

# India Was One

एक था भारत

By

An Indian

## Disclaimer

This novel is a work of fiction. Some places and events are actual, but some are the author's creations. Cricket personalities are as real as they appear. The cricket match is a work of the author's imagination. However, the game is for real. Few characters are fictitious, but some are still living. Mistake, if any, is the author's.

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## **India Was One**

*Present*

**T**he man hurried through the jungle with a lantern in his hand. The tall trees swayed to the tune of the blowing wind. The long shadows - cast by the light of the lantern - danced as the man moved swiftly.

“जल्दी करो| वरना देखने नहीं मिलेगा (*jaldi karo. warna dekhne nahin milega* - Hurry up. Or you won't be able to see),” he whispered in an urgent tone. Jai nodded, hurrying after the man with the lantern.

Suddenly, the jungle disappeared, giving way to an open area. They were standing on a hilltop. On the edge of the cliff was a makeshift railing of wooden sticks made from fallen tree branches. It looked as if someone had hurriedly built it to warn people to be aware of the deep ravine beyond. The man with the lantern hurried towards the far end of the cliff. It was the highest point with a great vantage point. From here, one could clearly see the mountains in the distance. Suddenly, Jai froze. He could see the man with the lantern hurrying toward what looked like a silhouette of a tall man. As the man with the lantern approached, the tall man didn't move. He raised his lantern, and Jai sighed in relief. The silhouette was not a man; it was just a 6 foot tall tree. The man started to tear leaves from the top of the tree, and Jai realized that the man was not tearing the leaves but simply peeling them off to reveal what was hiding behind it. It was a very powerful stationary binocular, with a slot to insert coins. The metal glistened in the moonlight.

The man waved to Jai.

“इधर आओ (*idhar aao* - Come here),” he beckoned Jai.

Jai hurried towards him, and the man showed him the binoculars. Jai smiled.

“Thank you.”

He quickly moved his face towards the binoculars. However, his face hit a leathery hand. Jai was confused.



*“Why can’t I see anything?”* he thought.

He backed his face away to see what was obstructing his view. The man had placed a hand on the binoculars, while the other hand was outstretched towards Jai.

“1000 Rupees pliss (please),” he grinned.

Jai was furious. He had already paid the man Rs. 5,000/- for this.

*“He is getting greedy,”* he thought.

But he realized that there was nothing he could do. He was at the mercy of this man. He would have to pay whatever the man demanded.

*“Just pay him. It’s worth it,”* a voice inside his head told him.

Jai reached his hand in his shirt pocket and took out the money. The man’s eyes gleamed at the sight of this. They hungrily followed Jai’s hand. As the money came out, he broke into a gleeful smile. He took the money with one hand and removed his other hand from the binoculars at the same time. He reached his hand in his pocket and produced a coin. He inserted it in the coin-slot of the binoculars.

“अब देखो (*ab dekho* - See now),” he said.

Jai eagerly moved his head towards the binoculars. They were out of focus. He adjusted the knob, and the hills far away on the horizon came into focus as if they were only a few feet away. He could see the same makeshift railing - made out of tree branches – on the other hill. He slowly moved his binoculars, scanning the cliff on

the horizon. *He suddenly stopped.* He could see a figure on the horizon peering through the same kind of binoculars. He could not see the face as it was obscured by the binoculars. The opposite figure also stopped. The binoculars were focusing on Jai. The figure slowly lifted her face. Jai's heart skipped a beat.

There she was.

His soul, his life, his Kaahi.

*His wife.*

Kaahi lowered her head. She was now looking through the binoculars. Jai lifted his head from behind the binoculars. He wanted Kaahi to see him, to let her know it was him. Tears welled up in his eyes. Suddenly, he remembered something. He lifted his hand and rubbed his earlobe gently between his index fingers and thumb.

*"I love you,"* he muttered.

He then hurriedly placed his face on the binoculars. He could tell that Kaahi was smiling behind the binoculars. She raised her head. Jai could clearly see her face now. She was smiling but her eyes were wet, and tears were rolling down her cheeks. She responded with the same gesture, and then she raised her hand and made a "v for victory" sign with two fingers

Jai instantly realized what she was saying. He also smiled but his eyes were getting misty. She was saying:

*"I love you too."*

She was crying uncontrollably now. Tears were pouring all over her cheeks. Jai had never felt so helpless in his life. He was

always used to being in control. This was a different feeling, totally new to him. He had the sudden urge to run to her.

*“That’s not the plan,”* he reminded himself. But looking at her, made his heart take over his mind. He just wanted to be with her.

*“What if I just walked down the ravine? I can be with her in no time,”* he thought.

He walked to the edge of the cliff and looked down. The man with the lantern came walking behind him, holding the lantern high. Jai took the lantern from the man and extended his hand into the ravine. The light from the lantern was good only for a few feet, beyond which was darkness. He picked up a pebble and threw it in the ravine to see how long it took for the pebble to reach the bottom. He tried to hear a sound of the pebble hitting the ground, but nothing, no sound. It was as if the pebble had vanished into an abyss.

Suddenly, he saw something shiny at the bottom of the abyss. He squinted his eyes to see what it was. He ran back to his binoculars and turned them to see what it was. Sharp barbed wires that separated the two mountains came into focus. He had come as far as he could in his country. But she was standing in another country.

*He was in South India and she was in North India.*



## Two



## The Canteen

*Few years ago*

Jai remembered the first time he saw her like it was yesterday. He was sitting in the college canteen (cafeteria) with his friends Bunty, Subra and Punk, drinking चाय (*chai* – tea). From where they were sitting, they could see the main road across from the canteen where people were passing by. It was drizzling. A few students were walking hurriedly towards the college under an umbrella, while some were wearing hooded jackets with their bellies looking big from the books

they had tucked inside their jackets. Others were holding newspapers to cover their heads and had folded the legs of their trousers to keep them from getting wet as they tip-toed around the puddles that had formed.

Some hawkers were selling hot भजी (*bhaji* – fritters) in a top-covered cart open from all sides. Steam emanated from their woks as the wet battered भजी (*bhaji*) hit the hot oil, making a sizzling sound. As soon as they came out of the frying pan, the hawker sprinkled them with a generous portion of dry spices. A few customers were savoring them while the others were just taking the shelter of their covered carts to stay dry.

Suddenly, an auto-rickshaw stopped on the road. Its tire splashed into a small puddle that the driver had tried unsuccessfully to avoid. A hand jutted out, holding a small red umbrella. The fingers pressed a button on the umbrella extending and unfolding it, and a woman stepped out quickly, attempting to avoid the rain. She was wearing faded blue denim jeans and a crisp white shirt, with her hair tied in a pony-tail, and she carried a tan colored leather bag. Jai choked on his tea when he saw her. He had not seen a more stunning girl before. She looked lost since it was her very first day. It was Jai's first day too but he was confident as he had the company of his three friends. She, on the other hand, was all alone. His eyes followed her as she disappeared in the college doorway.

The next day she came to the canteen; alone, lost and uncertain. A senior student approached her.

*It was very common in the canteen for the seniors to 'prey' on newcomers as they were unsure of themselves. Many times, the juniors would mistake the seniors as a faculty member, and they would listen to them and obey them*

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*unquestioningly. Once, a senior student had acted as a professor and entered the classroom full of juniors, and since the juniors had never seen the professor before, they had assumed that the senior was the professor. The senior had taken advantage of the situation and under the pretense of taking attendance, had asked the names of all. The juniors only realized that they had been fooled into giving out their names when the real professor showed up and the senior ran away shouting, "Thank you girls. I'll see you in the canteen."*

The senior sensed her uncertainty, and like a hyena hunting a lost deer, he came to her.

"What's the time?" he asked her.

"Ten o'clock," she replied curtly.

"Thanks. Say, you look very familiar. Have we met?" he asked her, gazing at her innocently. It was the oldest trick in the book, as the seniors often preyed on the juniors, knowing that they were new and unfamiliar with their surroundings.

"I don't think so," she replied walking away. Her friends had warned her about the no-good, sleazy characters wasting their whole day loafing around in the canteen.

"Are you sure?" he said following her, not giving up so easily. He was beginning to annoy her. Jai and his friends were watching intently while this unfolded.

"Yes, I am sure," she said, looking flustered now.

"By the way, I am Ramesh. What's your name?" he asked.

She just ignored him and kept walking, but he was persistent. "Which college do you go to?" he demanded, this time holding her

bag, stopping her. The color of her cheeks turned crimson-red with anger.

“*Leave me alone. Okay?*” she screamed, as she tried to free her bag, but to no avail. Ramesh was much bigger and stronger than her. He had clasped the bag well.

Seeing this, Bunty got up and approached them.

“What seems to be the problem?” he asked. He was an imposing figure: taller and more muscular than Ramesh.

“Why don’t you go back to your friends? This is a private matter,” he glared at Bunty.

Bunty could see the desperation in her eyes, a plea for help.

“Is he troubling you?” Bunty asked her. She nodded, almost in tears.

“Yes.”

Her eyes were panic stricken. She didn’t know what to do. A lot of students had gathered now to see what was going on, but no one dared to intervene as they all knew the consequences of confronting Ramesh. He was a local politician’s son, and he was very influential. Everyone knew that his father would come to his rescue if he got into any trouble.

*Apart from being a politician’s son, Ramesh was the local ‘wise-guy’ of the college canteen. People called him ‘Ramesh 42’ as he always wore a t-shirt with a big ‘42’ drawn across the front. It was his trademark. He had about a dozen t-shirts in different colors, but they all had a big ‘42’ in front.*

Bunty held Ramesh by the scruff of his collar. “Did you hear her? You are bothering her. Leave her alone. Is that clear?”

“*Why you...*” screamed Ramesh, as he struggled to free himself from Bunty’s iron-tight clutch, but Bunty held him tightly. Ramesh tried to punch Bunty in the chest, but his fists would not reach Bunty as he held Ramesh at arm’s length. Ramesh’s hands just punched the air in front of Bunty’s chest.

Ramesh’s friends came running to his rescue, so did Jai, Subra and Punk, even though they knew that Bunty didn’t need them. Ramesh’s friends looked at Bunty and swallowed nervously. They had to support their friend, but they didn’t want to get beaten up by this towering Sardar standing in front of them.

“What’s happening *buddy*?” Jai asked Ramesh.

Ramesh misheard Jai. “Hey! Don’t call me *bloody*.”

Jai found this comical. He chuckled.

“I didn’t call you *bloody*. I called you *buddy*, a friend. But if you don’t take my friend’s advice, he will make you bloody...that I can promise you.”

The other group was getting very nervous now. Bunty let go of Ramesh’s collar. Ramesh made a threatening move towards Bunty. But before Ramesh could do anything, his friends pulled him away.

“Let’s go यार (*yaar – pal*),” said one of them.

“Good idea,” replied Bunty, clenching his fists.

Ramesh and his friends left the scene in a hurry with Ramesh murmuring “देख लूँगा (*dekh loonga – implying - You’ll be sorry*).”



“I will be here every day,” Bunty shouted back.

He turned to her. His expression softened, “Are you okay?” he asked her.

“Yes, I think so. Thank you,” she replied meekly. She was shaken up by the incident.

“Why don’t you join us?” Bunty suggested.

Bunty (his real name was Manjeet Singh Sodhi) was a tall and well-built Sardar (a Sikh, with a beard and a turban) who was over 6 feet with long legs, but despite his imposing stature, he had a jovial look about him. He had a deep voice that complimented his personality, and he always sported faded denim jeans and a dull colored t-shirt. The only flamboyant thing he adorned himself with was his turbans. They were as colorful as his personality

*Sikhs are from the northern state of Punjab (bordering Pakistan). Sikhs are easily recognized with their turbans, uncut hair and a metal bracelet (kara). Most males have Singh (lion) and women Kaur (princess) in their names.*

She considered Bunty’s offer, hesitating a bit. She didn’t know them either. However, they looked friendly. And besides, Bunty had just come to her rescue. She needed such strong friends. Finally, she nodded and joined them for a cup of tea.

“These are my friends: Jai, Subra, Punk, and I am Bunty. This is...er...,” he looked at her to tell them her name.

“Kahani, but call me Kaahi,” she replied, gaining her composure.

“*Kaahi!* What a lovely name,” thought Jai, “Just like her.”

They all studied at the Sweet Lady College. Actually its full name was Our Sweet Lady of Pure Hearts College of Arts and Sciences, but everyone called it Sweet Lady College. Well, not all of them...Kaahi was from ENEM College (Sir Edinger Norman Economics & Management College). Sweet Lady and ENEM were two colleges right next to each other, separated by the canteen. Students from both colleges came to the canteen for चाय (*chai* – tea) or snacks. It was a common place for students to socialize. Many students – like Jai and his friends – considered the canteen to be their college. In the canteen, no one knew which college you were from, Sweet Lady or ENEM, and no one cared. All that mattered was that you were part of the canteen.

The canteen, as it was called by all the students, was a small cafeteria nestled between two colleges. It was composed of a big room with an open courtyard in front, and beyond the courtyard was the main road, separated by a small wall with an iron gate.

Both, Sweet Lady and ENEM were considered ‘filmy’ colleges, because they were situated in Juhu Scheme where film-stars (who sent their children to these colleges) lived. It boasted of illustrious alumni as many of the past students were famous in Bollywood as directors, actors, screenwriters, etc.

“I am hungry,” declared Subra rubbing his stomach.

“Already? We just ate a while ago,” protested Punk.

“So? I am a growing boy यार (*yaar* – pal).”

“Don’t you think you have grown enough?” joked Punk,  
“Huh fatso?”

“*Fatso?* Whom are you calling fat?” Subra replied, “I am in shape, right?”

“Yes boss, you are in shape. Round is a shape, isn't it?” Punk joked.

Subra (Subramaniam Iyengar) was a huge guy. He was extremely powerful, though not muscular, with a voracious appetite that went with his size. He could easily consume a dozen समोसा (*samosa* – a triangular shaped Indian snack like a spanakopita) and still have room for lunch. He was gutsy, and had a devil-may-care attitude towards life. He would take up any challenge without thinking of the consequences. He was a Tamil. His father had moved to Mumbai from the state of Tamil Nadu.

*Tamils, also called Tamilians are a linguistic and ethnic group native to the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. They speak Tamil which was the first Indian language to be given classical status.*

“I think it is the aroma of fresh समोसा (*samosa*) being cooked that is making you hungry,” Punk continued kidding. Subra ignored his remark and called the waiter.

Punk (Pankaj Bose) was a shy, portly and introvert guy. Unlike the others, he would take some time to open up, but once he got to know someone better, he was as jovial as the rest of them. He smoked a lot and his lips betrayed that. He was the richest kid in the group but he never flaunted his money. He always carried a wad of Rs. 500 bills with him, just in case. His friends could never understand why someone needed to carry so much cash, but they never asked. They too were comforted by the knowledge that there was money available...*just in case*. Punk had been living in Mumbai with his uncle for the past 5 years while the rest of his family was in Kolkata.

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*Kolkata is in the state of West Bengal where the primary language is Bengali. The Bengali people are native to the historic region of Bengal (now divided between Bangladesh and India). Although the name is West Bengal, it is in the eastern part of India.*

The waiter came with their tea and fresh समोसा (*samosa*). They spent the rest of the morning getting to know each other. Jai wanted to know a lot about Kaahi but was feeling awkward to ask in their first meeting. After this incident, Kaahi was always with them. She felt very safe. No one ever bothered her. She was one of them.

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Days passed and Jai got to know Kaahi more. He knew that just like him, she too lived in Juhu Scheme, and just a few roads away from where he lived. Many times, he dropped Kaahi off on his way to his home after the college.

One day, he and his friends were sitting in the canteen. All of them were there, and they were busy chatting with each other.

“Aren’t you supposed to be in a lecture?” Bunty suddenly asked Jai.

“No,” Jai lied. He had a lecture, but he didn’t want to go. *Not when Kaahi was there.*

Jai was medium-sized but well-built. He was clean-shaven with short, dark hair, a handsome face, intense eyes and a warm smile. He had a stubborn streak which only his friends knew about. Once he made up his mind about something, it was very hard to change it. His friends and his family mattered the most to him. His father was in the software business, and he was eager for Jai to finish college so he

could send him to Los Angeles to look after the US operation. His father was originally from Karnataka.

*Karnataka is bordered by the Arabian Sea to the west, with the main language being Kannada. Bengaluru (Bangalore) is the capital city of the state, and is at the forefront of the rapid economic and technological development that India is experiencing*

As time went by, Jai began to fall for Kaahi. He looked forward to meeting her at the canteen. He knew when her lectures ended and when she would come down to the canteen. He ordered an extra चाय (*chai* – tea) in advance, and eagerly waited for her.

The feelings were mutual, not just a one-way street. Kaahi found him adorable too. Many times Kaahi & Jai came to the canteen before their friends to spend some time alone. Jai always came ten minutes ahead of her and waited for her, anxiously looking at all the auto-rickshaws that stopped in front of the canteen. When he spotted her, his heart would skip a beat. A big smile would cover his face. He never had a more stupid smile on his face.

In the evenings, they often chatted on the phone for hours, as if they couldn't wait till the next day, when they would meet in the canteen. Jai felt that he could talk to her about anything.

Kahani...Kaahi. So beautiful, so precious, so gentle yet so strong. Her face was truly divine. Her eyes were very expressive and complimented her smile. Whenever she looked at Jai and smiled, his heart melted. When they argued, she would give this look to Jai and smile. Jai knew that he had lost the argument, *even though he was right*.

She was a Gujarati.

*Gujarati people or Gujaratis are an ethnic group that is traditionally Gujarati-speaking and can trace their ancestry to the state of Gujarat in northwestern India. Mahatma Gandhi, known as the father of the nation, was a Gujarati.*

The thing Jai found attractive in Kaahi, apart from her beauty, was her intellect. He admired the fact that she didn't agree with him blindly, and had a mind of her own. She had her own opinions about every subject, from politics to sports. She not only complimented Jai's wisdom but also constantly challenged his thinking. They were two peas in a pod, and just like Jai, she loved cricket. So much so, that sometimes she was the loudest in the room when they would all be watching a match on TV.

One day, during the monsoon season, Jai, Bunty, Subra and Punk had just returned from Matheran. They were sitting in the canteen. Kaahi was in college, attending a lecture.

*Matheran is a small hill-station outside Mumbai. No cars are allowed in. The only way one can move about in Matheran is by a horse or on foot. To reach Matheran, one has to either hike or go by a small train that goes up from the base.*

*They had chosen to hike. It was an annual tradition for them, to go to Matheran during monsoon. The heavier the rain, the happier they were to hike. This year, it was pouring heavily from the skies above. The mountains were lush green with hundreds of small waterfalls as the water made its way down. Finally, they had reached the top. Since it was monsoon, Matheran was deserted. The main market square was empty. Only a handful of shops were open, mostly tea shops. They had enjoyed the warmth of the tea and the spice of freshly made **बटाटा वडा** (batata-vada— Indian potato dumplings that are spiced and dipped in a batter and fried) in a restaurant while it poured outside.*

Now, Jai thought about how much he had missed her during his hike to Matheran and was eager to see her. He was anxiously checking the time on his watch as he knew that her lecture would get over soon. He ordered five cups of चाय (*chai* – tea). He looked at his watch again and felt as if the time was moving in slow-motion.

“Why are you looking at the watch,” Bunty asked, “Are you expecting someone?” The blossoming feeling between two of his friends had not gone unnoticed by him, and he was just teasing Jai.

“No, no one,” Jai replied sheepishly.

“Who is this fifth tea for?” Bunty asked innocently. “For me? How did you know that I wanted an extra one today? तू तो अंतर्धामी है, यार (*tu toe antaryami hai, yaar* – You are a mind-reader, pal).” He knew the extra tea was not for him.

“It’s not for you,” answered Jai sternly. “It’s for Kaahi.”

“But she is not here. What if she doesn’t come today?” he looked at Jai mischievously, with a grin.

“She will, and I know she is here. She told me last night on the phone,” Jai murmured looking embarrassed.

“You spoke to her on the phone last night? What were you guys talking about on the phone? Huh?” Bunty continued pulling Jai’s leg. He knew how Jai felt about Kaahi. He had seen it in his eyes. He had never seen Jai behave this way before. *His friend was in love.*

Jai gave him a sheepish grin.

“बच्चू, तू तो गया (*bachchoo, tu toe gaya* - You are smitten, my child),” Bunty laughed.

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Soon, Kaahi and Jai started dating. They went out to many places in Mumbai. They went for movies, restaurants or clubbing. Sometimes they just went for a long walk on the Juhu Beach, which his friends found very tacky.

“Juhu Beach?” Punk said, “Ugh, you two lovebirds couldn’t think of any other place? Juhu Beach is not the best place to be alone.”

*Juhu Beach is usually crowded with people, food stalls and hawkers selling various items.*

But Kaahi and Jai didn’t care, as they were only paying attention to each other, and were oblivious to the world.

*They were in love.*

One day, when Jai took Kaahi home, his mom started asking her all sorts of awkward questions.

“Do you cook? Are you a vegetarian or non-vegetarian? What’s your birth sign? What’s your height?”

Jai was very embarrassed, “Ma! Are you my mother or a tailor? Why do you want to know her height?”

However, Kaahi just smiled as she didn’t mind this line of questioning. She knew why his mom was asking these questions, and when Jai went to Kaahi’s house, it was the similar situation, with same nosy questions, but this time from her mom to Jai.

*Both were glad that their parents approved.*



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One Sunday morning, Jai was sitting in his bungalow. It was a two story structure with a terrace. The first floor (called ground floor in India) consisted of a living room with a dining nook. A door near the dining nook led to the kitchen. A long passageway led to the guest bedroom. Next to the guest bedroom, was a small 'temple room.' On the second floor (first floor in India) were three rooms: Jai's parents' bedroom, Jai's bedroom and a study room. Although it was called a study room, it was a multi-purpose room. More like a study/office/music/relaxation/computer room, or as Jai's friends jokingly called it...*the room of requirements*.

A tall banyan tree on the side sheltered the bungalow from the sun.

There was an open verandah in front with a swing that seated two. In front of the swing was an armchair with cushions. The raised verandah was open in front with no wall obscuring its view. Behind the swing were tall doors that led to the living room of the bungalow. They were horizontally split in half, with the top half of the door being a glass-frame, and the bottom half being wooden shutters.

On the side of the bungalow, beside the verandah, was a small but well-kept garden. Jai's mom loved greenery. She made sure that the garden was in good condition. She instructed the gardener to plant fresh flowers according to the season.

There was also a small vegetable patch at the far end of the garden with fruit trees and a tiny herb-garden. The kitchen opened right to the vegetable patch. The chef used to pluck fresh vegetables and herbs from the garden just before meal time, then wash and cook them.

During summer, the terrace floor was filled with dry spices spread there for baking in the sun. The whole terrace used to smell like a spice store. Once they were baked for a few days, his mom would put them in a huge stone mortar and pound it with pestle to grind it into a powder. Raw, green mangos also were cut and spread there for fermentation to make homemade spiced pickle.

*Indian pickles, आचार (achar), consist of a variety of pickled fruits and vegetables which are acidified with lime, or through addition of salt. The pickles also have various combinations of Indian spices, and often have oil.*

*Even using the same main ingredients, Indian pickles come in a wide variety of flavors due to differences in spices and the process of making them. A mango pickle from the southern states may taste very different from the north.*

Sometimes, his mom used to make homemade papadums, and she would spread them on the terrace to dry them.

*A papadum or a papad (पापड़): as it is known in North India, happala: as known in Kannada, or appalam: as known in Tamil, is a thin, crispy Indian preparation like a flatbread. It is typically served as an accompaniment to a meal in India. It is also eaten as an appetizer or a snack and can be eaten with various toppings such as chopped onions, chutney or other dips and condiments. In some parts of India, it is served as the final item in a meal. Raw papadums – dried, but unroasted - are also used in curries and vegetable preparations.*

Now, it was raining. He could hear the raindrops falling on the leaves of the tree that covered his bungalow. His dad was sitting across from him, absentmindedly sipping a cup of coffee while reading a newspaper. His mom was sitting on a comfortable sofa knitting a shawl. It was dark outside with the rain-filled clouds covering the sky. Suddenly, Jai asked, “Pa, could I go to Khandala with Kaahi?”

“Just Kaahi,” his dad asked without looking up, “what about the others?”

“Not this time,” Jai replied.

Jai’s dad looked up.

“Why?”

*Jai’s dad was more like a friend to Jai, and Jai confided in him many times. In fact, Jai had his first glass of an alcoholic drink with his dad. His mom had protested, “What are you doing?” she had said. “It’s better that he drink in front of me than hiding it from me,” his dad had replied.*

“समझा करो (*samjha karo* – try to understand),” Jai replied, grinning sheepishly.

“Okay,” Jai’s dad smiled back.

“May I borrow your car?”

“In this weather?” he asked. Jai’s mom stopped knitting.

“Why not?” he said, “It’s perfect.”

Jai’s dad hesitated a bit. “Okay,” he finally replied, “but be careful.”

“*What’s okay?* How can you let him drive in this weather?” Jai’s mom protested. “You are really spoiling him.”

“Of course I’ll be careful,” Jai told his dad, and then he turned to his mom, “Don’t worry, Ma. I’ll drive slowly.”

Jai took out his cell phone from his pocket and dialed Kaahi’s number.

“Hey, it’s me. Let’s go to Khandala.”

“What? Now?” Kaahi sounded surprised.

“No, tomorrow, when it stops raining,” Jai joked, “Yes, now.”

“Okay,” Kaahi hesitantly agreed.

“Cool. We are going by car. I’ll pick you up in fifteen minutes.”

Jai picked up Kaahi, and they headed for the freeway.

“What about the others?” Kaahi asked Jai.

“Not today,” he replied smiling at her, “just the two of us. I want to be alone with you today.” She smiled back. She too wanted to be alone with him.

*Khandala and its neighboring city, Lonawala, are hill-stations (just like Matheran) outside Mumbai. Many Mumbaikars drive there for the weekend to unwind...to escape the hustle-bustle and the crowds of city life. So Khandala and Lonawala are often crowded by Mumbaikars...so much for escaping the crowds.*

*After the Mumbai-Pune highway was built, it was very efficient to get there, that is, from Mumbai-Pune Expressway to Khandala. However, reaching the expressway from Mumbai was another matter. It took more time to reach the highway than to reach the farmhouse from the highway, thanks to Mumbai’s horrendous traffic. The Mumbai sidewalks were always dug up for some work, forcing the pedestrians to walk on the road along-side the vehicles. This dangerous situation caused traffic jams. Now the pedestrians customarily walked on the road out of habit, even if the sidewalks were not dug up. Many Mumbaikars joked that between walking on the roads with the cars, buses, taxis, auto-rickshaws, motorbikes and cycles, and travelling by a crowded local train, one got enough exercise. That was their excuse to avoid the gym.*

Jai's dad had a beautiful farmhouse in Khandala. The farmhouse was surrounded by green mountains. In monsoon, they could see hundreds of waterfalls of different sizes as water gushed down the mountains.

After a few hours of driving, they reached the farmhouse. Jai's dad had already called the caretaker to get the place ready for them. Hot tea was waiting for them when they arrived. They sat in the verandah and sipped hot tea while it poured outside.

Jai looked at Kaahi. She was looking in the distance as it poured down the misty mountains. Her hair was wet with beads of water forming, but her face looked fresh as a daisy.

Finally, he said, "Will you marry me?"

"*What?*" Kaahi looked at him startled, taken aback. She had not expected this. Well, she had expected it, but not so suddenly.

"Will you marry me?" he repeated, looking nervous now.

Kaahi nodded.

"Was that a yes or a no?" Jai asked.

"*Yes*, you dodo," she laughed.

"*Yipeeeeeeeed!*" he let out a jubilant yelp. He ran to her, and gave her a big hug. She hugged back.

"I can't wait to tell the others," he said.

"Me neither," she smiled, "My parents will be so happy. They really like you. They will be overjoyed to have you as a son-in-law."

"There is this one thing though," she looked at him.

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“What?”

“First, promise me you won’t say no,” she looked serious.

“What is it?” Jai blurted out. He looked concerned now.

“Promise?”

“*Yes, Promise, now what is it?*” he cried in a begging voice.

She looked at him mischievously and said, “You won’t tell our friends when I am not there. I want to be present.”

“*What? That’s all?*” Jai asked looking confused now. “Is that all I need to promise?”

“Yes,” she laughed.

Jai heaved a sigh of relief. “*Whew.* For a minute I thought you were going to reveal a dark secret or something like that.”

“*Gotcha,*” she laughed.

“Yes you did,” he replied with a sigh of relief, “*Whew.*”

They stayed there for a while, and enjoyed the rain while sipping hot chai.

Soon they headed back for Mumbai.

When they reached their house, Jai shared the good news with his parents.

“This is great news,” his dad exclaimed. Kaahi touched his feet, and he said, “Bless you. I am so happy today.” He soon called up Kaahi’s parents to inform them of the good news, but Kaahi had

already told them about it on the cell phone. They decided to meet soon to fix the wedding.

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“Yesterday went very well,” commented Jai, grinning at Kaahi. He was sitting with his friends in the canteen. Kaahi nodded in agreement.

“What happened yesterday?” asked Bunty.

Jai told them about last night. Kaahi joined in too, interrupting Jai, completing his sentences. His friends were now grinning, watching both of them.

“Well, I am not surprised,” Bunty grinned. He knew Jai’s parents were very liberal. They would always respect Jai’s decision.

“But I am a little disappointed in you.” he accused Jai.

“*Why? What did I do?*” said Jai defensively.

“We knew that you two lovebirds would get married, but why did you have to go all the way to Khandala, that too alone? Why couldn’t you call us? We wouldn’t have been a कबाब में हड्डी (*kebab mein haddi* – be in your way). We would have given you some privacy.”

“It’s not that, यार (*yaar* – pal),” said Jai. Then he saw Bunty smiling, and realized that he was just kidding.

“Idiot.”

“So इडली (*Idli* – South Indian snack) marrying a ढोकला (*Dhokla* – North Indian snack), huh?” Subra joked, “So what kind of food will you serve in your wedding? North Indian or South Indian?”

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“For once can you stop thinking through your stomach?”

Punk chided.

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Soon Jai’s and Kaahi’s parents met to make it official. They decided that they would get them married once Kaahi and Jai graduated.

“Once you graduate, I want you two to tie the knot. Then both of you can fly to Los Angeles for a long honeymoon.” Jai’s dad declared, more for Kaahi’s dad’s benefit. He knew that Kaahi’s dad would be worried about their future.

“Pa, it’s not a honeymoon. I know you want me to go to the US to look after the Los Angeles office,” said Jai.

“Nonsense, it is a honeymoon,” he replied indignantly, “think of it as a working honeymoon.”

Jai just gave up as he knew it was pointless arguing, but he secretly agreed with his dad. It was going to be a long honeymoon, and he was looking forward to it. He dreamed about how life would be with Kaahi.

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*Tooooooooooooooooo*, the train whistle blew as it slowly pulled away from the station to begin its long journey. The passengers waved goodbyes to their loved ones who had come to see them off. The wheels made a rhythmic clank as they rolled on the tracks. Slowly at first, the rhythm picked up rapidly as the train gathered speed.

Jai and his friends had to attend a wedding of their friend, Akshay. He was getting married in the city Bhavnagar in the state of



Gujarat. They had decided to go by train. It would be an excellent opportunity to see small towns in India, as Jai had explained.

“How are you going to see India? You are only going to see India whizzing past. And if the train stops, all you will see are the train stations,” Kaahi said, but she knew how Jai loved a train journey.

“Not that it matters to me. I am not going,” she continued.

“Why not?” Jai asked.

“I have a wedding to attend to in Mumbai,” she replied, “I wish I could go with you, but I can’t.”

They were going by Bhavnagar Express, which would leave Mumbai’s Bandra Terminus at 9:30 PM and reach Bhavnagar Terminus at 11:30 AM the next day.

*The best way to see India is by traveling on the Indian railway system. As one traveller has aptly said, “No visit to India is complete without experiencing the bustle of Indian railway stations.”*

They had reserved whole compartment for their overnight journey. The compartment was small and narrow that slept four (two on either side) like a bunk-bed. However, they were not ready to sleep yet so they all were sitting in the lower berths. Jai and Bunty were sitting on one berth while Punk and Subra were sitting on the opposite berth, facing them.

On one end of the compartment was a sliding door, and on the opposite side was a window that showed the outside world whizzing past them as the train sped. They had bought hot **समोसास** (*samosas* – Indian snacks) on the station before their journey began. Jai had smuggled cans of beer with him as he knew that alcoholic beverages were prohibited on the trains. They were savoring the chilled beer with hot and spicy **समोसास** (*samosas*).

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After an hour, the train was outside Mumbai city, now making its way through small towns and villages. Jai gazed out to see the landscape change as the frequency of bright lights of Mumbai city passing had reduced and was replaced by darkness of the night.

At around 1:30 AM, the train pulled into the city of Surat in the state of Gujarat. It was getting chilly. As Jai got down to stretch his legs, he saw a bunch of people on the far side of the station. They were huddled around a small fire to keep them warm. Jai approached them and warmed himself.

He then walked to a 'tea-stall' and ordered tea. Some hawkers were selling different items: fruits, sandwiches, cold drinks, etc. They were holding a wicker basket above their heads as they walked so that passengers sitting in the train could see what they were selling.

After a few minutes, the train whistle blew, indicating that it was ready to move. Jai quickly finished his tea and got in the train which was beginning to move. He returned to his compartment to find Bunty, Subra and Punk playing cards, and he joined them.

It was getting late, and they were getting sleepy. At 2:30 AM they went to sleep. Jai was thinking of Kaahi. He was missing her. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. He slid open the door to see who was bothering him this late at night. *There stood Kaahi, smiling.*

"*What?*" he yelled. It was just a dream. He didn't know when he fell asleep. He woke up with a start. The cabin was dark and quiet. The train had stopped. The window was open and the moonlight shone through it.

"*What time is it?*" Jai thought as he squinted his eyes to see the time on his wrist watch. It was 4 AM.

Suddenly, he heard a knock on the door. He climbed down and slid the door open. It was the night attendant.

“Sir, please be careful of your belongings. Keep them away from the window,” he said.

“Why?” Jai asked.

“The train has stopped in an area that is known for robbery. They come from the nearby village and steal through the window,” explained the attendant. “They can’t get into the train as the doors are locked, so they climb up and steal whatever they can through the windows.”

Subra and Bunty had also woken up and now were listening attentively. Bunty looked at the window to see what was at arm’s length for the robber to steal. There was nothing that could be reached through the window.

“There is nothing that they can take,” he declared.

“Well, there is sir,” said the attendant.

“What?” Bunty asked.

“The gold chain around your neck,” replied the attendant, pointing to the gold chain. “If you sleep with your head towards the window, they will snatch your chain, so please sleep with your head near the door.”

Bunty nodded.

The attendant left, and they all went back to sleep.

The morning sun woke Jai up.

Bunty and Subra were awake. They were sitting on the lower berth while Punk was still sleeping, across from Jai, snoring. Jai yawned lazily as he climbed down and sat.

“What time is it? Where are we?” he asked.

“7:30 AM,” replied Bunty, looking at his watch, “We passed Viramgam Junction.”

“How much more to go?” he asked.

“We reach Bhavnagar Terminus at 11:30 AM, so four more hours,” Bunty replied.

“Ugh,” grunted Jai as he walked to the door, “I am ordering a चाय (*chai* – tea).”

He slid the door open, beckoned the attendant, and ordered a tea.

He came back in the compartment and sat down as he looked out of the window. India was waking up. Cows were grazing in the open fields while the shepherds kept a watchful eye. Women were carrying water in a pot to their huts in the village. Some of them had them on their heads while the others carried the pots tucked under their arms.

Children were playing in the village courtyard while some elders sat under a tree, and smoked a बीड़ी (*bidi* – Indian cigarette) or a हूक़ा (*hookah*). Smoke emitted from a few huts to indicate that a fire was lit under a stove.

Now the train was passing through open fields of sugarcane. It curved and entered a tunnel. Their cabin was pitch dark, apart from the red glow coming from Subra’s cigarette and the steady rhythm of

the clunking sound echoing through the tunnel. The glow got brighter as Subra inhaled a puff. The train exited the tunnel, and the sugarcane fields continued.

*“This is India,”* Jai thought, *“Rustic and beautiful.”*

The attendant came over with hot tea. After finishing his tea, he went to freshen up. When he came back, Punk was already awake, and sitting down.

“Good morning,” said Jai.

“Good morning,” he replied.

“Did you sleep well?” Jai asked.

“No,” Punk said.

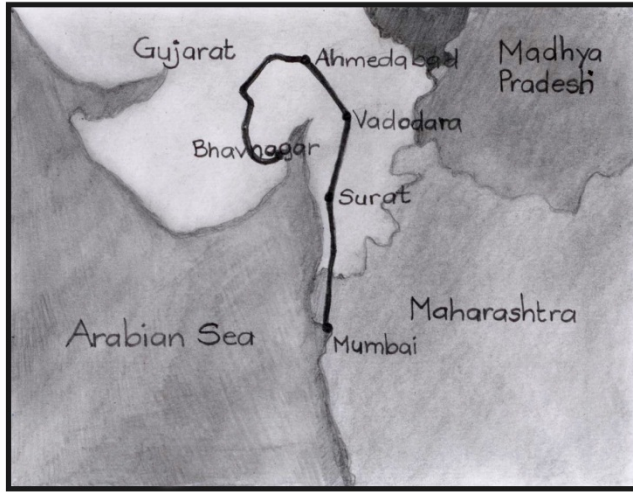
“Liar,” Jai laughed, “I heard you snoring.”

It was starting to get hot as the sun was rising. At around 10:30 AM, they reached Songadh.

“Still an hour to go,” Subra complained.

Subra, Bunty and Punk played cards to kill time while Jai looked out of the window to observe village life.

Finally, the train pulled into Bhavnagar Terminus.



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“Shakti has a reunion tour. They are coming to Mood-I,” declared Kaahi, “Are we going?”

They were sitting around a table in the canteen and sipping tea.

“Of course,” Jai replied.

“How do you know about Shakti?” asked Bunty, “I didn’t know you liked them.”

“Oh, I do,” Kaahi replied, “I’ve heard them on a CD. However, since they are a 70’s group, I’ve never seen them. So this is my opportunity to see them in person, and I sure don’t want to miss it. They play some amazing music.”

*Mood-I or Mood Indigo is the annual cultural festival of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mumbai. It is a four-day long event held every year*

*and attracts a crowd of 60,000 students from approximately 500 colleges all over the country. It is Asia's largest college festival.*

*Shakti was a group which played a novel acoustic music which combined Indian music with elements of jazz. Its leading member was an Englishman, called John McLaughlin, and it also featured the Indian violin player L. Shankar. It also included Zakir Hussain on Tabla, R. Raghavan on Mrindagam and T. H "Vikku" Vinayakram on Ghatam (an earthenware pot).*

"Here's a little trivia for you. Did you know L. Shankar's violin was called LSD?" Bunty asked.

"No, I didn't," Kaahi replied, "why?"

"LSD stands for **L. Shankar's Double** violin. He played with two violins joined together," said Bunty.

"Wow!" Kaahi exclaimed.

On the day of the concert, they all met at Jai's house and drove to the concert. Every musician was in his best element. John and Zakir were simply superb. "Vikku" Vinayakram had unbuttoned his shirt as usual and placed the open mouth of the Ghatam on his stomach to make it sound sweeter. He used his fingers, thumbs, palms and heels of his hands to strike the outer surface. Every now and then, he would throw the Ghatam up in the air, catch it and start beating on it again. But to their disappointment, R. Raghavan and L. Shankar were not present.

However, to everyone's delight, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, the most famous flute maestro of India, was accompanying Shakti.

The music concert was held on the sprawling lawns of IIT. The concert organizers had constructed the stage in the center, and

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thousands of fans had surrounded it to see their favorite band play. Jai and his friends lay down on the grass and looked up at the starry sky while the music played on. Unlike other concerts, where fans used to rush to go near the stage, this concert was very different. There was no pushing and shoving as the lawns of IIT were big enough to accommodate a large audience.

They played all the famous song from their album, and they were all long songs, at least ten minutes long, but not long enough for the fans. They wanted more, so the group played more. And the concert went on for longer than the scheduled time. No one minded as everybody was enjoying this once-in-a-lifetime event.

It was a magical night to remember. The crowd didn't want it to end.

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Soon, the monsoon season was almost over, and the heat and humidity of Mumbai showed its ugly face again. Once in a while, Mumbai got scattered showers. Actually, the rain was unwelcome now as it got hotter and more humid after it stopped raining. One afternoon, Jai and his friends had gone to Jai's house after the college. They were all in Jai's air-conditioned room. Punk was on the computer surfing the web. Subra was reading the newspaper and Buntly was sprawled across Jai's bed. Kaahi and Jai were sitting on a sofa.

“Are we going for नवरात्री (Navratri)?” Buntly asked.

“Yes,” Kaahi replied.

“Did you get the tickets?” he continued.



“Of course, for all nine nights,” she replied with a smile.

Right next to their college was a huge open arena with a big stage on one side. Every year, during the nine nights of *નવરાત્રી* (*Navratri*), the entire place came alive with music and dance. An orchestra played live music on the stage while people danced ‘ગરબા (*garba*)’ or ‘રાસ (*raas*)’. Huge speakers were located all around the ground so that music could be heard loud and clear.

*Indian parents are very strict and they rarely allow their daughters to go out at night. But નવરાત્રી (Navratri) is a religious festival. Even the strict parents allow their daughters to go out in the evening, so the girls really look forward to નવરાત્રી (Navratri).*

Everyone looked beautiful in their traditional Indian clothes. Every night they held a dance and a ‘best dressed couple’ competition. People were less interested in the prizes, but more in the bragging rights.

Every night, the organizers invited one Bollywood super-star as chief-guest. Sometimes, they joined the dance, and people looked forward to meeting their favorite star in person.

The night of *નવરાત્રી* (*Navratri*) arrived. It was past 10:00 PM when the five of them reached the ground to take part in *નવરાત્રી* (*Navratri*) celebrations. It was a hot and balmy night. People were sweating profusely as they danced and twirled to the rhythm of the music blaring through speakers, and their faces glistened in the bright lights. Jai and Kaahi started to dance. Bunty joined them, dancing with his eyes closed. His was more of a ‘*Bhangra*’ – a style of

*dance performed by the people of Punjab (where he was from) - than a ਗਰਬਾ (Garba) or a ਰਾਸ (Raas).* People around him looked at one another and smiled seeing him dance differently, but Bunty didn't care. He was doing it for himself, and not to win a prize. Punk and Subra stood in a corner. They never danced. They just surveyed the dancing crowd and enjoyed the music while smoking. It was past 2:00 AM when the music finally stopped.

"I am hungry," Subra said as he rubbed his stomach.

"So what's new?" said Punk as he jokingly punched Subra in the belly, "No restaurant will be open now. Only roadside food stalls will be open, and I don't want to go there."

"Let's go to Sun-n-Sand," Kaahi suggested as she held Jai's hand.

Sun-n-Sand was a hotel right on the beach. There were many hotels there, but Sun-n-Sand was their favorite. Its restaurants would be closed, but the coffee shop was open 24 hours. When they arrived, it was packed with all the ਜਵਰਾਗੋ-ਗੋ-ਗੋ-ਗੋ-goers. Just like Jai and his friends, they too had come there after the dance. The whole coffee shop looked like a big costume party, but everyone looked tired, as they had danced all night. Jai and his friends found a table and spent the next few hours unwinding, and having snacks and drinks. By the time they got home, it was 5:00 AM. After dropping off Kaahi and his friends, Jai drove to his house. He went up to his bedroom and crashed. He fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

He got up at around 10:00 AM and went to the canteen to meet his friends.

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*The younger generation loved Mumbai. They enjoyed their lives in Mumbai to the fullest. However, many seniors avoided going out because of the crowds, pollution and traffic. Their lives were confined to their apartments (flats – as they were called in Mumbai). “Mumbai has become a survival of the fittest,” they complained. But the younger generation had a great time in Mumbai. They could not imagine a life outside Mumbai. “Mumbai makes you street smart,” the youngsters counter-argued. Non-Mumbaikars hated life in Mumbai. They called Mumbaikars “Frogs in a well, who think the well is the world.” But Mumbaikars didn’t care. Love it or hate it, Mumbai (and Mumbaikars) welcomed all with open arms...both, fans and critics.*

Jai, Kaahi, Bunty, Subra and Punk were no exceptions. Even though Punk was from Kolkata, he had fallen in love with Mumbai. Though he knew that he had to return to Kolkata one day, he wanted to live life as a Mumbaikar. He had also started speaking in बम्बईया हिंदी (*Bambaiya Hindi - Mumbai Hindi*), with a Bengali accent.

*Mumbai Hindi is unique in itself. It is a mixture of Gujarati, Marathi and Hindi, with a sprinkle of English. “जा रहा है (jaa raha hai – am going)” became “गयेलाए (gayelai),” “पी रहा है (pee raha hai – am drinking)” became “पिएलाए (piyelai),” etc.*

Non-Mumbaikars were aghast at this atrocious language. “You guys don’t know how to speak the national language,” they accused.

“No we don’t,” Mumbaikars agreed.

Once a student who was from New Delhi told Subra, as he was leaving for the day, “हम जा रहे हैं (*hum ja rabe hain - we are going*).”

Subra looked puzzled.

“हम (*hum* – we)? How many of you are going?” he asked.

“Just me,” the student replied.

“तो मैं बोल ना| ये हम क्या लगाके रखा है (*toe main bol na. ye hum kya lagake rakha hai* – then why don’t you say ‘I. What’s up with this ‘we’).”

The five of them were inseparable during their college days. All of them were living in the present. They never worried about the future; they didn’t want to think about it.

It was the greatest time of their lives.

## Three



## Career

The five years of college whizzed by. Soon they had to think about their careers. They had spent a lot of time together and had become closer.

*The Indian education system is 10+2+3, i.e. 10 years of school, 2 years of junior college and 3 years of senior college, whereas the US education system is 12+4, i.e. 12 years of school and 4 years of college.*

“Has anyone decided what they want to do after college?” Kaahi asked, then she looked at Jai and said, “I am not asking you, sweetheart. I know where you will be.”

They had talked about their life together in Los Angeles, and wondered what it would be like.

Jai remembered their conversation.

*“Let’s go backpacking across Europe before we go to Los Angeles,” Kaahi had suggested. Jai loved the idea.*

*Europe was a destination they both were eager to visit. They had decided that they would explore Europe for a few months before going to Los Angeles. Kaahi’s window to Europe was limited to a few magazines, the travel channel and what she saw in Hindi movies. Many of the movies - being filmed in European countries - showed a hero and a heroine dancing in the middle of a busy town square bustling with tourists. Sometimes, they would sprint down snow-capped mountains in skimpy outfits, or they would run and sing in a meadow. This often attracted curious and mildly amused onlookers.*

*“How can they gyrate and thrust their hips in such a vulgar fashion with hundreds of people watching?” Jai joked.*

*“They are professionals; they don’t make millions for nothing,” Kaahi replied.*

*“I couldn’t do it, even if someone paid me,” Jai declared indignantly, “and besides, India is so beautiful with so many places to film. Can’t they find a single nice location that they have to go out of India to shoot?”*

*“Don’t you worry about that, no one will pay you,” she laughed and then added, “but, I’ll pay you to watch you sing while you gyrate and thrust your hips in the middle of a town square in Switzerland. As far as your complaint about*

*shooting out of India is concerned, it's for those who can't afford to go there. It's most economical for a common man to see a nice, foreign country for a few hundred rupees."*

A faint smile appeared on Jai's face as he thought of what Kaahi had said back then.

"So, what has everyone decided?" she asked again, bringing him back to the present.

Everyone groaned. "Give us a break यार (yaar - pal)," complained Punk, "We just graduated."

They were not ready to face the working world yet, and they didn't want to think about it.

"We have the rest of our lives to worry about it," he continued, "Today, I just want to forget about it, enjoy the match and see India win."

"Or lose," added Subra.

"*We are going to win,*" Punk scolded, "but don't say it aloud and jinx it."

They all had gathered at Bunty's house to watch a cricket match between India and Pakistan.

*When it comes to cricket, not only everyone in the room, but a lot of people in India become superstitious. Some who are atheists become religious and start praying to their gods for India to win. Some give up their favorite food or drink item, and some fast for a day. Sometimes, when a match is going on, people who are watching it on TV don't change their seating position, fearing that if they do so, it might somehow jinx the Indian team.*

*Cricket is THE premier sport in India. None even comes closer. Although field-hockey is India's national sport, its popularity has drastically diminished. It is not just a massive amount of fan-following, but also the huge amount of revenue cricket generates. In The World Cup (which is played every four years), around eighty percent of revenue generated by various TV commercials, merchandising, copyrights, etc. comes from India. In the last World Cup, when India made an early exit, the TV viewership drastically fell as people lost interest in the contest.*

*Cricket is not merely a sport but also a big industry for many manufacturers of cricket equipment like: bats, balls, helmets, stumps, pads, gloves, uniform, shoes, etc. Many multinational giants have entered this arena and have started paying huge sums of money to many cricket stars to endorse their brand. All the players selected to represent India are treated as rock stars with huge number of followers. Once when a very famous Indian player went for a haircut, thousands of fans gathered outside the barber-shop to watch him get a haircut.*

*Little did they know then that with the advent of IPL (Indian Premier League), it would be possible for a youngster to dream about making cricket as a career. All the teams of IPL and their players are paid well to make cricket as a full-time job. However, earlier, it was not possible to do this as the cricketers were not paid well, and they had to take up a job to pay the bills.*

*IPL's brand value is estimated to be around \$4.13 billion. According to global sports salaries review, IPL is the second highest-paid league, based on first-team salaries on a pro rata basis, after NBA.*

They had gathered at Bunty's house in Vile-Parle (East) – a suburb in Mumbai. Bunty's apartment was on the ground floor of a building that was one of the seven buildings in a housing complex called Kripa Nagar. It was around 1:00 PM on a Saturday. They were oblivious to the hot, muggy weather outside as they comfortably sat in



an air-conditioned room. They were eagerly waiting for the cricket match to commence.

A plate filled with spicy peanuts and bottles of chilled beer lay on a small table in front of them. Every few minutes, they would take a fistful of peanuts and flush it down with a sip of beer.

Their friend Ali (who was Bunty's neighbor) also had come over to watch the game. He was a scrawny looking kid who loved cricket with a passion, and like most Indians, never missed any match when India was playing.

A pre-game show played on TV; and experts, who were successful cricketers a few years ago, were trying to predict the outcome. They were discussing the weather, the pitch, the players, the team composition, etc.

Delicious aroma of आलू पराठा (*Aloo Paratha* – an Indian flat-bread stuffed with spiced potatoes) drifted from the kitchen. Bunty's mom was cooking.

Statistics of both teams flashed on the screen, and before one could finish reading them, a new set of statistics replaced the old ones.

*"Oh come on!"* shouted Bunty's dad at the TV, *"Let me finish reading. You remind me of that commentator...what's his name?"*

*There was a commentator who would talk about everything: the weather, the pitch, the sun, the temperature, the sky, the wind...everything but the match. This would frustrate Bunty's dad as the commentator took a long time to mention the score.*

Bunty's dad was an imposing Sardar with a graying beard, who was also passionate about cricket.

The TV babble continued, “I think the teams are evenly matched, it’s anyone’s game. Both have a very strong batting lineup. Pakistan has a better pace attack, and if it clicks, India could be in a lot of trouble. However, I think that the pitch is a batsman’s paradise. Pakistani pace bowlers will have to bend their backs a little more to generate that extra pace that is needed, otherwise, Sachin and Sehwag will take them to the cleaners,” said one expert.

“I agree,” responded the other, “It’s definitely a 300 plus wicket, and actually, I won’t be surprised if they cross 350.”

“I know what I am going to be,” declared Ali. “I am going to be a cricketer, an opening batsman for India.” Everyone glanced at each other, smiling as they knew how difficult it was to play for India. Being a cricketer and playing for India was everyone’s dream; but it was next to impossible to play for India as there were 11 spots available and thousands of Indians were trying very hard to get on the team.

“Of course, Mr. Sachin Ali Khan,” Jai joked.

*Sachin Tendulkar is a legend. He has been playing for almost 20 years for India, since he was 16. People have no doubt that he would complete his 20 years in cricket. In fact, they want him to celebrate his silver jubilee in Indian cricket. If people had their way, he would play till he was 50. He is worshipped like a god in India. The hopes of millions of fans lie on his shoulders. Although he is tiny in stature, he is a giant in the cricketing world.*

*Once, a few years ago, Sachin Tendulkar’s tennis-elbow had acted up, and millions of people who were not even doctors, wanted to give him advice on how to fix it.*

*One day, Kaabi made the mistake of stating that Tendulkar had not won the World Cup for India. Though it wasn't meant to be a negative remark, it made Jai furious.*

*"How dare you blame Sachin?" he fumed.*

*"अरे बाबा (arey baba), I am not blaming him," replied Kaabi defensively.*

*"Yes you are, why did you say 'Tendulkar has not won the World Cup for India?' There are 10 others on the team, so why is it his responsibility alone? Have you forgotten all the matches he has single-handedly won for India? Remember the 2003 World Cup match against Pakistan? He was the man who got India through." Jai was clearly upset.*

*"Gosh! Calm down," said Kaabi defensively, "I have never seen you like this before, and for whom? Someone you have never met in your life?"*

*"It doesn't matter if I've met him or not; never, ever speak anything against Sachin," said Jai.*

*Just like most Indians, saying anything against Sachin Tendulkar invoked a volatile reaction in Jai.*

Kaahi remembered that conversation and winced. She didn't want to think about it, so she turned to Bunty and asked, "What about you Bunty? Have you decided what you want to do?"

"I am joining the army," he replied proudly.

No one was surprised as Bunty had always expressed his passion to join the army. Not only did he have the desire, but he also had the physique to go with his dream. He had always wanted to serve his country; and his father too was an army officer...retired now.

Being a soldier was in his blood, and his parents had always encouraged him.

*During his service, Bunty's father was posted twice on the border, once near Pakistan and once near China. He often narrated nostalgic stories about his time in the army.*

“The army teaches discipline, boys,” he boasted proudly, “like Test cricket.”

He was always impeccably dressed, thanks to his army training, “First impression is the last impression, so always dress well,” he stated, “Kids these days don’t have any sense of proper apparel, they wear anything to cover their bodies and call it fashion,” he scowled, “and they have no respect for the elders. They greet you by ‘हाय (hi).’ What is this ‘हाय (hi)’? Are they so disappointed to see me?”

All laughed as they knew Bunty’s dad spoke perfect English. He knew what “hi” meant.

“No uncle, it’s a way to greet people in English,” explained Kaahi anyway. She contemplated what she was going to say next, then she continued, “And talking about Test cricket, it is so boring.”

She knew Bunty’s dad would not like to hear this. He winced, but Kaahi continued anyway knowing that she had touched a sensitive nerve. “No one has time to watch it for 5 days, and many times there is no result even after 5 days! What’s the point?” she argued.

“Nonsense, nothing like Test cricket. It teaches you to be patient. And पुत्तर (*puttar* – child), don’t just think a draw is a draw; there is victory in a draw.” Kaahi could never understand this, but out of respect she did not argue any further.

“*Generation gap*,” she thought to herself.

“I know, I know. In India, cricket is not just a sport...it’s a religion,” she said loudly.

“Do you know why?” asked Bunty’s dad.

“Because it has millions of followers,” Kaahi replied knowingly.

“No,” Bunty’s dad smiled.

“*No?*” she looked surprised, “why then?”

Now everyone in the room was looking at Bunty’s dad with full attention. They were also surprised by his answer. They had always assumed that was the reason so they were curious to know his take on it.

“Most people say that. However, that is not the reason,” he explained, “It’s because people here love cricket no matter what their religion is: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, etc. Cricket has a cult-like following in this country. It’s like it has formed its own religion. It never cares which religious background or caste one is from. It breaks all boundaries, and is a great equalizer in this country where people are still shackled by caste barriers.”

“That’s very interesting,” Kaahi admitted, “I’d never have thought of it.”

She continued, “Anyways, coming back to my original question, what are you guys going to do?”

“My dad wants me to go back to Kolkata,” said Punk.

## CHAPTER THREE

Punk came from a very wealthy and orthodox family from Kolkata. His dad, a very successful businessman, wanted Punk to go back and join the family business, and Punk was fine with that.

He knew how all his expensive tastes were fulfilled; and where the money came from. His dad had never asked Punk to curb his expenses. Whenever he needed more money, it was available. All he had to do was to make a phone call to his dad. His dad didn't ask: where he was spending his money? How he was spending his money? Why he needed more money? Punk knew that his dad treated it as an investment for the future; and Punk didn't mind this unspoken arrangement. To him, it was a win-win situation; enjoy life now, enjoy life later.

There was only one thing his dad told him, "Don't do drugs; don't even try out of curiosity. I know that you smoke, and I won't ask you to stop it, but try to cut down; it's not good for you." Punk never smoked in front of his dad out of respect. "Ok *Baba* (dad)," he had replied, "No drugs, I promise." He didn't touch drugs, and he was grateful that he didn't as he had seen what they did.

*There used to be a good-looking and well-built student at the canteen. Girls wanted to date him, and boys wanted to be like him. Then he got into the bad company and became addicted to drugs. Punk had witnessed the transformation in him; his body had withered and his handsome face had become ghost like. Nothing remained but a skull covered in skin, and there were dark circles around his bulging eyes that had been sucked into the skull cavity. His cheek-bones were very prominent now as his cheeks had been sucked in. His teeth had become yellow. A strong body odor emanated from him, he hardly shaved, and he had unkempt hair. He begged his friends for money. They started to avoid him.*

"I am confused and unsure. I haven't decided what I am going to do. All I know is that I am staying in Mumbai after graduating from

Sweet Lady,” declared Subra. He was the brightest of the lot. It always baffled his friends how he stood first in his class with very little studying. When others studied in the library before the exams, Subra would be in the college canteen sipping tea, chatting with someone, or if he went to the college library, he would be helping someone solve a problem. No one doubted what he would do with his life as they knew that when he took up something, he aced it.

“I have applied to various universities in the US for advanced education,” he said.

“Once you go there, you won’t come back,” Jai said.

“Why do you say that?” Subra asked.

“I know; most students never return, unless they have a big business back here. They go there for studies, take up a job to gain some experience. Soon they get married and raise a family. Before they know it, they are in their late thirties, early forties, and by then, it would be too late to come back.”

“It won’t happen to me,” Subra responded confidently, “I’ll come back as soon as I finish my studies.”

But Jai didn’t believe him. “They all say that,” he said.

Jai was right. Most of the students who went to the US settled down there. They only returned to visit their friends and family, or to get married.

When they were ready for marriage, a few weeks before their arrival from the US, their parents would put an ad in the matrimonial section in the local newspaper. A typical ad would read as, “Tamil Brahmin parents seeking a suitable partner for their NRI son,” or

“Punjabi Khatri parents seeking a suitable partner for their NRI son,” and it continued, “must be a graduate, must be tall, beautiful and with fair complexion.” Yes, ‘*fair complexion*’. Many Indians were obsessed with being fair. *Even if they had a dark-skinned son, they wanted a fair bride.*

The parents would line-up 3 to 4 ‘interviews’ per day for a suitable partner for their NRI son. NRI or Non-Resident Indian was a status acquired by an Indian who stayed out of India for six months, but people in India called them Non-Required Indians.

This was in the 80s and early 90s, when computers were not as widely used as today. Nowadays, after getting a reply to their ad, the parents in India emailed the girl’s photos to their son in the US. He then would decide whom he wanted to meet, and the parents back in India would arrange the meeting. After graduating and finding a good job, marriage was their top priority.

Jai could never understand the concept of ‘arranged marriage’. “शादी नहीं, बरबादी है (*shaadi nahin, barbadi hai* – it’s not a wedding, it’s your doom),” he always joked.

“How can you decide just by looking at a photo that you are going to spend the rest of your life with this person?” he always wondered. “What if the photo just shows the top half of the girl and she has a huge ass?”

“*Shut up*, that’s how things work in India,” Kaahi shushed him.

The NRI son would fly in for 4 weeks as that’s all he got for an annual vacation from his job. His friends in India joked that he had a tighter schedule than the president of the US.

- 1<sup>st</sup> week: Interview the girls and select one.



- 2<sup>nd</sup> week: Prepare for the wedding.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> week: Get married and honeymoon.
- 4<sup>th</sup> week: Spend time as a married man, going for lunches or dinners to meet various family members; and this time it was not just his side of the family, but her side of the family too.

After putting on a few pounds, from the calorie rich food he had consumed over the past 4 weeks, it would be time for him to go back while his wife would stay in India till she got her US visa.

This was very common in India where many bright Indians went to the US, never to return. It was called the ‘brain-drain of the country’. However, in recent years, the trend had reversed slightly. With many US companies having offices in India now, people would take up a job in one of them instead of going abroad.

*Also, due to the internet, the world has become smaller. It is very easy to be in communication with the US companies, and with the current state of the US economy, many want to come to Bengaluru (Bangalore) or Hyderabad for a better opportunity.*

This was immediately dubbed as ‘reverse brain-drain’.

“I won’t be surprised if a Chinese in the US wants to learn Hindi or learn the intricacies of cricket,” joked Subra, “or an IIT graduate returns home.”

*IIT or the Indian Institute of Technology is the best engineering university in the country. It is also very tough to get into. One had to give an entrance exam to get admitted. There are tuition classes just to prep the students for the entrance exam. They start from early in the morning, and go on till late in the evening.*

*Most of the IIT graduates leave India to pursue a career, and most of them are bound for the US, however, some stay back.*

*Coming to India is a lot more appealing now as things have changed in India. India is rapidly becoming modernized. The Indian economy is booming despite a sluggish world economy. The middle-class is becoming richer. With salaries getting higher, a middle-class family can now generate an income that they could never have dreamt about a few years ago. Buying power in India has increased. People are spending in abundance. Instead of being happy with what they have, they often get wound up in one-upmanship. The end result is that they often buy frivolous unwanted items just to impress the others.*

*Builders are building houses according to the international standards to attract NRIs. All they require now are the Non-Required Indians.*

“Wherever you guys are, whatever you are doing, all I know is you are attending my wedding,” asserted Kaahi.

Jai grinned mischievously, “Wedding?” he looked at Kaahi, “With whom?”

Kaahi looked up startled, and then she saw Jai grinning, so she lightly punched him in his stomach.

“है कोई। क्या मैं तुजसे शादी करूंगी? पागल हो गया है क्या? (*hai koi. kya main tujhse shhadi karrongi? pagal ho gaya hai kya* - There is someone. Do you think I'll marry you? Are you crazy?),” she said.

“*What?*” it was Jai’s turn to get startled, and then he saw Kaahi smiling.

“Good one,” he said as they all started laughing.

*They had talked about what it would be like to be married. They also talked about their house and how it would look. Kaabi would have loved to stay in Mumbai but she was resigned to the fact that her life would be in the US. She was not interested in getting a job or building a career as she was perfectly happy being at home and spending time with her family.*

*A lot of women in Mumbai thought of a career when they graduated, but not Kaabi. Her passion was cooking. She would often try new dishes with Jai, Subra, Buntty and Punk as her guinea pigs. Although they mockingly protested, they were secretly happy. They knew that Kaabi made the most scrumptious food, and they eagerly looked forward to trying it. If too many days had passed since her last meal, Jai would print a recipe of an exotic looking dish from the internet and beg Kaabi to cook it.*

*“This is a recipe for Oriental Salad. We don’t have more than half of the ingredients available here,” Kaabi would protest.*

*“Come on, be creative. I know you can do it, please,” Jai would plead.*

Now, they patiently waited for the match to start as they drank their beers and munched on the spicy peanuts. The pre-game show continued on TV.

“Cricket has become very hi-tech. I think it’s the most hi-tech game in the world,” observed Ali.

“No,” Subra grunted. “Football is.”

“Football, you mean soccer?” Ali asked.

“No, I mean Football, American Football,” Subra replied.

“How do you know?” asked Ali in a challenging voice.

“I’ve read up a lot about American culture while applying to the US universities. I’ve also seen the game on TV. The game is far more hi-tech than cricket,” Subra explained.

“*No way*, nothing can be more hi-tech than cricket,” retorted Ali, “and just because you have read about it or seen it on TV, that doesn’t make you an authority.”

Ali was now playing with Subra, and he knew that Subra was irritated. However, Subra didn’t realize this as he was too annoyed by now, and the beer too was working on his emotions.

“अरे? (*arey?*) How can you say that?” cried an exasperated Subra.

“I just know,” Ali replied stubbornly.

Subra looked very irritated with this explanation.

“Just because you like cricket, you want it to be the most hi-tech game in the world?” his voice was rising now.

“Maybe,” Ali replied indifferently, shrugging his shoulders, which annoyed Subra even more.

Subra looked angry now, but before he replied, Kaahi interjected, “Stop it you two. Just enjoy the match. It’s about to start.”

The TV showed the two captains, the commentator and the match referee standing in the center of the ground, near the pitch.

The captains were shaking hands.

Pakistan had won the toss and had elected to bat.

## Four



## India vs. Pakistan

“Welcome to Eden Gardens, Kolkata,” announced Sunil Gavaskar on TV. He had been a very famous Indian opening batsman in the 70s, and now was a sports commentator. He continued, “It’s a fine afternoon with clear skies. The pitch is a batsman’s paradise, and only above 300 is a good score. What do you think Rameez?”

“I agree,” replied Rameez Raja, a former cricketer from Pakistan, “It’s a good toss to win but Pakistan should have fielded first. This is a day and night match, so the dew will be an important

factor in the evening. It will become difficult to grip the ball. Pakistani spinners will have a tough time spinning the ball. The specialist spinner in their team will be ineffective, and it will be like playing with 10 players. A score of 300 plus is a must but I don't know if that is going to be a winning score as we all know that Indians are good chasers. Pakistan will really have to bat well to put this one out of India's reach."

*There is no rivalry bitterer between any two teams, in any sport in the world, than a cricket match between India and Pakistan. When both teams are playing each other, Indians and Pakistanis all around the world are glued to their TVs. In countries where cricket is not shown on TV, people are checking scores on the internet. Indians would tell Indian players, "No matter what, don't lose to Pakistan," and Pakistanis would tell their players, "No matter what, don't lose to India." If Indians lost, the Pakistanis would rub it in for days and vice-versa, until the next match. It was more than a cricket match, pride was at stake.*

*All over India, shops selling TVs tune their display units to the channel showing the match, and almost always, a small crowd gathers outside the shops to see the match. People commuting listen to the commentary on the radio. On the road, passers-by stop those with radios and ask, "What's the score?"*

*With the shorter format of the game, where each team bats for just 20 overs (120 balls), the game ends in just three hours, and the popularity of cricket has reached new heights. Now, the women and children get involved too; it is no longer a sport that only men watched.*

The match was being played at Kolkata's Eden Gardens, one of the finest cricket grounds in the country. It was also the biggest grounds in the country with a capacity of 90,000. The match was an ODI or One Day International.

The match consisted of only one inning per side. The side batting first would bat for 50 overs, or 300 legitimate balls, and then the next team had to chase down the total in 300 balls. 300 balls (or deliveries) was broken into 50 overs, so each over would consist of 6 ball, after which, a new pitcher (or bowler) would come in.

*Cricket is a sport that can be very complicated to explain, with its many fielding positions: mid-on, mid-off, square-leg, silly-point, slips, gully, cover, extra-cover, third-man, forward short-leg, backward short-leg, etc.; or different types of specialized pitchers like pace bowlers, spinners, etc.; or different types of pitches: off-spin, leg-spin, arm ball, googly (the wrong one), in-swing, out-swing, off-cutter, etc.*

The stadium was full today, the atmosphere electric. The sound of anticipation was in the air. The noise level rose to a big cheer as the Indian fielders came on the ground. They huddled together in a circle with hands around each other's shoulders. India's captain was talking to his team, giving a last-minute pep talk. Finally the huddle broke, and the players took their fielding positions. Pakistani batsmen walked in, and the crowd booed them.

*To play in India is very intimidating for any visiting team, and the umpires too are under a lot of pressure. One wrong decision against the Indian team, and the crowd can be extremely upset. People have been known to go on a rampage by burning seats and throwing bottles.*

*If there is a match between any two countries, the umpires are always from a third neutral country. Many times there are controversial decisions, especially LBW (Leg Before Wicket), but today, modern technology has eliminated these controversies to a certain extent. The umpire now can request a replay by signaling to the third umpire, who is seated in the commentary booth in the stadium. The third umpire scrutinizes the play carefully by replaying it in slow motion on TV. The third umpire then gives his decision that is displayed on the*

*giant screen in the stadium, out or not out, and the crowd cheers in jubilation or moans in disappointment, depending on the decision.*

*If the umpire raises his finger, pointing to the sky, the batsman is out. He then walks to the pavilion, no questions asked, never challenging the umpire's decision. The most he does to show his displeasure about the decision is to shake his head. Replay on TV comes in very handy, especially in run out decisions.*

*One umpire is very famous for raising his finger very slowly, almost in slow-motion, to give someone out. The time it takes for his finger to rise - from his side to up in the air - is like an eternity. The crowd goes absolutely wild when he hands out his decision, with the noise level rising as his hands rises. This is more exciting in close-decisions like LBW, stumped or a faint snick off the bat to be caught behind.*

*Some cricket playing countries have used modern technology to make the game more exciting by introducing things like Hot-Spot, where they use thermal cameras to show the impact of the ball on the bat. Snicko is used to pick up the faintest sound of the ball hitting the bat. Heart-Rate-Monitor is used to monitor the heart-rate of a player. Stump-Cam is used where a tiny camera is installed in the middle-stump. Stump-Microphone is used where a tiny microphone is placed right between the stumps, and Aerial-Cam (also known as Spider-Cam) is used where a camera is placed above the pitch to get a good aerial view of the ground.*

Everyone was ready: the batsmen, the fielders, the crowd, the umpires, and everybody watching at Bunty's house.

The batsman, Salman Butt, took the guard and surveyed the field. He then bent down and took his stance, by standing perpendicular to the bowler with bent knees and stomping his bat on the ground, indicating that he was ready to face the first ball. The wicket-keeper squatted down, the slip squadron kneeled down in



ready position, and the outfielders walked towards the pitch, ready to spring into action to field the ball if it was hit in their direction.

The umpire lowered his hand to indicate he was ready.

“Play,” shouted the umpire.

Everyone in the room leaned forward with anticipation for the first ball to be bowled.

As Zaheer Khan, the Indian fast bowler, ran in to bowl the first ball, the roar from the crowd became deafening. The noise level went way down as the ball whizzed past the batsman and the wicket-keeper (who was standing a few yards away from the stumps) collected it. He then tossed the white and shiny leather ball to the fielder in first slip, who tossed it to extra cover, who tossed it to mid-off, who finally returned the ball to Zaheer Khan, who was walking to his run-up, rubbing the ball on his blue-colored pants to keep the shine of the new ball.

*In ODI (the shorter version), a white ball is used and in Test match (the longer version), a red ball is used. Players too wear different uniforms. In ODI, they wear colored uniforms and in Test, they wear all whites: white shirt, white trousers, white shoes and white sweaters.*

“Good first delivery, outside the off stump. The batsman doesn’t offer any shot,” Sunil Gavaskar was now saying, “A very good afternoon to all the viewers across the world. Good afternoon Rameez.” They were sitting in a commentary box, giving ball-by-ball commentary.

The TV flashed the batsman’s photo and statistics with Pakistan’s flag in the background. They were impressive statistics with a good strike-rate (runs scored per 100 balls faced); they were in the

70s. Salman Butt was not the hardest hitter, but he was in good form now. There were many players with a strike-rate above 100 and some of them were playing today.

“Good afternoon Sunny (they all called Sunil Gavaskar, ‘Sunny’). Yes, it was a great ball for a loosener. Salman Butt likes to hit it on the up. Zaheer was testing him,” replied Rameez Raja. “However, he will not take the bait so early. He will assess the bounce of the pitch and then select his shots.”

This crescendo, a roller-coaster of noise, continued for the rest of the over. It was a maiden over as no run was scored. There was a thunderous applause when the over was finished. Zaheer Khan went to his fielding position, slightly raising his hand to acknowledge the crowd. Ashish Nehra was the next bowler.

The match continued this way. Pakistan’s openers were batting well, and they were piling up a good total without losing any wickets after the first maiden over by Zaheer Khan. Salman Butt was in great form. He was particularly severe on Ashish Nehra, hitting the ball all over the ground. The crowd was very silent.

Frustration showed on Nehra’s face, and his body language too betrayed him as his shoulders were drooping. Nehra came to bowl again, and once again, Butt square-cut Nehra for a boundary, 4 runs. Nehra kicked the ground in more frustration. It was a good shot. The ball crossed the boundary line like a bullet, before any fielder could move.

The crowd groaned, and so did everyone in the room.

“What a shot!?” exclaimed Rameez Raja on TV. “Pure grace and timing. Butt’s eyes lit up when he saw the juicy delivery outside the off stump, and he put it away for 4, executed perfectly. Indians

need a wicket. They need to try something different, maybe try Harbhajan early, although first power-play is still in progress. Only 7 overs have been bowled, and they need to stop the bleeding.”

“*Nehra*,” Bunty screamed at the TV, “*What are you doing? Don’t bowl there. That’s his strength.*”

“Good shot, that was,” admired Ali.

“Of course you’ll say good shot,” said Subra, still irritated with Ali.

“Huh? Why?” Ali asked, confused.

“What do you mean why? Pakistan is doing well,” said Subra. Everyone was looking at them, feeling the tension rising in the room again.

“So?” asked Ali.

“Never mind,” said Subra.

But everyone knew that it was not over.

They all turned their attention to the match on TV. The very next ball, Salman Butt hit Ashish Nehra for a boundary, a straight drive this time.

“What a beauty,” said Ali.

Then Subra said something that he shouldn’t have. It was more out of frustration than anger or malice.

“*پاکستانی (Pakistani).*”

He regretted it the moment it came out his mouth. “*Oh God, What am I saying? What did I do?*”

The room was silent. Everyone looked at Subra and Ali, startled. They all could see that Ali was furious. They all braced themselves for the worst.

“*What,*” Ali shouted, “*What did you say?*”

Subra was upset with himself as he realized that he shouldn’t have said that, but it was too late. It couldn’t be undone now. His stubbornness took over.

“You heard me,” he bellowed, but he knew that it was a wrong thing to say.

“*Yes I heard you properly. What the hell do you mean by that?*” shouted Ali, livid now. Bunty’s dad didn’t know what to say. Even Bunty’s mom had stopped cooking and came out of the kitchen. The tension in the room was unbearable. Everyone had forgotten about the match momentarily.

“You know what I mean,” Subra continued, sounding less convincing this time. Even his friends couldn’t believe what had just happened. They knew he was wrong, that he had crossed a line.

“*No I don’t. What’s wrong with you? Why can’t I admire a good shot? Does it make me a Pakistani? Just because I am a Muslim? Why can’t an Indian Muslim admire a Pakistani batsman’s shot?*”

He was almost in tears now, “Being a Muslim doesn’t mean being a Pakistani. I am an Indian and proud to be one. This is utter nonsense. What do I have to do to prove that I am an Indian first and then a Muslim? Tell me,” Ali’s face was turning red with rage. At the

same time, he looked hurt as though Subra had touched a raw nerve. Ali was experiencing emotions of rage, despair, sadness and exasperation, all together. Subra was looking down now, furious with himself.

Everyone was silent. They didn't know what to say. The only sound they could hear was the commentator on the TV.

“*OUT, Clean bowled!* Butt is gone, Nehra takes his revenge,” screamed the commentator.

Everyone forgot about the argument; they all turned to the TV. Ali's face now turned from rage to joy.

“*Yesssssssssss,*” said Ali, as he jumped and punched the air with his fist. He was so happy that he forgot about the previous moment and hugged Subra. “*Yes! Yes! Yes! That's what I am talking about baby,*” then he started screaming at Butt on TV, “*Get lost!*”

Subra was looking at Ali, smiling.

“*What?*” asked Ali.

“*You just proved that you are an Indian first,*” said Subra grinning sheepishly.

The tension suddenly defused and was replaced by a festive mood. Now everyone was cheering, whistling, clapping and giving high-fives.

“Aunty, I'll have a Paratha,” said Jai, “*साला (sala)* idiots. Because of your drama, I missed a wicket,” he said half-jokingly.

“Sorry,” said Subra extending his hand to Ali. “I didn’t mean it; you know that. You know me well enough to know I would never mean that, I was wrong to say that, sorry.”

“It’s ok यार (yaar – pal),” replied Ali, shaking Subra’s hand. “I’m sorry for pushing your buttons earlier.” He knew that Subra didn’t mean it. He had known Subra for enough years to know what kind of a person he was, “*Don’t ever question my Indian-ness. This is my country as much as yours. I love India just the way you do.*”

The mood was very different now than a few minutes ago, and to lighten it further, Punk said in a voice imitating ‘Gabbar Singh’ from ‘Sholay’ (a blockbuster movie of 70s.)

“तुमने सूना उसने क्या कहा? सूना? (tumne soona usne kya kaha? soona? – Did you hear what he said? Did you?). *This is my country as much as yours.* What a dialogue! वाह (wab – wow).”

Everyone burst out laughing.

*It is very common to use dialogues, from a hit Bollywood movie, in daily life. Bollywood is not just a movie industry but part of life in India. People often use dialogues from them, often to lighten the situation.*

Bunty’s mom brought out hot Aloo Parathas from the kitchen.

Jai asked, “Aunty, no लस्सी (lassi – a sweet yogurt drink)?”

Bunty looked at Jai and said, “Drink water. You’ve been looking fat lately.”

“*What?*” exclaimed Jai, “जलता है साला (*jalta hai saala* – you are just jealous) of my muscular body.”

Bunty looked at Jai as though he was about to say something, then he changed his mind, grabbed a pillow and threw it at Jai.

“Aunty देखो (*dekho* – see) what your son is doing to your *Parathas*? Don’t give him any; that’ll teach him.”

“*Off!* You two,” said Kaahi, “Stop it. Watch the match.”

The match continued. The batsman was facing a spinner, and the keeper was standing very close to the stumps. The batsman tried to play a defensive shot, thinking that the ball would spin in one direction, while it spun in the other direction. While playing a defensive shot, the batsman stretched fully forward, and his toe slightly slid outside the crease. The keeper collected the ball and whipped the bails off the stumps in a flash and then pointed his finger to the leg umpire.

“*Howzat,*” he yelled, appealing.

*Appealing is a term in cricket used to ask the umpire if the batsman is out or not.*

The crowd roared. The leg umpire turned to the pavilion where the TV umpire was sitting and signaled to him. His hands made a square in the air, a way to indicate that he was requesting a TV decision. The crowd was very silent till the decision was given. All eyes were glued to the giant screen which showed a pulsing logo of the sponsor. Suddenly, the logo started spinning rapidly, indicating that the TV umpire was about to give his decision. The logo stopped spinning and the word “out” sprang from behind it. The crowd went

delirious. Everyone in Bunty's room too started screaming and jumping with joy.

"*Stumped* is the most beautiful way to get anyone out in cricket," declared Jai.

"Nonsense, *LBW* is," argued back Ali.

"What about *caught behind* in the slips?" asked Punk.

"Oh god, you guys," protested Kaahi, "don't you get it?"

"Get what?" asked Jai.

"They are all *out*. An *out* is an *out* is an *out*."

"By the way, here is a quiz for you cricket pundits," said Kaahi, "What are the different ways of getting out?"

"That's easy," said Ali, "caught, bowled, *LBW*, run-out and stumped."

"Hit wicket," added Punk.

"That is six," Kaahi said.

"Oh yeah," remembered Jai, "Handling the ball."

"Seven," Kaahi replied, "three more to go."

"What?" Jai was surprised.

"That's right, three more to go," Kaahi continued, "Even I didn't know, so I Googled it."

"Okay, we give up," conceded Punk, "What is it?"



“Timed out, double hit and obstructing the field,” she said triumphantly.

“Yeah right,” said Subra, “you are making these up.”

“No, I am not,” Kaahi replied, “they are not well known as they are rarely used, but they are there, and they are valid ways to get out.”

“Okay,” said Jai, “Tell us what they are.”

“Timed out is a rule that is almost never used as it’s not a good sporting gesture, but the rule says that when a wicket falls, the next batsman must be at the crease to face the next ball within three minutes of the wicket falling.”

“In ‘double hit’, a batsman can be given out if he hits the ball twice, and the second strike is deliberate. The only exception that allows a batsman to hit the ball twice is if he is protecting his wicket, i.e. stopping the ball from rolling back on to the stumps.”

“And the third one?” asked Punk.

“In ‘obstructing the field’, the umpire can give out if he feels that the batsman has got in the way, on purpose, of a fielder who is about to take a catch or attempt a run-out.”

“Wow,” said Jai, “I didn’t know that.”

“I knew that,” said Ali.

“Yeah, right,” retorted Kaahi, “your nose is growing Mr. Pinocchio.”

“अलि ने धापा (*Ali ne dhapa* – Ali bluffed),” laughed Bunty, and everyone, including Ali started to laugh.

The match went on and when Pakistan’s inning was over, they had made 348 runs in their allotted 50 overs; the target being 349 to win. “It’s a formidable total,” a happy Rameez Raja was saying, “but you know the Indians, they have successfully chased 300 plus runs in the past, so it’s definitely not a safe total. They have a very strong batting line-up, with lots of big hitters.”

Now it was India’s turn to bat. Out walked the Indian openers, Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag. The crowd of 90,000 went wild. Chants of “Sachin, Sachin, Veeru, Veeru,” echoed through the balmy night. In the first over, Sehwag hit 5 boundaries scoring 20 runs, and in the next over, Tendulkar scored 18 runs. Sunil Gavaskar was screaming now, “If they continue to bat this way, the match will be over pretty soon.”

The hitting continued as the match progressed. Soon Sehwag was on 96. Everyone was nervous, everyone except Sehwag. He was cool as a cucumber.

“Normally batsmen slowdown in their nineties as they are nervous to cross 100. That’s why they are called nervous-nineties, but not Sehwag,” Sunil Gavaskar was saying, “He is not your typical batsman. He blazes through the nineties.” On the very next ball Sehwag jumped out of the crease and lifted the ball for a sixer. He had scored his century (100 runs), and the crowd went wild. Sehwag removed his helmet and lifted his bat to acknowledge the applause.

Sachin Tendulkar soon followed Sehwag as he elegantly drove the ball to covers and ran for two runs to go past 100. He too removed his helmet and lifted both his hands to acknowledge the

crowd. One hand was holding the helmet while the other hand was holding the bat. Sehwag came up to him and hugged him. Then Sachin pointed his bat towards the dressing room where his teammates were sitting. The TV was now showing the dressing room, where all the Indian players were standing and clapping, with big smiles on their faces.

“I am just waiting for the day when he crosses 50 centuries in Test cricket. It’s not IF, it’s WHEN,” said Sunil Gavaskar.

The score was 212 runs when the first wicket fell. It was Sehwag as he tried to hit the ball out of the ground, but he mistimed the ball. The ball went flying to the fielder standing at deep mid-wicket. The crowd moaned as the fielder caught it, but the moan turned into thunderous applause as Sehwag walked back to the pavilion with his bat raised.

Gautam Gambhir was the next man in. He too started hitting the ball well and soon the score was past 250 with the loss of 1 wicket.

“I told you, it was a mistake to bat first,” Rameez Raja was saying, “This one’s gone.”

Sunil Gavaskar was sitting next to him with a big grin on his face.

“True, but you and I both know that cricket is a funny game. It’s not over till the fat lady sings. Remember 1985 at Sharjah? You and I both were playing.”

“Ugh, please don’t remind me,” shuddered Rameez Raja.

*Sunil Gavaskar was referring to the famous match between India and Pakistan played at Sharjah. The year was 1985, and both, Sunil Gavaskar and*

*Rameez Raja were playing for their countries. India batted first. Pakistan's pace bowler, Imran Khan, was unplayable as he swung the ball off the air and seamed it off the ground. He took 6 wickets and conceded only 14 runs in his quota of 10 overs. His bowling figures were 10 overs, 2 maidens, 14 runs and 6 wickets. India could only manage to score 125 runs.*

*Then it was Pakistan's turn to bat. Everyone thought the match was over and Pakistan had won, as they could very easily chase the total. However, their joy was very short-lived. To the shock of millions of Pakistanis all around the world, they could only score 87 runs.*

*Pakistan lost, and India won!*

*It was a match remembered even today, fondly by Indians and bitterly by Pakistanis.*

“You were like a man possessed that day,” told Rameez Raja to Sunil Gavaskar, “You took four catches, and those were very difficult ones.”

“As they say, catches win matches,” beamed Sunil Gavaskar.

The hitting continued through the rest of the match. Everyone was ecstatic as they had never seen such hitting before, and India comfortably won the match.

Everyone in the room gave each other a big high-five as the winning run was scored. Sachin Tendulkar was declared “Man of the Match” by the judges.

“I hope he scores a triple century in Test,” said Bunty's dad. The only Indian to achieve this feat was Sehwag. He had scored 300 runs, *Twice*.

*There are three forms of cricket now, Test cricket: which is played for five days, ODI: which is played for a day and the new craze, 20/20 (or T20, as it is called): which lasts for about three and half hours.*

“He will,” replied Jai wishfully, but he had his doubts as he knew that Sachin Tendulkar had only a few years left before he retired. Although he was scoring centuries, it was not the same.

Everyone was in a joyous mood savoring the magnificent victory. But the reference of ‘Pakistani’ still played on everyone’s mind.

They all stayed up late at Bunty’s house relishing the victory drinking beer, eating spiced peanuts and *Aloo Parathas*.

Suddenly, Jai remembered something. He looked at his watch. “Let’s go,” he told Kaahi, “we’re late.”

“Where are you guys off to?” asked Punk.

“To my house,” Jai replied, “our parents are getting together”

“For?” he asked again.

“To fix our wedding date,” Jai replied getting up and heading for the door, and Kaahi followed him.

“Marriage, huh, that was fast,” laughed Subra, “अभी भी मौका है, सोच ले (*abhi bhi moka hai, soch le* – There still is chance, think it over).”

~\*~\*~

When they reached Jai’s house, both, Kaahi’s and Jai’s parents were sitting around a man in saffron clothes, intently looking at a

calendar. He was a Hindu priest, and according to the Indian traditions, they had called him to fix an auspicious wedding date. Though it was late in the day to call a priest, the priest had made an exception upon Jai's dad's request. Jai hesitated to enter the room. He had had a few beers, and didn't want to offend the priest. But everyone was so engrossed that they didn't notice Kaahi and Jai slipping out to the verandah.

"I want to ask you something," Jai said.

"What?"

"Where would you like to go on our honeymoon?"

"Oh, I don't know," Kaahi blushed, "I haven't thought about it. How about some place romantic?"

"We are already going to the US, and we have decided to take a vacation in Europe. So how about doing something local?"

"Kerala?" Kaahi suggested.

"In the monsoon?" Jai asked.

"Yeah, it'll be so romantic"

"True, but we won't be able to see many places. How about Rajasthan?" he suggested.

"*Rajasthan?* Why Rajasthan?" Kaahi asked.

"Why not? Both of us have never been there; it'll be fun. Come on, we can go for 2 weeks."

"2 *weeks?* Isn't that a bit long?" she looked doubtful.

“*Naaa*, there is a lot to see there,” he reassured her.

“Okay,” Kaahi finally agreed, “Actually, I always wanted to go there. Rajasthan has so many forts and palaces to see, and each one has a romantic story.” They went inside where the parents were.

To Jai’s relief, the priest had left, and their parents looked content. They had finally decided on a date and a location, and were busy discussing other ceremonies.

“Ah, there you are, where did you disappear?” exclaimed Jai’s dad when he saw both of them entering the room.

“We were in the verandah,” Jai replied, “talking about our honeymoon.”

“Where would you like to go on your honeymoon?” he asked both of them, “Europe, USA?”

“We have decided to go to Rajasthan,” Jai replied.

“*Rajasthan?*” his dad asked, “why Rajasthan and not the US?”

“We are going to the US anyway,” Jai replied.

“That’s true,” Jai’s dad agreed, “but are you sure?” asked Jai’s dad looking doubtful. “You can go anywhere you want. How about the Far East?”

“No. Rajasthan,” Jai replied firmly.

“Okay, Rajasthan it is,” conceded Jai’s dad.

Next, they planned the menu for the wedding and the reception.

## Thirteen



## The News

**D**uring fall, after daylight savings time ended and the US set back the clocks an hour, the days became shorter. When it started to get cold, out came the mothballed warm clothes from the closet. The trees began to shed their leaves, and they became barren. It was nearing the end of November, and Thanksgiving was around the corner. Kaahi and Jai had been invited by Jai's friend, Brian, for Thanksgiving dinner. It being their first Thanksgiving, they had no clue what the custom was.



“What happens at Thanksgiving dinner?” Jai asked Brian one day at the office.

“Well, Thanksgiving is always on the last Thursday of November. People want to spend it with their loved ones. They fly in from all over the US and even abroad to spend time with their families.”

“Families get together in the afternoon and have an elaborate meal. They have the works: turkey, cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie, mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing, yams, and more. Turkey is the center piece of the meal, and the head of the family usually carves the turkey. This meal - more like a feast - goes on till evening,” Brian continued.

“So it’s a holiday where people just get together and eat?” Jai asked.

“No,” Brian laughed. “The significance of Thanksgiving Day stems from the need to display gratitude through prayer and hymns. It originated as a religious community tradition, where the community offered thanks to God for its spiritual and material possessions. However, nowadays, it has become a day for national celebration, festivities, and general gaiety. The most important part of Thanksgiving is the family meal in every home. The whole family gathers at the meal and starts with the saying of grace.”

“*Turkey?*” Jai winced. “You know that we are vegetarian, right?”

“Of course,” Brian reassured him, “but don’t be alarmed. There will be plenty of vegetarian choices.”

Later that evening, Jai told Kaahi about it.

“We should go. It’ll be fun, and besides, his gesture of inviting us tells us that he considers us family,” he said.

“I agree,” she nodded.

They were sitting on their family room carpet. The backyard door was open. They could hear the waterfall. The wind-chime in the patio jingled. CNN blared on TV in the background. Both, Kaahi and Jai were silent now as they sipped their coffee, and thought about Thanksgiving. They were trying to think if there was any Indian festival like it.

“This just in,” the newscaster’s voice could be heard in the background. *“There has been civil unrest in India.”*

Upon hearing ‘India,’ Jai looked up. He raised the volume. The newscaster continued, “The situation is very tense, and the news from India is very sketchy. The Indian government has stopped all communications: no phones, no TV, no internet, nothing. It is like someone has turned off a switch to India. We are not getting any news from there. However, our correspondent was able to file a quick report through the internet, before the Indian government shut it down. We will inform you on further developments as soon as we hear something. At this moment, all we know is that there has been unrest in India, and all communications have been stopped.”

Jai and Kaahi were too stunned to react.

*“This is not happening. This is just a dream. I’ll wake up soon and all this will be gone,”* thought Jai.

But it was not a dream. This was happening for real. A cold shiver went down his spine.

*“How can this be true?”* he thought.

Now he started sweating. Suddenly he thought of Kaahi, and he looked at her. Blood had drained from her face. She was cupping her wide open mouth, as if not to let out a scream.

*“Pa, Ma,”* he thought, *“Kaahi’s parents.”*

Not believing CNN, he picked up the phone, and dialed India. No response; the line was dead. He tried the cell phone, with the same result. He threw the phone, frustrated.

*“What will I do?”* he thought. Mixed emotions were going through him: rage, frustration, anxiety, fear. He felt helpless.

Then Kaahi thought of something.

“Call up the Indian Consulate in San Francisco,” she said. Her voice was low, almost a hush.

“I don’t know the number,” he replied, in a frustrated voice.

“Call 411,” she said.

He dialed 411.

After a few rings, the operator came on the line. “City and business please?” said the operator.

“San Francisco, Indian Consulate.”

“Thank you, here is the number,” said the operator.

Jai memorized the number, and dialed it. The line was busy, so he pressed redial, busy again. He pressed redial again, and a show of relief on his face told Kaahi that he had finally gotten through. After a

few rings, a voice on the other end said, “Indian Consulate, may I help you?”

“Yes. I just saw the news on CNN, is it true?” asked Jai in a loud voice.

“Yes.”

“*What’s going on?*” demanded Jai.

“I don’t know.”

“What do mean you don’t know?” Jai shouted.

“I mean, *we don’t know!* We are getting very limited information from India. All modes of communications have been shut down.”

Jai was exasperated, and his voice betrayed that, “How can I get in touch with my family?” he demanded.

There was a long pause on the other end. The man from the consulate was thinking of the best way to answer this.

“*The only way I know is to go there personally.*”

“*What?*”

Jai thought that the man was out of his mind, but he controlled his anger. Suddenly, he realized that the man also must have family back in India, and he too must be as concerned as Jai was. Jai felt sorry for the man. Just like Jai, there would be many Indians calling the consulate, and the poor man had to sound very professional. Not showing his anxiety through his voice was an impossible task for the man, but he was trying very hard.

“You mean take a flight?” he asked.

“Yes,” the man continued.

“Is that the only choice?”

“Yes,” the man answered. He then asked, “What’s your name?”

“Jai...er...Vijay,” Jai said.

“Full name?” the man asked.

“Vijay Rao,” Jai replied.

“Rao? Where are you from?” the man asked.

“Mumbai,” Jai replied

Then the man from the consulate asked a very strange question, “I mean where you are originally from?”

*“What does that have to do with anything?”*

“It’s very important,” the man replied.

“I was born in Mumbai, but my dad is from Karnataka, if that’s what you are asking,” he replied impatiently.

“Yes, I am exactly asking that. So he speaks Kannada?” the man asked.

“Yes,” Jai replied.

“Are you married?” the man asked.

“Yes.”

“What’s your wife’s name?”

“Kaahi...er...Kahani.”

“Full name?”

“Kahani Rao.”

“I mean her full name before she got married.”

“*What sort of a question is that?*” thought Jai, but he said,  
“Kahani Parekh.”

Jai was getting angry now, but he controlled his emotions.

“Gujarati?” asked the man.

“Yes.”

There was a brief pause.

“*You two will have to go by different flights,*” the man finally said.

“*What?*” Jai shouted. He thought the man was totally insane,  
“*Why?*”

The man’s tone had softened now, almost sympathetic.

“You have to fly to South India, and your wife will have to fly to North India,” the man explained, with an anguished voice.

Jai thought he had misheard what the man was saying.

“What? Speak up please,” he demanded.

“*There are two Indias now.*”

# Being an Indian

Many Indians, all around the world, take pride in being an Indian.

So, *what is being an Indian?*

Is it religion? Surely it can't be, as India is a melting pot of many religions: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, Jains, Buddhists, Jews, and many more. Would an Indian who was born in India and an Indian who was born in a different country have religion as a common bond? What if they both were Hindus and worshipped the same gods and goddesses, but were from different states? Is Gautam Buddha, who was born in India, and is now worshipped by many more non-Indians, an Indian God?

Is it language? Again, the answer is *no*, as there are 15 national languages, and over 1,600 dialects. Take a look at the Indian Rupee bill (the Indian currency). Its value is written in all 15 national languages.

Is it the culture and customs? Could be, but it isn't the only thing, as different states have different customs.

Is it looks and features? Do you see a stranger abroad and assume that he is Indian just because of his looks? What if he is from one of the 'Seven Sister States' of India? Many of them have oriental features. Do you assume that he is from an oriental country? Or, he could look like an Indian, but be from one of the neighboring countries.

*The Seven Sister States are a region in the northeastern corner of India, comprising of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura.*

What about the millions of Indians who are not in India? What about their kids? What is their identity? They look like Indians, but think like westerners. What about kids from mixed marriages, where one of the parents is an Indian while the other is not. Where do they fit in? Are they Indians or something else? Which custom are they supposed to follow?

Is it the nationality or citizenship? What about all those Indians who now are citizens of different countries? Sure, they are not Indian citizens, but are they not Indians? When there is a catastrophe in India (like the earthquake in Gujarat), Indians all around the world rush to help. What makes them do it?

What is the common thread between a Punjabi from North India and a Tamil from South India? If both of them are Hindus, is it enough? Is it cricket and Bollywood movies? Yes, both are loved by most Indians. However, they are not the only thing. They both are great conversation topics.

If you live in India, the answer is very simple, *you are among Indians*, but not if you live abroad. Having lived in the US for the past 20 years, the definition of being Indian has been nebulous. My wife and I, like most Indians living abroad, try to instill Indian values in our kids, by sending them to Sunday school to learn our religion and culture. We take them to the cultural shows, musical shows, Indian festivals, etc...trying to hold onto our Indian-ness. We try to teach them cricket, and we take them to see Bollywood movies. Does going to Indian stores for groceries, cooking Indian food, and going to Indian restaurants (and ordering food for our non-Indian friends) make us Indians?



We try hard to hold on to our values, but know that it's the Law of Diminishing Returns. Whatever we know, we try to pass on to our kids, and they will do the same. Until a few generations from now, there will be nothing to pass on. My great-great-great grandkids will probably say, "Oh yeah! My great-great-great grandfather came from India."

In the future, will an Indian who has just come from India, feel a common bond between himself and my great-great-great grandkids? Or will the Indian think to himself, "*They look like Indians. They must be ABCD (American Born Confused Desi),*" and my great-great-great grandkids will think, "*Ob! A FOB (Fresh Off Boat).*"

What is it that makes you go back to India? Is it family, friends, sight-seeing, business, or something else? Is your comfort level much more when you go to India because you fit in? Do you still feel it is your country? Is it the people there that make you feel at home? Or is it just a state of mind? Is it just a way of life? Is it just the way you look; the color of your skin, your features, the way you dress, or the clothes you wear?

The intention here is not to provide you with an answer, but to make you think, and ask yourself, "*What is being an Indian to me?*"

It's entirely up to you...your point-of-view.

*An Indian lies in the eyes of the beholder...what you choose to see.*

You can travel the length and breadth of India, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Mumbai to Kolkota, and not see a single Indian. You will see Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, etc. You will see Maharashtrians, Gujaratis, UPites, Biharis, Bengalis, Tamils, Telugus, Malayalis, etc.

*Or you will see Indians.*

जय हिंद (*Jai Hind*)

-*An Indian*

## India, an Enigma

*She stands with arms open,  
steadfast in times of turmoil,  
donning the lovely tri-colors,  
holy rivers making a beautiful smile.  
She is the mother of pearls.*

*The land of festivals,  
with a romantic history,  
language and God of choice,  
and culture has an identity.  
Here music finds its voice.*

*Her magnetic architectures,  
as old as her mysterious traditions,  
hold beautiful treasures.*

*When people want to break her,  
it so pains my heart,  
the image of her future seems,  
a mirror of the past.  
And my dreams remain just memories.*

*But India has won,  
you and I can live together  
as one,  
now and forever.*

*Rahul*

# India Is One

## एक है भारत



सत्यमेव जयते

(*satyameva jayate* - Truth Alone Triumphs)