

# **Monks' Dilemma**

## **Monks' Dilemma**

**Dr. S.M. Jain**



**ABD PUBLISHERS**  
Jaipur      New Delhi

## Preface

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The central theme and story of the novel is about redundancy and futility of the parasitic institute of monks and others of their genre, the mahants, purohits, pundits, astrologers, soothsayers, tantrics, occultists, quakes and of their ilk. They are no more benefactors or useful in any way to individuals or society. Overtime all institutes of this genre have degenerated abysmally. They are all escapists, running away from and shirking the responsibilities, hardships, vicissitudes, toil and turmoil of a householder who labours hard physically or mentally to earn for supporting his family and also these parasites. They are professionals of a sort, practising their respective expertise in varied forms of chicanery, sleight of hand or mind proclaimed as miracles by them, exploiting the ignorance and sentiments of gullible people by enticing with gains and solutions of problems without commensurate effort and frightening with harmful consequences if they are not obeyed. It is obsession and superstitious belief system of people by and large towards irrational allurements to get benefits without effort on which these parasites thrive and prosper. Our revered canonical scriptures profess and postulate the scientific principle of cause and effect and that it is one's own deeds good or bad which fructify in beneficial or harmful results and there is no short cut or alternative. It is unfortunate that people do not follow the very scriptures they adore and even worship.

In yore during the prehistoric era of Rishabdeo, Ramayana and Mahabharata there used to be iconic persons exalted as Rishis and venerated highly for their immense contribution for welfare of mankind. They were not escapists of the sort of present day monks and mahants and their ilk. They married and raised families and earned by hard work to maintain themselves and their families. They were highly talented experts in various fields of science and technology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy, medicine and what not.

The objective of the novel is to establish logically and conclusively the redundancy and uselessness of parasitic exploitative institutions of monks and mahants etc. by presenting the real life characters and factual events and inter alia impress the need for rational and scientific temper and attitude Visa- Vis superstitions and obsessive blind, illogical and false beliefs in mantra- tantra and tricks, being propagated by monks, mahants and other charlatans for their own selfish gains, monetary and of name and fame at the cost of toiling masses. It is readers alone who will judge as to how successful the effort is.

**Dr. S.M. Jain**

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## Foreword

Normally the word 'fiction' is taken to mean something contrary to reality. In literature, however, as a genre it signifies reshaping and reproduction of facts in consonance with the wishes of the author.

Shri S.M. Jain - a prolific writer and fierce critic of everything that flies in the face of reason – in his book “The Monks’ Dilemma” has exposed the system of Monks and Nuns among the Jains ostensibly but in all creeds really. The story is interesting and the events as they proceed capture the attention of the reader leaving no space for any doubt or questioning.

The language of the novel is suitable to the cause he has undertaken to serve and the interest of the reader remains unflagging throughout the book. The overall impression the reader gets is one of emancipation from the age-old customs and ritualism which have thrived under the veneer of religion.

The author deserves congratulations for the boldness, lucidity and rationality his book contains.

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## Introduction

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I had a rare privilege of going through the manuscript of Shri S.M. Jain's novel entitled the "*Monks Dilemma*". It is imbued with several messages. Three of them seem to me of great social importance.

The storage of the novel resolves round the two present day forward looking youth, Deepti from a Rajput Family of Jaisalmer and Deepak from an Oswal family of Jhadol near Udaipur. Their matrimonial knot is a clear message to the grown up young boys and girls that the caste and creed must not come in the way of such all important relationship.

The second message relates to the age old outdated institution of Monkhood. It is nothing but perpetuation of rank parasitism prevalent in the society. Enough of it, now it must go. Every able bodied person must work to earn his bread.

The traditions die hard. In this novel Deepti and Deepak fulfil that impossible looking task through their persuasive and reasoning skill. They manage to have the consent of Acharya Vinaysagar to convene a broad based conference to discuss the relevance of monkhood.

The brilliant "Deepak and Deepti duo" and other like minded intellectuals at the conference, by their facts, figures and irrefutable arguments, carried the day. They were successful in convincing an overwhelming number of the presentees about

the futility of the monkhood. The reversal of monks and nuns to normal household life began. The return of the Acharya to Grihast life is the climax of the story.

The third message comes from Deepak, who establishes "Deepshree Rehabilitation Centre" to promote the cause of education, biodiversity and training of simple technical skills at Jhadol. That way he shows the path to the bright young entrepreneurs, who through their intelligence, industry and sincerity, earn or can earn plenty of money within a short time. They can, rather, they must invest their money the way Deepak does. That way, they can serve the society and the country in the best possible manner.

After all, we are all indebted to the country and we must do every thing possible to return the debt. That is the central theme of the book which should reach in every hand, particularly in the hands of the youth.

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## ONE

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Deepti was excited and elated. She got her first ever fat salary. She planned a picnic to some far off hill station just this week end. She preferred Ooty. She consulted Deepak on phone, "Deepak, I am really very delighted to have freedom to spend as much as I like from the salary I have received for the first time in life. I have decided that we would go to some hill station this week end. I shall prefer Ooty."

Deepak, "I like your proposal. But you are aware that I am engrossed in a very important project which has to be completed within this fortnight. The management has put entire responsibility on me. I am going to office even on weekends and other holidays."

Deepti, "It is my earnest request. There should not be any excuse this time. I have been observing for the last few weeks that you are exerting too much and getting weaker. Your face is turning pale. You are ignoring health which is not good. I shall not allow this to happen. I assure that the week end picnic would refresh and rejuvenate you. Your efficiency would increase and you would be able to work on the project faster and better."

Deepak, "I shall request the CEO and I shall let you know."

Deepti, "I have booked a taxi. I shall reach your hostel at 6 a.m. sharp."

Deepak, "I shall be ready well in time".

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Deepak reflected on his association with Deepti. They first met after their first semester examination results in which Deepak stood first and Deepti was second. They both congratulated each other. Thereafter they met frequently in the college canteen, library and on the campus. They often met to discuss problems, and exchanged notes. They did not even realise when their acquaintance got transformed into friendship and a sort of relationship of love and affection for each other. Deepti possessed every asset that would attract any sensible young man. She was beautiful, fair, well built and slim with sharp features and long black hair. She was exuberant and effusive, simple and straightforward, intelligent and strong willed. She would carry any one with her by her logic. He was however surprised as to what made her infatuated with him. He was very much reserved as compared with her. His only asset was his diligence and sincerity in his studies and work. He felt that he benefitted more by her company and that she must be a loser. He always felt very much relaxed in her scintillating company. Their friendship progressed smoothly and uninterrupted. On weekends they would often dine together. None of them was selfish at all. They cared for each other. There was no feeling of competition also; rather they cooperated in studies and helped each other. Both enjoyed the relationship.

Deepti arrived at Deepak's hostel at 6.a.m. sharp. Deepak was already waiting on the road side in front of the hostel.

Deepti was overwhelmed by his loving gesture and said, "I thank you for agreeing to my request at such a short notice. I am happy that you are so considerate to me."

Deepak, "We must respect each other's feelings. I have always valued your suggestions. I know that you are emotional but also very wise. You take decisions with reasoning and I very much value your concern for me. I agree that the trip to Ooty will be relaxing, will be rejuvenating and will help boost my efficiency".

Before Deepti could get down and accost him he hurriedly went to the other side of the driver and asked to open the door of the front seat. Deepti interrupted, "Why are you going there and not coming on the back seat with me?"

Deepak, "I want to caution the driver against speeding fast."

Deepti, "This can be done from the back seat also. You can see the meter from here."

Deepak agreed and sat down on the back seat by her side. He had always been shy and avoided body closeness not only to her but to any girl. Whenever she or any girl willingly or accidentally happened to touch him he felt a chilling sensation, though liking and enjoying the thrill but avoiding it cowardly.

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They soon passed and crossed the concrete spectre and lost glory of Bangalore which was known for its charm as a city of gardens. The pressure of growing population and influx of outsiders for lucrative job opportunities in this now famed silicon city and consequent building activity both

authorised and unauthorised have irretrievably spoiled and defaced its charm. They were passing by the countryside and the green fields with a variety of crops and plantations of coconuts, banana etc. There was a feeling of comfort and ease in the unpolluted air as experienced by a prisoner after coming out of the dingy, congested cell in the prison. The air in Bangalore had become highly polluted and the problem is accentuating. They were observing the beauty and charm of the countryside, its luxuriance, uninterruptedly and silently. Deepti broke the silence, "It is breakfast time and I am feeling hungry. Let us stop at some good place under the shade of some big tree and take our breakfast."

They stopped at a field by the road side. There was a well and a big shady neem tree. Deepti opened the Tiffin box and served sandwiches to both of them and the driver. She had brought tea also in the thermos flask. It was very refreshing, more so to the driver. Deepak thanked her for the trouble she had taken. Deepti welcomed it and said, "It was my suggestion and planning and I am trying to manage as best as I can."

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The lack of sleep made Deepti dose repeatedly and she soon fell in deep sleep resting her head on the right shoulder of Deepak. He felt a strange thrill, his testosterone started rising, the surging hormones subdued his habitual ambivalence of liking and simultaneously avoiding the female contact and under the spell of physical lust he slowly but steadily stretched his arm around her, gripped her arm, started squeezing her body slowly and slowly, tightly and more tightly intending to hug her. Simultaneously he turned his face and looked intently at her beautiful face, bending gradually more and more, closer

and closer almost to the point of locking his lips with hers. Deepti had been awake since his first tightening squeeze but deliberately pretended to be asleep, enjoying the hug and closeness, but she suddenly feared and realised that they were not alone and the driver might be watching. Pretending waking up she removed her head from his shoulders and moved away to a safe distance. She apologised for giving him the trouble by resting her head on his shoulders for so long and said, "I am sorry, I felt very sleepy as I could not sleep for even two hours last night and got up very early to prepare breakfast and lunch."

Deepak was numb and dumb with a sense of profound shame on his face. He never thought that he could go to that extent. His righteous and religious upbringing had etched an indelible moral code of conduct in his psyche which forbade any sort of scintillating physical contact. In the cultural milieu he had grown up under the guardianship of his pious parents till he completed his education up to higher secondary, did not permit any premarital and extramarital relationship and even brothers and sisters and cousins were not allowed exclusive company. The prescribed ideal code of conduct also cautioned that the external situations and other factors such as the type of people with whom one is associated with one is also very important. One should avoid such situations and company which may tempt one to go astray from the right path. As a matter of fact, it is all external influence that conditions the life style and habits of every one. The environment of the family, social contacts, peers relationships, school, college, profession or any other factor, are all important. There are examples of persons brought up in a very pious and ideal environment getting spoiled in future when in the college

and subsequently when in profession according to the company they are with, to the extent of throwing away all morals and good conduct and succumbing to drinking, meat eating, gambling, womanising, drugs etc which were forbidden taboos in their families. It is the environment that generates all sorts of emotions and moulds every one.

Deepti felt that she might have offended him and asked, "What has happened? Why are you turning pale? What is wrong? Did you not like my putting my head on your shoulder? I have apologised and have said sorry."

Deepak, "It is nothing on your part. I am ashamed of my own action. I deliberately put my hand around you with no other intention but only to stop you slipping and to let you have good sleep." (he lied).

Deepti understood his predicament and that he was experiencing a guilt complex. She knew that he was lying and his conscience was pricking him. She consoled him, "You did nothing wrong. You rather helped me to sleep well and get over my fatigue. I am really thankful to you. I was fast asleep and did not even know that you put any pressure on my arm. Please be normal. We have come to enjoy and not to be gloomy at all. There should not be any misunderstanding between us. We have always been helpful and cooperative and have never been the cause of trouble or discomfort to each other."

Such a calculated consolation from Deepti assured Deepak that Deepti was not at all aware of his advances and immoral demeanour on his part. He tried to come out of his self inflicted pitiable plight and tried to be composed and normal. To divert the topic and the stalemate he asked the driver,

"Where are we? How far is Bandipur and Madhumalai forest area?"

The driver who was enjoying the amorous actions and conversation of the couple (he mistook them as such) took some moments to reflect and answer; "We are shortly approaching Chamrajnagar and shall soon be passing through the sanctuary."

Deepti, "It is already past one o'clock. We should find a suitable place and take our lunch."

Deepak, "There is a good restaurant on the road just at the entrance of the sanctuary. It is a comfortable place where we can have our lunch."

The driver stopped in front of the restaurant. Deepak went to the manager and requested him to allow them to take their lunch they had brought with them. The Manager welcomed them and told the waiter to clean a table for them. The driver remained in the car but Deepak asked him to join them, sit and also share the lunch with them. After finishing lunch Deepak ordered coffee from the restaurant. Deepak made the payment and asked the driver to check the car, water in the radiator, and air in tyres etc as the facilities were available there.

They started on their onward journey to their destination Ooty. The road passed along the boundary of the sanctuary overlooking it from above. It was afternoon and it was hot in October. There was hardly any chance at this hour to see wild life which normally come out of their shady resting places in the evening or early morning. However Deepak could spot a few bison loitering and grazing. He asked Deepti

to see but she was asleep again after lunch, reclining on the other side of the seat on the pillow she had brought for the purpose.

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Deepak awakened her and asked her to see the hill side as the car was going up negotiating serpentine road and its sharp hair pin bends. The slopes were extensively planted with several types of species of Eucalyptus of Australian origin, replacing the indigenous *sholas* of the natural climax ecosystem, now left just as a relic of the past in a few crevices. The gentle slopes were all covered with tea plantations.

It was 6.p.m. when they reached the hotel booked by Deepti. Mistaking them as a couple the receptionist requested, "We shall feel obliged if you can kindly accommodate in one room and spare the other for another couple in the waiting list. I presume that your other friends have not come." Deepti smiled and looked at Deepak as if requesting to agree.

Deepak told the receptionist, "We are not a couple. We are just friends and colleagues."

After settling down in their respective rooms, they came down in the lobby. A Waiter came and asked for orders for anything they would like to have. Deepak said, "Dinner only at 8.p.m. We are pure vegetarian." He then started watching the T.V.

Deepti did not relish his indifference and interrupted, "Please stop watching T.V. We have come here to talk and interact with each other. "Let us go to the other corner from where T.V. is not visible." She caught his hand and virtually dragged him to the other corner seat.



"I want to discuss something serious with you. Please let us decide our future plan in life. You know that we intensely love each other and shall be more than happy if get united and tie the matrimonial knot."

Deepak, "Have you consulted your parents? Have you obtained their consent? You belong to a Rajput family and I am one Oswal vaishya. There is a traditional caste barrier. For me there is no barrier. As you know, my parents and the only elder sister have long back entered monkhood."

Deepti, "I shall manage my parents. They are not old fangled, are educated and liberal. They understand and respect my feelings."

Deepak, "I also want to share my inner urge with you. But I feel some sort of fascination for life in monkhood. I have been occasionally visiting my parents and their group of monks. I have always found them happy and contented, without any sort of worry, tension, anxiety or stress. In the institute of monkhood where my parents are, there is a well defined code of conduct. They abstain from all sorts of vices; have control on the emotions of anger, vanity, hypocrisy and greed etc. Their wants are the barest minimum. They keep only two sets of unstitched clothes and a few wooden utensils to bring their food and water from house holders and that too in such a way that no extra burden is put on anyone and it is a precondition that nothing should be prepared specially for them. It is also enjoined that they should not collect their entire requirements from any one household but from several houses in small quantities from each, the same way as a bee or butterfly collects nectar from several flowers without causing any harm to any, rather helping the plants in pollination so

essential for production of flowers and fruits and their further procreation. Likewise the monks repay the services of the householders by giving enlightening discourses and guiding them on a righteous path. They are very careful in all their activities, in walking, sitting, standing, sleeping, talking, eating etc so that no harm or injury is caused to any living being and it is important to note that all earth forms including minerals and air, water forms, fire (energy forms), plants which are otherwise considered nonliving are also considered living beings. These and all other life forms from the smallest microbe to the biggest animals are considered as one's own self and no pain or injury should be inflicted on them. They follow the five vows of non-violence, truth, non-stealing (i.e. not depriving any one from his possessions without his or her explicit permission), non-consumerism and celibacy without slightest transgression in letter and spirit. Because of their impeccable character they are respected by their devotees. They help and serve their fellow monks in illness, infirmity and other such situations as and when required. They live a perfect symbiotic life."

Deepti, "Monks enjoy at the cost of householders on their toil, hard earned money and effort. It is householders who arrange and have to worry about their food, water, clothing, stay and discourses etc. and all these require effort and money. As a matter of fact monks are parasites on the householders. There are instances of fights, animosity, revolt and split as a consequence of clash of competing egos even among very senior, popular and learned monks. I have heard about such instances also in the order of monks you are talking about. Monkhood is a cowardly flight and running away from the problems, hardships, responsibilities, toil and turmoil of life,

called escapism in philosophical terminology. In my opinion monks are not even competent to advise householders as most of them are initiated early in life before having any real experience of a householder and even those who join after experiencing are escapists and cannot suggest solutions because they themselves failed to find in their own cases as otherwise they would not have run away. Example is better than precept. It will be exemplary if monks show the righteous path remaining as householders facing all the music and problems and solving them. I detest monkhood.”

Deepak had no answer for such logical and convincing arguments. He only said, “ I want to have a real personal experience by being with them for a reasonable period of time and observing them closely not only the order in which my parents are but other prominent orders of monkhood also.”

Deepti, “This is a fantastic idea. I would also like to join you in this endeavour and I can term it as a research work and then we can jointly write a book on the subject. However, in case we jointly conclude futility of monkhood you must promise here and now that we shall marry to lead an ideal and exemplary life with all its sunshine and darkness, pleasures and sorrows, ups and downs, successes and failures, problems and rational solutions. It is past 10.p.m. and we are late for our dinner. I am feeling quite hungry and tired also. Let us take our dinner and retire; as we have to leave tomorrow early after breakfast.”

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## TWO

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Deepti finished the important office work she brought home and was about to retire when her mobile rang, “I am Chandrapal Singh speaking from Jaisalmer. You have to come here. It is urgent.”

Deepti asked, “But, Papa you should tell me the purpose. What is the urgency? I have joined service only two months back. It will be difficult to get leave. I have to be concerned about my career.”

Chandrapal Singh, “I know, you will not agree unless I tell you the purpose. You know my friend Vishal Singh and his son Ajeet. Ajeet has done M.Tech. From MIT, U.S. and is working in a multinational company on a lucrative pay package. Vishal is keen to finalise Ajeet’s marriage within a month. Vishal and I exchanged promises to marry both of you when you are grown up. But do not take it seriously. It is for both of you to decide. There will be no compulsion from any one. We only want you both to meet and decide.” You must manage to come home at Jaisalmer this weekend positively. They will be here on Friday evening.”

Deepti, “I shall come. Please convey my regards to mummy and love to all.”

There was turmoil in her mind. It was almost a somersault.

She was in a predicament. It was an insurmountable situation. She was very much perplexed and did not know as to how she would be able to cope with it. She had committed to Deepak to join him in his study of the life of monks and if both of them are convinced about the futility of monkhood and the order of nuns, then tie the knot in matrimony. She had known Ajeet also from her childhood as a very sensible, intelligent, balanced, very soft speaking, very composed and considerate person. He was quite effusive also and not that reserve type as Deepak. He possessed a good, charming personality. In all respects he scored better than Deepak but almost got erased from her mind with the passage of time, otherwise probably she might not have made commitment to Deepak who was not as enthusiastic as Ajeet might be. She also had regards for her parents' wishes. There was conflict in her mind, between traditional and cultural commitment and emotional infatuation with Deepak. It so happens because past memories get superimposed and erased by new ones in a changed environment. Four years' association with Deepak made its impact. It was the incessant play of interaction between evolving and changing environment and encrypted genetic and cultural background. She was not able to decide whether to tell and discuss with Deepak or not. She thought it proper not to talk to Deepak. She knew that Deepak will not at all mind even if she would switch towards Ajeet. But this would push him in monkhood and she was determined to protect him from such a parasitic and futile life.

However she thought that she should at least inform him that she would be going home because of some urgent family circumstances not clarified by his father on phone. But it was very late in night. She postponed it for next morning.

The same night by coincidence on return from office Deepak found two letters in his letter box, took them to his room to read at leisure as he knew that there could not be anything urgent because he did not have dotting family. He changed and opened and read the letters lying on the bed. One letter was from the managing committee for arrangement of stay at Jaipur of the order of the monks with their head, where his parents were. He was invited to come and stay for at least a week in first or second week of December. The second letter was from his closest friend of school days, inviting him to attend his marriage at Jaipur on 5<sup>th</sup> December definitely. As he was about to go to bed his phone rang, "I am Vijay from Jhadol, Udaipur, our home town. You would have received my letter by now, posted by me a week ago. I have phoned because I want you to come to Jhadol on 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>, December. I need you to help me in arrangements as there is no other who can do it."

Deepak, "I have only recently joined service. It will be difficult to get leave longer than three-four days. But I shall try my best because I am also very keen to come there and revive our cherished and fond memories." Vijay insisted and requested Deepak earnestly to make it as far as possible.

Deepak was eager to inform Deepti as he wanted that she should also accompany him to Jhadol and Jaipur. It was very late at night, so he decided to wait till next morning and went to sleep.

Deepti was smarter than Deepak and phoned him before he woke up, "I know you must be asleep at this time but I have to tell something very urgent. I am leaving by evening

flight to Jodhpur and from there to my home town Jaisalmer by taxi or with my uncle in his car if he is also going. I got a phone call from my father last night and he has asked me to reach urgently. It was very late in the night and I did not disturb you."

Deepak, "What a coincidence is it? How is it that almost similar events in our lives happen simultaneously? Last night I also received two letters. Is it that events are so predestined or such is our fate? One letter is about the programme of my parents and their group of monks at Jaipur, inviting me there and to stay there at least for a week. The other is from my closest friend of school days to attend his marriage at Jaipur on 5<sup>th</sup> December and later his phone that I shall preferably reach Jhadol on 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> December to help him in making arrangements. I very much wish that you should also accompany me. It is still a fortnight away and your programme of going to your home town will not clash.

Deepti, "There is nothing like fate or anything predestined. It is just a coincidence. Of course I shall love to accompany you to both Jhadol and Jaipur, circumstances permitting."

Deepak, "What circumstances are you talking about? Is there something special going to happen at Jaisalmer? There must be some particular programme that your father has called you so urgently and at such a short notice. I can imagine clearly, visualise and understand the anxiety of parents of a grown up daughter. They must be trying to find a suitable match for you so as to tie the marriage knot as early as possible. It appears that you are hiding the truth from me."

Deepti, "There is nothing of that sort so far. My parents will never force anything on me against my will. Of course

arranging meetings of boys and girls of marriageable age is a very routine affair and at least I am not aware."

Deepak, "I wish you best of journey. I shall be at your hostel before scheduled time of your flight and see you off."

Deepti "Thanks. You should not conjecture that I shall be getting married so soon and leave you. I am not going to allow you to become a monk and live a futile and a parasitic life.

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Deepti was surprised to see a festive atmosphere at her home. The house had been painted tastefully and decoratively. Everything had been given a new look. There was a new brand of exquisite furniture, matching curtains, linen, crockery and utensils all new and latest. All were in their best attire. She went straight to her grandmother, bowed and touched her feet, lifted her from the chair, danced, hugged and kissed her, put her back on the chair. She then met her mother and father with similar traditional courtesy and warmth. She lifted her sweet charming younger brother, swirled him round and round, kissing and fondling him repeatedly and when tired sat down on the chair with him. Her father came hurriedly to her and told her that she should get fresh and dress as per instructions of her mother as fast as she can. The guests would be arriving soon for lunch. She could understand the situation and did not argue nor asked any questions as was her habit. She went straight inside with her mother.

Soon the guests came, her father's friend Vishal Singh, his son Ajeet and their entire family and relatives. After all were seated comfortably her father said to Deepti and Ajeet, "You

should go inside in the study, talk, discuss and tell us your decision. There will not be any pressure or compulsion of any kind. You are both grown up, intelligent and competent to take your own decision about your life."

And the session began.

Deepti, smart and unassuming as she was in every conversation spoke straight and direct, "We know each other well. You have been very kind and affectionate to me. When I was simultaneously preparing for my twelfth and IIT entrance examinations you spared your valuable time for my coaching although you were hard pressed for time because of the work load of your B.E. second year studies. Your grace, sweet nature, composed and disciplined behaviour are encrusted deep in my mind and I have not forgotten and cannot forget those cherished memories."

Ajeet, "You are exaggerating. There is nothing that you should feel obliged for. It was my duty and being the daughter of my father's friend you are like my nearest kith and kin. I have great regard for your simple and straightforward nature. I know you as a very intelligent, bold yet compassionate, affectionate, loving and lovable person."

Deepti, "Please do not flatter and exaggerate."

Ajeet, "You indulged in it first."

Deepti, "We are here to discuss something serious, a turning point situation which will decide our entire future life."

Ajeet, "I have no reservations about you. I like you, love you and shall feel privileged to have you as my life partner. I have nothing to discuss. I have completed my education;

have a good placement with bright career prospects. I shall be happy if we get married before expiry of my leave so that we can leave for the U.S.A. soon after.

Deepti was in a very difficult situation. She was not in a state of mind to either say yes or no. She had her commitment with Deepak. She had to manage the situation diplomatically, "You have stolen my words and have spoken what I wanted to say. There is a minor hitch. I am not yet well settled like you. I am only three months in service and bound contractually to complete an important project. If I leave before completing I shall have to pay huge financial compensation."

Ajeet, "This is not at all a problem. I am already in service for over a year with quite a fat pay package. I have been able to save substantially. I shall clear whatever your financial liabilities are. As regards your service I shall get you much better job. You should not have any hitch. You can leave all your problems to me and I shall take care of them, rather I shall be happy to do that little for you."

Deepti, "It is not only a matter of financial liability. It is also a question of my credibility. I have committed myself to carry out the project because I like it. I request you to wait just for a year. It is not a long period."

Ajeet, "Waiting for one full year for marriage will be very painful, each day will be a year for me. My parents may not agree. I have a commitment with them that I shall not leave India without marrying some one of my choice. You are my best rather only choice. I have an apprehension that if we delay our marriage I may lose you and for that I shall not forgive myself and also you. However, please tell me without any hesitation if you already have a boy friend. I shall not

mind if you are committed to him. Please tell me the truth so that I can go from here peacefully.”

Deepti, “It appears that you are suspicious as generally all males are. I reiterate with all earnestness my request to you that you should kindly wait for a year for my sake. I have every hope that you will heed my request because you love me. Your query about the boy friend if I have any shows that you have forgotten Indian culture and under the influence of western environment you are getting westernised physically as well as mentally. The culture of having a boy or a girl friend is against our ethos. I am surprised that your exposure for four, five years only have erased from your psyche the impressions of our culture and traditions in which you have been brought up for over twenty or so years. For your information I do not even think about a boy friend. According to you our association when you were coaching me, our going to see movies, to restaurants, could be termed as that of a boy friend and of a girl friend. This type of friendship I have with many of my co- students and colleagues but of the type you are thinking about I have none. Anyway, tell me about you. In the culture you are living in for the past few years, not having a girl or a boy friend is considered a serious deficiency. Please tell me how many girls have you been in such relationships. During alumni meetings in our IIT, Bombay, I have heard the old boys narrating their strange experiences in US, UK and other countries. There even physical intimacy is not considered wrong and sex is considered just a requirement of body and its satisfaction. There the traditional mindset of girls has also changed and they think that if boys can experiment with a variety of girls, they too should have the same right. The respect for purity and virginity is not there. I was told that the

consequences are alarming there, increasing teenage pregnancies, sex related crimes and even murders and divorces so much so that politicians and sociologists are worried and seriously thinking to revive old time tested morals. I believe that once a boy or girl is addicted to having relations with a number of people of the opposite sex it gets etched in the psyche and it persists even after marriage. Extramarital relations are the main cause of divorces and sex related crimes.”

Ajeet, “What old alumni boys and girls have told you is correct. The life there is very much sex oriented and the harmful dangerous consequences are there for all to see. But for your information I have not lost my roots in Indian culture. I subscribe to it and believe in it as strongly as you do. My query was simple and is common now a day. The boy and girl must know about each other when they are entering a permanent life long relationship. I assure you that I do not have any girl friend so far (he felt a pinch in his heart because he was lying).

You have also put me in a very difficult situation. You shall also help me. We shall talk to our parents jointly. Your parents, particularly your father will be able to prevail upon my father because they are long time friends.”

Deepti was clever and articulate and was able to manipulate the situation the way she wanted. It is said that it is not possible for men to fathom the secrets of women's heart. The queen Pingala is a glaring historical example. She could fool such a wise king as Bharatari. She could manage two ardent lovers simultaneously, could continue to get unflinching affection of Bharatari while flirting with her trainer in horse riding.

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## THREE

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Soon after Deepak had reached office the CEO called him, "There is good news for you. The management is very pleased by your hard work and dedication. You have completed the project which is very important for the company, successfully and in time. Your presentation before the client and Directors of the company was really superb. A very hefty rise in salary perks and status have been sanctioned for you. You have been promoted as senior manager. You will get a free well furnished flat. The company has also gifted a car to you."

Deepak thanked the CEO, "It was possible only because of your able guidance that a novice like me could do it. The credit must go to you. I was only an instrument."

CEO, "It is your humility. I forgot to tell you that the company has also sanctioned LTC to you. You can avail it any time of your choice and convenience and with your girl friend if you have any. The company will pay the expenses for both."

Deepak, "I thank you very much, Sir. I shall avail LTC in December as I have to go to meet my parents at Jaipur where I have also to attend the marriage of my close friend of school days."

CEO, "Manage to have a girl friend by then and if possible get also married. You now have a flat also. You will feel bored in a big flat without a spouse."

Deepak "Thanks a lot for your valuable suggestion."

He wanted to share the good news with Deepti. He phoned as soon as he came out of CEO's chamber, "I have something very special to tell you. Please try to leave office at 5.p.m. the schedule time. I shall reach your hostel at 5.30.p.m. We shall go to some good restaurant."

Deepti, "I shall be in time. I also have a lot to tell you."

Deepak, "I am keen to know about your trip to your home town."

Deepti, "I am also very eager to meet you at the earliest."

Deepak reached her hostel in time and she was already there on the road side waiting for him. She was surprised to see him coming driving a new car and said, "You did not tell me that you have purchased a car. You should have informed me about this on the phone."

Deepak, "I have not purchased it. It is a gift from the company I got today."

Deepti, "Congratulations."

Deepak, "Why congratulate me; the credit goes to you because it was your suggestion to go to Ooty. It was very effective and I was very much relaxed and rejuvenated after that. It increased my efficiency. I could do that important project so well and in time. My presentation impressed the clients and the Directors of company. I got the reward because of you. I have been promoted as senior manager and have

also been given a furnished flat for which my CEO joked and told me that I should get married soon else I shall be bored in a big flat without a spouse. I forgot to tell you that company have also granted me one month LTC for a trip anywhere at any time of my choice with my girl friend or spouse. The company will pay for both.

Deepti, "I am ready to enable you to heed the advice of your CEO. We should get married soon and go to Switzerland for our honeymoon to avail the LTC."

Deepak, "You have not told me about your visit to your home town Jaisalmer."

Deepti, "It was very special this time. It was festive all around. The house was renovated tastefully with new paint, furniture and curtains were changed. You guessed rightly. When I reached there all were in their best attire and were waiting for special guests, my father's friend Vishal Singh and his M.Tech, son Ajeet. We were asked to talk and decide mutually about our marriage. There were questions and counter questions. It was long session. The substance was that Ajeet was on one month's leave and wanted to get married within this period. I plainly told him that he would have to wait for one year, because as I told him, I am contractually bound to complete the project entrusted to me by the company. He was even prepared to pay any financial liability for breach of contract. I refused on the pretext that it was not only money but my credibility that was at stake. He enquired about my commitment to a boy friend if any. I lied and did not tell about you. I handled the matter very diplomatically. We departed in happy mood. I know that he and his parents

will not wait for one year. I did all this because I am committed to you. You also wanted to tell me something special."

Deepak, "I have already told you about my promotion and other perks. I want to discuss with you about going together to Jhadol and Jaipur in my friend's marriage and also to meet my parents there. We can stay with the group of monks for a fortnight or more and study their life style as planned by us. We may commence our study from Jaipur. I want to avail LTC for this occasion."

Deepti, "It appears that you are an intelligent fool to waste valuable LTC on a trifle. Because it can be availed at any time of your choice it should be reserved for our honeymoon to foreign country."

Deepak, "You are fantasising about the event which is neither certain nor in sight in near future."

Deepti, "It may be delayed but is certain."

Deepak, "So we decide to take leave for a fortnight and go together to Jhadol and Jaipur."

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At Jhadol Vijay took Deepak and Deepti to nearby agricultural fields, measuring a meagre two hectares which his father pundit Birdhi (Vridhi Chandra) managed to save struggling hard against their challenging financial odds and vicissitudes. They sat down on the stone slab placed on two loose stone pillars under the shade of the majestic Mahua (*Madhuca latifolia*) tree standing there, for how long nobody knows, as a sentinel and provider of nutritious sweet flowers much relished by all locals, particularly the poor tribals as their staple diet. Its seeds yield good edible oil resembling butter,



the remaining meal is very good manure. There was a well on its side. The entire field was covered with plants of wheat, gram and a number of spices. It was a beautiful green carpet spread all over, pleasant, refreshing and soothing to eyes. Deepak's mind went back in time. It was here he and Vijay sat the whole day, five years ago, and he recapitulated sweet memories of their companionship since their childhood to the end of higher education.

Vijay interrupted his thought process and said, "It was here we met last before departing and drifting in two different directions. You got success in IIT entrance examination but I could not. You were reluctant to go but all here and particularly the members of your oswal community, persuaded rather forced you to join IIT, Bombay. Your father did not have means enough to support your costly studies. Your community helped but with a rider that if your father and mother both renounce and become monks in the order of their sect, it would deposit sufficient amount of money to support you. It is a very repulsive tradition that even monkhood is purchased and is not out of free will of a person. We in this town have been watching this obnoxious tradition. Not only the elders and adults but younger ones of eight to ten years are forced into monkhood and the practice is flourishing because of the financial compulsions. Monkhood is thrust on young and grown up girls only because their poor parents are unable to marry them in the competitive matrimonial market where the rich take away the available boys by their money power. Boys have become a marketable commodity and are almost auctioned to the highest bidder. I wonder why in spite of these glaring facts the heads of the orders of monks and community proclaim that all young or adult boys or girls adopt monkhood

of their own out of their inner urge of renunciation. What do the younger ones at the tender age of eight and ten know about renunciation?"

Deepak, "You know I did not at all agree to succumb to the temptation of the glare of cherished IIT but for the compulsion and pressure all in the town including you and your father put on me in the name of the rare honour the town and its residents will get because of first ever selection of a boy of their town. They valued the pride and honour of the town and its residents more than that of my parents and disregarded my own feelings of intense pain and repentance as I was responsible for the forced monkhood of my parents. The painful memories of the pangs of my suffering because of similarly forced monkhood of my elder sister were fresh in my mind. She could not be married as my parents did not have money to purchase a groom for her. I would not have yielded but the community threatened to excommunicate us on the pretext that it was a question of forgoing the rare honour the community got. I succumbed."

Vijay, "I would have done the same as you have if I could have succeeded in IIT entrance examination. My father was prepared to mortgage or sell the little piece of agricultural land."

Deepak, "On the basis of your rank in this examination you could have got admission in any other engineering college. You sacrificed your career for just a piece of land, where as I was instrumental in forced monkhood on my parents, I could have followed your example. You should have guided me as a good friend. But you also joined town folk and considered the glory for the town more important. How

is it more important than helpless persons? Is glory of town there in some little success of an individual or is it in the overall well being of its entire people?"

Vijay, "It cannot be undone now. It is futile to keep on brooding over the past. Let us think about future and resolve to make every possible effort to eradicate such evil practices from the society not only in Jhadol but all over."

Deepak, "Deepthi was my college mate. She is my friend. She has resolved and has committed herself to do that. She had been goading me and trying to brainwash me against the very institution of monkhood. I do not know as to why I remained obsessed with monkhood and wanted to become a monk myself. It may be in desperation or because of a feeling of repentance to punish myself with the same agony as my sister and parents were forced to bear. It may be an inherited genetic encryption in me as a result of continuing obsession persisting for generations in families of our community. It is what scientists ironically term as a god gene, a mutation of moral and behavioural gene. Genes are continuously mutating in response to evolving environment. You are right. Instead of brooding and repenting on the past we should resolve to eradicate such evils."

Vijay, "It is enough on this topic. Let us recapitulate the happy and joyful moments of our school days. It was our every day routine to come to this field, sit for long hours till late evening, talk, discuss, solve problems, do home work under the shade of this Mahua tree, cooler than even our mud houses then. The proximity of well full of water, made the breeze soothing and pleasant. My father would take us long distances inside the forest, then almost touching the agricultural

fields. We had been painfully and helplessly observing the forests, the green line, receding, and the number of trees declining and dwindling. My father used to tell us that the tribal people living all around have been given unrestricted rights to take whatever they want not only for their own bonafide use but also for sale. The rich forest contractors manipulated and exploited them by giving them little and making huge profits."

Deepak, "You remember that there was an old man living at the outskirts of the town almost as a hermit in a small hut like structure. He was very gentle and knowledgeable. He knew about varieties of medicinal plants growing in the forests and would prepare concoctions for ailing people in the town and others, free of cost. He was the first to help anyone in need and distress. He never asked anybody for financial or any material help. He lived on his meagre pension."

Deepthi interrupted, "He was not like monks who are parasites and live on the labour and money of others."

Vijay was surprised at such strong acrimonious remarks, "Monks are respected by almost all or at least by majority of people."

Deepthi, "They are professionals in cheating the gullible people by alluring them with rewards without effort and also inculcating fear of nonexistent providential influences. They play the same tricks as astrologers and such other crooks. They are cowards and escapists avoiding the rigours, hardships and problems of householders and enjoy at the cost of others."

Deepak, "She and I have decided to undertake a detailed research study of the lifestyle of monks, their importance, utility or futility and to write a comprehensive book."

This diverted the conservation topic. Deepak started again, "While returning from fields we often found him outside his hut. He would ask us to sit with him if we were not in a hurry. He would give us diluted curd drink and tell very engrossing and enlightening stories and his anecdotes from his own real life experiences of his long tenure in state forest service. During summer vacations we sat longer with him. After our eighth standard examination when I asked about the plight of receding and diminishing forests he explained all about the causes and remedial measures, needed. Do you remember, Vijay?"

Vijay, "He was a philanthropist to the core and an ardent environmentalist. He tried his best to educate people by going to villages and talking to them at their chaupals. He kept on writing and meeting the officers concerned from the collector to the chief secretary, from panchas, sarpanchas, MLAs, MPs to ministers and chief ministers repeatedly to follow and abide by the established scientific principles. He continued to hammer till his last breath that forests should not be exploited beyond their carrying capacity which is the annual growth rate of the forest and that the rights of people in settlement records were for the limited numbers then but the numbers have increased four to five times. He impressed that exercise of rights should be limited so as not to destroy the very object. His efforts were all in vain. Politicians are not generally concerned about forest or environment or even welfare of the country. Their only concern is selfish interest to keep intact their chairs and position which depends on vote bank politics. They never take decisions which annoy the voters even if it is harmful to voters in the long run.

Deepti felt bored and interrupted, "Do not brood over the past which is gone and is not going to return. I see some good greenery on the hills at a distance, may be a few kilometres. We should go and see that relic of the past. Vijay said, "The place is not very far. We can go by jeep up to the foot of the hills."

Deepti was delighted to see varieties of trees she had never seen before. Vijay knew names and uses of most of them. The main species were dhaura, siris, semal, palas, amaltas, kachnar, khair, salar, gurjan, aonla, bahera, Mahua, tendu, khirni and others. He told that the tribal people did not cut many of these species since they provided edible seeds, flowers, fruits, gums, resins, fibres and medicines for their own use as well as for sale. They were very much dependent on forests. But ever since the government started the populist scheme of food for work they got alienated as they lost dependence on the forest and started cutting such trees which had sustained them for generations.

Deepti pointed to a tree at some distance covered entirely with beautiful scarlet orange flowers. Vijay said, "It is not the tree that is bearing these flowers. It is Loranthus, a dangerous climber, a parasite which has engulfed the tree and which will smother and eventually kill the tree. Deepak let us go and cut and remove the climber. We did this many times in our school days. Vijay as a habit always brought an axe whenever he ventured out in a forest."

Deepti applauded, "I am happy that you destroyed the parasite which would have otherwise killed the benevolent Mahua tree. The Loranthus which was shining, sitting on the tree was not at all good. It was enjoying its glamour at the

cost of a useful tree. It was like monks who are not at all useful but enjoy all the glory and comforts at the cost of toiling householders.”

Both Vijay and Deepak were dumb and numb as they did not have any answer for her logical simile.

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## FOUR

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The marriage ceremony and the attendant rituals at Jaipur were short and simple. The venue was a moderate size hall with sitting capacity of about two hundred persons. The time given in the invitation card was eleven o'clock onwards on fifth December, 2010. Guests started arriving around 10.30.a.m. Deepak and Deepti came along with Vijay, the bridegroom, his relations and the retinue called “barat”. Deepti was surprised to see that there was no festive environment, no floral decorations and no band or music system and not even the symbolic gate (torandwar with memento type small wooden rectangular piece to be touched or hit by a stick by the bridegroom as a sign of winning the bride) which are all essentially integrated on such occasions. Deepti asked Vijay, “Are your in-laws very poor, unable to afford even modest decoration and small music band to give minimum festive look and colour.”

Vijay, “The family is fairly rich. For generations their family enjoyed the prestigious status as head priests of erstwhile rulers of the princely state of Sikar.”

Deepti, “Why is then the festivities, decorations and music, the ceremonial environment not there?”

Vijay, "Vibha, the bride will explain all about it shortly?"

At 11 a.m. sharp Vibhu came on the small 6' x 4' make shift stage, took hold of the mike and introducing himself as younger brother of the bride, spoke, "I welcome and thank all the guests for sparing your valuable time for coming here to grace the occasion. I am grateful to Mr. Vijay, the bridegroom, his family, relations and friends to have taken all the trouble of a long journey from Udaipur. I request the bride and the bridegroom to come and sit on the two chairs here on the stage."

As both ascended the stage, bowed and saluted the audience with folded hands they were given a thunderous ovation and applause with continuing clapping of hands till Vibhu requested them to stop and listen to Vibha who was already at the mike, "While coming into the hall from rear to front I have heard whispers and murmurings about lack of festivities, gaiety, decoration and music. Since it was my idea, my decision and my determination, my father Rajpurohit Vidyadharji and my mother Shrimati Kanchanji asked me to explain about such a drastic change. As far as I am concerned it is not necessary. Please permit me to explain in brief."

Deepti stood up and said, "It is indeed revolutionary. Please elucidate. It will be educative and may be enlightening."

There was a mingled roar, "Please, please do it, let us know all about it."

Vibha, "This decision is because of my growing commitment and concern for environment both physical and social. Both are intrinsically interconnected, inter-related and mutually reinforcing. This is the result of my training as

environmentalist while pursuing my M.Sc in Environmental Science. You will bear with me that ostentatious festivities are an unnecessary extra burden on physical environment which is already overburdened more than four times its carrying capacity. The vulgar display of invariably ill-gotten wealth on such occasions is also socially harmful because the poor cannot afford it and their daughters either commit suicide or go into compulsive monkhood. The pitch and decibel levels of music are so high that it is a serious health hazard because of the intensity of very high degree of sound pollution. As for floral decoration it is the greatest environmental sin. It is the flowers that produce fruits, seeds and all other necessities of life. If flowers are plucked away there will not be any food for almost all life-forms. Even those flowers which do not give edibles are also very essential as they provide food to numerous bees, butterflies and a vast variety of insects which are nature's indispensable pollination agents and if they perish or dwindle our food supply will be jeopardised. Plucking away flowers is abortion for trees."

Deepti sprang up from her seat, clapping and applauding, "It is wonderful. We must all vow to follow this."

Vibha, "I have something more to say. The marriage here will not be solemnised by circumambulation around fire. Anything even butter and perfume when burnt will produce carbon-di-oxide, methane and other obnoxious green house gases (GHGs), the concentration of which is already above maximum optimum limits, leading to global warming and climate change foreboding dire consequences. The ceremony will be over within a few minutes. We will take only one vow that we will be sincere and faithful to each other. I do not see any logic in recital of so called hymns which nobody

including the Pundit understand. Soon after, you are all requested to enjoy the simple lunch consisting of limited dishes.”

She bowed and sat down. Vibhu asked them to garland each other and utter the vow. No gifts were accepted as it was already mentioned in the invitation.

Deepti was overwhelmed and told Deepak that they will also follow it.

The ceremony was over within three hours and guests started going to their respective places soon. Only the families of the bride and the bridegroom were left to exchange final departing niceties. Deepak also asked Vijay to excuse him for not accompanying him back to Udaipur as he had to be with his parents and sister who were with their group of monks, camping at Jaipur. Deepak and Deepti invited them for their honeymoon at Bangalore. Deepti said, “Deepak has now a big flat given by the company. He does not allow me to share and I may be allowed for the period you both are there. We promise, you will have nice time. I forgot to tell you that Deepak has also been gifted a new car by his company. We will show you all the tourist places. We shall also go to Ooty, the most beautiful and picturesque hill station in the south.

They departed with promise to meet soon at Bangalore.

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The campus where monks were camping was almost like a small township with several small shops, rows of small make shift rooms made of tin sheets and also of bricks. There was a palatial building where monks were staying. The building had four big air conditioned halls of various sizes with audio

visual and other facilities for organising conferences. In front of the building there was a very large area of over a hundred metres square covered with pleasant blue plastic sheets for accommodating a few thousand followers to listen to the daily discourses of the junior, senior and the chief or the head monk. There were big covered enclosures for feeding thousands of devotees thronging every day from far and nearby places, many staying from a week to a month or more. The scenario was like a camping place of a king of yore. Deepti was overawed by the grandeur and said, “With such comforts, facilities and kingly status anyone will be tempted to join monkhood. Monks are like rulers and the head monk is like a king. Thousands of devotees are coming, bowing, prostrating and begging for boons from monks more so from the head monk. There are big queues waiting for just an opportunity to touch his feet, prostrate before him and beg for boons. He commands and enjoys awe, honour and respect more than any most powerful emperor ever had.”

Deepak, “You have seen only the outer facet, the enthusiasm and respect on the part of the devotees. You have not seen the austerities the monks follow. They live like a lotus in a pool of water untouched, unaffected and completely detached from material and sensual pleasures.”

Deepti, “I shall like to see that also. I shall find out as to how real or fake are their austerities, renunciation and detachment.”

After waiting for over fifteen minutes they could go near the head monk and Deepak followed the customary form of obeisance, bowed and prostrated. Deepti, stood with folded hands bowed slightly. She observed clear a expression of

disgust on the faces of all present feeling that she was not a true devotee or not a Jain.

It is an unwritten rule that visitors should first pay respects to the head and then go to others. They enquired and reached the room of Deepak's father who was earlier known as Shantilal and now as Prashant muni. His mother and sister were in a different building nearby as male and female monks are not allowed to reside together and even in the same building.

Deepak touched his father's feet and started weeping and wept and wept. Prashant muni raised his head and consoled, "Deepak, you should be happy to see that I am happier than I was as a householder."

Deepak raised his head and with folded hands beseeched, "I am responsible to force you and the whole family into monkhood. It was for my sake, for my education that you and mother had to renounce and become monks. Now for my sake you should return as a householder. I shall pay back all the money with full interest to the charitable trust which forced you both to become monks. I do not accept it as a charitable trust because it financed my studies on the condition that you go into forced monkhood. They are doing it for ages because they need new younger recruits to serve the ageing monks and to keep the institution of monks going."

Prashant muni, "It is not possible now. Rules do not permit this. If I do that the whole community will be up in arms against us, ostracise and excommunicate us. You should forget about it and be happy because we are happy more than we could be by returning as householders.

Deepak, "There are instances of eminent saints who left

monkhood and became householders back again. If you do not accept my request I shall never be able to absolve myself of the sin I have committed by forcing you and my mother into monkhood for my selfish objective. I then did not have the courage to resist the temptation. It is wrong that I was forced by the community, fellow citizens, relatives and friends. It was my weakness rather selfishness that weighed on my mind and I succumbed to my own temptations. Had I resisted, nobody would have been able to force me to agree to your monkhood in lieu of my selfish bargain. You have to accept my request else I shall suffer the poignant pangs of my sin."

Prashant muni, "You should not feel guilty. Your mother and I are equally responsible. We did not have the ability and courage to face the hardships of a householder and adopted an easy option of happy life without any sort of hardships of the life of a householder. Anyway I am now committed to obey our head of the order. I shall take appointment to discuss this issue and I hope that he will be able to convince you."

It was 2.30.p.m. Acharya (the title used for the head of the order of a group or sect of the order of monks) Vinay was busy sorting out problems of dissidence in his own group of followers. Prashant muni followed by Deepak and Deepti entered the room and except Deepti, both bowed and prostrated humbly and meekly like slaves as if living on his charity. Deepti sat down quietly but the twosome kept standing till ordered to sit.

Prashant muni requested the Acharya for being permitted to put up the problem posed by Deepak and submitted, "My

son Deepak is feeling guilty very strongly that he is responsible to force us in monkhood and he considers it as a sin committed by him for his own selfishness and to atone for it he wants us to revert back to the life of householders. He is prepared to pay back all the money with interest bartered for our monkhood.”

Deepti interrupted and said, “My humble submission is that you may kindly also reflect on the circumstances under which you were yourself forced to become a monk and also about your own attitude and action in case you were in the same situation as Deepak is.”

Deepti's question benumbed, stupefied, confounded and shocked Acharya Vinay. He closed his eyes, pondered over and after a long silence said, “It is a very intricate matter and needs deep consideration. I shall discuss it in joint council of all the monks of my order and may be with other Acharyas and monks of other orders also. It may take a year or more to sort out and take any final decision.”

Deepak bowed and said, “I shall wait for a year but no more.”

Deepti, “I may also bring to your kind notice that in case the decision is not in keeping with natural justice it can be challenged in a court of law because it is proven fact that initiations in monkhood are by and large forced as no one understands detachment or renunciation at a tender age of eleven or so. Elders are also forced by the conditions imposed by traditions and customs of communities postulated by the institutions of monks. Deepak may hesitate but I shall challenge any adverse decision in courts of law up to the highest level.”

Acharya Vinay, “I have other urgent meetings and you have to disperse now. I have told you the procedure to be followed as every system has its limitations.”

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Acharya Vinay was restless and could not get sleep the whole night. The memories of his childhood flashed again and again on his mind. He recollected that his father, a petty trader in a small town Nagaur died when he was just only three years. His mother survived on meagre savings and doing miscellaneous works, preparing papad etc. She was then young and being harassed by rogue anti-social elements she forced herself into monkhood and leaving him in the care of her mother, his grandmother who also went into monkhood after the death of his grandfather. He too was initiated as monk along with her when he was only eleven years old and did not understand anything about renunciation or detachment. He reflected and in his heart agreed with Deepak and Deepti. Yet he was in a great predicament and could not decide as to how to proceed in the matter. After pondering for long he decided to call a broad-based conference of all the heads of different orders of monks along with intellectuals, educationists, sociologists, lawyers, presidents of all different sects of communities and also eminent politicians.

Deepak for most of the time was with his father and mother, arguing and persuading them to revert back as householders. Deepti for whole two days till their scheduled departure time was busy collecting antecedents of both male and female monks, persuading them to spell out the circumstances under which they were forced into monkhood. She was with Shree, elder sister of Deepak, now Shradha



sadhvi for maximum time, arguing and asking pointed questions whether she really wanted to be a nun, “You are beautiful and still young. Before becoming a nun you must have thought and visualised about your own marriage on all such occasions when you attended marriages of girls of your age in the neighbourhood or among your relations”

Shradha, “When I was fifteen I attended a marriage ceremony of a distant cousin at Udaipur. My parents and maternal grandparents were also there. They selected a boy Vinod for me who was also there with his parents. He was tall, handsome and healthy. We were allowed to meet and talk. We liked each other and were engaged in a very nominal ceremony called “Tilak.” He was intelligent and got admission to a medical college. Marriage proposals started pouring in for him with huge dowry offers. His parents sounded my father which was almost an ultimatum that they have a dowry offer of ten lakhs. My father was in no way able to meet the demand and the boy’s parents broke our engagement. I wrote to the boy and reminded him of his promises at the time of our engagement. He never replied. There was no option left for me except to become a nun. My own ego played a major role. As a nun I would be superior to him and he will bow before me. He belongs to our sect and occasionally comes to pay obeisance but is unable to raise his head and face my gaze. My ego is satisfied. I am happy and contented. I have studied most of the canonical scriptures, mastered the art of speech and devotees revere me very much. Simultaneously I have done M.A. in philosophy. I am the chief guest and keynote speaker in most of the conferences. I have no grudge now.”

Deepti, “You have made my task easy because you did desire marriage. There is no point to stick to the predicament

forced on you because of the social evil of dowry. There is another aspect that prompted you to be a nun. Since the boy with whom you were betrothed also did not respond to your letter and forgot all the promises made to you, it stirred your ego. You became a monk because this elevated you on higher pedestal than the boy and as you said the boy now pays obeisance to you. This satisfied your ego. Ambitions and ego also play an important role in taking recourse to monkhood as it elevates the person even above the kings and emperors. Buddha and Mahavira are examples of their super ego and ambitions. They calculated that they would not be great kings or emperors they decided to adopt monkhood to be above them as monkhood has been held higher than any householder even a king or emperor, because the system has since ages been so cleverly designed by these escapists. You are still marriageable and can get a good job in any prestigious college and even in the university which will attract a good many bridegrooms. You must denounce the injustice thrust on you and revert back as a householder, marry a suitable match of your choice, perform your natural responsibility as a mother lest the heritage of your valuable genome is lost forever.”

There was turmoil in the mind of Shradha. She spoke out, “Ever since my initiation as a nun I am being continuously conditioned about superiority of a nun to householder. It is hammered down on all disciples that worldly life of a householder is full of suffering and problems and it is only through religious initiation that one can achieve happiness, peace and salvation. However during discourses I have been arguing against such indoctrinations. I have often quoted from the scriptures before the Acharya that there are instances of householders getting salvation. I have been emphasising the

importance of householders who toil hard to make all arrangements of food, clothing and shelter etc for the monks who do nothing and enjoy at the cost of the householders. The Acharya would be silent and not answer the questions posed by me and only exhort me to follow his instructions as ordained in the scriptures. In my heart of heart I long for what you have proposed. There is only one hitch. The Acharya will not permit and the community will be up in arms against me and will harass and defame me. She opened her mind to Deepti and asked her for the way out."

Deepti, "You leave everything to me. If you have resolved then no power on earth can prevent it. I shall secure permission from the Acharya and even if he does not agree I shall manage it with the police help. Tomorrow we shall fly to Bangalore and there I assure you that nobody will be able to do any harm to you."

They went straight to meet the Acharya. Deepti spoke plainly and boldly, "Shradha has decided to renounce her status as a nun and revert back as a householder. She has also decided to marry and undo the injustice done to her by herself, the community and by the institution that made her a nun. Kindly permit her or we shall seek police help."

The Acharya had no option but to agree. Deepti was very happy. She won a formidable battle against entrenched social and pseudo spiritual order. The three, Deepak and his lovable sister now Shree flew back to Bangalore.

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On the way from airport to the city Shree requested Deepti, "Please promise that you will stay with me at least for a month or so till I get acclimatised to life."

Deepti, "I want to live with you in your brother's flat if he permits. I requested him before he got the flat, but he refused."

Shree, "I shall manage it. Now leave it to me."

Deepak, "I have no objection now, rather I shall be grateful to you if you give company to my sister and help her face the new situation. We three shall work together to help her settle and stand on her own feet and be independent. We shall first find a suitable job for her and then a good matching bridegroom."

Shree blushed and went away on the pretext of going to the toilet.

In just a couple of days Shree and Deepti became good friends, reciprocating and complementing mutually. Shree was very proficient in cooking, stitching and housekeeping that she had learnt from her mother early in her teens. Deepti picked up many of her skills and in turn taught Shree computer operations viz. E-mail, Internet etc. She also started studying philosophy and religion with her help and reading the books Shree had brought with her. They talked for hours, sharing each other's views, feelings, aspirations and plans. Deepti often opened web sites of various marriage bureaus and coerce Shree to select a suitable match.

Shree, "Match for you?"

Deepti, "I have already searched and finalised. I mean it for you."

Shree knew but pretended ignorance and asked, "Who is your choice?"

Deepak was overhearing and did not want their topic to continue. He interrupted, "I hope, meals will be prepared in time and I will not have to suffer hunger after hard work in the office."

Shree, "Are you diverting the topic, fearing that you will be the next target?"

Deepti, "He is overwhelmed by his genetic obsession for monkhood, encrypted deep in his genes. It is not easy to overcome, but I shall see that it is erased soon and forever."

Shree, "Deepak, I am not going to agree about my marriage unless you finalised yours. I know that you and Deepti have been loving each other since long. I do not understand as to why you are delaying?"

Deepak, "You are elder and should get married soon. I am not going to marry till I get my parents released from the clutches of monkhood."

Deepti, "Your parents became monks after enjoying married life. If you are so enamoured about monkhood I am prepared to go into monkhood with you after marriage and fulfilling our duties as householders, myself as a mother and you as a father as your parents have done. I do not want the genes we possess, evolved after millions of years' effort and selection by nature, go waste."

Deepak, "Please get the meals ready. I am feeling hungry."

Shree, "Meals are ready and warm in the oven. Deepti, do not embarrass my brother any more. Let us enjoy our dinner."

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## FIVE

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It was Sunday. Deepak and Deepti were in a relaxed mood. Deepti suggested, "Sunday should be free for didi (Shree) also. She will not cook today. We shall have lunch out in the restaurant."

Deepak endorsed the suggestion but Shree was reluctant, "Meals are not prepared as carefully, cautiously and hygienically in restaurants as in our houses."

Deepti advised Shree, "You are no longer a monk and should adapt to the changing life style of modern householders. We shall go to a pure vegetarian place where non-vegetarian food is not even prepared. I shall show you the kitchen there to see yourself the hygienic standards. After lunch we shall go to see the picturesque gardens of Bangalore. We shall forgo dinner as the lunch will be heavy and shall take some snacks and best quality pure vegetarian ice-cream. I propose that we should see a very good movie, running in the multiplex nearby."

Shree as usual relented and agreed to the plan of assertive Deepti.

Deepak, "I presume, we shall not be leaving for lunch

before 12.30. By that time I shall be able to finish my pending work.”

Deepti, “You must be ready in time. I shall check E-mails in the meantime.”

There was an E-mail which surprised Deepti and she could not resist shouting loud and call Deepak to see it. Deepak came running to see what was so unusual that made her cry.

Deepti pointed to the message, said, “It is from Ajeet with whom I was being forced to marry which I tactfully I averted.”

Ajeet wrote, “I am sorry that I could not keep my promise to wait for your nod for a year. My parents were impatient and wanted me to get married before my leave expired. They had apprehensions that I might otherwise go astray and marry some girl in the U.S. The girl is from Jaipur. Her name is Abha. Marriage is fixed on coming Sunday i.e. only three days from now. Everything was decided in such a hurry that I could not inform you earlier. I am attaching the invitation card and request you to attend my marriage positively with all your friends. Please confirm your programme by return E-mail. I hope you will oblige me as I deserve at least this much of your consideration.

Deepti, “I am now free from my commitment, pretended though it was. We shall decide finally and expedite our engagement. I am writing to my father. I shall convince him there should not be any hitch about caste also because we know that your forefathers were Rajput and it was only after conversion to Jainism that the new caste Oswal was adopted.”

Deepak, “You are ignoring the main issue. You should first

reply to the E-mail of Ajeet. I shall like to attend his marriage and meet such a fine gentleman.”

Deepti, “So let me send the E-mail that we three shall be attending the marriage.”

Deepak, “It will give me an opportunity to meet my parents within such a short time. I am booking three tickets to and fro by the earliest available flight.”

Shree was very delighted and endorsed all that Deepti said.

Deepak diverted the topic and said, “Let me finish my work else you will blame me for getting late for lunch.

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They reached Jaipur Sunday morning and straightway went to the hotel where the bridegroom and the party were staying. It was breakfast time and they could meet Ajeet, his parents and relatives. Deepti introduced Deepak and Shree to Ajeet. To their surprise Vijay, his wife Vibha and brother-in-law Vibhu were also there. Ajeet came forward to introduce them. Deepak interrupted and said, “We know each other. Vijay is my close friend since childhood. I and Deepti attended his marriage and have known Vibha and Vibhu since then.”

Ajeet, “My to-be-bride Abha and Vibha are close friends.”

Deepti and Ajeet kept staring at each other sometimes straight and sometimes askance, just wished but did not speak. Both were feeling guilty in their own ways.

Deepak and Deepti were surprised to notice Shree and Vibhu in the same plight. To add to their suspense and breaking the stalemate Shree rushed towards Vibhu, touched

his feet and apologised for having hesitated to pay her respects to him.

Vibhu, "I am sorry that I failed to recognise you in your new form and attire. You are Shradha nun. You are now a householder and not a nun. It is a wonder, never heard before."

Deepti stepped forward and asked, "Since how long do you know each other?"

Shree, "Our Acharya took a very important decision to arrange teaching of English to all disciples. Vibhu was doing his M.A. then and was engaged as our tutor. He was so proficient and nice that every nun and monk remembers him with great respect."

Deepti saw a perfect match between Shree and Vibhu but did not reveal her assessment and feelings. She decided to speak to Deepak at some appropriate time.

After the breakfast was over everyone went to their respective rooms to relax. The marriage was late in the night. Deepak wanted to avail this intervening time for himself to meet his parents and asked Deepti and Shree if they would also like to accompany him. Shree hesitated but Deepti coaxed her, "You should have courage for your conviction and face the Acharya boldly. If he asks questions about your household life after leaving the order of a nun you should tell the truth that you are happier than when you were a nun."

It was 10.a.m. when they reached the place where monks were staying and routine daily discourse was just over and followers gathered there were paying departing obeisance, bowing and prostrating thrice. Deepak, Deepti and Shree

followed the Acharya to his chamber and after the Acharya settled down on his seat Deepak spoke humbly and respectfully, "With your permission we want to meet my parents."

Deepti added, "We also reiterate our request that they may now be freed from the bondage of monkhood and the order of nuns."

Acharya, "Monkhood or the order of nuns is not bondage but a right path to attain salvation. None is forced here. Everyone comes in monkhood of his own. As Shradha took her own decision to revert to household they are also free. I shall not force them to stay."

Deepti, "We thank you for your permission."

Shree was behind Deepti and took her turn to pay obeisance in traditional manner, bowing and prostrating thrice unlike Deepti who just raised and folded her hands. Her humility and behaviour caught the attention of Acharya. She stood tall, steady and composed with new found confidence.

Acharya, "Are you happy now?"

Shree, "I have yet to get sensitised to feelings of pain and pleasure, sorrow and happiness. The indoctrination, conditioning and regimented life as nun for years have desensitised me. You and senior monks have been constantly hammering on us disciples that household life is full of miseries and problems and should be renounced for real and lasting happiness. It has repeatedly been impressed that fulfilling sensuous needs of food, drink, clothing and feeling pleasure or pain from comfort or discomfort, from heat or cold, hunger or thirst etc are inconsequential in the path to salvation. I am now realising that food and other physical

requirements of the body are necessary and that body should not be despised as monks and nuns are taught. Of course life style should be simple and needs should be managed as to not encroach on others including various constituents of nature, the soil, water, forests and numerous life forms as all these like human beings have their carrying or bearing capacities beyond which none should be burdened."

Acharya, "I am impressed. You are adapting to the new situation. You are looking healthier. The glow on your face is manifesting confidence, happiness and well being."

Shree, "I am in good health because I am not torturing my body by the forced ritual of fasting every alternate day, continuously for two, three, eight days and for a month and longer as I was conditioned to observe of my own or in competitive spirit with other nuns. I am now taking nutritious diet, breakfast of boiled cereals and milk at 8.a.m., lunch comprising wheat and rice preparations with two, three vegetables and pulses at 12.noon, and then I take seasonal fruits at 3.p.m. and lastly supper almost similar as lunch at 6.p.m. before sunset, the age old practice in our country which provides automatically three to four hours' gap between meals and sleep advised medically also. Under western influence people now take meals late at night and go to sleep soon after, which is the cause of gastric diseases. The glow on my face of course manifests my renewed confidence but is obviously because I have now full well grown dark hair which by contrast enhances the colour and beauty of my face. As a nun it was obligatory to pluck hair periodically by pulling forcefully in spite of excruciating pain to which also nuns get desensitised in due course of time as the nerve cells at root of hair get irreparably damaged. As nuns we are advised to follow non-

violence so that no other life is hurt even slightly, yet we are required to pull out hair forcefully, causing pain to root cells and nerve cells which are also living entities like other life forms. Likewise prolonged fasting also kills innumerable living micro-organisms, the fauna and the flora in our body. This is outright violence and mockery of the mandatory vow of non-violence."

Acharya, "Your point of view is worth debating. I shall keep it mind during any future conference."

Deepak, "We beg leave of you to meet my parents."

Deepak went to see Prashant muni his father and Deepti and Shree to Pushpa sadhwi (earlier Phoolwati, Deepak's mother) and informed them about the permission of the Acharya to leave their religious bonds if they so desire. Both disagreed and said that they would wait for the decision of the conference of monks to be convened by the Acharya. Disappointed the three left for the venue of Ajeet's marriage.

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Ajeet the bridegroom and Abha the bride were seated on exquisite chairs on the decorated stage. Abha was looking gorgeous in her bridal outfit and her gold and diamond jewellery. Deepak and Deepti went up the stage to congratulate them and gave the presents to the couple. Seeing Deepti Ajeet looked intensely at Abha to show his pride that he has got more beautiful and befitting wife than her. To humiliate and tease her he pointed his finger over the body of Abha from head to toe holding for a moment or so pointing specifically at her beautiful eyes, nose, cheeks, lips and the curves below. Deepti sensed this and getting down swiftly went to sit with

Shree and kept moving her eyes till she located Vibhu. She caught the Shree's hand and virtually dragged her to the place where Vibhu was chatting with Vibha.

Deepti, "Shree did not tell us that she knew Vibhu. Shree has denounced the order of nuns and taken an extraordinarily bold decision against formidable odds and threats from her own community. It required a great effort and courage to win over her mindset as a result of intensive indoctrination exalting the life of nuns. She is now an eligible bride. I shall talk to Deepak if you approve my proposal."

Shree and Vibhu blushed.

Vibha answered, "I shall discuss it with Vijay and my parents."

Deepak too joined and called Vijay also. They discussed the matter in detail. Vijay and Vibha promised to talk to the parents concerned and try to finalise the matter as early as possible."

Deepti, "Please, Vijay recommend my proposal to Deepak also so that I and Shree are simultaneously married in as simple a ceremony as that of Vibha and yours."

Deepak, Deepti and Shree had to catch their flight and departed exchanging greetings and promised to meet again soon.

The dialogue with Shree stirred the mind of Acharya Vinay and forced him to rethink about the relevance of monkhood and its traditions, rules, code of conduct, life style and process of recruitment and importance of householders. He was

realising that decrying and denigrating the householders was like speaking against the very foundation and support system on which the entire edifice of monkhood stands and if they react, get annoyed and stop supporting because of continuing pestering and denying their importance, the institution of monkhood will not survive. He realised that the householders do a lot for monks and give everything they need but get nothing in return because monks, as a matter of fact, are incapable and incompetent to give anything to the householders, even advice as claimed by monks for the benefit of householders because the monks initiated at early age do not have any experience of problems of household and those who join late after living as a householder are generally those who became monks, being unable to face the challenges and problems of household and are therefore not competent to advise. He also felt that the claim of monks for better knowledge and understanding of scriptures and benevolence in imparting it to householders is also exaggerated. He knew that there are householders with academic interests, who are better versed in scriptures in spite of onerous household responsibilities and are invited and appointed to teach the very monks who claim to be superior. He had read in scriptures also about superiority of many householders who were more abstemious and stricter followers of the vows than monks.

He was impressed by seeing transformation in Shradha now Shree as a householder. He found her happier than before when she was a nun. He could have not imagined that she would look so elegant and graceful in her new attire, her fair beautifully chiselled face sparkling bright in the background of her long black hair now fully grown which during monkhood were being repeatedly and periodically plucked

out by hand to practice tolerance to excruciating pain in the process. It is cruelty to numerous root cells as each cell is a life form in itself. He could not yet find any logic in it in spite of being in the monkhood for over thirty years. She looked healthier, well built, smarter and more charming than during her life as a nun. Rigorous and regimented life style then had affected her health because as a nun she resorted to repeated fasting every alternate day, continuously for three or eight days and even up to a month as ordained for monks and nuns. He also felt that prolonged fasting was against the very basic tenets of non-violence because innumerable life forms inside human body depending on food taken by humans would die premature death and that fasting would also upset the normal biological digestive cycle. Though he had promised to organise a broad based conference of monks and intelligentsia to discuss threadbare the issue of redundancy or utility of monkhood, yet he was hesitant as it might boomerang in the form of strong revolt from communities of various sects. His conscience was pulling in opposite directions. He was under immense obligation to the community which respected and adored him and had spent millions on various educational, medical and other philanthropic projects on his bidding whereas he was also not convinced about the process of recruitment in monkhood and the order of nuns as he himself had been a victim. He was ambivalent and in a dilemma. He could neither retract nor decide conclusively about the promised conference. He decided to postpone it as much as possible.

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## SIX

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Deepti was in constant touch with Vijay, Vibha and her parents urging to finalise marriage proposals for both Shree and herself. She requested them to make a surprise visit to Bangalore and inform Deepak only a day before their arrival.

Her plan worked.

It was Saturday evening when they were taking their lunch when the telephone rang. Shree picked it. It was from Vijay and for Deepak.

Vijay was brief, "We are reaching Bangalore tomorrow morning, Vibha, her brother Vibhu and their parents are also accompanying. Rest when we meet."

Just an hour later there was another phone call. Deepti took the call. It was from her father. She called Deepak to talk.

Chandrapal Singh also was very brief, "We have not met before. My wife and I are coming to see our daughter Deepti. Please give the phone to her."



Deepak, "It was she who picked the phone. I do not know as to why she did not talk and handed over it to me."

Deepti was nearby and said, "I gave it to you first so that you are introduced."

She spoke to her father and mother repeatedly one after the other enquiring about their health and various matters. She talked over half an hour. Her father ended the call after informing that they are reaching Bangalore Sunday evening. She informed Deepak accordingly.

Deepak could guess the purpose of simultaneous visit of two families and asked Deepti, "I presume, you knew about the programme of the two families and probably did not tell me deliberately."

Deepti, "You are aware that I have been in touch with Vijay ever since I found in Vibhu a perfect match for Shree and I have been talking to my parents quite often. There is nothing to hide from you deliberately. I shall be the last person to resort to such gimmicks and that too with a person with whom I have decided to be a life partner."

Deepak, "I am sorry. I never wanted to cast any aspersion on you. I am happy that I shall be meeting your parents and Vijay whom we invited long back. It is matter of great pleasure that Vibhu and his parents are also coming and if the marriage of Shree is finalised I shall feel absolved of my guilt."

Deepti, "I wish that our marriage is also finalised."

Deepak, "Will your parents agree to such a diverse inter cast marriage as between a Rajput and an Oswal?"

Deepti, "There will be no problem if you give your consent."

Deepak, "I have no option left in view of your persistent effort in bringing me out of my mania for monkhood."

Shree who was listening as a silent spectator interrupted and said, "It is enough of unnecessary arguing. Let us sit down calmly and coolly and plan about the stay, menu and itinerary of the honourable guests."

The three sat till late night planning everything to the minute detail and retired late to bed and probably dreamt their respective futures the whole night.

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Sunday was a very hectic day for Deepak and Deepti. They went to the airport early morning to pick up Vijay and party. Deepak had arranged accommodation for them at a hotel but they insisted that they would stay at his flat though he pleaded that there will be discomfort as the flat is not that spacious. Vijay reminded him of their life in their home town, "You have forgotten that there even fifty to a hundred persons enjoyed staying in a small place during marriages and other such occasions. It is not the space but the togetherness that is important."

Deepak, "More guests, Deepti's parents will also be coming in the evening. I have arranged accommodation for them also in the same hotel. We may also shift there so that there is no discomfort to any. There is also a spacious lobby where we can all sit together and talk. In addition there is a meeting hall also for conferencing."

Vijay, "Nothing can be a better substitute of one's home. As far as I am concerned I shall prefer your house."

Shree was in her usual self, neither in a hurry nor idling. She was doing her house keeping silently and patiently. She

prepared breakfast and served it to all in time. She anticipated that Vijay would insist to stay in the flat however small it may be. She had put extra beds on the floor in every room and every other vacant space available by shifting sofas, dining table etc in a planned way so that nothing appeared haphazard. Deepak and Deepti were impressed. Deepti asked, "Did you get training in housekeeping while you were a nun?"

Shree, "I got all the training you are talking about from my mother."

After breakfast everybody lay down on beds wherever they liked. All were tired and fell fast asleep and woke up only when Shree sounded a warning alarm that all should take bath and be ready for lunch within an hour.

Lunch was delicious, a mix of mewar (Udaipur region) and of dhundad (Jaipur region) cuisine. All except Shree went to sleep again. She awakened Deepak at 4.p.m. which was time he should be ready and leave for airport to pick up Deepti's parents.

The flight was on time. Deepak told them that he had arranged accommodation for them in a hotel because his flat was small and other guests were also staying and they would not be comfortable there.

Chandrapal Singh, "We are not guests in the house our daughter is staying. We are family members. We shall like to stay in the house if it is not inconvenient to others. We shall like to mingle with your other guests as they are also going to become our near relatives soon."

Deepak drove straight to his flat. Shree had prepared tea and snacks already. She had been working since early

morning incessantly and there was no sign of fatigue. She was invariably calm and composed. After tea guests went to relax on the beds spread on the floor. Shree was meticulous in timings and arrangements. She called everybody for dinner at 6.p.m. sharp. Kanchanji, Vibhu's mother was observing her ever since their arrival and was very much impressed by her alacrity, expertise in all activities she was handling, her diligence, steadfastness, humility, grace and elegance and she judged her as a most befitting bride for her son Vibhu. After dinner the two families split in two groups, sat on mattresses at two distant places for their conferencing, counselling sessions. Vijay, Vibha, Vibhu, Vidyadharji and Kanchanji gathered at one corner and Deepak, Deepti with her parents Chandrapal Singh and Kaminiji in another.

Kanchanji called Shree to sit with them, "You should also take some rest. You have been working tirelessly since we came and I presume earlier also as other guests are there since morning. I wonder as to how you manage your multitasking so dextrously and with so much equanimity. We are very much impressed. I believe that you know about the purpose of our visit here."

Shree, "Yes, I know. Deepti did not hide anything from me. We are good friends, just like sisters."

Kanchanji, "You know Vibhu?"

Shree, "Yes, since long while I was a nun and he taught me and other nuns and monks English. I respect him and adore him for his sterling qualities, so rare these days in youth."

Kanchanji, "We have chosen you as our daughter-in-law. We shall like to solemnise your marriage with Vibhu within

a week, the maximum period of our stay here. Now let us join the other group and enquire about their decision.”

The other group also concluded with similar decision and was about to rise and announce but Kanchanji took the credit of declaring first. All agreed that both marriages should be solemnised simultaneously. They sat till late in night to plan, work out details and all modalities. Each one proposed, took and accepted the assigned tasks and responsibilities and got busy in arrangements. The date for marriage was fixed on the following Friday. They were all enlightened and did not believe in consulting astrologers for auspicious date and time. Vidyadharji quoted Chanakya, the greatest architect of famous Maurya Empire, “If work is done with proper planning and sincerity, the very time of its execution is best and all fears and apprehensions about the impact of planetary conjunction are irrelevant as planets or stars cannot do any wrong or good. The marriages performed according to the advice of astrologers at the most propitious time are not all successful and likewise those solemnised without their intervention are not all failures. Astrologers are also quakes who misguide gullible people in their own interest of earning money. They succeed because of the ignorance and weakness of masses that by performing certain rituals and spending money they would be able to ward off evil effect of the planets. They claim and boast precise forecasts but they never did so about earth quakes, storms, famines, epidemics, terror attacks though they arrogate to themselves the capability to predict future of not only individuals but also of countries and nations. There are numerous examples of ignominious defeat of brave warriors only because of astrologers who misguided and advised not to fight till propitious conjunction of planets and stars.

Deepti endorsed all that Vidyadharji said, “In spite of glaring facts you have mentioned astrology and its wily practitioners are holding their sway and spreading their wings widely. Related to it another superstition so called Vastu shastra is getting more and more popular in recent years. It is now an established scientific fact that with earth rotating on its axis everything, any room or location on every longitude keeps on changing its direction, hence the prescriptions of Vastu shastra that a particular room or thing should face or be put in particular direction are absurd and ridiculous. Rationalists took a bold step and filed public interest litigation (PIL) in Bombay High Court, requesting ban on astrology, palmistry, Vastu shastra and pseudo holy men claiming to cure even terminal diseases. Article 51 (h), Part IVA of the Constitution of India enjoins on every citizen to develop scientific temper yet unfortunately the Union Government in its affidavit supported these superstitious practices eulogising them as 4000 years old time tested science though these are not at all science by any scientific criteria. This is because most of those who matter in such government decisions are themselves superstitious to the core and throng to such practitioners.”

Deepak, “It is fortunate that none of us here subscribe to any sort of superstition. I think we have worked every detail regarding marriage arrangements. We should now go to sleep as we will have to be on our assigned jobs from early morning.”

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Marriage was arranged in a spacious hall with a built in stage. Vibha was supervising the arrangements. There was no floral decoration or any sort of extravaganza. Everything

including meals was arranged in a simple and neat way, though the gentry attending the ceremony comprised all those who mattered in the corporate sector in Bangalore. There were no superstitious rituals like circumambulation by bride and bridegroom around fire pot or anything of the sort. Marriage was solemnised the same way as was of Vibha and Vijay. Both pairs, Deepak-Deepika and Shree-Vibhu were seated on four chairs on the stage. On instructions from Vibha they got up and took only one vow that they will be sincere to each other throughout their lives.

Vibha was about to request for lunch when Deepak stood up and said, "I have a commitment to announce. The arrangements here should not give the impression that we are miserly in spite of getting fat salaries. We do not believe in wasteful expenditure only to satisfy our ego. We have constituted "Deepshree Rehabilitation Trust" to help those in need and we have put initial amount of Rs one million and more will be added every year at least by ten percent of our income. I request the philanthropists here to contribute as much as they can. I request you all to take meals; of course simple by your standards but you will find the menu safe and nutritious."

All dispersed after meals to their respective places.

Deepti's parents, Vijay, Vibha and her parents left by evening flights. The newlywed couples Deepak-Deepti and Vibhu-Shree remained at Bangalore to decide about their itinerary for honeymoon as they did not get time to plan until then. They were very tired after they returned from the airport. Except Shree all sank on the sofas exhausted. Shree did not lose composure and went straight in the kitchen, took out

some eatables from the oven and spread on the table, requesting all to take something to replenish the lost calories.

The newlywed then went to their respective bed rooms.

Next morning when Shree and Vibhu came out Deepak and Deepti were already waiting in the drawing room. Deepti joked, "The household manager is late. We are waiting for tea."

Shree blushed but replied in the same tone and tenor, "All of you have to take bath first before taking tea and befitting breakfast I shall prepare within half hour."

They were surprised by such an assertive and commanding posture of Shree manifested never before. They obeyed her, the dominating Deepti notwithstanding.

## SEVEN

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Deepak observed perceptible changes in Deepti. He expressed his feelings to her, "A few months companionship with Shree has transformed you into an adept, trained, competent, mellowed and perfect housewife."

Deepti, "Are you satisfied and do not repent marrying me?"

Deepak, "I am more than satisfied, rather fascinated as I am getting more and more dependent on you. Earlier I used to take care of my clothes and all other things myself but now I ask you even for such a small thing as a handkerchief. The ideal housewife in you has made me lazy."

Deepti, "Please do not flatter. Of course I am thankful to Shree for teaching me cooking and managing the house. I also have vivid memories of my mother's expertise in managing our house, many times bigger than our flat."

Deepak, "I am not flattering. I am speaking truth. Anyway, I want to share with you an important plan. You remember that I made an announcement at the time of our marriage to establish and start 'Deepshree Rehabilitation Trust'. We have established it, have got it registered and have also deposited

the promised amount, but it has not been made functional. It is not befitting for professionals like us. I am thinking to leave my job in the company and devote my entire time and energy to make the Trust truly functional."

Deepti, "What are you talking? You want to leave the company which has given you so much. You are Joint Managing Director. The company gave you befitting promotion every time you successfully completed the project entrusted to you. Of course you were rewarded for your intellectual excellence, dexterity, expertise, honesty, sincerity and hard work. I think that you should not be ungrateful and leave the company at the time they need you most for their new projects, initiated by you."

Deepak, "I shall not leave abruptly. I shall seek their permission and give them reasonable time to permit me to leave. I am just sharing with you my idea. You are my better half and I need your advice. We shall discuss it in evening. It is now time to go to office."

Deepti, "I have just one suggestion. We should involve Vibhu, Shree, Vijay and Vibha also in our project."

Deepak, "It is a very good and useful advice."

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As advised by Deepak and Deepti, Shree was doing diploma course in industrial psychology. Vibhu was interested in linguistics and was doing advance courses. He was simultaneously learning foreign languages. After doing short courses in French and Germany he was doing a diploma in Russian. Deepak invited both of them to join his firm soon after they finished their courses.

Vibha, with her zeal and commitment established herself as a much sought after advisor on environmental matters. She took up cases of environmental concern, particularly affecting the tribal people with the authorities concerned at district and higher levels, with ministers and chief minister and with central government. If relief was not given by government she went to courts up to the Supreme Court against pollution of air, water resources, soils and discharge of hazardous effluents by various industries, power and chemical plants, mining and others. Impressed by her expertise, influence and clout several industrialists sought her advice about their projects for facilitating environmental clearance. Her office which was almost like a corporate office was managed by Vijay. He did diploma course in administration through correspondence while working as a lecturer. He subsequently resigned from his secure government job to help Vibha who remained mostly out on tour.

While checking E-mails Vijay saw a lengthy one from Deepak, "It is to inform you that I and Deepti have left our jobs and have established our own consultancy firm 'Deep Consultants'. We are presently working from a rented apartment. We shall soon have our own building. I shall inform you well in advance to be present at the time of inauguration. Vibha must also come. You will be happy to know that within a short period of two months we have built up good clientele and need more man power to cope with increasing work load. I have learnt about fame and name of Vibha as advisor in environmental matters. Kindly request her to assist us also and let me know her consultancy fees per project or per month. We shall be able to pay higher than her current fees. It will not be my firm but my clients who will be paying. I have one

more important plan to share with you. You will recollect that at the time of my marriage I announced establishment of 'Deepshree Rehabilitation Trust' with initial donation of Rs one million from me and Deepti. There is a sizable increase in the funds from our savings as well as by donations from my corporate friends. I earnestly want to make the Trust functional as early as possible. I need help from you and Vibha. I wish that the operative area of the Trust should be in Mewar region preferably near Jhadol our native place. We shall require at least an area of one hundred hectares to house a school, a college and various vocational training institutes and staff quarters. There will be no monetary constraints. Vibha and you should be satisfied. Initially you both will have to take up the responsibility. We shall be coming frequently. Kindly intimate consent of both of you as soon as possible."

Vijay conveyed the message to Vibha who was in Delhi for attending a conference.

Vibha replied, "Please convey my heartiest congratulations to Deepak and Deepti. I am really happy to note that they have selected Mewar as the operative area of their Trust. Please inform them that we shall try to do as much as possible to make it a success."

The message was sent to Deepak who was very happy and relieved on receiving such a spontaneous response and thanked both of them. He invited both of them for detailed discussions at Bangalore or on a mutually convenient date at Udaipur.

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As usual Deepak and Deepti were busy in office. The receptionist informed that there was a phone call for Deepak

who was in a meeting. He instructed that it should be answered by Deepti. It was from members of the managing committee of the consecration ceremony of idols under the guidance of Digamber Jain Acharya Vineetsagar. They requested for appointment with Deepak. Deepti told them that they are most welcome at 4.p.m. She told Deepak about it after they had finished their lunch. Deepak was not comfortable in such ceremonies and told Deepti, "You should have declined the request as we are already very busy"

Deepti, "I have given them time only for a meeting. It would not be proper to deny appointment to respectable persons of a prominent religious community even if they belonged to a different sect other than yours. You may also recollect that we have taken a decision to study the life style of monks of different sects. This may provide us an opportunity for our purpose."

The members of the committee came exactly at 4.p.m. They were five and four were their clients. Deepak realised that it would have been very improper had Deepti denied the appointment. The president of the committee requested, "It will be very kind of both of you to attend at least some functions of five day ceremonies. We are aware that you are very busy. However, we shall feel obliged if you (pointing towards Deepak) chair any one of the functions on any day convenient to you."

Deepak saw the list and gave his consent for an important function on Sunday.

They were grateful. The President thanked and said, "It appears that you were able to read our minds. We also wanted you to attend this very function which is most colourful and

important as eminent scholars from all over the country will also be participating and deliberating on important religious and social issues on that very day. We have one more request and apologise if it is inconvenient. Our Acharya has desired that eminent persons invited to chair any of the functions may be requested to abstain from taking meals after sun set at least for a month."

Deepak, "It is very scientific and medically advised. I belong to the same tradition though in Swetamber sect. I could not keep it while in service but now we both are following it ever since we started our own firm."

Deepti entertained them lavishly by serving tea, coffee, fruits, snacks, cold drinks and dry fruits. They departed satisfied, obliged and happy.

Deepak and Deepti decided to attend all the festivities, rituals and functions on Sunday and avail the opportunity to study them and also to discuss important religious matters with the Acharya and the scholars. They left for the site soon after taking breakfast. They could not reach at 7.a.m. to watch the flagging off of the procession. They saw it mid way. It was a long retinue of decorated elephants, horses, bullock carts, trucks carrying tableaux depicting various events in the life of the enlightened, the Tirthankara, from his conception to birth, childhood, youth, and renunciation, life as a monk, enlightenment and ultimate salvation. Then there were rows of women in golden yellow attire carrying water pots of copper, silver and gold plated and one studded with imitation diamonds. Lastly were rows of men in snow white dress, singing and dancing with gaiety and fervour. There were

seven groups of musical bands in front of elephants, horses, tableaux, women, and men. At the end was a chariot carrying the idol of Tirthankara in front of which boys, girls and men were dancing. It was almost a kilometre long procession and took four hours to reach the venue. Dancing is a lascivious sensual activity and is hindrance in spirituality as mentioned in the scriptures. Yet the contractors of religions have sanctified it by integrating in religious functions which is manifestation of their latent sex urge. The institution of Devdasis in temples is a glaring religious aberration.

One of the members of the managing committee spotted and recognised Deepak and requested him to come with them to witness the food taking procedure of the Acharya at a nearby place in the precincts of the temple where the Acharya was staying. Deepti was very eager to see it.

It was 9.30.a.m. when Acharya came out of his room, went towards a secluded make shift enclosure at the remote corner of the compound. Deepti enquired about it and was told that it was a toilet place for him as he did not use modern flush toilet because innumerable micro-organisms in the urine and faeces get killed there. He returned, washed his hands and feet with water in a wooden coconut shaped pot, being carried by an attendant. He then moved a broom of peacock feathers over his entire body. He did this every time he went from shade to a sunny area so that the organisms acclimatised to shade do not get harmed. He then went inside the temple, swept the place where he paid obeisance, bowed, prostrated and uttered some hymns. He came out of the temple and moved towards rooms on the other side with his one palm touching his shoulder. There were groups of men and women with water pots covered by coconuts, shouting, "Come, come

here food and water is pure." He will stop at one place and move to another and stopped at the third. There the men and women uttered, "Namostu several times." They then circumambulated thrice, seated him on a wooden stand, washed his feet, worshipped him offering eight substances, rice, coloured rice, peeled coconut pieces, water, almonds etc. He was then taken inside a room. He stood clasping his little fingers all the time and took meals in his palms offered by devotees one by one in turn. Deepti counted over forty varieties of food items, varieties of sweets, juices, vegetables, pulses, milk, curd and what not. Below his hands was a big metal pot covered with grass and a lot was falling in it from his palms. About not confining to one place only for food Deepti was explained that the monks decided on the basis of certain conditions such as colour of the dress of the devotees, some weird article to be there etc. and did not tell anyone about it. Alternatives are arranged just on guess. The concept behind this is to put restrictions so that they observe fast to the maximum and thus strengthen their detachment of the body. After meals were over, his hands, feet and body smeared with food items were washed and dried with cloth by the devotees. He then left for the venue.

Deepti caught the hand of Deepak and both went to see the monk's toilet. It was all covered with sand to be removed along with the excreta daily by sweeper. They ran back and joined the retinue following the Acharya who joined the procession which was then only a little distance away from the venue. The timing was so synchronised that the Acharya did not need to walk long yet shown to have joined the procession.

The idol was taken and placed on a brick and mortar



pillar of about two metre height, symbolically representing the tallest mountain 'Meru' of one lakh yojan height as described in Jain cosmology. Then the anointment ceremony began. The family which bought the highest priced diamond pot for Rs five lakhs was given the first preference to anoint or pour water on the idol and in sequence others having pots of lesser and lesser price were allowed. Deepti was constantly enquiring about various processes and was told that earlier the pots were being auctioned and the highest bidder got the desired one. This consumed a lot of time. This has been reformed. The prices for various categories are fixed and devotees are selected on the basis of their financial standing and are approached and coaxed to buy the pots of a particular price.

After the anointment ceremony there was brief discourse or preaching or sermonising by the Acharya. He said, "This consecration ceremony is very important to transform the stone or metal idols in godhood, giving the same status as real and living Tirthankara to be revered and venerated as such. It is to recapitulate the real life of the Tirthankara starting from conception to birth, childhood to youth to renunciation, life as a monk, attainment of enlightenment to salvation. He emphasised that it is only a perfect monk who can consecrate by whispering a special hymn 'Suryamantra' in the ears of the idol. Those who donated money by participating as drivers of the chariot representing 'Indra' the lord of lesser gods or in anointment and in other activities will earn good 'Karma' and its fruits in the next life and will go to heaven as 'Indra'." The programme was adjourned for lunch break. Everyone present was requested to take lunch and reassemble at 2.30.p.m. to participate in the seminar to be addressed by eminent scholars.

The Acharya left for his room to do his daily routine of meditation five times a day at fixed hours. Deepti enquired about her audience with the Acharya and was told that he would be available after 2.p.m. She requested the President of the committee to arrange their meeting and it was done. When Deepak and Deepti reached there some devotees were already waiting for audience. The door opened exactly at 2.p.m. Devotees bowed, prostrated, touched feet and begged for boons. The Acharya had been informed about Deepak and Deepti in advance.

Acharya called and said, "You want clarification about rituals being followed here. I know that Deepak has a religious background as his parents are in monks, may be in the Svetamber sect. There is no significant difference in Digamber and Svetamber concepts. There is difference in ritualistic aspects and not in fundamentals. Earlier there were no meetings between monks of the two sects. Now we are meeting whenever there is some programme for important discussions to find answers to new questions challenging the scriptures."

Deepak, "I fail to understand the growing tendency in jains to indulge in superfluous rituals of worship and vidhans (ceremonies) and ignoring the main teachings of Arhats to follow good conduct for which Jains have been famous and even corrupt and indulgent Nawabs and other rulers appointed them as ministers and treasurers. Evidence of Jains was considered authentic by courts till recently. Now during last few decades Jains are found indulging in corrupt practices more and more. I have observed that even monks and scholars lay more stress on rituals than on good conduct. Jain Tirthankara and Arhat are completely detached and are neither pleased by

praise nor angry by abuse. They could not have preached their own worship which is flattery and is not compatible with fundamental Jain tenets. It is certainly the influence of Vaishnavite tradition where the deity is happy and angry as explicitly mentioned in Gita that the devotee good or bad will get pardon even without atoning for bad deeds by doing good deeds. I have one more question about the use of peacock feathers which are obtained both from natural shedding as well as by forcibly pulling out from live or deliberately killed peacocks."

Acharya, "We have to trust the householders who make arrangement for our peacock feather brooms."

Deepak, "But the fact is that both types of feathers are mixed and cannot be distinguished. The saints are also guilty by acquiescing. Recently the government has banned trading in peacock feathers and henceforth it will be illegal to purchase them. Govt. may relax but to be sure that feathers are naturally shed, the Digamber Jain Community should sponsor and finance maintenance of peacock sanctuaries and Govt. may reserve suggested areas."

Acharya, "This is an important aspect. It must be considered seriously by monks and householders. I agree with you that growing tendency of more importance to rituals than the conduct is because of Vaishnavite influence as many Acharyas came from that background."

Deepak, "I have one more personal question. There is always some reason, an important event in life that persuades to renounce household and adopt monkhood. It was so in case of even the first Tirthankara Rishabdeo who renounced on seeing his favourite dancer Nilanjala dying before his own

eyes while performing her dance. What was precisely the reason in your case?"

Acharya, "I do not know the precise reason because I was initiated when I was very young at the age of fifteen years and did not even fully understand the meaning of renunciation. Of course I was regularly attending the discourses of Digamber saints with my parents and was persuaded by parents, the Acharya staying in our town and by prominent members of our co-religionists. However, I remember that marriage of my elder sister which was a big problem for my parents because of unmanageable dowry demand materialised soon after."

Deepak, "It means that Jain community helped your family financially. Kindly tell about other monks you may know."

Acharya, "Monks are advised not to talk about this. If asked they should say that they entered monkhood out of their own will. I was very close to my Acharya and he once told me that he adopted monkhood because he was unable to make his both ends meet and support his family from his meagre earnings from his petty shop and was getting indebted. The Jain community promised to support his family and deposited five lakhs as a deposit from the interest of which my family is now living well."

Deepak, "It is clear that the monks who got initiated at early age do not have any experience of the challenges and responsibilities of house and are therefore not competent to preach or advise the householders. Likewise those who could not face the vicissitudes of household themselves and ran away as escapists are also not at all competent to tender any advice."

Acharya, "Monks devote most of their time in studying

sacred scriptures and on the basis of that knowledge they preach householders. Of course you are right that they do not have experience of the problems of the householders and may not be able to suggest proper solutions. Our main objective is spiritual."

Deepti, "I am not able to grasp the relevance of nakedness in a civilised society. People other sects do not like and rather hate it. Their women despise and feel it very repulsive. There should be an element of shame while living and moving in a civilised society."

Acharya, "Digamber form is total relinquishing, devoid of any possession. It is to observe the vow of non possession in totality. It also represents the innocence of a child who also remains naked."

Deepti, "No one despises the naked children but as they grow up they are required to be properly dressed. Children do not have ugly hair growth on genitals and it is very disgusting in adults. As regards non possession you do have the broom and water pot and you can have one more, just a little loin cloth. I have seen the articles being transported when monks of your sect shift to other town. They are in truck loads much more in number and quantity than of any ordinary householder. My other question is about your process of taking food. You keep some hidden conditions to take food at any household. I am told that the idea behind this is to make conditions more and more difficult to get food with the objective to avoid taking food and observe forced fasts. This is very strange and contradicts your own actions. You want to take food and therefore you come out to have it and simultaneously you prefix conditions to avoid it. I have one more question and that is about your make shift toilets. They are in the open and the heat of the sun would kill the very

microorganisms you want to save fearing that these would perish in modern flush toilets. Your faeces and urine have to be cleaned by poor helpless sweepers every day though it is against government rules. In fact the microorganisms will not die in flush tanks where the environment is more congenial for them than under the hot sun."

Seeing the Acharya nonplussed and in predicament to answer or not the president of the committee asked Deepak to proceed to the venue where he has to chair the first session of the seminar. The Acharya will also be coming and further there are eminent scholars there. Deepti's questions can be discussed there.

The Seminar started at 3 p.m. after the time consuming preliminaries of welcoming and honouring the chairman, chief guest, special guests and scholars. The time allotted for each speaker was ten minutes only and there was no time for questions. Deepti was disappointed and thought that such seminars do not serve any useful purpose except giving the opportunity to participants to meet each other at the expense of organisers who do all this to satisfy their ego by getting credit and accolades for the arrangements. Only twelve speakers could present the summaries of their papers till 6.p.m. which was time for evening meals. Deepti was preparing notes and handed over a brief to Deepak for his concluding address as the chairman of the session.

Deepak was very brief in his address, "I shall not take much of your time. I shall be committing sin by delaying you for evening meals. This will be harmful to me also as I shall overload myself with 'Antaraya' Karmic matter. I represent the modern educated youth with a scientific temper. To me the relevance of very consecration is questionable. Nothing special happens to inanimate idols by such extravaganza.

Suryamantra does not impart any power to them as they can be stolen by thieves. They are only an instrument of meditation so that we recollect the teachings of the Tirthankara. This can be done by meditating in front of the idols without any sort of such consecration. I am told that this ceremony has cost over three crore rupees, a very large amount which could have been fruitfully utilised for very useful purposes like helping the poor and the destitute, constructing hospitals, schools, shelters and giving scholarships to deserving students etc. I also want to urge that in this age of science and technology we should have a scientific temper and should discard superstitious rituals. All that is written in scriptures cannot be true and we do not have any original of what the omniscient Tirthankara said. The monks who wrote the scriptures were not omniscient. They were all 'Chadmast' and they have themselves written that they are likely to commit mistakes. You have erected here a miniature of Meru Mountain, described in scriptures to be several thousand kilometres high, but there is no trace of it in pictures taken by geo-synchronic satellites which show areas as small as one square metre. The Moon in scriptures is described to have life (of gods and goddesses) and that human beings cannot go there but all this has been proved wrong. When scriptures were written such beliefs prevailed almost in all religions. We should accept the scientific truths and subject old concepts, beliefs and rituals to scientific scrutiny."

The president of the committee apologised for the lack of time and requested all to take their evening meal and reassemble at 7.p.m. to witness the cultural programmes depicting some important anecdotes and events from the life of the Tirthankara. He particularly requested Deepak to stay but Deepak politely declined sensing the mood of Deepti.

## EIGHT

Vijay was busy carrying out the task entrusted to him by his friend Deepak. He selected three alternative areas for the approval of Deepak for the Trust and asked him telephonically to come and finalise any one of the proposed areas.

Deepak consulted Deepti and replied, "I thank you for taking so much trouble. We think that Vibha will be a better judge. It will be in principle an environmental project assimilating concerns of both social and physical environments. I am enclosing the power of attorney in your name and an appointment letter as advisor for Vibha for execution of projects to be taken up by the Trust. I am also enclosing a bank draft for Rs. one million to meet the initial requirement of money for land etc. I assure you to send you as much money as required. Money will be no constraint. Kindly request Vibha to devote as much time as possible for formulating whatever projects deemed suitable and necessary to give maximum benefits to the people. You need not wait for any approval and can proceed as you and Vibha think proper. We have some commitments here and shall try to come and meet you as early as possible."

Vibha was there when Vijay opened the letter from Deepak

and after reading gave it to her. She was very happy to have such a generous offer and said to Vijay, "We should send our acceptance of the offer with thanks. It will help realise my dream of establishing a home for destitute men and women and particularly for children. Send the E-mail right now accepting the offer and inform Deepak that formal acceptance on prescribed forms is being despatched by speed post tomorrow."

Vibha took up the assigned task with all the zeal, vigour and commitment she could muster. She selected and finalised one site out of three. It was adjacent to Jhadol and comprised a rolling, undulating landscape, once covered with lush forests but almost barren now as a result of excessive pressure of increasing population and the pernicious practice of shifting cultivation. Her reputation as a good social worker and influence could overcome and speed up the procedural wrangles in government departments and she could get the land transferred in the name of the Trust. She had the backing of the local people and tribals for whom she had devoted all her time and energy ever since she came to Udaipur. Her strategy was to involve local people and particularly the tribals in any project she implemented. This is the only recipe for the success of any project anywhere.

She visited some prominent NGOs, notably SWRC at Tilonia, CECOEDECON at Jaipur and VIKSAT at Ahmedabad and discussed her plan. She liked the layout of the office and other buildings of VIKSAT best. There were buildings for every special section so spaced that they were not visible till one reached there as there was dense tree cover all over.

She took help of her architect friends and proceeded

simultaneously with the construction of buildings and raising an ideal forest cover of only the indigenous species of over-wood, under-wood, shrubs and herbs in the same proportion as in the natural forests. The first building constructed was that of the primary school. Teachers were appointed, buses were purchased to ferry children to and fro villages and cooking and serving of good, nutritious mid-day meal to students was arranged and the school started functioning within six months. This educational project earned the trust and goodwill of the people. Such programmes which have maximum initial impact on the psyche of the people are termed gesture projects. Deepak was kept informed of the progress regularly.

Deepak and Deepti were very happy to note the progress and kept on thanking Vibha for her dedication and congratulated her on such a speedy progress and success every time they received the E-mail, simultaneously promising to visit the area as soon as possible.

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Deepak and Deepti were visiting his parents quite frequently. Since their return last night Deepak was feeling depressed. Deepti was worried by his plight. She made every possible effort to console him, "Worrying like this will not solve the problem."

Deepak, "I cannot tolerate sufferings of my parents in that prison of monkhood. The Acharya has given them free choice to leave or remain there. I do not know as to why they are adamant and do not want to leave."

Deepti, "They have been in that particular environment for a long period and have been strongly indoctrinated continuously about the superiority of monkhood to household

life. It is natural for not only human beings but all life forms to get attached and develop innate liking, even infatuation for situations and conditions they live in. There are creatures that enjoy living in excreta. People living in filthy slums for years enjoy living there and they do not exhibit any sign of grudge. Women forced to live in veils of various sorts get so accustomed to it that they even resent abandoning the practice. There are cases of human children left in a forest and brought up by jackals or other animals and when brought back continue their animal habits and it requires considerable effort and time to train them back as humans. There is no fault of your parents. It is natural rule of adaptability."

Deepak, "I feel guilty. They are suffering because of me and I am enjoying an enviable cosy life style and married life. I want to subject myself also to the similar sufferings as a penance till they are liberated."

Deepti, "You are already suffering from the same pangs of monkhood rather more than your parents. It is well established that mental suffering is more painful than physical. Your parents do not have any sort of mental agony and as a matter of fact they are mentally satisfied and over the years have developed liking for life style of a monk and are reluctant to leave. They will remain unhappy for sometime even after their liberation. There is a story of a prisoner who got so much infatuated with getting twenty lashes every day that after his release he kept begging people to beat him with lashes. This is how the human psyche works. People attached to harmful and even dangerous superstitious beliefs and practices continue them at the cost of their own life or their children and will not take medicines and will remain under the influence of quacks and other cheats including saints who promise cures

and gains, financial and other successes by their hymns or rituals or occult performances. The religious and superstitious beliefs are opiates and like addictive drugs that affect neurons strongly and it needs concerted efforts and therapy to get rid of them. The wily crooks, the soothsayers, astrologers, saints and others of their ilk take advantage of the ignorance of gullible people and exploit them. You are a student of science and highly educated and should not fall into a psychological trap."

Deepak, "Whatever you are saying may be right but I am unable to bear separation from my parents. It will not be possible for me to come out of gloom unless my parents are liberated."

Deepti, "We shall compel the Acharya to convene the conference he has promised to finally decide about the relevance of monkhood within next three months else I shall threaten him with legal action as I have enough evidence to prove that in a majority of cases monkhood is forced. I know that these religious people are very coward. It is out of cowardice and fear of facing the challenges of a household life that they run away into the safe cocoon of monkhood."

Deepak "Let me experience the life of monkhood till you succeed."

Deepti, "You are already a monk I can vouch from your very birth. Monkhood is encrypted in your genes. There is no need for you to become a monk in physical attire and form. According to scriptures it is the mental state that is more important than physical. By becoming a monk you will weaken our case. It will prove contrary to what we are trying to prove that monkhood is invariably forced rather than voluntary. If a person of your status and education adopts

monkhood voluntarily then it will spoil our case. So dear Deepak think that you have been a monk till you married me and that I have tried hard to extricate you from your genetically and self inflicted agony of mental monkhood."

Deepak was realising that there was truth in what Deepti said. His purpose should be to bring out his parents and not to entangle himself also in the same trap.

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Vibhu and Shree joined the firm "Deep Consultants". They were intelligent and studious. They picked up the tasks assigned to them in office within a short time. This relieved both Deepak and Deepti a great deal at home as well as in office, more so Deepti in managing the household. They could now plan their study of various religious sects and the respective orders and institutions of monks and mahants. They decided to take breaks from office for a week or so and entrust office responsibilities to Vibhu and Shree, of course with an assurance that they would be in touch by E-mail and phone for help if required to attend to their clients.

Deepak's first priority was to visit Jhadol where Vibha was working hard on projects of their Trust. He told his plan to Deepti, "We shall first go to Jhadol via Udaipur and see the progress there. On the way we shall see the important religious pilgrimage centres also. From Udaipur we shall go to mount Abu and visit nearby religious places."

Deepti agreed, "I have longed to see mount Abu, the only hill station in Rajasthan. I think that seven days will be very short. The programme should be for a fortnight."

Deepak, "We shall extend the period after consulting Vibhu and Shree."

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Vijay went to receive them at Udaipur air port. They went straight to Jhadol, Deepti continuously enquiring about the projects. Deepak interrupted often particularly while Vijay was driving on hairpin bends on sloping hills, "Deepti, we shall see everything ourselves. The details you are seeking cannot be explained in words. They are best elucidated on the spot itself."

Deepti was silent for some time but her inquisitiveness compelled her ask some question or the other. When they were nearing the town Deepak said, "I shall like to stay at my old house if it has been restored and made habitable."

Vijay, "You will find it comfortable. It will refresh your memories of your earlier days. I hope, Deepti will not mind if there is some discomfort."

Deepti, "I shall love to stay in our (now mine also) parental house. In my school days as a scout I stayed in tents and huts in small villages. I enjoy such changes."

They reached the house. Vibha was informed in advance. It was lunch time. After exchanging thanks, welcome and pleasantries they washed, took their lunch, enjoyed long forgotten local cuisine, exclusively ordered by Vibha to remind Deepak of his childhood and of the food that used to be prepared by his mother. Deepti could see depression on Deepak's face as he started brooding over the plight of his parents in monkhood.

Deepti tried to break his thought process, "Deepak please be here at Jhadol and do not reflect on matters belonging to Bangalore. Vibhu and Shree are competent enough to take care of matters there. Let us take a little afternoon nap to refresh. We have to go round the project area."

All agreed and retired to have some rest.

Vibha was at the wheel. She stopped at the entrance of the project area. There was a small thatched area along the boundary earmarked for parking. She said, "We shall alight here and walk down to see the preliminary work done so far. At VIKSAT, Ahmadabad vehicles are not allowed inside. I want to follow their arrangements."

Deepti was most inquisitive of all. Vibha answered all her queries and explained about the various works, "We shall not change the topography of the area by levelling etc. The area will be kept undulating with rolling hillocks of varying heights as it is and will be treated and developed according to its land capability pattern. The entire area has been fenced by five feet wide and four feet deep trench all around. The entrance gate is door less. The trench has been covered by an iron frame with iron bars at three inch spacing. Cattle and wild animals cannot go over it. The serpentine shallow trenches over the entire area are contour trenches two feet wide and one and half feet deep and are spaced one hundred metres apart. These trenches are a most effective device to trap every drop of water that will fall on the ground here. In between the trenches pits of two feet cube size have been dug for planting all available species of plants that grow naturally in this region. I have procured the flora for this area as written in his book by a dedicated botanist. He has recorded about 1400 odd species that grow naturally. I shall try to plant all these in the same proportion as they are in natural forest. We have started the nursery, located approximately in the centre of the area. I have tried to procure seeds of 100 species from various sources and sown them in the nursery beds. The plants will be of about

one foot height by the time rains set in and then will be planted out in the pits already dug. I shall get wildlings (seedlings from natural seed fall) during rains and first plant them in the nursery to grow to about one foot height and then in the pits. In due course of time we shall be able to cover the entire area in a good dense natural forest."

They reached at the nursery site which was the only green patch in the vast wilderness of naked barren land all around. It was very artistically and beautifully designed. There was a pond of 40'x15' size in the centre to store water from the tube well which was operative only when electricity was available and the supply was very erratic. It is necessary to keep water stored for watering the plants raised in the nursery lest they die and the whole labour and money was wasted.

Deepti was very pleased to see the pool and suggested, "We should have a swimming session. It is in no way less than a swimming pool."

Vibha, "It is such a swimming facility where not a drop of water is wasted as is the case in the swimming pools in cities where water has to be drained and refilled periodically and to be treated with chemicals. Here not a drop of water is wasted. Water of the pool is utilised for watering the plants in the nursery and refilled from the tube well every day. It is fresh good water every day and is good for healthy swimming if you so desire. I suggest that you should stay at Jhadol for a few days and experience country life.

The suggestion was liked by all and they enjoyed swimming after a long time since they had left the colleges.

Deepti, "I would love to stay here permanently after it is developed."



Deepak, "I am abandoning the plan of purchasing office building at Bangalore. I think we can shift our office headquarters here."

Vijay, "I think it is time to leave. We can come tomorrow morning again."

Deepti, "Tomorrow we are going to Nathdwara, the famous pilgrimage place and abode of the highly revered and adored deity in Mewar. On next visit we shall stay here for longer period at least for a week. I request Vibha to construct a small guest house also here."

Vibha, "I have one more important thing to tell you. I am planning to have wind and solar energy plants also here. My next work will be to construct a higher secondary school building and start it as early as possible. As suggested by Deepti we shall have a guest house also."

Deepak, "I am very happy to see the progress in such a short time. I shall be coming here frequently, soon after the rainy season."

Deepti endorsed the programme.

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The road to Nathdwara was serpentine, negotiating a hilly tract with ups and downs. The landscape was almost barren with no greenery worth the name. Vibha said that there were still some old people who had fond memories of a lush green dense forest over this entire area. There were species of all varieties of dry deciduous forests. The area was famous till recently for good quality sandal trees which had been cut, smuggled and sold away.

It was 10.a.m. when they reached Eklingji, the other famous pilgrimage centre in Mewar on way to Nathdwara. It is a much revered royal deity of the erstwhile rulers of Mewar. There was a queue of about 15 devotees before them. Deepti was behind Vibha. Reaching there she was pained to see people pouring a lot of milk on the Shivalinga. She could not resist admonishing, "Why are you wasting milk in such a large quantity. Your deity is not drinking it and it is all going down the drain below. It is a very nutritious drink. There are thousands of poor children who suffer from malnutrition. Your deity Shiva, if really benign, will be happy if you spare that much milk and give it to poor. I shall insist that those pouring water should not waste water also as it is getting scarce to meet the growing requirement."

The priest sitting there and the devotees were stunned and chill went down their spine. They were seeing by their own eyes that all they were pouring was going waste in the drain. But old beliefs since centuries and generations, etched in their very genetic code, had become ingrained in their psyche as an impulsive obsession. Ignorance generates superstitious beliefs which if practised repeatedly becomes a habit and when continued over a long period of time get encoded in genes as an established genetic trait which remains for generations. Such a trait or habit may remain dormant or manifest in progeny in any future third, fourth or any next generation e.g. drug addiction in great- great-grand parent may manifest in any great- great- great grand progeny which would suffer for none of its fault but of its previous generations. The genetic encryption of course gets modified and mutated by the ambient family, social and physical environment. Such is the natural sequence of genetic coding, its encryption and modification.

Deepti particularly exhorted the young educated girls and boys in the queue there, “You are worshipping the symbolic scene of sexual intercourse, phallus penetrating vagina, vulgar and obscene, a primitive reminiscent culture of uncivilised savages of yore. It is shameful and not befitting the educated and civilised people.”

Such a strong admonition infuriated the priest. Sensing his adrenal rising and anger manifesting in a frowning gesture on his face and that he may indulge in mischief and incite the devotees to offend Deepti physically Vibha intervened, apologised and addressed the priest,” I am sorry. Deepti is ignorant about the sentiments of the people here. I shall explain it to her in detail.”

This pacified the priest and any untoward scene was averted. Vibha quickly pushed Deepti out and they proceeded to Nathdwara.

At Nathdwara also there was a much longer queue of devotees waiting for the opening of the doors of the sanctum sanctorum of the deity. They were told that doors would be opened after 15 minutes. Here the doors are opened at fixed intervals for a fixed period for sighting of deity for devotees. Everyday doors are first opened early morning to awaken the deity from his overnight sleep, then for its bath and dressing, for meals and lastly to induce sleep.

Deepti asked Vijay, “How can a deity an embodiment of all mighty god, supposed to govern the whole universe where nothing happens without his direction afford to sleep? Why do people fantasize that there is god in a lifeless idol and that it has powers of granting boons as god himself? Why do people adore, bathe, dress and feed it like children do with

their dolls? Why do they not take any lesson from authentic history that armies wasting time in rituals like these including praying and not preparing adequately were repeatedly defeated and enslaved and the deity they worshipped never came to their rescue. Pilgrims get injured and even killed while on journey to pilgrimage of their deity and even at the very place of deity. Recently people sitting inside the sanctum sanctorum and praying were also killed by terrorists”

Vijay saw that doors were being opened and alerted that they could go inside to see the deity and that now was the time for its meals. Doors opened and people rushed in, made offerings of a variety of things from cash to eatables sweets, fruits etc. There were already a wide variety of dishes spread in front of the deity, prepared daily in huge quantity by the temple management.

Vijay told Deepti, “All these dishes will be shared by priests in prescribed quantities according to their rank. Initially there were a limited number of priests. But now the successors of the priests have increased and their shares are declining proportionately. The priests will sell their share to shopkeepers who in turn sell it to pilgrims. The items on sale are very delicious, are prepared in pure ghee. We shall purchase some.”

Vijay went to his known shop. Deepti went round the market, surveyed and enquired about the management of the temple. She noticed an old and sober shopkeeper, asked for the best item and purchased it, then sat down and enquired, “What is the structure of management hierarchy here.”

He answered, “The overall head of temple affairs is the Mahant. He is almost the owner. He lives mostly at Mumbai in a palatial mansion, enjoying all material comforts indulging

in sensuous vices. He comes only on some special occasions. Devotees revere him as representative of the deity and even worship him. The government has curtailed his exclusive powers and have appointed a management committee of government officers. Yet there are cases of bungling, misappropriation and embezzlement of funds and valuable jewellery by connivance of the management. It was rumoured that in one such major bungling the chief minister was also involved.”

Deepti was not surprised by such revelations. She sat pondering. She could deduce that there was no difference between the monks, purohits, kathavachaks (story tellers), mahants and the tantrics. A tantric uses occult practices including vulgar sexuality and cruelty by forcing sacrifice of not only birds and animals but also humans, children of others and even one's own. The monks and others also prescribe rituals of various sorts and dubious methods like fears of hell, rewards of heavenly pleasures and successes without effort. There is the difference of only degree and not of kind. They are parasites and cheats and survive on the ignorance and superstitions of gullible people who throng to these mainly because of their inherent weakness to shirk effort and have false belief that their desires will be fulfilled and works will be done by following the superstitious traditions of worshipping inanimate objects, the various idols of gods and goddesses even though they see these lifeless and powerless things helpless to be able to protect themselves and being easily damaged and stolen. This is deep rooted genetically and traditionally and emboldens and empowers the exploiters to exploit gullible masses and to enjoy all sorts of material pleasures parasitically at the cost of ignorant people both rich

and poor, educated and illiterate alike, high placed bureaucrats and ordinary clerks, professors to primary teachers, chief ministers, minsters, sarpanchas and panchas, eminent scientists to junior research scholars i.e. people of all sorts obsessed with superstitious beliefs. Even ISRO scientists perform havans before launching of satellites though these are injurious to environment as anything whatsoever, may be perfumes, when burnt, do produce CO<sub>2</sub>. There is need for concerted measures and determined crusade against all sorts of perpetrators, the monks, mahants, pundits, purohits, pandas and their ilk. The truths about various myths and superstitions should be told and hammered to erase these from the psyche of people through media and incorporated in the programme in education system from primary to all higher levels. She resolved that she would make every possible effort on her part and incorporate it as a main objective of their Trust and arrange for the training of dedicated volunteers to carry on the mission.

Vijay came searching for her and asked her to finish her enquiry as it was time to return to Udaipur now.

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Deepak and Deepti left for mount Abu early next day. On the way they stopped at the famous Rishabdeo or Kesariaji temple. Deepti observed similar scenario here also, people flocking to get boons and their works to done without effort and just by worshipping the lifeless idol, helpless even to save itself. Deepak knew about the temple and told her, “It is a Jain temple. In Jainism asking for boons from Jain idols is prohibited in principle yet majority do that. It is venerated by both Digamber and Swetamber sects but both sects are fighting for exclusive rights and possession and the fight is

going from one court to another and is now in the Supreme Court. Earlier during British rule both sects were allotted separate timings for performing worship in their traditional ways and the arrangement is continuing. Recently a new claim has been added by non Jain Vaishnavite community as non jains and tribals are also the devotees. This problem is the creation of jains themselves because they have been employing non Jain Brahmins or others as pujaris."

They did not stay long and left for onward journey and took a longer route via Ranakpur to another famous Jain temple which was in the valley below. They were descending from a higher altitude. The route was through a dense forest. From February-March to April- June was flowering time of many species. It was delightful and captivating as most of the tree species were in colourful bloom with variety of flowers in different colours. *Butea monosperma* (palas) which generally grows gregariously and with its profuse bright red orange large flowers, giving the impression as if the forest has caught fire and that is why it is called 'Flame of forest'. *Bombax malabaricum* (semal) was conspicuous by its crimson-orange fleshy very large 3" to 6" size flowers.

There were *Madhuca latifolia* (Mahua) trees dotting the landscape with their edible, very nutritious cream coloured flowers which till recently were almost a staple diet of the tribals before the food for work programme of government and now they do not hesitate to cut these benevolent trees providing edible fruits and oil rich fruits, each tree giving sustained annual income of rupees one thousand whereas they get a petty sum of rupees two hundred or so once only by cutting and selling it.

*Aegle marmelos* (beela) was also visible, smiling with its sweet scented greenish white flowers on broad panicles. *Bauhinia variegata* (kachnar) were also seen pulsating with their fragrant large reddish white flowers. *Adina cordifolia* (haldu) in yellow flowers on globose peduncles, exploited indiscriminately for its shining yellow coloured very fine textured wood, coveted for exquisite carved furniture, could also be seen but scarcely. *Cassia fistula* (amaltas) trees attracted the attention of passersby with their bright yellow flowers clustered on long racemes. Likewise *Albizias* were conspicuous with their pale white flowers on one to two feet long panicles. The little humble *Cochlospermum gossipium* (gongal) was seen really gossiping with their bright yellow flowers. *Lannea grandis* (gunja) and *Garuga pinnata* (kakad), the two dominant associates in these *Anogeissus* forests were conspicuous in their greenish yellow flowering racemes. There were many more varieties of trees, shrubs, climbers and little herbs in bloom but they were in a hurry and could not stand and stare to enjoy such fascinating bounty of nature in such abundance.

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It was 6.p.m. when they reached Ranakpur. They were just in time for evening meals which were not served there after sunset. The attendants at the shrine welcomed and invited them for meals. The meals were simple yet nutritious and delicious. They relaxed in the room reserved in advance till it was time for evening Aarti, the regular ritual in Vaishnavite shrines but now in Jain temples also. They reached the temple at 7.30.p.m. Its grandeur, tall and majestic, calm and serene, standing as a sentinel in the valley surrounded by wooded hills, was fascinating. The Aarti, the ritual of worship, singing

praise of the deity, the Tirthankara while rotating the well lit lamps filled with pure ghee, in various articulated rhythmic patterns was being performed by the pujari and devotees. Deepti did not approve the burning of pure ghee in lamps when there was sufficient electric lighting. It may have been necessary to use such lamps in oil or ghee when there was no electricity. There are many poor people who do not see ghee in their whole life. Instead of burning, it should be given to poor. She however looked with awe at the architecture of the temple, its long corridors lined with decorated pillars. After Aarti they went all around the interiors, the floral designs on ceiling and pillars. They decided to come in the morning to see it more closely.

Deepti, "Deepak, I am very much impressed by the gorgeous structure and its idyllic surroundings but I am not convinced of its utility. Why waste so much money and labour on such fine decorative carvings on hard sand stone? The artisans and labourers would have toiled very hard to create these only to satisfy the fancies of the rich who spent such large sum of money just to satisfy their ego. Worship and prayer can be done in simple and moderate structures costing a fraction of what may have been spent here for pomp and show of ill gotten wealth. It was exhibitionism and neither spiritualism nor religion. The floral designs carved on stone, though exquisite and done dextrously with hard labour and costing exorbitantly are no match to nature's own beauty. Instead flower garden should have been raised. "

Deepak, "The rich in those times were very religious. They earned by wisdom and craft, trade and business, but were very frugal in spending on fashionable clothing, wine,

entertainment and other such wasteful pursuits and were thus able to save for religious purposes on the advice of their gurus, the monks."

Deepti, "I have read in one of the scriptures you gave me to read that no one can earn huge amount of money honestly. You said that such ostentatious spending was done on the advice or instigation of monks. Obviously then the monks also have same sort of ego."

Deepak, "You must accept that the money was not spent on vices as is the case now a days. Such works of art also supported art and the artists. Whenever there was famine the rich came forward to help the needy by providing livelihood in the construction works."

Deepti, "This could have been done by constructing schools, hospitals, roads, houses for the poor living in dilapidated huts of mud and grass thatching."

Deepak, "It is only an academic exercise to talk about utility or futility of these no doubt elegant structures, much admired by visitors particularly the foreigners. I hope you will not go to the extent of suggesting their demolition. We have to check our E-mails. We should also go to sleep early so that we can see the temple once again in day light and proceed on our journey as early as possible."

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They reached Mt Abu at 11.a.m. and went first to see the famous Delwara Jain temples. The temples were built with best Makrana marble. The exquisite needle fine carvings on pillars, ceilings and doors was so fascinating and captivating that words in even superlative degree would not be adequate

to describe their stupendous charm that enthralled the visitors. They spoke volumes about the hard work, dexterity and patience of artisans and workers who must have toiled days after days, months after months for years to satisfy the exhibitionist ego of the rich who squandered money for no real purpose but only to show their vanity in competitive pursuits. The guide told that two sisters- in- law got their respective constructions repeatedly demolished to have it done better than that of the other.

Deepti was not enamoured by such vulgar purposeless display of wealth and said, "Deepak, I am not at all in favour of such wasteful expenditure and that too on temples of Tirthankaras who preached simplicity and not extravagance like this. The artists who toiled hard here must have been very talented and their talent and expertise could have better been utilised for bringing out new designs of household and agricultural implements or for evolving new technologies for cottage industries. You must also notice that majority of designs are human forms men and women displaying despicable obscene vulgarity, women in dancing and enticing poses and gestures exposing their curves to arouse sexuality. There are carvings showing even sexual intercourse. What is depicted here is that which is prohibited in Jain code of conduct where seeing such depiction is transgression of the partial (for householders) and total (for monks) vow of celibacy. It appears, you are so enthralled and enticed that you have forgotten time management. There is nothing important and of real utility to be so engrossed. These structures are as a matter of fact sheer irrational exuberance of ego and celebrity quotients of the rich. We have to go to see other places particularly Gurushikhar, the highest mountain peak in

Rajasthan. We have appointment with Brahmakumaris in the evening and we do not have much time."

Deepak as if waking up from slumber said, "You are right. We shall move though the splendour here is enticing to hold on the onlooker forever."

On way to Gurushikhar they stayed just a few minutes to only glance at some temples, both Jain and Vaishnavite. Deepti has always been averse to ridiculous idols, particularly of Ganesha and Hanuman. Ganesha is depicted with elephant head on human body and people pride in interpreting this as expertise of Indian scientists (Shiva here) in transplanting of organs. The fact is that at no point of time the head of smallest and youngest elephant could have fitted on largest human torso lest on baby Ganesha. About the birth of Ganesha also there is a very funny story that Parvati, the spouse of Shiva, created him in human form from the dirt removed from her own body while taking bath and then infusing life into it. Shiva killed Ganesha by cutting off his head because he did not allow him to enter the house on instructions by Parvati. On request of Parvati Shiva revived the dead Ganesha by putting a elephant's head on the dead torso. The question is why Parvati herself did not do it when she could infuse life in human form created from dirt and why Shiva put elephant's head when Ganesha's slaughtered head must be available there. Hanuman was very much in human form but made into monkey mischievously by some artist. There were different emblems on flags of different ruling classes and it was monkey on that of Hanuman's race like snake on that of Naga race. Devotees worshipping them are in fact insulting them by distorting their figures from human to that of half elephant and monkey respectively.

Deepti was really enthralled by the beauty and charm of nature's bounty spread far and wide in the valley below as seen from the Gurushikhar peak. It was cold on the peak and they had to leave because they did have winter clothes. They reached their hotel late at 4.p.m. Their hotel room was overlooking the clean bluish waters of the famous Nakki lake of Mt Abu. They took tea, relaxed for an hour and left for the International Headquarters of Brahmakumaris.

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The spokesperson or the guide, a lady in thirties took them around the campus, the grand buildings, the small and big meeting and meditation rooms and halls. Here again it was display of huge sums of money on concrete and stone. They met the head Brahmakumari and other senior members of the order. Deepti expressed her desire to know about the institution. The guide took them to a splendidly furnished visitors' room where a young lady spokesperson of the organisation was already busy talking to an American couple. The guide told them that the time given to the foreign visitors would be over soon.

The young lady Brahmakumari after seeing off the earlier visitors greeted them with her captivating smile and said in her refined and chaste fluent English, "I am Ratna Brahmakumari. I am sorry for the five minutes delay. They were very inquisitive and wanted to know everything about us."

Deepti, "We too are equally anxious to know about your organisation which you have so meticulously advertised that it has gained fame all over the world. Please tell us about the objectives and basics of your meditation techniques."

Brahmakumari, "Our founder Shiv Baba started the organisation with one main objective of bringing peace and happiness to people suffering from mental and physical agonies mainly because of their own negative thoughts and emotions. Shiv Baba was a human being like us and was a very prosperous jeweller. He retired from business and engaged himself in spiritual pursuits. He could connect himself with god, the fountain head of peace, happiness and purity. He got enlightenment and decided to guide suffering humanity to get rid of their problems and sorrows."

Deepti, "How did he connect with god?"

Brahmakumari, "He did it through meditation; connected with god in paramdham the permanent abode of god and all souls, got charged with abundant energy flowing from god, got enlightenment and established this institution of Brahmakumaris for the benefit of one and all."

Deepak, "Where is that paramdham located? There is no such place observed by our powerful telescopes which have been able to see far distant galaxies and quasars. Our space probes going around searching life anywhere have not yet come across life so far."

Deepti, "It may be mere imagination. All of us sometimes have weird imaginations and some people try to translate them in reality by continuously imagining and it becomes an obsession and if they have money power, intellect and tact they start convincing others also. This spreads by its multiplier effect. Anyone can sit and imagine any such thing or place and will visualise it in his mind and find himself there."

Deepak, "What is the meditation technique in brief?"

Brahmakumari, "Ours is Raj yoga model which does not require any hard and forced painful practice. It is centred on the premise that every soul is inherently pure, peaceful and full of happiness and suffers because it accumulates bad karmas, vices and emotions. In Raj yoga one can sit in any posture he is comfortable with and meditate. The technique is to think that he is pure and peaceful soul for at least ten minutes. This reminding of one's pure nature erases the negative thoughts and vices and one advances spiritually. The emphasis is that one should get rid of one's own vices and prejudices which are the sole cause of one's sufferings. The problem with most of us is that we see others as a source of our problems whereas it is otherwise and we ourselves are only responsible for our problems. Once one gets purified and charged with positive energy from god by connecting with him at paramdham through meditation one will himself become source of such energy for others around. Those whom we view wrong and even adversary will all get transformed friendly. Such is the power of Raj yoga meditation."

Deepti, "The entire edifice of your programme is based on conceptualised noumena of god and soul, the very existence of these entities is an imaginary creation of mankind to get a logical terminus for substantiating its various postulates which otherwise would not be convincing. How was the universe created? It has ever been a big question. The easiest way to answer this riddle was to conceptualise an imaginary creator the god. This has been challenged by even oldest philosophies e.g. Jainism. God is presumed to be very kind, omniscient and omnipotent. As such he should and could have created a happy and peaceful world, its denizens good without vices. But it is not so and the world is full of miseries and

bad people. Mankind has an inbuilt fear of death and an innate keen desire to be eternal and so the entity called soul was conceptualised to get solace of living eternally through soul which is qualified as immortal. The facts now emerging through development of genetics, neuroscience and environmental science are that all that is attributed to soul can easily and convincingly be explained as attributes of the material body."

Brahmakumari, "I would not comment on Jainism which does not subscribe to the concept of one almighty creator god but it does believe in the entity called soul. The existence of soul can be easily understood by the fact that two individuals are not same. It is because of past karmas in previous life. Even the twins born of same parents and brought up in same identical environment are not same in their mental, emotional and physical characteristics. This can be explained on the basis of past karmas of each soul in previous lives which are carried on by the soul in its next births."

Deepti, "The difference in twins can be explained on the basis of genetic and other physical factors. Twins are either from division of one zygote from fusion of one sperm with one ovum i.e. from one gamete or from two sperms fusing with two ova. In the previous case there is genetic similarity but the blood supply in the womb is either more or less in one zygote than in the other and this will result in significant differences in the otherwise identical twins. In later type of twins the genetic matter will be different. The difference attributed due to past karmas in previous life by the soul can also be explained genetically. The characteristics of great grandparents may not manifest in the next but in any future generation because of the control system of pause and release



or on and off switch in each gene. If a great grandparent has addiction to drugs, the future generations have same tendency for no fault on their part. It is all genetic or environmental and has nothing to do with the imaginary concept of past karmas of the noumenon called soul."

Brahmakumari, "It will not be possible for you to understand Raj yoga without understanding soul and its past karmas.

Deepti, "You earlier said that it is for all. Now you are contradicting yourself that it is not for atheists."

Deepak intervened and requested the Brahmakumari, "Kindly elucidate the point that none other than us is responsible for any sort of problems. It would imply that even terrorists and other anti social elements are not at all responsible for the harm they do. Likewise people suffer because of natural calamities of earth quakes, storms, floods, famines, epidemics etc and these can also be eliminated by your technique. I would be happy if you can tell a single instance of taming a hardcore, indoctrinated and conditioned terrorist, committed to jehad with promise to get into heaven and enjoy pleasures there perpetually on return for his heinous crimes of mass murders. I would also like to know if your organisation with all its proclaimed powers has ever averted any of natural calamities."

Brahmakumari in spite of all her training, expertise, experience and oratory skills was nonplussed and could not answer any of the queries. Seeing her in great predicament Deepti intervened and said, "I have one last question. I could not understand as to why the founder being a male himself christened the organisation in female denomination as

Brahmakumari and recruited mainly the females only. Did he consider males incapable? He remained head of the organisation but after him it is all dominated by females. Psychologically the persons claiming to have become celibate also continue to harbour sex instincts rather infatuation for the opposite sex. Mahatma Gandhi walked with hands on the shoulders of girls and not boys. The renowned and great Acharya of Terapanth sect of Swetamber Jains has created a new cadre of Samanis of girls and not of Samans of males. I want to suggest particularly for you that you should rethink about your commitment for monkhood (Brahmakumaris) and entire life as celibate. As you said every soul has a mission. You should bear with me that most important mission is to procreate lest the world will end eventually. You are intelligent, very learned, healthy and beautiful. You are yet young and marriageable. If you do not marry and procreate then the valuable storehouse of your excellent genes will be lost forever and deprive the posterity of your genetic assets. I earnestly request you to rethink about the circumstances under which you were forced to enter monkhood. I am sure it could not be voluntary."

Brahmakumari again could not answer. Deepak broke the silence, "We have taken a lot of your time. We shall now beg leave. I am giving you my card which has our E-mail and other addresses and phone numbers. We shall be grateful if you kindly mail the answers to our queries. I have seen persons practising regular meditation and then forgetting it then and there. It does not percolate down in their daily routine life and they are swayed away easily into spurts of anger and other emotions and vices and do not perform their acts or works carefully and with required attention, spoil them and

meet failures. Ideally one should practise to synchronise mind and body while doing any work, concentrating fully on the particular work in hand at a time and be able to stop diversion on any other as is generally the case e.g. while driving a vehicle if the mind is away on other matters, there will be accidents. It would be really beneficial if instead of meditation for a limited period of time of fifteen minutes or more one inculcates a habit of awareness every act, every moment. This will take care of almost all types of mistakes or wrongs one is likely to commit and suffer. I am also puzzled that you have equated your founder, though a human being, with god by denominating him as Shiv Baba. It would mean that Shiv Baba was god incarnation. We thank you very much for sparing your valuable time for us.”

Ratna was stirred to the core, ran straight to the head, the Dadi, so addressed by the followers, told her about the conversation with Deepti and Deepak and gave her its recording. It was played in presence of all disciples there. The Dadi herself and younger ones in particular were impressed and started recollecting their individual circumstances which forced them to embrace monkhood. It was almost common for all. Initiation was invariably not voluntary but forced by the circumstances mainly poverty and inability of parents to marry them. The conversation acted as a catalyst in the psyche and subconscious of all present there and through them spread to others, sowing seeds of revolt insidiously.

Deepak opened the lock of their hotel room. Before he could proceed to open the door Deepti pushed it with force, went inside and threw herself on the bed flat and stretched. Deepak was surprised at such an impulsive act of vivacious Deepti and asked, “What is the matter?”

Deepti, “I am tired. I am feeling very heavy in the head with the overload of useless trash of spirituality, god, soul, meditation, imaginary concepts, noumena and display of infructuous religious fervour and extravaganza. I want to offload this trash by real life diversion.”

Deepak, “You should change, take bath and I promise you will be alright.”

## NINE

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Acharya Vinay left Jaipur for onward journey to Udaipur where the next stay for four months was fixed. It is mandatory for Jain monks to remain at one location during rainy season. They walk on foot and cover ten to fifteen kilometres a day staying in villages or towns on the way. Acharya and his group were at village Sohargarh when Deepak and Deepti met them on their way to Jaipur from where they were to fly to Bangalore. After paying customary obeisance Deepak requested the Acharya, "Kindly expedite and fix dates as early as possible for your proposed conference of monks of all sects and religious orders to deliberate upon the futility or utility of monkhood so that my parents can be freed from the forced monkhood on them."

Acharya, "I shall do it on reaching Udaipur."

Deepak, "It will be late in case it is to be held at Udaipur. I request you to start preparatory work right now during your journey. If you permit I shall depute my sister Shree, earlier your disciple Shradha to accompany you and do correspondence work as per your instructions. She is now well versed in operating a computer. She will bring her laptop for this work."

Acharya hesitated because he was deliberately delaying it to gain time, but agreed lest he may be misunderstood.

On the main road towards Jaipur, adjacent to the village Sohargarh, Deepti spotted two huts little away from the road and asked Deepak to see people there. As car entered the campus a young man came and greeted them, "You are welcome. I am working on the project for uplift and empowerment of women with Aruna Roy of SWRC, Tilonia."

Deepak, "I know her. Is she here?"

Mrs Roy was happy to see Deepak and his wife Deepti and explained in brief their project on which they had been working for one year, "We at Tilonia came to know that the ex jagirdar of Sohargarh is still perpetuating his fiefdom even after the abolition of jagirs. They still charge fees for dry wood which is allowed free by the government for the villagers for their bonafide domestic use. The matter of concern was that the spoiled sons of the jagirdar harassed the girls going to collect wood or to defecate in the forest to the extent that many times the girls were molested and even raped. We trained the girls in self defence measures including some martial arts. Now the situation has changed and it is the sons of jagirdar whom girls feared, are now afraid of girls who go in groups and beat them up if harassed. We have also done some development work like tree planting, construction of anicuts, bundhs etc. We are also organising vocational training programmes to provide employment and self help"

Deepak, "We are also taking up a social welfare programme under our 'Deepshree Rehabilitation Trust' at Jhadol near Udaipur. Vibha, my friend's wife a committed social worker and a reputed environmentalist has taken up the responsibility to implement it."

Mrs Roy, "I know Mrs Vibha very well. She came to consult me also. I shall try to visit the site as early as possible."

Deepak, "It will help educate us also if we can synchronise our visit together. We shall be there on even short notice of just two days. Please inform us on telephone or E-mail and we will be there."

Turning to Deepti he told her about the exemplary sacrifice made by Mrs Roy, "She is an iconic person. She is an intellectual and got in I.A.S. in the first attempt and was enjoying cosy life as a senior officer at the centre with nice bungalow, car and what not. She left all these comforts, left her lucrative job and committed herself to social service. She now lives as an ordinary villager, travels in public transport, buses and trains like ordinary people. She is the architect of the Right to Information Bill and pursued it to its logical end, being enacted as law. We shall try to emulate her dedication, commitment and simplicity. Monks if they at all want to help people should emulate Mrs. Roy. She is many times superior to monks who are mainly engaged in selfish pursuits."

Mrs Roy, "Please do not exaggerate. It is embarrassing. I have done all that you said for my own satisfaction and happiness. I am happy in the way I am living. I am enjoying it. I feel great pleasure when I see a smile on the faces of the down trodden and poor."

Deepak thanked her for her promise to visit the site of their project at Jhadol and begged leave of her with the hope to meet again soon.

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All the four, Shree, Vibhu, Deepak and Deepti were

delighted to be together again at Bangalore. Deepak congratulated and thanked both Shree and Vibhu for managing the office in their absence so efficiently that all the clients were satisfied and had commended their work through E-mails received during their journey. Pointing towards Shree Deepak said, "I have committed to the Acharya that you would carry out one very important assignment for you."

Shree, "I hope, you are not pushing me back into the same cage from which I have been freed with great difficulty."

Deepti, "It is impossible now even if you want it as Vibhu will stand as an invincible wall to prevent you from getting into the trap again. You will now work hard to facilitate freedom of your parents and that is the assignment for you Deepak talked about."

Deepak, "We met Acharya at Sohargarh when he was on his way to Udaipur while we were returning to Jaipur. We requested him to expedite the dates of conference of monks he had promised. He was in no mood to expedite rather wanted to delay as much as possible. We requested him to start the preparatory work immediately and suggested that we shall depute you to help him. You may decide the dates when you would like to join him, record his instructions, names of monks and others he would like to invite and also formulate a detailed questionnaire to be circulated to the participants. I think you will be able to do this in a week's time. We shall then examine it, add more invitees, edit the draft questionnaire and circulate."

Shree, "I shall leave next week."

Deepti, "You will get a good surprise on your return. But I will not tell you now even if you insist."

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Shree returned completing the assignment given to her. Deepti embraced her and said, "I am surprised to note that the attitudes inculcated during your monkhood are still lingering with you. Ever since your marriage did you have any feeling or urge to go out to any place of your choice for honeymoon. We have done it at Mt Abu, the lovely hill station. We also utilised the opportunity to evaluate the relevance of the gorgeous temples costing huge sums of money which would have been better utilised for constructing schools, colleges, hospitals and shelters for the poor. We had a good discussion with Brahmakumaris also there. Here is a surprise for you that I promised, two return air tickets for both of you to enjoy your honeymoon in Kashmir. Time permitting you should also visit religious places particularly the famous Vaishnodevi shrine and tell your impressions to us on return."

Shree and Vibhu blushed but were delighted and said, "You are so caring that we do not feel the absence of parents."

Deepti, "Your flight is on Tuesday. You have enough time for preparations. This week end we shall go to some good picnic place."

Deepak, "I want to go to Shirdi to see the famous temple of Shirdi Sai Baba. Many of our clients have been telling about the miracles of Sai Baba who is no more in this world. I saw a brief documentary about him in which he is depicted as an ideal saint, living with utmost simplicity almost in tattered clothes, helping people in need. His most important contribution is that he tried to bridge the divide between the communities, particularly the two prominent communities Hindus and Muslims. He lived both in mosque and temple."

Deepti, "We must see and find out the truth."

They reached late in the evening and went straight to the temple which was not a simple structure as they presumed in view of life history of the saint. It was a big gorgeous monument with bewitching grandeur, fascinating frescoes, gilded doors and walls and beautifully carved and a decorated emblazoned golden throne with life size sitting statue of Sai Baba dressed in expensive silken attire and wearing a golden crown studded with precious diamonds and other jewels. Seeing all this Deepti burst out, "How can such an ostentatious display of silver, gold and jewellery, symbolise the simplicity of the saint who wore torn clothes, slept on the floor without bedding and lived an extremely frugal life?"

Deepak, "I am also amazed but we are here to know the truth of heresy and facts."

It was Aarti time and devotees were performing the ritual with zest and fervour, singing paeans in praise of the saint, eulogising him as real god, always present with the needy devotees to help, grant boons as desired. They came out before the Aarti was finished. Shree stood near the exit and enquired from the devotees coming out as to whose desires or prayers had been granted and fulfilled. Only a minuscule minority hardly five percent acclaimed that they got what they prayed for and the rest said that they would continue coming and praying till their wishes were fulfilled. Some told weird stories that Sai Baba was in person present on the scene to save them from disaster. Shree revealed her statistics for Deepti to surmise, "This is the case at every such place. Only a few get and that too by their own personal efforts but being obsessed by the deity, attribute success to it and then spread it to entice others and increasing numbers of devotees continue to swell as a multiplier effect. The felt presence of

Sai Baba is mere hallucination. A dead person cannot come and be present in person factually and is present only in the mind of the obsessed."

They left the place early next morning disgusted. Deepak consoled Deepti, "It is one more addition in our study about irrelevance of monkhood which continues to haunt the followers even after the death of the monk they adore."

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Boarding the Delhi-Srinagar flight at Delhi and disembarking at Srinagar was a gruelling experience because of intensive and rigorous searching, frisking and questioning. Their tour operator had appointed his man to receive them and was there in front of the exit gate, holding a placard with their names. The hotel room was well furnished and with T.V. and phone. Vibhu felt tired and threw himself stretched flat on the bed to relax and recoup. Shree rested on a sofa, gave him a glass of water and ordered tea on the phone. They felt refreshed after taking tea, snacks and fruits.

Shree asked, "What is the programme for today. We should go out in the evening and see some places or go for boat ride in the Dal Lake."

Vibhu, "I am in no mood to go out today. The primary object of our tour is honeymoon and seeing places is secondary."

Shree, "Honeymoon time is in the night."

Vibhu, "You are still continuing to be insensitive to sensual feelings. Monkhood is haunting you even after your freedom from that cage. Our honeymoon started the moment we left Bangalore."

Shree, "I did not approve and respond to your salacious moves during the flight. Sexual urge is alright in the young and the newlywed, but we are human beings, civilised and cultured and do not and should not indulge, any time, any place, in open as animals do."

Vibhu, "I shall abide by the cultural and civilised mores. Now we are in a closed room and it is night time."

Shree, "Let us take bath first."

Vibhu's passion rose as soon as they were on the bed. Shree was equally aroused. They lay on the bed doing foreplay; fondling, enjoying and experiencing orgasms till sleep overpowered them both.

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They got up late in the morning. It was 11 a.m. when they went out to see the famous Shalimar and other gardens, reminiscent of Mughal era. In Shalimar garden Shree noticed a girl, pausing for long at each plant and examining its leaves and flowers closely and scribbling in her note book. She went to her and asked, "I presume you are a botanist."

She introduced herself as Priya from Delhi and replied, "I am working on a U.G.C. project, "Biodiversity in Kashmir." The amount provided is not adequate to complete the work in such a difficult area within stipulated time. I have already spent one and half year and I have to submit my thesis within six months."

Shree, "You can apply for extension."

Priya, "I shall have to do that but this will entail extra expenditure which my parents will not be able to afford."

Shree, "We have established a trust to help the needy like you. You give me an application in the form I shall give you from my lap top, indicating the amount you require for completing your work. After completing your Ph.D., I shall like you to join our project at Jhadol (Udaipur) as a botanist. We shall pay you as per U.G.C. norms. We shall be in Kashmir for about a fortnight, visiting as many places as possible. It will be our pleasure if you accompany us. We shall be benefitted by your knowledge of plants. We shall adjust our itinerary to suit your interest."

They saw other gardens, Priya telling them about the various plants. They then had a joy ride in the Dal Lake. Shree wondered as to what was so special and extraordinary about this lake that it was so much adored and publicised. The water was dirty and stinking with bad smell. Lamenting on the condition of the lake Priya explained, "I have studied the history of this lake. It was really beautiful with the natural water courses feeding it regularly before its pristine grandeur was lost because of encroachments, mainly because of increasing population and the present area is not even one third of its original area. The stink is because the sewage from over a thousand house boats and also from adjoining areas of the city is drained in it in huge quantities."

They returned to the hotel. Priya accompanied them to collect the application form and also to decide about the places to be seen. Priya suggested Kargil. It was agreed that they would first go to Kargil and see remaining places of interest near Srinagar on return.

Vibhu remained a mute spectator and a silent listener all the time. He wondered about the general perception that opposite sexes attract as it was otherwise here and two females

were cosier with each other than even husband and wife. Shree and Priya became intimate within a few hours as if they had known each other for years. He was unable to decide whether he should be jealous of Priya for detracting the attention of his sweet heart or be happy for the opportunity of enjoying the company of one more young, smart and vivacious lady. Strangely, however beautiful and adoring the wife may be, men have weakness for variety, the new, may be the primitive instincts persisting in spite of evolution of cultures and civilisations and restrictive morality and codes of conduct. His initial feeling of instant jealousy melted away and was soon superseded by infatuation for such a nice and intelligent girl as Priya. To cover up his emotional swerve he flattered Shree and appreciated her gesture to help a needy student. Shree was no less shrewd and was observing the lascivious colours flashing on his face, mirroring his feelings. She decided to wait and watch the ambivalence to manifest and to check it as and when necessary. She was confident that she would not allow her husband to drift. She also did not want to lose the company of such an accomplished girl as Priya.

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They got up early and soon after breakfast picked Priya and left for Kargil. Priya seated on the front seat and Vibhu and Shree on the back. Only ten kilometres from Srinagar the driver had to slow down the speed as almost one kilometre long army caravan was moving in front at the prescribed speed of thirty kilometres per hour and less according to the terrain, slope and narrow turns. Priya noticed a patch of good natural forest a little distance from the road and requested to stop to allow her to see the area and document the various species there. When Shree asked her to accompany them she

had made it clear that their journey would be slowed because she would be stopping on way to study the good forest areas along or near the road side. Vibhu was quick to acknowledge the benefits of Priya's company, "We would have been bored if we were to trail behind the military caravan at snail's pace. I must thank Priya that she would be stopping for her work and the time lag would then enable us to drive at normal speed."

Shree, "Priya, please do not have any hesitation to stop anywhere, any number of places you want and any length of time you need to do your work. We are comfortable and shall be enjoying scenic beauty with ease and shall learn about plants from you."

Having worked as a lecturer before taking the project Priya was proficient in explaining or teaching. She told them in detail about the forests and their distribution, "The types of forest and the constituent species vary mainly according to climate viz. Tropical, subtropical, temperate and alpine as temperature, rain fall and soil types differ in these broad climatic zones. Nearer equator there is more rainfall, better soils and the forests are luxuriant with good biodiversity. The farther from the equator the lesser the luxuriance and the biodiversity and forests change from evergreen to deciduous and thorny in intervening deserts. On hilly areas the climate changes from tropical to subtropical, temperate and alpine according to the height. There are edaphic variations according to difference in soil types in climatic zones. Here in the Himalayas broadly up to the altitude of four thousand feet shisham, sirus and their associates dominate. Above this is chirpine, then there is an area of kail pines up to six-seven thousand feet and then from eight to nine thousand feet

generally Deodar on northern slopes and oaks on southern slopes. Higher up are spruce and fir forests and there is the famous *Betula utilis* (bhojpatra at twelve thousand feet) on the papery bark of which were written our first scriptures. Above this are alpine grass lands and around fourteen thousand feet is permanent snow line without any plants. In between these broad zones there are transitional zones, in which the species of two zones intermingle in varying proportions. Here we are in Deodar forests. I am documenting and collecting the specimen of associate plant species, many of medicinal value, in over-wood, under- wood, shrubs and herbs."

She took about one hour and stopped again at two more such places. The Army caravan had by then moved far away and they could drive at good speed. On the way Priya was pointing out the spreading habitations because of unrestricted increase in population and with that the extending agricultural fields, terraced and without terracing on milder slopes, pushing farther and farther up the green line. The forests were thin with reduced density of trees and at many places the hills were almost barren. It was late evening and getting dark by the time they reached Sonemarg and they decided to stay there for the night.

Sitting outside the hotel, sipping saffron kahawa Kashmiri tea they were simultaneously drinking through eyes the beauty and captivating charm of golden hill tops covered with white snow and glaciers shining in moonlight, smelling through nose the sweet smell of flowers in breeze and were also enjoying the melodious murmur in rustling of leaves and sitting between two damsels Vibhu was most delighted, feeling the ecstatic touch more deliberate than accidental and ladies



too must be enjoying the touch of a male, quite similar to the property of magnetism, opposite poles attracting each other.

Vibhu was silent all the time immersed in pleasure of female touch on both sides. Shree wanted to know more about Priya as she had offered a job to her in their project at Jhadol. She gently touched Vibhu's shoulder and said, "You enjoy the moonlit beauty of nature here. We are going to Priya's room. Please call me when you feel like retiring to bed."

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Shree and Priya both sat down on the bed, relaxed and comfortable. Shree initiated the dialogue and said, "We are friends now and will be working together after you finish your U.G.C. assignment. We shall know about each other. There is nothing special about my life. It is a common story of girls in poor Jain families. I was forced to be a nun because my parents could not meet the dowry demands of the parents of the boy with whom I was betrothed. It is always proclaimed that we voluntarily get initiated as nuns because of our own attitude of detachment towards mundane life of household. But it is not so. I did not know what detachment meant. There as a nun, we are indoctrinated and conditioned to despise life in household and all sorts of sensual pleasures. We live a strict and regimented life of a recluse. My brother Deepak and bhabi Deepti freed me from that cage and got me married to Vibhu. We are now trying to free our parents and others by exposing the hollowness of all types of claims of monks, their futility, redundancy and irrelevance for the society. They are useless parasites. You have been a student of Delhi University and must have experienced colourful life."

Priya, "I pity your plight as a nun. I agree with your views

about monkhood. You are right that life in Delhi, a cosmopolitan city, almost a miniature India with its multiple hues from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Gujarat to Bengal, is very colourful and worth experiencing. In Delhi one can see India of the seventeenth to that of the twenty-first century, from bullock carts to the metro, from dilapidated old havelis and jhuggi-jhompries in slums to most modern bungalows in posh colonies, from narrow lanes to broad world class highways, from puppet shows to 3-D picture halls, from small tea stalls to spacious malls and all that India is. Life style in Delhi University is very liberal and almost westernised. Boys and girls are in latest design branded clothing and smoking, drinking even by girls is not a taboo. The traditional difference in boys and girls is disappearing and it is difficult to distinguish between a boy and a girl from a distance. I lived in a girls' hostel and there was great attitudinal change within a short period, not only boys but girls also demanding more freedom to mix and interact, to be allowed in each other's hostels till late in night even whole night. You must have heard from your brother and husband that any girl who does not have a boy friend and a boy without a girl friend are considered backward and looked down upon."

Shree, "Did you also have a boy friend? Please also tell me to what extent your relationship progressed? I do not see any objection in having a boy friend if it is out of true love and eventual marriage but I do not approve premarital sex."

Priya, "I did have a boy friend but I withdrew on advice of my senior before I could have been trapped in the web of false promise of marriage which usually happens with most of the girls as boys are by and large not interested in marriage and just want sexual relationship to satisfy their lust and girls

at that age of surging hormones succumb, surrender and suffer the lifelong trauma and agony of unwanted pregnancy, abortion or illegitimate child and also from serious effects of contraceptives.”

Shree, “Your senior must have undergone such traumatic experience.”

Priya, “She was wise and very knowledgeable in matters of sex education. She knew the technique of controlling the hormones and sex urge but not the way monks are conditioned to do by hating and suppressing it. Once you know the technique you do not succumb and can continue befooling the lecherous boys and enjoy their foolishness in their enticing efforts of giving expensive presents on some pretence or other.”

Shree, “What is the technique?”

Priya, “It is very simple and easy to learn. It is a substitute for heterosexual copulation and satisfies the sexual urge. One is masturbation i.e. *hast-maithun* in vernacular. It is self sex without any partner. The second is homosexuality i.e. boy with boy or girl with girl.

Shree, “There is mention of masturbation in the scriptures I read as nun but it is strongly denounced and prohibited being unnatural.”

Priya, “Do you know its technique also?”

Shree, “There is no mention of its technique or process in the scriptures.”

Priya, “My assessment is that there is hardly any boy who has not practised masturbation in his adolescence and after if

unmarried or without a partner. You can confirm this from your husband. But it is rare in girls because of the social inhibitions and strict family control on girls. It is a recent phenomenon in universities and colleges, probably introduced by foreign students or teachers. By and large girls in India are ignorant about it. But with the changing situation and girls interacting more and more with boys it is necessary to propagate it to save girls from the ignominy they suffer because of unprotected premarital sex. The boys generally learn from the elder ones who entice younger ones to do it for them. Girls should also practice it at clitoris and further down. It is safe and there is no stigma attached because it is absolutely private confined to individual only. It gives the same satisfaction as actual heterosexual act and satisfies the sex urge, protecting the girl from falling prey to deceitful male advances and succumbing to surging hormones and sex urge. The homosexuality or sodomy in males is anal sex and in females is rubbing each other's clitoris the same way as in heterosexual act in male and female. It is getting more popular. It is wrong as it will destroy the very foundation of society and may eventually result in annihilation of mankind. Homosexuality is simply escapism from social responsibility of parenthood. The growing number of gay males and females and shielding it under pretext of natural phenomenon is because of irresponsibility to escape from the travails of parenthood. There is nothing natural in it. One reason for increasing number of gays is late marriage in pursuance of career and two persons of same sex living together for long period sharing common accommodation and resorting to homosexuality to satisfy sex urge which then becomes habit and becomes personality cult. The number of naturally

bisexual is far too limited than the swelling number of hypocrite gays who pretend to be so either because of being attached to such company for long or develop such attitude and mind set being addicted to the practice of homosexuality. It is a mental disease and can be cured by appropriate treatment. Unfortunately the pernicious practice is getting established and acceptance under the patronage of human right activists and gay associations and by governments also in many countries, because many in governments and vocal and powerful may have themselves been gays sometimes in their earlier years and therefore sympathise with gays and their associations. It is a fact that most of the males are homosexual at some stage in their earlier years. Even in case of naturally bi-sexuals and transgenders corrections can be done either way as male or female according to the dominance of hormones through medical intervention by compensating the required hormones and plastic surgery. In all fairness for the good of the society governments concerned should discourage rather ban and abolish legally this infamous and derogatory institution of gays and make it binding even for natural bisexual to live either as male or female in accordance with scientific evaluation of their suitability.

Shree, "It is very disgusting that our youth are getting corrupted by western cultural impact so much and are abandoning our ethos. The law against child marriage is based on the scientific fact that bodies of boys and girls are not mature for sex before the age of twenty-one and eighteen respectively. The licentious promiscuity in the west is resulting in more and more teen age pregnancies with lifelong deleterious effects. Celibacy till maturity as ordained in our scriptures is scientific and essential for health of present and future

generations. I appreciate your views about harmful consequences of growing homosexuality. You should also reconsider your views about masturbation which is not natural, not good socially, ethically and also health wise."

Priya, "But in the changing situations it is better than the ignominy of premarital sex. Anyway, please tell me whether you were immune from sexual urge as a nun."

Shree, "There is so much regimentation, indoctrination and conditioning and decrying all sorts of sensual pleasures that as a nun there is hardly an inkling of sexual urge. I do not know if I ever felt it. It may be because I was disgusted about any such relationship as my betrothal was broken. Also the male and female monks and nuns are accommodated in separate buildings and they meet only during discourses and there is no opportunity of interaction between individual male and female monks and nuns. Females either nun or householder, are not allowed to meet male monks even the Head alone and can do so only in group of at least two or more. But I have noticed that both male and female monks do look askance to those of opposite sex. This may be virtual manifestation of surging hormones and the latent sex urge. However there are rare and few cases of sexual escapades of some male monks who deliberately go to get food to certain houses when male members of the house are not there and exploit the opportunity. Some rare cases of pregnancies in female nuns have also been heard but these are suppressed to save the order from defamation.

Priya, "The fact remains that sex as an instinct cannot be erased or killed, it is only suppressed to spring up and manifest as and when the opportunity is there. This is why that there are cases of even the most revered saints in almost all religious

orders falling prey to lascivious infatuation and sexual interaction. Sex is such a strong natural instinct that any boy and girl brought up in rigid seclusion without any education and exposure to anything titillating or concerning in any way with sex, if on maturity are put in a room alone they will copulate. But I agree with you that unnatural sex should be discarded and sexual indulgence should be within the limits of social ethics and should have constraint in frequency commensurate with health concerns."

There was knocking at the door. It was Vibhu. Shree got up and said, "I am sorry to leave you lonely for so long. I think that you should have also been with us and enjoyed our very interesting discussion."

Vibhu, "Please do not forget to keep me also in such sessions next time. It is 11.p.m. and we should go to sleep as we shall have to leave early tomorrow."

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The journey next day was a continuous climb up to Jojila pass at about twelve thousand feet. Shree and Vibhu not acclimatised to the atmosphere at such a height were uncomfortable. Both suffered from vomiting, uneasiness and nausea. Priya kept avomine tablets and gave it to both of them. She repented that she did not give the medicine at Sonemarg before starting the tenuous journey. After Jojila it was downward slope to Dras and Kargil. Though at lower altitude than Sonemarg and Jojila, Dras and Kargil are cooler because of cold air getting pooled in a sort of natural depression surrounded by high snow clad mountains all around. Reaching Kargil Shree and Vibhu were so much fatigued that they could not think of venturing out from the guest house and lay on

bed to recuperate. Priya attended them; served tea and fresh fruits, apple, apricots and walnuts available from extensive gardens in Kargil and around. They had no desire and appetite for any other food. They went to sleep early.

Next day at 8.a.m. Priya knocked the door and Shree answered, "Please come in, it is open."

Priya, "I have ordered tea, snacks and fruits for our light breakfast. It will be sent soon. I shall go out to see some sites for my work. I suggest that both of you should rest to day. We shall go further towards Leh tomorrow."

Vibhu protested, "I shall not allow you to go out alone at such a disturbed place. We are well now, fully refreshed."

Priya, "Kargil is not at all a disturbed place. It is safer than Delhi. The war fought here was not because of the people of this region but was thrust on them by infiltrators from across the border. Their strategy was to cut our main supply route. By courtesy of the forest department and their help by providing me conveyance and guide I have reconnoitred the area from Jammu to Garskhon and Yalodra only about hundred kilometres this side of Leh. The area from Jammu to Jawaher tunnel is inhabited predominantly by Hindu community and if you go to Jammu by road you will see Hindu shopkeepers on road side near there. From the tunnel to Jojila pass the inhabitants are predominantly or almost exclusively Sunni Muslims as other communities have been pushed out by violent means. The pathetic plight of pundits, the original residents of the area, now living in camps in Jammu, Delhi and other places is well known to all of us. Sheikh Abdullah; the first chief minister himself said that he

was descendent of Kashmiri pundits converted to Islam. It is this region dominated by Sunnis that is disturbed and dangerous, afflicted badly by terrorism from infiltrators from across the border and also from separatists within the region. There is cross firing between the militants and security forces every day in Srinagar and many other places. The region from Jajila pass to the next pass Hambotlingla at 13202' height is inhabited by Shia Muslims who are very peace loving. Beyond this mountain pass the area is predominantly Buddhist and a very good development that is noticeable these days is that inter religious marriages between Shias and Buddhists are now common. Presently the Sunnis dominate the administration because of pressure techniques of violence and central government succumbing to it. The funds allotted by the centre for other regions are also being usurped by these notorious and aggressive people. If the Government of India, by a strong political will, takes a bold decision to divide the state in four separate states of Jammu, Kashmir valley, Kargil and Ladakh the problem of militancy will end. These four regions are quite distinct and different from each other in language, costume, religious beliefs, customs and traditions. There is nothing common in between them to keep them tied. It is wrong to ignore the interests of three major regions only to fatten and pamper the notorious one. If Assam could be divided in seven very small states of almost similar ethnicity there is a stronger case for separation of the four in J&K. The Government of India is keeping them together only to satisfy its false ego of pluralism and pseudo secularism and is also able to continue the status quo because the people here are not aggressive and violent as in Assam. They are being punished for their goodness. Instead of dividing the state the central government is resorting to more and more pampering of the notorious

people in this Sunni dominated small area by pumping funds liberally, some of which percolate to terrorists also. While thousands of villages in the country are without electricity every village in this problematic area is given the facility of diesel generators at a prohibitive cost. Kargil is a very peaceful place. You should not worry about my safety."

Shree, "We are ready and shall come with you. We have no fatigue and no problem now."

They first went to the forest office. Priya had procured a letter from the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests addressed to all concerned forest officers with instructions that she should be given necessary help. An experienced forester accompanied them as a guide. They stopped at Kanor, the site of recent plantation done by the department. Priya asked Vibhu and Shree to note the naked mountain slopes all around and pointing towards almost vertical cliffs said, "See the benevolence of nature, there are valuable medicinal plant species of sturdy Rosa, Hippophae, Artemisia and many others in small crevices on rocky slopes. The growth is more at the foot of the hills where there is some soil depth. It is unfortunate that the valuable medicinal plants are recklessly cut and burnt as fuel in spite of free supply of the wood of Deodar, Oak and other species to the people here."

While she got busy in her work of documenting and collecting the specimen Shree stopped the passersbys, mostly young girls, carrying truncated conical baskets on their backs and enquired about local traditions. A smart girl in the group told many interesting things, "We are all college students doing our graduation in various subjects mostly in arts because laboratory facilities in science subjects are not

adequate here. The rich here send their wards to Srinagar to study science subjects to subsequently join medical or engineering and other courses.

After college hours we are busy collecting wood for three to four months long winter when entire area and our houses remain covered with snow.”

Shree, “You are all educated and should know the value of medicinal plants you are collecting to be burnt as fuel. The government arranges supply of wood free of cost from forests in other areas.”

All girls joined in chorus loudly and said that was very meagre and not sufficient. Shree was impressed by the girls and told them, “We would help any deserving girl or boy for any higher study anywhere. I am giving you the address and E-mail of our Trust. I also want to caution you that the population should not be allowed to grow unrestricted. If it is not done you will be destroying more and more of the medicinal plants. You should send a strong representation to the government for putting up here a processing and manufacturing plant for medicines here. This will provide enough revenue to enable people here to purchase fuel wood and much more. You should also get solar energy and biogas plants.”

Priya asked the guide to take them to other places having some different varieties of plants. He took them to Sanko where there was a very good forest nursery. Priya was delighted to find over thirty medicinal plant species being raised there. She collected the specimen from the nursery. They returned to the guest house, took lunch and went to their rooms to relax.

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Next day they left early. Priya gave avomine tablet to each. It was a steep climb on serpentine mountainous road. Reaching Hambotlingla pass at the height of 13202' they stayed for some time to have a look around. From here it was downward drive. In the valley there were lush green terraced agricultural fields where crops of maize etc. could easily be identified. The road was running parallel to river Indus flowing through a narrow valley speeding fast, its crystal clear water splashing and breaking against stony, rocky obstacles into snow white waves shining bright in the caressing rays of the sun, splitting them in rainbow colours as a prism. Passing through Lalum, Silum and other villages they reached Darchik. Priya saw a good forest area. They stopped there for her to identify, document and collect specimens of plants of her interest. She was surprised that the climate in the valley here was salubrious and congenial for plant growth. There were Mallotus and other such species which she saw in the Doon valley. It was like an oasis in the vast and barren wilderness of cold desert. They went up to Garskhon and Yalodra but did not come across any such luxuriant patch of rich biodiversity as at Darchik. Leh was only a hundred kilometres from here but it was not in the project area of Priya. They returned to Kargil late in the evening, took dinner and retired to bed.

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On return journey they stopped for the night at Srinagar and next day travelled by road to Jammu and went straight to Katra the base camp for going up to the famous cave shrine of Vaishno Devi.

They were advised to start early morning for the shrine on foot or a pony. They decided to go on foot. The climb was

tiring but smooth on a well laid and maintained path. There were covered places with benches to rest and relax at short distances. Shree pointed out to Vibhu the pilgrims throwing their leftover eatables and other waste here and there although there were sufficient number of dust bins around and there were notice boards also warning people of a fine of rupees five hundred for not putting the waste in the big containers. Sweepers had to be constantly on their toes cleaning all the rubbish being strewn continuously. Suddenly there was commotion nearby. Shree went there and saw that the sweepers had surrounded the senior supervisor and questioned him for not taking action against the notorious pilgrims. Shree also joined them and said to the officer, "Why are people so callous and undisciplined? Why the management is not enforcing its own rules? Religion ordains discipline, moral conduct and compliance of the rules. Why are people smoking in spite of statutory warnings?"

The officer politely clarified, "It is not the policy of the management to annoy the pilgrims. They are the main source of income not only to the temple trust but also to the large number of people here. Their contribution to local economy cannot be wished away."

Priya pulled away Shree shouting, "In this country the religious places are not for teaching good manners but to promote superstitions and indiscipline."

After the security check they went through the cave leading to the seat of the deity Vaishnodevi in another smaller cave, cave in cave, a natural phenomenon, nothing miraculous or special. Shree enquired from the priests sitting in the small cave, "Where is the idol of the deity."

The elderly priest pointed towards three miniature conical hill type extrusions obviously obtruded by the tectonic upheavals during the geological process of formation of mighty Himalayas from the unfathomable depths of once Tethus Sea. There were no idols of any sort generally associated with deities. Shree remarked, "These are three irregularly shaped odd types of mini structures."

The Priest explained, "The middle one is Vaishno Devi and on right and left are Mahakali and Saraswati. Vaishno Devi grants boons and fulfils all sorts of wishes of devotees. During Indo-Pak wars Devi protected the residents of Jammu from onslaughts of repeated bombings by blinding the pilots of the enemy air force."

Shree, "Devi is supposed to be the guardian of all people on this planet earth. Her devotees are spread all over. Why was then the Devi concerned with protection of the people of Jammu only? If Devi is claimed to be omnipotent, why is then there deployment of huge paraphernalia of protection forces? If it cannot protect itself, how it will protect and help others? Remove the forces from here and it will meet the same fate as Bamiyan Buddha statue in Afghanistan at the hands of unscrupulous, dogmatic, indoctrinated and motivated hard core terrorists who are blinded by false assurances from their trainers that they will be bestowed with eternal pleasures on imaginary heaven."

Priest was nonplussed, annoyed and asked her to move out and make room for other devotees waiting in the queue.

They returned to Jammu the same day. Shree enquired from the manager of the guest house, "Is there any eminent saint of any sect staying at Jammu?"

Manager, "There is a highly revered saint staying here. He is the head of prominent Sthanakvasi Swetamber Jain sect."

They left early to meet the saint. Priya did not accompany as she has to go to the forest office for her work in Jammu. When they reached the venue breakfast was being served to the devotees. They also joined. The president of the managing committee, seeing new faces, asked about the place they came from. Shree told him all about their antecedents and also about the sect and its head and her period as a nun. The president though not happy by seeing her as a householder, reconciled himself, because such detractions though not common, are being tolerated by the community in view of changed legal aspects. He gave her special attention and promised her an exclusive audience with the saint. The routine daily discourse started at 9.a.m. After the customary ritual of obeisance by devotees, bowing, touching his feet, prostrating and getting boons was over they got the opportunity to meet the saint in his room.

The Saint was inquisitive and asked Shree the reasons for reversal to the household, "You were under a very learned guru and must have imbibed the truth that being a nun is far better than a householder for emancipation of self and ultimate salvation from the miseries of the cycles of birth and death. What made you change your mind?"

Shree, "My brother Deepak was repentant for the circumstances under which I was made a nun and my parents were forced into monkhood. He and particularly my bhabi Deepti told me the greater truth than you are telling. There is a mention in our scriptures that householders can also attain the so called salvation. If you think without prejudice you will

agree that a person shouldering all the household responsibilities can attain salvation and he is more competent as compared to the monk who has run away from the challenges of household. I am now convinced that monks are parasites and dependent on householders who toil hard to arrange everything for them."

The saint was aghast by such strong views against monkhood and that too from a former nun.

Shree asked, "In your morning discourse you told about meditation, hymns (mantras), their techniques and powers. You also stressed the necessity of some photo or idol of Arhat or guru to practice concentration whereas the Sthanakvasi tradition is opposed to idol worship. I am also unable to understand the reasons of the saints of almost all Jain or Hindu sects, claiming to have extraordinary powers of mantras, being confined up to Jammu only and none has the courage to venture farther in the valley for fear of terrorists. None of the saints past and present have ever been able to subdue any enemy, invader and any present day terrorists. Where is the truth in your eulogised mantras?"

Acharya, "You have turned an atheist and I do not want to waste time in arguing with a convert like you who has left the lofty life of a nun for the sake of worldly pleasures which are all transient and short lived and which eventually bring miseries."

Shree, "You have evaded my question because you are fettered with your own orthodox views. I am sorry and beg leave. She performed the ritual of obeisance, bowed and prostrated."

This comforted the Acharya to some extent.



## TEN

Putta Parti was a small village a few decades back. It is now a bustling modern town with good roads, hospitals, schools and colleges. There are well furnished guest houses with modern three star and five star comforts. It has attained a cosmopolitan status because of constant flow of devotees of all shades of caste, colour, creed, language and race. They come here for audience of Satya Sai Baba who proclaims to be an incarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba. Deepak and Deepti managed to get appointment through their influential clients who were his dedicated devotees. They sat in the front row. Satya Sai Baba came at his scheduled time in his overflowing silken robes. All stood up in reverence. He was on the wheel chair, his paralysed legs fully covered with his robes. He had on his face bewitching smile, articulated or natural, nobody could make out. His bewildering hair style of symmetrically puffed and blown out dishevelled hair was captivating and was his special hall mark to catch attention of everybody. He pointed his finger towards Deepak and Deepti, "You have some questions."

Deepti, "You are proclaimed to be incarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba and simultaneously of almighty God but Shirdi Sai

Baba never proclaimed so. You are famous for materialising things of choice of devotees, the trick of hand, the late P.C.Sarkar challenged that he can also perform the same. Shri Krishna in the Gita said that he would incarnate in India whenever there is danger and onslaught on religion. The God incarnate should be concerned about the whole, the entire galaxy, the whole universe rather than India only on this planet earth, the little speck on the canvas of infinite universe. Does it mean that it is only in Bharat (India) that there is decadence of religion and nowhere else? As a matter of fact the conditions in the country at present are worse as compared to the Mahabharata era. It appears that your incarnation is as per promise of Shri Krishna. The greatest menace is from the hard core terrorists. Being incarnation of almighty God you should eliminate them. There are several problems of poverty, famines and droughts, wars and pestilences and many others, you must be aware of. You are here and these problems should be solved. There are stories agog that you have solved problems of many of your devotees, cured them of even terminal diseases. Your devotees in your name have done commendable philanthropic work; have built hospitals, schools and colleges. It is the householders who have done all these but you have taken all the credit. Is it not unjust that monks usurp the credit due to householders? All these compel me to conclude that monkhood is a redundant and a parasitic institution. Monks thrive on the sweat of the householders. Should not the institution of monkhood be abolished? Did any monk ever make slightest effort to earn money and then spend on charity? Do monks at all know the tribulations, difficulties, problems, hardships and challenges the householders face to earn money and meet the challenges? How do then they

arrogate to themselves the wisdom and competence to advice and guide the householders? It is a surprising paradox that a person of your status capable of curing others is himself afflicted with paralysis. I also fail to understand that the God incarnate like you should be concerned with problems of his devotees only and not of mankind as a whole. Are you so partial or help only those who flatter you with their obeisance and allegiance? These burning questions, material and spiritual, ephemeral and eternal, superstitious and rational are agitating my mind. I have come here with great hope for the answers from you, supposedly the omniscient and epitome of all knowledge."

Deepti's pointed questions shook the very core, stupefied every nerve and neuron in him, tumbled down the entire edifice of his institution he had built so dexterously and meticulously with clever articulations and manipulations, hypnotic tricks, slate of hand, and concocted stories of his miracles, boons and cures, their multiplier effect, based solely on the ignorance, blind faith, superstitions and weakness of the gullible people wanting to get benefits without effort. Satya Sai Baba was dumb and numb, so was the entire audience, the very foundation of their faith in him shaken miserably. He had no option but to evade and escape. He mustered some courage and said meekly, "The time is over. It is time for my meditation. I am retiring to my room. You have to seek another appointment."

Deepak congratulated Deepti and said, "Our mission is successful. We should leave now. There is nothing more here to stay for."

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Shree was checking her E-mail. Deepak wanted to know about the progress in the preparatory work she was doing for organising the proposed seminar. Shree wrote him, "I sent the questionnaire to four hundred proposed invitees comprising prominent monks, intellectuals, scientists, writers, journalists, lawyers, educationists, mahants, pundits, priests, astrologers and politicians. I have received replies from one hundred and forty only so far. I am sending reminders. I am simultaneously analysing and categorising the responses viz. The number and percentage of monks initiated in early teens, as adults, as householders, as married or single, circumstances that forced them into monkhood, their understanding about detachment, their notions about soul, god, heaven, hell and salvation and views of others about relevance of the very institution of monkhood in any sect. I shall tabulate the information after some more responses are received. I shall finalise the compilation even if I get replies from over two hundred addressees. I do not expect attendance of more than that."

Deepak, "Acharya Vinay is expected to reach Udaipur within a week. You should go and meet him ten or fifteen days after he has settled their, apprise him of the work you have done so far. If there are any new instructions, try to comply. This time you should insist on getting final dates for the conference from him, impressing on him that it would require a month or more for preparations and that it had to be organised within the period of his four months stay at Udaipur. You may also hint that delaying the conference deliberately on any pretext will compel us to take legal recourse."

Shree, "I am in touch with the President, Managing Committee and shall go there after a fortnight of his arrival there."

Deepak, "If there are no other important commitments. Deepti and I shall also join you. In the meantime we propose to go to Hardwar, meet some prominent saints and study their life style and functioning."

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Deepak had three invitation letters on his table. One was from a local client inviting him to Bhagwat programme on the coming Sunday. The other was for an annual event at Arvind Ashram Pondicherry. The third was from Osho Foundation, Pune. Both were scheduled next week end. He consulted Deepti. She suggested, "We must attend the Bhagwat programme of our client. The dates of other two programmes are clashing. I shall prefer to go to Pondicherry. Osho was a pervert to the extreme and advocated sex even for the ultimate salvation. I think that he must have been a sex maniac and there were reported cases against him even in U.S where society is permissive and promiscuous. He was punished and thrown out of that country disgracefully. I wonder how he managed to establish himself again in India. One of my friends at Jaipur was from Jabalpur, the native place of Rajneesh alias Osho. Her father and Osho were colleagues in a college. Rajneesh used to teach yoga also in addition to his subject and was organising yoga camps at different places during college vacations. He remained unmarried but his sex escapades were well known. He exploited his female students with impunity as a practice of yoga, an essential ingredient in Vam Marg and Tantric rituals, he must have adopted from there. Of course he was a genius, intelligent, very knowledgeable being a voracious reader of almost all important scriptures of all sects and was an impressive orator, the qualities he skilfully

utilised in his own perverted way. He became popular because sex sells best."

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Bhagwat programme was organised in a spacious compound of the family temple. There was a big dais, decorated profusely with all different available varieties of flowers and posters and pictures of deities. The head Pundit was seated on a beautiful throne- like raised seat, surrounded by members of his team, each having a musical instrument to play as and when desired by the Pundit. There was a voluminous scripture in his front. When Deepak and Deepti reached there he was delivering his introductory lecture, "Bhagwat is a jewel and epitome of all scriptures. Those, who attend the discourses on the Bhagwat with devotion, are bestowed with boons and they accumulate immense good and beneficial karmas that entail pleasures in next birth in heaven or on earth. You will hear numerous instances of god himself coming to personally help his devotees in distress."

Pundit then started reciting a devotional song with his team playing their instruments. Ladies and gents in the audience started dancing and this went on for over fifteen minutes. Pundit turned a few leaves of the book and read a few lines about the incarnation of Hiranyakashyap, stopped and sent a young child with a begging bowl to roam around the audience for collecting donations. Again recital of song, playing of musical instruments, dancing was repeated followed by a brief from the story and collection of money. In over three hours the story from the book was narrated hardly for half an hour. There was lunch break. It was announced that the programme would restart after the Pundit had taken rest for

an hour. Deepti met the sponsor Seth Karamchand and enquired, "What will be the total expenditure by you for organising this event."

Seth Karamchand, "The fees of the Pundit and his team are Rs. fifty thousand. In addition I have to pay for their lodging and boarding expenses which will cost about Rs. twenty thousand. I will have to give a set of complete dress to all of them. It is also obligatory to present a gold ornament which may cost around Rs. thirty thousand. I am also arranging breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner for all who are attending the programme."

Deepti, "Your total expenses may swell up to Rs. five lakhs. The pundit will get a hefty amount through donations he is managing cleverly. There are many really disabled and destitute who need help. The amount you are spending in this useless event would have helped many needy. Your name is Karamchand. You should believe in good karmas which alone can bring success or boons according to the scriptures. The Pundit has not done justice in telling the story from the Bhagwat. He wasted more time on songs and collections."

Seth Karamchand, "I am only following the family tradition. My father used to organise the event annually."

Deepti, "There are several old traditions. Some are good and relevant and many others are even obnoxious and should be abandoned like keeping women in veil and confined within the four walls of the house. There was Sati tradition and wives were burnt alive with the dead husband. This has been banned legally yet it is revered. People still go to quacks and tantrics for treatment and suffer and even die for want of proper treatment available now. Many in our country still practice

sacrifice of helpless birds and animals as offerings to lifeless idols of deities and stoop down to the extent that they even sacrifice children of others and their own also to get boons for cure of diseases and fulfilment of other desires. Diseases can only be cured by proper treatment and desires can be fulfilled and success can be achieved only by commensurate action (karma) and appropriate effort. Listening to Bhagwat any number of times will not solve any problem. Of course emulating the good actions of the great and successful icons of the past mentioned in the Bhagwat will certainly help. The business of quacks, tantrics, pundits, mahants, monks, astrologers and such other parasites thrives on the human weakness to get success without proportionate effort."

Seth Karamchand, "You have a very valid point and I shall certainly keep it in mind while spending money in future on obsolete rituals and traditions."

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Shree got an E-mail from Vibha, "I shall be at Jaipur next Monday for a meeting with the Chief Minister and shall request him to inaugurate our school building and also our first tree planting (vanmahotsava) at Jhadol. I was informed that you have a programme to come to Udaipur. If it suits, you may come to Jaipur so that we both meet the C.M. and then go to Udaipur."

Shree consulted Deepak and Deepti. She joined Vibha at Jaipur. The Chief Minister was impressed by Vibha's presentation about the project at Jhadol and accepted the invitation. On the way to Udaipur they stopped at Ajmer to visit the revered Dargah of Khwaja Mouddin Chishti also called as Garib Nawaj, a Muslim saint famous for his

compassion for the poor. The Dargah is his burial place over which a magnificent mosque has been built with liberal contribution from ordinary devotees to small rulers, kings and emperors.

The narrow road leading to the Dargah was overcrowded by visitors and vendors selling flowers, chadars (a bed sheet size piece of cloth) in various hues and colours, of ordinary to muslin fabric, embroidered or ordinary and costing from a few hundreds to thousands. The vendors, the guides and the Khadims (the hierarchical partners in the offerings to the Khwaja) and their agents competed with each other to grab as many as possible the richest of devotees, jostled and harassed the visitors. The small enclosure around the tomb was small and crowded by attendant Khadims who were putting chadar over the visitors and demanding cash donations. The visitors by and large throng to the Dargah to ask boons for successes and cures under the pervading superstitious belief of all strata of society, rich and poor, illiterate and learned that they would get their wishes fulfilled by the grace and benevolence of the Khwaja without effort and matching action (karma).

Shree met the head Khadim and asked, "Islam ordains good action (karma) in accordance with the dictates of the almighty god and as revealed to the prophet and does not allow obeisance to any other than the god, even to the prophet, then why this practice of obeisance to the Khwaja is allowed here?"

Khadim, "People get their wishes fulfilled here and therefore pay obeisance to the Khwaja and pray for granting boons to them."

Shree, "There are instances of people, dying on the way, while coming here, in accidents. If incidentally some escape injury or death then they proclaim that the Khwaja has saved them. The question is that all were coming to pay obeisance then why only some were saved and not others? The injury or death or escape can be explained on the basis of impact on the person of the resultant force of numerous forces emanating as a result of accident, applying the principles of Dynamics."

Khadim, "You better ask the people as to why they come here and ask for boons."

Shree, "It is your duty also to tell people about the fundamental tenets of Islam."

The Khadim pretended that he had some very important work and went away.

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Deepti had cherished a strong desire since long to visit Hardwar. Standing with Deepak at Harkipauri she watched with interest the odd activities of the pilgrims, some taking bath, reciting songs of praise and begging boons from the river Ganges, others throwing last mortal remains of bones of the dead with their family priests reciting hymns which they could not decipher and many other tourists, enjoying the funny rituals. Deepti went to a pilgrim who had taken bath and was waiting for his companion and enquired, "Do you not feel that the water here in which you were bathing and gulping also with both hands repeatedly, is polluted and may harm you? It has been analysed in reputed government laboratories and found unfit even for bathing much less for drinking."

Before she could complete her sentence his companion came out and both sped away. In the meantime the person who was performing rituals after throwing the bones and adding to the pollution of the already polluted river came out. Deepti questioned him, "Is it proper to throw bones in the river and add to its pollution? Do you think that paying hefty sum to the priest and throwing bones in the Ganges and performing certain rituals will absolve your father from his wrong doings? Are the scriptures wrong? All canonical scriptures are unanimous that it is the actions of a person that shape his future and not such rituals. If you had spent the same amount which you have wasted in coming for the ritual and paying to the priest on some philanthropic work by helping someone in need it would have made your father's name memorable." The response was disappointing, "Sorry, I have to catch the train and do not have time to listen your lecture."

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The guest house where they were staying was spacious with over twenty rooms, some well furnished with A.C, some with coolers and the rest with fans only. The front residential portion for the Mahant and his family was palatial with princely comforts. This de facto guest house with exorbitant rentals was built as an Ashram on the land given free by the government for the purpose of providing accommodation to pilgrims free or at nominal maintenance rental. It is not followed in any of such Ashrams and all the conditions of allotment are being openly flouted. Mahants are enjoying and amassing wealth. Mahants are generally married and enjoy family life, yet they consider themselves as Sanyasi. They do not do any productive work and usurp a substantial part of the earnings of the pilgrims by exploiting their sentiments and

superstitious beliefs. The fact is that it is the devotee who gives and the Mahant takes, but the status is reversed and the giver, the devotee portrays himself as receiver, virtually a beggar and paradoxically the beggar is revered as a giver. Mahants, monks, priests, pundits, astrologers and their likes neither have competence nor will to give; they only take, plunder and exploit. There are temples of Bharat Mata, a replica of Vaishnodevi and others where priests and trustees run their similar fiefdoms.

There are many such Ashrams, de facto guest houses or the fiefdoms of Mahants who have been exploiting the blind faith of the gullible since generations. Deepak and Deepti visited some of these and found all of them almost similar. On the way to Rishikesh they visited the headquarters of Gyatri Shakti Peeth. It was in a sprawling campus with facilities for stay, meals, meditation, yoga and training for the followers. The meals are prepared hygienically and served at a nominal price. They took their lunch here and also the herbal tea. They saw the Ayurveda pharmacy, being run by the Peeth and met the manager there. Deepti asked him about the purity and authenticity of raw medicines and the drugs prepared, "What is your source of procurement of raw medicines? Do you get your drugs tested in government laboratories or in your own?"

Manager, "We get the medicines from traders and also from big markets of herbs at Delhi and other places. We prepare the drugs according to the methods prescribed in Ayurveda scriptures and there is no need for testing."

Deepti, "There are specific rules for collection of medicines from the forest, the season, time, stage of maturity etc. It

should be done under the supervision of an expert who knows and can identify correctly. We know that medicines from forest are collected generally by tribals who are very poor and illiterate and in need of money, therefore usually collect in whatever stage mature or immature and traders are invariably adulterators. Now-a-days medicinal plants are being cultivated in agricultural fields where the eco system is quite different from that in forests where medicinal plants naturally grow and therefore cannot have the same potency. When the purity of raw material is not assured how you can be sure of the efficacy of your drugs?"

Manager, "I cannot answer your questions, you better meet our head."

They could not meet the head of the organisation, but got appointment with next senior most, Shrichandra, a tall and slim old man, may be in his eighties, sober and composed, greeted him and sat down. Deepak said, "We have come from Bangalore on tour here and shall feel obliged if you can kindly tell us in brief about your organisation."

Shrichandra, "Our main objective is to restore morality in the country. We are publishing small books and pamphlets and distributing free. We are training dedicated followers to go to all parts in the country and propagate our message of morality based on the oldest scriptures the Vedas. We impress upon our followers to perform havan (offering ghee, grains etc in fire) daily and also follow a virtuous life style."

Deepak, "I know some of your followers at Bangalore and have seen them performing havan every day. I do not understand as to how burning of wood, cow dung, ghee and perfumes will help restore morality? Anything burnt even

ghee or any perfume does produce CO<sub>2</sub>, the increasing concentration of which is a major factor in global warming and climate change. The wood burnt is manufactured by cutting green trees which would have given O<sub>2</sub> as long they lasted, fifty to a hundred years. The poor in our country do not even see ghee all their life. Instead of burning, it should be given to the poor. I have also read the claim of your follower at your branch at Borkhera, Kota (Rajasthan) that burning of one tola of ghee in havan produces ten tonnes of O<sub>2</sub>. I wrote him to give me the secret formula of producing O<sub>2</sub> for getting it patented and that I shall give him Rs. one lakh. He did not respond. If you want I can prove that havans pollute the environment by measuring pollution level before and after performing the havan. I shall arrange all the equipment and pay for the expenses for this demonstration. If it is not possible now we can fix any convenient date suitable to you and your followers in large numbers if possible. I shall come again."

Shrichandra, "It is contradictory to what our Vedas preach. I shall discuss your views with our scholars and let you know."

Deepak and Deepti knew that he would never respond as it would shake the very foundation of the organisation.

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While returning to the guest house they saw a procession of devotees of 'Hare Krishna' sect. All with tonsured heads, wearing saffron attires inscribed with words 'Hare Krishna' all over, marched slowly on the narrow road, reciting repeatedly the words, 'Hare Krishna' with rhythmic melody of various musical instruments. They stopped at the Ashram they were staying, but kept on reciting the same words. Deepti went to

one who appeared to be the head of the group and asked him, "What is the purpose of reciting the same words over and over again so loudly and adding to noise pollution by equally loud notes of the musical instruments. You are also blocking the road and causing inconvenience to people? What is your name?"

He replied, "You can address me 'Hare Krishna'. We recite the name of our deity because it is very soothing. We get so much engrossed and immersed that we forget all our worries and feel immense happiness."

Deepti, "It is waste of your valuable time which you should utilise for some productive work. The peace and happiness you are talking about is only in your imagination and not real and only like the superficial and temporary escapism like under the influence of intoxication. The solution for worries and problems is in appropriate action and not just forgetting. Our scriptures ordain action (Karma) and not wasting time as you are doing."

Hare Krishna, "You join us. You will have the same experience."

Deepti, "I am not a fool to waste my time in useless and idle pursuits."

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They returned to their room. While sipping tea Deepti suggested, "We should not miss Mathura, Vrindavan and Gokul and visit these places also."

Deepak, "The activities in temples there will also be same as we have already seen."

Deepti, "It is the birth place of Krishna, the most popular deity in our country. It was in this region he was borne and spent his childhood and enjoyed company of amorous damsels, the 'Gopies' and killed his maternal uncle to free his imprisoned parents. We must see these places."

At Mathura they first saw the birth place, the prison where Vasudev and Devki, the parents were kept imprisoned by Kansa, brother of Devki. Deepak have read the story and told it to Deepti, "Kansa loved his sister Devki very much but while travelling in his chariot he heard a voice which his advisors, the priests, pundits and astrologers interpreted as from heaven (Akashvani) that his own sister's son will kill him. The voice must have been eco from surrounding hills of some disgruntled insider to create rift. Kansa got enraged and imprisoned his sister and her husband so that he could kill all their children as soon as they are born. The subsequent events were the result of superstitious interpretation of eco as heavenly voice by priests. There is another unbelievable story beyond human comprehension and experience. When Vasudev was carrying new born infant Krishna in a basket on his head and was crossing the river Yamuna it was in spate but receded as soon as it touched the toe of Krishna."

Deepti, "How then half of the building could be converted into mosque and Krishna, the god incarnation did not protect his own birth place? Why priests and pundits misguide people that he always comes to help his devotees in distress? He has never come and his devotees have been repeatedly defeated by invaders. The stories narrated by pundits are mere concoctions"

Vrindavan is very near Mathura. The main temple here has



a gold pillar, manifestation of the ego of the person who built it. Deepak told a very disgraceful story about the temple, "It was built by a Jain Seth, richest person of Mathura at that time. Normally Jains are not supposed to build Vaishnavite temple but superstition overweighs everything else. He was issueless. Some Vaishnava monk promised to grant boon of getting son to his wife if she built a majestic Vaishnavite temple."

Deepti, "Children are not products of any boon but fusing of compatible spermatozoa and ova. The Seth must have been impotent and his wife must have been impregnated by the monk. There are several such unwritten stories."

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While returning to Mathura from Vrindavan they were obstructed by a procession of devotees reciting the words, 'Radhe, Radhe'. Their dresses were inscribed all over with these words. Deepti asked, "Radhe is probably rustic version of Radha, beloved of Krishna. She is not any god incarnation, then why is revered as deity?"

Deepak, "She is treated the same way as queens are along with the kings."

Deepti, "She was not a queen. Krishna never married her. Surprisingly none of the sixteen thousand queens and their chief, patrani Rukmini are not as revered as Radha. It is wonder of superstitious India that even an extra-marital relation is glorified which otherwise is considered a taboo in the society."

Deepak, "There is no mention of Radha in canonical scriptures. It is later addition by some influential monk or priest who must be having infatuation for female. It is manifestation of latent sex urge."

At Gokul the scenario was much more ridiculous. Idols of Krishna as a child were put in many houses depicting playing; sleeping etc. and the priests or their wives were asking donations. Anguished by the superstitions prevailing all over they returned to Mathura for a night's stay in a rest house in a Jain temple which was built by the same Seth from the left over residue of Vaishnavite temple at Vrindavan.

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## ELEVEN

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Shree explained to Acharya Vinay the information collected through the questionnaire and its statistical compilation and analysis, "Over eighty percent of respondent monks have admitted that their initiation was not because of their own independent decision or any inclination but was because of economic compulsion of their families. A majority of them wished they should have enjoyed the life of a householder like their other relatives and friends."

Acharya, "You have proved your point."

Shree "I have not done anything except compilation of the information given by the practicing monks themselves."

Acharya, "There is nothing left to discuss in the conference. Why not cancel it?"

Shree, "We cannot cancel it now. We have committed in the questionnaire that it is for the proposed conference. You made a solemn commitment to Deepak, Deepti and me also. It will not be proper to even postpone it much less cancel it. I request you to kindly approve the dates in last the week of September as suggested by Deepak and Deepti."

Acharya, "You are insistant and there is no option left to me. I have to toe your line of action. You have my approval

to communicate the dates suggested by you to all the participants and start preparations. I shall talk to the members of the managing committee for our stay to extend all possible help. You have my blessings for the success of the conference"

Shree was surprised by such a prompt acceptance by the Acharya. She could surmise that the continuous churning going on in his mind for all these months must have culminated in coming to a rational, judicious and reasonable conclusion. He himself might have been the victim of similar financial and family compulsions for his initiation as a monk. She was happy on her success. She took leave from the Acharya, expressing her gratitude with humility and customary bowing, prostrating and circumambulation.

She informed Deepak and Deepti about the most favourable outcome and told them that she would stay for three days with her parents here. She repeatedly requested her parents to agree to her request and give up monkhood. But they were adamant and were not willing to do so unless the Acharya ordered. They told her plainly that there had been cases of revolt in the past but they would not do so as it was sinful.

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Deepak, Deepti, Vibhu and Shree reached Jhadol on twelfth August, three days before the date of inauguration of the school and tree planting (vanmahotsava) on sixteenth August by the Chief Minister. Vibha had made elaborate and adequate preparations for the event. All of them went round the area every day and worked out the details of the programme meticulously.

The C.M. arrived at 9.a.m. sharp, the appointed scheduled time. He was received by Vibha who introduced Deepak,

Deepti and Vibhu. Shree was already introduced. Shruti a tribal girl working with Vibha, in tribal attire put Tilak on the forehead of the C.M. and performed Aarti, the traditional ritual while receiving an honoured guest. Vibha had put a sign at the gate with an arrow pointing towards the parking spot and inscription that vehicles were not allowed inside. The C.M. read and walked on foot accompanied by Vibha. She explained the layout of the plantation site, "The entire plantation area has been divided in plots of size of one hectare and pits of two feet cube size have been dug in alternate plots leaving adjoining plots vacant for agricultural crops of grains and cereals only in the area which is plain. The area which has a slope of even more than two percent will all be covered by plants or fodder grasses, according to land capability classification. The species that will be planted are indigenous and none exotic and this area is fairly rich in bio-diversity. We are paying special attention to the medicinal plants growing naturally in forests, but dwindling fast as a result of over exploitation. When the trees mature and herbs and shrubs reach harvesting stage we shall establish processing units for a variety of minor forest produce, to be operated, managed and shared equitably by tribals working with us or in the neighbouring area associated with our project. We shall gradually extend our project activity in this tehsil and then in the district."

The C.M. was highly impressed by the scenario as he walked. There were tribals in their traditional attire and colourful head dresses, presenting a rainbow spectre. He was taken to the highest point in the area where the nursery and storage pond usable as swimming pool also, were located. Vibha requested the Chief Guest, the C.M. to plant the sapling

of Bargad earmarked for him. As he started, Vibha gave the signal with a green flag in her hand and all tribals simultaneously planted the saplings with them. Soon water started flowing out of the sprinklers spread throughout the area. The C.M. was looking for the can to water the sapling as is the practice. Vibha explained, "We have adopted here sprinkler watering which is the only irrigation technique that is similar to natural rainfall."

"It is amazing You have planned so meticulously that everything is spontaneous, systematic and at the right moment." exclaimed the C.M.

He then proceeded to inaugurate the school building. It was a single story building with underground storage facility. The function was simple without any fanfare. Vibha said, "The school will be residential. We are incorporating vocational courses right from the beginning as even children can do many things such as weeding and hoeing in the nursery, preparing paper and earthen toys etc."

The Chief Minister was highly impressed by the project profile and said, "I shall like to replicate it in the state at as many places as possible. Please give me a copy of the project. I shall put it before the cabinet and request you to personally give its presentation."

Vibha then announced on the mike, "All of us shall now take lunch together. I request everyone to go to the covered shamiana."

The menu was simple and to the liking of the tribals. It comprised purees (fried wheat chapatti), potato-onion mix vegetable and sweet dish Lafsi (broken wheat cooked with

jaggery and plenty of ghee and sprinkling of dry fruits). The C.M. was delighted to see such a large congregation of tribals enjoying meals with smile on their faces. It is a unique characteristic of tribals that they never grumble about deficiency or shortage if any and gladly enjoy whatever is offered by the host who may be poor. They share equitably even five kg food among five hundred with only a morsel for each. This is in contrast to the scenario seen in lavish parties in the so called urban civilised society where in spite of a sumptuous menu guests complain about the slightest deficiency of even salt or some other trivial thing. Tribals are therefore more civilised.

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## TWELVE

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Acharya Vinay was with his disciples when Deepak, Deepti, Vibhu, Shree and Vibha entered his room. They paid obeisance and sat down quietly. Pointing towards Shree he said, "I was discussing about the conference. We are of the view that the proposed four days will be too long. It should be for two days only. Let us finalise the dates. I propose 25 and 26, September. Being Saturday and Sunday, both will be non working days in all important establishments and shall facilitate better attendance."

Shree, "We have just come from our programme at Jhadol and have stayed here to finalise arrangements and the detailed programme of the conference."

Acharya, "I have called the President of the Committee for the arrangement of our stay. He will be coming shortly. I have told him to extend every possible help to you in organising the programme. You may discuss details with him."

The President and his team came at the appointed time. He told plainly, "We shall make all arrangements of stay, meals, transport and everything for the participants of our sect. It will not be possible to accommodate others."

Deepak, "Thanks for that. We shall manage for others. We have fixed meetings with committees of other sects."

The respective committees of other Swetamber and Digamber sects agreed to shoulder entire responsibility for participants of their sects, monks, householders and all. The Nathdwara Temple management committee also agreed to share the burden of all participants of various Vaishnavite sects. Shree suggested that they should stay at Udaipur and finalise every detail.

They sat till late at night to finalise the programme. Deepak suggested, "We shall book rooms in hotels according to the status of the invitees, the mahants, priests, astrologers, scientists, politicians and others."

Shree, "I have the data to facilitate this. I have received responses on the questionnaire from one hundred and forty only out of four hundred addressees. So far only sixty five have confirmed their participation. There may be a few drop outs and a few additions also."

Deepti suggested, "Before finalising the time table we should also fix the number of speakers and the time to be allotted to each. There should be only one speaker from each category i.e. one from each sect of monks and similarly one each from mahants, priests, and astrologers. Likewise there will be one such speaker from scientists, rationalists and others."

Vibha, "You should not exclude environmentalists. There should be one from them also."

Shree, "I shall do this exercise. I shall then discuss with you"

Deepak, "It is all your responsibility now. Of course we shall all be at your disposal. You are staying here till the conclusion of the conference."

Deepak found a heap of letters on his table after a break of over a week away from the office at Bangalore. He spotted an attractive invitation card, picked it and after reading gave it to Deepti. She responded promptly, "It is their special annual programme. We must attend it. It is on week end Sunday. The Ashram is not far off and is only thirty kilometres from our place."

Deepak, "There is no mention of lunch. You shall have to get up early to prepare pack lunch."

The building of Ashram was majestic and architecturally superb. There was a spacious veranda in front, decorated profusely with flowers and plants. In the middle of the veranda was an exquisite throne like seat for the Guru and almost adjacent to it was portable silver replica of Shiva temple. There was a big ground in front well covered and decorated tastefully. There was sitting arrangement for over five thousand. Below the veranda the musicians of grand orchestra of the Ashram were sitting with their variety of musical instruments. The Guru descended on the scene at 9.a.m. sharp, in flowing white robes, loose and long, sweeping the ground as he moved from one side to other, a diminutive figure with long beard and hair style, died natural black evident from white lining at the root of the beard.

He said, "I shall be performing anointment of Shiva Lingam and reciting sacred hymns which you should all listen attentively. The orchestra will be playing simultaneously. The sounds of hymns and music are of divine origin and helpful in soothing the mind. After that I shall answer your questions."

He poured about five litres of milk coloured with saffron and mixed with dry fruits. The milk was not wasted down the

drain but collected in a silver pot to be distributed to devotees to drink. The performance of orchestra was impressive. When it stopped after performing for its scheduled time audience was allowed to ask questions.

Deepti was first to put her question, "I want to know as to what is religious and spiritual in the Shiva Lingam. It is obviously a vulgar depiction of intercourse, phallus penetrating the vagina. You have washed it with milk and asked us to drink it. It is repulsive to drink the washings of phallus and vagina in conjugal process. Your claim that hymns and music of orchestra are of divine origin is not correct as all these are creations of mankind. These are tricks to attract people. The diversion of mind is no solution to various problems which require commensurate efforts to solve. It is like intoxication under which problems are just forgotten and suppressed temporarily to manifest again with greater intensity. I have been viewing your discourses on T.V. You have been preaching that one should remain calm, composed and equanimous in good as well as adverse situations. Recently after some accidental firing in the Ashram you lost your temper and admonished the assessment of police that it was not aimed at you. You have high Y-Grade security yet you are so afraid of death whereas you preach fearlessness."

Guru, "It appears, you have come here in sat sang for the first time. Time is short. It will require lengthy explanation to answer your question. You will have to take exclusive appointment for this."

On way back they stopped at local centre of Ramakrishna Mission. They met the monk in-charge of the centre and asked him for permission to take their pack lunch at some suitable

place in the campus. He accosted them to the dining place and asked the attendant to look after them. After taking lunch they requested the monk to tell them about the Mission.

Nityanand, "Our main objective is to propagate the teachings of Paramhansa Swami Ramakrishna as elucidated and explained by Swami Vivekananda. We have centres in almost all important towns and cities in India and in foreign countries also. We are publishing plenty of good literature and running educational and other various philanthropic institutions."

Deepti, "I saw on T.V. serialised documentary on Swami Ramakrishna. His relationship with a tantric lady was interesting. It was probably under her spell that he started hallucinating direct audience with the goddess in person. When he was terminally ill he could not be cured by his mystic powers, his tantric consort and the almighty goddess appearing in person before him. Obviously all adulations and exultations about him are exaggerations and mere concoctions. Swami Vivekananda might have been obsessed with him for help given in dire need. It is Swami Vivekananda who made him famous like Asoka did for Mahatma Buddha. We are in hurry and for you also it may be time for rest. We shall come some other with appointment and discuss in detail."

## THIRTEEN

Shree worked hard for over a month to set everything in the right place. She remained in continuous contact with expected participants, sending E-mails and letters, requesting them to confirm their participation. She prepared a comprehensive set of guidelines for the participants, giving details of routes to Udaipur, the place of their stay, names, addresses and mobile phone numbers of contact persons and all that a new visitor to the place should need. A detailed time table of the conference was also prepared along with the instructions for speakers and to the various categories of participants to select one speaker for each category. She sent the entire information by speed post to all.

Deepak, Deepti, Vibhu also arrived at Udaipur well in advance on twentieth September to check all the arrangements. Vijay and Vibha and their staff were already assisting Shree in the preparations. They were all determined to make the conference a success such that their purpose of convincing, the monks and others about their redundancy, escapism and parasitism was fulfilled. Every day they sat till late at night deliberating on the various points the monks and others could put forward about their importance and preparing logical and convincing arguments to contradict them effectively. As Shree

would be busy conducting the conference they decided to nominate Deepti to express the views of their group.

The Conference began at 11.a.m. sharp on twenty fifth September. In spite of confirmation from sixty five only fifty two participants came and could be accommodated in the well furnished conference hall with audio visual projection facility. Acharya Vinay asked Shree to apprise the audience about the statistics she had compiled and analysed.

Shree, "I collected addresses of over four hundred important monks, mahants, priests, pundits, astrologers, rationalists, scientists, politicians and others and wrote to them to fill the questionnaire prepared by me in consultation with Acharya Vinay, requesting them all to make it convenient to participate in the conference. Only one hundred and forty responded. The analysis of data has revealed that over 80% monks have of their own admitted that they were forced into monkhood because of financial and other family and social compulsions. Kindly peruse the projection on the screen. The data are self explanatory, giving the number and percentage age wise revealing that they were at a tender age in early teens when they did not understand the meaning of detachment and their admission that they did not have any experience of the life of householder, his problems and difficulties. Nuns have admitted that their induction into the religious order was because their poor parents were worried about their marriage. I shall clarify whatever is desired about the data presented."

There was no question and morbid silence prevailed for over five minutes. Shree broke the silence and said, "I presume that the data projected for perusal of all of you are explicit and do not need any clarification. I request you all

to abide by the guide lines. Accordingly only one representative from each sect of monks and similarly from other groups will present the views of the group. I have received names from some groups. The remaining groups are also requested to give the names of their representatives so that the sequence of speakers can be worked out. I have received the name of Deepti to put counter views and questions on behalf of the rationalists and scientists. I request Acharya Vinay to inaugurate the Conference."

Acharya Vinay, "I thank you all for accepting our request to participate in this Conference and taking the trouble of coming here, some of you from long distances. With changing times, opening of wider and wider horizons of knowledge by phenomenal advances in science and technology, shrinking of space and time, opening and liberalisation of societies, increasing contacts and interactions between people of different regions and their interdependence, have given rise to new challenges, dissensions leading to revolts against old values, concepts, systems and institutions even those considered sacrosanct and inviolable, are now coming under the scanner of criticism more and more regarding their relevance and utility. The institutions of monkhood, priests, mahants, pundits, astrologers and others which were considered useful and beneficial to people and the society for giving guidance in almost all activities, are now being questioned as redundant, useless and they are denigrated as parasites, cheats and exploiters. I request you all to put your points of view, justifying the role and utility of the organisations you represent."

Manu Vedanti sprang up from his seat and shouted aloud in rage, "It is blasphemy. How can a handful of persons decry

us? Our teeming followers repose their trust in us, seek our guidance in all their difficulties and problems and get solace."

Acharya Vinay, "There is no need to be excited. By exhibiting anger, impatience and adrenal upsurge you are strengthening the case of opponents. Please keep sitting and speak calmly."

Pointing towards Manu Vedanti Deepti said, "You have mentioned in the questionnaire that you do not know anything about your parents. You only know what your Guru told you that he picked you from a fare where he found you lost by your parents. It may be that you might have been kidnapped as happens in many cases. Gurus need disciples to serve them particularly in old age and also to carry on their legacy. Obviously you do not have any experience about the life of householders, their problems, difficulties, challenges, responsibilities, ups and downs. You have lived on donations and do not know how one earns his living and maintains the family. You do not do any labour and shed sweat to meet your own expenses. Like your guru you must also be planning to marry and enjoy the life of a pseudo monk and a pseudo householder at the cost of others, on the shoulders of the householders who toil hard to meet their expenses and of parasites like you also."

Manu got furious and said, "You westernised atheists are bent upon denigrating the Indian traditions, ethos and time tested values and institutions. I am leaving and shall not be a party to discussions here."

Deepti, "Please stay a minute. You should not runaway like this. You have talked about your values and institutions as time tested. The fact is that these are manipulated to meet



your selfish ends and to make people live in an imaginary world by indoctrinating them to be obsessed by your dictates and unrealistic promises that the rituals and devotion to the deity prescribed will solve all the problems. But it never happened and the people made inert and despondent, kept engaged in reciting paeans of praise of deities and not making adequate and commensurate efforts to meet the challenges and suffer the failures. India lost battles repeatedly and was enslaved disgracefully only because of inaction (Akarma) and not matching action (Karma). No deity ever came to rescue. We kept on worshiping inanimate idols requesting them to come and help and continued suffering defeat after defeat, whereas the iconoclasts kept on winning. You want to leave. We will not force you to stay. But kindly just keep in mind the promise I am making for all present here that if at any point of time you feel repentant about your parasitic life style you are welcome to join our 'Deepshree Rehabilitation Trust' at Jhadol. We shall provide you all necessary amenities of life and work to earn your living gracefully."

Shree requested Mahant Ramdas to speak next.

Mahant Ramdas, "We should try to evolve a moderate, middle path, a balanced synthesis of old and new. All that is old is not bad and all that is new is not sterling truth and good. The modern consumerist life style is also already manifesting its impending dangers. The green house effect and climate change are its serious repercussions. I have no hesitation in admitting that the prevailing old notion of devotion (Bhakti) and ignoring appropriate action in the false hope that the deity will come and do our work has done immense harm. The deities we worship did everything themselves and even fought battles. Worshipping them to imbibe their spirit of action and

to follow their ideals should be the objective of Bhakti. It is a fact that the institutions of monks, priests etc. have been misleading gullible people for their selfish ends. I am really ashamed of my parasitic life and announce here and now that I shall join the active life style as promised by Deepti."

Deepti jumped from her seat, clapped and clapped with joy and many others joining her in the chorus, thanking and applauding Ramdas for his bold announcement. Deepti said, "I assure Mahant Ramdas that life style envisaged in our project will be austere, non-consumerist and close to nature. However we shall continuously try to avail themselves of the benefits of scientific and technological developments. We are also not averse to development but it should be sustainable which is possible only if natural resources are used within their respective carrying capacities and rejuvenating time cycles.

Shree announced lunch break with the request to reassemble at 3.p.m.

The second session started with thinner attendance as eighteen participants left after lunch. Shree invited Shreyans muni as the first speaker of the session.

Shreyans muni, "I got into monkhood at the tender age of eleven. Born in a middle class family in a small town I was brought up in a religious environment and listened to the discourses of the monks with my parents. The monks generally eulogised the institution of monks and denigrated that of house holders, asserting that monks are reborn in higher life forms as human beings or in heaven and are never reborn in inferior life forms and in hell and that their salvation is assured within fifteen rebirths. As a child also I enjoyed marriage festivities in marriages and other functions and wished to be

a house holder. The Acharya of the order of monks, to which my parents had allegiance, was continuously coaxing me to become a monk and he would repeat the ensuing benefits, rebirth in heaven and assured salvation etc. I am not aware of what transpired between him and my parents. But my elder sister, whose marriage was not getting finalised because of high dowry demand, materialised soon after I got initiated in monkhood. The fact is that I got into monkhood as a result of my continuous conditioning and indoctrination and allurements of heavenly pleasures in the next birth and assured salvation within next fifteen births. Later when I read scriptures and found that even householders get into heaven and also get salvation, I told the Acharya that if the householder living in all the turmoil and fulfilling all his responsibilities towards his family, society and even of maintaining the monks, could attain what monks got after running away from all that a householder faces, then he is definitely better than monks. The Acharya would only console me by telling that monks have better opportunities for meditation, reading scriptures and facing austerities to facilitate salvation. I would always contradict him and protest that a householder is then much better placed to get all those benefits without all the facilities that the monks enjoyed at the cost of the very householders. He would then generally stop the topic on some pretext. I shall discuss the proceedings of this conference with my Acharya in presence of all fellow monks and try to get final word on the relevance of monkhood.”

Deepti, “I must congratulate Shreyans muni for his courage to put forth all the facts so frankly. He has admitted that he was enticed by promises of heaven and salvation. It is the same as astrologers, priests, mahants, pundits, tantrics

and quakes do to entice people by false and imaginary promises. Nobody knows about heaven and salvation. All probes into the solar system and galaxies farther and farther have not revealed existence of such places are mere conjectures of the writers of the scriptures. There is no evidence of lofty Sumeru Mountain millions of kilometres high in the middle of the earth, not visible from geo- synchronic satellites which can see as small an area as one metre square.”

Shree then called priest Sadanand to speak.

Priest Sadanand, “Priests as a class have been doing, are doing and shall continue to do yeomen service to the society not only in India but the world over by preserving, maintaining and carrying out all sorts of rituals, events and practices at the places of worship and centres of faith and allegiance of millions of people. It is the institution of priests that is keeping aloft the flags of various traditions, cultures and civilisations all over ever since the advent of mankind on planet earth. Priests organise events, prayers and guide people. The events serve a very useful social purpose of bringing people together to interact and socialise for mutual benefit. Priests advise and guide people to perform appropriate rituals to solve their problems. The strings of faith that bind people to the deity through priests have been instrumental throughout the ages in making people happy, getting rid of distress and depression, at least psychologically and in most cases materially also. The institution of priesthood is important and should not be decried outright.”

Deepti, “History is replete with instances that the priests kept the Indian rulers shackled in rituals, lasting from days to weeks and months and by that time the enemy came to the

door steps, cutting supplies of food and other essential provisions and the battles were invariably lost resulting in enslavement of the rulers. It is the priests who advise rituals and events to please the deity as a cure to diseases and solution to other problems of people dissuading them to take proper treatment or take steps and make efforts to solve problems and as a result people suffer and often even die and suffer failures. Priests by and large are concerned with their selfish interests and security of income. They impress on the people that the worship of the idol of the deity, will cure and solve their problems. How can the lifeless idol which thieves can steal, sell or break, the idol which cannot protect itself, can do anything for others? By enforcing, inculcating and perpetuating such superstitious blind beliefs the priests are instrumental in alienating people from action (Karma), weakening and erasing their self reliance and confidence. Priests misguide and condition people to have faith in lifeless idols of deities and not in themselves, their own will power, their resolve and effort. Priests contrive to receive offers in millions in the name of the inanimate deity and enjoy the booty, the money which can be utilised more fruitfully in good and productive ways in education, hospitals, and in vocational help to the needy. Though some Trusts of temples have now started some philanthropic activities, only a fraction of total earnings is spent on these and the major portion is used by the priests, in the maintenance of temples which provide income and on rituals and events which are pretexts to extract more and more money. The Tirupati temple is being plated with gold at enormous cost, though the money could be utilised more fruitfully. Indulgence in reciting praise or the name of the deity for hours and days as is the usual practice in temples,

perpetuated by priests, is most unproductive waste of time and should be utilised in productive work. Terrorists easily kill such priests and devotees sitting right in front of their deity. In most events in temples the noise levels are over 100 to 120 decibels which cause debilitating noise pollution, many a time, flouting the laws by disturbing students during examination days also. The processions organised by priests of temples are a nuisance to general public, blocking roads and creating traffic jams and stampede causing injuries and deaths. There is no justification for continuation of the pernicious institution of priests. There are numerous cases of sexual abuse by priests, mahants and their ilk, notably the institution of 'Devdasi' in religious garb."

There was no reply from Sadanand. Shree invited pundit Sudhanshu to speak.

Pundit Sudhanshu, "Pundits and priests are twin brothers and associate with each other in most of the religious and social events and functions. Priests rely on idols of deities and pundits on scriptures. Pundits are almost equally involved in religious activities in association with priests and more than them in social activities in marriages, birthdays, death rituals and others."

Deepti, "You are doing the same harm as priests. Marriages performed by you with all the fanfare of elaborate rituals are not always happy and end disastrously whereas marriages without your intervention are not always a failure and are more successful than those with rituals by you. What then is the utility of the institution of pundits?"

Father Joseph spoke next, "We help poor and downtrodden, give them food and clothing, provide educational facilities in

remotest areas where neither government nor any other religious or other philanthropic agency ever ventured. We bring smile on the faces of those who earlier hardly have a square meal daily.”

Deepti, “You do help people in remotest areas, but your sole objective is to convert them to Christianity. In areas where Christian missionaries are active almost the entire population has been converted. The tribal people are so poor and simple that you can convert by just providing a mouthful of porridge of wheat and jaggery. The unrest in these areas, demand for separation and independence is all because of conversion and instigation by missionaries. You have done more harm than good. Violence continues unabated. There is another serious charge against the missionaries that they swear by celibacy but exploit children and adults sexually and commit most heinous crime.”

Mullah Nasruddin spoke next, “We are working relentlessly to provide religious education to the children of our community. Our madrassas, thousands in number, spread in every nook and corner where community is in majority. It is because of our efforts and work that the community has been able to maintain its distinct culture and identity.”

Deepti, “You and your madrassas are responsible to keep the community backward. You have deliberately deprived the community from modern education. I do not want to generalise but many madrassas become nurseries of breeding terrorism by indoctrinating extremism and twisted interpretation of the holy Quran, particularly the meaning of words like Jihad. Sacrifice of innocent animals continues an essential religious ritual, though some enlightened persons from your community,

who are members of People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), have clarified that non-violence is quite compatible with Islam. The Saudi Arabia's top ranking cleric Sheikh Abdelaziz bin Abdullah al Sheikh has said that Sacrifice of animal is not obligatory, the flesh does not reach Allah nor does their blood but piety from you reaches him. During obeisance at Kaba the holiest of holy places Muslims dress as Jain monks symbolising non-violence and are forbidden to do any harm lest kill any, may be an ant or other even if it is biting painfully. Obviously sacrifice of animals is contradiction to this perception of non-violence in Islam. In no country other than India there are separate laws for different religious communities and it is all because of a separatist attitude, being hammered day and night by you people. Somehow there is now some awakening and saner people in the community are agreeing with the government to introduce modern education in madrassas and it is hoped that things will change in due course of time.”

Shree called Vidyanand to speak next.

Vidyanand, “Our work is straight forward based on prescience of Astrology. We tell people in advance about the impending events both good and bad and suggest measures to circumvent the misfortunes. We do no harm and only help people and guide them.”

Deepti, “Astrology is not at all a science. Astronomy is a science about planets, stars, galaxies and the construct and evolution of the universe. You base your forecasts on the position and movement of planets and stars. Of course all these are inter-related and are mutually reinforcing and affecting each other. It is the moon's influence that keeps earth

at 23.5 degree inclination to its axis and this is instrumental in creating weather conditions congenial for life to evolve and maintain unlike Mars and Mercury where inclination is 60 and 90 degrees respectively and the weather is harsh and unsuitable for life. Planets do have effect but on the earth as a whole and not on individual living beings. Experiments have been made and it has been observed that children, six in number born at the same time in the same labour room at the same latitude and longitude had different fortunes. Your language is generally vague and ambiguous and can be interpreted the way it suits the astrologer. This country suffered ignominious defeats because of astrologers. The one lakh strong army of brave Marathas suffered most humiliating defeat from a small ten thousand army of Ahmadshah Abdali because astrologers prohibited them from fighting for next three months proclaiming that the stars were not in their favour. The result was that they starved as their supply lines were blocked by Abdali and Marathas even killed and ate their horses to survive. There are many recorded historical instances. In many cases people suffer only because of the subconscious fear psychosis as happened to a client who was told that he had a chance of accident on a particular day and he did meet with the accident because of the anticipated fear created. If the scientific principle of cause and effect, and what is ordained in the scriptures also that it is good and bad actions of a person that fructify in good and bad results, is correct, then planets and stars are inconsequential. Your profession is for your own selfish interest to earn hefty amounts of money and is based on tricky concoctions. You first frighten your clients about the impending dangers of unfavourable conjunction of stars and then suggest rituals to neutralise them and in the process extract maximum possible amounts of money. There is more

cheating than any help. Very much like astrology, Vastu is another such fad frightening people about directions of various rooms etc in a building. If the earth rotates on its axis as established by authentic scientific observations then the direction of every longitude is constantly changing and there will be no fixed direction of any room etc. Astrologers, practitioners of Vastu are also parasites like monks, mahants, priests, pundits and others of the kind. Pundit Sudhanshu bracketed pundits with priests. You did not do so. In my opinion astrologers should also be bracketed with priests and pundits as their technique is almost the same. The practitioners of these three professions entice people by promising gains without effort. This is such an allurements that even highly educated scientists and technocrats succumb to the temptation. The spell and charm by these three professionals have been contrived and manipulated so cleverly that the majority of people have been befooled. Senior scientists, professors at IIT colleges, their students are commonly seen wearing amulets, rings with varying gems and other such charms. Most of even highly modern executives, technocrats and students have red strings or red thread tied around their wrists which look very ridiculous. How will such inanimate objects like a coloured thread help get success? It is really a pity. All these institutions should be banned by law to liberate gullible ignorant masses from the shackles and slumber of superstitions and blind faith. People will then make appropriate efforts to meet the vicissitudes as and when they arise."

Shree invited swami Harshanand to speak about his organisation Aryasamaj.

Harshanand, "Aryasamaj does not subscribe to idol worship and any other superstitious rituals. Swami Dayanand Sarasvati

the founder interpreted Vedas correctly for the first time. He emphasised good education to all and chain of DAV schools is doing yeoman service in providing quality education.”

Deepti, “Aryasamaj ordains most pernicious ritual of Havan for everyone every day. In havans it is manufactured dry wood obtained by cutting green trees, uselessly burnt along with edible grains, ghee and many other things. Anything burnt even perfumes will produce CO<sub>2</sub> and will therefore add pollution to the environment. It relies solely on Vedas in which the verses are mainly in the form of begging almost all sorts of things from imaginary noumenon god. This is total dependence and subservience to some unknown external power and negates self confidence and effort. Rigveda is proclaimed to be oldest book about five thousand years old. Dayanand Sarasvati and his interpretation is very recent phenomenon. Earlier the interpretations by two stalwarts and learned scholars of Vedic literature Mahidharacharya and Sayanacharya dominated the scene. Some of the verses are so vulgar and obscene that one cannot read them before sister and daughter. If words have different meaning then verses can be interpreted and twisted according whims and beliefs of the interpreter. It can be argued as to why interpretations by Dayanand Sarasvati are correct and that of earlier scholars wrong. There are verses in Vedas which advocate unlimited conspicuous consumption, the major factor contributing to environmental pollution. In Aryasamaj also institution of monkhood has crept in and there are swamis who do not do any work to earn their own living and are dependent on householders.”

Karma Yeshi, Buddhist Lama spoke next, “Buddhism is most non controversial and does not subscribe to any sort of

ritual and also noumena of soul and god. It prescribes and ordains good and virtuous conduct of compassion towards all and non-violence and truth are core principles.”

Deepti, “Visit to Buddhist monastery will reveal that various rituals are galore. Reciting hymns, chants, paeans of praise in front Buddha idols and wasting time idly are main practices. Buddhism preaches compassion and non violence but does not prohibit meat eating if the killing of animals is done by others and thus endorses acquiescence in killing of innocent animals. Buddhists are by and large non vegetarians. A non vegetarian eats ten times more than a vegetarian because the animals killed and consumed eat vegetation and only one tenth of total calorie intake is converted in meat and rest of calories are consumed by animals in their own metabolism. Non vegetarianism is an important factor contributing to environmental degradation. As far as I know the lamas are supposed to be celibate. But only males are initiated and there are no female lamas. What happens to females? Are they subjugated in polygamy? There are lamas (monks) also who do not do any work and are dependent on householders and are parasites. There is no belief in soul yet reincarnation is admitted. Its metaphysical concept that everything is transient and that all appearances are delusion is strange. Of course things are changing and transforming but all these appearances are real and not delusions. It appears to be the impact of Vedic concept of Maya.”

Shree announced the name of Sardar Kartar Singh as the last speaker of the session.

Sardar Kartar Singh, “Sikhism is most practical and non ritualistic religion. All of the revered gurus were ardent

householders and not irresponsible escapist monks. It symbolises universal brotherhood without any discrimination on the basis of caste and rank.”

Deepti, “Of course the gurus were ideal icons. But the followers are concerned mainly with external symbols and by and large not in imbibing and following the teachings of gurus. Mere obeisance to Guru Granth Sahib is of no consequence if the teachings enshrined are not imbibed and followed. Majority of followers are non vegetarian and take alcohol. A class of gyanis and ragis has also come up who are dependent on donations by householders.”

Shree announced the end of the session and requested all the delegates to take their evening meals and to come the next day in time at 11.a.m. to participate in remaining sessions.

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Next day the delegates who came kept waiting outside the conference hall but the doors were not opened till ten minutes past 11.a.m. Shree saw a small piece of paper pasted on the door and the inscription written on it, “The further sessions of the Conference are cancelled by order of Acharya Vinay.” She ran towards the room of the Acharya, Deepak, Deepti and others followed. There was another notice pasted on the door here, “Visitors not allowed. The Acharya is unwell.” Shree enquired from attendants and other monks and got only one reply that doctors have advised complete rest to the Acharya.

There was no option left and all delegates dispersed and returned to their respective places. Deepak and Deepti smelt a rat and concluded that there was something fishy and it was all deliberate. They devised their own strategy. They prepared

the briefs of the proceedings and video clippings and mailed to all important newspapers, broadcasting and T.V. channels. Their efforts were successful and it was reported on the front page of prominent news papers and was broadcast on all important channels at prime time. The impact was much more than expected. They were flooded with phone calls and E-mails congratulating them and giving the feedback that it had created a tsunami in religious, social and political circles. Rationalists were planning to file PIL to get the parasitic institutions of monks, mahants, priests, pundits and astrologers banned by law in the same way as the quakes. They were also trying to build pressure on legislators to bring an appropriate law in parliament and assemblies.

The delegates who did not attend the second session of the conference and the rest also met to chalk out their strategy. They planned to consult Acharya Vinay also and met him secretly. They did not go to his place in groups but one by one and took the precaution to avoid notice by parking their vehicles at a distance separately. Acharya Vinay was also in a predicament and wanted to meet them. He spoke, “I was also keen to discuss the proceedings of the conference with you all. I want to clarify my position and circumstances under which I was forced to organise the conference. I could not even imagine that the arguments of rationalists will be so strong, logical, emphatic and convincing that the other side would not be able to counter them effectively. I was pained to see most of you absenting from the second session as if you felt defeated. This weakened our case. Anyway we should now decide our next step before the damage is done. We should do something concrete and pre-emptive.”

Manu Vedanti, "We should teach them such a lesson that they do not dare to challenge our institutions in future. We should file defamation suits against them in a court of law. We may go to the Supreme Court straight as the matter is so important and urgent. We have better resources, financial and others than they have. We can also ask our followers to manhandle them physically to such an extent that they will not forget it all their life time."

Acharya Vinay, "I do not agree with your second suggestion that they should be physically harmed by instigating our followers to resort to violence. This will only defame us more than they have done. We shall consult senior lawyers about your suggestion that we should take legal action. I have faced legal challenges while initiating adolescents in monkhood. We hired best of the lawyers, but cases are still pending in courts. The point is that there is no substantial ground. They have neither defamed any nor uttered a single word that is defamatory. They have relied on scriptures that give more importance to action (Karma) than devotion (Bhakti). They have cited instances which cannot be overlooked easily. The unique principle of 'Anekant' in Jainism ordains that views of others should also be considered as there may be some truth in their point of view also. We should have a positive attitude. Instead of taking legal action or inflicting physical harm we should analyse and find if something has gone wrong and there is really some degeneration over time in our functioning and then let us decide to set it right. I am confident that this will have a lasting effect and the people of their kind will not only be silenced for ever but these very people will become our supporters and followers. "

Priest Sadanand, "I am afraid this will never happen. They are die hard opponents. Of course I agree that we should rectify our short comings. I endorse the first suggestion of Manu Vedanti that we shall take non-violent legal action which is the right of everyone aggrieved."

Acharya Vinay, "We shall consult local lawyers initially and may then hire top ones if the filing of legal suit is feasible. I shall call some prominent lawyers of Udaipur tomorrow at 11.a.m. I request you to be here in time."

The next day the scenario changed abruptly. Everybody came with bundles of news papers flashing the news of proceedings reported on front pages. Lawyers opined that they need time to be able to give their legal advice. Acharya Vinay consoled everybody, "We were late. But we should not be despondent. We shall consult lawyers and take appropriate action."

They all left with a heavy heart, dejected, vanquished and in a sombre melancholy mood.



## FOURTEEN

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Deepak and Deepti decided to stay for a few days at Jhadol to draw and finalise the future development plan for the project which Vibha was implementing very deftly. Shree stayed at Udaipur to meet her parents and also the Acharya.

She went to see the Acharya and entered his room unnoticed, paid obeisance and kept standing till the Acharya signalled her to sit. Without showing any anger or annoyance he asked her, "What brings you here now?"

Shree, "I have come to apologise for anything wrong or unpleasant committed by me. I did not utter a word except the brief approved by you."

Acharya, "It was you who coaxed and goaded me repeatedly to organise the conference. You articulated your statistical jargon to prove us wrong. It gave advantage to our opponents. I have fallen in the eyes of my followers. They expressed strong opposition to my consent. The members of the Managing Committee here and the delegates from other sects gathered here last night and forced me to cancel the conference. It has never happened in my life before. My decisions have always been respected and never challenged like this. I have been disgraced and hurt badly. I have to

undertake penance as ordained in scriptures. After such a humiliation I have been left with no other option but to leave my position of Acharya and hand it over to the senior most monk. There have been similar instances in the past also. I shall put the proposal tomorrow during my discourse in the morning."

Shree was stupefied and was unable to speak a word in response. However she was trying to understand the inner truth behind such an extreme decision by the Acharya. May be it was a pretext for his subsequent step to revert back to household life.

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Next morning Acharya did not preach as usual. He put forth his plan or decision, "I accept that I committed a blunder by agreeing to organise the conference, the very object of which was to question the relevance of monkhood and similar institutions. All this happened mainly because the parents of former monk Sadhwi Shradha now Shree, continued to stay here as a monk and a nun. I would have asked them to go back the way Shree has gone. I now ask and urge both of them to leave the religious order and reverse back to household. I hope they are listening. Shree is here. I request her to take her parents with her. I apologise to all of you here and also my other followers all over for the mistake I have committed. As a penance I am renouncing my position as Acharya of this order giving it to Muni Sheetal who is the senior most."

The rest was a formality. Acharya Vinay got down from his seat and personally led his successor to the seat of the Acharya. Shree was amazed at such a turn of events so swiftly as if all this happened within the twinkle of an eye. She was

delighted that her parents had been liberated so easily without any effort. She did not lose any time and left with her parents immediately. They also could not utter a word, no resistance as earlier because now it was an order of the Acharya.

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When Shree reached the project site at Jhadol, Deepak, Deepti, Vibha and all others were surprised to see Shree's parents in household attire. Deepak got up and ran and touched their feet, embraced, wept and wept, not out of pain but out of immense pleasure. He today saw his first and foremost desire fructifying. Deepak asked everybody to accompany him to their ancestral house. His parents were really very happy to see their old house renovated and modernised without any significant architectural change. They thanked Deepti, the main motivating force to dissuade Deepak from becoming a monk as penance for his parents' forced conversion for the sake of his education. Tears rolled down their eyes in immense happiness seeing Shree and Deepak married. Deepti said, "They must be tired and let them rest. We shall celebrate tomorrow."

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Deepak and Deepti decided that they would not stay at the project site and return to Jhadol every evening and spend maximum time with their parents. Shree and Vibha stayed at Jhadol to look after their parents and went to the project site only with them as and when they so desired. Vibha was at the site and doing hard work to prepare the prospective twenty year plan. She was a naturalist and a staunch conservative environmentalist. Deepak and Deepti were trying to integrate modern science and technology in Vibha's scheme of things.

Vibha made explicit her concepts, "The project planning should be such that the life style of all connected with it should be close to nature and forest based. There should be minimum dependence on agriculture which is not at all environment friendly. Ever since the birth of agriculture some ten thousand years ago there was a crusade against forests and vast areas of forests were cleared and burnt to extend agriculture and the process is continuing. Agriculture can be done only on one-tenth of land surface whereas forest can be grown on more than ninety percent of land area, on good and bad soils, on plains and slopes, on dry and wet lands, on saline and alkaline soils, in desert and salubrious climates, in tropical, subtropical and temperate zones. There are over ten lakh varieties of plant species which can provide food, fodder, fibres for cloth, various chemicals, gums, resins lac etc, a variety of wood, bamboo and other raw materials for cottage, small, medium and big industries. Forests once planted are everlasting if scientifically managed, unlike agriculture for which ploughing, sowing, watering, manuring are required crop after crop, requiring recurring input costs which are rising every year and as a result of which agriculture is not economically viable anywhere in the world and is being sustained by heavy subsidies. The productivity of polyculture forests is more than most modern high-tech agriculture. Forests serve as most efficient safe guards against natural calamities of storms as wind velocity is reduced substantially, erosion is checked as roots of trees bind the soil, floods are prevented as forest cover checks runoff and increased infiltration of rain water takes place in soil to provide subsoil water to streams and wells etc, and makes famines disappear as edible products from forest are available even during droughts. I have planted all available

local species to meet all types of needs of people here. A forest-based life style is symbiotic where all constituents of nature, animate and inanimate act, interact and manifest for mutual benefit."

Deepak, "I agree with you. However we shall plan in such a way that the project is self reliant and does not depend on external financial help. We shall integrate cottage and small scale industries after imparting necessary training to the farmers. We shall have vocational courses in all spheres and shall gradually develop our education facilities to the level of a technical University providing research facilities in pure as well as applied sciences and we should be able to offer every type of guidance to industries and government institutions."

Vibha, "We should have an extension programme also. Our programmes should not remain confined to our limited project area only. We shall extend our area of operation initially to clusters of villages in a radius of five kilometres and then ten kilometres and so on."

Deepti, "This is our objective. We shall not be confining neither to our project area nor to our state but open branches in other states also. It will require really very hard work. I think that we should shift our headquarters from Bangalore to the Jhadol project site. I am sure that our clients will prefer this place to Bangalore. They will be in a natural environment here and feel refreshed."

Deepak, "I was also thinking the same. We shall first finalise the plan in hand. I think it may take another fortnight."

Deepak's phone rang. There was a message from the guest house at the project site, "Some guests have arrived and are

in guest house and want to meet you all immediately." He replied, "We would soon be there and have tea with the guests."

It was a super surprise. Deepak and Deepti could not even trust their eyes as they saw before them ex Acharya Vinay, his four disciples with Mahant Ramdas and Shreyans muni in household attire. Behind them were female nuns in equal number and in a matching age group. They greeted them with warmth. Mr. Vinay (formerly Acharya Vinay) said, "Our conscience was stirred to the core by the discussions in the conference and we decided to get rid of hypocrisy we were living with for so long in monkhood and as a Mahant and similar such forms. We have come to join you in your crusade against superstitions, religious bigotry, exploitation of gullible masses and parasitic institutions."

Deepak, "Your joining us would immensely help us in our mission. We shall accommodate you and provide all facilities to live an active, productive and self-reliant life. You will be an asset here. Your work will be to go round the country and apprise people about the futility of parasitic institutions of monks and others of the kind. We have short documentaries on their useless and nefarious activities. However our first job will be to put you in a matrimonial relationship so that you become full-fledged householders"

And thus the MONKS'DILEMMA ended.

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## Cover page

The novel is a first ever bold attempt to reveal the hollowness and uselessness of the exploitative and parasitic institution of monks, mahants, purohits, pundits, astrologers, tantrics and their ilk, developing its theme and story around real life characters and events. It explodes myths about their chicanery, eulogised by them and their agents as charismas or miracles. The book exposes their articulated contrivances to entice people by false assurances to grant boons for monetary and other gains without effort. Inter alia it impresses the need for eradication of superstitions and blind beliefs in order to promote rational and scientific temper and attitude. The book also endorses the scientific principle of cause and effect and postulations enshrined in our canonical sacred scriptures that one reaps good or bad fruits (results) according to one's own good or bad deeds and there is no short cut or any other alternative.

Born on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1928 **Dr. S.M. Jain** had his education at the then Government Herbert College, Kota. From 1949 to 1951 he worked as teacher (Maths) in the then Govt. Girls Inter College, Kota and Govt. High School, Bhawanimandi. Selected by Rajasthan Public Service Commission he had his Forestry Training at Forest Research Institute & Colleges in 1951-53 and again in Refreshers Course in 1967.



Shri S.M. Jain is a retired Forest Officer. He worked on responsible and challenging posts in State Forest Department, covering every sphere of forestry activity. After retirement he did his innings in a leading paper mill, Rajasthan Tribal Area Development Cooperative Corporation (RTADCC), Apex N.G.O. and Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), New Delhi. In RTADCC he started and organised first ever from the scratch the collection, storage and marketing of over forty different minor forest products in six tribal districts. In ISMA he planned, coordinated and guided various widely acclaimed rural development activities of 180 member sugar factories spread all over the country. He was member of two Sub Committees of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) on behalf of ISMA and represented the President of FICCI in the Board of Governors of Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM), Bhopal. His project, "Forest for Food" was sanctioned by Department of Science and Technology and Ms. Sneha Sharma has done Ph.D. on it. Subsequently he started his consultancy services and worked as consultant in various industrial houses and mining firms and was instrumental in raising large scale plantations on wastelands, mined areas and waste dumps. The Government of Rajasthan awarded him and also the Associated Stone Industries Ltd., Ramganjmandi for the meritorious plantation work. He was awarded the honour 'Jain Gaurav' for his work as specialist in forestry on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2002 at Science City Auditorium Kolkata, on the eve of 2600<sup>th</sup> birth celebrations of Lord Mahavira by All India Digamber Jain Samman Samaroh Samiti, Kolkata.

Since 1989 he is in the panel of Consultants in Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests (NAEB) and also the Ministry of Rural Development and Employment. On assignments from these Ministries he has so far carried out thirty seven evaluations and survival rate studies of tree planting, afforestation, soil conservation and watershed projects implemented by the District Rural Development Agencies, Divisional Forest Officers and Apex NGOs in Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and J&K. NAEB gives such assignments to retired forest officer not below the rank of Chief Conservator of Forests.

"Rajasthan Ke Vanya Pashu", a book written jointly by him and late Shri Mahendra Prakash was first ever pictorial and descriptive documentation of wild animals of Rajasthan and was published by Public Relations Department, Government of Rajasthan His second book "Vanpal" is his novel in Hindi. "Pristine Jainism." With 'Foreword' by late Dr. L.M. Singhvi is his third book. His fourth book is "Environmental Ethics" with 'Foreword' by Dr. Karan Singh ji (ex ruler J&K.). His fifth book "Essence and Substance of Yoga" with 'Foreword' by Dr. Kiran Bedi has also been published. His next book "Environmental Doctrines" is also being published. He has written over eighty technical and general articles published in prestigious dailies and journals and have presented papers in national and international seminars. At 82 he is agile and active and is continuing his writing hobby. He is associated with Digamber Jain Atishaya Kshetra, Shri Mahaveerji and other charitable and social welfare organisations.