

# The Comfort of Distance

Storyline Literature: Leo Tolstoy (90% Realism & 10% Romanticism)

The main concern of short stories in modern literature is never about providing a solution or exploration, but to help people acknowledge that an issue exists by explaining the context.

Here, I tried to give almost no closure—just like real life. Only reflection makes sense.

The Sabido Method is a social learning technique based on renowned social psychologist Albert Bandura, used by various serials to bring about positive changes, especially in developing countries where societies are collectivist and less educated.

Tell them numbers, facts, or data—they will forget within a day.  
Tell them an emotional story, and they will remember it for a longer duration.

The Sabido Method, developed by Miguel Sabido in the 1970s, promotes positive social change—especially in areas like health, education, gender equality, and population control—through entertainment-education (E-E), particularly via radio and TV dramas.

The key idea is “creating intense characters” so that, even if a less educated person does not fully understand the issue directly, they start relating to the characters. Sooner or later, they discuss the characters with family and friends, which ultimately leads to discussions about the issues related to those characters.

Success Stories:

Mexico: Family planning through the soap opera *Ven Conmigo*.

India: Doordarshan's *Hum Log* addressed family size and gender equality.

South Africa: *Soul City* series addressed HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria: Radio and TV dramas promoting women's rights, child education, and health.

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## Chapter 1 - The Flight

Urvi Jain, 40, works in the finance department at Barclays Bank in London. Her life is structured, independent, and outwardly sorted.

Her old friend from Delhi University, Anvi Jain, now working as an HR professional in Germany, arrived in London to fly together to India.

Anvi's husband and son had already left for Udaipur weeks earlier and were waiting there.

From London, Urvi and Anvi flew to Jaipur, where Anvi's parents live.

During the flight, the conversation began with Urvi's animal activism—her deep involvement in wildlife protection, her solo travels across Africa, and her passion for photography.

But gradually, as often happens, Urvi ran out of things to say—she's introverted, and her current life rarely overlaps with Anvi's.

Naturally, the focus shifted to Anvi's life—her husband, her son, their festivals, conflicts, the warmth and chaos of family life.

Somewhere in between, Urvi was reminded of her singleness—the absence of a child, a partner, a household filled with voices.

She's fiercely aware that the Earth doesn't need more humans—its carrying capacity is 1.8 billion, and we're already at 8 billion, with 70% of the world living in some form of absurd poverty. And yet, even with that awareness, her loneliness in a city like London is undeniable—the absence of belonging often feels more suffocating than the noise of crowds. Over time, she has learned to deal with it. She's developed well-practiced answers to justify her life choices—logical, sharp, often inspiring. People respect her choices. Some even join her in the causes she supports. But deep within, she isn't always fully sure of herself—her confidence is a rehearsed layer, not a rooted truth.

## Chapter 2 - Arrival

After landing in Jaipur in the afternoon, Urvi and Anvi stayed at Anvi's parents' home for the night. Anvi's elderly parents, quiet and affectionate, welcomed them with warmth and simple home-cooked food—just the way Urvi liked it. The next morning, they left early for Udaipur, where Anvi's husband Vikram and son Dev were already waiting. That afternoon, the entire family visited the Ranakpur Jain Temple—a place of silence, symmetry, and spiritual stillness. Inside the temple, they sat in silence, side by side, letting the stone walls and cool air quiet their thoughts. Later, they posted a few photos on Instagram—group pictures, intricate temple carvings, and a few candid smiles. Anant Jain, Anvi's childhood neighbour, whom she considered a big brother and who is now a senior IPS officer, commented: "Nice pic, good to see you all at Udaipur." That evening, they visited Anant's home, where he lived with his wife and children. He was on a week-long leave. Using his influence, Anant helped Urvi complete the final stage of her paperwork—something that would've taken days, done in just a few hours. Everyone expressed their condolences for the loss of Urvi's parents, who had died in a car accident in Uttarakhand the previous year due to harsh weather conditions. The next morning, Anvi, Vikram, and Dev left for Vadodara to visit Vikram's brother. Anant and Urvi dropped them at the railway station personally. On the drive back, Anant told Urvi about his plans for a PhD in the future, and his desire to research rehabilitation and reintegration systems.

## Chapter 3 - The Visit

To help Urvi understand things more clearly, Anant took her to an old age home, where a few elderly former prisoners—abandoned by their families in their later years—lived alongside other senior citizens who had been left behind by their children. The facility was modestly built, jointly funded by the state government and the Reliance Foundation, with a capacity for only 50 residents. Anant and Urvi spent some quiet time observing the environment met few older folks before moving to the meeting room, where they were joined by Gauri, a psychologist and social worker from the Reliance Foundation. Gauri shared a few brief stories about the residents, offering Urvi a glimpse into the harsh and often hidden realities of old age in India. Most elderly people in India are not as saintly or innocent as often portrayed in traditional narratives. While many do show signs of forgiveness and calmness, it's often not due to spiritual maturity, but rather the natural weakening of memory, body, and mental strength.

Emotional manipulation and family politics are common—both by elderly parents and their adult children.

Many people raise children with the hope that they will serve as emotional and financial support in old age.

Most children fail to meet their parents' expectations in old age—some grow distant, others go as far as abandonment.

There is no clear pattern—parents have been abandoned regardless of whether they had six children or just two, whether their children were biological or adopted, and whether or not parents had a criminal record.

Anant shared an observation from his 20+ years in law enforcement:

“After inequality, broken parent-child relationships are the most common factor behind crimes.”

He expressed his frustration with Indian academia, particularly the lack of interdisciplinary approaches in studying social issues. Anant said he wants to pursue a PhD in the U.S., where fields like psychology, sociology, criminology, and law intersect, and where access to domain experts would help him ask better, more meaningful questions.

He also spoke candidly about his personal regrets:

As an IPS officer, he missed his son's early childhood due to constant transfers and workload.

Even when time allowed, he chose to stay distant to avoid conflicts he had with his wife at that time. He admitted: “I escaped responsibilities by burying myself in extra work.”

Urvi listened silently, taking in the layers of Anant's experience.

She left the conversation feeling more confused and conflicted—realizing that human lives, relationships, and regrets are far more complex and layered than they appear from a distance.

## Chapter 4 - Reflection

The next morning, Anant and his family left for Nagpur to visit his brother's family.

Before parting, Urvi thanked them warmly—for helping her with the paperwork, for the hospitality, and for the thoughtful conversations.

Anant dropped her at The Oberoi Udaivilas, where Urvi had planned a regal retreat for the remainder of her stay in Udaipur.

With time to herself, she began exploring the city's most important landmarks, each wrapped in elegance:

**City Palace, Udaipur :** A private guided tour through the palace's grand halls, mirrored chambers, and royal courtyards — with exclusive access to galleries and panoramic lake views from the royal balconies.

**Lake Pichola :** A sunset boat ride across the lake, gliding past Jag Mandir and Jag Niwas (Taj Lake Palace), with champagne in hand and the golden light painting the water in hues of amber.

**Bagore Ki Haveli :** VIP access to the Dharohar Dance Show, followed by a curated walkthrough of royal artifacts, traditional costumes, and glasswork in the restored 18th-century haveli.

**Sajjangerh (Monsoon Palace) :** A drive to the hilltop palace at dusk — offering panoramic views of Udaipur's lakes and palaces, just as the sky turned a lavender blue over the Aravallis.

**Jagdish Temple :** A brief but soulful visit to the 17th-century temple, admiring its intricate carvings and the rhythmic chants that echoed through the inner sanctum.

**Shilpgram :** A detour into traditional village arts and crafts, where Urvi explored authentic Rajasthani textiles, pottery, and tribal paintings in a serene, curated space.

**Fateh Sagar Lake :** A peaceful evening walk along the promenade, followed by coffee at The Wadi Café, watching the sun dip behind Nehru Park on the island.

On her final night in Udaipur, she logged into Twitter after a few months.

A familiar name popped up on her timeline, in a post where he was sitting beside the Chief Minister: Rajveer—one of her batchmates from DU, now a sitting Member of Parliament. He used to organize programmes for marginalized sections of society and was actively involved with NGOs during their college days.

That moment pulled her inward, triggering a long wave of introspection.

She had barely spoken to Rajveer during college, nor had she engaged much with students from communities different from hers.

Most of Urvi's time at university had been spent obsessing over grades, memorizing a syllabus she now realizes was at least 50% irrelevant—even back then.

This academic obsession had stolen the time she could have used to explore beyond textbooks—but she hadn't, largely due to her parents' repeated warnings: "Focus on your studies and stay away from boys, especially those from other communities."

She recalled a time when a feminism awareness programme was organized on campus:

Very few male students, even from marginalized communities, participated.

She and her female friends also didn't attend any awareness programmes focused on caste and religious discrimination.

Looking back, she realized how the feminism movement she had witnessed in college had excluded minority and lower-caste women entirely. Today, she has no idea where those women are or what happened to them—a gap that now deeply unsettles her.

She remembered her corporate career in India, where she never stood up for marginalized colleagues—not because she didn't care, but because of financial pressure, especially the burden of her home loan EMI.

She noticed that even those more privileged than her also chose to stay silent in the face of workplace injustices—silence was the norm, not the exception.

After moving to the UK, she had access to opportunities and institutional support to speak up—especially against racism—but she remained silent there too: unsure, hesitant, or simply unwilling.

She now realizes that a large part of her material success came from staying quiet in situations that demanded courage—much like many privileged men she once criticized.

She realized that while she often preached "non-violence" to others, her own ignorance carried subtle traces of violence. It reminded her of something she had read months ago from the Jain scholar Umāsvāti: "Negligence leads to violence."

The recognition of her own hypocrisy and blind spots threw her into emotional turmoil—a quiet storm of self-judgment and discomfort she hadn't anticipated.

She booked an appointment with her psychologist, Dr. Sanya, who lived near her home in London—hoping to understand the chaos within her before falling into the trap of harsh self-judgment. It was something Dr. Sanya had emphasized during their last session, three months ago: that judgment offers no solutions, no understanding, and no space for real questions—because there is no substitute for understanding.

The next morning, Urvi left Udaipur for London.