

A visit to the Cursed Village (The Lokayatas).

“Don’t go there. I warn you don’t go there. That village is the village of the cursed ones. The people there are cursed by Gods and whosoever goes there gets ruined. Go back both of you, said the age old priest.”

Daksh Shahstri was a twenty-one-year-old college student who lived in a small town near Jaipur with his family. They lived in a two-storey apartment in which the upper storey was usually rented out. This time their guest was a girl name Sarah from Germany. Sarah was 20 years old and was working on a research project on “Indian Culture”. Daksh and Sarah had become good friends. Daksh, after returning from his college made it a point to visit Sarah’s room and help her with the project. If there was nothing to do, Daksh used to help Sarah in learning the local Hindi language. Daksh loved her company and availed every opportunity to spent time with her. Daksh had started liking Sarah. In the beginning he was not clear with his feelings but now he had realised it. He wanted to express his feelings to her but every time he tried he was not able to do so. The two had very different tastes in life and perhaps that might have been the reason as to why Daksh wasn’t able to express himself.

Daksh decided to share his feelings with his friend Radhakrishna. Radhakrishna was his class mate, a very intelligent guy who had been to many countries. At this young age he had experienced life like an adult and everyone in college used to consult him in any matter, personal or otherwise.

After the class, Daksh asked Radhakrishna that if they could spend some time alone in the canteen as he wanted some help. Radhakrishna agreed.

“Radhe, I am so confused I don’t know what to do”, said Daksh.

“What’s the matter Daksh?”

“I don’t know how should I express myself?”

“Can you please be clear?”

“She came here for 6 months and 5 months have passed already. I only have one month and this will be over soon like the previous months. She will be in Germany and I would be here, Oh my God, how would I spent my days without her? What if she forgets me? No she can’t. She once said that I am her best friend in India?”

“What are you talking about? Can you please explain properly as to what the matter is?” said Radhakrishnan his tone a bit loud than usual.

“Radhe, I am talking about Sarah, the girl from Germany who is living as a paying guest at my place. I really like her and I want to express my feelings but I don’t know how? Our culture, thinking is so different I don’t know how to relate? How should I start? Please help, Radhe.”

“Ah! That is good news. So, finally my old friend has found his dream girl and that too from Germany,” said Radhakrishnan with a smile on his face.

“Now would you please give me some tips as to how I should go?”

“See Daksh, I think you should take her out to some nice place and with a small gift, express your feelings,” said Radhakrishnan

“She doesn’t like going out. All she likes is to study about *India* and its culture. I mean no one in India is interested in that and we have someone like her who comes all the way from Germany to India to study our culture. I don’t know despite of all this, why I like her?” said Daksh

“So, that’s the case. I have a solution for your problem. If she likes Indian culture and its uniqueness, take her to place like that.”

“She has already visited all the places that I know. She now is more aware about the places in Jaipur than us,” said Daksh with a gloom on his face.

“Don’t worry, my friend. There is still a place that I am sure she must have not even heard about.”

“What’s that?”

“The village of the Lokayata (the cursed ones),” said Radhakrishnan

“*LOKAYATA*, no not at all. Nobody goes there. I have heard pundit ji saying who so ever goes there faces the wrath of Gods. I have heard those people are against the Holy Vedas.”

“Even I have heard that but nobody knows what it actually is and who knows it might be a good place and all this is a rumour. Now, you have to choose Sarah or Wrath of Gods?” Asked Radhakrishna

“I will ask Sarah, I have no other option. Let’s see what happens, anyways thank you, Radhe. You always help me. I don’t know how on earth I would have survived without you.”

“I am always there little friend.”

Daksh returned from college and directly went to Sarah’s room. He told her about the village of Lokayata. Sarah agreed to visit the village and expressed her excitement. They decided to pay visit to the village tomorrow morning.

It was a bright sunny day, both of them were ready and started the journey towards the village of Lokayata. The village was located in outskirts and they have to cover majority of the distances by foot.

On their way, they found an age old priest. Sarah suggested Daksh to ask the priest whether they were on the right track or not?

“Panditji we wanted to go to the village of Lokayata? Are we on the right track?”

“Lokayata!” exclaimed the pandit, “how can one be on the right way if he wants to go to the village of the deviated ones, the cursed ones”?

“Don’t go there. I warn you don’t go there. This village is the village of the cursed ones. The people there are cursed by Gods and whosoever goes there gets ruined. Go back both of you,” said the age old priest.

"I think we should go back Sarah, said Daksh in a low tone."

"No way! After such an introduction, how can one not go there? I want to go. If you want to go back you can," said Sarah in a stern voice.

"How can I leave you alone Sarah?"

After much walking they saw a small lane on the top of the lane was a board and on this was written *Anvikshki*.

"We are close Sarah," said Daksh, "Radhe said that after going through *Anvikshki* one reaches the villages. Come let's go."

After crossing the small lane, they saw a small village. The people in the village were looking similar but there was some strangeness.

As they entered the village, they grabbed the attention of few village men. They started talking among themselves. One of them approached us and started talking to us in some different language.

"Please tell me what the dwarf men is saying Daksh?"

"I don't know Sarah".

"Which language is this?"

"I don't know."

"Then how are we going to know about them Daksh?" said Sarah.

"Good question Sarah."

"Ha-ha, very funny Daksh."

"You speak to them in your local language. May be they will understand."

Daksh stared speaking in his own language. After listening to Daksh the village man started shouting as if he was calling somebody's name.

In a short while a smartly dressed person arrived there. He had some resemblance with villagers but he looked familiar or more like us. The village guy talked to him in his own language. After listening to the villager, he came towards us and said,

"Hello, I am Drsna. May I have your introduction please?"

"Hello Drsna, I am Sarah from Germany and this is my friend Daksh from India. I am working on Indian tradition and culture. I am here to know about your village. The village of Lokayata."

"That's great!" exclaimed Drsna.

"Welcome to Lokayata. Please come inside. Maybe we can talk more comfortably inside the village premises."

“So tell me what all do you know about us?” Asked Drsna

“I don’t know much. My friend told me in an outskirts there is a village with some unique tradition and people regard them as cursed,” said Sarah.

“Another thing, while we were walking towards the village and were about to reach the opening of the passage of Anvikshki we met an old priest who said that people here are cursed by Gods and who so ever goes there will be ruined.”

“People usually say these things. I appreciate the fact that you didn’t blindly believe what that priest said but crossed Anvikshki to know about us. Usually people just believe what the non-Lokayatas say about us and take them as source and don’t even bother to cross Anvikshki to visit us. The other problem we faced was of language. The people were not able to understand our principles as we have age old tradition. So, all that was known was secondary account but I decided to change that and went to different places to learn other language and other knowledge to present the first-hand account. This bad fame about us is merely because of us being described by our oppositions and how can anyone who opposes you present you in a good light. We have faced the same fate for years.”

“Do you mean what people say about you is false and are all allegations?” Asked Dasksh

“Not all, but the way they present us is not the way we are,” said Drsna.

“So, what is Lokayata and what makes you different than others Drsna?” Asked Sarah

“We are the Indian materialists. The Carvakas, said Drsna.”

“What Materialist? Indian materialist!! Thought the words are counter intuitive. I was of the belief that the two words can’t go hand in hand. Is it some recent development?” exclaimed Sarah.

“Yes! Indian materialists. It’s not recent this is an age old tradition even before the times of Buddha.”

“I can’t believe this. Tell me more about your principles.”

“You see today tag lines written on t-shirts *“eat, drink and merry.”* This they have derived from us. We follow the same.”

“That’s interesting! Tell me something more?”

“We live a simple life. We don’t get into complexities. We believe that one should minimise the pain and increase pleasure as possible. One should do actions which increases pleasure and decreases pain as far as possible,” said Drsna

“You come close to hedonism, I am stuck. Hedonism in India, I thought it was never possible were people do painful rituals to please God. A land where people sacrifice their pleasure for the desire

Of heaven and liberation. In a place where people talk about the world hereafter and we have a village following hedonistic principles. It’s so astonishing,” said Sarah

"It might seem so. But you tell me Sarah don't we make sense. Why should one not enjoy his life in a futile admiration of enjoyment hereafter? *A sure shell is better than a doubtful coin.* Why should I sacrifice my pleasure and enjoyment for something I don't know whether it exists or not? For liberation I don't think one can be liberated in life. Pain is there till your alive and only death can make you free from pain and suffering. So, death for us is the end and the liberation. This desire for living eternal life is responsible for such theories heaven, of next life, new birth etc. Why can't we accept death as an end?" Said Drsna.

"You mean you don't believe in *svarga* and *narka*?" asked Daksh

"*Svarga*, the place where one reaches after performing Vedic rites. These are myths and are inventions of priests whose professional interest lies in coaxing threatening and making people perform the rituals. They make their life heaven by showing the ignorant masses the dreams of heaven."

"Then you must also not believe in the existence of God?" asked Daksha

"We deny the existence of God, we are atheist. Why do we need a God? The concept of God is much needed by the priest who cannot explain the nature and mechanism of world. We don't believe in God's as a cause of universe. We believe that the laws of nature which are inherent in the materials are enough to explain the world as it is without the concept of God."

"You mean you are *nastkia*," said Daksh.

"Yes, we are *nastika*, atheists."

"I am also an atheist. I believe in science and laws of nature and not on any divine account till now," said Sarah

"Sarah, you're an atheist," said Daksh in a pained voice.

"She is an atheist. Oh! God please kill me. Now she can have as many boyfriends as she wants. No God to stop her," murmured Daksh in a low voice.

"So, what do you guys believe in Drsna?" asked Sarah

"We believe in what we perceive," said Daksh.

"Ah! George Berkeley. You guys resemble western thought a lot. Tell me more?"

"We believe in matter as only reality as it's all what we can perceive. The four forms of matter Air, water, earth and fire. These four are responsible for the existence of world as it.

You started like Berkeley but result is totally opposite. Interesting!" said Sarah

"You don't believe in soul or the *Atman*?" asked Daksh.

"For us anything that is perceived exists. We don't deny soul as such, the conscious living body is soul for us."

"How can *Atman* be body?" interrogated Daksh

"The *Atman* is the body itself, which is characterized by attributes as we see in daily experiences and judgements like I am smart, I am tall, I am dark I am a proud Indian (quite in trend these days); I, the self, if distinct from body would be meaningless. So, we don't deny soul but we deny soul being different from body something unperceived."

"For the time being, let me agree with your argument that soul is body made of the four elements. But tell me how can consciousness be found in body if it's not present in the four elements you mentioned?" asked Daksh.

"Good question Daksh," said Sarah.

"Thank you, Sarah."

"I hope he doesn't have an answer for this one and I would win the argument. Sarah will definitely get impressed," said Daksh to himself

"Daksh, take these two bottles of colour. One is the red and the other blue. Please mix them."

Daksh mixed the two and the mixture turned into green colour.

"So, Daksh, was green colour present there already?"

"No, it wasn't."

"But how come it's there if it was not present."

"By mixing the two colours, it's so simple."

"In a similar way when the material combine in a particular way they give rise to consciousness which was not there in the individual material," said Drsnā

"Makes sense," said Sarah.

Daksh was not satisfied by the answer. But he was not ready with a counter argument so he kept quiet.

"So, if no existence of soul apart from body it means no immortality of soul, it means death as an end. All the question of life after death, heaven and hell becomes meaning less," said Drsnā.

Daksh while listening to Drsnā observed something unusual. Large quantity of smoke was coming out from the back side of one of the house in the village.

"Sarah, see I think that house has caught fire. We should run for the rescue." Said Daksh

Drsnā asked Daksh to stop but he ignored him and ran towards the house.

On close observation, he saw that it was a stage show practice and the members were trying to create smoke with the help of dry ice in water.

After a while, Drsnā came following the two.

"I told you it's not fire but you didn't listen. They are just creating effects for their performance," said Drsna

"It's not, but there usually is no smoke without a fire," said Sarah

"Here you have inferred and therefore committed a mistake."

"What's wrong with inferring?" Asked Daksh

"Take the present case. You inferred from smoke that there was fire because you think all instance of smoke are instances of fire, this particular case is also a case of smoke, therefore you thought there is fire."

"For such a stand you should have proper knowledge of all cases of fire and smoke which is practically not possible. What is found to be present in universally present perceived cases of smoke may not be present in unperceived ones. I am not saying that you will be always wrong while inferring but what I am trying to say is that there is a chance of error in inference as just happened. So, we can't take it as valid source totally," explained Drsna

"What about uniformities experienced objects possess? How will you explain that?"

"What do you mean Sarah? Please be more lucid," asked Drsna

"Let me put it like this, why is fire always hot and water always cold?"

"Now I got your point. It's because of their inherent natures of things that they possess. There is neither any guarantee that uniformity perceived in past would continue in nature."

It turned dark outside. Sarah reminded Daksh of getting back as it's already late.

"Thank you, Drsna, I am really thrilled to hear all your philosophy. Today my perception about Indian philosophy has changed. I thought that there is no materialist thought in the ancient Indian philosophy but Carvakas is as old as Epicureans. All your arguments are very nice. I have few refutations but I am short of time. I need to ask you more. I invite you to come to my place. So that we can carry on the discussion."

"I accept the invitation and would love to hear your refutation. I hope one or the other gets convinced. Even if not, let's agree to disagree. Thanks for coming. Not all take the path of Anvikshki."

"I have one final question," asked Daksh

"Yes, please."

"People say you don't even believe in The Holy Vedas? Is that true?"

"I already mentioned we only believe in what we perceive. Knowledge of words is, therefore, knowledge through perception and is quite valid. But if the words suggest something that can't be perceived and is of objects unperceived we doubt that and same is the case with knowledge from authority. For Vedas we don't believe in them. We look towards Vedas in the same way as I talked about religion. It has been written by some priests for their benefits. Through Vedic rites they have

benefited themselves and have earned superiority, high esteem and ecclesiastical monopoly. Vedas is just a tool for justifying their acts.”

Daksh was not satisfied by this answer. He had his refutation as Vedas is not only about rites and rituals. He thought this method adopted by them limits the scope of knowledge. But as it was getting late, so he decided to rest his case.

Daksh replied, “Do visit my place. We are going to have a good time”.

On their way back, both of them for a long time didn't utter a single word. Sarah was just thinking about what she just heard few hours ago and comparing it with all what she learned in Germany. The thoughts of Karl Marx, Hume's theory of Causality, gene theory, philosophical fundamentalism and the teachings of Carvaka were revolving round her mind. On the other hand, Daksh was also thinking about the argument. The conversion had changed the way Daksh used to think. He was not totally convinced but the words of Drisna had sown a seed of critical examination in his mind. He now decided to study all the texts. At the same instant, he thought that the purpose of his visit was not fulfilled. He hardly got some lone time with Sarah.

“Daksh, is everything fine?” asked Sarah.

“Yeah, absolutely, how was the visit?”

“It was really great. Thank you so much Daksh. You have helped me a lot in these months. You're one of my best friends.”

“Thank you Sarah,” said Daksh

“How about watching a movie tomorrow?”

“Why not,” said Daksh, with a big smile on his face.

“Will it be fine if we go out for a dinner after that?” asked Sarah politely

“Yeah sure,” replied Daksh .

“Today was the best day of my life. The cursed village turned into a blessing for me,” said Daksh to himself.