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# Preface

It’s been a while that I have been thinking that I should write, many thoughts have come and gone and I haven’t penned them. Well, I don’t think I am a writer but I am a good story teller. My expressions, my body language and modulation of my voice generally create a great story of a small event. But will I be able to express the same in words? An uphill task, but surely worth giving a try.

I have not been a voracious reader, but I read, I read anything and everything which can trigger a thought process or provide wings to my imagination or even sometimes bring me back to reality. So yes, I do read but if someone asks me to accept a challenge to share 10 best books that I have read, I may not be able to provide a single name. Am I confused? Not really. Am I completely sorted? Haha, not at all. I am a very common person just one amongst you who has had an opportunity to meet a lot of people, learn from their experiences, few of my own experiences during the course of my professional life of over 20 years.

Recently, I read Sudha Murthy again and realised I also have quite a few eventful experiences which I could share with my readers. Furthermore, her simple style and easy narration encouraged me to write. I am certainly not a philanthropist and neither am I as travelled or as experienced as her but, I am sure my few stories will bring a smile on your face or even make you ponder.

# Chapter 1: When my son taught me, what is out of the box thinking?

As a baby, my son would not talk a lot; he would constantly be thinking or listening, for more I can say crying. He was born pre-term. I dislike the work pre-mature. I always feel babies are matured in their own way and when they are born pre-term they mature much faster since they are subjected to hardships much earlier in their lives unlike the other normal born ones.

I am a Konkani, married to a Marathi, post my delivery we moved to Hyderabad for work so in the very tender age my child was subjected to multiple languages. I would interact with him in Konkani, my husband in Marathi, the land lady where we stayed spoke with him in Telugu and my colleagues and neighbours either in Hindi or English. Probably, this was the reason why my son went mute till about 18 months and then he started to respond in the same language the other person would talk to him. But he was still slow to speak or rather chose not to speak.

My interactions with him during those days were very enlightening and entertaining.

During his pre-primary school PTM, I saw all his classmates talking, especially the girls, all animated and excited and expressing themselves freely. I saw a girl speaking very clearly her name and age. “My name is Aahna, and I am 2 years old”. And there was my son who had to be coaxed to speak, but then I was not going to give up. So I kept on teaching him,” If someone asks you how old are you?” You should say,” I am 2 years old”. After about 20 minutes, my son turned around and pointed out to his “2 ears” and asked, “mamma, 2 ears?” That is when I realised my son was not the one to do rote learning, he was the one who would learn from observations and experience and I would have to be patient.

As he grew old, we as parents learnt new ways of thinking from him. Once I asked him, who is the tallest person in your class? He was quick to say, “Swaroopa Ma’am”. That’s when I realised how important it is to be very precise and clear in your question, since his interpretation of my ask was very innocent and clear.

Vyom’s innocence was always an eye opener for me and I realised that we as parents and adults subject these kids to immense pressure. Once he was asked in his school what he would like to be when he grows up. My son kept on crying the whole day at school after listening to this question. Once he got home, I received a call from his school coordinator explaining me the situation. I told her I will try to reason out with him, but it is very difficult to understand what a 3 and half year old child would cry for. Nevertheless, I and my husband decided to discuss with him. It was a normal practice that I had started at home that every evening once we were all back home from work and school respectively we would sit together and share our daily experience. The 3 year old understood this and always contributed with his poems and stories from school. But today, was a special day, he did not share anything but kept quiet. After Vinay and I finished our stories for the day we asked Vyom about his day. He said, “I cried”. When asked why? He said,” I was scared”. I asked him as to why he was scared? To this he replied, “I was asked, what will I become when I grow up?” My husband said, “Yes, so what is there to be scared about?” To our surprise Vyom said, “Why should I become something, I want to remain Vyom, why will I change when I grow up?” Vyom managed to give us a life lesson. We never change and we should not change. We remain the same even when we grow up. I could understand his insecurity and scare, we explained him that he would remain the same and it’s just what is it that he would like to do when he grows up, was the question that his teacher had asked. After a lot of thinking and a silence Vyom said “FATHER”. ☺

I have come to believe that kids are our best teachers and the modern education is the real culprit in compartmentalizing their imagination and curbing their thought processes.

# Chapter 2: How education convolutes the child mind!

One of my managers, when I worked in a MNC, had a Christian name and a Muslim surname. For the sake of maintaining privacy, name changed, Jeniffer Shaikh. When she first joined the organization we were all very intrigued by this name. She was a very dynamic lady and would come across as very confident and liberal person. As days passed, we got to know each other better and she told me that her mother was a Christian and had married a Hindu. So she had a Christain name and a Hindu surname earlier and during her medical college days she met Aslam Shaikh, who was her husband so now she had a Muslim surname. Her story really fascinated me. Her son, Zais was a very smart kid. We would meet him during any family gatherings and he would come across as a very intelligent kid just like his parents. One day, Jeniffer, got back from her family vacation and she narrated us an experience. Zais had to fly to Chennai to his grandparents home with the flight assistant since both Aslam and Jennifer had work commitments and it was Zais’s summer vacation. So Zais took a flight from Goa to Chennai whereas the parents took the flight to Mumbai. While on the flight the airhostess was very curios just like anybody else with a closed thought process and asked Zais , “your mother is a Christian, Father is a Muslim and the Grandfather coming to pick you up has a Hindu name so what are you?” Young Zais in the blink of the moment said “INDIAN”.

I am a Konkani, married to a Marathi so once at school; Vyom (2.5 year old) was asked a question, “What is your mother tongue?” Vyom said, “PINK”. ☺

# Chapter3: Our Education system and it’s pressures

My sister’s son, Vivan, is the most creative kid. He is curious and has counter questions for everything that one says and when no one has a solution he has one. Vivan can keep everyone entertained to the fullest. This is the story of 10 year old Vivan.

Once for official data collection his school had sent a form for his parents to fill in which had basic details including the blood group. My sister filled the form and asked Vivan to submit it to his class teacher. Next day at school, Vivan and his friend, before submitting, opened the form and started reading the details. Vivan saw that against the blood group column “O+” was written. Vivan immediately used his pencil and cancelled this and wrote “A+”. His friend, Saksham, saw this and change and made a similar change in his form as well. In the class of 25 students, 15 students ended up making this change. All the kids submitted these forms. In the evening, when my sister got back home she received a message from school to re-send the details in a Whatsapp message. Unaware of the changes made by Vivan , she sent in the details. Next day at school, the class teacher ended up questioning every kid as to why this change was made and each one answered that the other kid did so I did. And eventually, it boiled down to Vivan that he was responsible for the trigger. When questioned by his teacher Vivan chose not to answer the rationale behind this change. So like any school, my sister was informed of this action. In the evening, when my sister got back from work, she asked Vivan the reason for making such a change to which Vivan answered, “Am I not supposed to score “A+” in all the subjects then, how can my blood group be “O+”?”

My sister found it very hard to explain the alphabet change to Vivan. This incident makes me ponder, have we removed all the fun and excitement of learning from our education system? Has it come down to only scores and grades? What as parents and teachers can we do to bring back the lost glory of entertainment, fun and learning to education?

# Chapter4: Friends – acquaintances or ...

I studied in the most prestigious college in the Mumbai, although I lived on the outskirts of Mumbai, I still had managed to score enough marks to secure an admission in Ramnarain Ruia College.

I completed my bachelors in statistics and then further completed my masters from the University of Mumbai. I was reasonably good in studies, although never stood first but managed to secure a third position almost every year. I made few good friends there (I thought)☺ But time taught me that these were associations with expectations since each relation had some expectation. The friendship which we make during our school days is the purest form of friendship with no expectations or presumptions. All those girls who used to call me for notes or study related support never kept in touch with me once they were settled in life. I have practically travelled from Dombivli to various locations in Mumbai on weekends when I had only day off from my work to help them prepare for their final exams or for their MBA papers, but ones they secured good scores/ a prestigious job none have called me to inform or even thank me.

Once for a similar reason, to help my friend from Ruia in Statistics for her MBA paper I went to Matunga. Her exam was in the afternoon so she asked me to come over by 7:00 AM. I stayed in Dombivli and did not intend to trouble by mother to make an early breakfast on a Saturday, so left the house with just a cup of tea by 5:30 AM so that I could reach her house on time. I have always been very punctual; I rang her door bell exactly at 7:00 AM. She stayed in a very plush locality, the five gardens, in Mumbai. I had never seen such a big house then, I hail from a middle class family and lived in a 1 BHK apartment, so to see a 5 BHK was kind of a surreal experience for me. The door was opened by her mother, who wasn’t expecting me. This was a very different experience for me, since in our house we knew everything about every family member and the entire house would be ready to welcome any of the family member’s guests. I had to introduce myself and then my friend was alerted about my presence and then she came to escort me in. Well we spend about 3 hours studying together and solving all possible doubts. In all this while, I was offered just a glass of water. When we finished with our session and I was just about to leave, my friend told me that on her way to the examination centre she would drop me to the railway station. So I waited for her to get ready. While I was waiting, her mother asked me would I like to have anything and going by our normal (Indian) culture of saying no, I said “No Aunty”. I was expecting, like in my household, I would be requested, insisted to have something and then I would eventually agree. But to my surprise nothing of this sort happened. I front of me Aunty prepared a grilled cheese sandwich and juice for my friend and I sat there waiting for her to finish.

While waiting, I was reminded of an incident while in school, one of my buddy’s was unwell and teacher had asked me to stop by at her house and give her the class work so that she could prepare for her exams. Her house was enroute to my house, so I decided to visit that very evening after school. Her father was a textile mill worker and they stayed in a very small house with only 1 big room which had a cloth partition denoting the kitchen area. When I reached her house, I saw that my buddy was lying on the small cot. She had recovered from fever but was still feeling week. I inquired about her health and handed over her books to her. At that time her mother was making Jowar Bhakri (flat Indian bread made of Jowar flour) on a stove and was piling them for their dinner. While I was about to leave, aunty stopped me and said that I could not leave the house without having the Bhakri. She insisted that l have it and even warned me that she would never talk to me if I would leave without eating.

These incidents remind me of the Marathi phrase “Pahila Java Shrimanta Kade Ani Khayla Java Gariba Kade”.

Love stories—Smita, Renu, Hema