

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOLD

Alok Kumar Das



Gold ring



Gold coins



Gold nuggets

Have you ever wondered where the gold (symbol - "Au" and Atomic number 79) in your wedding ring came from? "Gold is where you find it", so goes the saying. Gold was first discovered in natural state, in streams all over the world. No doubt that it was the first metal known to early hominids. This yellow metal has fascinated the human kind from time immemorial. There is another famous saying that "Old is Gold". And now it is proven that gold is also very old.

Gold became part of every human culture. Its brilliance, natural beauty, its luster, great malleability and resistance to tarnish made it most enjoyable to work and play with. Gold's early uses were no doubt ornamental, its brilliance and permanence linked it to royalty and deities in early civilizations. Gold was associated with water (logical, since most of it was found in streams) and it was assumed that gold was a particularly dense combination of water and sunlight. The Incas referred to gold as "tears of the sun". The Hindus regarded gold as heavenly and belonging to the Gods. And today modern science writers are also proving it to be heavenly and extra-terrestrial.

The "Gold of troy" treasure hoard, was excavated in Turkey and dated back to 2450 – 2600 B.C. This was a time when gold was highly valued but had not yet become money itself. Gold was always valuable to humans, even before it was used as money. Gold coins in the form of money can be traced long back in history. Gold was used as money in ancient Greece.

The "value" of gold was accepted all over the world. Today, as in ancient times, the beauty of gold itself has universal appeal to humans. But how did gold become a commodity, a measurable unit of value? It replaced the bartered system of trading and made business easy and global. According to a statistics approximately a total of 171,300 tons of gold have been mined in human history till now.

How gold was formed

In a supernova in the depths of space, long, long ago According to Tyson, the author of Death by Black hole and other Cosmic Quandries all gold on earth started out in the center of a star, he says stars are "in the business of cosmic alchemy". Where did the gold in your jewelry originate? No one is completely sure. The relative

average abundance in our solar system appears higher than can be made in the early universe, in stars, and even in typical supernova explosions. Some astronomers have recently suggested that neutron-rich heavy elements such as gold might be most easily made in rare neutron-rich explosions such as the collision of neutron stars. Since neutron star collisions are suggested as the origin of short duration gamma-ray bursts, it is possible that you already own a souvenir from one of the most powerful explosions in the universe. In the beginning, when the universe began, there were only two kinds of atoms: hydrogen which has one proton, and helium, which has two protons. The problem was that hydrogen and helium could not combine to make a new kind of atom of three, four or five protons. The two atoms resisted each other because they were having the same charge. Unless of course, it got very, very hot. How much heat would it take to get two protons to sit together? About 10 million degrees, Tyson says. And that's where star comes in.

Fiery Fusion:

Stars like our sun are so hot that protons collide with such force and have no choice but to combine. It's called fusion. Inside the sun's furnace, protons turned into heavier and heavier atoms: Hydrogen atoms combine to become helium, and then those helium atoms combine to become carbon. "It keeps going", Tyson says. "Carbon and oxygen and nitrogen and silicon, and (fusion) just plows its way up the periodic table of elements".

Carbon has six protons, nitrogen seven protons, oxygen eight protons. A hot star can cook all the way up to iron, a 26 –proton atom. But that's where it stops. "When you reach iron nobody can do anything it's dead matter. You cannot fusion it. You cannot fission it," Tyson explains. Once a star has converted all its atoms to iron, it's out of fuel. "That's a bad day for the star," Tyson says. "And at that moment the entire star collapses, and in that collapse, the star reaches stratospheric temperatures and blows its cores to smithereens."

The collapsing star:

A collapsing star is called a supernova. The explosion is so powerful and cataclysmic that you can see it across the universe. Supernova outshine whole galaxies, because the atoms

inside are colliding furiously, creating intense heat – hundreds of millions of Degrees. Only in a supernova, it is possible to create atoms with 30 protons, 40 protons, 50 protons and even 60 protons. Nature prefers even numbers for stability, but every so often, the star will forge an odd-numbered atom, a real rarity: gold!

Gold is a rare, odd-numbered atom with 79 protons. For every single atom of gold in the universe, there are 1 million iron atoms, Tyson says.

Uses of Gold:

Primary use of gold is ornamental (78%). Apart from that its inert nature makes it useful in dentistry, medicine and since it is a good conductor of electricity, it is useful in precision electronic products like computer, calculator, mobile phone, GPS devices and high tech application as aerospace vehicle etc.

A long journey:

After the explosion, those few gold atoms are cast deep into the universe where they sit in empty space for eons. Eventually, some of the atoms may join a cloud. The cloud may condense into a planet. Once inside a planet, some of the atoms may make it near the surface where we can come and dig them up. So, every atom of gold in your wedding ring was forged in a collapsing star, and then travelled across the universe to get into your finger. All the gold we wear and all the gold we give has made this same journey. So how many miles and how many years are represented in a ring?

Calculating the path from several supernovae around our galaxy back to our solar system, Tyson concludes, all told, it's a journey of 3 million light years.

The Best Phase of Your Life

A short article - Arunav Bora (Romit)

This article's inspiration comes from an incident that just happened a few days back. I was making my way back on the bus after a gruelling day of lessons, wishing nothing more than to just crash into my hostel bunk. Amidst those thoughts I noticed a young boy, in his early teens complaining loudly to his mum about how he hated school and wished he didn't have to go there every day. The poor lady was trying her best to console the agitated child and avoid creating a huge fuss. But to my amusement the teenager just went on and on. There was just something in his innocence that brought me back to wondering about my own school life.

'Lessons, homework, grades, exams, talks, seminars, etc.'

Admit it. Each and every one of us has been in that boy's shoes before. Each and every one of us has been admonished for not doing our work before. Each and every one of us has had our parents ranting about the values of school life and how we 'must' go to school for our own good. The list goes on and on.

As a child we always wanted to grow up fast. Not have anyone controlling us and instructing us every step of the way. Grow out of the protective cocoon that society had wrapped around us and evolve into graceful butterflies and fly out into the world.

But somehow as I look back now, with my graduation looming in the near future, I can't help but wonder, are the best days of my life behind me?

The so called freedom that we desire for most of

our school life is in the end nothing but a mirage. The world outside is one daunting fast paced environment where like a raft catapulting around in turbulent waters, we are left trying to regain our balance at every junction. And most importantly, suddenly we realise that for the first time in our lives, we are all alone. There is no one here to fend for us. No Dad to come and apologise for you after your latest falling off with the boss. No Mum with her constant words of encouragement and home cooking that is sure to lift you up after a bad day at work. No Teacher to explain to you the complex processes and know-how of your workplace.

In the words of American writer, Patrick Rothfuss, 'When we are children we seldom think of the future. This innocence leaves us free to enjoy ourselves as few adults can. The day we fret about the future is the day we leave our childhood behind.' Unfortunately for me the time has come to embark on this new journey. A new chapter with unfilled pages beckons and at this time, all I can do is look back with fondness at the years that helped shape me into the person I am today.

So next time you are rushing your homework in the school bus or eating from your friend's tiffin box or throwing paper planes in the middle of the class or jumping in delight when your teacher fails to show up or even refusing to wake up for school in the morning, remember this. These are the memories that one day you will treasure beyond anything else. These are the people that love you for who you are and will stay true to you forever.

And this is undoubtedly the best phase of your life.



Memories fade but they never die

Mamoni Gogoi



Memories fade but they never die. My association with Kuwait was long before we came to live here in 1997. The vivid pictures of the early days in Kuwait goes back more than 10 years before that when sailing with my husband on a Kuwaiti Flagged Ship on a regular run between Australia and the Persian Gulf ports. Kuwait was our home port and we used to call Kuwait at a frequency of every two to three months. The one weakness all ladies have is Gold and the picture of the Gold Souk in Kuwait City of those days is still embossed in my mind. Such heavy Gold ornaments, all of Arabic origin, I had never seen anywhere during my worldly travels before and the heavy gold waist belts really impressed me and I envied the ladies who would own one of those. The big Malls of today were nonexistent. There were rows and rows of smaller shops in the City, some of which still exist today and bring back flashes of the past. Bazaars and markets were also there in Fahaheel, Salmiya and Farwaniya.

Prior to the invasion of Kuwait on 2nd August 1990 we were last in Kuwait in July and we flew back from here on 7th July 1990. We were back home in Shillong when suddenly one day Juman came and told me that Saddam Hussein has invaded Kuwait. He was upset and worried about his employment but even though I was also shocked, my immediate reaction was 'What will happen to all the Gold'. There were reports of immense destruction which was beyond imagination.

Early in 1991 we again joined one of the company ships "MV Al Yasrah" in Dubai and sailed for Australia. We were

scheduled to return back to the Persian Gulf and call at the ports of Muscat, Dubai and Bahrain. The sea lanes up to Bahrain were all clear and safe. We were in port in Bahrain, when on 20th April 1991 we got the news that the US Navy has cleared a sea lane to Kuwait free of sea mines and we were to proceed to Kuwait with all the balance cargo that we had on board.

There was a lot of excitement on board. Not to mention the tension. Night navigation was not allowed as it was unsafe and the ship was only to sail in the daylight hours and stop at night. Saddam Hussein's navy had dropped hundreds of sea mines into the gulf sea lanes. During the passage from Bahrain to Kuwait we were escorted by one US Navy Mine Sweeper in front and three naval frigates on the remaining sides. This gave us some confidence. Everyone on board was instructed to keep a look out for any floating objects which could also be a drifting sea mine. I along with my toddler daughter Neezum also played our part. We were the first commercial ship to enter the port of Shuaiba after the invasion.

There were CNN helicopters hovering over us when we came in. Shuwaikh which was our regular port of call was still unsafe and closed for navigation. Kuwait was in utter darkness at night as there was no power supply, there was not a single light and the only lights were from our ship. Even in the day time the sky was covered with thick black smoke from the burning oil wells. Words cannot describe what we saw, at noon the sun was totally obscured by smoke and it was like midnight. Within minutes of standing in the open, residue from the smoke would turn our faces and clothes full of black spots.

There was destruction all around. The normal presence of security personal within the port was nonexistent. The port was abuzz with US and British Marines. There were US and British naval vessels and helicopters all over. The numerous bunkers made by the Iraqi army within the port area now lay abandoned. Guns and gun shells of various sizes lay scattered all over the port. In the port we were walking around truck loads of diffused sea mines each bigger than the size of a normal bucket. There were a few wrecked naval vessels in the port. Disabling of the sea mines was still in progress which was evident by the occasional loud explosion with the accompanying large fountain out at sea. There were rumours that a lot of bodies were pulled out from the water in the port, shot at close range with their hands and legs tied behind them. There were two large abandoned empty oil tankers in the port, the oil from which was pumped into the sea by the Iraqi invading army before



they left. What really interested Neezum was the huge Ice Cream truck that did the round of the port for the navy personnel, I think she got her share too.

Our stay in the port was for two weeks. The company Chairman and some of the Directors visited the vessel and enjoyed the luxury of a clean water bath and a decent meal after many days, or should I say months. On special request by the Chairman, Juman visited the company's livestock farm in Sulabiya to access the technical damage done by the Iraqi army. The farm was converted to a make-shift camp by the US Marines. The fleet of company trucks was without their batteries and tyres which the Iraqis had taken. The roads were all intact and untouched because probably Saddam Hussain was convinced that the country will be his

one day. But on both sides of the long drive there was total destruction. Hundreds and hundreds of burnt down cars, deserted armoured vehicles and army tanks lay scattered all along but not a sign of any human being. There were oil wells still ablaze throwing up huge columns of black smoke and flames into the sky.

When we sailed out of Shuaiba we had left behind all the food and provisions that we could spare for our company personnel that were still stranded in Kuwait. Radio communication systems, telephones and Xerox machines were given to the port for their use. What I see around me today and the memories of the yester years, before and after the Invasion of Kuwait is something that has left a huge impact on my life.



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Career vs. Family

Ways to Make It Work

Kakoli Nath

Life is a Hurdle.....Reframe your world by looking at every possibility as you move forward after a certain limit.....

We humans have the unique ability to observe our circumstances from every angle and make decisions or rationalize them based on what we see. Unfortunately, we often forget to do this and get so caught up in the drama that we become focused on a single facet of life and lose sight of alternatives. This shrinks our perspective and turns three dimensional reality into a flat two dimensional picture. Our power to change and create becomes lost in the landscape.

We can probably all agree that today's family and work dynamic is more complicated than ever, so many of us don't want to adopt the working circumference. The biggest challenge many of us face is how to balance the demands of family, friends, and career. So what happened? We became more driven—by both necessity and desire. We want the best of everything in life- a great career, great kids a grand lifestyle and a nice friend circle. The result is a society full of career-oriented married folks who struggle every day to carve out a work life balance. They are not very good at it, but they want to get better day by day.

While we want happy and fulfilling lives outside of work, we have to make personal sacrifices in order to achieve our career aspirations. How do you balance those sacrifices so that they don't greatly interfere with our personal goals? How do we fit in roles such as wife, mother, and friend into an already hectic schedule? Since time is precious, keeping a balance between the two worlds can be a challenge. Fortunately, with proper planning, balance is possible. With the cooperation of each family member we not only can have a successful career, but also a rewarding and enjoyable personal life.

There are some tricks, some strategies to achieve some sense of balance between work and family. I am sharing this with you after 15 years of well-earned experience in creating work-life balance.

The first step to achieve balance is to get the family to agree on what the priorities should be. Prioritized childcare with experienced Nanny reduces the family load a little bit. Every problem can be taken care of if we sincerely wish from our heart. We should take every opportunity to hone the skill of observation. As we release our judgment on various issues, it becomes easier to visualize that everything and everyone just "is", and it follows that we can then look at every situation we encounter more objectively, from every angle. When children are involved, we have to re-balance our lives so that we have time to spend with the kids. With family members support & encouragement everything is feasible in this beautiful world, little courage & inner mental strength acts like boosters.....

It is important to stay connected, to find time between hectic office hours or during travelling for business and talk with the family as often as we can. The goal is not just to hear someone's voice, but to actually be connected to what everyone is doing and have a direct sense of each other's lives. Listening, solving family members particularly kid's queries, problems provides us great satisfaction.

But there is always a BIG REALITY hidden.....

A woman, at this point, can't necessarily model her career after that of a typical man because there are just differences. Keeping hand in hand but walking two steps behind with a fresh mind thinking about the family can be wonderful and pave the pathway towards a successful life.....And this in turn will act as a jewel in crown for a Happy life.....

Magh Bihu 2013, at Wafra





Blessed Ignorance

Chinmoy Dutta

After a brief but desperate attempt to jump back into the aquarium it gradually lost control over its bodily movements; the mind was by then working all out only for the natural instinct to try for survival; slowly even the mind gave up and it entered into an infinite nothingness. There was nothing to know how long it had been; but at some point of time it started feeling a soul comforting warmth. There was a mystical haze beyond which there was an infinite glow of light, not harsh but pleasant. There was a natural pull towards the light through the haze. It floated towards the light and entered the haze; because everything had to pass through the haze to see the light. It had no control over anything; not needed too. Everything was happening naturally. It was attracted towards the haze and once inside the haze it suddenly realized that it could look back on timeline; though at that moment it did not know that it would see much beyond the beginning of its life as a lovable creature of limited intelligence in an aquarium.

It all happened suddenly. The boy named Raja was playfully watching the fishes in the aquarium for quite some time and then all of a sudden dipped his hand in the aquarium, caught hold of the fish he could catch swiftly and took it out. At that very moment Raja's father, while keeping aside the billiard cue, called out for Raja as it was time to go home. The boy dropped the fish on the table and ran to his father. The incident would not have happened to it if Raja did not come with his father to the club that day or, may be, even if it did not happen to be the nearest fish when Raja dipped his hand in the aquarium. It was also possible that Raja's father did not happen to call Raja at that very moment and the boy would have put it back in the aquarium after a close look that he wanted to have for so many days. Apparently, these were a few immediate causes, the consequences of which had led to the incident.

Oh! Strange; when inside the aquarium, it did not understand human language, but now inside the haze he knew that the boy was named Raja and his father called out for him to go home! Yet, of course, inside the haze it was about to see many things that it did not see when it was in the aquarium. It was poised to see things beyond the closed walls of the club room where the aquarium was placed, and on the timeline many happenings that had influenced the incident and had happened even before it was born.

It was always a pleasure when the billiard or pool games started in the evening every day. Firstly, because the room that remained dark whole day was brightened up by the billiard table lights switched on in the evening before the billiard players came. Secondly, and more importantly, the attendant of the billiard room sprinkled food into the aquarium after switching on the lights of the room.

Raja's father was a good player and had been champion in a number of club events. In the first strike itself he could pocket a number of balls in a 9-ball-break pool game. His opponent friend would say "Oh! you are lucky that the third ball has sunk in to the pocket only after being hit and diverted by that red ball". It didn't matter! Raja's father was an expert player and he knew how to hold the cue, on which ball and where to strike, with what force and how long should be the follow through. Even before a strike he could visualize roughly where the balls would finally end up. Of course, with so many balls moving in all different directions, being redirected after a rebound or a collision with another ball, it was difficult even for him, for his limited expertise, to visualize what would be the intermediate movements of the balls after a strike. He, however, could visualize roughly where the balls would finally stop. Though a little annoyed, he did not say aloud to his friend that the third ball was destined to enter the pocket the way it had sunk as it was destined to be so just when the strike had been struck and not because of any luck neither just because it got hit by the red ball at the last moment. Being hit by the red ball was only the immediate apparent cause. That the third ball would collide with the red ball and finally sink in to the pocket was a consequence of the strike that had been struck with a big bang.

There were many fishes in the aquarium; all of different kind, different shapes, different colours and different nature. Some were restless fast swimmers and smart enough to sense the approaching footsteps of the attendant with the food. They always had their share of food first. It was also interesting to see the skinny bright eyed fish that did not scamper around but positioned itself so intelligently that it would always find a piece of food floating towards it. These were the smartest and most intelligent creatures in the aquarium. They had enough intelligence to study the floating behavior of the food particles in the artificial current of the aquarium water. They could even outsmart the rest of the fishes and creatures in the aquarium. The rest of the fishes ate whatever remaining food they could find. There was, of course, enough food for all as the attendant was always generous and never failed his duty. These fishes knew about almost anything inside the aquarium; the pebbles, the mosses, the water current, the periodical changes of the water and what not. They could even see beyond the aquarium; the bright lights, the billiard and pool tables, the score board, the cue stand, the balls rolling on the table, the humans. But they could not understand much about what all these were going on outside the aquarium. Also, they did not know or could not even imagine what was there outside the room. The very smart ones could sense the approaching footsteps of the attendant; and



one evening they were all frightened to see a human kid very near to the aquarium, his nose pressed against the transparent glass wall. Raja was fascinated by the colorful fishes in the aquarium and whenever got an opportunity he managed to accompany his father to the billiard room.

Had it not been inside the haze, it would have never known that Raja was once taken to a picnic by his parents when he was five years old and that was only a couple of months before the incident had happened. It was there where he saw a man sitting quietly near a rivulet. The man was looking at the horizon, sometimes singing at low voice and an infrequent watch on that part of the flowing water where he had his fishing thread plunged into the water. Raja got curious when he once saw the man pulling the fishing rod with a jerk and there landed a small fish. Raja ran towards the man for a closer look and was even more thrilled when the man allowed him to try fishing for some time. It was from that day Raja always had a longing for catching a fish on his own. Was it this event that had a consequence in happening of the incident? Certainly it was and one of the precursors linked to the immediate apparent causes like Raja coming to the billiard room on that particular day, it being the nearest fish that Raja could catch hold of and Raja's father calling him at that very moment to go home. There were, in fact, innumerable events happening simultaneously and that had been happening since time immemorial that had a bearing on or had culminated into happening of the incident which itself would be a precursor event for some future happening.

The timeline by now had picked-up good pace. Raja's father started playing pool since his college days. They played in the town hall club. There were many tables and every alternate day excluding Sunday there was professional coaching. The instructor was a keen enthusiast of billiards and gave his best to train the students. Most of the students picked up the skills of the game up to a certain level. However, only Raja's father and two of his friends excelled beyond the average level. The key to success, as the trainer always reminded the students, was hard work. For the other students, though they appreciated the trainer's words, the urge for working hard for this game never came to them, for there were numerous factors and precursory events, not vividly understandable to them, that had prioritized their interest and attention to something else. Raja's father liked the game, the balls rolled even in his dreams, and he was fascinated by watching the strikes of the trainer who could play so controlled shots that while one ball would sink in to a pocket the other balls would come to a stop in very convenient positions to play the next shot. There was another factor. Once when Raja's father was playing a tournament game he suddenly noticed a pair of beautiful eyes looking at him admiringly. That day he ended-up playing one of his best games ever. They eventually met, remained friends for several years and got married. Raja was born two years later. He inherited many biological traits from his parents and as he grew up

numerous events happening around him, some noticeably and many more unnoticeably, shaped his mental attitudes and his biological process of emotion stimulating hormone secretion that controls his thoughts and behavior; and five years later the incident was to happen.

When inside the aquarium, it did not know from where, when and how it came in to the aquarium. The timeline was by then really accelerating very fast. The billiard room attendant was one day handed over some tiny fishes by the club secretary's wife to be put in the aquarium and taken care of. It was born in a sea and soon after got caught in a fisherman's net. Its ancestors lived in the same aquatic body. No, it could see on the timeline, that its ancestors of several thousand years ago had migrated from a different part and they even looked entirely different! The timeline was racing at an unimaginable pace. It saw some single celled creature. Life was about to begin. There was no life before. The lifeless masses, engulfed by energies having potential to create life, were getting ready to accept and support life. The strike of creation had been struck with a big bang and the incident was destined to happen billions of years later.

It was almost at the end of the haze and was about see the light beyond the haze. For once it wished it knew all these when in the aquarium! But, in the next moment it realized that for the creatures living in an aquarium with only limited intelligence it is not necessary to know all these. Because, it did not matter! What was destined to happen would happen anyway; knowing these would unnecessarily destroy the dynamism of happiness, sorrows, disappointments, achievements and above all the curiosity and hope that keeps life moving. Oh, the creatures with limited intelligence in the aquarium are really blessed with this ignorance. Probably, because of this reason the Creator had pushed the ancient Vedic research, which perhaps could distantly see the haze and the light beyond, to a decline paving the way of materialistic science to popularity.

It had just finished crossing the haze and was about to float in to the light, then suddenly a flash in the timeline came alive. Raja's father and none around him could feel the breeze that had manipulated some movements of the balls the day when he played one of his best games when the pair of beautiful eyes was looking at him admiringly and with such a spontaneous intense wish that a ray of light was granted for him that day.

The haze was gone and it was poised to see what was there in the light.



THE BOMB BLAST

Siddharth Sharma

The sound was deafening. It was the sound of the unworldly unworthy sound. The sheer birth of it was with the bursting of the dormant air around it – as if the shrapnel that flew with it have death written on them. It lasted seconds, but seconds was all that was needed to make everything undone. The unexpected, ungodly scene was triggering people to make the frantic effort to keep them alive. The blooming foul smoke made the perfect curtain raiser for this devilish drama. Blood on the streets, and the vehicles catching fire with severed torsos lying on the ground made the revelation that all the devils had been let loose.

The time was around thirty minutes past 3:00PM. Rajesh was counting whatever the money he had withdrawn from his account when the bomb went off in the market by the side of the bank. He had heard the loud noise and felt the earth shaking. It did catch him by surprise that his hands and legs went numb. It also instilled fear even in to his lifeless soul as the only thing he had been contemplating those days was to end his life.

And then he heard the people yelling. And running. And also crying.

He came out of the bank not knowing what to do. He saw other people from the bank doing the same. He could see the place from where it all began. The mangled burning metal of all the vehicles presented a ghastly sight, smoke bellowing out of the severed torsos lying all around, with the nearby shop walls smeared with blood splashes heralding loudly the news of the bombing.

Yet, most of the people who came out of the bank went hurriedly the other way. The urgency to save their souls was too much. The fear of another bomb, the fear of any more deaths, and the daily dose of terrorism in this part of the world had made all the people cynical to what they see all around, and the only remaining priority was to keep them alive to the time the thread snaps.

Rajesh did not know what to do. He had been in the lowest point in his life; all dreams of his had been shattered by life, and he fought hard for far too long a time then that he found himself in that cul-de-sac from where he could escape only if he end his life. He could not stand up to the aspirations of his widowed mother, and his elder sister who tried so hard to give him an education in the hope that he would land himself in a job to take care of them.

He tried his best. He could clear his exams alright; but did he manage his grades as required for a decent job? No, and

it was his fault. He tried, but so what, no grades was the same thing like failing to get his degree. All it meant was no job, and a life to the pits. Degrees being damned, he did try his hand in a venture to try to earn something on his own. He felt himself broken to zillion pieces whenever he recall how he had convinced his mother to part some of her late husband's money to help him open a small village shop near to their house. It was kind-of-everything shop; he sold toffees, peanuts, lollipops for the kids going back to their homes from school, and in the morning, bidis and the Flake cigarettes for the young guys going to their town bound errands or just to hang around; rice, lentils, oil, soaps for the housewives who would stay in their homes the entire day when their men would go out to the fields to harvest the crop or go about their jobs in the nearby tea garden. Things were going good for a while, but then again life did play its dirty game once more. How could he forget that dreadful day, the morning full of the black smoke that came bellowing out from his shop when it was put on fire. He never did find the culprits, and he just did not care now but he was very angry then. He cried so much that day, he still could not forget his mother's eyes, eyes so desperate and in pain, he had sworn to kill all those who were responsible for it. He did approach the law, the police, even though he always knew that wouldn't help. He tried on his own, he had his own suspects but vindication wasn't really fair as he had no proof. The final hit that literally blown him apart was when she - his friend, soul or whatever - broke the news that she would go to the town forever as she would get married soon; it was impossible for her part anymore to ignore her father's repeated demands to fix up her groom. He knew he just had nothing to live for any more, and it was becoming increasingly unbearable to be at home everyday with his sister and helpless mother.

He had come to town to collect his money that day. It was many days before when he had convinced himself that he had actually no option left but to end his life. He had balanced himself, and convinced himself on the question whether it was really an act of cowardice. Maybe..... maybe not. Did he not try? He even tried the nearby tea garden, but the foreman there would never help him because of his mother and father. The foreman was, in fact, happy to see him in this state of affairs, for he could never forget the grudge that the girl he once loved so much, the girl who was Rajesh's mother, left him to marry his friend.

It seemed to Rajesh that him being disposed of and out of the scene, things would or maybe even improve for the

better for he had been a bad dream or a bad omen for his own folk.

So he came to town. The plan was to collect the money and to sell off his bike in which he rode to town. Whatever the money he would get, he would send this money home so that his mother and sister could do some days. After that, it would be all God and His ways. As for him, he would end his life after the money would be sent but he still had to figure out a way how to do it. He even jotted down his farewell note in his memory for his mother.

But the mayhem unfolding right before his eyes left him confused. He just did not know what to do. Should he just run away like the others? What that would serve? He would end his life anyway. Should he go looking for his bike? Had his bike blown away too? Oh! His money, what about the money he would send home? Or, did it matter seeing all the people lying just dead and some with limbs blown off? Why why these bad, wretched things always happen to him? Why he was always the chosen one for all the bad?

He sat down in one of the stairs of the bank. He did not know what to do. Then he saw people crying and pleading for help. He thought no more. He ran to one of them. He saw blood, the blood was everywhere. But he forced himself not to be distracted by it. He dragged the suffering woman to the clear side walk. Then he saw another. He again ran towards him. And still more. Every thought in his mind, so confounded with a hurricane of worries, and concerns which were a little while ago, had shut itself off. With no signals emanating from his brain, he was at peace and he was running, shouting and helping others as much as he could. By then, a lot of people also came around, and they were all doing the best they could to help. The police came. The paramedics came after them. There were sirens all around. Ambulance after ambulance came.

Rajesh, his clothes blood stained, was so busy with others in hauling up all the injured on to the ambulances one after the other. There was no stopping. The queue seemed never ending. The police was also there. There were people now pouring in for curiosity and also with worries that some one of their own may be among the injured. Among those being hauled up into the ambulance was a little girl, unconscious with tattered and dirt filled clothes but with no blood. It seemed that the bomb blast stunned her so much that it had snuffed out the life in her. There was a cry for this little girl. It was the police, and then some of the people asking for some attendant for this girl. Probably everybody knew there wasn't anybody present for this girl who might be her own, or may be even there was somebody who might be dead by then, but they kept on asking. Almost impulsively, Rajesh took the poor creature in his arms and volunteered himself in to the ambulance. Within minutes, the back doors of the vehicle were slammed shut, the sirens screamed and soon it was on its way to the hospital.

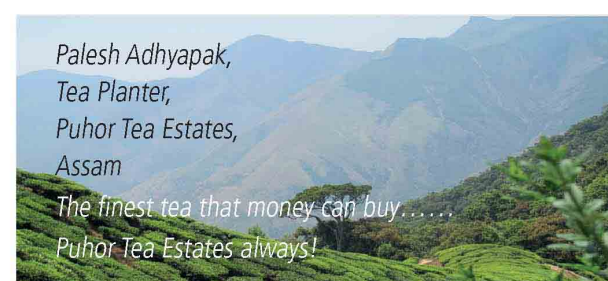
Hospital was a hell in white and green, and with the stench of Dettol and all the weird smells that make the feel of death closer than being alive. Doctors running around in

the corridors in their white aprons, nurses in their white and green overalls were pushing the stretchers, and the seemingly headless flow of people made everything all the worst. He had his little girl too being carried away in a stretcher, and he was soon being asked to sign some papers immediately for some urgent procedures to be done on the girl. He had no other choice, even to think for a moment or two, for he was told that the possible haemorrhage may be too fatal to delay. His girl was taken away in to the operation room, and with the red bulb at the top of its huge entrance doors being turned on, he felt so tired. He could only help himself to a glass of water and sat down in one of the bench.

He did not know when he felt asleep or how long he slept. But when he woke up, he knew he slept through the night to the middle of the next day. His body ached, every joint cried in pain. His clothes were all so gory and dirty with stains. He suddenly remembered his money, and frantically reached for his pockets. His money was not there. He could not think anymore, his eyes hazy, stomach pleading for some food and he knew the signs that tell him that he would die. He asked for it, didn't he? His mind was groping about with these thoughts, when he again fell asleep.

He woke up again by a warm hand on his shoulder. His weary and confused eyes opened to a neon filled hospital corridor, and he could see a decently dressed gentleman and a lady beside him. It was the gentleman who woke him up. They took Rajesh to a nearby café where Rajesh had his wash, his food and gave out his story with the little girl. They were her parents, the little girl's parents, their only child and there was no need to say how grateful they were for Rajesh. One thing lead to another, and it took no time for the good old man to realise the hopeless situation Rajesh was in even though Rajesh did his best to camouflage it to the foray of questions he was so politely asked.

Rajesh was persuaded to accept some money, and as the parents of the little girl took their leave, the gentleman handed over a card to Rajesh when he shook his hands for goodbye. They being gone, Rajesh took a look at the card in his hand,



Rajesh flipped the card over, and in neat handwriting it said: Rajesh be there at my office in Silpukhuri on Monday next, 10:00 AM sharp. I have to introduce to my staff their new Assistant Manager before my morning meeting at 11:00 AM.

Till then, good bye.