**THE RED-LETTER DAY**

“ BELIEVE IN YOURSELF AND ALL THAT YOU ARE .

KNOW THAT THERE IS SOMETHING INSIDE YOU

THAT IS GREATER THAN ANY OBSTACLE.”

The hall was packed with audience. It was a dance show. Dance performances by upcoming young talented artists.

Everyone was engrossed in the mesmerizing performances . Every move, every gesture, every poise, every flicker of their eyelids, expressed their grace and perfection.

Then came Gautami , Gautami Bhatt… she was young ,fresh and graceful. She came to perform the Ganesh Vandana.

My mind flew eight years back, when I had witnessed her performing the same Ganesh Vandana in our school auditorium.

Yes, she was my pupil Gautami; a special child in a special school. She was a victim of Cerebral Palsy- a motor neuron disorder.

She had a partially impaired vision and speech.

It had also affected her body movements, muscle coordination and motor skills.

I still remember my first encounter with her. She was twelve years old. Just a kid; disabled limb movements, impaired speech and a blank gaze. She stared at me. I tried to smile at her, but she didn’t . .. just a blank stare…

I was working as a visiting teacher to their school to teach these children art & craft. Most of the students belonged to the educable group.

Though majority of them had no idea of the world of colours, still they could hold a colour crayon and fill in the colours . But Gautami couldn’t. she just didn’t have the grip.

I tried to help her out, but she was reluctant to cooperate. Suddenly she looked up at me with utter hostility and gave a smack on my face. Her hand was strong and heavy. I was not at all prepared for it. I was completely taken aback.

“Gautami, what’s this? “ her teacher couldn’t believe it.

Is this the way to behave with a teacher?”

But there was no feeling of remorse in her eyes, nothing had affected her.

Her teacher took the drawing sheet from her and flung it away in a fit of anger.

“ Gautami, you are punished ; no colouring for you today. First say sorry to your teacher.”

But Gautami didn’t budge an inch , didn’t flicker her eyes. She just sat still.

I too didn’t react. I just needed little more time to know them and understand them. I told myself, remember why they are here and why you are here.

After the drawing class was over , I went up to her ,she was just sitting doing nothing. Her drawing sheet was still lying on the ground.

I slowly went up to her, picked up her drawing sheet and gave it in her hand. She looked at me. I smiled at her and gently patted her on her back.

She looked at me and smiled. Caught both her ears and made a gesture to say sorry. Then she made the alphabet V with her two fingers and placed it on her lips. I understood her sign language it meant- I am friends with you.

I was not prepared for this either. It deeply touched my heart. I too, replied to her with the same sign language.

That was the day our friendship was born and as the days passed by , it was slowly blossoming.

Gautami was a very good dancer inspite of her disabilities. Though she had no expression in her eyes , she could correctly pick up every dance step.

At the end of the year, Gautami’s father got a transfer to Surat and that was the end of our alliance.

And today , after eight long years I was seeing Gautami , seeing her dance once again.

After her dance , she came back and sat with her mother. After the show , I went up to her to congratulate her and her mother. She was very happy to see me. I saw a million of sparkling stars studded in her eyes. she made the alphabet V and greeted me. So .. she had not forgotten our sign language.

Her journey was not easy , it was of ups and downs, trials and failures. But Gautami was a born fighter, she didn’t give up inspite of all the odds and ordeals. Looking at her face I could feel the fulfillment in her heart . It was indeed a Red Letter day for both of us.

**Curie Pereira**