

SHORT STORY

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INTERVIEW OF DELHI UNIVERSITY

Dr. DHRUV SHANKAR

(Ex-Lecturer)

Department of Applied Science and Humanities, Krishna Institute of Technology & Naraina College of Engineering & Technology, Kanpur, U.P., India

Shankar was a hardworking person struggling with his calamities and destinies. Although circumstances never favoured him, he tried to do his best in every favourable or unfavourable position. While he was eight years old, he lost his mother and then, in any way, his father who was a poor farmer, brought him up and provided him educational expenses only at the age of Post Graduation, after that he became totally independent of his money-matters. He started his career as a teacher in a private institution – S. M. L. K. S. D. Inter College, Kanpur. Eventually as well as accidentally, he was married and got two sons for bringing up. He had to keep on working for his livelihood and continue his studies side by side. In addition to all these things, he was ambitious and wanted to get a job in any government degree college. Hence, he completed his Ph.D. qualification in 'English' from C. S. J. M. University, Kanpur and continued to apply for the same under the influence of his chequered career. With the passage of time, an advertisement for the post of assistant professor came from Delhi University, and he applied for the same. Though Shankar thought that he would not be called for interview in such a prestigious university, one day, after passing a number of months, Shankar got an E-mail call for the interview from Delhi University. The e-mail conveyed the message that his interview had been scheduled for the post of assistant professor in the subject of English on 16th January, 2014 in the Vice-Chancellor's Committee Room, Old Vice-Regal Lodge, at University of Delhi.

On getting this hopeful message, Shankar was overjoyed as he had got an opportunity to appear at an interview in Delhi University. The pool of ideas started to rise in the form of a tide. He thought that he would go to Delhi in a very systematic and planned way in order that he might appear very well before the interview committee. In this sequence, he decided to go to Delhi by Shatabdi Express, so he went to the reservation counter and booked his ticket for the date of 15th January, 2014. He, then, purchased some useful things – comb, oil, mirror, soap, tooth paste, tooth-brush and Boro Plus Antiseptic Cream etc. – for his journey, and started to revise some topics about which questions might be asked in the interview. The appointed day came very soon and he became ready to go to the railway station, but by his friend, who was a railway employee, he came to know that the train was too much late due to fog and frost. Indeed, in those days, the weather was stormy, and there remained frost even during the day time. He was informed that the train would leave at 4 p.m., while its scheduled time of leaving was 6 a.m. Thus, the train was late by 10 hours. Hence, he reached the platform just before the departing time of the train. As soon as the train arrived, he entered his compartment and seated. It was a VIP-train in which he was travelling the first time. He felt better as the train was full A.C. and light music was playing its role cheerfully. After some time, he took out a book from his suitcase and began to revise some selected topics. During the journey he was served tea first and then dinner also. Nevertheless, the fact

is that he enjoyed the journey peacefully and the train reached New Delhi at 11 p.m.

While the train was moving slowly at the platform, an announcement was done by the railway loudspeaker: 'Now you have reached the capital of India which is the centre of politics and it is hoped that the journey of all the passengers would have been safe, sound and on the beneficial ground.'

Shankar got down the train and meditated where he should stay at night whether in a hotel or anywhere else. Since, he felt stomach ache early in the morning, he decided, he must not stay in a hotel as he reflects:

"Who would care for me in the hotel if I got unwell at night? Sunil, my friend, dwells here. I must go to him. Yesterday, I talked to him and he forced me to reach Indralok Metro Station and he would come to receive me there. He longed that I must stay at his dwelling place."

Recollecting his friend, Sunil, Shankar decided to talk to him, so he took out his mobile phone and rang the bell. His friend received his phone-call immediately.

"Hello! Shankar."

"Yes, Sunil, I have reached New Delhi Railway Station." said Shankar.

"Hearing this, I am very happy. Now take a taxi and come to Indralok Metro Station, Shanti Nagar. Please tell me when you are about to reach there. I'll come to receive you."

"It's O.K.; I'm coming." uttered Shankar.

No sooner did Shankar come out of the station than one of the taxi-drivers came to him and questioned:

"Sir, taxi? Where do you want to go?"

"Indralok Metro Station, Shanti Nagar."

"O.K., sir, I'll make you reach there and take 200 Rs. as a fare." said the taxi-driver.

"It's too much. I'll try anyone else."

"Sir, my fare is right, and you know, it's very late at night."

"I'll pay Rs. 150. If you are willing, I'll go with you."

"No, thanks, sir."

Thus, refusing, the taxi-driver went away. Now, Shankar tried to get another taxi, but all of

them wanted more than two hundred rupees. After some time, that taxi-driver again came across Shankar and agreed to go with him at the fare of Rs. 150. Shankar sat in the taxi and left for Indralok Metro Station situated at Shanti Nagar. On the way, Shankar and the taxi-driver talked about the stormy weather as it was very cold and foggy night.

"Sir, where would you like to go from Indralok Metro Station?"

"Shanti Nagar and my friend will be there to receive me."

From his suitcase, Shankar, now, took out the address of his friend which he had noted on a paper two days before and put it into his pocket. He didn't know where the taxi driver was going to carry him as he was absolutely unacquainted with the routes of the city. In fact, he did not know the route of Indralok Metro Station. The taxi-driver might take him anywhere else; but very soon they had reached Indralok Metro Station. Shankar again phoned his friend and he guided him to reach the bus stand of Shanti Nagar. Now, Shankar wanted to know where the bus stand of Shanti Nagar was situated. Hence, he asked the taxi-driver to move slowly so that he might ask someone about the location of the bus stand of Shanti Nagar. It was mid-night and there was none to tell him the direction of Shanti Nagar. Suddenly, he saw that some persons were standing at the footpath. He asked the taxi-driver to stop in order that he might ask the location of the bus stand of Shanti Nagar. The taxi-driver obeyed him. Peering out of the taxi, Shankar asked the strangers.

"Where is the bus stand of Shanti Nagar?"

"That's there." one of the strangers said.

There were four strangers, and, all of them stepped towards him immediately. One of the strangers told Shankar that he was also going to the bus stand of Shanti Nagar and he wanted to sit in the taxi. Shankar understood that something had been wrong there. Then, Shankar assured them that he would get it, but one of the strangers again insisted.

"Please, let me sit in your taxi and I'll tell you."

"No, no, go on your way. I'll go alone. There is no need of your help. Don't sit here."

Now, Shankar realized that the strangers were the loafers as well as robbers and wanted to rob Shankar. From the left side, one was talking to Shankar while from the right side, the others snatched his suitcase; and then, all of them went directly to their bikes. Hurriedly, they kicked their bikes, rode on them and flew away towards the Jakheera Bridge. Shankar was taken aback and could not understand what had befallen. Nonetheless, he asked the taxi-driver to chase them; but he refused saying that they might fire in which both of them might be injured. All this happened only in a few moments. Again, it was mid-night and there was none in the surroundings except the taxi-driver and Shankar. Although some vehicles were running on the road, the vehicle-owners didn't know what had happened to Shankar in a few moments.

"Sir, you have been robbed; they have taken away your suitcase." said the taxi-driver.

"No, not a suitcase, they have taken away the earnings of my whole life. Today, I have to appear at the interview for the post of an assistant professor in Delhi University and they have taken away all my original documents which have been placed properly in the suitcase. Besides, there were some other things – woollen clothes, books, 5000 Rs. and some other house hold belongings – also in the suitcase."

While, both of them were talking about the mishap, Shankar's friend phoned him. He received the phone call in a hurry.

"Hello! Sunil?" said Shankar.

"Yes, where are you, my friend?" reflected Sunil.

"I am here at Red Light near the Indra Lok Metro Station. Come soon. I have been robbed. Some strangers have snatched my suitcase having all my documents, money and woollen clothes while I tried to ask them the route of Shanti Nagar."

"Oh dear! It's so? Have patience and stay there. I am coming soon."

Very soon, Shankar's friend reached the incidental place. He dialled 100 number immediately and narrated the incident to the police authorities. All of them – Shankar, Sunil and the taxi-driver – waited for some time for the arrival of the police jeep; but it didn't appear. Hereafter, they

moved towards the nearest police chaudi for FIR. Reaching there, Shankar illustrated the incident to the in charge of the police chaudi and, as an eye-witness, the taxi-driver verified the incident. Hearing the case attentively, the in charge of the police filed FIR and giving a copy of it, he said to Shankar:

"Shankar, take this copy of the FIR, collect your patience and try to go to appear at the interview. It's too late at night. Now go home. I'll try my best to find out your documents. Be courageous. I think, you'll win one day. It's O.K. May God bless you!"

"Thank you, sir." responded Shankar.

Leaving the police chaudi, the taxi-driver begged for his fare and Shankar paid him Rs. 150. Saluting them, the taxi-driver went away. Sunil along with Shankar moved towards his home. It was one o'clock at night and all the family members were sleeping. Shankar lay down on the bed and tried to sleep, but failed. The reflection of ideas started to appear on his mental scenario.

"Today I have to appear at the interview for assistant professor. Now, I cannot.... I don't have my original documents. Now, it has been just opposite of what I thought. In fact, I may be compared to a soldier who is standing on the battlefield but without any arms."

Although Sunil tried to console him, he was in vain. He assured Shankar that the police would investigate the case and all the documents would be found out. But Shankar did not seem to listen anything, he was tossing on the pillow every moment. It was mid-winter, even then, he was perspiring. He had no strength to appear at the interview as he was extremely broken-hearted. At this time, he recollected the Cuban fisherman Santiago, the hero of *The Old Man and the Sea*, who lost the labour of eighty-four days and returned home empty-handed in spite of his hard struggle to achieve his goal. Shankar's position was the same. Early in the morning, Sunil's brother, Manoj also tried to persuade him to appear at the interview, but even he could not be successful in his efforts.

It was the morning of 16th January, 2014; and Shankar along with his friend went to the incidental place and talked to the many strangers

but he could not get any information about his documents. He was telling the people that he did not want to get the woollen clothes, he did not want to get Rs. 5000; but he wanted to get his documents only. He gave his contact number to some of the local people and requested them to inform him if they came to know anything about his documents. Thus, wandering here and there in search of his documents, Shankar returned his friend's home in the state of disappointment and depression.

In the noon, Sunil took Shankar to the market in order that his depressive mood might be changed. There were a number of shops decorated with different items, but Shankar didn't show any interest in them. Sunil was talking to him, and Shankar was responding unwillingly. He didn't want to take, purchase and eat anything. All the glamour of the market was useless for him. By now, his shock had been converted into tears that were appearing every now and then after some interval. All the same, he didn't tell even his wife about the mishap and was bearing the pressure of the shock alone. In the market, his position might be compared to *The Lost Child* by M. R. Anand. When the child was lost in the fair, he did not want to get anything, though, earlier, he wanted to get everything. Having lost his parents, the child's reaction was the same at every temptation: "I want my mother, I want my father." Similarly, Shankar did not want to get anything now except his documents. While he was returning from the market, a phone call came from his wife:

"Hello! Pinki...."

"Hello, Babu, How are you? " Shankar's wife articulated.

"I am O.K.; How are the sons?"

"They are fine, and what about the interview?"

"It's O.K., satisfactory. Today I am coming, Pinki."

"O. K., Bye Bye. Have a nice journey."

At any way, the clock struck 10 o'clock at night and Shankar got ready to return home by Shram Shakti Express as he was having the returning ticket in his pocket by this train. Sunil gave him a shawl to wear at night and came to see off him at the station. On reaching the platform, at

which Shram Shakti Express was standing, both of them talked for some time and when Shankar's friend went away, he sat on his seat in his compartment and began to think:

"Yesterday, I have all the belongings. Today I have only this shawl offered by my friend. The Capital of India has taken everything from me. By birth, God has given me nothing. I belong to a very poor family, and the most valuable things that I was having, were those documents. But now they will be lying in any of the gutters of Delhi."

There were tears in his eyes whom he was wiping secretly. There was none to console him as everyone was unacquainted with him in the compartment. He was murmuring to God:

"You have taken my arms while I am about to win. Why don't You like my winning? You say in the *Gita* that nothing can take place without your will. Then, it was your will....? You have given me nothing. I have been struggling hard since I was born; and now when I'm going to win the race, You catch me from behind.... "

Shankar was feeling extreme exhaustion now, so, he lay down on his seat and covered his body with the shawl. Tears stopped to come out. The chain of ideas which was occurring on his mental scenario stopped as Shankar began to doze off at the time when the train started to run on its track. Since, he couldn't sleep at the last night, he plunged in the lap of slumber very soon. Now, Shankar wasn't feeling the stabbing tinges of the incident. As long as he was sleeping, he saw a dream in which he talked with a heavenly person on his mobile phone.

"Hello! Hello!.... " said Shankar.

"Hello! Are you Shankar speaking? "

"Yes, Speaking.... Who are you? "

"I am a saint. I've snatched the file of your documents from the robbers. As soon as I got your name, address and mobile no. given in your file, I rang you to give the information. Come and take your most valuable property. I'm here at the taxi-stand near Indralok Metro Station. I'll wait till you arrive."

"Thank you very much. You are more than God for me. You have saved me from going to dogs. I'll, forever, remain indebted to you. Please, stay

there. I am coming soon. ” uttered Shankar imploringly.

Afterwards, Shankar ran from the place where he was standing and reached the Indralok Metro Station as soon as it was possible. The hermit, having the file in his hands, was waiting for him there. Shankar touched his feet many times, and as soon as he took the file of his documents in his hands, the hermit disappeared.

God knows what will happen when Shankar gets up from his sleep. The train was whistling and making a rattling sound. Some passengers were still awaking and some were listening mobile songs; but the train was piercing hard to achieve its destination through the dense frost and stormy night. Besides, it was giving a message that some are winners (achievers) and some others are defeaters (losers) in this world, but both of them are the same as all the persons will go empty-handed at the end of the eternal journey. Finally, it is right to quote the following lines by Gray as they are imparting the same consoling message:

“The boast of heraldry, the pomp of
power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er
gave
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.”
