him and he could instead have worn a coat and shirt of a lighter colour. The Minister's face shrank and his eyebrows tightened, indicating that he did not take it too well. Adding salt to the wound, some of the scientists and government officials who were seated in the same row as us, heard my remarks and laughed. Although I had said that I only said this for his own welfare and not for any other purpose such as insulting or mocking him, this had not gone down well with him and I could sense that he apparently took it as an insult.”

As Parameswaran stared him in shock after hearing this, Muralitharan however gently smiled and continued, “After this news of the appointment of the new director of the NSC had come, I too was surprised that why was I not being selected and another person was instead chosen as the director. Then I received the answer for this only a few days ago. I got the information from a confidential source in the government that it was a very close call for the director of the NSC between me and the other person and when it eventually boiled down to the matter of casting the votes of the cabinet council which usually selects the director of the NSC, both of us received two votes each from the council. However, the Federal Minister Arcus Giraffe had voted against me, keeping in mind the incident which happened last week and thus his was the decisive vote which resulted in me not getting another term as the director of the NSC! I also did not publicize and talk with anyone about this matter in public except for my family, as this would create unnecessary controversy and trouble for the confidential source which had provided me with this information, which I wished to avoid.”

“Besides this, since I am already about 60, I want to lead a peaceful and happy life with my family and grandchildren and thus I did not want to make this issue big. And, another important thing, Parameswaran, this matter is utterly confidential and you also must

not tell this to anyone. Is it clear?” asked Muralitharan as he finished with a grim expression on his face.

Parameswaran also nodded his head and assured him that this matter will remain with him and he will not divulge it to anyone. However, he became angry and disgusted as he placed his hands on his friend’s shoulders soothingly and asked “What type of injustice is this? Aren’t intellectuals and higher ranked government officials allowed to express even their views about the dress about the Ministers freely even if it is not liked by the matter? How can a Federal Minister just vote and prevent you from getting another term as the director of the NSC just because you had told him that his dress was not suited for him? This is very absurd and totally unacceptable! Everyone has the rights to freely express their opinions in democratic societies!”. However, Muralitharan just smiled and replied, “It is because not everybody, especially some people at the highest realms of the society do not like opposition and dissent since they are always uncomfortable for them! That is the reason why!” Parameswaran also agreed half-heartedly with his friend after hearing him.

Rules

The thought of going to Meenakshipuram, the capital of Mirugam City in Animal Land made Somanathan very excited. The city was touted to be an Information and Technology hub and some international software giants also had their offices there. Somanathan had just finished his education recently and he had received a job offer in a mobile phone manufacturing company there. He was now at the airport in Chennai, and waiting for his flight after having finished all the required procedures. Somanathan tried to use the internet in his mobile phone but the internet was not working for him. He had tried to get the connection in some other ways but he could not. “Oh, my goodness! Suddenly at the airport, this internet has stopped working. It was working even at home this morning and because of this, I cannot even check the news or Facebook. I hope that I am not missing something major!” He sulked. Then eventually he stopped trying to surf the internet in his phone and resumed waiting for his flight.

He soon left for his flight and had arrived in Meenakshipuram the next morning. When he was coming to the checking counter after collecting his luggage, he was surprised to see swarms of people standing in a queue opposite to him, holding their mobile phones. “Why are so many people standing there? What could be their problem?” he was wondering as he made his way to the checking counter and was waiting there for his turn. His turn soon came and he showed his passport and other documents to the officer, who was a cow. Somanathan smiled after the officer had finished checking his documents and thought that he could go after this. However, to his surprise, the officer had asked him to show his social media accounts. He asked, “Why are you asking me to show my social media accounts, Sir?” The officer was shocked and retorted, “Why ah? You do not know the new rule which came recently about 10 hours ago? According to it, all the people who are travelling to our country are supposed to show their social

media accounts at the airport and then only are they allowed to inside their country. “

Somanathan was angry and bit his teeth in anger and was grumbling. “I would have known of this law if my internet was working and I was able to read the latest news.” He then opened his social media accounts and showed them to their officer. The officer was checking them when he stopped at a few Facebook posts. He pointed them to Somanathan and asked, “Did you like some of the posts which were critical of our PM Johnson Lion? Somanathan was hesitant and was just staring at him before he nodded his head; in acknowledgment of his act. Then the officer puffed up and declared, “Sorry Sir! You cannot enter into our country! Please go to that queue and wait there till you return to your own country!”, he said; pointing to the queue opposite him.

Somanathan could not believe what was happening there. He said, “What is this, Sir? Just because I had liked some posts critical of your Prime Minister, you can’t tell me to go back to my country!” The officer replied, “Sir, I am not telling you to go back; it’s according to our new rule. According to it, people who had supported or liked posts critical of the central government are not allowed inside the country. I am sorry, Sir!”

Somanathan retorted,” How is this fair to foreign travellers like us, Sir? How can you expect people who live overseas and expect to know of this new law which was passed only 10 hours ago? What about people like me who could not access the internet on our mobile phones?”. The officer replied, “Sir, why are you asking me these questions? I am only working in the government and my duty is to obey and implementing this order, whether it was announced yesterday night or five days later! Things in this world change rapidly within a day or even a second! Sir, please go and stand in the queue, Sir without wasting our time! There are so many people waiting behind you!”

Somanathan was clearly unhappy and angry with all this what was happening here but he could not do anything.

Views

“This entire controversy that has arose from this speech is unnecessary and unwanted. Mr. Madhavan Duck has only expressed his views about the protests and he did not mean to provoke a riot or a protest through his remarks. He was only exercising his right to free speech as a citizen of the country.” Rajan Monkey and Sundaram Goat couldn’t believe themselves when they had seen on television, about how the National Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Joseph Giraffe had said about the remarks made by Madhavan Duck, the director of the National Horticultural Board about the protests against the Gambola dam in Xi Jiang City.

The state government of Xi Jiang City had proposed to build a huge farming complex called, Gambol Library in the state, in order to boost the agricultural sector in the state and also to usher in development in the state. However, this proposal was met with very strong opposition from the people and the farmers in the area where the agricultural complex was to be built, stating that various environmental problems might arise from this complex as a significant amount of land need to be acquired and it would also need to be flooded for it to be built. In addition to this, many thousands of people and farmers were very worried and voiced their apprehensions that they would be displaced from it if the complex is being built in the state. These protests soon started to gain momentum over the days and many prominent intellectuals soon joined the protest. It was in this situation that Mr Madhavan Duck had commented about these protests a few days ago that the protesters are protesting without knowing about the benefits of it and the protesters and the protests should be squashed very vehemently like squashing ants with a hammer.

His comments had created a huge controversy and he had received a huge backlash from various sections of the society. So, Rajan and Sundaram were wondering why was the Minister defending him. They were also very shocked when the prominent historian,

Jayachandran Rhinoceros was arrested last week when he asserted that the national monuments of the country is common for all and everyone has a right to it and they were not to be appropriated by certain forces. The reason behind his arrest was given that he was allegedly referring to the campaigns of the ruling party's leaders who had been requesting and trying consistently to build a fort dedicated to a prominent Hippopotamus chieftain from the 15th century inside the Kanaga palace which was built by the King Aadiveera Lion II by stating some reasons which became a huge controversy recently. His arrest also became a burning topic in the country and everyone criticized the government, accusing it of blowing up the matter out of proportion. However, the government did not budge and he was only released after the case had went to the court.

Sundaram and Rajan could not understand these incidents. "Hey Sundaram, what is happening in our country? The government arrested an intellectual based on the context which his speech was not even intended for but defended a government officer who was clearly telling to deal with the Gambola farming complex protests very severely!", asked Rajan. Sundaram replied, "Actually Raju, it is because not everyone likes everything!" and flashed a half-hearted smile.

The Interview

The panel of interviewers who were seated in front of Mr. Sadashivam were all in smiles after listening to his reply to their question. Then they proceeded to the next question, “What would your plan for the economy of the country if you get selected as the director of the economic council of the country?” and Sadashivam replied by speaking about his plan about developing the primary and tertiary sectors of the country and about how he would reduce the inflation of the country. The selectors were listening to him patiently and nodded. Then they began to see the research papers that were published by him and then began, “Oh Mr. Sadashivam! You have done a lot of research in the fields of international economics and labour economics over the past 25 years. What is your opinion about the national entrepreneurship scheme that has been launched to identify and groom potential entrepreneurs?”

Sadashivam thought for a while and then replied, “Actually this is a good scheme but encouraging entrepreneurs is not the only way forward to develop the economy but also it should be accompanied by infrastructure development and job creation. Besides this, the social infrastructure such as the health and education should be developed so that to ensure an all-round development of the country. This scheme can be modified and developed in a much better way to reap fruitful results!” Hearing his answer, the panel of interviewers were a bit taken back and were staring at him. Sadashivam thought for a moment that a sarcastic look had appeared in the faces of the members of the interviewing committee, but he was not too sure. Then the panel of the interviewers were then whispering with each other. Then they turned and looked at Sadashivam and told that, “Mr. Sadashivam, your interview is over. Please wait outside and the results of the interview will be communicated to you.” Sadashivam then thanked them and left the room.

Sadashivam too was standing with the other interviewees outside for a while and then a person from the room where the interview was conducted and announced the results of the interview from the post. Hearing the results, Sadashivam was shell-shocked to find that Illamaran Hippopotamus, a professor of political science for 25 years in a university in the state of Ahmednagar who had not been published even half as much as the research papers as him had been chosen as the director of the economic council of Animal Land. Sadashivam expressed his shock with another candidate who was standing beside him, “See Sir, I have over 30 years of experience of teaching and research in universities here and abroad and I have also published several research papers and written several famous books also. How can Mr. Illamaran Hippopotamus be selected ahead of me?”.

The other candidate also agreed with him and expressed his sympathy to Sadashivam. Sadashivam sulked angrily and went to the bathroom. However, while he was in the bathroom, he could hear two voices speaking outside and it was the peon elephants speaking to each other. They were saying, “Hey Raju, this Sadashivam does not know how to survive. He spoilt his chances of becoming the next director of the economic council.” Sadashivam was fuming as he heard him and the other peon also agreed with him. The other peon continued and laughed, “Who would want a person who would not agree with their views as the director? That’s why they have chosen Mr. Illamaran Hippopotamus! ”. “Yeah Raju!” the other peon also agreed with him. Finally Sadashivam learnt the reason why he was not selected for the position and he groaned as he realised the ways of the world.

Danger

Jonathan Chan Mouse was very relieved as he was standing in the counter in the airport where the people were standing in a queue to have their passports verified. He thought that he was very lucky to find and board this flight as he had booked the ticket only two days ago and after this, he would be far away from Animal Land. After finishing all procedures prior to the boarding of the plane, he went to a café in the airport and sat there. When he started to use his phone, “Hey Jonathan! What a pleasant surprise!” said someone and Jonathan was startled when he heard this familiar voice and he looked up. Then he smiled as he recognized the animal who had spoken and was also sitting beside him. It was his close friend; Ismail Goat.

Ismail and Jonathan were collegemates. They were also working together in the same company but Ismail had left the company a few years ago and had joined another company. Ismail started talking, “Hey Jonathan! How are you? Are you still working in Peters Electronics? What brings you to the airport?”. Jonathan replied, “I am fine, Ismail and I am still working in Peters Electronics. I...I... am going to go to Japan to visit my brother who is working there and to stay with him for some time,” with a bit of hesitation. Ismail noticed his hesitation and asked, “Jonathan, why are you hesitating? Is everything fine?”. “Yeah! Yeah! Everything is fine,” replied Jonathan, with a bit of hesitation and nervousness. Ismail became concerned after seeing that, “Ismail, do you have any problem? Please feel free to talk to me about your problem! I am your friend, isn’t it

“Okay fine! Ismail, “Jonathan replied and he turned around to make sure that no one was seeing them and started talking to him in a very low voice. “Ismail, you must have known about the rising attacks and murders of mice and other rodents since the past few years, due to the alleged reason that they are posing a nuisance to the public. Last week, my neighbour who is also a mouse, was

walking on the road when she was attacked brutally by a group of tigers, who accused her of causing inconvenience to the public in the road. Fortunately, she was rescued by some passers-by and also by some police officers who came to the spot after being alerted by some animals. She is now admitted in a hospital and undergoing treatment,” Ismail was shocked to hear this.

He was wondering why were the rodents unfairly targeted by everyone and why were these attacks on them being carried out. Jonathan continued, “So I became very scared and thought that I might become the next target for these animals and so I decided that I should flee from here and go overseas for some time, even for years until this problem is over. So, I decided to go to Japan where my brother was working and stay with him. After informing him, I started to search for flight tickets online and luckily found and booked a ticket on a flight to Japan today. Now I am just waiting to board the flight and reach Japan safely,” he said. Ismail also could not help but agreeing with him as he thought how things had turned against the rodents and mice in Animal Land.

Media

“Oh, my goodness? Did you read this article by the “The Animal Times” about the budget? It has heavily criticized the budget announced by our National Finance Minister Fernandes Owl and saying that it has offered nothing new to our economy and that it has totally neglected the primary sector of our economy and also not have focused on the welfare of our people. It has only focused on the secondary and tertiary sectors by announcing incentives for MNCs to set up their factories here and tax cuts.” Vasu was talking to his friend, Ali Cat by holding a copy of the paper. They both were sitting in the basement of their college hostel and their classes were over. They were waiting to meet the warden of the hostel and to speak with him about a matter.

“Yeah Vasu! Whereas the “the New Animal Post” has written that the finance minister has presented a budget which focuses on the economic growth of our country and has introduced several measures to boost the economic growth of our country. It has also mentioned about the new schemes in the budget such as National Port Development Scheme and other special incentives for farmers and the middle-class people, as to how the Budget has provisions for everyone. And our CM Veerabhadran Ox has also praised the Budget, terming it as a very progressive and inclusive budget, “replied Ali who was holding a copy of the “the New Animal Post”. “Ah! Speaking of CM Veerabhadran reminds me of the programme that I had watched on “White TV” last week when I had gone to my house. It had spoken about the famous steel tycoon of our country, Mr Walden Gorilla and his life; such as about his company, businesses and also about the community development projects that his company had undertaken in villages in many states.” “What? Has his company undertaken community development projects also?” asked Vasu.

Ali replied, “Yes, didn’t you know about this?.” Vasu replied, “No Ali! I did not know and I thought that he was only a very successful

businessman who had even acquired many other companies, based on a program that I had seen in “Black TV” some time back and he was also embroiled in many controversies about his business practices and it had also mentioned that there are a lot of cases registered against him and his various companies on various counts! ” After hearing Ali, Vasu became puzzled, “Why did they report about him like that?”

“Ha-ha! It is because the owner of the “Black TV” is Mr Pratap Mehta, whose father was Mr BH Mehta, one of the leaders of our state’s socialist party and “White TV” is owned by the general secretary of the ruling party in our state, Mr Chia Ming Cow. In addition to this, Mr Walden was a very close friend of our CM’s father and former National Minister, Mr Pursothaman Gorilla! , “replied Sriram as he was laughing and place his hands on Vasu’s shoulders. Vasu and Ali turned around, surprised to hear his laughter and they were shocked after hearing this information. “See Ali! We did not think about this! “ sighed Vasu.

A Strange and Interesting Journey

Clad in a black suit and a brown shirt with a pair of glasses, I descended on to the top of the stage, which had a large banner, “KAADA MOVIE PRESS MEET” behind it. The director, screenwriter and the heroine of the movie also came along with me. As we took our seats and when the press conference was about to begin, I basked in the glory and flashed a triumphant smile, upon seeing the news reporters swarming us and the photographers taking photos of us, especially me. I then took a quick glance around the auditorium and saw all the people present, I paused for a second when I saw a cute and chubby little child, standing besides his mother. He was wearing a yellow shirt and seeing him, my mind went back about 30 years ago, when this famous actor Ravindra Kumar was an ordinary kid named Palaniappan...

I clearly remember that I was about four or five years old back then and I too was wearing a yellow shirt, just like the boy whom I had seen today. I was standing outside our house and eating some sweets as I was seeing a cow going with its calves in the road. I enjoyed seeing them and was laughing to myself; I had always enjoyed seeing animals and observing how they behave since my childhood. I was still standing there when my mother came and saw me with the sweets in my hand. She chided me for taking the sweets and even eating them without her permission. I just flashed her a meek smile while she was still cross with me and took me inside our house.

I was the fourth child and the youngest in my family; I had two elder sisters and an elder brother before me. My father had a grocery shop in Trichy and my mother was a housewife. As I was the youngest in my family, I was naturally the apple of everyone’s eye in my family. I always got whatever I wanted and I spent my

childhood days, playing and enjoying with my siblings and cousins. So, I was not worried about anything and always enjoyed life as it was, without any expectations.

When I started my schooling at the age of five, I also had a nice time at the school when I was in my Lower Kindergarten (LKG); going to school in the morning at 9am, playing with the other kids and also eating food with them, and coming back to home in the evening when school gets over at 4pm. I clearly remember that I never had specific hobbies or interests at that time, except that I would play with my elder sisters during my leisure time. It was during this time that my parents took me to a movie theatre to watch a movie and I clearly remember that was the first movie that I had watched.

The movie was a Kamal Hassan starrer “Kalyana Raman” and seeing Kamal Hassan as a naïve man, with his teeth burgling out and him performing antics, I laughed a lot and enjoyed it. I also loved the film and was keeping on thinking about it when I got home after the movie. I imitated some dialogues spoken by Kamal Hassan from the film to my parents and family and they too laughed out aloud and were happy after hearing me, saying them. That was my first brush with cinema. As time passed by and I stepped into the teenage phase in my life, my voice had changed and I also grew older. I had lesser time for playing with friends and classmates as I found myself being saddled with books and having to study a lot and write examinations.

However, despite the work that I had, I always discovered a way to make some time and go to the theatre and to watch the latest movies that have been released. I had become such a big fan of movies. Seeing Rajinikanth coming majestically in the film “Murattu Kalai” and saying the famous dialogue, “I will chop your head off!” and Kamal Hassan as a thief in the movie “Guru” and beating up rowdies, I would also stand up and would be clapping and cheering for them, along with the audience. When I got home, I used to be so involved with the movies that I used to speak the dialogues said by Rajinikanth and Kamal Hassan to my parents and siblings. I would try speak the dialogues in the same tone and

modulations as Rajinikanth and Kamal did and my mother and siblings would praise me for this. This practice even found its way to my school, when I gradually became an expert in mimicry and would speak just like the actors in front of my friends and they also enjoyed it a lot.

My friends would directly come to me when they wanted to hear some dialogues from the movies for the second time and I too would grant their wishes without any hesitation. My mimicry skills reached to the next level where I used to even stand in front of my mirror and imitate the mannerisms in which the famous Tamil actors, Shivaji Ganesan or Kamal Hassan would walk in the movies. Seeing me doing this, my siblings would be laughing at me while my mother would get angry and shout at me, asking me whether I thought that I was Rajinikanth or Kamal Hassan and all this was a waste of time. She also would tell me to do my work, instead of doing this. I too lowered my head and nod my head obediently when she was scolding me.

However, despite my great love for movies, I somehow managed to strike a balance between my academics and movies and I always used to be a bit above average in my exams at school. So, my parents would not be so bothered about me watching films, except warning me not to watch too many films and not to come home late at night after watching them. Besides keeping an eye out for upcoming films, I would also would keep an eye out for the movie reviews or articles about films and enjoyed reading about film stars and movies in magazines and newspapers.

Seeing me walking and acting like film stars, my best friend Sekhar once told me that you have a great future in cinema and you will be a great actor. However, after hearing him, I laughed and dismissed all that and I replied that it is not possible to enter a cinema and become famous. I also added that I am not interested in entering cinema. However, fate had another script written for me.

After writing my 12th standard exams and passing it, I was standing at the crossroads of my life; I had to choose what would I be studying in college which would determine my future. As I had no

personal ambitions or goals, I did not know what to choose and resorted to my parents, to help me to choose my stream in college. They told me that I could study civil engineering as it had a lot of scope and so it would be very useful for me. I also agreed with them and started to study civil engineering in a college in Dindigul.

During my first year in college, my friend once took me to watch a drama in the college auditorium, which was put the college theatre team. It was a comedy drama about a family. I absolutely loved it and thus I started to watch dramas put by the drama often whenever I had the time.

Then, on one fine day, the moment finally arrived when I made the first step in the journey of my life. Interestingly, the strangest part of this strange journey is that it began with a word. I still remember this moment very clearly; college had ended early for me and I was going home by coming down the stairs. I was passing through the auditorium when I heard the word “Action!” from it and I stopped for a moment, surprised. I turned back and went into the auditorium to find out who had said it.

Then I found out that the college drama team was practicing for their upcoming drama and it was the director who had uttered that word, as a prompt to the actors to start acting. As I was very curious to see the rehearsal, I asked them whether could I see it and the team members replied that I could stay and watch the rehearsal. Seeing the actors speaking dialogues and changing their body expressions according to the situations, I fell in love with it and decided that this was my passion from now onwards. I had decided from that moment to enter the field of theatre and become an actor.

From then onwards, I started enquiring about when would the college theatre team would be having their auditions for their team and I was eagerly waiting for it. When the day for the auditions arrived, I went for the auditions and seized the opportunity like a tiger catching its prey and enacted the situations, which were given to me to the best of my ability. The senior members of the team

were very happy after seeing my performance and then selected me in their team.

I then attended the initial warm up sessions very enthusiastically and also with an aim to learn acting as much as I can. Following the warm up sessions, it was later in my first year in my college that I bagged my first starring role in a drama and I still remember it vividly. It was a fantasy drama about the love of a prince and a princess and my role was the friend of the prince. After seeing my performance in the drama, my classmates and friends were full of praises and their praises made me very happy.

After starring in dramas in supporting roles, I progressed to playing the lead roles in dramas. Whenever I was playing the role of a teacher, politician, scientist or Hamlet also on stage, I used to be showered with appreciation and praises from everyone about my acting and that would serve as a boost for me to continue acting. Seeing my passion and dedication towards acting, my friends in the college theatre team have praised me and told that I certainly had a future in acting. My parents also were very pleased with me regarding my foray into the theatre team and they also praised me after seeing my performances in college.

Then in my third year, I made another life-changing decision; I then decided to enter the field of acting and not engineering. I was very confident with this decision as I was very passionate about acting and believed that I could become an actor, if I put in some efforts. I then disclosed my decision to my parents after I had completed civil engineering and a storm thereby ensued at home. My parents were very angry at me for having chosen acting as my career option and they told me that it is extremely tough to break into cinema. So, I should rather work as an engineer.

However, I weathered this storm and stood very firm in my decision. I said that I love acting and I cannot work as an engineer as I didn't like it. I also explained to them that I would try to the best of my efforts, to get into cinema and requested them to give me two years' time. If I don't get a break in cinema then, then I

would automatically leave my wish of becoming an actor and work as an engineer, as per they wish.

My parents too finally relented after I had requested them for two years' time and agreed to my decision of trying to enter cinema and what transpired next was history. After debuting in the Tamil film Naan (Me) in 2000 and although I had initially struggled to get a break while playing small and supporting roles in the Tamil films, I then landed my first big break with the film Rendu Killadigal(Two Smart Boys) in 2005 and post its success, I have not looked back since then and then my success journey as a film star still continues with Kaada in 2015...

Alternative

Sakthivel was studying in his 10th standard back then and he was playing cricket with Narain and Chandra in school. First Sakthi was bowling but however how much he tried to bowl, either it went for wide or boundaries. He had even missed a good chance to run out Chandra when he was running. In addition to that, he felt very frustrated when Chandra came up to him, teasing him for his inability to run him out by shaking hands with him and he shrugged his hand off and was grumbling. The situation did not improve much when he was batting. Narain asked Chandra whether to bowl maiden overs or wickets and started to bowl maiden overs when Chandra gave his reply. When Naman bowled a bouncer that was going to hit Sakthi's face, that was the last straw. He was so angry that he was grinding his teeth and was about to yell at Narain and ask him whether did he want to injure him by bowling this. However, after that game, due to circumstances, he couldn't play cricket.

Alternative:

Sakthi had smashed Narain's bowling all over the ground by reverse-sweeping and pulling for boundaries. He caught the attention of his PT teacher who believed that he had a great potential and began to coach him in cricket. Soon he began to make rapid strides in cricket and improve his batting such that in a span of years he made it to the state Ranji team. He eventually went on to don the India team colours and established himself as one of the premier batsmen in the world by smashing bowlers all over the ground.

The Truth:

Years passed by since that incident and Sakthi also finished his school education and eventually his graduate degree in journalism and was in the hunt for a job. However, no matter which newspaper office he tried, he just couldn't get a job as a journalist in those offices. He had tried on the online magazines also, but it

was of no use. Then after a long struggle, he had found a job in a newspaper in Chennai as a reporter and had settled down in his job peacefully, writing articles and editorials.

One day while he was returning from his office, he happened to chance upon a poster of a movie and suddenly his childhood love for films sprang up and he also remembered that it was his childhood desire to become a famous scriptwriter and director. Then he decided that from this moment onwards that, he would work towards his dream by writing some scripts for films whenever he had time and work towards achieving his goal. From that day onwards, Sakthi always used to sit down, to think of some ideas for films and write scripts based on them in his notebook. Then, while he was working in the newspaper, he also on the other hand, began searching for producers and famous directors whom would accept his scripts. Finally, after struggling for a long time and after many trials and tribulations, he got the eye of the famous director M.M. Pandu who had directed some box-office hits who provided him the opportunity to write the script for his next film. That laid the foundation of Sakthi's long and successful film career and his career graph has always been an upward curve since then...

15 years later and Mr RM. Sakthivel, a tall, dark-complexioned man with dark eyes was now one of them most sought-after names in the industry. Dressed in a black tuxedo at an awards ceremony and sitting stylishly in the front row, he chuckled when a director asked him what he would have done if he hadn't got into the field of cinema and also wondered how his life would have changed if he had chosen cricket instead of cinema...

Election Campaigning

Five years ago, this news had sent shockwaves around the country. Everybody was very surprised when they learnt of the order issued by the Election Commission against the Prime Minister Premkumar Lion and the Nationalist Party of Animal Land(NPA) during an election campaign in Meenakshipuram in the 2044 general Elections.

Addressing a rally of party workers PM Lion had said, “The leader of the Socialist Party of Animal Land(SPA), Mirudan Cheetah has a big family of seven sons and three daughters and there are also reports of many scandals that his children and their businesses have gotten into. There have also been a lot of cases filed against his children. This is an indication that Mirudan Cheetah has failed to take care of his family and raise his children well. Therefore, how can he effectively lead the country as the Prime Minister if his party wins the election? So, I urge you not to vote for him and his party and instead vote for the NPA which has always given a responsible and efficient government.”

His statements had sparked off a huge controversy and he himself had faced a huge backlash for making such statements, not only from the leaders of the SPA but also from the other parties. The SPA had filed a complaint regarding the PM’s speech to the Election Commission(EC), saying that the PM had insulted their leader and levelling false allegations at him and his children. The EC, too after hearing his speech through the video, had deemed it as inappropriate and against the code of conduct of the elections. It had then subsequently banned the PM from campaigning for 72 hours for the general elections. It had also warned him not to speak like this during any other election campaign or else he would be banned from campaigning in the future altogether. This news had soon spread like wildfire around the country and people had praised the EC for its courageous, yet impartial action regarding this matter.

Some sections of the people had even attributed the action of the EC due to the fact that it was headed by Vijayaraghavan Crocodile , who was the Chief Election Commissioner and a person with extraordinary courage, commitment and dedication towards his duty. He had also introduced a lot of successful and tough measures during the various elections in the country to ensure the smooth conduct of the elections.

As the time rolled by, the leadership of the Election Commission had also changed hands; Vijayaraghavan Crocodile had left and Ravinder Sharma took his place in 2049. Mr. Sharma had also served as the Secretary of Commerce and Industry in the Government of Bunderban from 2035-2040, during the period when the incumbent Prime Minister Lion was the Chief Minister of the state. Mr Ravinder Sharma was famous for introducing many social welfare schemes in Bunderban during the tenure of Mr. Lion, which was successful.

After he had taken charge, the 2049 general elections had come. PM Lion too was back afresh after successfully a five-year term which was marked by high economic growth and other achievements between the animals and humans, which had boosted his popularity among the people and the NPA was also tipped to win the general elections by a landslide. Thus, the general elections turned out to be a very fierce contest between political parties and leaders who were embarking on whirlwind campaign tours across the country and making lavish promises to the people on the hope of winning the elections and forming the next government in Animal Land.

It was in this situation that PM Lion during an election campaign rally in the state of Dazaka, elaborated about the achievements of his government in great detail and also about the plans and schemes that his government would implement when it was voted into power for a second term. Lastly, he gave the finishing touches to his speech by saying that, “My dear and beloved citizens of Animal Land, as you all know, the state Dazaka has always been a very arid region and thus it has always faced many obstacles as infrastructure facilities such as hospitals and roads have not been

able to be developed with ease here. Our government has always put in the utmost efforts to improve the infrastructure of the region and usher in the development. Now, if we are bestowed with the power of serving the people of Animal Land, the camel population of Animal Land and especially Dazaka will be one of the key targets. Our friends, the camels have always prone to certain problems and our government will aim to remove their problems as much as possible and make their lives happy. We will implement various schemes such as the Camel Nutritional Development Scheme and Camel Jobs Generation Scheme for their benefit and our new administration will be an administration for the camels!”. As he finished, PM Lion’s speech was met with rapturous and thunderous applause and it was also very well appreciated and received by the citizens of the state.

However, as much it was met with applause in Dazaka, it was also met with heavy criticism on various fronts both in Dazaka and across the country as politicians, political parties, prominent intellectuals and also citizens had complained that the PM was targeting the camel population in the state of Dazaka through his election speech which was clearly against the code of conduct of the elections and thus they demanded that the EC should take action against the PM for this speech. Many political parties and leaders had also submitted a joint complaint to the Chief Election Commissioner and he also assured them that he would investigate the matter.

The chief election commissioner noted down of the complaint and investigated the matter. However, his report dropped a major bombshell the next day through its report on it. The report dismissed the complaints of the Opposition parties and clearly stated that the PM Lion’s speech was perfectly within the limits of the code of conduct and that the PM did not target the camels during his Dazaka campaign speech. It also added that that he was only promising them that certain schemes and programs will be carried out for their welfare if his party came to power. This report of the EC also sent shockwaves around the country, just like five years ago but in a completely opposite manner. Everyone was very

baffled and confused and they could not understand why and how did the EC not take action against the PM, when what he spoke was clearly against the rules of the Election Commission. This question continued to linger in the minds of the people for quite some time.

Secret

Marcie Harrison, or Marcie as he used to called at school by his friends, was a tall body with short and streamlined hair, who had large eyes and wore spectacles. If anyone thought that because he wore spectacles that he was a nerd, then they were completely mistaken. Marcie was anything but a nerd. He would sit in class, most of the time, chit-chatting and cracking jokes with Henry who was his close friend and everyone else, rather than sitting and listening attentively to the teachers. However, what surprised him was the fact that despite Marcie not being a studious boy, he would always pass his exams with flying colours. When Henry asked him why, Marcie smiled and just replied that he would study one day before the exams and his performance in the examinations was due to his instincts.

Even after their school days, Marcie and Henry remained in contact with each other through writing letters or visiting each other's homes. While Henry pursued political science at his undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and went on to become a lecturer, Marcie studied business administration and wanted to become a businessman, which was his childhood dream.

Then, suddenly, in 1995, about 20 years ago, Marcie met Henry and told him that he was going to Cook City from Animal Land and start a construction business there. The bank had given him a loan to start his business. When Henry had asked him how was he going to start his business, Marcie laughed and told him, "I am going to climb up the ladder step-by-step, man! I am going to first work in the field, learn the basics of this business and then start my own business!" "How can you..." Before Henry could finish his question, Marcie put his hands on his shoulders and assured him, "Do not worry, man! I can take care of myself and I have the hard work, determination and intelligence to become a great businessman and you will see my name along with my story in the newspaper!" he declared and left. Then, as years passed and one day, while he was in college, he was shocked when he was shown a

newspaper which had the photo of Marcie and a story about him. Yes, he had seen him in a newspaper, but the article about him was not about his success and fame, but was about him being arrested on the murder of a high-ranking government official from the Cook City. The report also said that Marcus Harrison, an immigrant from Animal Land and a leading businessman in Cook City, might have been a spy of the Animal Land government and that he was in possession of some very confidential information about the internal affairs of the government of Cook City and that he also might even had a role to play in the death of the government official.

The government of Cook City had also said that the murder of the high-ranking government official was an international conspiracy and that even Marcie had also colluded with international agents and spies on this murder case. However, on the other hand, Animal Land dismissed all these charges against him and clearly stated that he was an Animal Land national who had gone to Cook City to start his own business.

Henry, too like his home country, firmly believed that his friend was not a spy and hoped that he would be acquitted from his case. Meanwhile in Cook City, investigation regarding the case started and after it was completed, the Supreme Court of Cook City declared that Marcie was guilty of on the count of murder and was sentenced to death. Animal Land immediately chose to file an appeal to put on hold this ruling on the grounds that the police and lawyers of Cook City was not conducted in a fair way as Animal Land diplomats and lawyers were not allowed to meet him, in the International Court of Justice(ICJ) in the Hague, the Netherlands.

The case too was heard at the ICJ and after the investigations were completed, the ICJ concluded that the trial was indeed unfair and it announced that the death sentence of Marcie would be put on hold till further notice. After this, eventually Cook City agreed for the Animal Land diplomats to meet Marcie and Animal Land lawyers and diplomats arrived in Acropolis to meet him. After meeting him, the case was again reopened and after a protracted legal battle of 4 years, Marcie was finally innocent and acquitted. Marcie then

left Acropolis after this and returned to Animal Land . Hearing the news of his acquittal, Henry felt very relieved and happy. He contacted Marcie and told him that he wanted to meet him one day. So, one day, they had agreed to meet in a restaurant.

When Marcie came and Henry looked up and saw him, he noticed that he still had the same big eyes and wore spectacles when he was young, but the only difference was that he was more built-up now and white hair was beginning to appear on his head. Then, they started talking and Henry told, “Finally Marcie! I was so happy that the case was over and you got released by the court! You must have suffered a lot during these two years in prison! Still, you came out of this due to your willpower, honesty and determination! I also firmly believed that my friend was not a spy and you had not played a part in the murder of the high-ranking government official of Cook City. Marcie patiently listened to and cleaned his mouth after drinking his coffee. He then looked around and made sure that no one paying attention to them. Then, he lowered his voice and said to Henry, “Hey Henry! I absolutely played no part in the murder of the government official from Cook City and have no idea of the international conspiracy behind it. I had also not even met him even once when I was in the country. However, I am giving a very important and yet secretive thing to you as you are my best friend of childhood. However, you must not even breathe a word about it with others. Understood, Henry?”

Although Henry wondered that what could be such a secret that his friend was telling him to not to tell to others, he still nodded his head and assured that he will not talk about this to others due to his trust in his friend. Marcie also smiled and handed over a small red and yellow card in a cover to him and left. When Henry went home and opened the cover and saw the card, Henry was breathless and speechless and he felt as if the world around him had turned upside down and he could not even comprehend what was going on around him. The card read, “Marcus Harrison, Special Officer on Deputation, Foreign Intelligence Unit, National Intelligence Board of Animal Land” and if this was true, then was his friend really a ...

Social Media

The auditorium was filled with thousands of people and it resembled like a rally. The stage was set and it looked very huge. At about 5.30pm, the actress Priya and the director Rehman had come in and the whole area broke into ferocious rounds of applause. Rehman who was a very famous director who had delivered commercial hits like “Yasagan” and “Niyam” while Priya was a very popular actress who had paired up with stars such as Yanesh and Karguru.

And, about 6pm, a tall and dark-skinned man with a very dynamic personality had entered into the auditorium and soon the whole auditorium had begun chanting his name,” Long live our leader, Rishi! Long live our rising star, Rishi!” and began cheering and applauding him. And the hosts on the stage soon announced, “The hero of the film has arrived! Shall we start the audio launch of the film now?” and the audience also shouted in unison, indicating that they could go on. One of the hosts said, “The audio launch function of the film “FIFIA” will be happening now. First, we would like to call upon the director of the film to speak about it!” and initiated the proceedings. After a couple of speeches by the principal cast of the film and few other notable personalities, Rishi had come to stage to speak.

He greeted the audience, “Welcome Chennai!” and the audience too returned his greetings with loud shouts and cheers. Seeing this huge and raucous response given by the people to actor Rishi, Mark who was sitting in the far end of the auditorium with his friend Manikandan, became surprised and asked him, “Hey Mani! Is Mr. Rishi such a popular hero in Tamil cinema? He has got such a huge popularity!”

Manikandan smiled at his Dutch friend who was currently studying with him in college and replied, “Yes Mark! He is a very popular actor in Tamil cinema and is also one of the top stars in the Tamil cinema right now!” Hearing Manikandan, Mark’s curiosity increased and he continued to ask him, “How did he become so

popular? Did he work his way up to the top or does he have a particular style of acting!” Manikandan shook his head and said, “Nah! He became so popular due to his gymnastic skills !” Mark could not contain his surprise and said, “Due to his gymnastic skills?.” Manikandan nodded and Mark further probed him, “How?”

Manikandan explained, “Yes Mark! Would you believe that if I told you that about three years ago, this Rishi was known as Kumarasean and he was the son of a farmer in a village in Thoothukudi who was pursuing his undergraduate degree, who was very passionate about gymnastics. When someone took a video of him performing difficult and mind-blowing gymnastic skills and uploaded it on the social media, it changed his fortune tonight and he became an overnight sensation as millions of people became his fans! Moreover, when this video was seen by some of the film directors, Kumaresan immediately hit the jackpot as they started offering him the lead roles in their films. When the first film in which he had debuted as a hero became a huge success, then Kumaresan began his career as the film star Rishi who is currently one of the top stars in Tamil cinema right now! And another trivia for you, Mark! His films are always known for their stunts and gymnastics!”

Mark could not believe what he had heard from his friend and he asked Manikandan, “Hey Mani! Did he become a huge film star due to his gymnastic skills? Oh, my Goodness! This is unbelievable! ”. To this, Manikandan started laughing and said, “Yes, my friend! That is why social media does-Noticing and bringing ordinary people into the public spotlight and turning them into stars!”

Genie in the lamp

“U-18 District Cricket Tournament: Victory International defeats DNS School; Krishna takes 4-19!” after reading this article in the newspaper about their classmate, Aadidev and Bhushan were very surprised and started thinking about how he was about a year ago when they were studying in 9th std. However, their thinking was interrupted by the sound of girls going and surrounding Krishna once he stepped inside the class and Krishna also was talking very freely with them. Aadidev and Bhushan just turned and looked back at him and then began to think about last year...

Back then, the image of a boy coming punctually to class every day and not missing even a class, flashed through their minds. Krishna did not talk with or mingle with anyone that much, except for his close circle of friends such as Ramya, Vidya, Ashok and Wasim. He used to be reading books during free hours and was very nice and polite to his classmates and teachers. He also would not miss any of the deadlines and submit all of his assignments in time.

It was in this context that the incident occurred. It was the games hour of the class and they were all in the basketball court and playing a game of basketball. The practice of the school cricket team was also going on in the field besides the basketball court. Krishna initially declined to play basketball but his classmates eventually coerced him to play and he also agreed. While they were playing, one of their classmates passed the ball to Krishna who would then have to shot the ball inside the basketball ring. When Krishna threw the ball for shooting, he threw it so far away that it landed on the boy who was bowling and hit his head accidentally. The boy immediately fell and injured his head.

Seeing him getting hurt, Krishna immediately ran and towards him and said, “I am very sorry! Are you fine? Is it hurting a lot?”. Then suddenly the boy who was batting, snapped at him and said, “Hey! From where do you come from, to spoil our cricket practice? See, now you have hit his head! Now how will he bowl? We have an important match coming soon! Who will bowl in his place? Will

you bowl?” “I am sorry!” apologized Krishna with remorse and regret.

However, that boy was not willing to let this go. “What sorry? Can you bowl? Do you think that it is easy to learn how to bowl and start bowling? Hmm... you probably don’t know the basics of cricket only ! How will you know bowling? Can you at least bowl a proper ball without it being a short ball or a wide? Bowl at least a proper over and then we will...” “Stop it!” thundered a voice and everyone turned back and looked in shock. Krishna’s eyes had turned red and he was breathing hard. He was clutching his fists and shouted, “What? I know that I have done a big mistake and am apologizing to him! However, you are coming in between and shouting at me!”, he shouted and continued, “What did you say? I don’t know even the basics of cricket? Didn’t you ask me to bowl at least a proper over?” he pointed to the person and shouted, “NOW! I am saying in front of everyone over here! I will learn bowling and become very skilled in it in six months!” he thundered and snapped his fingers. “I will become a great bowler and will baffle you with my good deliveries! THIS IS MY CHALLENGE!” he finished at last, still breathing heavily.

The whole class hadn’t recovered from their shock. Is this all true? Was the same silent and polite Krishna that they had known? Where was all of this anger and aggression hiding within him for all this while?...

Aadidev and Bhushan were still shocked by thinking of this incident. “Hey Bhushan! From then on, Krishna had changed completely and he started training vigorously to become a good bowler. Now we can see where has this training and hard work got him to!” said Aadidev. Bhushan also agreed with him, “Yeah bro! But I still cannot forget the day when Krishna became so angry! It was like seeing another Krishna altogether! Sometimes we don’t know about the character traits of people completely and we do not know which genie is there is there in which lamp in this world...”

Similar

It was a busy and usual day at the ITIC Market City in Whitefield. It was a constant screaming of people going in and out of the huge blue and glass plated mall, which greeted the people who entered in with the huge posters of famous animation movies such as “Shriek”, “Minions” and “Jurassic Park” under the heading “World’s Most Famous Movies”. Ashwin and Shankar too were about to enter inside the mall. They were both engineering students who were in the final year and were also close friends.

“Aah! I am so angry today! I must eat 2 to 3 chicken burgers at the KFC once we step inside the mall!” thought Shankar. However, Ashwin had knocked him over his head and said, “Hey Shankar, you are already talking about food before we are about to step inside the mall itself! My goodness! We will certainly have something when we go inside as you are hungry! However, please do not talk about food now itself!” Shankar frowned after hearing his friend and shrugged his shoulders. Then he also followed Ashwin as they were about to enter the mall when Shankar noticed an old man standing in front of the mall and smiling at the posters. Intrigued to know why the man was smiling, he started walking closer to him, dragging Ashwin along with him, despite the latter’s protests. When they had finally approached him, Shankar turned around and looked at him and was curious.

However, when he had seen him, he found himself gaping in shock and could not believe his eyes. Was it really him? When he saw the elderly person again; the same blue eyes which was full of radiance, the golden spectacles and the almost bald head, except for some occasional grey hair, confirmed that he was the person which he had thought. Seeing him staring at the old man intently, Ashwin asked, “Hey Shankar! Why are you staring at this old man for quite a long time?” while pointing his hand towards the old man. However, before replying to him, Shankar tapped him on his head twice and chided him silently, “Hey Ashwin! Don’t shout and raise your hand and point towards him! Don’t you know who he is? The

famous writer Stanley Morris who has written amazing and best-selling novels such as *Kate and Katherine* and *63'* and he has even won the Man Booker prize about two years ago for his novel *Life* which was about life during the Great Depression in the USA!"

Shankar, after hearing his friend and the name of the writer which had mentioned, blinked his eyes in amazement and too stared at the person intently. Upon staring at the person intently, he also realized that it was indeed the great writer Stanley Morris. Both friends were very happy that they had met such a great writer and they greeted him and introduced themselves to him as their great fans. However, Morris was very surprised, "Oh! Are you both my fans? Am I the great writer Stanley Morris.?" They were both stunned. Vijay tried to explain to him, "Sir! What is this, Sir? What happened to you Sir! Being such a great writer who has written best-sellers such as *The Charles Peckers* and *Life*, why are you asking that if are you Stanley Morris? Sir, why have you come to India?"

Morris became even more amused and became more surprised, "Oh! Have I written such bestsellers? I don't know who am I actually! I also don't know how I came here and that's why I have been standing here for quite some time..." Ashwin and Shankar could not explain his shock and then in a flash of a second, Shankar felt like as if something had hit his head. He suddenly remembered something about him and then dragged Ashwin to a corner and said, "Hey Shankar! Don't you know that Mr. Morris suffers from short term memory loss and I have read about it frequently in the newspapers! I just remembered this just now!"

Then Ashwin also remembered this after being told by his friend and then it hit upon his head also and said, "Hey Shankar! I too remember that he has memory loss quite often! What are we going to do now, Shankar! How are we going to manage Mr. Morris!".Shankar also nodded his head and started to be immersed in deep thought about how to deal with this great writer Morris. When he turned around after some time, he was shocked to see Morris now standing beside him and staring at him. He stood there staring at Morris for some time in shock, not knowing about what

to do. He only came back to his senses when his friend shook him and he remembered what he was thinking about. When Ashwin asked him why did he become so shocked for a while, he whispered to him silently in reply that it was due to the reason that Morris had suddenly come and had stood beside him.

Then, Ashwin nudged him and told him softly in Tamil, “Hey Shankar! Mr. Morris must have a reason behind him coming and suddenly standing beside you. Come on! Go and ask him why is he standing beside him! Go!”

Shankar too nodded his head and cleared his throat and when he was about to ask Morris, Morris himself smiled and asked the both, “Why are you so shocked to see me standing beside you? What were you both talking about softly? Is it about me?” Ashwin shook his head and was about to say something, but Morris himself went on and handed over a piece of paper to them and said, “I was wondering how to do and how to go back home to my country, when I started searching the pockets in my shirt and pants and found this piece of paper. I guess that it would be the name of the place of my current place of residence. Can you please drop me at this address?” Shankar and Ashwin took the paper from him and saw that the address of a hotel had been written in that piece of paper. Feeling very relieved, they booked a taxi and the three of them began to go to the hotel.

“I absolutely love his books. They are always very interesting and full of unexpected twists and turns and in fact, his work has always spanned over a variety of genres such as crime, romance and historical fiction and he has excelled in all of them!” said Shankar excitedly as he was talking with Ashwin when they were going with Morris in the taxi.

Ashwin also agreed with him, “Yes Shankar! I am not such a great reader of books, but I also became his die-hard fan after you had introduced one novel of his to me and I loved it. Then, I have been reading all his novels since then and loved them all! His novel, “Murder in an Amphitheatre” is such an amazing novel and it has such an amazing plot and engrossing story. On the other hand,

“Happy Days” is such a beautiful romantic novel set in India and England. It was so touching, especially its unexpected ending.”

“Yes Ashwin! And I also never expected such an ending when I read the novel!” agreed Shankar as they were discussing about Morris’ works. While they were busy engaged in such a serious discussion, Morris was sitting at the other end of the taxi and smiling at them. “What a pity! He does not even know that we are discussing about his novels!” thought Shankar. Then Shankar started saying, “I like one of his earlier novels, “Matrix Inside the Frame” a lot. Its plot revolves around a businessman, housing agent, a farmer and a student and how the incidents in their lives are inextricably connected with them. It is such a thrilling and fascinating novel!”.

Ashwin, who was taking part actively in the discussion till then, seemed hesitant after hearing this and thought deeply and said, “Hey Shankar! This novel reminds me of a recent film which I watched and there is a superb scene in the film which involves the scene of a student’s brother will be needing blood during a medical emergency and another student will be donating the blood and save the latter’s brother. Following this, the student who has donated the blood to the brother will be acquainted with another student’s mother which will then develop into an everlasting bond and the other half of the film proceeds in this man...”

However, Shankar did not allow him to complete and interrupted him, “Hey Ashwin! There is also a very similar scene in this novel which reminds me of this film but in that, it will be slightly different as it will be the businessman’s wife will be needing blood and the farmer will be donate it and it will not have a third character! This film and this novel seem to have similar plot points. What is the name of this film which you had mentioned?”.

Ashwin replied, “Four Stories and it is a Tamil language film directed by Trichy Prakash...” and Shankar asked him, “Trichy Prakash? Interesting. Isn’t he the person who has directed blockbuster commercial films such as Puli(Tiger in Tamil) and Vannil Suriyan(The Sun in the Skies)?” and Ashwin nodded his

head. Shankar continued probing Ashwin, “Hey Ashwin! Can you provide me a gist of the film?” asked Shankar.

Ashwin said, “The film revolves around four students around a university in Chennai and how their lives become gradually interconnected after they stay in the same apartment.” Shankar noted, “Even Morris’s novel is about how the lives of the famer, businessman, housing agent and a student but these four people are not related to each other in any way...”. While they were speaking, Morris who was seating silently at the other end of the taxi, heard his name being mentioned and promptly turned towards them and asked, “What? Have I written a novel? Does my novel talk about how the lives of four people become interconnected? What is the name of my novel which you both are talking about?”

Ashwin and Shankar thought to themselves, “Oh my goodness! He is still does not know who he is!” and then when Morris questioned them again about the novel, Ashwin promptly responded and told him the name of the novel. Upon hearing the name of the novel, Morris became immersed in deep thought and thought about it a lot. When Shankar asked him if he could remember anything about the novel, Morris shook his head silently and replied that he could not remember anything about the novel. Then he again turned back towards the other end of the taxi.

Ashwin and Shankar again looked at each other and shook their heads silently. Then they continued with their discussion and Shankar remarked, “Ashwin, the novel *Matrix Inside the Frame* and the Tamil film *Four Stories* appear to be quite similar, yet dissimilar as well. This is very interesting! The novel was written by Mr. Morris and published in 1989. When was this film released?”. Ashwin replied, “It was released in 2015.”

Shankar again repeated the year of the release of the film, ‘2015? That is about two to three years ago?’ and Ashwin nodded his head. Shankar went on, “The year of the publication of the novel-1989 and the film was released in 2015. So, there is a gap of between 26 years between the novel and the film. Hmm... Do you think that Trichy Ganesh might have been inspired by this novel or

its novel? It could be well be an instance of inter-textuality...”. Once Ashwin heard this, he became furious and shook his head seriously and said, “NO! NO! MY dear friend! Why are you thinking like this? It is never like that! Trichy Ganesh has mentioned about how he had got the idea for making this film in an interview to a television channel and he has clearly stated that he was inspired by some real-life incidents to make this film and he had directed this film so that it would be different from his previous films! If he had taken inspiration from Morris’ novel, then he would have stated that explicitly in his film itself!”

“Oh!” said Shankar and he went on, “So, was he inspired by some real-life incidents to direct the film Four Stories? Oh! My goodness! Then I was wrong! Morris has also said that he had derived the idea to write Matrix Inside the Frame based on the then social and political climate of the United Kingdom and he also said that his novel was a commentary on capitalism and individualism. I had unnecessarily confused both the novel and the film and you had also become angry due to this issue!” Ashwin also became happy when he heard this from his best friend and heaved a sigh of relief. He said, “Thank God! You have at last realized that the novel and the film are different!”

However, Shankar again started to think and he remarked, “Yes! The novel and the film are different pieces of work, but there are based on the same concept!”. Ashwin could not control his anger and berated his friend loudly, “My holy God! I thought that you will leave this matter altogether, but again you are hanging on it. This is an aspect of you which makes others and even me angry: you always insist that your rabbit has three legs! My goodness! There are so many pieces of work such as art, film and music which deals with concepts such as time travel differently such as the novel The Time Machine by H.G.Wells and the Hollywood film Predestination, which was directed by Michael and Peter Spierig, which was released last year. Why can’t the novel Matrix Inside the Frame and the Tamil film Four Stories be examples of this?”.

Seeing him shouting, Morris again turned back, placed his shoulder into his hands and told him to remain calm. Seeing the famous writer, Ashwin smiled and became calm. Seeing his friend getting angry, Shankar also bite his tongue and realized his mistake.

By this time, the taxi had stopped and the driver also said, “Sir, your destination has come!”, pointing to the hotel which was written on the piece of paper which Morris had given it to them. While Morris and Ashwin got down of the taxi happily, Shankar also chided himself for confusing both the film and the novel unnecessarily and then got down of the taxi and went inside the hotel with Mr. Morris and his best friend.

About The Author

K. Saravanapperumal is an avid reader and writer who loves reading and writing and his other interests include research, history, cricket and psychoanalysis. His favourite authors are Charles Dickens, R.L.Stevenson, Jules Verne and the Tamil writer Kalki Krishnamurthy. Swami Vivekananda, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and the famous broadcasting journalist Edward Murrow are his role models in life. He was born in Singapore and now resides in Madurai, India with his parents.

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