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The Entrepreneur

Dr. Neha Kumari

“Didi, buy a lotus for offering!”

I was on my way home, passing by the temple, lost in my thoughts when I heard a voice call out again, “Didi, buy a lotus!” I turned to see two very young schoolchildren in their uniforms, smiling coaxingly at me. They were sitting on the pavement in front of the temple, a few lotus flowers spread out on a nearly clean but small handkerchief, the kind often made for children. Only the flowers were resting on the kerchief, with their stems sticking out. The boy squatted in front of the flower arrangement while the girl stood beside him, the one who had called out to me.

“What are you little rascals doing here? Bunking school?” I asked authoritatively, as one often does when addressing young kids.

“Oh, Didi, you’ve misunderstood us. It’s the lunch period—free time! Buy the flowers; they’re just ten rupees each,” the boy insisted, trying to maintain a quasi-adult demeanour.

“Is there any discount?” I asked casually, enjoying their banter. In response to my question, the boy asked, “What time is it?” After I told him it was a quarter past twelve, and he declared there would be no discount. I found his response amusing. As I realized I was getting late, I asked what they would do with the money and if they wouldn't spend it on anything inappropriate.

“We are good kids, Didi. We won’t waste money,” the boy replied, his voice calm yet sincere, as if it carried the weight of a promise too often broken in a world careless with small treasures. Despite their gentle persistence that I buy more flowers, I chose just one and hastened home, for I had to welcome dear friends, old companions from distant days, who were visiting the city after what felt like an eternity. The air was crisp with winter’s embrace, and the sky, clear and open, seemed to mirror the joy of reunion. I had arranged for us to gather on the terrace, where the breeze whispered through the trees, and everything felt as if time had paused to grant us this moment. My friends, nostalgic for the tastes of home, had placed special orders for homemade Gujarati snacks—a familiar comfort for hearts that had wandered far.

Meeting old friends is an incomparable joy. Buried memories, long asleep under the dust of years, rise like distant echoes to the surface, carried by the current of conversation. Each shared recollection is a marker of the arduous journey we have walked, a journey that time, ever patient, has swallowed into its vast and silent womb. In these conversations, acquaintances long forgotten take center stage, and strangers become familiar—if not in person, then through the stories that breathe life into their names. We, who once played as children, now sit as quiet judges, casting our indifferent verdicts on the grievances brought before us.

One friend, in particular, a senior scientist of great repute, had come to the city not for joy but to settle a bitter property dispute with her siblings. As she spoke, it became painfully clear that they were prepared to drag each other through fire and to the very edge of the world for a mere ounce of inheritance. How strange it was to hear this, knowing that not too long ago, these same siblings would have walked through hell itself to protect the smallest token for one another. Time, it seemed, had sharpened the edges of their hearts.

As we wandered the terrace, the wind playing softly around us, I caught sight of the pond beside our home, its surface adorned with delicate lotuses in full bloom. How had I not noticed this beauty before? In the rush of life, we so easily overlook the quiet miracles around us. The sight of the lotuses stirred something within me, as if the answer to a riddle I hadn't known I was pondering had suddenly become clear. These flowers, the ones held so innocently by the little schoolboy earlier—they were from this pond. But the question remained—how had he gathered them?

My timing to reach home was not same everyday but one day when I was getting back home around one in the afternoon, I found them again, imploring every passer-by to buy their lotuses. Seeing me, they exhibited the most hopeful smile that I had ever witnessed on any face until then so I went straight to them asking playfully, “so kids, how is the business?”

“Not good if you don't buy these all.” Came a prompt reply. I greatly enjoyed their business communication.

“So...do I get any discount now? It's our second business deal.” Listening this, he asked the time again. Hearing that it was quarter to one, he said buy these five in thirty rupees. When I said I want only one, the girl said, “didi, buy all these in twenty only.”

“And why this huge discount and what has time to do with you discount plans, kids?”, I asked in the same playful tone. I couldn’t help enjoying their company, in them I had my past self, the childhood.

“di..di..our lunch time finishes at one and we have to get back to school.”

Their uniforms were from a nearby government school, a detail that caught my eye as I stood there. On a whim, I struck a playful deal with them: I would buy all their flowers—no discounts—if they gave me honest answers. And so, our little interview began. I asked where they lived, which class they were in, about their parents, and their lives in general. The answers were as I had expected—they were in primary school, their parents worked in laborious jobs, and they carried the weight of modest means. What amazed me was their bond as siblings. When I asked how they got the flowers from the pond, the girl proudly said, “My brother knows how to swim. I can too, but not very well. He plucks the flowers, and I protect the uniform. Then, when he has dried himself, we come here and sell them. My brother buys me biscuits and cake for lunch.” She added the last line with pride.

“And how much money do you earn every day?”

“We buy our lunch for tiffin and whatever is left, we give to our mother at home.” I could just smile at their courage and zero investment business skills.

“And when the season of lotus is over, what will you do?”

“There is always something to sell. “Nature is mother”, my mother says.” The boys added casually but I was impressed with the wisdom of the young man and her upbringing. What I saw in them was the miracle stored in the future.

I paid them for the flowers but when I offered to buy them some snacks, they both chimed in at once, “We are not beggars.” I felt a mix of elation and concern—elated by their sense of self-respect, yet worried that my casual attitude might hurt their feelings. When I got back home, I narrated the incident to my brother and his remark clarified the young gentleman’s stand.

“He is an entrepreneur.”

Author's Bio:

Dr. Neha Kumari is an Assistant Professor at GLA University, Mathura. Her research interests include folk tales, mythology, and cultural studies, exploring their intersections with various fields such as gender and feminist studies, trauma studies, post-colonialism, popular literature, and digital humanities. She has published and presented numerous research papers and has also authored several short stories.