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Numerous stories about the young scholar wandering aimlessly on the campus were on air. Each one had given his own version. But one thing about him was clear on which there was unanimity that he had lost his mental balance.

He was young, tall, five feet eleven inches, brown with slightly grown beard streaked in white, had sunken eyes as deep as that of a ripened old man and dishevelled hair. While walking he would murmur to himself, smile at passers-by, sometimes would stand before a rock or a stone or a tree and talk endlessly. Nobody knew what he was talking about, and had made an attempt to go nearer him. Most of the time he spent outside on the campus, strolling like a street dog. Nobody ever ventured to talk to him, thus he was isolated and detached.

When I joined the university (S.V. University) for my MA programme I noticed this young man and I sensed the symptoms of neuroticism in him. On enquiry I received conflicting versions about his background; and this had kindled my curiosity to learn the correct version of the story of him. I learnt that one scholar in Philosophy residing in G-Block hostel meant for research scholars was sheltering him in his room, and he was the right person to give the correct input.

So, one evening as he was coming out from the university library, seeing him, with regained strength, courage and hope I ran into him and hurriedly introduced myself. At that time I joined the

department of English Literature for my MA programme and I was a fresher on the campus. His name was Dushyant pursuing research in the department of Philosophy on Sartre and J. Krishnamurti. He was as tall as the young neurotic scholar, wheatish in complexion, sober and reflective, and in true sense he had borne the disposition of a philosopher. Incidentally he hailed from Anantapur district where too I had my schooling. This identity had given me courage and quickness to introduce myself to him.

“Good that you had school education in Anantapur,” he said smiling at me and shaking his right hand with mine. He stood on the steps leading to the main entrance door of the huge building. Even today it stands magnificently with a raised statute of Mahatma Gandhi in a pond in front of it. The dome on its top exactly resembled that of Taj Mahal.

The library was familiar to me and I was known to the employees working inside since I had been a regular visitor and user of it for quite some time since my college days.

Correcting him, I said, “Not in Anantapur, but I had schooling at Guntakal.” The town is well known for Railway junction as well as for the Divisional Railway Office in the south. “I joined the department of English for my MA programme and I am put up in D Block hostel.” I cheered myself.

“Let’s have some tea.”

We walked together towards the university canteen located opposite the auditorium. The campus was full of trees, well grown, as tall as reaching the height of two storied building. Thanks to the founder of the university who had the vision in making the university eco-friendly. Even today one could see, many of them are Gulmohar (delonixregia), Indian laburnum and jacaranda giving distinct smell in summer when in full bloom, absolutely awesome. While walking and in the canteen over tea we talked many things, but I did not refer to the young neurotic scholar who was being sheltered in his room since this was my first meeting and I confined my conversation to the mundane things.

We parted. Days and weeks had rolled on and I had only a brief encounter and thereafter never in any of my encounters had I talked about the young neurotic scholar. I considered it sensitive and any reference to him would be rather embarrassing both for me and Dushyant. I allowed myself to move closer to him since I thought that would create space for ample freedom to talk about the young neurotic scholar.

Certainly, our frequent encounters had thickened our bond. This had emboldened me to talk about the neurotic scholar.

One evening. The sky fell off, and the trees were filled with cacophony of the birds. Except the deafening noise of the crows flocking the trees for evening roost nothing else was heard. A few students were noticed on the campus roads heading towards downtown for relaxation. I was returning from a long walk and as I was crossing the clock tower building (administrative block) I noticed Dushyant coming in the opposite direction. Having

noticed him I greeted him and we moved on together. A few minutes after the neurotic scholar was seen taking a right turn leading to the auditorium. I realized this was the best moment for me to talk about him with Dushyant.

“Sir I would like to know something about him. I have seen him walking aimlessly, talking to himself and smiling. Several students have given me conflicting versions of this scholar. I am told you have given him a shelter in your room.” I said unhesitantly.

“Yes, indeed, I am sheltering him. There is a story behind him.”

Even before he continued the narration I spelled out my curiosity. “I am eager to know more about him.”

“He is a scholar in the department of Anthropology, registered under Professor Prabhu Das Reddy. Sudhir Reddy is his name, endowed with wide scholarship. He talks scholarly. He is a voracious reader. His professor’s scholarship is not a match anywhere before Sudhir. It is true that Sudhir is more scholarly than his professor. Students and other scholars in the department would approach him for his guidance. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why it has spoiled the relations between them. The professor could not stomach the popularity of his scholar. He became envious of him. The second most important reason is that the professor wanted to give his only daughter to him for marriage. Sudhir used to visit the professor’s house regularly. Since both the professor and Sudhir belonged to the same community, the former asked the latter to marry his only daughter. At first Sudhir has given his acceptance. But, on learning the pampered nature of the girl, he

has withdrawn. This has angered the professor and widened their differences further. For quite some time they haven't talked with each other. The differences rose and the professor started behaving indifferently and ill-treating and humiliating Sudhir. This has angered Sudhir. On several occasions there were heated arguments and shouting in the department, and one day it had led to quarrels and in a fit of emotion and anger Sudhir has beaten the professor with his chappals. Thereafter, Sudhir stopped going to the department. His professor has submitted a complaint against Sudhir's misdemeanour to the Vice Chancellor who in turn placed him under suspension and withheld his fellowship. He too has complained against his professor by submitting a list of allegations. Several interlocutors tried to mediate between them but failed. Sudhir has remained adamant and never apologized. And the professor too has not yielded to any persuasion efforts made by interlocutors. Both have stuck to their guns yielding no room for the others to patch up their differences. This has gone for long. Sudhir used to visit the department and shout at him using all vulgar language. No body dared to interfere or intervene. As the days went by, he has become isolated. No one has ever talked to him. Every day he would go to the department and sit a while and leave. After some months, he has been thrown out from the department, his belongings have been removed from his room. He has been asked by the university authorities to vacate his room in the hostel and he has not been permitted to dine in the mess. As he has been put to this kind of humiliation, slowly he has slipped into depression that has quite made him neurotic. A deep transformation has

come in his behaviour. He has stopped talking to anyone. Neither has any one ventured. Thus he has been isolated and alienated. Sometimes he would sit and shout, sometimes while walking he would yell. He does it in English. He never speaks in his mother tongue, Telugu. His English is fine and the students of English department feel envious of him. He has fine vocabulary and he speaks committing no errors. And his mastery over his subject is extraordinary. About the subject he talks soberly. His scholarship is unquestionable and even professors from other universities have certified that. Meanwhile as the months have passed, the depression in him has ripened and has turned him into completely deranged. Every day he goes to library, sits there and reads books. Nobody in the library dare enough to talk to him. As he has been virtually thrown out, he has refused to move out of the campus. He has started roaming round within the campus. Often he would sleep inside the buildings, stand in front of the canteen in hunger. But he has never begged any one to feed him. The proprietor of the canteen would take pity on him and give him some food. He has never brushed his teeth, washed his mouth and clothes. He has been with one pair of dress. He doesn't have any belongings. Sometimes he disappears from the campus and reappears. Nobody knows where he goes and lives. It was on one day I noticed him lying under the tree moaning. I rushed to him and noticed he was completely emaciated. His eyes were completely sunk. His hands became thin. His stomach has stuck to the bones. He must have been without food for quite some time, I realized. He looked at me in askance. His condition has terribly shaken my conscience. No sooner have I noticed

him in that condition than I removed the bottle of water from my shoulder bag and sprinkled on his face. I opened his mouth forcibly and poured water. He barely drank for he was totally weak. First, what I should do was that I should provide him food as his body has completely malnourished and weakened. I could not lift him and take him to my room. Luckily, at that time I noticed an auto moving fast on the campus, and I called the driver. With the help of the driver I have put him inside and instructed the former to drive towards G- Block. I sat holding his body on my lap. As soon as I reached my room, I took him inside and I fed him. His body was stinking. A bad stinking smell emitted from his mouth. He hasn't washed his mouth and body for days, it seemed. After feeding him I put him to rest. He slept for nearly four to five hours. Later I took him to the bath room, and with the help of watchman of the hostel, we washed his body. I threw away his clothes as they were badly stinking and I gave him mine. Slowly and steadily as the days went by he has recovered, but he has hardly talked to me. Several times I have persuaded him to tell me his native town and the name of his relations so that I could intimate them. I thought that way I could help him. But he refused to divulge any information and I have never insisted thereafter. I have allowed him to live with me sharing my room. For a year I have fed him. He rarely talks to me. He goes out on his own and comes back to the room. He never asks for food. I feed him at appropriate times."

He stopped the narration. It was gripping and I was completely absorbed in it despite the noise of the birds. Now subsided. Occasionally I heard the crows crowing in

the darkness that enveloped the trees, though the campus lights were burning and spreading the light on the roads. I looked up and noticed the twinkling stars as if partaking the human plight. I was speechless for some time after listening for I was choked with emotion. Later I said, "Can I see him and talk to him a while in person?"

"Yes, you can, but not in the room. When he is out, you can try."

We strode towards the hostel blocks. I accompanied him up to his block. After reaching he walked into his block. I turned back and headed towards my block.

That evening I had food in small quantity because I did not feel taking. I was completely in shock and dismay. I returned to my room, I made hardly an attempt to read. Stretching my legs on the cot I tried to sleep, but I was completely seized with the narration given by Dushyant. It was heart rending. As I ruminated over it, slowly the eyelids fell and I slipped into sleep.

A week had passed during which neither I made an attempt to see Sudhir at Dushyant's house nor did I encounter him anywhere on the campus. He was not seen.

One morning as I was walking towards the university library, there I found Sudhir standing near the pond and watching the fish in the water. I stopped but hesitated to move nearer him. I waited a while hoping he would turn back and see me. If he did so, then I could talk to him. But he did not turn back. His eyes were transfixed on the water. He was reflecting deeply, I thought. A few minutes, I myself moved to the pond and stood beside him. Nothing happened. After a few painful moments of

silence, he lifted his head turned to me and smiled. I too reciprocated. This had given me necessary courage to enter into the domain of conversation. I introduced myself. Later he talked about the professor and other members of my department. He rambled and thundered at the professors for their mediocrity in the universities and unfair methods resorted to at the time of recruitment as well as in service. According to him none of the professors had any academic stature. He talked of the past glory of the university and assailed the previous Vice Chancellors for their involvement in corruption and nepotism. He did not allow me to talk, rather I became a passive listener.

I felt uneasy as I looked at my wrist watch which showed fifty minutes past nine. I had another ten minutes to rush to the class room. Hurriedly without minding his reaction, I told him that I had to leave for the class. To which he didn't say anything. Even without expecting any reply from him, I involuntarily withdrew from him and strode past towards the department. On the way I realized that Sudhir had talked intelligibly. There was no falsity in his wild outbursts against professors in the universities. He was right in his own way, I thought as he was the real victim of vicious politics.

Examination dates had been announced and I became seriously preoccupied with preparations and taking the examination. The long summer vacation had followed.

As I was in a hurry to leave for my native town, I did not give any credence to my further meetings with Sudhir. I left without any guilt.

The vacation was over, and I was back to the campus and settled down. My other preoccupations had obliterated my memory of Sudhir during vacation. One day I found Dushyant walking down the campus, heading towards downtown and I met him accidentally. Seeing Dushyant, Sudhir had struck my mind at once. Notwithstanding the temptation I asked, "How is Mr. Sudhir?"

He replied with pain in heart: "One day he has disappeared from my room. I tried to trace him, I searched all around the campus, but he was not noticed. I thought he could reappear as was his wont. Days and weeks have passed, but there has been no sign of his location. He has never returned. Finally, one day his only sister visited my room to collect his belongings and she told me that he had starved himself and became senile. He vomited blood and as he was taken to hospital the doctors detected blood cancer. He was not conscious of it and he starved himself and died. This was what she had told me. I felt so bad of it. I could not control myself. I wept as I was the one who had fed in his last days by providing him shelter in my room."

"Poor man!" I said and parted with my heart loaded in pain expressing my wonder at the strange ways of man's life.