

A Pebble for Dickey

## Chapter1

Kamala clutched tightly, the dark pebble , in her closed fist. She felt the scaffolding give way under her foot and she heard the screams of terrified workers falling from different heights as the entire scaffolding at the construction site collapsed. A steel girder supporting the scaffolding had worked loose causing all joints to come apart. Forty odd workers fell, mostly women , standing at different heights of the structure to carry steel baskets of pre mixed concrete to be poured for the terrace roof of 5 story building under construction. Kamala was standing on a wide wooden board when she fell. Somehow she kept her hold on the board, squatting on it like a surfer riding the waves. The board and she were dropping from a great height. She enjoyed the thrill of the freefall and was amazed how skilfully she had balanced and kept looking at the rushing floor. When she was a clear six feet from the ground, she separated herself from the board and jumped with both feet together and immediately on contact with ground she rolled over her head and felt the board drop on her back driving all the wind out of her chest. She smiled and closed her eyes, still clutching the pebble.

She was lost to the world for the next half hour or so. She came to her senses when a pair of municipal workers grabbed her hands and feet to lift her to be transferred to a waiting ambulance. She opened her eyes and signalled to them that she was alright. The workers left her to attend to other injured people. Kamala opened her fist and looked at the shining black stone. She put the stone to her eyes and forehead with a strange devotion and mumbled a word of thanks, ,”Thank you, Krishna. You have done it again.”

She looked around her. It was chaos all over the place. Many of her friends were badly hurt. Ambulances were moving about lifting people and removing them to hospital. The young engineer, though dazed by the disaster, remained calm and resourceful, guiding the rescue work. Kamala moved slowly testing her limbs and stood up gingerly. When she could stand up without help, she was relieved and a smile lit up her brown unlined face. She hastened to help her friends.

It was a nasty accident , first one at this site. They had put up wooden board walkway over the scaffolding , in a zigzag pattern to help the workers climb from floor to floor, carrying concrete to be poured over for casting the roof. Kamala and her friends had climbed up these heights with out trouble.it was tough but it was safe, till now. At 40 + kamala did not have much choice . She was stuck to this job. These days the daily wages were decent. Government had built nice flats for construction workers and she had a decent place to live and sleep.

A doctor came over to look at her. Already people had begun to talk about her miraculous escape. The doctor looked kind and soft. He held her hand, looked into her eyes and spoke, “they say, you floated down like a feather. You look alright for a person who has dropped 50 meters , without getting her legs smashed .I see no sign of shock, you are not shaken up. How did you manage it?” His question was sincere.

Kamala smiled, “Yes, I could control my fall. Krishna told me what to do. He always tells me what to do.”

Who is this Krishna?

Kamal showed him the black pebble. ”Krishna is inside this pebble.’

A STONE?

“Yes, a stone .Not ordinary one. This one is special.”

How is it special?

“you will not understand.”

Try me.

“leave it. I can not explain it. He is there alright and He helps. He helps all those around me.”

The doctor was staring at her.she was asking him;

‘Look , tell me how did you come here so soon after the accident. It never happens in most accident sites. But to day, you are all here, you , the ambulances, the nurses the whole lot .how?

Do you know how?" She asked the doctor.

I do not know .please tell me

It is because, my Krishna here called you up.'

The doctor would not believe this.

He asked softly, ' madame, if your Krishna is so concerned, why did he cause the accident in the first place?.'

Kamala 's eyes flashed in a strange show of anger, 'My Krishna did not cause the accident.' She wanted to go on but remained silent

"Go on madame, you were going to tell us some thing". The doctor was prodding her.

Your Krishna was not able to stop the accident. He saved you and let others suffer. Your Krishna is unfair, biased. Not a good god , is He?. You were just plain lucky.

The doctor was enjoying her discomfiture.

Kamala looked straight into his eyes and said softly, "Have you heard about karma. We all have to go through such things because of karma, so my good doctor, be good to every one and may be Krishna too would be good to you."

She stood up and walked away without even looking at the effect her words had on the doctor.

Doctor stared at the ground. Slowly he packed his bag and walked towards the engineer who was waiting for him.

Engineer took him by hand and said with emotion, "thank you, Doctor ,for coming in so promptly on our call. The ambulances have carried 10 workers to the hospital for further examination and treatment. Your nurses have done a fantastic job. Tell me, sir, are you always so ready? I am really amazed'

Doctor was modest, " to be honest, I am also surprised.. It just happened that we were ready at that point when your call came through. There is one worker in your gang who had a ready answer to that question."

What was that?

She said it was all her Krishna's doing. I am a Christian and tempted to agree with her. Anyway, please tighten up your scaffolding. Krishna may sleep on his job and you may not be so lucky every time.

Engineer smiled, and said, "I will definitely attend to that. So, you talked to kamala and came under her spell. She is a strange woman but a good one at that."

Doctor returned to his hospital. Before leaving the accident site, he looked around for kamala. She was not any where in sight.. He drove away. His mind was full of questions about Kamala, Krishna and the black pebble.

## Chapter2.

There was no work to do after the accident. kamala went to collect from the locker room her bag containing a tiffin box and water bottle. She felt hungry after all the excitement of accident. The pebble was rolled into the folds of her saree and tucked into her waist. She found a leafy tree that threw a big circle of shade. She sat on the grass spreading a towel .She took out a handkerchief size plastic sheet from her bag and placed the pebble on that sheet. She washed her hands with water from the bottle and with wet hand she wiped the pebble clean and with end of saree she dabbed at the pebble to make it dry. She began to talk to the stone.

Eh , Krishna, you saved me again today. I should be thanking you. But my mind thinks differently. Who would have missed me if I had died. No one. is there anything left for me to do?. The old man had said that I am here for a purpose and I can leave the world only after that purpose is served. like sabari in Ramayana. I do not know what my purpose is and you are also not telling me much.”

She remained silent as though she was listening to someone. The face was absolutely at peace, no hint of tension.

A CHILD WAS TALKING TO HER;”WAIT KAMALA.ALL IN GOOD TIME.NOW STOP COMPLAINING AND GIVE ME FOOD. I am hungry

“Of course, Krishna. I am sorry, it is well past your normal lunch .Just a moment. Here is your food.

She opened her lunchbox. Sour smell of fermented curd rice and hot pickle filled the air. “You know Krishna, this is end march. The heat is so terrible even the best curd rice will turn sour.so please, for my sake accept this humble offering.”

There was sound of a child laughing. The pungent smell vanished. She scooped a little food in a spoon and touched the pebble. The food seemed to disappear in thin air

She cleaned the pebble and put it back on the sheet. Now, I will eat, okay?

Uh, uh .came the sound

She patted the pebble smiling sweetly and ate peacefully. she cleaned up her vessel and drank some water. wiping her hands dry, she lifted the pebble tenderly and put it in a toy cradle .She folded the plastic sheet meticulously and returned it to her bag. This was her regular ritual. She thought she would sleep for some time. The agent shouted from somewhere , “Eh kamamma, the truck is leaving , you want to leave now?”

“Yes sir, give me a minute” . she quickly packed up all her stuff in her bag, taking care to wrap the pebble and tuck it in her waist.

She had her own one room tenement in hyderbasti .It was constructed for workers by the government. All houses were alike all neatly laid out in a cluster. The place was reasonably clean. Living alone for long time, she had developed this habit of talking to herself. People found it strange that she spoke to the pebble and as though it had soul of its own, it seemed to talk back to her. Many thought she was crazy, but she never cared.

She used a key to open her door and entered. she was telling the pebble, “remember , first thing to do is to thank our swamiji for saving our lives today.”

The pebble continued to talk to her.

‘Yes, dear. Swamiji saved us all, it could have been a major tragedy. The poor doctor does not understand these things being a Christian. But he did a great job today, why not include a word of thanks to the good doctor.’

Kamala agreed readily

“ Sure, Krishna. you have a good man there. take care of him, will you?. Hope we will meet up with him soon.”

She put her bag away in a cup board after removing her tiffin box for cleaning. There was a small cup board in a corner in which she had kept a framed picture of Lord Krishna in His famous child form. There was another picture of a bearded old man adjacent to it. she kept the pebble on a piece of clean cloth in front of krishna’s picture .She then proceeded to sweep her room clean. She lit her stove and kept a kettle of water to brew some tea .She kept the flame low and went to her bathroom for a refreshing bath and changed her clothes. She ran a comb through her hair and made herself pretty with a dab of kumkum on

her forehead. She stole a look in the mirror and chuckled, not bad for a 40+ woman. The kettle made a sound and she made some tea. She filled her cup and put it on the table. Then she stood in front of the pictures, with her hands folded, palms together, her head low... The evening sun swept through the window lighting up the pictures. As pictures go, they were ordinary pictures. She looked at the Oldman with wide open eyes. It was not a picture for her. It was a sort of divine manifestation. The eyes that stared from his face were very bright, broad forehead and shapely nose. He must have been extraordinarily handsome in his younger days. Kamala was talking to him now, "Swamiji, today you performed another miracle to save us all. The scaffolding gave way and all workers fell from heights. Luckily no one died. Some had broken their legs and some escaped with minor injuries. There was a good doctor to attend to the injured workers. I know you will say it was Krishna who saved every one but I know Krishna did it for you. The doctor laughed when I told him so. I got so angry that I wanted to say some thing nasty. I remembered your words of advice that I should be nice to every one. So I spared him. But I must say that he and his staff of nurses did a great job today. Bless them, swamiji. Such people are rare these days."

She stood silent for some time as though she was listening to some one. Then she said, "Yes, I will be kind to him. I do not know when I will meet him next."

She bowed her head and stepped back. The tea was now right temperature to drink. She found some biscuits and decided to have a meal of tea and biscuits. She took the pebble out and kept it in her lap and went through motions of offering tea and biscuits. She said, 'Krishna, do you know that this tea and biscuits taste so delicious after you taste it.' She completed her meal and there was a shine of intense contentment and peace in her face.

She closed her eyes and leaned back on her chair. Events of past 15 years flashed in her eyes in a fast rewind and stopped at the stage of time when she first met the swamiji. And how she got her pebble.



### Chapter3

A young Kamala was walking fast in the afternoon sun. It was month of May and sun was torrid. She had pulled the end of saree to cover her head. The hot radiation from the tar road hit her in the face roasting it to a fine blend of reddish brown. She had more than a mile or so to cover before she could reach her hut in the outskirts of the city. Her hut was situated amidst a cluster of thatched huts in a clearance beyond the big hospital. She was just beginning to see its profile shimmering in the hot sun. She wanted to pause and have a sip of water, but decided she would hurry home. The road was deserted and she saw no movement of vehicles. Every one preferred to stay indoors to escape the heat.

She walked and walked. Soon she was with in touching distance of old man who was walking in front , ahead of her. He had been in her sight last few minutes..

She noticed that his steps were becoming wobbly.

He was swaying from side to side trying to maintain his walk.

She knew he would collapse any time .She had seen many people suffer heatstroke during long summer months.

She hastened her steps to come close to him and caught up with him just as he collapsed. She caught him in her strong hands. She pulled him over to side and found a tree near by. She made him lie on the ground in the shade. She looked inside her bag and took out a long bottle of water. she sprinkled some water on his face and put the water bottle to his lips. He drank eagerly and sat up in a fit of cough. She moved and put him against her chest to make him a little more comfortable. With one end of saree she waved in front of his face. The wind generated by this makeshift fan revived him. He stayed put leaning against her soft body and opened his eyes. He moved a little to look at her and smiled at her. His eyes were very bright and she saw those eyes were very kind.. He tried to speak. She offered him some more water and he drank some more. He wiped the bottle clean and returned it to her. He said softly, "Thank you , dear. You are very kind."

Kamala found her tongue. She said, "Oldman, you should not be out on the road in this heat"

I know dear, but I am in a hurry.

'where do you want to go?'

Hyderbasti.

But that place is far away. You can not walk to that place, not in the condition you are presently in. If you don't mind, you can stay with me for the night and proceed to hyderbasti in the morning

The old man considered her offer.

I came here to visit a hospital. can you take me there. I have to see a doctor there.

"Yes, I will help you to reach the hospital. It is near by.

She walked ahead and he followed her holding her hand. kamala found the hand soft but it had some strength. They came to the hospital.it was a two storied building of old type design, standing on its own ground with lot of trees all round it. She saw many people sitting under different trees. There was car standing at the portico and a well dressed but tired looking man standing close to the car in the act of opening it. He saw kamala and Oldman. His tired face changed to one of anger. from where he stood, he stopped kamla and the Oldman in their tracks with an unexpected outburst, " you have come a long way,Oldman."

'and just in time, I hope' returned the Oldman, jerking himself free from kamala's hold.

The words came out spontaneously. There was no attempt to greet each other.one could make out that there was no love lost between them. kamala could touch the intense sense of hatred trading between the two. she realised they knew each other .

The Oldman said calmly, I have come to take charge of what is mine. what is justly due to me . as per your own commitment made long long ago.

The younger man retorted, 'there is nothing that even remotely belongs to you. I have made no commitment. you are wasting your time. now go away.'

The Oldman stood his ground. he had expected this .he said maintaining his calm. ." I am asking you one last time. Settle now and you will live well with all that you possess. if not , doomsday is not far off. I am the only person who can save you. After all these years, god has sent me back here. I will save you as per His will but all help will be conditional."

Your helping days are long over, Oldman. I am amazed that you still talk about god after what all you went through. You are a doddering old fool. I have no use for help, not your help anyway.so please go away.

Oldman laughed. 'okay, I will go away now. But your dooms days are closing over you. I can see all that as clearly as I see you now

I see this smart building built with my money, being ripped apart and put to flames. Thirty days That is all you have. My words always come true.'

The younger man laughed. "You have suffered a stroke, Oldman. Sun stroke. you are blabbering. Go home and sleep. you will see everything in new light once you wake up after a good night sleep. I am tired , I have had a busy day."

He got into the car away drove away without another look at the Oldman.

The Oldman kept staring at the speeding car .His eyes were blazing. All his muscles were drawn tight over his old body. The hold on the young woman's hand was too tight. With great effort he brought his emotions under control He said haltingly, 'let us go my dear. Those people who drive double speed to their hell are blind to red lights on their way

I am the red light he jumped now.

A pity, he did not wait to listen to what I had to offer.

I am sorry we are going to lose a good doctor..

They walked to kamal's hut. There in over a kerosene lamp. The old man told an extra ordinary story. Kamala listened with her jaws dropping.

## Chapter 4 .

At the age of 35 Dr Kamalkanth was a world renowned Paediatrician specialising in infantile surgery. He had worked at the Guy hospital in London and subsequently joined a well known hospital of , child trust group showing amazing surgical skills to cure children. His services received excellent reviews and he was awarded Fairchild medal for services rendered by him.

He nursed a desire to establish in India, an academy of surgical excellence to train Indian doctors in advanced surgical methods and procedures. .once he found a good sponsor he took leave of England and landed at Hyderabad to set up his academy. .His concepts were new , teaching methods were advanced and facilities offered excellent training. He brought in imaging systems, fibre optics camera system, keyhole surgery techniques, local desensitisers to avoid complicated anaesthetics , remote monitored simulators into teaching labs, so that doctors could train in real time situations and gain formidable skills. The exercise proved to be great boon to a society starved off credible surgical skills in a growing population domain.

He married a girl from an influential family and the couple went on to build a name for their unique skills and enterpreunership.The result was a chain of hospitals all over AP , nothing big but every one compact, well managed systems using locally available skills and resources. These hospitals became extremely popular with common man as there was no exploitation or commercialisation. Service and trust combined and thrived.

At Hyderabad, they added child care unit to the hospitals to help working mothers to keep their children safe while they were busy at work. .This became popular as children got good food, medical attention and sound basic education. Shanta, the wife of Dr kamalkant was the brain behind the idea and she took every effort to make it a big success.

Dr kamalkant enjoyed his work and cherished the contribution he and his family were making towards the society. They steered a clear course avoiding too much public attention, political leanings and turf warfare. They cultivated an image of social workers and stayed away from being accused as commercial exploiters as most corporate houses in medical domain, were known for.

The couple had two sons. Like all working mothers, shanta put her children also in the same child care centre showing to everybody that her confidence and pride in the enterprise she had started.

The disaster struck one day with out any warning. SIX CHILDREN DIED IN THE CENTRE AND FOUR MORE DIED IN THEIR HOMES AFTER BEING TAKEN HOME IN THE EVENING BY THEIR MOTHERS. This was the opportunity eagerly waited for by the distractors and low profile business rivals of Dr Kamalkant. There were many who did not like the popularity and patronage enjoyed by the couple in the eyes of society.. They donned the hats of moral policemen and began to rise a big stink about the incident. A shocked doctor soon found out that the cause of death was poisoning of milk powder used by the centre and supplied by a disgruntled vendor. He was not even allowed to disclose his findings, but was subjected to intense criticism in public domain .The media blew it into a big thing, whipping up an uncalled for public out cry. In all hue and cry raised by the media, it was conveniently forgotten that one of the victims was Doctor's own younger son. Police and municipal authorities moved fast and in a fast and rather harsh procedure, slammed the doctor into a cell The doctor was dragged all over courts, his licence to practice was revoked and all his hospitals spread across the state were taken over Shanta fought tooth and nail but authorities were in no mood to settle or listen to reason. Shanta was unhappy with the way doctor had reacted to the crisis and legal procedures he took up. She moved out of his house to be with her parents while the doctor languished in the jail. In a matter of 6 months, a celebrity doctor was cut down to the size of a petty criminal out to make a fast buck.

The police investigation did find out about the contaminated milk supplied by a vendor who wanted to teach the purchase manager a lesson for not increasing budgetary sanctions for milk supply. Government used this fact to prove irresponsibility on the part of management in this case, Dr Kamal kant. His reputation as a social well wisher was tarnished and he was labelled as another capitalists bent on exploitation and profiteering at the cost of human lives. Kamalkant was hoping that his wife would move the matters to higher courts, but she lost interest in him when he was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment by a determined jury who had pre judged him based on media

reports and sensational reviews in the press. Reason went for a toss and the doctor took one blow after another in silence.

One property that surprisingly remained untouched by the authorities was an unregistered, partly completed hospital building built for the doctor by a friendly builder. One of the doctors from the childcare centre approached Dr Kamalkant in the jail and struck a deal with the doctor in total secrecy. The deal was that the premises would be kept in safe custody by the young doctor, so that when Dr Kamalkant came out of jail after serving his term, he will have a place to live and rebuild his future. Kamalkant signed the papers in good faith and young Dr Shankar Reddy started a new career with great faith and promise of carrying on with good work started by kamalkant.

The doctor never met Shankar Reddy again

## Chapter5

Kamalkant was now a broken man and his mind turned to spirituality. Because of his exceptional surgical skills, the prison authorities allowed the prison hospital to use his services for which fees were paid to his prison account. While keeping up his skills in tact, Dr Kamal kant also developed himself spiritually by reading lot of books and calling for new books to be added to prison library.

Shanta continued to ignore him as she believed he had bungled the entire case by trusting lawyers of inadequate capability to put up effective defence. Kamalkant stopped thinking about his family and thin coat of vairagyam covered his mind set. In recognition of services rendered and good conduct through out the term, he was released after 12 years. When he emerged out of Tihar jail, near Delhi, far away from Hyderabad, he was a totally different man , with out any ambition or hatred against any one. He tried to contact Shanta but she did not respond and he gave it up. He decided, he would not go down south. During the jail term, the fees paid for his services and other allowances had amounted to a sizeable sum with which he could sustain himself.

He travelled north, roamed about in the hills and reached gandaki river. As he was bending down to scoop water in his hands from the river, he found the stone. HE PICKED IT UP AND EXAMINED THE SHINING PEBBLE, HE FOUND A SENSE OF ELATION IN HIS MIND. The stone was heavy. The sun's rays hit the stone and in the reflected beam of light he found new meaning to his life. He felt the stone was cleaning him inside out. He had heard his Brahmin friends talk about saligrams which they kept in the puja rooms. He had heard them tell about power of these pebbles when kept and worshipped daily. They called their pebbles by different names of gods. He wondered if the pebble found by him also had some unknown power.

He examined the stone sitting on the river bank while drying himself in the sun. A worm had drilled a hole in the stone to make a home for itself while it remained submerged in the river water. To his keen eyes, the hole looked like some one leaning against a cow and holding a flute in hand. He called out softly, 'venugopala' and put the stone to his ears. He distinctly heard the tunes

of long forgotten melody on Krishna sung by his mother. Kamalkant was thrilled that he could recognise the song after all these years. He cried out like a child repeating name of Krishna .From that day, the stone remained with him close to his body. He felt divine agencies were now beginning to direct his life. He spent many evenings in isolation talking to the stone and one fine day, the stone talked back.

Some thing in his mind told him to go to Rishikesh, . He found an ashram who could use his skills in return for a roof and board. .He began an altogether new life He was now past 65 years and his spiritual leanings made him pick up friendship with all people who came to rishikesh for mental peace

The Ashram authorities found kamalkant had amazing skills at organising events. Over stressed people from big cities like Mumbai, Calcutta, Ahmedabad etc found it rejuvenating to spend a few peaceful days at the ashram. The spiritual discourses by kamalkant became a great hit and his advice on health matters were very helpful. kamalkant worked on combining the concepts of health and spiritualism, perfected it and prospered. Soon the ashram had a health spa, yoga clinic and counselling desk. Kamalkant was a new man with flowing grey hair and matching long beard. The ashram authorities soon made him a director and he was now officially referred as swamiji..

Life seemed to settle nicely to a routine keeping swamiji happy and busy forgetting those days of suffering behind bars. Swamiji kept attributing all his success to the black stone in his hand. He maintained it in a divine form ,an ikon .He performed puja to the stone and offered milk and fruits before his meals. He would talk to the stone calling him Krishna and telling him about the work done by him every day. The stone seemed to listen and occasionally uttered a word or two in appreciation. The rational mind of the doctor termed it as his own imagination on account of loneliness and lack of understanding companion in his life. But that changed soon when the stone became down right chatter box admonishing at times and advising him when he needed some.



One day after his morning puja, the pebble talked to kamalkant. He heard , 'Kamal, will you please take me out in the open today. I would like to look at the sky and hills around this place.'

Kamal was puzzled.He said, 'sure Krishna'. He took the pebble in his hand and walked out to the garden with in ashram compound. The sky was grey and it was very cold out in the open.

It had been a very hot summer in the plains and winter had set in earlier than usual. visitors to the ashram would be very less in number and after new year traffic will pick up. Today, dark clouds were clinging to the hill tops and there was a hint of rain. The stone shook in his hand and he heard the stone say, "There is going to be a cloud burst in the hills and there will be huge landslide. Many people will suffer. why don't you go and alert the authorities. Stop people from travelling".

Kamal knew what he had to do. He rang up the hospital and advised them to test their state of preparedness to handle a sudden landslides. He also asked for a meeting with military regulators to stop movement of vehicles in the hill roads. The commander of military camp gave him time to talk. THE COMMANDER WAS AMMUSED THAT A SWAMIJI FROM LOCAL ASHRAM WAS GOING TO TALK TO HIM ABOUT POSSIBLE LANDSLIDES. The army usually took control of hill roads during winter months. The commander was busy organising supplies for long winter months. He listened to the swamiji with respect but laughed out when the good swamiji began to advise him on what he should do .

The commander said rudely, 'that is enough swamiji. we will take necessary precaution. but let me tell you, it is too early for landslides. The rains will not be so heavy during this period, they pick up strength a little later only. Anyway thank you for your concern and we will take steps to face any disaster".

Kamal felt like a fool talking about non existing danger.

Swamiji returned to ashram a little disillusioned. Late in the evening he heard a great explosion in the military camp in the hills and saw a huge ball of fire rising in air.

It came on TV that huge ammunition dump maintained by the army had exploded causing huge landslide trapping a dozen army trucks and many personnel on foot patrolling the hill roads. A SUDDEN CLOUD BURST COMPLICATED MATTERS AFFECTING RESCUE WORK. The commander remembered the swamiji and he promptly told the Military intelligence people that was investigating the explosion that swamiji had a prior idea about the coming events. That was enough.

Early morning, much before sunrise , swamiji was picked up from the ashram premises by MI for interrogation. How did he know about landslides ?. Did he know about explosion?. did he see any terrorists in the hills or around ashram? how and where did he pick up all this information?. Even the met dept had not seen the cloud burst. How did the swamiji know about this ?

The questions came one after other, in a frightening sequence. Swamiji was staggered .he looked at the pebble in his hand,' Krishna , what is this?'

The pebble remained silent.

Two burly sergeants joined the team. the interrogation was now becoming a bit physical. The sergeants took turns to punch swamiji in the face.

Swamiji fell off the chair. THE PEBBLE ROLLED OUT OF HIS HAND.

He leaned forward to pick it up. The sergeant kicked the swamiji and other sergeant picked the pebble up.

KAMAL KEPT TELLING THAT HIS KRISHNA HAD TOLD HIM TO ALERT THE AUTHORITIES.

WHO IS KRISHNA? WHERE IS HE NOW? .We would like to talk to him

“He is very much here. He is listening to all this. You better believe me.”

They laughed at him. They were angry that he was not cooperating.

It is ridiculous to believe that a stone could talk.it is better not to talk about Krishna. He kept looking at the sergeant who was tossing the stone and catching it.

The nature of questions changed

Where are you from? what is your back ground?

How do you know about medicine ? Are you a doctor?

Kamal was silent

Why did he come to rishikesh?

One by one, in a systematic manner, they extracted every bit of information he was desperately trying not to reveal

He was in tihar?

That clinched it. They slammed him in a cell in the barracks. They were courteous enough to return the stone to him.

For two months , they held him. Their investigation could not link him with the events of the day. They decided it was a cruel coincidence. They thanked him for his advise on handling the disaster. he was allowed to return to the ashram. The ashram authorities were decent. They did not ask embarrassing questions. They made it clear that he could not stay in the ashram any more. He was asked to clear out of the place.

## Chapter6

KAMAL moved out of ashram without taking anything with him. He had his purse and some money. He looked at the stone. He asked himself, ' Krishna, why is this happening to me ?'

He did not hear any response. He decided the stone had lost its power because he could not offer proper puja while he was held in the military camp. He wanted to fling the stone away. He looked at it for one last time. He will discard it just like other things he had discarded in life before.

He felt his palm becoming warm. The stone was becoming heavy. He could not move his hand to throw it away.

'What is this Krishna ?', he shouted.

The stone shouted at him

"I will not leave you. You head south now. There is lot of work to be done. Your time in rishikesh is over. You do not know it but you have saved thousands of lives. so do not feel let down. I only use people for good of every one. you are important to me.so I will not let you discard me. "

Kamalkant was in a daze

He found himself a ticket second class AC sleeper on a train going to Hyderabad. Unfortunately he got an upper tier sleeper. With creaking bones he climbed on top and lied down. He looked around in the compartment to see who were all travelling with him.

## Chapter 7.

Kamalkant adjusted the pillow and tried to relax. The AC WAS WORKING NICELY AND IT WAS PLEASANT INSIDE THE COMPARTMENT. He tried to kill the demons in his head by concentrating on people travelling with him. There were 4 young people in their mid thirties. They were speaking in telugu, his mother tongue, a language he had not used in the last 15 years. During his jail term and in the following years in rishikesh he avoided using that language concentrating on improving his Hindi. He heard the heated exchange of words. He tried to concentrate.

“have to finish him off in the train only. Once he gets down at Hyderabad, he will be totally outside our reach. Security blanket around him will be tight. He has become a VIP now.”

‘Why should we kill him?’ asked another man. ‘Not all operations are successful. He performed the operation all right, but patient died.

Exactly. the patient died. cause of death was negligence. The person who died was my young son ,because of doctor’s negligence. The court did not decide. They wanted to go by rules. Rules helped him to escape. My rule says the doctor dies .

It was never proved. You had your chances. your lawyers did a lousy job. He is free now.

‘whose side are you on’ screamed the young father. He escaped by legal gymnastics. we signed the papers before surgery that gave him a life line .when I have my dagger in his eyes, he will have no way of escaping. daggers do not speak legalese.”

There will be people in his compartment.

No ,he has taken a coupe. He will be alone.

How will you enter?

Caterer’s uniform. I have got one .I have really planned well for this task. Dr Shankar Reddy , you will not escape now. the man hissed

Kamalkant heard all this and was jolted when he heard the name of the doctor. Dr Shankar reddy. same man? The name was same , the man who took over his unfinished hospital. The man who promised to keep it operational and running till he returned. The man who ditched me.

Kamalkant sharpened his ears to listen to their conversation with more interest now.

The young father continued.

My father told me once. This Shankar reddy was a product of a surgical academy, a top class training set up exclusively to train surgeons. It was started by Dr kAMALKANT, a brilliant doctor from UK. SHANKAR Reddy was entrusted with task of managing purchase dept in addition to medical services. The man wanted to make fast buck by fleecing the vendors. He picked up a fight with milk vendor .The supplier hit back by supplying poisoned milk. More than 10 children died in the child care centre attached to his hospital. Even the infant child of Dr.Kamalkant had died.

The case raised a big stink. Poor kamalkant became a scapegoat who was sent to jail. Dr Shankar Reddy kept low profile and no body connected him with the tragedy.

Shankar Reddy got hold of unfinished and unregistered hospital some how and never looked back. He is now VIP DOCTOR.

If Kamalkant was alive now, he will gladly hand over the dagger to me to finish him off.

Kamalkant winced hearing these words.

The pebble spoke softly.

‘did you hear that swamiji. This is your chance to redeem yourself. You have to save that doctor. In spite of whatever they say about him, he still remains a good doctor”

Must I save some one who ruined me?

‘A good hospital should not close down because of one bad man. you have to save him. I am telling you”

Swamiji was not convinced. He was not very keen on getting involved..

The pebble hissed

“Kamal, this Doctor is important for the hospital. It is your hospital. It is your legacy to the society. It is serving a good purpose and Doctor is an agent.”

This doctor killed a patient.

‘How do you know.?’

These people are agitated because of that. ”the swamiji pointed out.

‘Kamal, you have performed a thousand operations in many places. Has not any one died on the operation table in the theatre, be honest. Surgery has its risks. Patients are told about it’

But this doctor was said to have been negligent

“It was never proved”

It is never easy to prove negligence. Doctors always clean up the mess made by them .There must have been some motive.

“Exactly. There was no motive in this case. Are these people talking about any motive?”

No, there is no mention of motive , not so for.

“that clears your way to intervene and save the doctor”. There was relief in the tone of the pebble

I am 72. How can I stop these people.

Alert the doctor. Inform the security.

‘Are you joking? You know what happened last time you sent me to alert the army about cloud burst in the hills.’

You saved thousands of people

“Nobody gave me any credit!”

That does not matter. .In my green book, I have entered all A's against your name.

Big deal. That is joke of the century.

'I am serious.' The stone mumbled

KAMAL LAUGHED SILENTLY.

Kamalkant thought about the matter on hand. He did not know where Dr Shankar Reddy was sitting in the train.

Even if he knew that ,how was he going to convince the doctor about the danger?

What if he recognised kamal? would that not create new problem?

What if he refuses to believe him?

Kamalkant thought for some time. Then he decided he will involve a third party to save the doctor.

He prayed to Krishna.

The pebble grumbled, 'can't a guy sleep for some time?'"

"Krishna, you can not sleep now. You are here to help me. Now, tell me how do I find Dr Shankar reddy in this train."

Simple. Find the travelling ticket inspector. He carries a clip board with list of all names of passengers. Ask him.

Kamalkant got down from his berth making minimum noise. But old age and weak bones are great nuisance. The compartment was dark because all passengers had gone to sleep switching off all lights. He stumbled through narrow aisle lurching from side to side. The TTE had his own bunk. he had completed his examination of all tickets and was getting ready to grab some sleep. Swamiji with his long beard scarred him silly, appearing all of a sudden

Kamalkant had his lines all set,

"excuse me, I am not well. Can you help find a doctor on this train."



The TTE was irritated. "How will I know about that", he was aggressive.

Kamalkant was calm. It is mandatory for doctors to indicate it in their application form while filling reservation form. It is always shown in the list of passengers. Please check.

The TTE glared at the bearded man. He extended the clipboard towards kamalkant, 'take this and find out if such information is there'.

Kamal kant grabbed the clipboard and went through the list. It took time but he found it Dr Shankar Reddy AND Mrs Reddy IN COUPE D attached to HA1 compartment. He also noted that in coupe E there were 2 passengers Major Dickey and Mrs Kadambari. Kamalkant returned the clipboard with a word of thanks.

Kamalkant had noted that one could go from one end of train to other as all compartments were inter connected. He asked the TTE where HA1 was. It was only two compartments away. He decided to wake up the passenger in coupe E to alert Dr. Shankar Reddy.

He lurched through the vestibules and reached the coupe E. He was about to knock on the door when the door opened sliding on rails.

Kamal was taken aback to see the door slide open all of a sudden. A burly Gurkha in army fatigue was at the door with a bull dog face and a tone to match.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? .The tone was authoritative and demanded a prompt answer. Even before he could catch his wits and answer the first question, a volley of questions followed in rapid fire mode.

'You are not here again to sound another alarm about another overdue disaster.?'

Kamal RECOGNISED THE PERSON AS Army major deputed to the hills to oversee the rescue operation. He had watched him speak to the jawans and his superior officers. He had dominated the show so much that a person watching could not say whether He owned the army or Army owned him. He had appeared at that time like a lion and jawans were running head over heels

executing his orders. He had watched from his cell window the major sitting with the jawans and sharing their food.

Kamalkant thanked the gods for putting him in touch with this Major. He knew his job would become a lot easier if he could convince this man.

“Thank god, you are here major. You are the god send. Yes, I am here to sound out another alarm.”

Don't you dare to tell me you have planted another bomb in the train. somewhere.

“No, no major.no bombs. But there is a bunch of young parents plotting to kill a doctor in this coupe. They are expecting to strike just before the train streams into Nagpur station early in the morning. They will strike and get down from train at the station and walk away.”

‘How do you know?’ Dickey barked

“I heard them talking. My berth is right over their seats. They spoke in telugu.”

.You understand Telugu?

“I am a telugu.”

You are telling the truth?

“Yes, Major.”

In the mean while, Kadambari woke up and joined them to see what they were discussing. Kadhambari smiled to herself. Her friend had been complaining that life had all of a sudden become very dull with out any excitement or violent action. Dickey looked for trouble at every corner and when it came he was in his elements dealing with it. From the way the conversation was going on, she was convinced that trouble had at last found its way to Dickey.

She patted Dickey and said, “enjoy yourself, Dickey. I will go and sleep”

No kaddu, not so soon. we may need a feminine pitch here. So please stand by and watch.

Dickey knocked at coupe D door.

An impatient man shouted from inside, "go away , we are sleeping"

No, Doctor. Please, open the door. This is an emergency.

The doctor opened the door and saw the burly Gurkha in army green banyan and khaki shorts.

He was annoyed and tried to shut the door on Dickey's face. But Dickey was quick to put his feet in to prevent the door from shutting., He said in an unpleasant tone, 'Look here Doctor. There is a bunch of young parents out to kill you and throw your body out of train. Would you like to talk about it or allow them to walk all over you.'

Oxford English from a gurkha floored the doctor.

He said haltingly, 'what was that? I did not catch all that you said. Somebody wants to kill me? whatever for?'

You killed a two year old child in a botched up surgery.

'When and where?'

Do not act as though you do not know. It was there in all national papers and media went berserk. It is a miracle you escaped .you possibly have powerful friends. But to night, you are at the core of a trap like a bloody rat.' Dickey could cut you down with words.

'What are you talking about?'

The surgery you did at AIMS Delhi. If you still continue to act as though you don't know, I will punch you to death and save those poor parents lot of effort. Dickey's Popeye forearm and ham fist was with in inch of Doctor's face.

Doctor stepped back in hurry.

'I did not perform the operation. I have explained it all during the enquiry. The doctor who actually performed the surgery was careless. He did not check the child's blood condition. The child bled to death, not because of surgery but because the child was a haemophilia patient and the stupid doctor did not know about it. That is the truth'.

“May be. But the young parents of the child are not buying it. Would you like to argue that point with them? They want your blood.”.

That is not fair.

“Not fair? You doctors, what do you know about fairness considering the way you all gang up to fleece the patients. Did you not collect the fees for your services beforehand for a surgery that was botched.”

That is a different matter.

“That is what you think. The parents think differently. Now they are holding you by the short hair. You want to scream for help or fold up and die. That is for you to decide.”

Doctor was silent. The major was menacing.

Doctor said , ‘I am not the fighting type.’

Then you must be the running type, rats .

‘I am not good at that either.’

“So what are you, man?”

Dickey was angry.

‘I am a good doctor.’

Dickey looked him in the eye. what he saw in the eyes impressed him.

“Okay , you are good doctor. I will not debate that point now. The Oldman wanted me to save you. So I will help you. Now we have to swap places. You take my place and I will take your place. They will come to hit you and I will be there to deal with it.

‘I do not seem to have any other choice. I will talk to my wife. tell me how you got to know about all this?’

Dickey pointed to kamalkant standing away in the corridor. There was no light and doctor did not recognise him.

'I SUPPOSE, I SHOULD BE THANKING YOU FOR THIS.BUT PLEASE BELIEVE ME I DID NOT KILL THAT CHILD”

He did not wait for response. He went inside the compartment to brief his wife and prepare to swap places with the major.

Kamalkant went back to his bed satisfied that matter was safe with Dickey in the picture.

## Chapter8

Nagpur station was still half an hour away. The young angry parent Keshub chander woke up. his cellphone sounded the alarm. he quickly switched it off and got up from his bed. He pulled his suitcase out and latched it on to a hand bag. He removed the knife from its shining leather sheath and tested the edge on his palm. He had bought the knife at chandni chowk market after the court hearing was over. He will not need his friends for the job. He moved out of compartment wheeling his suitcase.

Kamal kant was awake. He did not try to follow him. There was a God called Dickey waiting to deal with him. He turned in his bed and slept.

Keshub was walking towards the coupe.

He had worked it out in his mind. every little detail. A hundred times and more. He will go to the coupe, knock on the door .The good doctor will open the door. he will plunge the knife in his belly and step out.no speeches. No fuss. push and out.

What if his wife opened the door?

Same work. Plunge the knife in her gut. close her mouth. enter compartment and kill the doctor. single murder or double murder, it does not matter. The doctor has to die.

Dickey waited patiently in his coupe , for the assassin to knock. He eased the door open.

Keshub was soon outside the coupe. He knocked. The door slid open. The sliding door surprised him. He expected the door to make some noise. There was no one standing. His knife was out ready for the thrust. There was no one to plunge it in. It was dark. He stepped inside the coupe, knife hand in front. suddenly that hand was grabbed and he was thrown. A judo expert would know about it. Poor keshub did not know any thing about judo. He flew in air and banged his head against a window steel frame.it was painful. The arm that held the knife bent and plunged into his own thigh and he screamed. A burly man was standing over him. Soon the compartment was filled with policemen.

Kaddu switched on the light. An inspector was putting handcuffs to keshub's hands.

In a dejected mood and in pain because of gash in the thigh, keshub allowed himself to be pushed out of the compartment on to the platform. His friends watched him, with a blank expression.

It did not take even one complete minute. He had failed to kill the doctor. That hurt him more.

## Chapter9

Dr Shankar Reddy was profusely thanking Dickey for handling the situation , so efficiently, saving him and thwarting the plans of the assassin. He said with lot of emotion, 'let me assure you, major, I did not contribute anything to that surgery which proved fatal for the child. I was at AIMS FOR A TECHNICAL SEMINAR ON SURGERY ON INFANTS AND I am an expert in the field. They dragged me into the operation theatre just to impress me on what they were doing there at Delhi. The doctor was so excited about my presence and wanted to earn more credibility for his skills by associating my name with his work. He did not know that the child was haemophile. That was a ghastly blunder which could not be corrected at that juncture. I pointed out his error and they quickly went to cover up their mistake. The poor parent did not know these things and his putting the blame on me and wanting to avenge is not fair. I feel sorry for him and am prepared not to press charges on him for his attempt to kill me. I hope the authorities will deal with him fairly”

Dickey said, “You don’t have to give me any explanation . As it is I have very poor regard towards doctors. If you want to thank any one, you must thank the old man who came and told us about this attempt. Go and find him and compensate him suitably if you think saving your life was worth any thing at all. “

The doctor did not like Dickey’s tone. He remained in his seat till they reached Secunderbad station. The doctor and his wife moved out of station got into a waiting car and disappeared with out any ceremony.

Kamalkant walked out of the station in a daze. The station had changed totally from what he remembered .He was returning after more than 15 years. This was his place of birth, place where he grew up, and prospered .Along with some very pleasant memories he also remembered certain turbulent events that had destroyed him. Now he was not at all sure if he was happy to be back here. He looked at the pebble and made a face. He mumbled , so Krishna what now? The pebble was silent.



He pushed his way through the crowd, towards the exit gate dodging auto Riksha touts and taxi drivers out to snare a gullible fair. His rishikesh ashram had a small place in Secunderabad and he could lodge himself there.

He saw Dickey and kaddu walk towards the parking lot. Possibly they had a car waiting to take them home. Kamalkant thought about Dickey. What a strange man? so quick to understand a situation and act. How well he handled the attack. may god bless him.

Dickey saw him and held up a hand to signal him to stop

He said, 'Yes, Swamiji. where are you staying at Hyderabad? Can we drop you some place.'

"I am not sure. I have no place to go other than my old ashram. I have to think and decide."

'That is funny. You came all the way from Delhi and you don't know where you want to stay. Are you upto some new mischief?'

"No, not at all. I stopped telling lies long ago. I really have no place to go. My purpose of boarding the train at Delhi was pre ordained by forces we can not understand. It was to save the poor doctor I suppose."

Okay. If you have no place to go to,, you can be our guest for a few days till you make up your mind about staying some place.

"no , no. I can not impose myself on you. You are very kind. You go ahead, I will manage."

The pebble stirred.

'What is it Krishna?'

You will be better off going with them.

Dickey asked, 'Did you say some thing?. You sure, you can manage on your own?'

Kamalkant could not make up his mind.

The pebble grumbled, "come on kamal, go with Dickey."

Why should I?

There is something happening. You have a major role to play. stay put with Dickey.

Okay , major. I will go with you, if you don't mind..

They drove down to maredpalli and got into the Friend's nest banglow. A police jeep was standing outside in the portico. James looked up from his chair and stood up to receive Dickey, kaddu and the Oldman.

Dickey introduced Kamalkant to James. James formally said,

Welcome to our nest. I am james.pl ease let me show you to your room. Or would you like to have some tea before you go to your room?

James was a good host. He was polite .He had a long memory. He had recognised the Oldman. .If dickey and kaddu had brought him here, there must be some reason to it. He was sure kaddu also knew .After all, she was not a great lawyer for nothing. She had watched the entire trial from close. he will play along.. He told their chief cook Tai to bring some tea.

Kamalkant was grateful. He accepted the tea with a word of thanks..

He said, " I know you are all curious about me. I will tell you all about me. just allow me to have a shower and change of clothes. We will talk.

James led kamal to his room. Kaddu and Dickey moved to their rooms .Kaddu gave James a thumbs up sign. James smiled.

It is back to action stations for the friends at the nest. Dickey was back home. There will be no more dull days .

The friends at the "nest" Did not bother the old man in any way. They allowed him free run of their premises and waited for him to open out at his convenience. The old man was not sure how much to reveal about his past. He had his own routine. He wokeup at 5 in the morning before any one else woke up.He went out for his morning walk, through the deserted streets and came back home in time for tea.

They also learnt that he was good at attending to wounds. Kaddu had cut her hand with a knife while she was trying to cut open a jack fruit. The old man attended to that with amazing expertise. The way he stopped the bleeding, how he managed to stitch up the gash, how he rolled the bandage and tape impressed them. Kaddu asked, 'where the hell did you learn to wrap a bandage like this?

Guy hospital, London, he said with a smile. I started my apprenticeship, in that hospital attending to injured patients in their OPD section. Yes, WAS GOOD DOCTOR AND GREAT SURGEON ONCE UPON A TIME. I STOPPED MY PRACTICE.

He was silent, looking with a blank face at the opposite wall.

'Do you want to talk about it?' asked Kaddu with hope that he would talk about the tragic trials.

"NO, NOT REALLY. I have better things to do than mess with the people.:

What is that ?

."Spiritual."

We do not understand.

He said slowly, "You know what I mean. Offer a shoulder to cry on. Mend a broken wing here and there. Wipe a tear. Play the good Samaritan, with out getting too bored or too involved."

Great .

"Yes, as long as you keep the involvement within limits. You cross them, you get hurt."

Kaddu patted him in the back. She said, "if you are in trouble, just let us know. Dickey and I revel in it. He is retiring later this month. when he is free, we will be full time engaged in trouble. Dickey is a born trouble buster.'

KAMAL SAID, "I know, I have seen him in action."

They laughed.

## Chapter10

At the Bolaram military academy of Indian Army, a conference was being planned to discuss military civil co ordination during incidents of civil unrest, disaster management, terrorists strike and ever present Maoist problem. A team of 30 top IAS officers deputed from various states were supposed to attend the conference along with Andhra AND Telengana states officers. Hyderabad was a metro city and a sensitive one due to newly emerging ISIS JIHADISTS who were making their presence felt, trying to lure young and impressionable people into their activity. Government was giving lot of importance to this meeting because it was observed by the central committee that lack of coordination was affecting the work. It was expected that military will share their experiences in fighting insurgents in Kashmir, north east, Punjab and other sensitive areas, with civilian authorities and for mobilising equipment, men and material, improving speed and effectiveness of response to threats, leadership requirements and training. Major Dickey as an expert on counter insurgency was supposed to lead the army delegation and deliver key note address.

Dickey was going to retire from the army at the end of the month and he was allowed to spend the last month at a post of his choice and he chose Hyderabad. Dickey and his five friends from Poona had built a bungalow in secunderabad with intention of spending last phase of their life together in Hyderabad. All five friends had started their career in Poona and maintained close contact all through their careers and decided to spend the autumn of their life again together .They called their house in Hyderabad Friends nest. They maintained similar places at Poona and Delhi also.

The military civil conclave at Hyderabad came as a blessing in disguise for Dickey. He had spent a glorious time in the army as the most decorated officer. He had a master'S degree from Poona university in political science, political history and the thesis submitted by him for a doctorate programme was confiscated by the defence department as a top secret strategy document and he was denied an opportunity to obtain his Phd in military civilian showdown. Defence dept compensated Dickey with the most prestigious civilian award created for the first time to a serving Army officer. An abridged version of his thesis found its way to military libraries of all international countries ,an

achievement without parallel in military scholarship. ,But Dickey was known more for his bull dog attitude of never say Die and be on top of situation in any and every situation.. He thought this conference was a nice way to end his association with the army he loved.

For the local governments of Andhra and Telengana states, this conference was a major effort as they had to handle with more frequency, insurgency of increasing potency. Maoist activity was a real and potent threat needing sensitive handling compared to threats from ISIS and other jihadi outfits which could be taken up head on with complete people support.

The IAS officials deputed for this conference were from an elite cadre created specially to provide greater trust to central government's new initiative to make the federal structure stronger, to thwart the designs of Maoist to destabilise the country from within.

The Maoists had got wind of this new initiative and had planned a secret operation to disrupt the conference by a surprise attack aimed at creating a fear factor in the minds of civil administrators and confusion in the mind of military establishment .Comrade Satya, trained in china was head of group handling central India that included northern territories of Telengana and Andhra bordering chattisgarh state in central India, the strong hold of maoist.

Their increased presence in Andhra territories was a matter of great pride for the Maoists because for long this region was one of the well administered areas of country. They gained major foothold and turf in the region by helping political parties win turf wars by adding their muscle and fire power to the highest bidder. . .This way they colluded with one or other and destroy leadership. Whichever party that was ruling, had to depend on Maoists to keep peace. Maoists in turn turned to downright blackmail to gain political influence. They moved about with impunity and when ever the state political bosses acted tough, the Maoists would launch an attack and political will to crush them evaporated as the political bosses cared more for their own personal safety rather than political integrity of the state.

Police had a job to do to protect the civilian life and property and they went over the heads of political bosses to deal sternly with Maoists. This created tense situation between police and state government. Police used such

situations to gain some additional power and influence in the administration and budget allocations. Police hated to lose their men and so had to deal ruthlessly with Maoists to maintain their internal morale. So many times the political bosses and police worked at cross purposes and Maoists used these differences to gain turf advantage. One such privilege won by Maoists is to organise a mahasadas OR ROADSHOWS in the villages to promote their ideology among the peasants and agricultural labour. They usually round up a few cruel landlords and during the Mahasadas, conduct a trial accusing them of atrocities against poor villagers and farmers. The leaders pass judgements and mete out punishment to the huge joy of the oppressed. By a tacit understanding between the ruling political parties, police are asked to stay away from the location of these kangaroo courts. The landlords who are caught, have no protection from police. Some times, the punishment is in the form of mutilation by cutting the limbs or defacing them with grime. By punishing the oppressors this way in front of villagers, Maoists tried to impress on the minds of rural people that they are offering better governance than the elected ruling party, thus undermining ELECTED govt's credibility. Political parties resented this, but are unable to act against them because they themselves have used these elements to gain political advantage. This is what makes Maoists more daring to push their ideology ahead.

One such sadas was conducted at the outskirts of city of Warangal by the Maoists, with out permission from the police. It was, assumed by the Maoists that the ruling political party would warn the police to turn a blind eye on the events associated with Mahasadas, in the interest of maintaining internal peace. After the dantawada police massacre, police had sworn to take revenge. So they ignored the instructions of political bosses and they raided the place, disrupting the meeting and arresting a large number of their cadre. They also shot down a few people who resisted the arrests. Among the arrested lot was a SriLankan communication expert , a china supported spy who operated with in India as a MAO sympathiser. At that moment, police had no idea of catch they had made but the maoist cadre were rattled by his arrest and desperately wanted to spring him from jail, before serious interrogation of arrested people began. The contact official from Chinese embassy and Sri Lankan embassy were making repeated call to Maoist leadership to arrange to get their man out of jail before any interrogation started. They were not sure

whether this person would stand rigorous question and third degree that local police was capable of. The man was a technical geek, an expert in cyber coding and satellite interface protocol controller and his job was to train Indian cadre in use of special application packages and gadgets.

In recent days, Sri Lankan govt was playing proxy for china, sending their nationals to spy in India for china. These spies entered India as fishermen released by Sri Lanka Navy in guise of indian fishermen. Incidents of capture by SriLankan Navy, of Indian fishermen operating from Raameshwaram and Tutikorin were becoming too frequent. Government of India was aware of it and if they allowed it to continue the reason was not to precipitate a situation, that would push Sri Lanka more towards China.

Sathya, the local chief of the cadre had received clear instructions. Weapons and personnel were quickly transferred to his control, so that he could launch an operation that would not only get their man out but also teach the police a lesson

Maoists applied political pressure to get their cadre released but the police held firm and refused to toe the line. They were prepared to face reprisal raids by Maoists.

Politically, situation was becoming difficult. Maoists were becoming impatient and some thing had to give. This was the situation when one of the moles of Maoists operating from within the Military academy, reported about the planned civil-military discussions during the conference. The agenda and names of officers deputed for the conference were quickly obtained and satya was ready with a plan. He had gathered his comrades in arms together for a review.

Every had a Xerox copy of the agenda. Satya was running through the agenda and some thing in the sheet caught his attention and sathya got excited which he showed by slapping his thigh and shouting , "what is this name doing here?"

The others reacted, 'what name?'

"THIS NAME. Major Dickey. what is he doing here?"

'What is wrong?. He is another Army officer sent by Delhi.'

"Do you think it is just a coincidence?"

We don't understand. why are you so excited just seeing a name?

Man, this name is Major Dickey. Does it not ring any bell? Do you know who that gent is?"

No, Not much.

"I know him. If his name is there, it is not a coincidence. When we are planning an operation against the academy and he is on that side, it is not coincidence. With Dickey, it is always a part of his strategy. I am beginning to think that our Chinese friends do not know that Dickey has penetrated their network. Dickey knows about our man in the police custody and that is why he has got his name included in the list of military officers to be in Hyderabad. he has created a cover for his move."

I do not think so. IAS is a powerful body and they may want fool proof security for their lot. Army might have sent Dickey just to satisfy their bosses in Delhi. That explains it, if your gent is as hot as you seem to think.'

Yes, Dickey is very hot. Suddenly, I am beginning to feel, we are not on top of the situation .If Dickey is there, we will be walking into a trap. He is nasty and he does not hold back for any body. He kills. I think, we have to start thinking altogether differently.'

Ravi, a dynamic young leader spoke for the first time, 'I think you are over reacting. We do not know any thing about his involvement. As per the agenda, he is just going to give a speech.'

That is what you are supposed to think. damn it. Dickey does not give speeches

He punches, blasts , he kills.

You know what happened when the army was presenting operation bluestar to Indira Gandhi. Dickey was there. At the end of presentation, Indira Gandhi asked him if the plan would work. you know what he said to her, 'no madam , it will not work"



She asked how he would do it.

Dickey said, I will need only one tank to blast Har mandhir sahib and Akal takt. I will have Bindranwale by his hair in next one hour'

Indira Gandhi got so scared that she took him off the team that carried out the operation. Finally they could succeed only after blasting Akal Takt. Dickey sent flowers to the General in appreciation."

There was long silence.

Ravi asked, 'so he is hot. What do you want us to do. Abort the operation? Take him out before he reaches the academy?

'You can not do that."

why not?

I am tempted to challenge you to take Dickey out. But you are a valuable man. I would not like to lose you by allowing you to go after Dickey."

He is that good?

Yes, undoubtedly.

Then I will send my best man. if he fails I will go after him whether you like it or not.

"Do not be silly. If your man fails, you will not go after Dickey. Dickey will come after you like a tiger tank, bulldozing every thing on the way. You don't have to prove to me that you are brave. Just stay away from dickey for now. Our operation is more important. you are more important. In our line of business there is no scope for carrying on with personal agenda to prove a point."

The meeting which had started on big Hype suddenly became stale. Sathya sensed the mood. Satya realised he made a mistake talking too much about Dickey. He had rattled his corps. Never a good idea when you are all set to organise the biggest ever snatch. He suggested a break. One by one his boys left the room, to take a walk or stretch their legs or take a breather before the brainstorming session resumes again. He decided to take a break and comeback with new plan. Ravi had not moved from his place. He was looking

at Sathya with his mouth closed tight. The more he thought about Dickey, more he felt like taking him on. But Sathya was not so keen. Should he strike on his own, was the question throbbing in his mind. Match his skills and wits with Dickey. It had been a long time since any one had questioned his mettle. Dickey was a challenge, he did not want to pass over.

Sathya touched his shoulders, 'forget Dickey for now Ravi. our plan is good and Do not change the odds by bringing new factors. They do not add up. we will succeed. When that happens, Dickey will come after us. we will deal with him then. presently in the interest of our mission let us skip Dickey.

It was sound advice and delivered very sincerely. Mission was more important every time

Ravi said, 'it is okay. I will not do anything silly. But I sure would like to know more about him'

"Easy. just type Dickey in your laptop and see what the computer throws at you" Sathya laughed.

Ravi walked back to his room. They were on the outskirts of Bolaram cantonment. They had taken the first floor premises of a welding shop run by one of the maoist cadre. There were always some people or other working. There was a construction boom and window grills and metal gates were in big demand. it kept some elements of the cadre engaged and earning good money. It permitted movement in and out of cantonment.

Once inside the room, he pulled his chair and opened his laptop. A GOOGLE SEARCH FOR DICKEY. He typed the words. His eyes popped to see 1GB of content with several photographs. He sat and read the entire content right through the night.

When he was finished with reading, he stood up looking at the picture of Dickey saluting the President after taking the award. Ravi was standing erect, at attention returning the salute. I would like to shake hands with you, Major. he said he had a nice feeling having got to know more about him. A fine man to beat, it was as though he had taken a fresh shot of heroin.

He moved over to his cot and collapsed. He Slept like a child.



## Chapter 11.

Next morning at Friend's Nest, maredpalli, Kamalkant woke up fairly early and got ready for his usual morning walk. He was surprised to see James already up and rounding up the dogs for their morning walk. The dogs, Two ferocious beasts, very well trained by the local police trainer. They were very sharp and eager for their walk, straining at the leash held by an aging but yet strong James. The friends took turns taking the dogs out in the morning and this week it was James turn. He was already out of the compound. Kamalkant caught up with him. 'Which way are you heading?' he asked James

'I will take the Bolaram road, less crowd at this time of day and dogs can have a free run without people stopping them at every step.' Said James, 'would you like to join us, ?

NO, I will head for Mahendra hills. The steep climb will do a lot of good for my aging heart", he said laughing.

'Good idea', said James, 'but do not go too long. There are bikers hitting the roads to test their vehicles and they don't care too much about who else is using the road. stay on the side lines. Too many hit and run cases are being reported these days, victims always old men who could not dodge fast enough. please be careful'. There was concern in every word.

Kamalkant promised he would be careful.

He liked to walk alone. That helped him to think and deal with the devils that dogged him. His pebble was always there for company. He took it out of his coat pocket. He started talking to it

'see Krishna. It is a week since we landed at Friend's nest. We are overstaying our welcome. We should move out."

Hold on. There is still time.

"why are you holding me here"

Some thing nasty is going to happen. you should be here to help matters

'what help can an old man give. The friends are all professional, an amazing collection of skills. They can run an army."

. They can always use a doctor. But why are you so impatient?

“I have to catch up with Shankar Reddy,. you know it”

Yes, yes. All in good time.

It was still dark. Street lights were not on. Head lights of a jeep speeding down the hill road hit his eyes blinding him for a moment. The road was turning towards him ahead.

He walked ahead keeping to the edge of road. .Jeep was in the middle of road, no way he will swerve toward him. There was no pavement.

The driver half asleep, having driven for long in the night, suddenly woke up, he saw a dog making a dash across the road in front of the jeep. He turned to avoid running over the dog, Then he saw the old man with a long beard, in the light and cried no, no and turned the wheel violently. He lost control, he missed hitting the old man but landed his jeep into a ditch dug by telephone dept carrying out a major work of laying fibre cables for improved communication.

The old man lurched, avoided being hit by the jeep and fell on the road , twisting his ankle.. He saw the jeep still on its wheel but buried in the ditch at an awkward angle.. He peered through the glass in the pale light of early morning, the driver was slumped on the wheel, nasty gash on the forehead and his arm twisted below the steering wheel.

‘My God,’he said in a sense of shock, “he sure looks in bad situation.”

He looked up and down the road. There was no one in sight.

He remembered the cell phone given to him by Dickey.

He called up friend’s nest

Hello said a sleepy Dickey.

Dickey, kamal kant here, up on the mahendra hill road. just escaped being run over by a jeep that is presently buried in the ditch on the side of road. The driver is stuck inside the jeep in poor way. I want to help, but my leg is twisted and I can not do much , it is hurting. can you do some thing?’

Rapid fire talk with out wasting time but clear on details .

Dickey was wide awake, he said promptly, ' got it .just stay put there do not move. I will send somebody to help with jeep and I will be there as soon as possible.'

Dickey then called his friend Jamshed who ran the biggest garage and service centre in hyderabad and conveyed the information. Jamshed cursed him and was annoyed at being woken up at ungodly hours. But you do not say no to Dickey. he called up his men and instructed them as to what they had to do. He cursed the Indian army for allowing its officers to harrass poor citizens early in the mornings.

Jamshed and his men came with police close on their heels. They extracted the driver in one piece from the jeep. jamshed drove the jeep over to his garage. The police took the driver to the police station, where a police doctor had a look at the still unconscious driver. In time , the driver regained his senses and was shocked to see himself in police custody charged with reckless driving.

The police dropped kamalkant at Friend's nest and briefed Dickey about jamshed and work done by him.

Dickey helped Kamalkant to walk up to the house and settle on a chair. Kaddu had woken up by now. She was ready with tea and biscuits She looked at swamiji's leg injury and remarked, 'you have been extremely lucky, Swamiji. not much damage'

Yes, dear. krishna saved me. He told me to step back when the jeep veered towards me to avoid running over the dog. But I am not young , you know. I was a bit slow. The ankle still hurts

What would you like, ice pack, hot water bottle ?

Can you get me crepe bandage? asked swamiji. you have wait till James comes in. he maintains the medicine chest.

Dickey finished his breakfast and dressed up in his military uniform to go to Military academy at Bolaram camp where his unit was located. While he was

waiting for his transport to arrive, his friend Jamshed called up, 'Dickey, I thought I will tell you this before I tell the police'

What is it?

Your friend on the jeep was carrying 4 baskets of vegetables. Buried in each basket were 4 country made revolvers with ammunition. what do I do?

'tell Mouli all about it. and keep my name out of all your talks with police or anybody else.

Anything else'

Yes, there is one important thing.

What is it ?

There was a Xerox copy of Army Academy paper with a typed text.

And you read it?

Yes.

What is it about?

It is an agenda of a meeting at the academy. Shall I give that note also to Mouli?

Yes, you do that and Jamshed;

Yes Dickey

Hand over all the revolvers to Mouli. Don't you try to pinch one

'Dickey' , jamshed almost shouted

Yes, jamshed.be careful. Don't get into trouble with police.AS I SEE YOU ARE ALREADY IN TROUBLE. The jeep driver looks like trouble for all of us.

Tel me how many people know about you and your men going out to get the jeep. Bury the jeep some place and keep the police informed.

OKAY, I GET THE MESSAGE. I will tell my boys not to talk too much about it.

That would be better. you can expect a bomb thrown at you very soon

Dickey---

Do not worry, I will be with you.

The army jeep turned up to take Dickey away to academy. A corporal stepped out and saluted smartly. His face then broke into a wide smile of genuine happiness on meeting his hero. He said, 'it is nice to see you again, major'

Dickey returned the smile and said, 'same here, Vickey, all well?'

Yes, Major. Boys are sure happy , you are here. They wish to plan some thing for the evening, if you are free.

No time, Vickey.I see some serious troubled times ahead of us. I have a tip off that says your commandant is going to be bumped off.

I don't joke about it major. We expect that to happen every day.

You all are alert?

All the time.

Good, shall we leave now?

Sure,major.

They walked towards the jeep. Dickey allowed Vickey to take the wheel. Dickey always drove himself and he trusted only two people to drive well.one was vickey and the other young DPC Mouli of Andhra Police.

The jeep made good speed towards the vast grounds that housed the Academy complex. Vickey kept a continuous chatter on the status of academy and recent problems faced by it because political interference in matters relating to postings and promotion. Vickey trusted Dickey to do what was required to restore the academy to its glorious tradition and place of honour among similar institutions across the country

Col stood up to receive Dickey. Dickey saluted Bajpai before reaching out to grab his extended hand in a firm handshake. The col pulled Dickey in a bear



hug and remarked , 'Dickey, you are a sight for sore eyes' ,. Once the formalities were completed Dickey said, 'Col, we need to talk.'

Anything wrong? asked the col.

Police found a xerox copy of Army Academy memo sheet with typed text relating to agenda of secret meeting with civilian officials on Army civilian coordination. It was found used for wrapping a country revolver buried in a basket containing vegetables. Should we take it as serious or not?

Dickey never believed sugar coating any thing. He gave it straight up.

'What are you trying to say, Dickey?'

"Information is going out of your office. you need to check it out. look for a mole. Government is putting lot of efforts to make Army civilian co operation more effective. There may be some elements who may not like it .These elements are quite capable of stopping such a cooperation."

'Point noted. 'Dickey.

Have to do more than that col. If I am expected to speak on the occasion, I should be briefed properly .

'you can meet with the team.'

There was a call on Dickey's cell. It was Mouli

'Dickey , we must meet. tell your col to invite me for lunch at your officers mess. There are some developments about which your col must know.

Okay, Mouli. you are welcome. Did you speak to jamshed?

We spoke. I have collected the goods. That is what I want to talk about

At the officer's mess, the col, Dickey and young PC sat around a lunch table to discuss possible threats to the officers of the army and government officials participating in the conference. The accidental discovery of the country made pistols and the copy of printed agenda sheet were grave matters that needed to be analysed. Should they treat the issues as local brew maoist related or is it some thing to do with terrorists activity supported by inimical foreign countries operating with in the country. If the matter is assumed as related to

Maoists, then local police can handle it. if it is other way, then central government will have to be called in. some decision has to be taken.

Maoists never believed in mass destruction of men and material. They had certain beliefs and operated strictly as per that. They attacked police and killed only when provoked. where as the terrorists wanted to create a fear complex and did not mind killing people without reason.

Next question was related to arrest of Maoists cadre at the recently held mahasadas in the outskirts of Warangal city. How is it connected to the conference at the army academy?

.Are the Maoists moving to spring their friends from jail?

The Maoists will resort to a risky operation of jail break only when some of their top leaders are arrested and put in jail. If so who is that person among the arrested lot, who is worth an attack on police premises Police can not keep the people for long if there is no evidence, so police usually released the people after holding them for a month or so.

Dickey suggested that the police should handle these two matters as separate problems but conduct interrogation in a coordinated way. Providing security for the conference was more important than wasting time on unrelated issues.

They examined the movements of participating officials to and out of conference. The IAS officers had to be fetched from the state secretariat and after conference, they had to be taken back. If there is an attack on them, it would be out on the roads and not on a confined place. So secured transport and well monitored movement were required.

It was decided that the army will provide an armoured plated air conditioned bus with driver and commandos. Radio surveillance enroute with strategically positioned snipers will monitor the movement of the bus and two batallions of troops will be stationed to move fast to tackle any threat on the road. Mouli took notes on army stationery and folded the papers carefully in his tunic pocket. They had a relaxed lunch.

Mouli shook hands with the colonel and took leave. Dickey walked with Mouli up to the police car. he asked, "Mouli did you talk to the driver? did you trace the jeep and check its ownership?"

Mouli said , yes. they had traced the registration and identified the owner as one of the rich farmers in the district. The owner was being brought to Hyderabad to identify the car and the driver. The driver had made a statement that he was car mechanic and the jeep had come up for repairs. He wanted to test the vehicle on a long drive, so brought the vehicle to Hyderabad. he was helping a local farmer to reach the vegetable baskets to the monda market in secunderabad. It is a standard practice. He did not know anything about the basket, guns or printed paper. A PERFECTLY ACCEPTABLE STATEMENT.

There was one more point. The driver had in his possession a costly smart cell phone. Mouli checked the calls made on that phone and recent down loads. The latest download in the phone was related to biography of major Dickey. information related to awards and international postings

So someone was very interested in Dickey. Why should a car mechanic carry information about Dickey in his smart phone. Answer me Dickey. you are getting unwarranted attention at some place.

Dickey became very alert.

'Did you examine the man.? was he really a mechanic? .did you check his finger tips ? usually they smell of grease and petrol. Their finger tips would be dirty'.

Mouli said, "yes, I have checked all that. This man is as neat as dude in tuxedo. I think he will be a big hit in Tollywood. HE TALKS WELL. I think he is a well read man. Dickey , why do well read men with guns take interest in you. That beats me."

Well you don't have to sweat about it, now that you have the man with you. work on him. Find out from his log who all were called by him and who all called. you may strike it rich.

I would like to know him too. Make some arrangement, I should see him and he should not know about it. did you get it. Also talk to the old man at the nest. he has uncanny knack of smelling trouble from a distance.

They laughed, shook hands. Mouli held on to the hand a little longer like a child. Dickey was his hero. Dickey patted him on the back, 'do not worry kid. It will take more than a mechanic to take me out.'

Mouli smiled .he nodded his head and started his car.

Back in his office he called his team and briefed them about his meeting with the col of Army academy and Major Dickey. He told them that there may be some attempt to take Dickey out before the conference.'

He stopped for effect. His team was one of the best. They all were obligated To Dickey in some way or other. If Dickey was having trouble it was nothing new. But what Mouli had to say was different. He was talking about a protection ring around Dickey.

Ashok Reddy was the first to react. If there is a move against Dickey, I am taking position outside the nest from this moment on and I will take my men with me. Mouli laughed out. "There is time for all that. But priority to break the driver and make him talk. Next some one has to go Warangal and talk to maoists held up there. We have a cell phone and hundred telephone numbers. we have to see if these numbers appear in the call list of cell phones seized by Warangal police.so talk to concerned inspectors and get list of cell phone numbers. Then sit with cellphone service provider and obtain logs of all phones and recordings made in the last month. If there is mention of academy or dickey mark it and tie it with the cell phone owner. Find out if there are any numbers from the called list that is appearing in all phones we have to work fast. conference is exactly two weeks away.

All the inspectors went their ways to carry on with the investigation.

Very soon, they identified a common number called by most of the cell phones taken from the arrested people from the maoist cadre. They also found that cellphone that had received a call from cell now held by Mouli. mouli told the Warangal police inspector to bring that person to the inspector's room to receive the call from the jeep driver .They kept the voice recorder in the cell on.

Mouli handed over the cellphone to the jeep driver and told him that there was call for him from Warangal.AT THE OTHER END, WARANGAL Inspector did

the same with one of his prisoners. The man at Warangal end saw the number and got excited and air was filled with rapid fire talk in a strange language. At Hyderabad, man held the phone a little away from the ear to reduce the blast of foul language streaming in. He remained silent glaring at Mouli. Not receiving any response, the Warangal man became silent, realising the trick played by the police to make him reveal his identity. Warangal police have now established that he was not an Indian and things were going to become more uncomfortable for him. He dropped the cell phone and screamed at the inspector, who did not hesitate to kick the fellow where it hurts. The man fell down and was treated to brutal beating.

Mouli told the Warangal inspector to transfer that prisoner to Hyderabad under armed escort

Mouli had scored his first point. He knew the name of prisoner held by him and name of the Warangal contact. His foreign language expert told him that the language was Sinhalese used in eastern Lanka.

Mouli wanted Dickey to know about this development. He called Dickey and told him how he had established the identities of two prisoners. Do you know

Where these gents are from?

Sri Lanka?

How the hell did you know that?

It was a long shot. I am very popular among Sri Lankans

Okay okay .stop bragging

The name of jeep Driver is Ravi and one exposed at Warangal is samaraweera.

Ravi is incidentally a Tamil Sri Lankan. Now we have some thing to work on.

Dickey said harshly, "you have not found any thing useful yet. Don't be led away from the basic objective. Find out what the Sri Lankan was doing in Warangal. What is Ravi up to driving a jeep in Hyderabad. Son, start working."

Dickey was happy that Mouli had opened up the investigation.

He and Colonel sat through the afternoon reviewing the security arrangements at the venue. The transport arrangements to bring the delegates to the venue, electronic surveillance , communication, requirement of arms light and heavy, and selection of combat groups to handle frontal attack.

Dickey explained to the groups what to expect and how to respond to suddenly changing situation and decision making. He briefed the drivers that they should not venture into civilian areas alone, to avoid being kidnapped at the last minute. He repeated that these guys are very good at infiltration, so the moment you see an unfamiliar person in uniform you must challenge them

He spoke to the commanding officer of Armoured corp located inside academy to spare a couple of tanks and armoured vehicle with machine gun mounted on roof,

There were questions. Dickey and the Colonel took turns to answer .It was important that every was clear about his role.

Dickey knew very well that every well made plan can come unstuck at time of actual action. But we must plan and have well thought options .To be properly equipped is very essential for success of all plans

They concluded the meeting and all personnel dispersed fully knowing their role.

At the end of day, Dickey headed back to the nest in the Army jeep driving it himself.

## Chapter14

At the Maoists camp beyond Bolaram cantonment, state chief Sathya Narayana was reading through neatly compiled reports from various units of the state. Report of transfer of arrested Maoists cadres from Warangal to Hyderabad was upsetting. He was planning a separate operation to take Samaraveera from warangal jail. At Warangal he had more local support including some sympathisers in the police. now he will have to find out where his people were being held .If Ravi and Samaraweera are in the same complex, it would make matters easy. He had to take Ravi out of jail. Sathya knew that Ravi was one of those dyed in the wool believer Carl Marx, Mao and Indian leaders like Muzumdar. The top leadership thought highly about his knowledge. He should not be rotting in some remote jail.

He saw the report from Hyderabad about arrival of cadres from Warangal to be lodged in newly constructed jail complex attached to police commissioners office. This was more a transit arrangement before pushing them into some central jail complex. There was also a report about installation of remote operated gate for the PC office complex. It was designed to lock up the entire complex in the event of un authorised entry or attack..Sathya smiled.He had experts who could work around any electronic control systems.

He had finalised his plans to attack the PC office and spring Ravi out. Now that Samaraweera was also there, He could accomplish two tasks at the same.

He started moving his men to their positions. arms and ammunition were carried INTO THE CITY by ladies in their big vegetable baskets. Country bombs and detonators were in place and demolition experts were standing by for instruction. The plan was to attack the police station from the front. At the same at the rear side where prison cells were located, bomb squad were to blast the rear wall and gain access to the cells, breaking the locks of the cell doors were only physical work to be done. Early morning time was taken because most guards would be fast asleep and reaction time to recover from shock would be long. ADDED TO THAT THERE WOULD BE SURPRISE ELEMENT TO THEIR ADVANTAGE. Messages were sent to Ravi and Samaraweera in advance so that they would be awake and be ready to move fast out of the cells after jail break.

Dickey always said that Indian police men were notorious for their inefficiency and rustic manner of responding to a crisis. They would come up most extraordinary ways to put obstacles in the way of jail breakers , like driving a bullock cart in the path of speeding vehicle. Sathya was very much aware of this. He had factored all this in his plans. He was sure that jail break by itself could be easy but get away from the city may present some problem. He had a few options and back up plans.

The diversion plans to cover their escape routes involved exploding bombs in places like Ravindra bharti, Nizam hospital and in koti areas so that police will be drawn away from their escape route. He planned to reach sanatnagar and then get on to balanagar to catch north bound road. The other route was to take begumpeth flyover and hit rashtrapathy road leading north. But that was directly in line with militaryway

Once the plan was firmed up in his mind, he called for a meeting to brief his men. He distributed the arms and instructions as required. He wanted to lead the attack himself but there was a protocol to be followed as desired by high command. State unit chief should not participate in attack on jails. Another operation at the army academy was ahead , for which he would be required.so he called a senior comrade called Ramulu to lead the attack.

Ravi got the message through one of the tea boys. He was happy that Sathya was making a move to get him out of the police cell. At the same time, he was not happy that the other Sri Lankan also would be rescued. Ravi hated being put in the same bracket as the Sri Lankan. Ravi knew that samaraweera was planted by Srilankan Navy to spy for china. Samaraweera did not believe in any ideology. Ravi was basically a tamil at heart and he used his language skills to take up srilankan identity to escape harassment by Sri Lankan army.His father died fighting for LTTE and after the war life for a tamil was a horror.He opted to go to India as a Chinese agent because he believed in that ideology and felt India was ripe for a changeHe believed LTTE lost the war because India let them down at a crucial stage of war and he wanted to do something by way of revenge and changing the form of government was one good honest way of achieving it. But Samaraweera was different. He was against Indian people especially tamils. That made him a villain in Ravi's mindset. You can be against a government but not against the people.



He thought about his situation in Indian jail. He had trained himself to be a great warrior. He wanted to pit his skills with that of Dickey. Without any action, he found himself in jail because fate willed differently. His jeep was confiscated. He had injured himself, broken rib and fractured hand. He maintained absolute silence during the interrogation, not giving any information. Police had treated him nicely. Because of his injuries, there was no attempt to beat him up physically. He was grateful for that. He was also happy when he came to know that the Oldman who had brought about his capture had not been hit by his jeep..

During his stay in the jail, he had heard name of Major Dickey several times. There was even talk about Dickey coming up for questioning him. But Dickey had not shown up. It would have been nice to meet him. He had heard several stories about exploits of Major Dickey and his cousin Col Prabhu in Sri Lanka in the back streets of Jaffna.. That was before IPKF turned against LTTE. After the war, Dickey's family did a lot of relief work to help the affected families from the war-torn nation. P. Shankar Iyer's chain of schools helped many children to study and war veterans to gain employment as teachers and instructors. So Ravi subconsciously had cultivated a hero-worship attitude towards Dickey.

They attacked at 3:30A.M when the whole lot of guards and security staff had gone to sleep. They came in two vans each carrying six men .A third van moved to the rear of the complex to drill the rear wall.They drilled holes and planted pencil bombs in the holes and detonated the bombs to make a man sized hole in the wall. The high speed drills with diamond impregnation points were surprisingly silent.

The group in front dealt with remote control lock and opened main gates letting them into the complex Ramulu cursed the Indian mentality of putting so many doors. Silently they moved inside with out encountering any resistance.

The lock experts tackled the cell locks and withdrawing bolts made terrible noise . The guards woke up and saw strange hooded men moving and raised alarm and all hell broke loose.

Ravi had to be helped to move where as samaraweera was only too happy to run. He was grabbed by one of his friends and taken to the van at the back. They were supposed to take a different routes to the north road

Police realised they were under attack. There was confusion initially but soon training effect took over and some policemen moved to the armoury gun rack to grab a rifle each. The shooting began and a couple of intruders dropped dead. They saw two vans from front of the building start . police started firing at the van. Ravi had difficulty getting into the van. A passing bullet found its home in his thigh. He was roughly pulled inside and he collapsed on the floor of van. It was still dark, he felt for the wound and his hand was wet with blood. He knew he had to go to a doctor. He felt the bullet embedded in his thigh. He badly needed services of a surgeon to extract the bullet. If it is not done immediately ,he may lose his leg also. The prospect scared him silly and he shouted at his friend ,'we need to go to a doctor. I have been hit in the thigh. I am bleeding. we need to stop at some hospital.

His friend was confused. 'we can't waste time. we have to leave the city before sunrise;Ravi screamed at him,'YOU TAKE M E TO A GOOD HOSPITAL AND LEAVE.'

The man was irritated and reluctantly agreed to stop at the first hospital

The second van carrying Samaraveera raced towards the Jubilee bus stand. An early morning bus was scheduled to leave for Warangal at 5.00 A.M. Three seats were reserved in the first bus to leave for Warangal.

The van stopped at the roadside entrance to the big bus terminal. Three people got down, walked inside. They found a tea stall and ordered a cup of tea each. Then they walked to platform number 12 where a gleaming new bus parked and passengers were entering one by one. Samaraweera and his two colleagues got in and found their seats at the rear of the bus and promptly dozed off to sleep.

The cell phone at the bedside table of police commissioner's residence screamed unceremoniously. Mouli was jerked out of deep sleep by the persistent ringing. The cell phone was connected to a charger. A sleepy hand groped for the cell and separated the charger. Mouli put the phone to his ear and felt the blast of rapid fire talk of Inspector Kamath briefing Mouli about the early morning attack on the police station and jail break.

Mouli barked instructions. You know the drill Kamath, close all exits, stop all trains and buses. Send squads to Immilbund, Jubilee BUS STANDS AND ALL RAILWAY STATIONS. Send signals to search all vehicles. I will be at the station in fifteen minutes.

He rang up his boss and briefed him. In turn the IGP, chief secretary, Home minister, chief Ministers were informed as per protocol. Homi brushed his teeth, changed into informal jeans and T-shirt, grabbed his gun in its holster and raced to his car. He was on his way to station within ten minutes of the call.

At the Jubilee bus stand, bus scheduled to leave at 5.00 WAS STILL AT THE PLATFORM. Samaraweera woke up with a start and grabbed his friend's hand to look at the wrist watch to know the time. It showed 6.00 and bus had not moved. Why are they not moving out. His questions were answered by a police night stick being pushed powerfully into his stomach. He tried to get up and found a huge arm bearing him down. He looked up in pain and caught a huge fist smashing his face.

The same hand now grabbed his shirt front and pulled. A thin mouth hissed walk out. He tried to stand up moving his hands to grab the rails for support. A

boot kicked his groin and he fell flat on his face. He was dragged brutally out of the bus. His tender skin being scrapped badly. A police man standing outside on the platform , put a handcuff and he was bodily lifted and thrown at the back of a police pickup van. His two companions were already there with bloodied face and broken limbs.

Gopalpuram police station adjacent to Mahankali temple was not far away. The van sped out of the bus stand and reached the police station in next 5 minutes. Samaraweera was still in his senses and he wondered if any other police force in the world would have caught them so fast. At the police station he was photographed and his fingerprints were taken and he was kicked into a cell. He did not know what happened to his friends. A policeman was stripping to his waist .samaraweera saw a muscular man walk into the cell.samaraweera realised that he was going to get his brains smashed in a third degree interrogation. He was not a fighting man and the very thought of becoming a punching bag unnerved him and he sat in the corner of his cell, trying very hard not to cry..

The other van carrying was speeding westward. The driver knew there was a big hospital called Legacy hospital was located somewhere there beyond kukatpalli/sanatnagar area. He knew Ravi was an important comrade and the movement expected big things from him in future. He had to be saved at any cost. He told his friends that they should get ready to deal with a medium size hospital.

Inside the van Ravi was becoming very jittery and alarmed to see uncontrolled flow of blood. As a young boy, he had seen many gunshot wounds in the LTTE camps and he had seen many people losing their limbs because the bullet was not taken out immediately. These days terrorists , bullets came treated with some chemicals to induce poisoning of blood fast.

He was glad that a hospital was located and soon they will be able to get his wound treated.. The van stopped and driver spoke to Ravi. This looks promising. It is three story high and well spread. there must be operation theatre and surgeons inside. Shall I drive in.

Ravi was impatient, yes please. do not waste time.

## Chapter15

Dr.Shankar Ready was washing his hands with an antiseptic soap to prepare himself for the surgery. He had planned to do a simple tonsil operation on a four year old .He was always concerned about infection especially when you were dealing with young children. .The child had been moved to the operation table. It was a matter of 10 minutes delicate work. He had always maintained a high level of cleanliness. He prayed for a few minutes with his eyes closed, when he was rudely shaken up by 4 four sleepy looking men holding guns..He was physically lifted and brought to the van.On the way, he was briefed," Look doctor.This is an emergency. My friend here has been shot and he has lost lot of blood. You have to extract the bullet ."

The Doctor was alarmed. The child was already in the theatre and here he was being bulldozed into some thing totally un expected.

He looked at Ravi lying on the floor of the van which was not clean. Ravi was on threshold of consciousness and he was holding on surprisingly well. Doctor knew he was already in deep trouble, but maintained himself calm.

He told, 'You have come to a wrong hospital. I have never done an extraction of bullet. It is a messy affair. I am not trained for that sort of work. I can not do it.If you force me , I will end up killing your friend before I reach the bullet through all that flesh and bone. Believe me, you need a different skills for extraction of bullet and dealing with bullet wounds.'

If his intention was to scare the gang, he failed.

"Listen Doctor. We are not going anywhere else. We know all about extraction of bullet and we have checked about you before stopping here. If you refuse to do what we tell you, we will kill you and destroy your hospital.'

It was not working well for the doctor.he said, 'you do not seem to understand. This man has lost lot of blood. He needs blood first .We don't keep blood in this hospital. we have to get it from govt blood bank. There is paper work for that. then we should know his type ' .

We don't have to go anywhere Doctor. Your lab technician can make type test in five minutes and we are six of us here to give blood. so start extraction with out wasting any ones time'

Doctor would not give in so easily, guns or no guns

He said in the same calm tone, 'listen, you people are acting like ignorant fools. I can not do type testing here because our lab technicians will come by 9.30 only. second , I can not use your blood with out screening it. That will take moretime.

Thirdly, you can not give blood on empty stomach. you go out , have breakfast and come. then I will see about using your blood. Fourthly I will need help to do extraction.as you are so stubborn to getting the bullet removed in this hospital, I will have to summon help. I will call a surgeon/ doctor over. just give me minute. he quickly took his cell phone and dialled the first number that came to his mind. The intruders could not stop him because he sounded so convincing..

The number that had come to Dr.sankarrao 's mind was that of Dickey.The moment Dickey responded with a formal and sleepy hello, Dr spoke rapidly. This is Dr sankar rao from legacy hospital. Doctor, I need your help immediately, please come here in next twenty minutes.pl bring your lab technician with automated blood test equipment, for typecasting, screening and filtration .I have a bullet extraction job on emergency. All hush hush.pl come soon, I will attend to all preparatory work on the patient'

The doctor did not wait for any response. he turned his back and ordered an attendant to take a stretcher and bring the patient to the spare operation theater. He ordered a senior nurse to get the theatre to be ready in next fifteen minutes with all equipment and surgical tools all sterilised and ready.

The doctor supervised while Ravi was removed out of the van and placed on stretcher.He told the gang, ,"you all go to some near by hotel and have some breakfast, so that if necessary, I will use your blood.. You do not worry about your friend. By 9 o clock, you can take him with you. He moved away fast leaving the gang stunned and a little confused. They realised suddenly that

they were all really very hungry. breakfast sounded good. Ravi seemed to be in safe hands. They went in search of a hotel, taking their van with them.

Dickey heard the rapid fire talk by the doctor and made notes about name of hospital. He remembered the doctor's name from kamalkant train incident. Though he had no idea of the early morning attack on the police commissioner's office complex, he was quick to connect the information given by the doctor to some Maoist activity and proceeded to inform his friend APC Chandra Mouli.

Mouli was having a testing time at his office fielding so many calls from all and sundry while monitoring progress made by search parties tracking down the jail birds. He was naturally irritated when Dickey's call came through and he barked into phone unceremoniously, "what is it Dickey? Are you also calling me to tell how inefficient my police force is. Yes, Yes. They blasted the rear wall of the complex and spirited away the two Sinhalese Maoists and I am here, there and everwher, trying to bring them back. so unless it is terribly important, switch off your call and let me do my work"

Dickey heard all that outburst without interrupting. He had been in similar situation and his sympathies were with Mouli. So he made himself heard by adapting his most pleasant tone and said, 'Relax buddy. I am most probably giving you the best news you would ever hear. I just got a call from Doctor Shankar rao of legacy hospital. He has got a man with bullet wound and half a dozen gun wielding goons are threatening to cut his throat if he did not extract the bullet. the doctor claimed he is not an extraction specialist and needs a surgeon's help. Doctor is on stalling mode and his time is running out. I think this is your chance to redeem your glory .So get your police surgeon with his toolkit ready and help the poor doctor. If you want, I can go dressed as assistant to surgeon to deal with the goon squad. Are you listening ?. say yes sir brightly, you idiot.'

Mouli stared at the phone with his mouth open and his face broke into most pleasant smile and he said, 'Dickey ,I will kiss you sometime very soon. but just now the post of assistant to police surgeon is already taken and big thanks to you. call you as soon as I grab that joker.' he put the phone down and called his inspector kamath and shouted instruction rapid fire.

In less than 30 minutes, Mouli , a police surgeon and Kamath, all in plain clothes were at the hospital driving furiously in a private car. A few minutes later, a police ambulances with attendants raced into the hospital compound..

Ravi was sedated in preparation for the surgery, so he never knew what happened to him. The two goons standing guard outside the operation theatre, were dozing when Inspector Kamath and another constable appeared to take them away. They were too surprised to offer any resistance.

The gang of four and their leader Maliah drove round the block looking for a decent hotel to have some breakfast and strong coffee. Hyderabad is unique in this regard because not many hotels open early in the morning , so they had to waste considerable time before sighting a popular Udipi hotel .They sat down and ordered and by 8 o clock returned to the hospital, carrying parcels of food for their comrades waiting in the hotel.

They climbed up the flight of stairs leading to surgical section. Their friends were not there to greet them. The operation theatre was locked from outside. The entire place seemed deserted.

He raced down the stairs sensing trouble, reached the reception desk and caught hold of young man who had just arrived to take over his day shift.

‘Where is the Doctor?’ Malliah asked.

“which Doctor sir?”the man asked in return.

Dr.Sankar Rao.malliah was now screaming

Oh! Dr.Sankar rao left at 8 o clock immediately after his surgery. He will now be available after 11.00A.M”.The man answered politely, not understanding why the GUEST was getting agitated. He was blissfully unaware of the events of early morning.

Where are my friends? where is the patient we brought?

“What is name of patient, sir?”.the man was provocatively polite and Malliah answered him with a resounding slap. The receptionist was shocked beyond words. The most un expected stinging slap brought tears in his eyes but he held on and played his part of a trained receptionist to the hilt.



'This is outrageous , sir. I will report you to the police immediately.' He reached for the phone watching Malliah get his gun out.

"YOUNGMAN, IF YOU DON'T GET YOUR Doctor Sankar in next five minutes, I will blow your brains out and burn this hospital to ground.

The man got the doctor on line.

Dr Shankar Rao was calm. He said, "The police came and took your friends away. I finished my scheduled work and returned home. I do not know any thing else about your friends."

Doctor, if you do not come back here in next ten minutes, we will kill your receptionists , all your doctors and burn your place. He banged the phone and told his friends to take the hospital apart. In next ten minutes they smashed every thing in sight.. A couple of shots were sufficient to scare all the in patients and there was a stampede to get out of the hospital. Systematically, they burned the hospital to the ground. Malliah knew that if police had taken his friends back to police jail, his work was finished and waiting at the hospital would not be such a smart idea. he told his friends to wrap up and get back to the van. He swore he will kill the doctor for betraying him.

Back in the van, the gang considered their situation. it was bad that Ravi could not be sprung out of jain. They hoped he would get proper treatment at the hands of government. They also hoped that Ravi would not talk.

About getting even with the doctor, they may have to wait. He would now be under a stiif security blanket. It is better to lie low. But the temptation to have the last word with the doctor was strong. Malliah called up the doctor's number and when he came on line, he said, "Do not be too happy about what you have done. We have killed your doctors and destroyed your hospital. We will come after you now after all excitement dies out. Your sleeping days are over. Prepare yourself to deal with your end."

He drove away with out waiting to hear what the good doctor had to say..

The news about the massacre at the hospital hit the city like a bomb. Kamalkant watched it on TV being played again and again.

Kamala heard about it too at her construction site. She remembered that swamiji had predicted it.

## Chapter16

Kamalkant informed Kaddu that he would go upto the Legacy hospital, to see if he can be of any help in restoring it back to its old status.He had not told any one at the Friend's nest that it was his own hospital that had been usurped by Dr Shankar Rao.He hoped that Shankar Rao would now be more inclined to talk about a settlement with him, now that events had proved detrimental to him.

When he reached the hospital, he saw that Dr Shankar was already there directing the cleaning up operation.The damage was enormous.He had hired a local engineer to help him in restorationwork.A gang of workers were already engaged in the work and among the workers kamala was also involved.She knew that her swamiji had predicted this disaster and the arrogant Shankar rao would not listen to swamiji.shankar rao was a traitor and deserved this.

When Kamalkant entered the hospital premises, the first person he saw was young Kamala. She waved to him and he waved back cheerfully.This was the young girl who had helped him when he visited this hospital a few days back.She had watched with pain when Dr Shankar rao behaved rudely and threw him out.She had heard what he had said about the impending disaster.

She asked him,'swamiji why did you come here again?'

I came here to see if I can help him some way.

'you know the good doctor hates you'

I know.Iam hoping that this unexpected blow would soften him a little..

'I do not think so.He is very angry now.Three of his doctors were killed in the raid.'

While they were engaged in casual talk, Dr Shankar Rao and the engineer walked in.Shankara rao saw the bearded Oldman and got agitated .

He walked towards the old man with quick steps and shouted,'what are you doing here?'

I came here to help. I want to help you.

“why? this is what you wished. You must be happy that your curse had come true so fast. I have a feeling you are behind all this. I think those gangsters were your friends. .You tried to kill me in the train and when your plan failed you hatched up a more sinister plan to destroy me.Iwill inform the police about you. Just now.”

Kamal kant was alarmed. Mention of police unnerved him .he said, ‘you are insane. I came here to help. I know it is a bit hard for you. you can use my help.’

I do not need your help. you get lost. I know what is in your mind. Remember this is my hospital and I will keep it that way.so do not try any thing.’

Dr shanakar rao pushed the old man

Kamalkant put his head down. The workers had stopped work and were staring at him. He moved away. A security staff of the hospital urged him not to make a scene and guided the Oldman towards the exit gate. Kamalkant would not go so soon. He enquired about the fate of the inmates of the hospital. The security staff clarified that the raiders were very considerate, they allowed the patients to move out of hospital before sacking it mercilessly. Their anger was against the doctor who had tricked them and not against the patients.Dr Shankar later ensured that every inmate was traced and guided to near by hospitals to continue their treatment. People appreciated that.

That explanation seemed to satisfy kamalkant. He told the guard, ‘you know. Your doctor is having a good heart. I honestly want to help in restoring this hospital back to its normal shape. ‘The tone of sincerity in that statement convinced the guard .

Kamakkant visited the hospital every day. The doctor was at work round the clock. He did not mind the huge expenses he was incurring. He was determined to get the best of equipment and facilities for his hospital. The doctor had noticed that the Oldman and young kamala were also doing their bit. His mind put a question mark against their motive. Exercising great self control, he learned to ignore their presence. His immediate and urgent objective was to make his hospital operational as early as possible. Kamalkant expected the attackers to hit the doctor again and he wanted to be close to doctor to

prevent it if it was humanly possible. His Krishna had been quite for too long.  
To kamalkant it was not a good sign.

## Chapter 17

Back at the Maoists camp. Morale was low. Sathya was seething with rage. He had made a big mistake giving the charge to Malliah. They had failed to liberate Ravi and Samaraweera. Now , no one knew about their whereabouts. He was not sure if he should still go ahead with the mission against the army academy. The meeting had been postponed to allow the police time to hunt down the raiders. At the army academy, Dickey had managed to identify the informer. Security at the academy was very tight.

Malliah was keen on another strike against the doctor. He was hard core Maoist who believed in using power to gain an advantage. For him fear was the key. If the doctor could flourish again, it meant a big failure for his movement. So he kept a watch at the hospital to strike at appropriate time. He wanted more men and material for his work. It was becoming difficult to control him.

Sathya cursed Dickey for all his failures. Even though Dickey had not confronted them directly, he somehow played a hand in helping the police to nab Ravi and Samaraweera. That young firebrand APC was being hailed as a great hero. Police were becoming more aggressive and demanding. It appeared suddenly, there were more police on the streets than ever before.

He wondered if he should worry about Ravi and Samaraweera at this stage. Disturbing the Army civilian co ordination exercise was now becoming top priority to keep the government in tenterhooks and at the same time keeping a restive cadre in control. Satya had to execute that operation himself. He was not able to trust any of his assistants with important assignment.

At the Army Academy, security personnel were on high alert. A Russian made tank now stood at the beginning of long road that led to the massive gates of academy. Machine guns were mounted on either side of gate.

Snipers were sitting on top of tall trees lined up on either side of Bolaram road coming in from the city. Bolaram cantonment was sealed and no civilian vehicles were allowed to trespass. Some local MLAs raised some objection, but they were silenced. Army jeeps patrolled all roads leading to academy.

Senior officers made rounds of inspection in random manner to test the state of alertness. They were ready for war.

At the secretariat, it was police show all the way. Elite police cadre manned strategic points. Police had mounted machine guns in the second floor of secretariat complex and could look down on the vast front part of the complex. Two brightly painted buses made of armoured plate and reinforced chassis were standing by to carry the delegates. The drivers were personally selected by Dickey. Each driver had a rapid fire Kalashnikov rifles under the seats and fully loaded automatic guns in the side holsters. There was a tea stall at the secretariat grounds that served needs of public who visited the secretariat for various reasons. Dickey wanted the stall to be closed, but he was vetoed by the home ministry as he did not want public to be alarmed by too much of security. He said, take all precautions. The owner has security clearance and he has been operating for quite some time on a renewable licence issued every year.

Dickey had made a dummy dry run driving the bus and he found that the road to the academy was too straight and long. That meant attack on the bus enroute was not possible. The roads were watched day and night, so no scope for installing land mines. Police had banned all parking of vehicles for two days to remove planting of remotely triggered bombs, in the parked vehicles

Dickey was back at the secretariat and was talking to inspector Ashok Reddy. The IAS officers were going to board the bus at exactly 10 o'clock and it was now 9.30 Dickey felt he was on top of situation. Mouli was with the IAS team, to ensure that they would board the bus one after another and not go in group. Dickey's cell phone rang suddenly. Dickey always hated such calls coming at tense moments. With irritation written large on his face he barked, 'yes, what is it?'

Dickey, kamalkant here. Krishna says you should blast some tea stall. Is there a tea stall near you?"

Dickey froze.

Dickey watch out.

Dickey cursed kamalkant. He had checked with Mouli about Tea stall. He had cleared it.

On a hunch, Dickey decided to take a look. He checked that his handgun was there in his pocket. He was carrying old fashioned hand held walkie -talkie. He strolled up to the stall. The owner came forward to greet him and asked if he would like some tea.. Dickey brushed him aside and walked in. It was not a big place. Dickey's trained eyes looked for some indication of abnormality of any sort. There were a few people sipping tea. He stopped at one table. Satya was sitting there with a tea cup in his hand. There was a label with letters PRESS in large letters pinned to front of shirt. Dickey glared at him. Satya returned the gaze .

Dickey talked to the owner, stop all service. Call all your boys back. I want a head count.

I can't do that. They are all over the place.

Dickey shouted, 'I said, call them back.'

There was clamour for space as the owner tried to reach the door to call his boys. Dickey could see them nicely spread each carrying a tray.

Dickey frowned. THE BOYS WERE WAITING FOR SIGNAL.

He looked at the buses. All the boys were on one side of bus, the side where the door of bus opened. As Dickey was watching, the IAS officers started walking towards the bus in a single file one after another. They were calm.

Satya unclipped his label , that was the signal for the boys. But the boys could not see him remove the label because the massive body of Dickey was covering Satya..

The owner shouted. The boys held their ground. Dickey was staring at Satya. Satya had got up from his seat and moved towards the door so that the boys could see his shirt front with out label. Dickey caught the difference .Instinct told him to grab Satya, but his eyes were looking at the table.



Dickey knew immediately. He started talking to his men on his hand held walkie talkie." Target the tea boys. watch out for their trays. Take them out. take out all chaiwallas. I repeat chaiwallas.'

Guns started firing and boys spun the trays in the direction of buses. One by one the trays hit the bus and exploded. Luckily most of IAS officials had got into bus. Only chief secretary was outside. He was a little slow. He heard the firing of guns and jerked himself to jump into open door of bus. A flying tray caught his leg , glanced off and exploded in air. flying nails and shrapnel caught the secretary in the legs. He collapsed and fell on the ground missing the bus..

A yellow painted van raced in and two hands reached out and picked up the chief secretary and raced away.

At the tea stall, Dickey was in trouble. The tea stall owner was behind him and sathya in front. The owner pressed his gun to Dickey's back and sathya was waving his gun in Dickey's face. Satya was smiling, "Dickey, I have been waiting for this moment for a life time. I told my bosses that I can out think you and even catch you alive. You are our trump card. You will lead us to safety, sandwiched that you are between me and Malliah. We have our transport at the back road behind the tea stall. We have made a hole in the wall and we will all crawl through the hole together ."

Dickey held his ground. He never liked people who gave speeches when situations were tense. He was busy calculating his chances. The gun at his back was held high up, Dickey had put on his bullet proof vest, but a bullet fired at point blank range always penetrated the bullet proof fabric. So risk was there sure. Sathya did not present much problem. He had to do some thing. He knew some thing suddenly would divert the tea stall owners attention. Mouli burst through the open door with his gun firing. Dickey timed his kick backward to a nicety heel catching the owner in the groin. At the same time his right hand lashed out catching sathya on the chin. Sathya had looked up to see Mouli screaming as he burst through and just for a moment he had taken his eyes off Dickey. A moment of distraction is sufficient for people like Dickey to turn tables. Satya fired just as Dickey lashed out and knew he had hit Dickey. Dickey went through his right cross to chin before the he felt impact of the bullet. He

staggered for a moment and steadied himself catching the edge of tea table. He watched sathya fly in air and knock his head against steel rod. The point protruding out of wall to serve as a hanger for clothes. The point penetrated his skull and he kept hanging from there. Mouli in the meanwhile had mowed the owner down and when he got his breath back , he found he was sitting on top of a dead body.

Dickey screamed at him, 'YOU FOOL, YOU SAID YOU HAD CLEARED THE TEA STALL OWNER'

Yes, I did. But this one is not the owner. They had taken over the stall after killing the owner. I suppose from the way you are screaming, you are not hurt. I have lot of work to do, if you do not mind.

Blood was dropping from a gaping hole in the shoulder. Mouli helped Dickey to get up and walk out. His eyes were misty.

Dickey came out in the open and took a deep breath.it hurt him to breathe.

A police doctor came running to attend , but Dickey brushed him aside.

'what is the damage outside?'

'They took the chief secretary away. He was too slow. The buses were not damaged.is the conference still on?. Shall I ask the buses to proceed?'

Of course. The conference is still on. I do not think they have men or equipment to follow up this strike with another one on the road. Still tell them to be watchful.

Dickey started walking towards his car

'Where do you think you are going?'

Home. There is an old doctor at home waiting for me to show up. He was a famous doctor once .had worked at GUYHOSPITAL IN UK.I will let him extract the bullet from my shoulder. He has been retired for some time. I think, he can start practicing again. I am happy to be his first patient. Let him make a beginning with me.

'What the hell are you talking about?'

'The swamiji. he tipped me off about the tea stall.'

How the hell did he know about it?

'His Krishna told him.'

Who is Krishna?

'Krishna is a stone, a pebble in fact, a pebble that talks. At least it talks to him.'

Dickey are you alright?

'Sure I am. The good swamiji promised to give that pebble to me'.

Dickey could not carry on anymore. His strong legs shook and he dropped to the ground. Mouli was sufficiently alert to catch him and lower him softly

Dickey held Mouli's hand.' don't worry kid. I will not die.it is a nice way to retire from the army, though.'

Mouli hugged dickey. Tears rushed out uncontrolled .

