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## The Slaying of the Demon

Sridhar Venkatasubramanian

The festive mood had fully set in Kolkata with the start of the *Durga Puja* (also known as *Dussehra* or *Navratri* in other parts of the country). Dull grey monsoon clouds had given way to bright blue sky. There was a slight nip in the air in the mornings, signalling the arrival of pleasant winter days ahead.

It was the 2nd day of the Pujas and I was sitting on the balcony of my house in south Kolkata, enjoying my cup of tea.

My sister, who stays in the suburbs, had come with her kids, to stay with us for the Puja holidays. She and the missus were talking loudly, planning about evening outings, saris, and so on. My nephews were creating a racket in the living room, drowning out even the sound of the loudspeakers from the nearby Puja pandal. It was quite a din, but I was not perturbed. After all it was 'the Pujas'. I looked around myself and felt quite happy.

I have lived in this city for so many years, and yet, I cannot not fathom how it totally transforms into a fairy tale land during the four days of Durga Puja. There was an air of joviality everywhere and my house was no exception.

I could not help but recall, how a demon had come very close in destroying this happiness in my household.

It was the first Durga Puja season after my marriage. My sister, like every year came to my place, along with her kids. But I could sense that my wife was not very happy with this.

"This is difficult. I was planning to invite some of my friends" my wife hissed at me.

"What's the problem in that. My sister is not going to stand in the way"

"You do not understand. I do not want to introduce a semi-illiterate village girl as my sister-in-law, to my friends".

You see, my wife was born and brought up in Delhi in a cosmopolitan society, whereas my sister was a plain Jane from rural Bengal.

"She comes only during the Pujas and I always look forward to her visit" I told her firmly.

The result - my wife cancelled all her programs and stayed indoors saying she was not feeling well. I do not know whether my sister sensed something or not, but the next day she was preparing to go back.

“You take care. *Boudi* (Bengali for brother’s wife) needs some rest and peace, but the kids are always creating a racket. It is better I leave with them” she said.

I reluctantly bade her farewell during mid-Pujas.

Next year , my wife insisted that we spend the Pujas with her brother in Delhi. She threw a tantrum when I told that she should be mad to even think of going out of Kolkata during Pujas.

But when I called up my sister, she told me , “*Dada* (brother) , you should not be selfish. Take her to Delhi. May be she feels homesick during the Pujas. We can meet some other time”

So, off we went to Delhi. My brother-in-law , a top executive in an MNC and his wife, Chairperson of an NGO, welcomed us, warmly. We had brought *boudi* a very special Bengal cotton sari. She accepted it gracefully and told us that she would keep it for some special occasion.

We spent three days there, enjoying dinner in 5-star hotels, attending cocktail parties, moving around Delhi in a chauffeur-driven Mercedes. All thanks to our high profile hosts.

This year also my wife insisted that we go to Delhi. After much debating, I reluctantly accompanied her.

This time the reception in Delhi seemed a little cool. But I brushed the thought aside immediately, as a figment of my imagination.

We were shown to the guest room. The housemaid brought us tea and snacks and left.

“Did you see what the maid was wearing? It is the sari that we gave *boudi* last year.” my wife told.

“ You are imagining things. Come, take out the gifts we have brought for *dada* & *boudi*”

We were about to knock on their room, when we heard *boudi*’s voice in a rather loud tone,

“ .....you mean to say that you are going to sit there and allow your sister and her petty bank employee husband to come here every Dussehra. You know it is only during these holidays we are able to entertain people of our circle at our home. And you know these two don’t fit in our society. Last year itself, I heard some of my club members making some catty remarks. I don’t know about you , but in our home we don’t allow these types within arm’s length.....”

We did not remain there much longer. At lunch table I told our hosts that I had received a distress call from home and therefore had to rush back.

During the day-long train journey back, my wife did not utter a single word. She just sat still, looking grim.

As soon as we entered our house, she asked for my phone and I could hear her talking to my sister.

“*Didi* (Sister), we have come back to Kolkata. Tomorrow, you catch the first local train in the morning and come prepared to stay with us for the Pujas. Bring the kids..... No, I will not take ‘no’ for an answer. *Didi*, I miss you so much . Please do come, please”

Then she covered her face and started sobbing uncontrollably. I patted her back softly, but allowed her to cry. I thought tears were the only way to lessen the burden she was carrying.

It is said that Durga Puja marks not only the arrival of Maa (Goddess Mother) but also the slaying of the demon.

This Durga Puja, Maa in her own mysterious way had helped the slaying of a demon called ego which had hitherto been in my wife’s heart.

With a lightened heart , I started to look forward to savour the revival of Puja Spirit in our home.

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**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.