

SUDHA MURTY



Wise & Otherwise

A Salute to Life

REVISED EDITION



PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park,
New Delhi 110 017, India

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014,
USA

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto,
Ontario, M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin
Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria
3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632,
New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Group (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank,
Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL,
England

First published by East West Books (Madras) Pvt. Ltd 2002

Revised edition first published by Penguin Books India 2006

Copyright © Sudha Murty 2002, 2006

All rights reserved

25 24 23 22 21 20

ISBN 9780143062226

For sale in the Indian Subcontinent only

Typeset in Sabon by Mantra Virtual Services, New Delhi

Printed at Yash Printographics, Noida

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior written consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser and without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above-mentioned publisher of this book.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ix

FOREWORD x

1. HONESTY COMES FROM THE HEART 1
2. ON HUMAN FOIBLES 6
3. IN SAHYADRI HILLS, A LESSON IN HUMILITY 11
4. DEATH WITHOUT GRIEF 17
5. WHEN THE MOP COUNT DID NOT TALLY 23
6. AN OLD MAN'S AGELESS WISDOM 27
7. IN INDIA, THE WORST OF BOTH WORLDS 31
8. LIVING THROUGH CHANGE 37
9. WHEN TELEGRAMS WERE BAD 44
10. A MAN TOO CLEVER BY HALF 48
11. A BOND BETRAYED ON RAKHI DAY 54
12. A LESSON IN LIFE FROM A BEGGAR 58
13. FORGETTING OUR OWN HISTORY 62
14. CAUSE, THEN CURE 67
15. STOVE BURSTS OR DOWRY DEATHS? 73
16. IDEALISTS AT TWENTY, REALISTS AT FORTY 78
17. WHAT IS A RED-LETTER DAY? A HOLIDAY 82
18. ONCE UPON A TIME, LIFE WAS SIMPLE 87
19. POWERFUL POLITICIANS AND UNSUNG DONORS 92
20. WRETCHED OF THE EARTH 96
21. SALAAM NAMASTE 101

22. [A WEDDING TO REMEMBER](#) 106
23. [INSENSITIVITY INDEX](#) 109
24. [TO SIR WITH LOVE](#) 113
25. PAY OR I'LL COMMIT SUICIDE 116
26. [NOT ALL'S WRONG WITH THE NEXT
GENERATION](#) 118
27. [THINK POSITIVE, BE HAPPY](#) 121
28. [LIGHT AS MANY CANDLES AS
POSSIBLE](#) 124
29. [WOMAN WITH A MIND](#) 127
30. [THE IT DIVIDE](#) 130
31. [WHERE THERE'S A WILL . . .](#) 134
32. CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE 137
33. THE PRICE OF JEALOUSY 141
34. THE TRUTH ABOUT WOMEN 144
35. [A LIFE WITH DIGNITY](#) 147
36. ON COLUMN WRITING 149
37. [THE NOBEL PRIZE](#) 152
38. [UNWED MOTHERS](#) 155
39. ALLIANCES INVITED 158
40. WILLING CANDIDATE 162
41. [SORRY, THE LINE IS BUSY](#) 164
42. [BE FAIR TO OTHERS](#) 167
43. BONDED BY BISLERI 170
44. *BAHUT KUCH HOTA HAI* 176
45. OH TEACHER, I SALUTE THEE 181
46. TREAT ME AS HUMAN 187
47. AN UNKNOWN BENEFactor FROM
CHENNAI 194
48. [LIFE IS AN EXAMINATION](#) 199
49. [MY MONEY, YOUR MONEY](#) 204
50. [IS LIFE FAIR?](#) 210
51. [THREE BRIGHT YOUNG MEN](#) 214

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Mr T.J.S. George, for having kindly consented to write the Foreword. I also thank Penguin India for their long-standing support, especially V.K. Karthika, who showed keen interest in publishing a revised and updated edition of this book.

But readers, ultimately I thank you. You are the best judge and my source of inspiration. Without your support, I cease to be a writer.

Bangalore
March 2006

Sudha Murty

FOREWORD

THE MISSION IS THE MESSAGE

We are heirs to the tradition of seeing human quality as *sattwa*, *rajas* or *tamas*. This is a beautifully Indian way of expressing a metaphysical concept familiar to other civilizations as well: of all God's creations, man alone has a choice between good and evil, and he reaps his rewards according to what he chooses.

Few set out consciously to perform *sattwik* work. Fewer still deliberately desire a life of *tamas*. Some could even start out with *tamas* or *rajas* and elevate themselves to *sattwa*. All this would be attributed to the larger cosmic scheme of karma. Jamshedji Tata appears to have had only a *sattwik* view of life and work—laying an industrial foundation for his country, starting educational and research institutions, and setting up a network of charities when such ideas were unknown. On the other hand, Alfred Nobel spent his genius inventing dynamite and smokeless gunpowder, which would all become agents of mass destruction. Then, perhaps stung by the implications of his life's achievements, he put the fortune he made to *sattwik* use by instituting the Nobel Prizes, as recognition for noble work.

Sudha Murty was not meant to hide her light under a



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

HONESTY COMES FROM THE HEART

One bright June morning three years ago, I was reading my Kannada newspaper as usual. It was the day the Secondary School Leaving Certificate results had been published. While columns of roll numbers filled the inside pages, the list of rank holders and their photographs took up almost the entire front page.

I have a great fascination for rank holders. Rank is not merely an index of one's intelligence, it also indicates the hard work and perseverance that students have put in to reach their goal. My background—I was brought up in a professor's family—and my own experience as a teacher have led me to believe this.

Of all the photographs in that morning's newspaper, one boy's snapshot caught my attention. I could not take my eyes off him. He was frail and pale, but there was an endearing sparkle in his eyes. I wanted to know more about him. I read that his name was Hanumanthappa and that he had secured the eighth rank. That was all the information I could gather.

The next day, to my surprise, his photograph was published again, this time with an interview. With growing interest I learned that Hanumanthappa was a coolie's son, the oldest of five children. They belonged to a tribal group.

He was unable to study further, he said in the interview, because he lived in a village and his father, the sole breadwinner, earned only Rs 40 a day.

I felt sorry for this bright boy. Most of us send our children to tuitions and to coaching classes, we buy them reference books and guides, and provide the best possible facilities for them without considering the cost. But it was different for Hanumanthappa of Rampura. He had excelled in spite of being denied some of the basic necessities of life.

While I was thinking about him with the newspaper still in my hands, I gazed at a mango tree in my neighbour's compound. It looked its best with fresh bark, tender green leaves glistening with dewdrops and mangoes that were about to ripen in a few days. Beyond the tree was a small potted plant that, I noticed, had remained almost the same ever since it had been potted. It was a calm morning. The air was cool and fresh. My thoughts were running free. The continuous whistle of our pressure cooker broke the silence, reminding me that half an hour had passed.

Hanumanthappa's postal address was provided in the interview. Without wasting much time, I took a postcard and wrote to him. I wrote only two lines, saying that I was interested in meeting him and asking whether he could come to Bangalore. Just then my father, ever a practical man, returned from his morning walk. He read the postcard and said, 'Where will he have the money to come so far? If you want him to come here, send some money for his bus fare plus a little extra to buy himself a decent set of clothes.'

So I added a third line to say that I would pay for his travel and some clothes. Within four days I received a similar postcard in reply. Two sentences: in the first he thanked me for the letter, in the second he expressed his willingness to come to Bangalore and meet me. Immediately, I sent him some money and details of my office address.

When he finally arrived in our office, he looked like a frightened calf that had lost its way. It must have been his first trip to Bangalore. He was humble. He wore a clean shirt and trousers, and his hair was neatly parted and combed. The sparkle in his eyes was still there.

I got straight to the point. 'We are happy about your academic performance. Do you want to study further? We would like to sponsor you. This means we will pay your fees for any course of study you wish to take up—wherever it may be.'

He did not answer.

My senior colleague, who was in the office with me, interrupted with a smile, 'Don't go at the speed of bits and bytes. Let the boy understand what you are suggesting. He can give us his answer at the end of the day.'

When Hanumanthappa was ready to return home, he said in a low and steady tone, 'Madam, I want to pursue my studies at the Teachers' Training College in Bellary. That is the one nearest to my village.'

I agreed instantly but spoke to him a little more to find out whether there was any other course he preferred. I was trying to make it clear to him that we would pay the fees for any course he might choose. The boy, however,

seemed to know exactly what he wanted.

‘How much money should I send you per month? Does the college have a hostel facility?’ I asked.

He said he would get back to me after collecting the correct details. Two days later, he wrote to us in his beautiful handwriting that he would require approximately Rs 300 per month. He planned to take a room on rent and share it with a friend. The two boys would cook for themselves in order to keep their expenses down.

I sent him Rs 1,800 to cover his expenses for six months. He acknowledged my draft without delay and expressed his gratitude.

Time passed. One day, I suddenly remembered that I had to pay Hanumanthappa for the next six months, so I sent him another draft for Rs 1,800.

This too was duly acknowledged, but I was surprised to find some currency notes in the envelope along with his letter. ‘Madam,’ he had written, ‘it is kind of you to have sent me money for the next six months. But I was not in Bellary for the last two months. One month, our college was closed for holidays and during the next month, there was a strike. So I stayed at home for those two months. My expenditure during these months was less than Rs 300 per month. Therefore, I am sending you the Rs 300 that I have not used for the last two months. Kindly accept this amount.’

I was taken aback. Such poverty and yet such honesty. Hanumanthappa knew I expected no account of the money sent to him for his monthly expenses, yet he had made it a

point to return the balance money. Unbelievable but true!

Experience has taught me that honesty is not the mark of any particular class nor is it related to education or wealth. It cannot be taught at any university. In most people, it springs naturally from the heart.

I did not know how to react to this simple village boy's honesty. I just prayed that God would continue to bestow the best on Hanumanthappa and his family.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

‘No problem at all, sir. I shall attend to it,’ I said. I was used to working throughout the week, so cancelling my travel plans didn’t bother me. My work gave me more happiness than any celebration or outing.

The next morning, I left for the small town where the project was based. By the time I reached the town it was already noon, but it looked as though the day had just begun there. The shops were just opening and folks were setting out to work.

As I was walking from the bus stand, a young lad hurried towards me and said, ‘Sorry I am late, ma’am. I was supposed to receive you at the bus stop.’ He was our clients’ representative and had come to take me to their office.

We reached the office after a few minutes’ walk. It was a small office. Though by no means modern, it was neatly furnished with some old but reconditioned furniture, everything in its right place. They were all waiting for me and I felt comfortable as I sat down. The cool buttermilk they offered me was most refreshing.

Before beginning my work, I was introduced to a neatly dressed young man who was supposed to coordinate with me. He was quite well-mannered and seemed very confident and bright. I was pleasantly surprised to see the good quality of his work. It had a professional touch. I was told that he was the most well-read man in that town.

He had documented his work very well and efficiently. Because of this, our job was completed sooner than expected. I did not forget to compliment him when I was



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

become bright like this?' I asked.

'No, no. Heredity and genes also play an important role. My son has taken after me.' His face shone with pride and I was curious to hear more. After all, I had an hour to spare before my bus departed.

'You must have been a good student in your college days?' I probed.

'Yes, I was always a first-ranker in my school and college days,' he replied, clearly appreciative of himself.

'Where did you graduate from?'

'I graduated from BVB Engineering College, Hubli.'

I became alert. I knew Hubli. It was my college. 'Which year?' I asked.

'In 1972, with the first rank.'

'Did you secure the gold medal also?' I persisted.

'Yes, I did obtain the gold medal for that year,' he said, glowing with self satisfaction.

By this time I was able to size him up quite clearly. And what I saw saddened me.

'May I see your gold medal?' I inquired.

Suddenly, the mood in the room changed. 'Why? Don't you believe me?' His voice was uncertain.

'No, I just want to see the gold medal you secured in 1972,' I repeated.

'It is very precious to me and so I have kept it in a bank locker,' he said.

I did not give up. 'Which bank?'

'Why should I give you such details?' he demanded, annoyed with my persistence.

Everything was clear by now. I think it was clear to



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

The rain, the glistening leaves and the strong smell of wild flowers made me feel as though I was on a different planet. But I never felt like an intruder. Not even when I reached the school after a long walk and every villager stood by staring at me.

Reaching the school was an adventure in itself. I saw a lady walking with rhythmic grace despite the three pots of water balanced on her head. I stopped her and asked, 'Which way should I go to reach the school?' She made an exclamatory sound, stared at me and walked away. Perhaps she didn't want to talk to a stranger, especially one from a town. Or perhaps she didn't understand my language.

I then approached an old man who was weaving a cane basket while humming a folk song. I knelt in front of him and asked in a loud and clear tone, 'Where is the school?' Curiosity was written all over his face and he seemed anxious to ask me all kinds of questions. But he didn't. He simply said something in his dialect and indicated directions with his hand.

The school was an old thatched building, probably built by the tribals themselves. It was a primary school. I could see a few children playing outside, while others were busy under a shed-like shelter doing something with leaves and straws.

I walked in and found a small room with two chairs, two tables, and a blackboard with a pot of water beside it. There were no electric lights or fans. Instead, a small shutterless opening served as the window. This was the only source of ventilation in the room.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

Thandappa, who seemed to be more than ninety years old. He was happy to see me.

I asked him the same question: 'What problems do you face in running the school?'

Commuting to school was difficult during the rains, he said. Besides, the school clothes wouldn't dry in the rainy season—the simplest of problems and a familiar one, too. During the course of my work, I have listened to many such problems from many such people.

After acquiring a fair understanding of the people and their lives, I departed, not forgetting to thank them for their cooperation. I decided to return with some umbrellas and clothes for the children.

When I went again, it was winter. The rains were over. Now the scene was transformed. It was paradise. There was no mud and no frogs croaking. Birds were cooing. The sky was clear. Many rare flowers had bloomed. I met the same Thandappa. He recognized me and greeted me with a smile. His eyes seemed to welcome me warmly.

'Please accept these things which I have brought for the children here. Last time, I didn't know what to give them,' I said, handing over a big bag to him.

The Thandappa hesitated. I wondered whether he was feeling embarrassed. I told him, 'You have not asked for any gift from me. I brought this myself. It will help the children during the rains. Please get the clothes stitched according to their size.'

He walked into his hut without saying a word.

'What do you want to learn?' I asked some children who were standing nearby.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

missing mop was not found, then there must have been an error in the initial count. But the sister was very confident of her count and was quite firm that she had not gone wrong.

The surgeon became impatient and said, 'Let's not waste any more time. Give me the needle and catgut.'

But the sister would not agree. Politely, but firmly, she said, 'No sir, unless I find that missing mop, I cannot give you the needle and catgut.'

The surgeon contained his rising anger and searched the abdomen once again. Finally, he said in a sharp voice, 'I am the senior person here. I am also responsible. Now, I order you to give me the needle and catgut.'

The nurse was in a dilemma. But she did not change her stance.

The surgeon was really angry by now. 'If you do not obey my instructions, I will dismiss you after the operation,' he warned.

Now the nurse was worried. She was the eldest in her family and the only earning member. It would be terrible if she were to lose her job. She was fully aware of her precarious position, but still she stuck to what she thought was correct. 'Sorry sir, I cannot give you the needle and catgut.'

It was an impossible situation. The inexperienced nurse's apparent defiance had the surgeon fuming. He was so upset that he did not know what to do. He looked down in frustration. To his amazement, he saw the blood-soaked cotton mop lying on the OT floor like a wounded soldier on the battlefield.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

LIVING THROUGH CHANGE

Life and times have changed in truly revolutionary ways. Yet, we seldom feel the impact of change because we live right in the middle of it. Old ways have changed, our festivals have changed, our attitudes have changed, our norms, values and ideas have changed. Two festivals in which I participated recently brought this point home to me fairly dramatically. In both cases, the extent of change that had taken place was conveyed to me through conversation. This added a personal touch and helped underline the fundamental nature of the changes through which we are living. The first event was a Diwali celebration. The second was a music festival.

Diwali is an occasion for great celebration in our country. Everybody buys gifts, prepares sweets and visits friends. Offices remain closed for days. Children buy crackers.

Last Diwali, I saw an advertisement saying that some orphanages were selling sweets prepared by the orphans. I thought that buying these sweets would be the best way to help and encourage the orphanages. I bought a few packets of sweets and went to the house of a close friend.

I expected her to be in a joyous mood, celebrating this great festival with enthusiasm. She was a housewife,



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

happy that nobody had noticed me. There were retired officers, middle-aged housewives and old ladies, but I could not see any youngsters in the hall. Two middle-aged housewives wearing Dharmavaram saris were sitting right in front of me. They looked elegant with fresh jasmine flowers in their silvery hair. Since the rows were close, I couldn't help but hear what they were talking about. They were discussing the problems of finding grooms for girls these days.

'The software boom has made it difficult to get grooms above twenty-eight years these days,' said one woman profoundly.

The other woman was also interested in the topic. Obviously, the subject of grooms was far more important to them than the music.

The first woman went on to explain, 'Today, when a boy completes his BE, he may be twenty-two years, and he will get a job in one of the software companies. He will work for two years and then he will go abroad for a year. By that time he will be twenty-five and probably would have earned more money than his father, who might have been a bank officer, an honest government employee or a professor. Tell me, why should he not marry and settle down?'

Unaware that someone was eavesdropping, she answered her own question. 'His parents will search for a software engineer girl. Today, I've been told that about 50 per cent of the students in engineering colleges are girls. An engineering college is just like an arts college these days. I am sure the boy's father will get a software



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

booths were unknown. If anything was urgent, the only channel of communication available was the telegram. The telegram denoted a whole new culture in those days. In villages and small towns, a telegram was a big event, often a harbinger of bad news.

One day, I received a telegram. As usual, it was ominous. 'Father expired. Start immediately,' it said. The sender's name was given as Lata.

I was shocked. My colleagues were very kind to me. One of them called the railway station immediately to book a ticket on the next train to my home town while another applied for leave on my behalf. I just sat still, crying.

My father was more than a friend to me. We used to talk a lot and discuss many things. The previous week, when I had visited him, he had been hale and hearty. He had not shown any signs of illness. What could have happened? Was it a heart attack or an accident? How was my mother? How difficult it would be for her!

One of my colleagues used to get a telegram similar to the one I had just received at least once every year. 'Granny expired. Start immediately,' his telegram would read. He would tell me that this was the best way to get leave.

'Do you have enough leave?' he asked me now, thinking the telegram I had received was one like his. I was very angry with him.

My journey back home was simply unbearable. I thought of my childhood and my college days when my father was a part of everything. At first he was a role model, but later, when I had seen more of the world, he became more of a friend than a hero.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

popular Hindi film song, or even reading a book at leisure—are rare luxuries in villages. A lack of basic facilities forces village boys and girls to while away their time uselessly. Having observed this aspect of village life at close quarters, I decided that one of the primary goals of the Foundation should be to launch a project titled ‘A library for each village’.

I feel libraries play an important role in the lives of children, the citizens of tomorrow. As I was raised in a middle-class family in a small town, I was well aware of the importance of books and knowledge in the life of a student. In my childhood, I had limited access to books and it was then that I had envisioned starting free libraries offering unlimited access to the world of books. As soon as I had been named trustee of the Foundation, I knew I had to take the first step towards fulfilling my desire to build libraries for village children.

Reading has many advantages. It is not only a useful hobby, but also helps us imbibe better qualities. Keeping this in mind, the trustees planned to establish libraries that contained books in the regional language and not the textbooks that the children were using in school. Simple, illustrated, interesting books that could be read without anybody’s help were thus selected for these libraries. In this manner, the Foundation would sow the seeds of a love for reading in the villages of Karnataka.

With sufficient nurturing and caring, the project has grown from a tiny sapling into a huge, wide-reaching banyan tree. More than 4,000 such libraries have been established all over the state. The books have succeeded



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

ever used such a good word to address me. People call me by different names. I don't want to repeat them to you. Akka brought back childhood memories.'

Tara continued talking. She spoke of her poverty and of losing her parents in an epidemic. A younger brother was all she had. She adored him and though she was only a child herself she found work as a coolie to look after him. But when she was twelve years old and her brother was only eleven, he sold her to an agent in a red light area. He had taken her there on the pretext of visiting the village fair. That was on a Narali-Poornima day.

It was now clear to me what she was going through sitting on the steps of that temple. It was Narali-Poornima day once again and the word akka must have triggered in her mind something she had been desperate to forget all her life. Rakhi is not merely about a sister tying a thread on her brother's wrist. It signifies the bond between a brother and a sister. And Tara, through no fault of hers, was pushed into her dreadful life by her own brother. On a Rakhi day.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

because I wasn't even getting wet. That day I couldn't give the beggar and his granddaughter their daily quota of leftovers. They went hungry, I am sure.

'However, what I saw from my window surprised me. The beggar and the young girl were playing on the road because there was no traffic. They were laughing, clapping and screaming joyously, as if they were in paradise. Hunger and rain did not matter. They were totally drenched and totally happy. I envied their zest for life.

'That scene forced me to look at my own life. I realized I had so many comforts, none of which they had. But they had the most important of all assets, one which I lacked. They knew how to be happy with life as it was. I felt ashamed of myself. I even started to make a list of what I had and what I did not have. I found I had more to be grateful for than most people could imagine. That day, I decided to change my attitude towards life, using the beggar as my role model.'

After a long pause, I asked Meena how long it had taken her to change.

'Once this realization dawned,' she said, 'it took me almost two years to put the change into effect. Now nothing matters. I am always happy. I find happiness in every small thing, in every situation and in every person.'

'Did you give any *gurudakshina* to your guru?' I asked.

'No. Unfortunately, by the time I understood things, he was dead. But I sponsored his granddaughter to a boarding school as a mark of respect to him.'



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

I have never gone to a race in my life. I felt a bit uncomfortable. It was getting dark as it was an evening flight, so the young cousins did not see the frown on my face.

The boy asked, 'Is this award for a horse race? There is a lady on the back of that beautiful horse.'

I realized that these young people could only associate my trophy with horses and races. They had absolutely no idea about the woman in battle gear sitting astride the horse. Was I being given an opportunity to tell them?

'Will you go and have a look at the statue and tell me what you think about it?' I asked them.

'We did look at the statue and that's why we are asking these questions,' they replied.

I was taken aback. Being a teacher, I thought it was my duty to tell them about Rani Laxmibai. (I now realize why my son teases me about my habit of viewing every youngster as a potential student and my eagerness to convert every moment available into an opportunity for teaching.)

'Have you heard about the First War of Independence?' I asked the youngsters.

'Yes. It was in 1942, wasn't it?' said the boy vaguely.

The girl added, 'Of course, we've seen the movie *1942—A Love Story*. The war between the Indians and the British. Manisha Koirala was just stunning in that.'

'No, that was the Quit India movement. The First War of Independence was fought a century before that and we lost it.'

They did not reply.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

fate that awaited their daughter.

The case of this pregnant girl would end like any other 'stove burst' story. Her husband would go free. He would marry again. And similar incidents would be repeated. The problem continues because there is no immediate punishment of the offenders. Even when cases are registered, they drag on in courts for years. The greed for material things is growing, so people go for easy dowry money.

Ethra naryasthu puiyanthe, ramanthe . . . Those words came back to me. Without my knowing it, tears welled up in my eyes.

The duty sister came and announced expressionlessly, 'Patient in bed number 24 is dead.'



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

‘When did you shift to condiments?’ we asked.

‘Once I was successful with garments, I diversified to home products. Nothing succeeds like success. I always consider the customer as a god. Work for the customer’s satisfaction, not for your satisfaction—that principle pays. Life is a great teacher. I learnt everything by experience. By learning something from each of my mistakes, I learnt not to repeat them.’

We were both surprised and delighted at Ratna’s courage and the turnaround in her life. We had all thought that Vinutha would be very successful and Ratna would be mediocre. But things turned out totally different. At twenty we were idealists, at forty we had become realists.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

A WEDDING TO REMEMBER

As a trustee of the Infosys Foundation, I get stacks of letters. We help people financially for various reasons. Naturally, both needy and not-so-needy people write to us. The most difficult aspect of this job is to tell the difference between both kinds of people.

One typical Monday morning, letters poured in. I was going through the letters. My secretary told me, 'Ma'am, there is a wedding invitation card with a personal note attached to it. Will you be attending?'

As a teacher in a college, I get many wedding invitations from my students, so I assumed the card was from one of my students. But when I read the card, I was unable to remember either of the persons getting married. I wondered who could have sent me an invitation with a hand-written note stating, 'Madam, if you do not attend our marriage, we will consider it unfortunate.'

I was still not able to place the girl's or the boy's name, but I decided to attend the wedding out of curiosity. It was the rainy season and the venue was at the other end of the city. I wondered if attending some unknown person's wedding was worth the trouble.

It was a typical middle-class wedding with a stage decorated profusely with flowers. Film music, which



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

NOT ALL'S WRONG WITH THE NEXT GENERATION

Recently, I visited Egypt. I wanted to see the oldest pyramid in the country. It is not in Giza but in Sakkarā, 24 km from Cairo. It is a five-step pyramid built for the Pharaoh Zosheyer. The architect was Imenhotep, the most intelligent and wise man at that time. While I was travelling, I was accompanied by a guide who also happened to be a well-read student of Egyptology. He was describing the writings on some of the pyramids. Pointing to some inscriptions, he translated aloud, 'The children of the next generation will be spendthrifts, will not think much and will not know much about life. We do not know what their future will be. Only the sun god Ra can save them.'

While this was being read out to me, I remembered the oft-heard complaints about the next generation in our own country—that youngsters do not respect our ideas, that they are rude, that they don't read much. It struck me that every generation has the same complaints about the next one. This has been going on from generation to generation, all over the world, for at least the last 5000 years.

Today's children have far more knowledge and far less



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

THREE BRIGHT YOUNG MEN

Many years ago, I was the chief guest at a function. This was held in a hostel for poor students that had been built by a philanthropist. Food and shelter were free, but students had to bear other expenses like tuition and clothing.

In my younger days, I have come across many families who would look after students who were economically backward but otherwise bright. They used to help them with their fees or clothing and often with their food as well. In those days, most colleges were located in larger towns. Many poor students who came to study in these towns used to stay with these families and would be treated as part of the family. The woman of the house considered this a good deed and helped the poor students wholeheartedly. Today, the situation is different. Even smaller towns have schools and colleges, so this custom has disappeared.

While I was sitting on the dais, I remembered the past and congratulated the person who had built the hostel. It was a good deed and of great help to many students. The hostel secretary told me about some of the students in the hostel who had secured ranks but had a problem paying their tuition fees.



You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.

wondered why you did that. I was a total stranger and not related to you at all. You never expected anything from me. Now, I have made it a point to help people who are not related to me, without any expectation. This is my small gift to you. It may not be a big thing, but I would like to give it with affection and gratitude. You have changed my life.'

I was touched by his words and tears filled my eyes.

I reached Mumbai. My international flight was delayed due to a technical problem, so I thought I would go and buy some snacks at the Santa Cruz market. While walking on the footpath with a friend, I stumbled and fell down. My foot swelled up. I was worried that it might be fractured. My friend lived in Mumbai, so she took me to a doctor close by. She assured me that though he was a little expensive, he was very good.

We went to this doctor in Khar. The clinic was modern, the receptionist was smart and professional. She asked whether I had an appointment and when I said no, she asked me to wait. She talked to the doctor and then sent us in. The doctor was young and very confident. I felt at ease. He made me comfortable with his smile. While he was examining my leg, he started a conversation.

'Ma'am, I have met you before. You look older now.'

'Where have you met me before?'

'I was in a student hostel. You had come there as a chief guest. After the function, I met you with my two other friends.'

I guessed who he was but wanted to reconfirm. 'Where are your friends now?'