

## Victim

By M. S. Wankhede<sup>1</sup>

Rahul was sitting silently in the doorstep of his hut in the small village called Narayanpur situated on Nagpur-Chnadrapur highway, which has around 1200 population all farmers and farm labourers. His father, a landless labourer, is a man known for his honesty and simplicity in the vicinity. But his caste has always been a barrier for him and his family and because of it he could get no open access in the village. Being a labourer his whole family has been living in abject poverty.

Rahul was revising his book on 'Computer Engineering' that he had somehow managed to buy it from the amount that he received as scholarship from 'Dr. Babashaeb Ambedkar Technological University, Lonere, District Raigad. He came across a letter that was kept folded in the middle of the book. As soon as he opened it the whole scene of the past event came before his eyes. The letter was written by Neeta Deshmukh, a daughter of Champatrao Deshmuck, then a minister in the government of Maharashtra. He began to read it:

"Dear Rahul,

"I don't know what to say. But it always questions me why are you so silent. I know you are always passing your examinations with good scoring. It seems that you are engulfed only in your study and that's why you get good marks every year. But only study, I think, is not the solution to all problems in life which is meant for enjoyment. If at this stage if we don't enjoy it, when shall we have the fun of life? It's true – 'education is such a key that can open the locks of progress and development'.

"You are in fact a magnet for me. Note, this is our last semester. I feel it is a proper time to express my feelings to you. When our examinations are over we would depart to our natives and I would not get a chance to express my heartfelt emotions for you. For last three years I have been really restless for you but I could gather no courage to say anything to you. I always wanted to share my feelings with you since you passed your first semester with distinction. Your physique has always been an attraction for me but more attraction for me has been your mental ability for all these years. In spite of all my attraction and appreciation for your grand success in all the seven semesters with distinction, I could say nothing else except I congratulated you on your success every time. No doubt we have been friends but I wish more than friendship.

"Rahul, I don't know much about you except a very brilliant classmate studying with me for last four years. And do not want to know anything about your family background. Just I want to be your girlfriend and finally to be a life partner. Can you accept my proposal? If your reply is

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positive, I would be exalted and if you reply negatively, I feel, my life would be a cave of darkness. So it's my humble request to you to accept my proposal and make a place for me in your life. Don't write a reply. Come directly to the Maharaja Restaurant for lunch at 12.00 noon tomorrow. That would be a positive sign for me. Then we'll have long guffaw over our further planning. I hope you may take it positively.

"Awaiting your reply

"I ever remain

Yours

Neeta."

"After reading this letter, I felt utterly dumb, tears rolling down my cheeks. It was a turning point in my life that threw me into a dungeon".

"Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Technological University, Lonere" once again flashed before my eyes after a period of six years. It is one and only one of its kinds in the State. The University is located at Lonere, the place in the ranges of Western Ghat, at the foot of Raigad fort, the place from where Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj administered his major activities. It is also near Mahad where Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar had his struggle for water of Mahad Chawdar Tank. It is autonomous in nature and Unitary in its character. It is established in the year 1989 by the Government of Maharashtra. Although relatively young, the University is making its mark in the field of research and technological services through its dedicated faculty and disciplined students. The University has a conducted institute of its own, "Institute of Petrochemical Engineering", running Diploma Courses in eight streams of engineering and technology. The University extends its services to the society through a governmental scheme of "Community Polytechnic" by educating the dropouts and empowering them with technical skills. The University offers education especially to rural women through a Certificate Course in Nursing Technology.

"As a very clever and silent student, I was a very favourite of my hostel mates, class mates and the faculty at the college".

"I went to Maharaja Restaurant, where Neeta, with great hope, was eagerly waiting for me. She greeted me with shake hands and requested me very fondly to sit. I sat silently. I had no words to utter. This was a very embarrassing situation for me as I was aware of the 'caste' factor and I had burnt of caste in my own life. Hence I felt that to have a love affair and a thought of my marriage with a Maratha girl could be a daydream for me. I recollected from my reading that Babasaheb Ambedkar had to suffer a lot because of caste. So I thought that to love a Maratha girl could never be a possibility at all. Moreover, Neeta's father was a minister and the richest person in the Konkan region. I knew how the power corrupts and the absolute power corrupts absolutely. I had been convulsing throughout the night when I received that letter. I well knew that even if I respond positively, my love story with Neeta could never be a successful one. I thought then Neeta and I are poles apart which could never meet because of the caste, power, prestige and honour of the so-called high caste to which she belongs. I was struggling with my thoughts and I could not hear what Neeta was saying. Finally Neeta shook me caught by my arms, saying

"Rahul".

"Hmm!"

"Listen, guy! What are you thinking of? Come on! Let's begin sharing of our feelings".

I was still silent.

“Look, Rahul!”

“Still I was looking at the glassful of water on the table. Like that glassful of water that could not overflow, my feelings could not get out. No words I could find to utter. This was the only occasion that had put me in an embarrassing position”.

“See. Let’s order our lunch and then we’ll discuss the matter”.

“Already a shy sort of boy, I could dare to say nothing. Neither positive nor negative in regard to the content of the letter Neeta had sent me. Then somehow I said, “I don’t have much money to spend on any simple food. I can just pay for a cup of tea or coffee. What would you prefer tea or coffee?”

“Neither. I invited you for lunch; I’d order food of your choice. We’d relish it and I’d pay for it. Is that clear to you?”

“I remained silent”.

“Hey, Rahul! We are not just classmate but we are going to begin a new life after this moment and it’d be a successful love story taking place in the Natural atmosphere of Western Ghat! I’d pay the bill. Don’t worry.”

“Ok! But...”

“But... what? Don’t say anything. I’m dying for your response. That’s all!” Neeta caught my hand. “Say what you want to say”.

“I could not respond”.

Neeta called a waiter, who came hurriedly saying, “Yes, Madam!”

“Bring one-by-two tomato soup and half chilly chicken. I’ll order for the main course later”.

“In past three years at Lonere and in the whole life before this occasion, I never had been to any restaurant to eat anything or even drink a cup of tea because of scarcity of money. With the words ‘chilly chicken’ my mouth started watering, even then I had no desire to eat chicken. But I was helpless”.

When the waiter went away, Neeta holding my hand said “Rahul, please let me know what you have to say about my proposal”.

“Neeta, see. I think you are taking a wrong step”.

“What’s wrong there in the proposal of love and marriage? Are we minors? We are well matured to take the decision of our life. Moreover we are going to be graduates”.

“Neeta, it’s not the matter of maturity. It’s the matter of love and culture”.

“What do you mean by it?”

“I mean to ask what you know about me”.

“You are a very handsome boy. I like you. I want a bond of love with you and wish to marry you. That’s all I know”.

“Have you ever tried to know about my family background and my financial position?”

Neeta just looked at me with blinking eyes.

“When I can’t pay for a tea, what would I do for you?”

“Oh! That’s bothering you! You mean to say you won’t be able to take care of me in future because you are very poor!”

“You are absolutely right! When I can’t manage my expenses, how can I keep you in luxurious position? Even I don’t have a house to live which would give you any comfort. Simply it’s a hut

that drips during the rainy season; no electricity to run the fan to provide respite from the summer heat. My cooler is the mango tree in my courtyard. That's all my property being the sole heir of Sugandha and Shamrao Sontakke".

"I don't care about your financial position. I know you have such potential that would make you lead a comfortable life hereafter. Moreover you have been selected for TISCO that would give you handsome package when you clear your final semester. And I have tremendous faith that you are going to maintain the record of all previous semesters. Once you join the company, it would help you to make the things comfortable for you, your family and for me too. You may be thinking that I am going to be a burden over you as I couldn't qualify for any company during all the placements. Is that bothering you? I know I'm beautiful but not so clever like you but I assure you I'd earn enough to add to our income. I promise you. And forget about my richness, my family and my lifestyle. I would never trouble you for any kind of comforts. I'd be happy with what you provide me."

"I was very attentive to what she was saying. Finally she paused for a while".

"Neeta, how could I convince you? Neither your beauty nor your income nor even your cleverness bothers me at all".

"Then what bothers you?"

"Caste". We are not abroad. We are here in India. And you know Indian culture that is incomplete without caste. So how could it be possible to be united in marriage? Will your relatives and people of your caste witness our marriage take place?"

"Don't think of the others. Think only about the things concerning us".

"Ok! I won't think of the others but what about your family? Would your family members give consent to our marriage? If your family comes to know about this affair, they would make you a prey of 'honour killing' or they would do something with me. I don't think they would see their only daughter marry off a Mahar boy".

"My family is well cultured. They love me from the bottom of their hearts. They will do what I wish to do. Moreover they don't believe in the rubbish things like caste and religion at all. My father is not only a minister but also a follower of equality. He always gives example of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar in his speeches and general talk too. These social workers are ideals for my father. Moreover he is well known for his charity. He helps to all those who come to him for help. He never thinks of caste. He never makes any kind of discrimination. I'm the only heir of all what he has. He taught me equality. He never felt any desire for the light of race. I believe he would support our marriage happily".

Waiter came with soup and chilly chicken and served us. This interrupted her.

"See, Rahul, don't stretch the things on that line. If you accept my proposal I would convince my parents only after our final examination is over. Leave this matter to me".

"If they are not convinced, then what would you do?"

"Leave it to me. Tell me what your decision is!"

"I was still not in any position to express my feelings. I was in a dilemma as I have been experiencing the issues of caste and poverty all through my life. I felt in his mind "Caste is more harmful than poverty". I knew well that I could be a good earner in the nearest future and I would make the life of my parents comfortable. I was engulfed in my thought having the skinny stature of my father and mother in the rags".

“A very clever and hard working, I have been a very fond student in all through my schooling. Although my family never enjoyed any moment of life as they have been struggling hard to make both ends meet. A merit from a very small school Vikas Vidyalaya, Nandori I was the first student in the school who had brought laurels to the school in its history and thus I became a star for all teachers who taught me there as I made all of them feel their chests with puff of honour. I scored 96% marks in S. S. C. Examination in March 2002. My father and mother felt as if they were in the paradise at that time. Nobody could gauge that I can get such a big success. Even then my father was worried about my further education but he never lost his hope. He promised me he would bear all hardships in life but he would see me climb the ladder of success. With the help of a generous teacher in my primary school he got me admission in the 11<sup>th</sup> standard in R. S. Bidkar College, Hinganghat in science stream and I passed out H. S. S. C. Examination in March 2004 with same percentage of marks and became a topper not only in the college but also in the Wardha District and 5<sup>th</sup> in the general merit list and 1<sup>st</sup> in backward classes in the Nagpur Divisional Board. For my success I was felicitated by the college management. I had a great desire to become a Doctor so that I could serve the poor and the needy giving justice to the profession in the true sense. But the expenses of medical education were beyond our reach. I appeared for MH- CET and in it also I shone with 182 marks out of 200 in SEEE and 185 in PMT. But because of money problem I took admission in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Technological University, Lonere, Raigad for B. Tech in Computer Science.”

“The whole village was praising me and my parents – Shamrao and Sugandha Sontakke who had no money to distribute sweets among the relatives, villagers and my friends to express their happiness. I felt very sorrowful for our poor living but it was not in my hand in which family I should take birth. But I resolved not to die a poor! Seeing my unhappiness my father bought a kilogram sugar from the village shop on credit and tried to distribute among all the well-wishers. When he began the distribution of sugar the villagers dispersed from our hut only a few those who were the relatives and the friends belonging Mahar community were retained. Though all were Shudras, they could not like to taste the sweetness of sugar from the hands of a Mahar, although they were expressing happiness on the success of a Mahar boy. Indian Constitution has the provision for the non-discrimination and allows no untouchability. People from so-called high caste still observe casteism and untouchability. I had read and heard in a song that even a great humanitarian Babasaheb Ambedkar had to experience very badly the caste problem. How could I be spared of it then? I somehow convinced myself. But I could not help to say how rigid the caste mentality in India is! In such difficult situation, I thought, Neeta’s family would never grant permission for our marriage”.

All these thoughts flashed within no time in my mind.

“Rahul”, said Neeta, “your soup is getting cold. Have it”.

It was the maiden experience of sipping soup for me. While sipping soup and relishing chilly chicken Neeta opened her talk.

“Rahul, feel free to say what you like. But I tell you I can’t survive without you. You are the sole aim of my life. If you reject this offer I’d have no grudge but...”

“But... what Neeta?”

“Nothing”.

And the silence followed. We were looking at the pieces of chilly chicken stuck in the fork.



Waiter came and said, "Excuse me. What do you want in the main course, Madam?"

"I'll tell you after a while," replied Neeta. Saying "Ok" the waiter went away.

"Hmm, Mr. Rahul, how much time do you require to come to conclusion on a very simple matter like love and marriage?"

"It's simple for you but very tough for me, Neeta. Rather it's a Herculean task for me".

Neeta broke into laughter and said, "See, the condition of the great scholar, a merit in S. S. C. and H. S. S. C. examinations and the topper in all the seven semesters in B. Tech. Computer Science, who is not so-so like me".

"That's the matter of education and study but it's a test of life and death! I could ponder over the matter so that it should not spoil anybody's life. Had I been a rich like you or a son of a minister or at least belonging to your caste, I could have readily accepted your offer and there could have been no problem".

"Oh, Rahul! You spoke in the last debate competition and you won the first prize for your excellent views over humanity. You also mentioned of equality for all. Have you forgotten them, haven't you? Why don't you see the practical side of it. When I'm ready, why should you go for negative thought?"

"I don't have any negative aspect. But expressing the views on any topic and to see the practical side of those views are two different things".

"What exactly you mean to say?"

"If possible, forgive and forget me considering it a daydream".

"Not possible".

"Then, give me some time to think".

"Twenty-four hours only!"

"Ok!"

"We finished our lunch. I was under the heavy burden finding no way to get any solution. I was repenting for accepting the invitation of lunch at the Maharaja Restaurant. Rather I would have remained unresponsive. Now neither I could reject the offer nor accept it. My position was like facing death to either side I could go having a well at one side and the cave on the other. Neeta paid the bill and we left the restaurant. The whole Sunday was spoiled and the night too in convulsion. The next day I had to accept the offer by all means, as per the conditions laid down by Neeta".

"Monday morning I went to the class. When the class of Mathematics was over Neeta beckoned me to go to the canteen for a cup of coffee. And I had to follow her. We shared a cup of coffee. I gave my consent and the love story of us began to flourish in the large campus of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Technological University, Lonere perched in the Natural beauty of the Western Ghat. Soon, the news spread in the campus like a wild fire. It also reached to the faculty".

After a month or so Neeta informed her father, "When the examinations are over I'd give you a great surprise".

Her father took it just a matter of fun as usual Neeta liked to play fun. But this time it was not just a fun but a fact! He was in darkness!

Meanwhile Neeta went to her native for Holi festival as there were holidays for three days. As usual her driver came to pick her from there. When the luxurious BMW car came, Neeta was ready with her packed luggage and talking with Rahul. This was for the first time, the driver saw

Neeta having some talk with a boy. He never had any such occasion before this in his several picks and drops. The drive got down.

“Ganesh, load the luggage and wait for a few minutes”, Neeta said and continued her talk for ten minutes or so and then said, “Bye, Rahul” with a flash of smile on her face and holding his hands.

“Bye... bye”.

“The car took her away and my feet turned towards my hostel room. I never liked to watch TV for my restricted reasons. Whenever I went to the recreation hall, I just used to listen news on TV and read newspapers”.

“Four days passed. The Holi festival was over. The same luxurious car came to drop Neeta. This time Neeta came with the pack of sweetmeats - laadu! She gave it to me when the practical of C++ was over”.

“Neeta, please don’t change my habits”.

“You should feel happy that I have started taking care of you right from now”, said Neeta loudly laughing.

“See, I never tested such home-made delicious sweetmeats nor could I buy ever. Moreover I couldn’t get anything from my home ever. How can a Mahar living below poverty line have a test of such delicious food”.

Getting angry Neeta said, “Don’t mention of your caste and poverty hereafter. It pains me a lot”.

“I was joking, yaar!”

“Rahul, I am really attached to you. Not a single moment I keep myself away from you. You are always before me like my shadow or sleep. Your place is in my heart. The four days of Holi festival were for me like four years. I could not enjoy Holi in your absence”.

“But I never observe Holi festival since my childhood days”.

“So after our marriage too, there shall be no Holi at all”.

“I’ll not restrict you. But I won’t play Holi”.

“Then I would not play hereafter. I promise you that the things you don’t like or you don’t approve I’ll not follow. But I tell you not a single moment my mind was without you in all four days. Today I am very happy to be united with you. I’m exalted”.

After a long discussions both dispersed.

The time of test examinations and practical examinations was nearing. Rahul got busy with his preparations. Although Neeta was not very sharp in her study, she also had never been DC or no subject was back in all her semesters. Every day they used to meet, talked so many things and even discussed the points of their study.

On 10<sup>th</sup> of April. Early in the morning Rahul and Neeta met.

“Rahul, today we shall dine together at Maharaja Restaurant”.

“Ok”.

At 6 O’clock both went to the Maharaja Restaurant as before 7 every hosteller had to be in.

Neeta was carrying something with her. Rahul could not guess nor did he dare to ask. As soon as they entered the restaurant, they occupied a table in the corner and she placed order for dinner and asked the waiter to bring a plate and a knife. The waiter came with the plate and knife and put them on the table.

“Rahul, close your eyes for a moment and don’t open till I ask you to do so. Otherwise I’ll feel unhappy”.

Rahul followed her advice.

Neeta put the cake with words “Happy Birth Day to Rahul” on the table. Placed two candles numbering 2 indicating Rahul completed his 22 years. She asked the waiter to provide a matchbox signaling. The waiter handed her the matchbox and she lighted the candles.

“Now, you can open your eyes, Rahul”.

“I opened my eyes and was surprised to see the arrangements on the table”.

“Rahul, blow off the candles and cut the cake”.

“I blew off the candles and cut the cake”. Neeta clapped saying “Happy Birth Day to you, dear Rahul!”

Both shared the pieces of cakes at each other’s hands and later Neeta gave that plate to the waiter to distribute among the staff. Then she handed Rahul a gift pack. Rahul opened the wrapper and to his surprise he found that it was a set of BlackBerry Curve.

“Thanks a lot for the surprise, Neeta! But how could you know that 10<sup>th</sup> April is my birthday and I am 22”.

“That’s a secret of this surprise! And deliberately I couldn’t wish you when we met in the morning”.

“But, Neeta I don’t have anyone with whom I can contact on phone”.

“I’m there, my dear, Rahul”.

“The loneliness of four days of Holi festival made me restless and I wanted to gift you a cell phone so that I could be in touch with you. Then I went to the university office and got the information about your date of birth and thus came the surprise!”

“But, why you gifted me such a costly cell phone!”

“Don’t see the cost! See my heart! Be in touch with me regularly! Here is the prepaid sim card!”

Both dined together and moved to their respective hostels.

The examinations were over. After examinations, two more days Neeta and Rahul stayed there. Neeta arranged for a taxi and they visited Raigad Fort, Mahad Chawdar Tank and Mahabaleshwar.

The luxurious BMW car came to take away Neeta. Once again Ganesh, the driver of Champatrao Deshmukh saw the same boy talking with Neeta. He loaded the luggage and got ready to drive but it took half an hour. Then Neeta got in the car on the back seat, informing Rahul to be in touch with her and she also promised that she would regularly recharge for him. Both dispersed with tears in their eyes.

The next day Rahul packed his luggage and got ready to go to Kalyan to catch Sewagram Express. He was waiting for bus to go to Kalyan at Lonere Bus Stop. Suddenly a police van came. A policeman got down the van and enquired “Are you Rahul Sontakke?”

“Yes, sir. I’m Rahul”.

“Please, come and have your seat in the van, I’d drop you at Kalyan Railway Station”.

“But, how do you know, sir that I’ve to go to Kalyan? And who told you to do so?”

“I don’t know. But my officer ordered me to pick you”.

The policeman drove his car towards Goregaon instead leading towards Mangaon.

“Sir, why are your driving towards Goregaon?” I asked.



“My officer asked me to do so. I think some other person has to be taken in the van”.

When the van reached Goregaon Police Station, Inspector Pratap Singh Naik asked the police constable Shankar Vaidya to check the cell phone and ask Rahul for the documents related to it and the sim card.

“Sir, why are you checking it? Am I a thief?”

“Yes, you have stolen this handset”.

“No, sir. It has been gifted to me by my friend”.

“What’s the name of your friend?”

“Neeta”.

“Who’s this Neeta?”

“Neeta Champatrao Deshmukh”.

“Oh! So clever boy!”

“Shankar, put him in the custody”.

“Sir, I’ve done nothing wrong. Just see there is the number of Neeta. You can call her and confirm the matter”.

“Don’t tell us what to do. We know what the thieves have to say. We’ve confirmed everything. Come”.

Rahul was put in the custody. His cell was switched off and the sim card was removed. He was given third degree treatment in the police station in such a way that he was not in the position even to tell his name and address. Just he was uttering, “Call Neeta” repeatedly.

The next day DSP Alibag, Bhaskar Jadhao informed the Inspector Pratap Singh Naik to admit Rahul in the Thane Mental Hospital, the state’s biggest facility for psychologically ill patients and close his file telling the hospital authorities the case is from the streets without mentioning his name and address.

The Thane Mental Hospital has a long history of treating mentally ill patients. Throughout recorded history the city has left its mark under various names. However, its present-day name Thane is said to be derived from ‘Sthan’ or ‘Sthanaka’, the capital of the Shilahara kings of Konkan. The Thane Mental Hospital was built in 1901. Since then it has shaped the future of a number of mentally ill persons. Suresh Gondhali is one of the many people who are leading a normal life after being treated at the Thane Mental Hospital. While Suresh was dropped at the institution by his family, over the two years, Thane Mental Hospital with the help from the Neptune Foundation, has picked up 60 mentally ill destitutes from the streets, right from Ghatkopar till Kalva, and offered them treatment. Of these 60 people, 43 have been reunited with their families within a year. Neptune Foundation picks up homeless people suffering from mental disorders from the streets, and gets them admitted at Thane Mental Hospital with help from the police and with due court permissions. Their treatment includes medication along with counseling, and once their health improves and they manage to remember details about their kin, the foundation reunites them with their families. One such person is Milind Rahangdale, who was found on the streets in Mulund. After offering him initial medication, he was shifted to the mental hospital wherein after treatment, he managed to divulge a few random details about his hometown. Soon, his family was traced and he was reunited with his mother and two brothers. Dr RY Shinde, medical superintendent (regional), Thane Mental Hospital says, “Since the patients stay without their families, our staff takes complete responsibility to look after them. All

of us are like a big family.” One of the most successful stories would be that of Suresh Gondhali. After receiving treatment, his life has taken a drastic turn. Eventually, after he was discharged and reunited with his family, he started working as an administration supervisor at Neptune Foundation itself. Here in this hospital destitute patients are also given vocational training so that they could see their bright future. To such a charitable and humane institute finally Rahul was admitted. Everything was kept in secret: his name, address, and his education and the institute where he educated. The last hope was there that like many mentally ill distitutes, Rahul could also be treated to start a new life.

Pradnya Karwade, an occupational therapist, was working there in the Thane Mental Hospital when Rahul was admitted. She was from Nagpur and recently transferred from mental hospital Nagpur. She was given the responsibility of Rahul. As mentioned by the medical superintendent Dr R Y Shinde, every staff member takes care of every patient like a family member.

Every time this newly admitted patient was repeating “Call Neeta”. This patient was given treatment for a fortnight and his counseling started. He was very responsive to the treatment and Pradnya Karwade began to feel happy. She felt that she would be successful in her effort to help Rahul regain his mental health. In spite of all her efforts she could not find out “Who was Neeta?” and “Why was this patient every now and then uttering Call Neeta?” But she had a long experience of 24 years of handling such patients. The repetition “Call Neeta” went nearly for nine months.

Meanwhile Rahul’s parents who were waiting for the return of Rahul from Dr Bbabsaheb Ambedkar Technological University, Lonere. When a fortnight passed, Rahul’s father phoned to the office and he was shocked to know that every student left the hostel fifteen to twenty days ago. The warden told Shamrao Sontakke that Rahul left the hostel on 17<sup>th</sup> May. Shamrao fainted when he heard this. When he regained his strength he just started crying and Sugandha also joined him. Rahul’s parents could do nothing.

In the month of July the result was out. Every student came and collected Mark Sheet and Leaving Certificates except Neeta and Rahul. Both passed this examination with distinction. All the seven semester Neeta passed with first division but last semester she passed with distinction in all subjects. Perhaps this could have been the effect of her discussion of study with Rahul, who had been the topper in all the semesters.

Every day Neeta tried to contact Rahul but his cell phone was switched off. She had opened the surprised as she had promised her father to tell when the examinations would over. When the minister knew from her darling daughter he pretended his unwillingness for the marriage of his sole daughter with a Mahar boy saying “My dear Nitu, I am your loving father and could do anything for your happiness”. And Neeta was overjoyed with this answer without knowing the real face of her father. When the result was declared the minister sent his PA Raghao Kakde to collect his daughter’s Mark Sheet and Leaving Certificate and in her presence told him to get the address of Rahul Sontakke so that they could contact him. But he knew everything about Rahul. Raghao Kakde reported the minister in the evening that Rahul could not collect his documents and also told him that Rahul’s parents had lodged a missing complaint about Rahul. He also informed that Rahul got placement in TISCO with a package of 7 lakh per annum. But Rahul could not collect it too. This gave a great shock to Neeta who started crying loudly. The minister consoled her saying that the very next day he would go to Narayanpur, the native of Rahul and

try to sort out the matter. He also promised his daughter that he would inform the police to solve the problem soon. Immediately he rang the DSP Alibag, Bhaskar Jadhao informing him to send the orders to the Samudrapur Police Station under which the area of Rahul's native comes. It was his pretend.

Pradnya Karwade gave this new patient a name Nitesh because of his uttering "Call Neeta".

One day Pradnya called him as "Nitesh".

He came and asked her, "Is my name Nitesh?"

"Yes. I gave it to you. And hereafter I'd call you by that name till you regain your mental strength".

Rahul shook his head positively.

That day Pradnya tried hard to enable Rahul recall his past but she could not succeed.

After dinner Pradnya gave Rahul the medicine and then he went to bed. In the midnight he suddenly started shouting "I've done nothing wrong. Don't torture me. I haven't stolen this cell phone. It's been gifted to me by my friend Neeta. Call Neeta and get confirmed what I say".

Pradnya was called by the staff to look after Nitesh. She came. Caught hold of him and uttered, "Nitesh!"

"Who is Nitesh? My name is Rahul Shamrao Sontakke. I'm not Nitesh. And where am I? How could I come here? I was about to go to my native Narayanpur, District Wardha. Who brought me here?" And then he recollected the whole incident at Lonere and the treatment he got at Police Station Goregaon. But he kept himself silent on this matter. Now the authorities of the Thane Mental Hospital decided to contact Rahul's parents and send him with them as he was recalling everything about his past.

Meanwhile the minister told his daughter that in spite all the efforts by the police department, the search of Rahul was beyond their approach. He also pretended that the wretched status of his lovely daughter is causing pain to him and began to shed false tears. Neeta was moved by the tears of his father. For her he was the loving father and next was Rahul dear to her.

She consoled her father saying, "Baba, I'd would do what you decide about me. I don't know where my Rahul has disappeared. But I can't cause you much pain. Please decide my fate".

The minister once again pretended. He said to her, "I'll find a suitable match for you. And immediately I would arrange for your marriage so that you could lead your future with happiness. I'll start the search for the bridegroom. I do not see the tears in the lovely eyes of my lovely daughter".

The next day the minister reported to his daughter and wife that DSP Bhaskar Jadhao has agreed to the proposal of his son Ramesh Jadhao for Neeta. His son is an IAS officer of 2006-batch and is about to finish his training the next week. When he comes they'd have marriage. "Are you ready for this proposal, Nitu?"

"As you wish, Baba".

Finally the marriage took place in a grand way on 25th July 2008.

The medical superintendent of the Thane Mental Hospital contacted the Inspector, Police Station Goregaon, who told him if the patient admitted by his officers on duty is back in his senses and recognizes his name and his parents, then the mental hospital authorities should hand over him to his parents. He also promised the authorities that there shall be no problem from the police station.

A message was sent to Shamrao Sontakke to come to the Mental Hospital Thane to identify their son Rahul and take him with them. With the help of the police staff, Sugandha and Shamrao Sontakke came to the hospital and after all official formalities took Rahul home.

“I spent one year in the painful experience of the mental hospital, but more painful for me was the charges levied on me by the police. I could not tell anyone anything about police incident and my love story. I understood all the causes of this suffering: the power. For me the ‘caste’ was more unbearable than all my pains at the hands of the police and at the mental hospital”.

As one year has elapsed since his placement order from TISCO, he could not get that job and now he was preparing for off-campus placement. When he got the love letter in the book, the whole past flashed from in his mind.

His mother gave a call, “Rahul, lunch is ready. Come and have it”. Mother’s call brought me to senses. “I closed the book; wiped my face and went inside for his lunch”.

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(Note: The story is my original composition. The characters in the story are imaginary and any similarity with any living or dead are just a co-incident. I declare that this story has not been published yet. - Dr M. S. Wankhede)