

The PVC pipe (based on a true story)

Raghu the 12 year old rag picker was walking down the footpath headed towards an unknown destination he knew not where. His work was to pick up rags, plastic pipes and tin jars and sell them at the end of the day at government recycle centers to earn some money. What was garbage to others was the means of his daily meal for about five years now.

At home his mother and two younger sisters were waiting for him patiently to return with the sum. His abusive father had left them to die five years ago, his mother worked in a cycle factory which was now shut.

He didn't like this job, not because it was physical pain but because there was nothing to learn in it. He loved to learn and to study and yet it had been three years since he last attended school. It was not the money that stopped school government schools do not take fees but, it was the time; he needed to work. At least he had been strong enough not to become a thief.

Raghu earned almost fifty to sixty rupees a day which was not much but was enough to replenish a day's provision to the family.

He wondered as he walked where his father would be and how he would be. He didn't feel angry about it because anger was a distraction to work and he couldn't afford to be angry at work. His bag felt heavier; that was good the heavier the bag the heavier the pocket.

He crossed a drain and picked up a PVC pipe from in front of a house, as he did that he heard a loud scream from a man who thundered out of his house and shrieked in his high base voice

“Thief, Thief”

Immediately a crowd gathered around the house with a concerned look on their face. The man snatched the pipe from Raghu's hands and said

“How dare you steal my stuff?”

“I was not stealing sir” said Raghu calmly he could hear the whispers in the crowd”....so young...Thief in the locality...what have his parents taught him...shame....” Still he maintained his supernatural patients.

“Not stealing? Then am I lying?” said the man

Raghu fell silent.

“Go from here you rascal illiterate bastard and never ever step in this locality otherwise....”

Tears rolled down Raghu's eyes. He had been named thief by the society. He silently picked up his jute bag and replied in a low trembling tone

“Yes sir”

And left penetrating the crowd

He wiped his tears as he put up the load to his shoulders and began walking. He was not crying because he was insulted and wrongly been accused as a thief but because he couldn't make sixty rupees today.

-----Ronit Banerjee

please comment