



Love for You

Dedicated To

RADHA

Her devotion for her beloved was complete and selfless.

She expected nothing in return for her love.

May we learn to love like she did!



Dedicated also to

Krishn

He loves everyone who loves him.

May we also love everyone in the same way!

Jai RadheKrishn! Jai RadheKrishn! Jai RadheKrishn!

Anil Chawla

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LOVE - A DIVINE GIFT TO ONESELF



Jesus talked of love to God and love of one's neighbor. Much before Jesus, Krishn (or 'Krishna' as some prefer) lived a life that was a demonstration of love in all forms. Of course, the tradition of love was not started by Krishn or Jesus. Love is a universal immortal emotion that has been around since times immemorial. It seems so simple that surely no one needs a discourse on love. Yet, Kabir remarked DHAJ AKHAR PREM KA PADHE SO PANDIT HOYE (Loosely translated as - One who understands the basics of love becomes a pundit.)

Attempts to explain and understand love have continued from Krishn to Jesus to Kabir to modern poets and filmmakers. Authors, thinkers and saints have written on the subject for centuries. Surprisingly, in spite of the enormous effort of generations and centuries, love remains an enigma even today.

The problem of understanding love starts with a paradox. In almost everything that we do there is a strong pre-supposition of the existence of "I". Utilitarianism, and everything else that the world teaches us, tells us to maximize personal happiness. At the same time we are told, love is not for one who seeks pleasure; love is not a means to satisfy one's needs, aspirations and ambitions. Yet, love is the ultimate joy and is the highest goal that one may ever hope to attain. All this confuses many. The confusion is caused by the haze of self-centeredness that stops us from looking beyond our own self to the outside world. The paradox of love arises from our attempts to understand love in terms of our paradigm of selfishness. We confuse love with sex, care with trade, emotions with calculations and then blame it all on the enigmatic nature of love.

Love involves transcending one's own self and giving without any thought of getting something in return. Human mind is generally so engrossed with itself that any act of moving beyond seems to require a great deal of effort. But there are moments that one does it almost effortlessly. A mother breastfeeding her child loves the child. She is giving away without expecting anything in return. A mother is therefore the first image of divinity that a child experiences. A few years later, the child is now grown up and has a life of his own. The mother expects the child to care for her. This expectation leads to bitterness. The pure love of yesteryears is now replaced by a transaction that involves give and take. Mother seeks to bind the child with her so-called love little realizing that her selfishness has taken over and only a shadow of love is left in her heart.

The paradox of love is that love binds but one who seeks to bind the beloved cannot love. In fact, one can generalize and say that love can do many things but one who seeks to use love as a means for any purpose can never love. The idea of using love as a means to some end is anathema to love. Parents who project their own dreams and aspirations on to their children do not do so out of any love for their children. They love only themselves and treat their children almost like their properties. They dehumanize their own children. True parental love gives all that children need (including guidance, discipline and education), not what the children want, without demanding anything whatsoever in return.

If the selflessness of love is difficult to achieve in parental love, one can imagine the difficulty of achieving this ideal in erotic love between a man and a woman. It is very easy for one to slip and dehumanize the other. Treating the beloved as an object for one's sexual gratification has been promoted in recent times by films and other popular media images. This is not to say that sex is sin or that sex should be kept away from love. On the contrary, sexual attraction can be and is often a stepping-stone towards love. Sexual acts (including touching, caressing, kissing etc.) can be means of expressing one's love. The important point is the attitude of the person concerned. One can view the acts on one hand as a means of getting pleasure and on the other hand one may view them as a way of giving pleasure, as a way of expressing one's love. The difference between the two views is the difference between a loving intercourse and a rape. The former concentrates on giving without any consideration of getting back, while the latter tries to snatch pleasure for oneself without giving away anything. One is a manifestation of love while the other is an expression of brute power that leads to nothing but hatred. The irony is that the manifestation of love gives power and strength to both while the act of brute power erodes power and weakens both, the perpetrator and the victim.

Sex as an expression of love is in sharp contrast with loveless rape. However, one must realize that the two are extremes. Generally speaking, sex even within marriage falls somewhere between the two extremes. Most men (and women too) cannot get over their obsession with their self-centeredness even during the most intense moments of an act that must have been designed for human beings to learn to completely lose their selves in love.

One sees today an exhibitionist tendency in erotic love. It is almost a fashion to 'fall in love'. A college going boy is under pressure from his peers to 'fall in love' with a suitable girl (and vice versa). A girl-friend or a boy-friend becomes somewhat like a medal that one displays prominently. Beauty, family riches, good clothes, muscular body - everything adds to the value of the medal. The fashionable, exhibitionist display of love that one sees on Valentine Day and in posh joints across all major cities is a disgrace and cannot be called love by any standards. It is aptly called as falling in love. True love involves no fall and is an elevating experience that raises one to a divine plane.

The concept of divinity varies from religion to religion. Hinduism treats any one giving away something selflessly as divine. The word DEVATA (or DEVI) is simply defined as one who gives. DEVATA (or DEVI) is translated into English by some as Gods (or Goddess). This causes a lot of confusion and leads to allegations of polytheism. A DEVATA or DEV or DEVI is someone who is a manifestation of God but is not the Almighty. Parents are hence DEVS. Husband is called as DEV and wife is called as DEVI. Each one of us has hence a potential to become a manifestation of God and attain the divine status of DEV or DEVI by giving away selfless love.

Christianity is based on two primary commandments - Love God and Love thy neighbor. This represented a dualistic view that treated God and neighbor as two distinct entities. Protestant saints and theologians moved towards a non-dualistic view of reality. Neighbor or this world is a creation of God and is in fact a part of the total reality called God. Viewed in this way, God and neighbor become one; love for one is love for the other; two commandments merge and become one commandment; a carpenter's work acquires the same status as the work of a Bishop; service of the world becomes a service of God. At this point Hinduism and Christianity converge. One can notice the similarity between Shrimad Bhagwad Gita's call for working with a sense of selfless duty and Protestant Christian morality that preaches one to practice one's vocation as a duty towards God.

In every religion, love for God is expressed through devotional songs and rituals. The songs and rituals have meaning only if they are accompanied on one hand by a surrender of the ego or in other words by selflessness and on the other hand by the carrying out of duties assigned by God. Love for God is no different from the love of a person. Love demands absence of selfishness as well as care for the beloved. If one loves God, one must lose oneself totally to God and do all that God wants one to do. God has given me children and hence caring for children is an act of God. God has made me a member of the society and hence doing my duty towards society is necessary for me if I love God. In this way, love for God makes one live a selfless life devoted to one's family, society, country and the world.

Does it all sound too idealistic in this world full of selfishness? Is it practical? What does one gain by working selflessly? How I wish I could answer these questions with logic and facts! May be there are some who can. But as far as I know, this is the point of personal faith when logic gives way and one goes by personal experience and intuition.

The other day, I visited a friend's house. He had married two decades ago a girl whom he loved passionately. His children are now grown up and are going to college. His relationship with his wife was excellent for all these years, but now it seems strained. Ego clashes on trivial issues have become a daily affair. Both blame each other. Being a good family friend, I found myself in the unenviable position of listening to both privately whining against each other. I was pained because I had seen them in happy times when they had no money but had love. Now they had all the money that they wanted, but no love.

The situation is typical. A man-woman relationship often starts on the basis of erotic love with sexual attraction providing a strong bonding. With passing of time, sexual attraction and needs diminish. Love for children loses its innocence as children grow up and try to seek their own life-course. Simultaneously, as one grows up, there is hardening of egos, habits and attitudes. Innocence and carefree attitude of childhood is replaced by nagging questions, doubts and fears. Solution to the problem is to rediscover the joy of love. No, one does not need Viagra. One needs love and not sex. One needs to learn love that is not erotic. During the youth, a person's erotic drive provides one with an opportunity to surrender one's self. Two decades later, one has to create such an opportunity by loving non-erotically.



One may love one's work or one's society or one's country. Every form of love is a way of immersing one's identity into the infinity of the cosmos. The experience is truly divine. Jesus says that one who gives is more blessed than one who gets. Radha gave away everything she had to Krishn and never asked for anything from Krishn, not even his companionship. No wonder Radha is given an exalted status in Hindu mythology and worshipped even before Krishn. It is not possible for everyone to rise to the status of Radha or Krishn or Jesus or Kabir. But, everyone can experience the joys of love - a divine gift that one can give to oneself.

ANIL CHAWLA

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LOVE WITHOUT MOH

Author - ANIL CHAWLA



Jesus Christ loved his disciples. He rose from the dead, preached for forty days, reached Jerusalem and, as legend has it, left the earth alive by rising up to the sky. Why did Jesus leave his disciples, whom he loved so much, and rise up to the sky?

Krishn loved Radha. Yet, he left her, went away to Mathura and never came back to her. Did he really love her? Why could Radha's love not keep Krishn bound to her?



We do not know much about the life of Jesus. But, we do know many instances in the life of Krishn, when he left his beloved ones with tears in their eyes. Tears never moved Krishn or even Jesus. Both walked on their path of duty without letting any entanglements stand in the way. This sounds strange behavior for the messiahs of love who otherwise removed sufferings by curing sick and physically deformed.

Popular understanding of love is shaped by folklore, literature and, of course, films. Standard story format is -- boy loves girl, both are possessive about each other, two get married against all odds and live happily thereafter. In this format of love the key word is possessiveness, marriage being a certificate or license to possess. Love and possession have become almost synonymous in minds of most people. The accepted

logic seems to be that since I love you, I have a right to order you, to bind you as per my will, to use you and even abuse you. Nothing can be more perverted; nothing distorts love more.

Love that possesses is no love. Love is transcending one's self and giving without any thought of getting something in return. When one seeks to possess, one is only seeking to increase one's properties; one is driven by lust for power, for ego, for sex, for self-aggrandizement. One is fond of one's properties but that is not love since one's properties are an extension of one's own self and one gives away nothing when one yearns and cares for one's wealth or assets, whether animate or inanimate. Such a yearning is full of expectations that can never be fulfilled completely. Unfulfilled expectations lead to sorrow, bitterness and anger -- emotions that love should never know.

Love, by definition, must not expect anything - not even love in return. But the one who is loved has a duty to return love with love. It sounds complicated but is very simple. A tree gives away its fruits and asks for nothing in return, but if I take the fruits from a tree, I owe it to the tree to take care and give it water etc. from time to time as needed. As a giver, one must have no expectations and the other, as a recipient, is duty-bound to give back. Each gives what the other needs. Neither expects anything and both create a relation of love.

What if the relationship becomes one-sided -- one gives without expectations but the other



does not fulfill the responsibilities cast upon him by love. Surely, such a relationship cannot be sustained due to practical limitations. Life is not a two-person game. Each one of us interacts with a multitude of people from childhood till death and each person, one meets, offers an opportunity to love. There are some who love or have done acts of love towards the person concerned in the past and there are some others who have done nothing of the kind. One is duty bound to love the former. Practically speaking, there is a limit to what anyone can give away. So, it is necessary to prioritize. This is the first and foremost problem that one encounters in formulating the ethics of love.

At each moment of one's life, one has to undertake this exercise of evaluating the love that one has received and give love in return. Collectively, all those who have loved me (or love me) bind me to the extent that I am bound by my sense of duty to them. But I experience love not just from individuals but also from others like my country, my society, mother nature, mother earth, and, if I believe, from God. Surely, I owe duties to all these as well. Each individual is bound by duty to love all these collectives or wholes. It is not unlikely that one will face dilemmas and conflicts among duties.

Arjun faced such a dilemma standing in the battlefield. On one side he could see all his relatives who had given him unconditional love when he was a child. On the other side was the call of duty to the society, to the rules that are necessary for survival of a civil society. Should Arjun have given a higher priority to his personal emotions and avoided the bloodshed of all his loved ones? Krishna advised Arjun to get over his emotions and do his duty.

The word used in Sanskrit and various Indian languages for Arjun's emotions is 'MOH' (I have found no equivalent word in English). Love is giving while moh is holding and being held. Love gives and lets go, while moh gives with one hand and tries to tie up with the other. Love liberates while moh enslaves. Love has no expectations while moh is full of expectations. Love does not possess, moh is based on a sense of possession. Love, moh and physical desires, seem to be inextricably linked to each other; but the problem is that they are opposite in nature.

Let us consider an example from a play by Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) called, "No Exit" (1944). In Sartre's play, a man and two women find themselves trapped in a hotel room. They have been escorted into the room without knowing how or why they are even in the hotel or what they are supposed to be doing in the room together. Once they are in the room, however, they discover that they cannot get out and that all their efforts to summon help are fruitless. They also discover a rather unpleasant dynamic among themselves. The man is attracted to one of the women, but she happens to be a lesbian and is only attracted to the other woman. The other woman, however, is not a lesbian and is rather attracted to the man -- who, of course, does not find her attractive. Soon they realize that they have died and that this is the afterlife, the wrong kind of afterlife. They are in hell, and the lesson of the play is nicely summed up as, "Hell is other people." (The above story is as quoted in an article on Existentialism by Kelley L. Ross at <http://www.friesian.com/existent.htm>)

Sartre's characters find hell in each other because each of them is engrossed in what he/she wants. Hell is not other people; hell is everyone's obsession with one's own physical desires and one's inability to look at anything beyond. Heaven would surely have been a situation where all of them could move beyond and rise over their desires and strive to make life pleasant for each other, not necessarily sexually but as complete human beings. In such a heaven full of love, each would have cared for the other and would have given one's best without concern for getting anything in return.

Let us take the story a step further. Suppose, three of them do care for each other and a heaven like situation develops in that hotel room. A few days later one of the women is moved from that room and as replacement another woman is sent to that room. The man has no control on this replacement. He loses heart and starts sulking, misbehaving with the new arrival. He had loved the earlier occupant of the room and is heart broken now that she is no longer there. His emotions can be summed up as MOH. His act of giving without expecting had created a heaven in that hotel room. Now, moh will again create hell. To convert that hell into heaven, he needs to get over moh and give love once again.

Life is truly like that fictitious hotel room where people keep coming and leaving. We have no control on arrivals and departures. Love without moh can make life heavenly and divine, while moh can make it hell. On the other hand, blind pursuit of physical desires can surely make it unlivable hell. It is in our hands to either create heaven or hell around ourselves.

The above example was fictitious but one can find many such situations in real life. Triangles in erotic love are very common and form the basis of more than half the films made every year in Bollywood. In a typical case, my friend 'A' loved 'P' who loved 'A' but also loved her parents who wanted her to marry 'B'. She eventually married B. My advice to A was to wish her good luck, treasure the good memories of the relationship, and move on in life.

In the above case, P's parents were very happy, but an opposite situation is often seen. It is painful for parents to see one's children grow up and move on an independent course. In the Indian context a father sees his daughter go away after marriage to her husband's house. Kanyadan or giving away one's daughter is an essential act that anyone with a daughter must perform. It is an act that needs one to get over one's moh for someone whom one had loved from the bottom of one's heart.

Getting over one's moh is essential even when someone very close passes away. Sartre compared life to a hotel room without exit, but it is actually like a train compartment from which people keep boarding and alighting. Everything is in a state of perpetual change. In such a dynamic environment, entanglements of moh can lead to frustration, pain, disillusionment and sorrow. Love without moh is the only way to divine bliss.

Jesus and Krishn, both loved their disciples, but were not bound by moh. The two messiahs of love walked free, gave all that they could and expected nothing in return. Followers and companions of both cried because of moh. The only exception was Radha who gave her love to Krishn and did not seek to bind him with her moh. No wonder, in Indian mythology, Radha is accorded a very high status; she is truly the Goddess of Love. May we all learn to love like Radha -- without MOH!

ANIL CHAWLA

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LOVE AND OBSESSION

Author - ANIL CHAWLA



They had just got married after a short passionate affair. The girl had been my wife's friend for many years. They had visited our house for a friendly courtesy visit. But, they had no courtesies for us. All their courtesies were for each other. All attempts to make conversation with them failed since they were either trying to talk to each other or were just staring at each other. When snacks were served, they picked up only one plate. The boy started spoon-feeding the girl who in turn was spoon-feeding the boy. This display of mutual adoration and absorption left us deeply embarrassed. They had visited our house and we were feeling as if we were intruding on their privacy. Thankfully, they departed soon after.

In our hearts, we remembered them and even wished them well, but we lost contact with them. It just did not seem proper to intrude on their privacy and visit them or even call them telephonically. Years passed.

Almost six years after their visit to our house, one evening, we met the boy in a children's park. No, he was no longer a boy. He was now a man. He looked older, more mature and even a bit tired. A young girl aged about four and a half years was holding his hand. We guessed that the girl was his daughter. After the initial courtesies, we enquired about his wife. He told us that his wife had gone to her mother's house a week back and for some time he was doing babysitting. This sounded strange to us. We guessed that something was amiss.

A few weeks later she came back from her mother's house. She rang up my wife and talked for a long time. She bitterly complained about her husband's rude and violent behavior. We had enough worries of our own and had no intentions to get involved with their marital problems. Time kept passing. We heard that they lived a bad married life - husband often assaulted the wife, she used to go away to her mother's wife and return when he apologized. This pattern continued for many years. A few years back, we heard that the husband was involved with another girl. And then, last year finally came the news that he was living with that other girl and had filed for divorce. At the time of writing, the wife lives with her mother and daughter, struggling to delay and obstruct the divorce proceedings.

That is a true story - tragic, but true nevertheless. Unfortunately, one keeps hearing more and more of such sad stories where boy meets girl; they fall madly in love; they get married; but they do not live happily ever after. Based on such instances, some (especially Indians) have a tendency to criticize all love marriages and argue for arranged marriages. Some others tend to look down at love as a temporary and unreliable phenomenon. However, the reality is that in all such cases, there is just no love - neither when the two are dotting over each other nor at any time thereafter. Most such cases are of obsession by one or the other and in a few rare cases of both being obsessed with each other.

The word, "obsess" (or "to be obsessed") is defined by Concise Oxford Dictionary as "preoccupy continually or to a troubling extent". Obsession can be for a person or thing or act. It is a psychological condition that in its extreme form needs medical attention. The person affected by an obsession desires the object of his obsession with enormous passion, ferocity and even madness. When the object of obsession is a person of opposite sex, there is a tendency to confuse the obsession with love. However, there is a fundamental difference between love and obsession.

Love is focused and centered on the needs of the beloved. Obsession, in contrast, is self-centered. The obsessed is always focused on his (or her) own desires and the object of obsession is incidental. Love treats the beloved as a human being and in extreme cases lovers treat love and beloved as divine. For the obsessed the centre of his attention is an object with no desires, no life independent of the intense desire that the obsessed has for the object. He (or she) is almost like a child who is mad for a toy and will take the toy with him (or her) to bed, to garden, and even to the toilet. But if one day the toy hurts the child, there is immediate rejection. The child is now looking for a new toy while the old one is thrown mercilessly into the dustbin.



Obsession is, unlike love, not just passionate; it is ferocious and cruel. The pathos of cruelty that an obsessed displays can be seen in an innocent form in the craving that a child has for a favorite toy. Take the favorite toy away and the child will cry for days and may even stop eating food. The child can be cruel to himself in such a situation. The same cruelty may turn outwards to the toy when the toy is no longer the favorite one. An adult, who expresses obsession in terms of erotic love, is even more dangerous. He (or she) may go to any extent to get the object of his (or her) desire and may even turn violent if the object is taken away. Intensity of such passion is destructive in case of any denial; the obsessed one either destroys oneself or destroys the object of obsession. Newspapers are full of stories of some young boy or girl committing suicide after being turned down. One also hears stories of some boy killing or throwing acid on the face of his girl friend after knowing that she is getting married to someone else.

Violence at denial is only one facet of obsession. The other facet of violence manifests when the obsessed gets hold of and becomes the owner of the object of his desire. No, they do not live happily thereafter. The relationship of the obsessed one with the object of obsession is not a relationship of caring. It is a relationship of power, a display of brutishness, a game of ego. The ownership has to be absolute, to the exclusion of everyone else, and the obsessed needs to demonstrate it every moment to get any pleasure from it. One is not concerned if this stifles or even hurts the object of obsession. Too bad, if it does. The case is typical of a child who sees a beautiful singing bird in the garden, gets hold of it and puts it in a glass jar besides his table, without any concern for the life of the bird. By the end of the day the bird is dead and the child is back in the garden looking for a fresh bird.

Surely, it is very difficult to distinguish between love and obsession during the initial stages of a relationship. But some telltale signs should not be ignored. Let us say that a girl has to decide whether her boy friend is treating her as an object of obsession or as his beloved. Some of the questions that she must ask herself are as follows:

- a) Does he accept me as I am or does he want me to make some changes to my appearance or dress or hairstyle or even my career?
- b) How does he react to my friends, relatives, family members, colleagues and acquaintances? Do all these appear as pests to him and he wishes to have me all by himself or does he genuinely enjoy meeting everyone who is dear and near to me?
- c) How does he handle disagreement with me? Does he get disturbed when I have an independent opinion or does he welcome it?
- d) In a public place or when introducing to friends or relatives, does he show me off as if I am a trophy that he has won?
- e) Does he want to be with me at all times (either physically or by telephone) so much so that I find myself getting cut off even from my family? Does his continuous preoccupation with me has started affecting adversely his or my job and normal life routines?
- f) Would he still care for me if I denied to him what he craves for most? (This may be sex or may be something else) One may also ask the question, would he love me even if due to some reasons beyond my control, I cannot meet him or talk to him for one year?
- g) Are his expressions of passion interspersed with occasional threats of termination of relationship?
- h) Last but not the least, how do I feel when I am with him? Do I feel strong, comfortable and relaxed? Or do I feel weak, tensed up, on my toes, centre of attention but not relaxed?

The above questions have been written in first person as if a woman is thinking about a man. They will not change much if a man has to ask similar questions about a woman. In either case, being an object of obsession is painful and more often than not tragic.

Confusing obsession with caring selfless love and becoming an object of obsession amounts to stepping unwittingly into the greatest tragedy of one's life. It is like drinking poison when one wants to drink milk.

My wife's friend and her husband were obsessed with each other. There was intensity of desire but no caring, no sharing and no desire to give joy. The focus was on one's own desires and possibly on getting pleasure. It is not unlikely that one of the two was obsessed, while the other was just playing along and reciprocating actions in a loveless mechanical way. Irrespective of whether one of the two was obsessed or both were obsessed, lives of both have been ruined.



It may be too late to do anything about the lives that have already been ruined. But, there may be many other cases where it may not be too late. Caution against falling into a trap of obsession is necessary because obsession ruins both - the obsessed as well as the object of obsession. Moreover, it gives love a bad name. Let us spread love that is truly divine and gives freedom. Let us be on guard against the pathos of obsession that stifles and chokes.

ANIL CHAWLA

30 April 2003



A GLASS TOP CENTRE TABLE

Author - Anil Chawla

The borderline between friendship and love is very thin. Sometimes I wonder whether there is any such borderline? Is it not that the two fields overlap? How thin is the line between love & lust, the sheer physical sensual desire? Is one a prelude to the other?

I know friendship and I know lust - both are relatively simple. No, I do not claim to be able to define friendship. Yet, I am never confused about it. I have always been very clear about who are my close friends, intimate friends, not-so-intimate friends and business friends.

Lust - physical desire, a mad rush of blood to one's head - is something that needs no explanation. It is a common practice to look down upon lust as something sinful and even dirty. It is almost fashionable to pretend that one has no lust and physical desires.

I do not understand love, at least not the love that poets, authors and filmmakers talk about. This type of love is supposed to strike one as a thunderbolt. It strikes one suddenly, is completely irrational and leaves one completely incapacitated for the rest of one's life. In its true form, it is supposed to be free from all lust. Most poets have talked of love as something different from friendship. While friendship normally involves some common interest or attitude or perspective, these are not considered as prerequisites for love. True love is supposed to be devoid of both friendship and lust. For example nobody talks of Majnu being lustful or of Majnu and Laila being great friends.

I do not understand this so called true love? As far as I can understand, love is a strange concoction of friendship and lust. Both the ingredients are necessary though the proportion may be varied from time to time and from case to case. Love without physical desire will lack the passion that leads to an intoxicated state of mind. Lovers that cannot be friends, do not remain lovers for long.

The love story of Mrs. & Mr. Dutta fascinated me very much when Mrs. Dutta narrated it to me. It was a perfect love story ending with- "and they lived happily ever after". I had reasons to be fascinated. This was the first time in my life when I had met a real person who had a true love experience - the sort that poets sing about and filmmakers picturize with thirteen songs and three fight sequences.



Mrs. Dutta was a short, plump lady when I met her in August, 1983. I had just started my business of furniture and interior decoration with some visiting cards as my only assets. I neither had a showroom, nor a workshop. The monsoon was at its peak. A lot of people believe that one should not buy wooden furniture in rainy season. So, there was no business. I was feeling depressed and dejected. Mrs. Dutta had visited a prominent furniture showroom. An informer told me about this and I went to her house to persuade her about my skills, quality, prices etc.

She was surprised at our method of collecting information and took a long time enquiring about our marketing system, our history, our background etc. My partner and I spoke some truths, some half-truths and some lies. When, it was our turn to give some sales talk, we were pleased to find that she did not need any persuasion. She placed the order and even gave us a handsome advance. This was the beginning of my business career as well as my association with her.

Mrs. Dutta was about forty years old at that time. She did look her age and in fact looked older. She was fair and had sharp features that looked out of place with her plump body. The features did indicate that she was extremely beautiful in her good days. The most beautiful part of her face were her large eyes and her habit of looking straight into the eyes of another person. Her eyes had a child like appearance about them. As I got to know her more, I found her eyes to be a true expression of herself.

She took a childlike interest in any new thing. She was most fascinated by our bold and direct approach and had hence placed the order knowing fully well that she was taking a risk.

She was an Assistant Professor at the Local Girls College. She used to go to the college only to the extent, it was necessary. She was extremely talkative but she never talked about her college or her colleagues or about her students. Nobody would have guessed that she was anything more than an elderly housewife, unless told so.

I got along very well with her. We would sit for hours just chatting away. She was a good listener and hence I used to enjoy her company. She would normally talk about her house, her children, her cooking and such other topics. It was extremely unusual for her to talk about her husband or about herself.

Her husband, Mr. Gautam Dutta worked for a multinational pharmaceutical company as an Area Sales Manager. It was a Senior Management position, and he was overall in-charge of the whole state of Madhya Pradesh. For almost twenty days in a month, he used to be on tour. For the ten days in a month, he was at home, he gave me the impression of a devoted husband. He used to drop his wife to college and later pick her up. I had often seen him take his family out for shopping or just for an ice-cream at New Market.

He wasn't very talkative. He wasn't even a very good listener. At times, I tried to engage him in a discussion, but it was utter failure. When I was talking, he was either playing with his cigarette pack or smoking with a sleepy look. When I stopped talking, there was complete silence. I soon gave up my attempts at starting a dialogue with him. However, he was not unfriendly or discourteous. His mannerisms and behaviour were impeccable. He was always well dressed and gave an impression of a perfectly polished gentleman. This did contrast with Mrs. Dutta's careless attitude about her own clothes and appearance.

The first time Mrs. Dutta talked about her husband, was when we were discussing about a centre table for her drawing room. My profits on a glass top centre table used to be slightly more than a Formica top centre table. I was hence trying to sell her the idea of a glass top centre table. She was resistant but I was insistent. I tried to argue that her children had now grown up and hence there was no chance of the glass breaking.



Mrs. Dutta replied, "Oh, it is not the children, but it's Mr. Dutta". I was shocked and so was she. Inadvertently, she had spoken the unspeakable. I just did not know what to say but said, "Oh, Mr. Dutta?" She was in no mood to explain her statement. She was most embarrassed. I could not understand the reasons for the extremely strange expressions on her face, but did not press on the subject. She, however, added in a low voice, "Mr. Dutta is a very different man after a few drinks." This was a new aspect of the otherwise perfect personality of Mr. Dutta. I was curious to know more but Mrs. Dutta quickly changed the topic and went to the kitchen to get me a cup of coffee. After the coffee, just when I was leaving, she requested me to not mention to Mr. Dutta, what she had told me.

This small incident brought me much closer to Mrs. Dutta. She became more warm towards me and, I think, looked upon me as somebody she could confide in. A few weeks later, sipping a cup of coffee on a cool cloudy evening, I asked her that since she was a Bengali, she must be interested in Ravindra Sangeet. She laughed and said that she was not a Bengali but was married to a Bengali who did not enjoy anything musical, Ravindra or of any other type. This was news for me. It was often that I had seen her cook fish. I had heard again and again that she was getting all the furniture made in rainy season so that her house had a new look at Durga Pooja. She spoke

fluent Bangla with her husband and her kids. It was strange for me to even imagine that she could be a non-Bengalee. I told her that it was a great surprise for me and asked her to tell me more about herself.

Her maiden name was Gita Khanna. Her family had migrated to Jabalpur from Punjab after the partition of India and Pakistan. Her father was a senior officer at the Ordnance Factory at Khamaria, Jabalpur. She had two brothers, one elder than her and one younger than her. Both the brothers were well built and had simple rustic morals. They believed that it was their primary duty to protect their sister from the evil eyes and designs of any man. They strongly believed in the popular folklore of family honour and kept a ready stock of hockey sticks and bicycle chains to defend any attack on their "Izzat" (honour).

Khamaria is located at the outskirts of the city of Jabalpur. The Ordnance Factory has its housing colony at Khamaria. The road from the colony to the city used to be a deserted road in those days. On this road, Miss. Gita Khanna used to bicycle everyday to go to college which was a girls college. Normally she would go with a group of girls to avoid teasing by boys. Once in a while they would meet a group of boys who would pass comments. They ignored the boys and the boys never dared to follow them.

One day the girls noticed a well dressed handsome boy following their group. The girls knew him. He was also from the housing colony. His name was Gautam Dutta. He was never seen in any of the groups of boys that were involved in teasing girls. Everyone of the girls knew that his only interests in life were studies and table tennis. It was hence very strange that he should be following them. He did not pass any comments. In fact, he followed them in such a well behaved manner that no girl could even object to his bicycle coming just a few meters behind their group. It became a daily routine for him to be waiting at the colony market square for their group and then following them all the way to the girls college. He never made any attempts to approach any of the girls or even to indicate any particular girl that he was following. It was obvious to all the girls that he was not being frivolous. He was extremely serious but was shy.

The Khanna family had to go out for a marriage at Indore for three days. Gita had accompanied her family and hence was not in the group of girls going to the college that day. As usual, Gautam was standing at the market square waiting for the girls. But that day he did not follow them. During the three days that Gita was not in town, he would look at the group of girls with eyes that expressed more than they could hide and pedal his way back to home. The whole colony knew of this development in no time. Gita knew it as soon as she came back and so did her brothers. Gita was too stunned to react to this news. Her reaction was more of disbelief than anything else. She had read all the romantic books and had seen all the films that described true love. She also knew that getting a true lover was the greatest fortune a young girl could ever hope for. No, she could not believe that she was that fortunate. She thought that there was some trick. She did not hate or dislike Gautam, though she could easily confirm that she had not fallen in love with him so far and she would not have been bothered even a small

bit, if he had fallen in love with some other girl. She was confused. On the one hand, there were all the girls telling her of the greatness of love, her good luck at being able to get such a devoted, well behaved husband etc. On the other hand, was this boy for whom she felt nothing.

Her brothers took a different view. Somebody following their sister was an affront to them. They considered Punjabis to be a superior race than Bengalis who, in their opinion, were short, thin, ate foul-smelling fish, listened to a strange type of music and in general did not know how to live life. Their fair sister's name being linked to a skinny, dark Bengali was something that they just could not approve of. There was only one hitch - that if their sister was stupid enough to have fallen in love with this creature, they were helpless. They could not go against their beloved sister's wishes even if she was being idiotic. They asked her if she was in love with Gautam. Her reply was negative and this cleared the only obstacle in the course of action that they had planned.

The next day when Gautam was waiting for the group of girls to come, the brothers met him and told him to stop chasing Gita. He did not argue with them. The girls came and proceeded on their way to the college. Gautam could not follow the girls since the brothers were holding his bicycle handle. This went on for three days.

On the fourth day, the brothers changed their strategy. They did not stop Gautam at the market square and let him follow the girls. Halfway to the college, they stopped him and showered on him a few slaps and blows. They also warned him that if the next day he was found following Gita, the treatment would be made more severe. And so, the next day on the same spot, Gautam got a taste of hockey sticks. The brothers had beaten him up quite harshly but had taken care that no bones were broken, to avoid a police case. They were convinced that Gautam would not dare to come the next day. So it was natural that their blood boiled when the next day, they saw him following the girls. They pulled out their motorcycle chains and were frothing with anger when Gita stopped her bicycle near them and asked them to stop the nonsense that they were doing. She called Gautam and asked her brothers to shake hands with him.

She was convinced that if there was a true lover on earth, it was Gautam. She needed no further proof of the genuineness of his love. Gautam met her in the colony park the same day in the evening. In this first meeting, he proposed and she accepted. It took about a month to convince the parents who agreed half-heartedly. It was agreed that they get engaged immediately and get married after Gautam gets a job. Gita's brothers felt that Gita had cheated them and her relations with them got strained for the rest of her life.

Gita started preparing for her new life. She could now meet Gautam once in a while ,though her parents did not really approve of it. She tried finding about his likes and dislikes. There was hardly anything she could find. Gautam was so thrilled at every meeting with Gita that he was almost in heaven. He would just look at her, listen to her

and once in a while when they would get sufficient privacy to be able to touch each other, he would go mad with joy. He did try to suggest to her that they could go out to a place where they could be more intimate, but both of them knew that it was mere wishful thinking. In the meanwhile Gita learnt Bangla language, learnt Bengalee dishes and tried to develop a taste for fish cooked in mustard oil. A few months later Gautam got the job as a sales representative with a multinational pharmaceutical company. A few weeks later, as Mrs. Dutta put it, "Gita became Mrs. Dutta."



A couple of days later, I went to her house again to deliver the centre table. She looked at the Formica top and remarked, "You were right. A glass top looks better. I wish I could have taken a glass top centre table". By then, I had lost all interest in selling a glass top center table to her, so I tried to tell her that her choice of Formica colour and shade was very good and the particular shade selected by her suited a centre table beautifully and it even looked better than glass. She looked at me with her large eyes in a strange way and said, "Oh, How I wish that he stops drinking. The doctors have advised him against it. He should now stop touring also. One should be careful if one has heart trouble".

The centre table was the last item of furniture that was to be supplied, so I was more bothered about giving the bill and getting my payment rather than the personal life of Mrs. & Mr. Dutta.



In the months that followed, my business picked up and I opened a showroom and workshop at a prime business locality. I got so involved with my work that I soon forgot all about Mrs. Dutta and her family.

Four years after I supplied the furniture to the Dutta family, one afternoon I was sitting in my showroom when a light blue car stopped in front. As was my habit, I got up and went to the glass door to open the door and receive the lady who had just arrived. At first I could not recognize Mrs. Dutta. She looked much younger than her age. She was wearing a salwar kurta. As far as I remembered, she used to always wear a saree. In fact this was the first time that I had seen her driving a car. She had cut her hair short and had changed her glasses with contact lenses. I stood amazed, gaping at her. She saw my amazement, looked at me with her beautiful large eyes and smiled. The eyes and the smile were the same. I regained my composure and wished her a good evening and asked her to come in and have a seat. After making her comfortable, I told her that I could not believe that it was the same Mrs. Dutta. She asked me my opinion whether the change was for the better or worse. I assured her that she looked much better and I liked new Mrs. Dutta more than the old one.

She was now actively involved in theatre. She had come to me to get some props for the play that she was doing at the City Hall the next Saturday. I did not know of her interest in theatre and told her so. She said that theatre and music were her passions in her college days. and she was trying to pick up the threads once again. Music was proving to be difficult but there was absolutely no problem with theatre.

She was now the co-ordinator for the college annual function where she had tried out a few experiments with form and style. I listened to her talk with an enthusiasm and effervescence that I had never seen before. She no longer looked like an elderly housewife. Her enthusiasm made the dull afternoon bright. I told her about the play that I had acted in during my college days. She told me her views on various types of theatre. She wanted to some day work on a musical play that would have a modern look but would draw its inspiration from the folk dances of Chhattisgarh.

We talked for almost two hours. She had not talked about her house or her kids or her cooking even once and this surprised me. She invited me to drop in home sometime.

I went to see her off to the door. I opened the door and as she was getting out, asked her, "How is Mr. Dutta?" She said in a casual manner, "He died last year" and walked over to her car. After starting the car, she waved her hand to me and wished me goodbye.

A few days later, I went to her house and found that the centre table had a new top - a glass top.

Anil Chawla

Year 1991

A Devout Christian

- Anil Chawla



It was a hot and humid evening, just the sort when one wishes that one should have carried a larger handkerchief to wipe the sweat off the face and neck. The only consolation that one could have had was that the afternoon which had just passed was worse and the night would not be as bad. Standing on the Dadar station and waiting for the 8.35 slow local to Andheri, I could well imagine what was in store for me for the next half an hour. It had been a hard day and I was really looking forward to reaching my hotel and having a bath. For a moment, I did think of taking a taxi from Dadar to my hotel at Andheri, but the fear of traffic jams and the exhaust pipes of buses that pump smoke directly into taxis, made me decide against it. Now that I had chosen to expose myself to half an hour of hell in the sultry second class compartment of a local train, I had to be mentally prepared for it.

Fortunately, the train was not very crowded. There was sufficient space to stand and even to move about, without stepping on anyone's toes. I suddenly noticed a tall, well built person of middle age, holding a briefcase in one hand, shouting at the top of his voice, "Worship Jesus. There is no other God except Jesus. Jesus loves you. Jesus died on the cross for you. Jesus loves all". This middle aged man did not in any way look like a priest. His physical features suggested that he was either an ex-boxer or a former football player who had now taken up a job. Of course, one does not expect priests to preach in second class railway compartments and what he was doing could not be called preaching.

He was shouting continuously. He was not only shouting for Jesus but also shouting against all other Gods. For a moment, it amused me as well as some of my co-passengers but it soon became extremely irritating. Some passengers who wanted to sleep, found his shouting a disturbance. Some did not like his attack on other Gods. Some had their own worries and they did not want to be bothered about Jesus. The majority consisted of people who were finding the weather very oppressive. and were hence in an irritable mood.

An old man, with grey hair, was the first person who tapped gently on his shoulder and tried to request him to keep quiet. The zealot would not pay any attention to him. A few minutes later, some others made similar attempts but of no avail. He continued shouting at full volume.

A young skinny man could bear it no longer. He started shouting back at the Christian zealot asking him to shut up. The young man even threatened to hit him but there was no effect. The message of Jesus Christ continued without any interruption. The young man was now joined by two more men. The train had by now reached Bandra, half way to Andheri. The group of young men was now threatening the zealot in a more violent manner. They were showing him their fists and were holding his collar and were even trying to close his mouth with their hand. He was a very strong man and could easily remove the hand on his mouth and continue his address. He however made no attempts to answer their threats or even remove their hands off his collar. The situation was going from bad to worse every moment. The young men were losing their patience and the zealot showed no inclination to tone down his address to co-passengers. Some of the older men tried to reduce the tension by appealing to the young men as well as to the Christian zealot to shut up. Their efforts were in vain.

One of the young men, suddenly decided that the issue could only be resolved by harsher means. He gave a slap to the Christian zealot's face. The slap was intended to convey a message rather than to really hit. The zealot, however, made no attempts to either resist the slap or even dodge it. He continued his arguments in favour of Jesus. This infuriated the young men. There were only three minutes to go before Andheri, but these three minutes proved crucial. Two of the young men attacked the man's face with all their might. The zealot soon had a bleeding mouth but he continued his arguments in favour of Jesus. The young men were stopped physically by some men who had by now started sympathizing with the Christian zealot. The situation would have easily degenerated into a riot but the train had reached Andheri station. Everybody jumped out of the train. The Christian zealot had stopped shouting and the tension got diffused. Just as he was alighting from the train, I overheard a passenger ask him, where did he have to go. He replied, "I had to get down at Bandra but because of these men, I came all the way to Andheri. May God bless them." Blood was dripping from the sides of his mouth and he was blessing his tormentors. A true Christian indeed.

I had never met a true Christian ever before in my life so I decided to follow him all the way to his house and talk to him. He walked to a tea stall on the platform, took a glass of water and washed his face and mouth. I expected him to now take a train to Bandra. The train that we had come by had Andheri as its last stop. The train was still standing on the platform. The indicators showed that it was going to Churchgate which meant that he could board this train and go back to Bandra.

He, however, seemed in no mood to board this train. He was standing leisurely near the tea stall, with the air of a person who has come for an evening stroll after dinner. He stood there till the train left the platform. He started walking with an easy gait towards the over-bridge. I followed him.

Ratna Liquor Centre, a small bar serving liquor is situated about half a kilometer off the Andheri station on the road to Versova. It was not very crowded when we walked in. There was a table in the corner that was vacant. Other tables were occupied by a wide spectrum of men. This was the first time that I had gone to a bar serving country liquor. I was quite surprised at the overall look which I must confess was much better than I had expected it to be.



He had taken the seat on a corner table. I took his permission to share the table with him. He smiled and asked me to sit down. This was the first time I had seen him smile. It suddenly made him look like a human being made of flesh and blood. Fortunately for me, he started the conversation. "It is the first time you have come here. The types who come here do not ask for permissions. Is it the first time that you have come to a bar? "

I assured him that it was not the first time that I had gone to a bar but it was the first time that I had come to a country liquor bar. He asked me if I had come here to try country liquor out of curiosity or if I had run out of money. I confessed that I had come to talk to him and I would rather have a whisky with soda instead of the country stuff. He called the waiter and ordered for a quarter of whisky, a large peg of "narangi", soda and some peanuts. He clarified that the place did not serve whisky but since he knew the waiter, it will be arranged for. The drinks arrived in no time. He was extremely friendly. He poured the drink for me and said, "Yes, what do you want to talk to me about. My name is Allen. I stay at Bandra. I work everyday for twelve hours at a large company in Worli. I work hard, so my company pays me well and I can afford to run the house and have enough money left for drinks. I go to church every Sunday. There is nothing else about me. What are you interested in? Ask, don't be afraid. I won't hit you."

The wound on his lip had not healed as yet. A drop of blood had come on the outside of his glass and was mixing with the water to form a strange pattern. I looked at his mouth and noticed that he was trying to wipe his lip with a beautiful handkerchief. I told him that he was spoiling a beautiful handkerchief. I asked him if he was married. For a

moment he did not reply. He lifted his glass, emptied it, ordered for a refill and turned to me. "Yes, I am married. You guessed it from that hanky. You were right. My wife takes care that I have a nice hanky in my pocket every time I leave home. Are you married? Oh yes, you have got to be married to ask about marriage after looking at a man's hanky. Well, after all, marriage finally means having a clean hanky in your pocket. Isn't it? Don't you agree? At least for me that's all it means."



He paused to have a sip. I was feeling tired. I had not followed him all the way to talk about his wife. I wanted to talk to him about Christianity and now that he had opened up to me, I used the opportunity. I shot a volley of questions at him - What else did he do to promote Christianity? How often did he address the crowds and what were his experiences? He was taken aback. He did not know that I had followed him from the station. He explained to me patiently that he talked of Christ only when he got an inner inspiration to do so. It was not very often that he got such an inspiration, probably once in two or three months. Every time he did this, he got bashed up. He did not mind the bashing up. His explanation impressed me. "You know that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the mankind. None of us is great enough to die for somebody else's sins. Everyone carries his own cross and does penance for one's own sins. I do not curse those who hit me. I do not even hit them back. In fact, I am grateful to them. Christ never cursed those who put him on the cross. As son of God, he willed them to do so. I will them to beat me up and I bless them for it."

I don't think I understood what he said. I wanted to ask him more about it but the weariness combined with the intoxicating effect of whisky had made me dull. I did not ask him any question. The liquor had helped him on the other hand to lose his inhibitions of talking to a stranger. This led to our conversation becoming a monologue. He told me all about his life.

He was a commerce graduate from Ruparel College. His wife Lucy was with him at school as well as college. They were classmates for 15 years. He knew her ever since he could remember. Both of them used to stay at Bandra. At school as well as at college, they used to get along very well. She was better than him in studies and it was often that he would go to her house to take notes or to understand a problem that he could not solve. She used to be very nice. If it was not for her, he would have never even passed his high school. His interest was only in games and in particular football. He represented his school and later his college and even the university. He would often miss classes to attend football practice or to go for matches. Whatever he missed in the class was easily made up with Lucy's help.

They used to go to school together. In the train and the bus he took all care of Lucy. He was a well built boy who used to play centre forward for his team. He could easily give one in the jaw to anybody who dared pass a remark at Lucy. It was not required normally since his presence was sufficient indicator to everyone to keep out of the way. He never thought of it that way but the whole college talked of Lucy and Allen as if they were going steady and were going to get married. He used to get irritated with such talk. He considered Lucy as a good friend. He was not ready to give up his friendship with her since he would have been helpless without her. He knew that he was dependent on her for his studies.

When he was in school and college, he did not care about religion and church. As far as he could remember, he never accompanied his parents for the Sunday morning mass. He used to laugh at some of his friends who went to church every Sunday. Lucy often joined him in ridiculing their friends who were of religious temperament. He used to be extremely critical of the church for its condemnation of sex. He always felt that the church was being ridiculous in talking of sex for procreation only.

His interest in sex was normal and healthy. He used to enjoy looking at girls. Of course, he was too well behaved to pass comments or indulge in eve teasing. He had his share of sensual dreams and fantasies. In all these flights of imagination, he would imagine about all the girls in his neighbourhood, his school and his college except Lucy. She was different. He could never think of her in that way. Curiosity is an important part of sex. He was curious about all the girls but not about Lucy. He knew her so well that there was nothing to be curious about. He remembered the time when as kids, they had bathed together in a state of complete nudity. Whenever, he went to her house, she would meet him in whatever clothes she was wearing whether it be a gown or a slip or just petticoat and blouse. She never felt shy in front of him.

There was one more reason why he could never have thought of Lucy in a lecherous manner. Lucy was, for him, a symbol of all that is good and pure in the women of this world. She was an ideal. He believed that she was better than him in all respects. His friendship with her was based on a deep sense of respect that he had for her. Even Lucy knew this. She liked the respect that she would see in his eyes for her. In his own mind, he had put her on a pedestal and could not now desecrate her with his lewd thoughts.



Both of them completed the college and got jobs at Shivsagar Estate, Worli. They were now working for two different companies but since the offices were located in the same area, they used to be together while going and coming.



Few months later, their parents met and decided that it was high time that Lucy and Allen got married. The marriage was fixed up. The ceremony was truly grand. There were a large number of guests. There was some dancing, some drinking and a lot of general merry making. It was quite late by the time all the guests left. He was thoroughly exhausted. He had not drunk much but he had eaten quite a lot. He had been forced to eat a morsel with almost every guest. He had lost count of the number of glasses from which he had taken a small sip. He had been standing for hours. The only thing he looked forward to at that moment was sleep.

Allen reached his bedroom with difficulty. He had barely managed to walk his way to the bedroom. He removed his shoes, his necktie and his shirt. Just as he was heading towards the bed to crash on it, he noticed Lucy. In his half-tired, half-drunk state of mind, he could not understand the reason for Lucy sitting in his bedroom at this hour. This aspect of marriage had not really struck him so far. Yes, he had thought of it but had always postponed thinking about it. His reaction always used to be, " Let the time come. " And now when the time had come, he was least prepared for it, mentally and physically. He sat next to Lucy, held her hand, mumbled some niceties, said goodnight and went off to sleep.

The next morning when he got up, Lucy was already awake and was dressing up. He wished her a good morning. She did not reply. She looked at him in a manner that he did not understand. He said it felt nice being with her as a husband and wife. She let out a short, scornful laugh and left the room. He was perplexed. This was the first time that he did not understand her.

The next night was a disaster. He began by apologizing to her for the previous night. They talked for some time. He was conscious of the duty that he was supposed to perform as a husband. He had often held her hands, put his head on her lap, kissed her face but now he was gripped with a strange fear. He could never imagine that he would be required to deflower the goddess that he worshipped. His whole body and mind revolted. He started sweating. Within an hour, he had drunk at least six glasses of water. Lucy noticed it. She asked him if he needed a doctor. She comforted him in every possible way and put him off to sleep.



The World Cup Football was beginning the next night. For many nights, he watched the live coverage of world cup on T.V. The first night, he did this, Lucy waited for him but he slept on the the sofa chair without putting the T.V. off and with the lights on. The next night, Lucy did not wait for him. He was dozing by the end of the game and somehow managed to switch the T.V. off and go to bed. This became a routine that continued even after the world cup ended.

His relationship with Lucy changed dramatically. She was less warm towards him. More often than not, she was in an irritable mood. He found that after marriage, they had really nothing to talk about. She would find some excuse or the other to go late to the office so that she did not go with him. He started sitting late in his office, so as to make sure that he reached home a couple of hours after she had reached. It was at this stage that he started getting attracted to religion and church. He started going to church regularly. She disliked going to church and considered him a hypocrite. She would often ridicule him on this account in front of his friends. All this reduced their marriage to, as he put it, "a nice, clean hanky in my pocket".

The bar was completely vacant by the time Allen finished his story. He asked me to finish the whisky that was left in the bottle. I told him that I had taken my quota for the day and planned to leave the rest. He did not like the wastage of precious whisky and told me so. He poured the whisky into his glass, added water, finished it one draught and got up from his seat.

When we came out of the bar, the weather had become pleasantly cool. I wished him goodbye and asked him to pay my best compliments to Lucy, his wife. He smiled and replied, "I shall do that, but not tonight. Right now, I am not going home. I am going to Rosie. I shall enjoy the night with her." He paused for a moment, put his hand on my shoulder and said, "I have done my penance and now I may, as well, do some sins."

He called an autorickshaw and I walked to my hotel thinking of the devout Christian, I had just met.

Anil Chawla

Year 1991

AN EPILOGUE TO LOVE

Author - ANIL CHAWLA

He loved her. She too loved him. Two had met a few years ago under circumstances that could best be described as acts of fate. During these years they had come as close as a man and woman could ever be. They had shared some of the most beautiful moments of life. They had cried at each other's shoulders. They had played with each other as if there were just two of them in the universe. Not a day passed when they did not talk to each other; not an hour passed when they did not think of each other. Immersed in each other, they were at times ecstatic, at times like children, and at some times like wild beasts swayed by a thousand hurricanes.



All this is now history - a secret history known to only two of them. Fate and circumstances led to a parting of ways. No, they did not part with a big fight; they did not even drift away. They understood each other's compulsions. They wished each other well. They knew that they must go their own separate ways to let each other grow, develop and live life to the fullest. So they decided to move into different directions. They parted like the best of friends. They had travelled together and cherished the sweet memories of the divine journey. The blissful memories of life in heaven were not marred by anything, not even a minor tiff.

They had walked out of heaven, willingly and happily. May be they were fools to do so! May be that it was God's wish and that they were just following the Supreme Being's commands without even realizing it. Of course, there were circumstances and factors that forced them. But surely they could have resisted. Was their love too weak? Did their passion lack something? Was it flirting that should have ended after the first few meetings but had extended for years?

Uncomfortable questions that kept raising their ugly heads! Both of them must face these questions. The questions just refused to go away. But even worse was the pain gnawing away at their hearts. One does not often realize that pleasant blissful memories can be intensely painful. The joy of divine selfless love can be an exhilarating experience for the lover as well as for the beloved. But memories of the same love are painful, indeed very painful.



When they were parting, the first signs of pain were already there. She was feeling it more than he was, or was it the other way round. Neither of them had cried at that time. But in the months that followed, both have cried many times. Unfortunately, they cannot even cry openly. Tears have to be suppressed lest anyone comes to know of their secrets. So, the eyes do not weep, but the hearts cry every moment.



A friend recently remarked that this was like a mobile phone sending out a signal every five seconds without anyone realizing that such a process was on. Unknown to everyone around them, their hearts were sending out signals. At every other moment, irrespective of what he was doing at that time, his heart would bring up her name. She faced a similar situation. Initially, this disturbed her more than it disturbed him. He was able to face the storms in his heart more calmly, at least externally. She was affected physically. She lost her health and was depressed. Of course, no one knew the reason for her falling health. Only he knew, though he was at a distance of more than a thousand km.

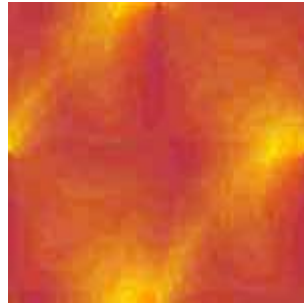
Days, weeks and months passed. Their hearts, though separated by hundreds of miles, were chanting each other's names with the same frequency as on the day immediately after parting. Both suffered anxious moments when they wondered if the other had forgotten all about it. The temptation to call up using a phone or send at least a letter was too strong. Something held both of them back. Neither of them wanted to do any act that would adversely affect the other's life. Neither wanted to be selfish. Each one was suffering pain, tears and sorrow, but did not want to share it with the other. Both had given each other the best of pleasures and now were suffering in silence and solitude. Both prayed and wished for well-being, pleasure and happiness of their dear one. How could he or she give the beloved any of the pain, sorrow or tears? So, anxiety had to be suffered as and when it came.



But these anxious moments were short lived. Though months had passed without any communication by letter or phone between them, something had kept them linked to each other. This can be called mysterious and is inexplicable. Two of them had linked at a non-physical level. Their bodies were hundreds of miles apart, but their souls had become mates.

Baptized by pain, tears and sorrow, their love had grown beyond the physical. When they separated, they did not know that they were inseparable. They walked through an ocean of fire, that separated their bodies but could not break the bond between their souls.

The souls have mated in a fashion that the bodies could never have. Every act of physical mating is a short affair that lasts just a few minutes. The soul transcends all limitations of space, form and time. The unification of souls is eternal.



With their souls entwined in an inseparable bond, they walk together through the ocean of fire, their bodies separated by distances that cannot be bridged. The pain, tears and sorrow have sublimated to provide the energy for a fusion of souls.

Traditionally, love stories end with "and they lived happily ever after". This normally means that the boy and the girl get married. In this case, they have not got married, but they will live as one soul ever after, enjoying the divine experience of love in happiness and in sorrow. Will you pray for them to be physically together once again - if not in this birth, may be in the next birth?



ANIL CHAWLA

4 November 2003





Anil Chawla by name
Engineer by qualification
Philosopher by vocation
Teacher by aptitude
Entrepreneur by profession
Manager by occupation
Businessman by accident
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Translator by demand
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In addition to, and more important than all other qualifications etc.,
he has a heart full of love
a heart that is not ashamed of crying
or of being happy

Joy, pain, sorrow, tears, laughter – life has given him everything
He thanks Almighty for everything
And prays for love.