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Thamasoma Jyothirgamaya (From Darkness to Light)

Sridhar Venkatasubramanian

Pradip was only 16 years of age when he decided to leave home for good. At that time he was studying in the ninth standard in the village school.

Pradip's father was a teacher in the school. His income was only sufficient enough to get them the basic needs of life.

In many of the households of that village, kids were usually taken off from the school and sent to work in factories in the nearby town of *Sivakasi* (a town in southern India popular for fireworks production) to supplement the family income. But, however difficult the circumstances were , Pradip's father never allowed his son's education to be hampered.

Pradip however took a dim view of this. The inability to have the desired things always left him frustrated. He was convinced that if he stayed in the village, his life would also end up dreary like his father's.

So, one day, just a month before *Diwali* (Festival of lights) he left home and went to Sivakasi. He got a job in the fireworks factory, which was recruiting casual labourers for the ensuing festival.

He had heard that the work was hard. But, he was not worried . He had no plans of staying in Sivakasi permanently. Once he had accumulated some money, he planned to try his luck in *Chennai* .(A major metropolis of southern India)

The factory labourers were provided with dormitory facility near the factory itself. Pradip being usually worn out at the end of the day's work returned there to settle in his bunk.

He did not talk much with others . But there was an elderly man whom he liked very much. The man had four sons who were also working in the same factory.

One day while they were having a chat, the elderly man asked him, "Pradip , you are quite young. What are your plans for the future?"

Pradip told him about his plans to go to Chennai.

"But Pradip, if you study for two more years you will complete tenth standard. Afterwards you could enter some polytechnic and then your future would be better"

"Uncle ,it is no use studying further. I have seen semi-illiterate people in my village doing much better than my father"

"Pradip, you are so wrong. Let me tell you about my life. You will be surprised to know I was the previous owner of this factory. In the beginning ,everything was going very well. I gave my

sons whatever they asked for. I did not care when they dropped out of school, very early in life. I thought when they grew up they could take care of the factory. However, the cycle changed and I lost everything in a mishap in the factory. My sons were by then grown up but had no education. So we had no option but to do manual labour here. Not a day has gone by since, without my ruing over how I had spoilt the future of my sons.”

Tears were rolling down the man’s cheek as he was narrating his life story. Pradip was shocked to the core of his heart.

Three days before Diwali the factory made payment to its labourers. Each one of them was given a gift hamper of sweets & firecrackers , personally by the owner’s son, Aditya, who had recently returned after completing his studies in Chennai. The labourers were also given a week’s holiday for celebrating Diwali with their family.

Pradip returned to his village a changed man. Alighting from the bus he distributed the sweets and firecrackers among the village destitute .

He then entered his home, gave his entire earnings to his father and fell at his feet.

“Father, forgive me. I will stay here and continue my studies .”

Meanwhile in Sivakasi, Aditya was told by his father, “Son, I have become old. Now it is your turn to take over the reins of the factory”

“Father , kindly listen to what I going to say. Today I was pained to see a lot of child labourers in our fireworks factory. I know they do not have the means to go to school. But, we have a lot of money. So, I have decided to close the factory and construct a school for the destitute with vocational training so that in future they will be able to stand on their own feet. We will compensate the regular workers so that they can find other means of living. Father, we have taken so much from these people. It is time to return”

That Diwali the lights seemed to shine brighter in the houses of Pradip & Aditya, as if to indicate that here is the light that will lead others from darkness to enlightenment.

About the Author : Sridhar Venkatasubramanian is a Cost Accountant and a retired bank executive . During his three decades of association with the bank he had been posted in places, as diverse as remote villages in Bihar to metropolitan cities like Chennai. He had the opportunity to interact with different types of people and had witnessed several interesting situations . He is presently engaged as a guest lecturer in training colleges of various banks viz., Allahabad Bank, United Bank of India etc. He also offers free lessons to those poor students, in his locality, who aspire to crack admission tests for bank jobs. Since his school days he has been a avid reader of fiction and non-fiction works. After retirement he has taken up to writing short stories. His short stories mostly depict real life situations , suggest thoughts on human face of relationship in the given situation and provoke the mind of those who read the stories.