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The Bike

Dr. Gagan Bihari Purohit

The stopping sound of the gas horn was enough indication for Venu that it was a wakeup call to put things in right place. He made a straight forward attempt to cling to the idea of possessing the old bike even after seventeen years of continuous use. It had been a priceless companion ever since it was inducted into Venu household witnessing many ups and downs for it shared both sadness and happiness associated with the family. The tag of a flying machine well suited to the lifeless motor cycle; it performed many an impossible and arduous task assigned to it by the master from time to time. It was nothing less than a close family friend who used to perform five average men's work on a routine basis without any sign of breaking down. Weight up to three hundred kilograms had been a child's play for the robust bike.

He took stock of things related to the old bike, pressing hard for owning the old bike against stiff opposition from his children, including his wife. Solution to this impasse seemed nowhere near to replace that old rag of a bike. It was easy for Venu to convince his wife whenever the bike went wrong on the way. But now things went out of control when three members of the family—his daughter Bini, son Vicky and wife Banita-- were up against arms with the bike. Benu would brood over the fate of the bike. What would it do when handed over to an unknown hand? He made up his mind to do something concrete for the bike so as to enhance its life span by another five years. The repair of the engine by replacing the bore and piston, its connecting rod and the timing chain would set things right for him. By repairing the engine every four or five years, Venu could easily remember the main accessories of the bike. But he knew that once the mechanic loosened out the assembly he would come up with a long list of parts, some major and some minor, to add to anguish of Venu. Apart from having three old bikes for maintenance of the garage, the mechanic had also opened up a small accessories shop of a sort in his garage itself to save his customers from time and harassment. This was, of course, the mechanic's version in defense of having minor parts for the benefit of customers. But the customers had different stories related to the mechanic's opinion, some of whom felt that the mechanic could accrue two-fold benefit from the deal. In addition to the usual 30% commission from selling parts, he could also cheat the customers by not replacing some of the minor parts at all. He knew for sure that many customers would not favour the idea of spending much time in the garage, leaving aside their office or other important work. Moreover, the customers weakness of not knowing the parts of bike proved more than handy for the mechanic.

The argument, the mechanic gave in his defense was even more interesting. Most of his customers were employees in public and private sector offices. "Do they not cheat their employers, falling grossly short of their standards and accountability?" The nascent pay hike in the seventh pay commission was also being cited by him as a make up for his misdemeanor. It was a naked truth in far and near India that nefarious activities were on the rise in absence of the nemesis.



Venu didn't have any grudge to bear against the mechanic for love of his old bike. The demand for old Hero Honda was never at the receiving end. The dilemma-of-a-life time, whether to sell it or not pricked him every now and then. But a strong undercurrent from a far off corner from his heart would always resist any thought of neglecting it, not to mention parting ways with it. Many childhood friends with whom Venu shared his rather happy time along were removed from the scene long ago. But the motor bike had been the real companion who had never deserted him like his childhood friends, many of whom were mere opportunists, always calculative in their concerns as to how much profit they would make out of the deal called friendship. They would be on minute standby to out throw Venu of his position with a silly slippage from the regular watchful ways. He was always at arm's length if he had got any chance to deal with human friends whose fault-finding spree would not let even a slip of a tongue. How could these so-called human friends be on a par with the old automobile bike which had served him with commitment and sincerity, without expecting anything in return? It had been a silent spectator, and even a significant support to whatever Venu did, wrong or right, over the years which would almost be impossible to expect from a human being. This was precisely the reason why he was averse to any sight of dispensing with a friend and conscience-keeper which could be counted upon in every difficult situation.

The bike always caught Venu nostalgic about the good old memories. Riding on the wave of old memories had been fun and pleasure at critical periods of time in our life where things were getting out of our control. The days were gone when every occasion was celebrated with gaiety and fervor. Sweets had the alluring smell of pure ghee. The time when the entire day was being spent playing in the village street was rare and sparse. Sweat soaked clothes, supported by a strong slap, either from an elder from your family or someone outside from the village used to come in the way of game play and rest. *Gili danda*, hide and seek, police-thief and above all kabadi were the games that every child of the village was willing to participate whole heartedly without having any preparatory sessions, the response was spontaneous, rules came to us as others things of life came automatically. No tree was long to climb, no race out of reach. Bathing in river was a routine affair, daring the flood water a favourite pastime. Stealing sweet *Jamuns* from the nearby neighbourhood was something considered a heroic act, and the swift movements while jumping from one roof to another within seconds often posed the real challenge. Even monkeys with their natural flair for jumping would play a second fiddle to Venu's daring run for a life risk. Breaking the tiled roofs and the blame game of who-did-it that followed had no root in truth, for the strange fear of being beaten until the numerous bamboo sticks meant for keeping the animals, more specially street dogs away, would be broken in the process of churning out the truth out of Venu. Summer vacations were meant for merry making, even going to a distant aunt or uncle's house was more than satisfying experience for young guns like Venu. Going to *Apera* or theatre (street performances) was always considered to be a bonus, circus or cinema was treated as no less than a luxury one could afford to.



How could one forget about the dog-eared note books which figured more caricatures than the text notes? Missing classes regularly for stealing raw green cereals on the field beside the road on the way to school was on the rise and the repeated threats from the farmers in charge of their respective fields with a complaint lodged before the school authorities to be punished with stern punishments of kneeling down under the sharp pebbles; only to repeat the same mischief on a routine basis until the farmer finally harvested the crop with annoyance and agony. Attending marriage functions for days together meant a real time-off from the studies and swallowing Amul spray powder meant for the delicious sweet dish, *kheer* was a real challenge for the host to deal with naughty deeds of village children of which notoriety of Venu stood out.

The bike did provide a glimpse of childhood notoriety that one would like to treasure in this narrowly squeezed out world where children had no outing outside their home confinement. Their study and home work coupled with sky-was-the-limit aspirations of their parents had made them book worms who were good-for-nothing fellows outside. Even they often failed to settle small bills at the grocery shops who would revel in doing difficult sums in less than a minute's time. The only saving grace for children today seemed to be their mastery over the operation of the smart phones. But they would fail bitterly on the friendship scale in comparison to the lifeless machine.

The reminiscences associated with the bike were no less engrossing. Riding it with passage lift-ups up to four passengers was not a joke. A strain on the engine was obvious, but it was challenging all the same. Taking three children and two adults besides the owner on the ride was an experience one could hardly forget. The memory it evoked when one embarked on an adventurous but romantic journey to a nearby park or stream to spend some private time away from the hustle and bustle of the public life was on song to revive an intensely personal moment or past glory. The memory of a newly wedded couple Venu and Banita when the bride was on the course to realize the dreams of a life time in the company of her newly married husband could well be realized sitting on the back seat. The close grip she would cast around the entire body was a hair-raising experience for the man. All her girlishness became a mesh with her overnight transformation to womanhood. The bike was also a silent witness to how the lady had taken a complete hold over her husband. Many more private moments of its master had not been lost sight of from the meticulous observation of the living thing. When pregnant, it took every pain from six weeks up to forty two weeks to see through the long process of the child birth. A sweet and smiling baby girl came to sit on its petrol tank to have a glimpse of the new world. In between it had undertaken much pain in catering flawless service to three members of its master. It had undertaken something larger than the daily concerns of the master's family. Every odd thing being happened right under the nose of the steel frame of the flying machine, as the master would often term it; the lifeless bike had never deserted its master for years on a stretch. It was a true companion and more than the happy days the critical stretch of time was being well looked after by the bike. In the run up to routine scratching, the young gun would unleash torture on the iron make up but nothing serious would come in the way because of its strong nut-bolt structure



which was opposed to flesh-and-blood life. Had it not been for iron nut and bolt, the machine would have behaved in the same flesh and blood way. It served with rare security and empathy for the master and those around. For six years on the roll it was put to use by the master for the family service, the notoriety of the small girl was taken for granted by the inanimate companion of a life time. Then it felt overweight one day. But before much time being spent to find out the reason, it knew for sure that another member was a welcome and no one but the bike had to feel the burden at first. It's duty increased on a faster pace. In addition to its regular routine work, medical attention to yet-to born baby was given to it and it accepted extra burden without complain. In less than a year a son came to grace the master's family and it had to do the repeat schedule of work to cope up with the demands of a new born child. Every now and then it felt the weight of four humans on its lifeless skeleton but nothing in the world had perturbed it to veer back from the duty assigned to it. When it fumbled at times Venu would set things right by looking after the technical modalities. It had seen the master's rise from a mere man of society to a man of establishment within a few years. Now that he came up with a brand new car to accommodate four fully grown members how could he forget the service it rendered to him for years together. But then he knew that human beings were very selfish and cruel; they believed in their development only, be it at the cost of others sincerity and hard work.

“They often tend to forget the help and friendship by their own kith and kin, let alone the service of a lifeless bike. But what can be done about this. Whether master deserts it or remembers the uninterrupted service provided over the years is up to him? On its part it is right to every bit of it; the ball is in the master's court now, he can hit a six or resort to getting bowled”.

For Venu, all grandiloquence, fun and pleasure around had their premature end but not the service of bike. The comfort, if not luxury of its master's family consisting of four members had always been its priority. When human beings, including its master were yet to emerge from the gripping issue of preserving family values which had taken a back seat in the present context, it was the self less service of the bike that stood the test of time and came out victorious each time it was put to acid test. Quarreling as they were, on every drop of a hat, the human ways are out of its grasp. The only major concern or the one point programme it had was to provide flawless service. It was never ever afraid of the heap of work it had to do. Even after eighteen years of rigorous use, its heart was in the right place. It was really incredible but in the heart of hearts it knew that it had told the truth.

The tussle between Venu on one side and Banita, Bini and Vicky on the other over the issue of disposing the old bike resulted in the former's victory. Venu was always comforting his mind to get rid of the old bike at the behest of stiff opposition from his family but every time his conscience pricked him to part ways with a friendship of strong bond. Such a strong undercurrent for the man- machine bond was still flowing through his blood and veins.