

# The Undiscovered Holiness

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*Dedicated to*

*Shivaay.*

*For you inspire the ethics, honesty, integrity and eternal beauty within every being.*

A short introduction:

The beauty of life is hidden in its interpolation, perception and interpretation. Even small incidents have a great meaning provided we are open to introspecting them with an uncorrupt mind and a non judgmental approach. The story is about a voyage. It is a simple story of a simple girl, who is infatuated by the primitiveness of her holy deity- Shiva. In a hope to surmount her existence by experiencing the divinity of the lord of lords who resides in mountains, she dwells a pure desire to reach the holiest place. Did she happen to find her Shiva in the ceremonial mystery of Hinduism?

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Whether you are spiritual or an atheist; the story has something to speak to you. The journey is all about giving a meaning to your own connection with the goodness deep rooted within you.

Meet Shivgaura , the inquisitive, naïve lover , finder, seeker of God!

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## **Chapter 1- It All Begins With A Search**

12:21 – Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I am not sure how life is for other folks in their late 20's but if you are philosophical, sincere, responsible, broken and a psychology loving geek; I can definitely conclude it for you.

Simple, it's complicated!

Shivgaura is typical in her own ways, she is intelligent yet silly, she is happening yet boring, she is passionate yet lame, and she is intense yet mild. How difficult it is to define a woman who is beautiful and ugly at the same time.

In order to uncomplicate the story, we need to go for character assassination of Shivgaura without any further delay.

She was like a vibrant wind, unsettling, ambitious, chaotic; wild and free.

The problem of sapiens is we are always encroached by the ideas of finding our own vitality and uniqueness. We hate the notion of mediocracy and obsolescence ignoring the irony of the fact that we are mortals. Just like any other young beautiful girl in her late 20's, Shivgaura was also looking for a meaning in her life. The allurements of modern lifestyle left a deep black hole in her soul. Perhaps she failed brutally in love and she was busy in personal development. A B-school graduate with a handsome salary, she was now 27, that age of life when a majority of your so called friends leave you. Some of them are married, others

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immigrated, and the left ones living with the concept of schadenfreude in some distant world. Shivgaura was single. From being a lucid extrovert to a self proclaimed introvert, she was living a mundane life of 5-days working and practicing crocodile yoga on weekends. Don't be too surprised if you haven't heard about crocodile yoga before, it is an art which we all practice but we rarely brag about. The art of sleeping without paying any concern to any nonsense happening around on weekends is the gift of our corporate bonded lifestyle.

One fine Sunday, when she was trying to get over the guilt of being a staunch crocodile yoga expert, she landed up to uplifting musical verses- " Atma Shatkam."

Goosebumps flashed her skin; she was in an exotic state experiencing a heavenly trance. This rarely happens especially at this highly active libido stage of life. An age when all your friends and colleagues are busy doing PDA (public display of affection) on social media bragging about their luxurious yet vain honeymoon experiences in Bali, Prague, Fiji etc etc. The love is so deep and true that it almost floods all your instagram, twitter, facebook news feeds; it is so intense that it automatically unlocks the phone and jump on to status update while the innocent account owner was busy kissing hugging his better half. Of course, this is the reality or how else can someone who is on a personal holiday with family to spend quality time be found posting on these social apps. There must be some trap.

For Shivgaura it was not about flaunting about kissing her beau in Bali in half pants! It was not a vague experience; she felt an inner turmoil of action. The love and the purest form of energy flowed from within. The movement felt like a snake crawling her backbone, climbing up with the speed of light all the way to her sahasrara as if she was meant to spontaneously meet the divine. Like any other normal person, she was left dumbstruck!

If she was living in some interior village of Deccan plateau, the story could have ended up with some hypocritical occultist, witch or maybe a shrewd quack pundit.

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Thankfully! Shivgaura was a rational educated Indian from suburbs, someone who would trust Google first before trusting an erudite pundit and his interpretations.

An inquisitive mind, opened the chrome browser on her app n typed- Atma Shatkam

Bingo ! Here it is! A plenty of links to open, browse, study and understand.

Thank you Google! We can now find the meaning of our own spiritual or metaphysical experiences without being judged by our religion, category, and class and most importantly in the absence of any so called religious guru.

Interesting! She exclaimed.

Atmashatkam also known as Niravanashatkam is a composition dedicated to divine coming from the Hindu Philosophy of non-dualism. "Ātma" is one's soul - True Self. "Nirvāṇa" is complete equanimity, peace, tranquility, freedom and joy. Non dualism is a wondrous thought of aesthetic spiritual nature which simply teaches that the multiplicity of the universe is reducible to one essential reality.

Be it your ego, intelligence, attention, riches, ruins, sins or good deeds, everything as per the 6-fold verses of Atmashatkam is compressible to single unclouded reality- Shivoham!

I am Shiva!

According to Hindu mythology, Shva is the supreme majesty within Shaivism . He is the omnipotent being who creates, protects and transforms the universe. Lord Shiva in his highest form is formless, limitless, transcendent and unchanging absolute and the primal soul of the universe.

Shivgaura was actually enjoying her religious pursuits and mythological research for the first time. She was busy in finding meanings of the verses, the hidden philosophy, the said and the unsaid meanings. She was lost in her prolific search for her existence. It all started with simple music- a YouTube video but she felt so connected as if it was a part and parcel of her being since ages. She rarely visited temples, she never believed in customs and rituals. She was a rationalist- a 20<sup>th</sup> century girl, busy living a

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logical life. All of a sudden she was feeling different, a euphoric pleasure encroached her mind. There was a state of awareness, empowerment and most of all peace. All this was happening even without the sight and smell of Cannabis sativa.

Is it really possible to relate with divine in such an abrupt fashion?

“What you seek is seeking you.”- Rumi

**Ahaṃ nirvikalpo nirākāra rūpo  
Vibhutvāca sarvatra sarveṃdriyāṇaṃ  
na cāśangata naiva muktir na meyaḥ  
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham.**

***I am all pervasive, and without any form, pervade all senses and world.***

***I have neither attachment to the world, nor to the liberation (mukti).***

***I am "Shiva"***

***Sat-Chit-Ananda***

***Ever existing, ever consciousness, ever new bliss***

***Beyond all these.***

***The holiest sixth verse of niravanashatkam***

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## Chapter 2- The Hippocratic Thrust

**The only thing worse than a liar is a liar that's also a hypocrite!**

- Tennessee Williams

The truth begins from within. No matter how raw or mature you are, if you believe in the factual adequacy of time and space; certain things are meant to happen. For Shivgaura, apparently- everything was falling in line, as if all the cosmopolitan energy has taken the responsibility of her life. The longest relationship of her life has finally ended up, the so called BF got married to some rich daughter of a rich father, though she wasted almost 4 precious years of her life on a moron who failed to take a stand for her at the right time, there was no signs of regret on her happy – woouoa I m so lucky face!

Not that she found a new guy or her parents bought a groom for her with some lavish amount of dowry. She was in an extreme state of satiation when she got a perfect job at a dream destination. Bang on! She was flying to Australia in the coming month. All set to be placed in a new country and start a new life, in a new culture with new people in an exotic world.

Shivgaura was the lucky one! The first stroke of luck is visible in her name, she owe her name to her loving grandmother who beautifully blended the two names- Shiv and Gauri (mothe nature, the most respected wife of Lord Shiva). To add the element of indigenousness and infuse love with usher freshness the Gauri in her name was modified as Gaura.

She is definitely lucky as categorized by all her acquaintance. These acquaintance who usually know someone, merely by the Hi-Hello gestures of the individual, their academic and career success, the way one communicates in those far away formal discussions. None of them have any clue about the abusive childhood experiences of the poor child, they barely know that her father was a very aggressive man who paid no heed to the tender heart of little Shivgaura. She was lucky to have a caring mother who helped her to survive an impoverished childhood and she was really really lucky to find some role-models in the form of

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grandparents, aunts and uncles as she was living in a joint family. She never had those expensive toys and delicious candies but she often had a nurturing woman around her. Sometimes her mother, sometimes her aunts would be listening to her naïve stories of childhood fantasy and help her to live an ecstatic life based on future aspirations and fantasies.

One fine day, you will become a doctor and all the problems would come to an end.

She wanted to fly high but unfortunately she failed. She could not become a doctor and became a subject of sheer disdain for her father. She never received the paternal love she deserved but she kept working, fighting, and improving herself. The folks who know her formally have always seen her pretty smiling countenance, perhaps her mother was the only witness of her tearful nights full of pain, loneliness and longing for support. Maybe that's why she never called her lucky!

All's well that ends well, the delicate, sweet, sensitive Shivgaura is now a full-fledge independent women. World calls her lucky- because she is finally going abroad to live her dreams. The self-serving bias of the masses has tagged her hard work, persistence, efforts and mental strength as her luck!

This is how our society works but finally Shivgaura was happy. After so many failures she could taste success but her life was quite different now. After that mystic Sunday, the day she first encountered Atmashatkam, she was experiencing a different level of love in her veins and peace in her heart. A soulful symphony captivated her mind, she became fond of the sounds of Atmashatkam and other devotional songs dedicated to the beauty and exuberance of Shiva.

In her free time, she was listening to divine music, reading holy contents, writing poetry and painting Shiva. She was at peace with the pace and the momentum of life, nurturing the Shiv within. The thrust was natural. Who won't fall for a deity who is free from all sorts of materialistic bondages? The one who demands nothing, apart from the purity in heart and devotion in thoughts. He is

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worshipped for his simplicity is so magical, his approach so raw and his divinity so divine that even the breeze around Holy river-Ganga enchants the mist of his extramundane affectionate existence.

The healing effect of time was so powerful that it was pampering and consoling the childhood wounds of Shivgaura. As she was growing up; her bond with her father was getting better and better with time. Lately, she realized that it's not easy to earn the bread and butter for an entire family of 10-12 people. World beyond home is very harsh and a man, no matter how soft or kind at heart will get affected somehow by the deep and gigantic atrocities of this mean materialistic world.

Empathy is a remarkable ability; it helps to understand the world in different manner with multiple frames. A sensible sensitive heart is never left untouched by the finesse of empathetic life. For shivgaura, this was a perfect time to inculcate the natural instincts of loving bonds.

Shivgaura wanted to travel!

Travel to Far East, to the alluring natural beauty of Uttarakhand, India. She wanted to visit to Kēdārñāth Mandir (Kedarnath Temple) - a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is on the Garhwal Himalayan range near the Mandakini River in Kedarnath. The temple was built by Pandavas and revived by Adi Sankaracharya and is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, the holiest Hindu shrines of Shiva. She wanted to go with her father. Shivgaura's father, being an army man was a robust person with great physical abilities and stamina, he had visited the temple thrice in past.

Those were old days Shivagu ! Your father was young. Now he is retired army personnel, living on medicine and practicing yoga for dealing with daily life and its hassles. I think you should not plan this trip now. Shivgaura's mother tried to explain her. She wanted her to make pragmatic choices and not to fall prey to sudden emotions all the time.

But Momma, this is what I truly want!

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I think I am capable of taking care of Dad; it would be a perfect trip to content our drenched souls. I think you should also join us and make this trip more memorable. Unwilling to hear any excuse, Shivgaura was determined to take the voyage.

6:00 AM

Wednesday Morning!

Trin...Trin...Trin...Trin.

The phone rang.

Who the hell can call me so early in the morning?

All the anger and rash on Shivgaura's face turned to a blissful pleasing smile as she heard the voice of her favorite cousin- Shashi on the other side but the happiness didn't last for too long for the sassy shashi came up with an unpleasing news.

I heard Koyla (Coal) aunty is all set to ruin your travel by joining you.

Koyal aunty is mother in law of Shivguara's favorite nina aunty. Basically her parents named her as koyal which means the cuckoo bird, sweet soothing pleasing creature. Unfortunately, koyal aunty was not as sweet and nice as her name in fact she was an owner of all the dark traits, and hence the honest cool kiddo troop renamed her as koyla aunty (shhhh! It's there top secret!) . Koyla probably suits her more, it stands for coal. Although Shivgaura was against naming her as Coal aunty for she had a developmental perspective towards coal. Coal is an amazing substance, it transforms into invaluable diamonds when it faces high pressure and high temperature. When it comes to Koyal aunty, no such transformation was possible at any cost as she was as stubborn and sullen as possible. She was like a typical vamp found in Ekta Kapoor type daily soap operas. She can get you divorced in minutes; she can spoil your healthy loving relationships. Her gossips and networking abilities are world famous but owing to her prestige and reputation she will never use it for anything good. The infamous

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old witch was reborn but she looked far better as if she blossomed herself with too many botox injections.

Anyways! This was the deal; Koyla aunty was going to Kedarnath along with Shivgaura and her father. One day later, she was here, at Shivgaura's home with all her luggage and travel baggages.

Ab apko toh pata hi hai bhaisahab. Vinit ko kaha fursat milti hai ! (Talking to shivgaura's father- you know it brother, Vinit (her son) has no time)

Sab hamari Shivgaura ki tarah achi kismat wale kaha hote hai.

The very obvious dialogue, not everyone is as lucky as our Shivgaura, Koyla aunty stood as per her name from the moment she entered. Poor Shivgaura need to tolerate all this for the next 4 days.

### **10:30 PM**

On the dining table, when all the other people have left for their bedrooms. Koyla aunty was in conversation with Shivgaura's mother. There was an expression of dismay on her face, she sounded broken and for the first time in the history of time Shivgaura felt empathetic for her.

Our lives are so vain Manju. I never really wanted to travel at this age of my life, with my arthritis I am going to create a lot of trouble for the poor father and daughter but perhaps innocent Shivgaura has no clue how much I was pressurized from my in-laws and family to go to the pilgrimage. 49 years of life and I am still craving for that one day of my life when my life is actually mine. Your childhood is ruled by parents, adulthood is dominated by husband and old age, it is at the mercy of your kids and lost in the cobweb of social norms and custom. They murdered my childhood dreams, they killed my youthful instincts and now when I want to die in peace, they still hound my soul. Sometimes I feel as helpless as a domesticated animal.

Koyal Aunty immediately wiped her tears as she saw Shivgaura coming towards the kitchen.

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The three lovely women were surrounded by the mystic yet comforting chills of pin drop silent. One good thing has certainly happened Shivgaura doesn't hate Koyal aunty now.

She is no more Koyla aunty. At least not in her eyes!

**Nobody's born rotten.**

**You just don't have bad kids. It's not true. There is no such thing. But we can make them bad.**

**– Jean Liedloff**

Chapter 3- Shivaay Calling

**Finding is reserved for those that search- Jim Rohn**

**3:00 AM**

The chilling winds hit her face with a smash as soon as Shivgaura woke up and went near the window to locate the moon on the morning sky. She was excited about the journey to come. The news paper and the social media updates were sufficient enough to confirm that the journey won't be easy. Wherever you go in the world you cannot escape the law of demand. Undoubtedly, the beautiful and divinity of Himalayas are unquestionable but it cannot retain too many people at the same time. The current status of Kedarnath as depicted in the news reports is crowded. Lack of resources and too many folks to demand is going to create some complexities for the travelers for sure but then good things, they don't come easy.

**4: 00 AM**

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Shivgaura left home with her father and Koyal aunty. Finally the journey has begun but how weird it is to face a setback as soon as you take your first step. The 4:45 AM bus that fetches tourists from Rishikesh to Gaurikund was houseful.

But we had a pre-booking with you. How can you deny us all of a sudden? Shivgaura's father expressed his anguish.

I am so sorry babu ji, but I am helpless. 15 people from my wife's village came last night to our home, they are very old people, and my wife has blood relations with them, I need to cancel your seat and let them take the first bus possible.

Aap fikar naa karo Bhole BaBa apke liye kuch intezaam zarur karenge (Don't you worry; Lord Shiva will certainly find a way for you.) The conductor left, leaving Shivgaura and her family with his words of consoling. With a pathetic beginning that had to move on, the next bus to Gaurikund was at 7:00 AM but the booking agent was way more pragmatic. He denied instant booking.

I cannot confirm you, your seats sir. It would all depend on the number of people who already have some pre-booked tourists with us. If I am left with a few seats, I would help you out but I just suggest you better cancel your plan, this is peak period and I don't think you will find any seats now-said the booking master.

It was already 7:00 AM and the bus hasn't arrived yet. By now, the city girl Shivgaura couldn't control her inquisitive instincts. Unlike the normal culture in mountains where women are not supposed to enquire and take the lead, the literate Shivgaura saw a smaller bus with an Imprint on it - "Kedarnath."

She walked out of their personal vehicle and went straight to the skinny conductor who was wearing a green t-shirt and grey pants. Is there any possibility to get a few seats in your bus, she asked humbly.

Chances do exist but you need to contact our booking head, he pointed to a middle aged whitish man, the one with a white cap. Shivgaura immediately ran to him.

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At first, she felt a bit insecure because the moment she questioned the booking agent about seats, he looked at her in a strange unacceptable manner. No man of professional etiquettes would look at a woman from top to bottom sticking his eyes to such areas where he shouldn't. At least this is the basic social decorum in cities and towns in India.

How many seats? He questioned

3. We are three people travelling. Such 3! Can you please help?

Go. Get inside the bus. The tickets shall be given in the bus itself. He remarked.

Shivgaura and her family quickly grabbed their seats only to wait for the next 2 hours in a still unmoving bus. Shivgaura was still puzzled about the way booking agent looked at her. Did he think I am an alien? Was he really a wolf like bad man who looks at woman as a sex object analyzing their assets? Or was she measuring my enthusiasm and devotion for lord Shiva by looking at me from top to bottom, how genuinely I want to travel?

She realized that these questions will die with her like a mystery but she was thankful to God for she was not gifted with beautiful assets that grab the attention of men who lack character and integrity. As a woman you need to be so tolerant, it takes a moment to identify any disrespectful behavior and it takes years to ignore such memories. In search of a comforting heaven, Shivgaura grabbed her female, Koyal aunty. She embraced her with motherly warmth.

At last at 9:00 AM the bus started moving and the spirit of the traveler rejuvenated the hearts of tourists. An old man in the bus began to cheer. Bolo Kedarnath baba ki ! And the other travelers whoop- Jai ! A positive ambiance of triumph and happiness was created in the bus.

After a 100 kilometer, the journey became more fascinating. Shivgaura was left spellbind with the freshening smell of greenery and the soothing palpitations given by the swift strokes of blissful winds. 11,000 ft above the sea level, she was pleased to be surrounded by the nature. Amazed by the beauty of Ganges at one

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side, bewildered by the twist and turns of the mountain roads, the young lady was lost in the magic of phenomenal landscape.



The captivating view from a journey to Kedarnath

***In every walk of the nature one receives far more than he seeks. – John Muir***

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Tantalizing Ganges.

***The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness. – John Muir***

The Journey has just begun. Shivgaura’s father smiled at her and said, “The journey has just begun sweetheart, you will be delighted to explore the scenic

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beauty ahead. It was a blessed gleeful atmosphere but after a few miles the air became a bit polluted. The smog surrounded the entire area.

One of the localite traveling in the bus informed others about the fire in the forest. This is a phenomenon that often occurs in the summer season. Owing to the greatness of deforestation, global warming, misuse of natural resources forests are meant to suffer. Sometimes the fire occurs naturally and many a times it is initiated by wicked men who then fake it out as if it was natural.

These mountains hide a lot of greed and malicious intents. People are ready to kill each other on the name of development and materialistic pursuits. These are just forests, they can't even complaint. The old man uttered sorely. The sight of burning trees and fumes was saddening indeed. While the nature tries to give us plentiful of love and warmth, we are mean enough to pass on pain, brutality and harm in different forms.

In June 2013, Uttarkhand faced a huge tragedy because of heavy rain falls and cloudbursts, the region was flooded. Landslides, due to the floods, damaged several houses and structures, killing thousands of people; causing immense destruction. After 2004 tsunami, this was a worst natural calamity faced by India. The infamous Kedarnath yatra was restricted for quite some time with an intent to reconstruct and reestablish roads, shelter and means of communication. In 2018, you can still feel the shattered soul of tragic occurrence. The roads, they still don't feel safe. A number of times Shivgaura was frightened by the fragility of the route and astonished by the skills and acumen of Bus drivers who drive in these mountains.

They are severely accident prone areas. I think I can give it in writing that even the best drivers from New York, New Delhi, Taiwan or Beijing cannot drive on these meticulous paths. Shivgaura exclaimed. Look at the sense and sensibilities of these bus drivers, how patiently they give way to each other and take ownership of our security. Hats off!

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As soon as the bus stopped Koyal Aunty was delighted that she would finally be landing at the holy land of Gaurikund.

Wait! What! What did you just say? We haven't arrived to Gaurikund yet. Hell why? If you are getting married in this town Mr. Conductor, let me tell you. I am not at all interested in attending your wedding. Drop us to Gaurikund Now. The Koyla (Coal) of impatience started to burn within koyal aunty as the conductor told the tourists that the bus won't go further.

After seeing the scenic beauty of Rudraprayag, Devprayag, Gupt Kaashi, they were in the beautiful village of Chamoli district- Sonprayag. The conductor was not a selfish man, he was a considerate guy who doesn't want all of them to die and meet God directly because the roads ahead are way too smaller and steep. A bus can't go further unless you have plans to reach hell or heaven directly. The 5 km journey to Gaurikund is covered by Jeeps available after a 1km walk.

You only realize how far is 1 kilometer when you have to carry 5 Kg of weight on your back. Shivgaura was now enlightened by this amazing fact because she was now experiencing it. While she was busy moving with one-set of luggage, Koyal aunty and her father were also torturing each other while pulling a 2-kg suitcase. We are so fond of our materialistic pursuits that they scorch us till the moment we breathe our last. All the philosophical theories related to luggage and last breaths came to an end when they saw the Jeep stand. The passion to travel to Kedar and the dream to visit the holiest temple is soon going to be a real experience.

**The things you are passionate about are not random. They are your calling. –  
Fabienne Fredrickson**

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## **Chapter 4- The Climb**

### **No one is so brave that he is not disturbed by something unexpected- Julius Caesar**

Little did Shivgaura know that while she was busy walking and carrying the 5 Kg luggage, her father has already invited a few guests to accompany them.

Shivgaura and her father were poles apart, she is an independent introvert who was in love with the idea of solo tripping or at least some personal time with her dad, her father was on the other side, a jolly extrovert, who loves to exaggerate and make friends while traveling, however this friendship won't last long. These associations were only meant for boosting ego and impressing people with falls information, something as abominable as Madhuri Dixit is our first cousin, we have 3 bungalows in South Delhi, the prime minister of New Zealand is our family friend so on and so far.

Bragging was his hobby and she hated it the most but it was his addiction and she can't help him anymore. Sometimes accepting people as they are is the only cure. Accept and ignore, Shivgaura has been tackling this since ages. Though this time, Shivgaura was deeply disappointed because their privacy was encroached by her father's swanky traits. He no more belong to Koyal Aunty and Shivu, now he owes all his attention and care to the 35 year old lady traveling with her 15 yr old kid and a 22 yr old boy.

When Mr.Agasthya ( Shivgaura's father) booked seats with Jeep driver, he absolutely forgot that he is traveling with two beautiful ladies with severe nausea issues. The severity is to the extent that they can't stand 5 minutes of journey without a window seat. Distressed Shivgauara denied traveling in that jeep and sat in the next jeep along with Koyal Aunty. Both the women occupied the window seats and now they were 6 people in the same group, traveling for Kedar.

In haste Shivgaura denied agreeing to her father and later regretted her own choice. There was something wrong with this driver. Her nose gave her the answer with a cent percent diagnostic accuracy- the driver was drunk!

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Wow! A drunk driver would be driving for the next 5 kilometers on steepest and scantiest roads ahead. For our teetotaler lady excitement and fear was on cloud nine. He was constantly spanking the horn and obviously driving rash. All of a sudden, they were stopped by a group of Ponies and out of fear a Pony suddenly jumped to the ditch on the scariest side of the path. If the pony moved a little more left now, she will be moved forever. It was a shocking Omg second! This could be an RIP Moment !

Once again thanks to the sixth sense and intellect of the local hill people, the Pony owner softly and swiftly bought her back on the road. Stop driving! You fool drunken man. He rebuked the driver, a sense of guilt was visible on the driver's face when he turned his eyes down and started to move with some sense. For the next 3 kilometers his soul and everyone's prayer kept them alive.

Shivgaura thanked God as she landed on the holy land of Gaurikund. Beautiful, blessed and blissful, Gaurikund was a truly intoxicating place. It intoxicated Shivgaura's senses with the sound of the flowing river and waterfalls, the greenish essence of Mother Nature and the healing hunch of moist environment. At 6:00 PM they headed further to look out for a hotel and get a room, they can't travel further now. In order to reach Kedarnath which is still 18km away, they have to start their voyage again tomorrow. Shivgaura's father has been to this place earlier, there is nothing to worry about from this point. Everything is totally under control.

I have a place; the room will cost you 2000 bucks sir! A sales guy said to Mr.Agasthya.

Get away or I will kick your ass; the infuriated father expressed his swagger.

The ladies instantly felt that Mr.Agasthya is being way too mean to the poor fellow but then they had no other option. Mr. Agasthya was confident to get a room in just 100 bucks; the only thing is they need to travel on the other end of Gaurikund which is approximately 1.5 km. Consider that this would be the last

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torture of their journey, six of them; once again started walking and pulled their baggage to other corner of the nurturing landscape.

You don't get a good Coffee in 100 bucks these days sir, how can you expect a room in that budget 11,000 ft above the sea level. A police officer did the job of reality check for Shivgaura's father when he tried to enquire about the Dharamshala.

Disappointed Mr. Agasthya asked the ladies and the kid to wait near the small enquiry cubicle of police. They went to find a good place to stay. It was getting dark, the ponies and the tourists that climbed the mountain today were returning back. Pedestrians were looking very tired. There were palanquins carried by four bearers, who were taking giants steps. Their walking strategy was a bit scary because they almost threatened every third person coming their way, nudging a few folks from their original path with their swift inconsiderate movements.

There was one more category of transportation where a robust hill guy will carry you on your back in a basket named as Pithu (typically derived from a Hindi word- Pith which means back). The Pithu would cost you 8000 bucks, the palanquin bearers charged 5000 and the pony would cost around 2300. Just a reminder this are the prices for a one way trip. A round trip would definitely cost you more but Uphill movement is costlier than downhill.

It's been 40 minutes; there are no signs of Mr. Agasthya and his return. The stranger aunty from Kanpur who intruded Shivgaura's family trip was now sitting at a small restau nearby. She was eating Maggie with her son. There is something special about eating Maggie in mountains. The Maggie which you generally buy in 10rs will cost you 40rs.

I feel like calling consumer court and confirm, is it right if someone charges us 4 times of MRP (maximum retail price) Don't you think it is an indirect extortion Koyal Aunty ? Shivgaura questioned with amazement.

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There is saying in our culture darling! Safar mai toh Raaja ko bhi takleef hoti hai. (Even the great king has to tolerate a few discomfort which traveling). May be this is just a real-life example of the same. Koyal Aunty replied with a consoling smile.

After 1:30 hour, Mr.Agasthya was back with pleasing yet distressful news. They have finally found a place to cover their heads for the night. A single room with 3 beds and an attached washroom to accommodate 6 people doesn't sound delightful of course and the best part it just costed 3500 bucks. (Remember the guy whom Mr.Agasthya castigated!)

There is one more old saying Shivgaura.

And puzzled Shivgaura questioned," And what is that Aunty?"

An over smart crow sits on dirt!

And the ladies burst in laughter 😊

Around 10 PM, everything was sorted; they got two extra bed sheets so that everyone could settle in the little tacky room. It was now gossip time! Shivgaura was going through a love-hate relationship and emotions towards the woman from Kanpur. At one point she likes her for the motherly care and love she holds for her son, when she feeds an almost grown up kid with her own tender hands. At the other moment, she is filled with disgust for her as soon as the lady reveals that she is a government teacher who bribed the authorities with 15lac rupees ( 15,00,000 bucks) in order to get that job. Now that she has a monthly salary of 55,000 she is absolutely okay with the fact that she gave a huge amount of pay off.

Do you know, according to an article published in Times of India, 1 in 2 MBAs in India fails to land a job. There are currently nearly 31 million unemployed Indians looking for jobs. Perhaps most of them have a degree, a majority can speak, read and write English along with a local language and at least a few are capable enough to change the destiny of the nation but unfortunately they cannot afford

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a bribe as huge as paid by Mrs. Sharma, the ostentatious lady from Kanpur, who is not ashamed of sharing that she is a corrupt chunk of flesh and bones.

When everyone was deciding about their bed, Mrs. Sharma modestly chose the sheets on ground, she was totally okay to sacrifice the comfort of a bed and sleep on ground. Shivgaura was struck by a stroke of philosophical sadness. She was 11,000 ft above the sea level, at a place where any private telecommunication network was not available. She was thinking about her graduate friends, Vinay- who came from a village, the son of a farmer who struggled so hard to get a degree so that he can have a government job and make his father proud. Vidisha- the girl, who fought with her parents, denied getting married at a juvenile age of 19 just to get right education. Adrima- the friend, who badly needed financial assistance to complete her education, she was respected by entire college as she was pursuing a private job along with a degree. These people were a living epitome of perseverance, efforts and sincerity but they all lost in the battle against corruption. A battle where qualified and diligent people like them are left unemployed and people like Mrs. Sharma who could barely speak a word of English correctly was teaching English Literature in 9<sup>th</sup> standard.

RIP to the quality education which is a basic right of every Indian student. Right to equality, right to freedom, right to education and so many more but are these rights implemented rightly? Who is ensuring the rights of these rights? Poor rights, they are left at the mercy of corrupted souls and bribed aptitudes.

Shivgaura was already overwhelmed by the bribe story of Mrs. Sharma and to add up to her agony the clever lady from Kanpur came up with another story- How she handled her duty in election. For Shivgaura , it was like watching a web series on soothing criminals. In 2014, Mrs. Sharma had her first election duty. The candidate who stood in the election was an acquaintance of Mr. Sharma; he happened to come at their place and joined his hands and requested humbly to her. Madam, Dhyan Rakh lena ( Mam, kindly take care of my candidature!)

Bang on! This is it. Mrs. Sharma's ego was so easy to be pleased, during her election duty when the votes were casted; they closed the booth half an hour

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early and misused the EVM (electronic voting machine) ensuring to cast more than 400 fake votes. After knowing the ground realities of wicked life, Shivgaura was no more proud to be a part of a democratic nation. No wonder why thousands of Indians wish to settle in abroad and never plan to come back.

How strange are the paths to Kedarnath, a gold medalist who has never cheated in her life was sharing her room with a corrupted woman who showed no signs of guilt and shame while narrating her upsetting stories. Irony is both of them are here to worship Lord Shiva. It just reminded Shivgaura of the traditional mythological stories of Lord Shiva that depicts that he was worshipped by angels, demons and spirits. He was loved by all.

Wednesday

3:00 AM

Koyal Aunty and Shivgaura started to get ready. Mr.Agasthya was already prepared for moving ahead. In order to protect themselves from the harsh cold winds, they covered themselves well and wore all the warm clothes they bought along with them.

Waving a good bye to Mrs. Sharma and her stories, they started to look out for hiring Ponies. It was dark as there were no street lights to support their endeavors. The things became a little more difficult for the family as they missed to buy torch lights available with the local vendors. Mr.Agasthya and Shivgaura were standing near a shop; the shopkeeper was trustworthy man who was maintaining a locker for the travelers. The tourist can vacate their costly rooms and keep their luggage safely for a cost of 50rs with this man. The daughter and father were busy making the entries on the register and collecting the safety card number, suddenly a group of travelers rushed in, yelling at the pedestrians to walk at sides and be careful of Ponies. It was a moment full of chaos and rude haphazard.

As she turned back, Shivgaura realized Koyal Aunty is missing.

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Dad. Dad! Where is Koyal Aunty? Can you see her?

Fearful Shivgaura started to scream Koyal Aunty's name all around in order to find her. At first, they decided to move a few meters so as to find her but then Mr. Agasthya thought about going back. Let us search her at the hotel. Within next 5 minutes Shivgaura was helplessly troubled. She tried calling her mobile by borrowing mobile from a stranger but to her misfortune Koyal's phone was switched off. If you are lucky, your mobile might become reachable. The only network that works in those mountains is BSNL. Tears started to roll from Shivgaura's cheeks as she began to think about the atrocious possibilities- rape, robbery, kidnapping, murder!

Oh my God! She almost ran madly to find her and took a deep sigh of relief when she found her standing near a roadside pole.

Aunty! Why the hell are you standing here? How could you just leave us this way? Shivgaura expressed her unease.

I am so sorry sweetheart, I just felt that you guys have already moved ahead and I am left behind. My apologies dear! Koyal aunty touched her head affectionately.

Never ever leave us again. Shivgaura almost jumped on the 49 year old lady and hugged her tightly.

4:30 AM

Blimey!

The horseman tied a bunch of jaggery to the horse and they were all set to climb Kedarnath. The Ponies usually walk in pair. Koyal Aunty and Mr. Agasthya were sitting on the pair of Ponies. Shivgaura got a horse. Her horse was a white sporty creature. The steep valley of Kedarnath was scary and staggering at the same time. One wrong move by your horse has the power to end your life.

Oops! Did I forget to tell you that these Ponies and Horses actually slip? Every time Shivgaura saw a skidding Pony she would miss her mother more. The

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horsemen have given a few instructions to entire family on balancing their weight while the horse climbs or descend. Unsure about Aunty and Dad, Shivgaura was following it religiously like the holy bible of horse riding. It will take 3 hours to climb 16.5 km with Ponies; the remaining 1.5 Km is to be walked again. The Ponies will drop you at the Pony stand.

If you have never tried an adventurous journey before, you should definitely try going to kedarnath temple riding on a Pony. Shivgaura was sure about giving this advice to all her friends, relatives and colleagues. Within an hour she developed a special bond with her horse. She caresses him gently and loved the warm feel of his coat. She was enjoying the scenic beauty all around her and pampering him from time to time.



Raja: The Horse with Horseman

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**Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains un-awakened. – Anatole France**

There were hundreds of horsemen in the region working daily for their bread and butter. Everyone had a different relationship with their domesticated animals. These Ponies and Horses had a special names, unique signals and ways of communication that was a secret code between them and their owners.

While some of the horsemen were very kind and loving towards their horses calling them as Beta (son) Laado (daughter) and treating them with utter love and respect, others were horribly brutal abusing them with such complicated cruel words that they won't even understand. They were hitting their ponies with sticks and hunters. It is a painful site for every soft-hearted person. Shivgaura was missing John Abraham.

No, he is not her boyfriend but you can consider him as a Star crush. John is a model turned Bollywood actor, who works with PETA, an animal right organization. He speaks up for animals and endorses the ideology of loving them. Ignoring a hot looking man with a kind heart is quite impossible especially when you are a single young woman. Shivgaura made a note in her mind- I would definitely write a letter to John requesting him to visit Kedarnath once and look at the pathetic conditions of these poor Ponies and do something for them.

When I will reach the temple, I will pray for Raja (the horse). I will ask God to bless Raja instead of blessing me. People visit CharDham for the sake of salvation, ideally these Hill people who carry others on their back and shoulder and these horsemen and their Ponies should get the benison of salvation. They bear so much of pain and bring the tourist to this holy destination. Ummm.... Maybe I will also pray for mom, she is alone at home and I am missing her so much. Ohh... I also need to pray for my very close friend Anupam, who is 37 and still single. He is such a lovely guy. Dear God, you really need to get him married now. Shivgaura was all lost in her childlike hopes and fantasies. Everything was becoming clear and more exciting as now she could see those mountains covered in snow.

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Nature is so bewildering. Just 10 hours away from Gaurikund and Kedarnath , there in Rishikesh people are living in AC and celebrating summers. At Kedarnath, the snow white beauty and lush green mountains are mesmerizing thousands of tourists. The poetic souls are chirping the songs of benevolence and love is the magic unconsciously ruling all terrains.

**An honest man is always a child- Socrates**



**Only a child sees things with perfect clarity, because it hasn't developed all those filters which prevent us from seeing things that we don't expect to see. – Douglas Adams**

Chapter 5- The Queue of Corruption

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**If something can corrupt you, you are corrupted already. - Bob Marley.**

7:00 AM

Shivgaura and Raja's association was now coming to an end. They have reached the Pony Stand. It was for the last time that she caressed him and waved a good bye. It was time to walk. Shivgaura was bouncing out of happiness; she was delighted like a child. While Mr. Agasthya and Koyal Aunty were slowly and steadily strolling further with frequent breaks for rest, it looked like Shivguara has turned to Pony herself. Elevated with joules of energy, she was blooming like a little bud, eager to explore the world and future possibilities.

Clicking pictures, making videos, celebrating the arrival she was lost in the eternal vibrancy of the valley. Unlike a normal pilgrim who is overwhelmed by the ideas of purifying himself, highly focused on religious pursuits, Shvguara was behaving as if she is at her best friend's home, totally carefree in absolute comfort. If you are particular about norms, rituals, rules and conduct; you won't like this upgraded immature version of Shivgaura. She was overjoyed and it was visible from her body language. Childlike pure pleasures barely understand age related restrictions. When you are happy, you are all about positive energy and extended spirituality.

Intoxicated by the mystic purity of the Himalayas, shivgaura was paving ahead happily on her own, she almost forgot that her family members are along with her. She looked irresponsible towards their needs. Perhaps it was not her fault, it is the beauty and ugliness of emotions, they have the power to make us look foolish and vulnerable. At one moment they turn an individual to an altruistic sacrificing person, like a mother, father or an elder; at other they frighten the realms of reality by stimulating the beast within- rapists, gangsters, criminals.

An Angel or a demon, maybe we are nothing more than emotions overpowered by thoughts and vice versa.

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Owing to high altitude, the situation was becoming troublesome for Koyal Aunty. She was finding it very difficult to walk taking frequent breaks at almost every 10<sup>th</sup> step. Mr. Agasthya booked a Pithu for her in 500 bucks. It was 8:00 AM and Shivgaura found a huge line but she couldn't see any temple. When Koyal aunty arrived, she sat for a while at a small shop, a kind of tent serving tea, biscuits, water and Maggie.

Shivgaura asked Koyal Aunty to stand in the queue, once she is ready. I will just explored this place and find out where is the temple for this line seems to be a never ending story. She conveyed and started to move.

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It appeared to be an insane line. She has never seen such a queue before, even a child could tell that it will take 3-4 hours for a person standing at the last point in the line to reach and finally see the Shivling in the temple and of course it won't be easy to stand for so long in the chilling weather of Kedar. The stick that most of the pedestrians carried with them while climbing was looking like a boon when you can actually see how people are using them to shift their 50-60% body weight while waiting in the never ending queue. Of course 15-20 people were surely moving and coming out in every 5 minutes from the temple but it appeared like it is making no difference in the size of the queue. For any operations or mathematics student, this line was a strange puzzle because it was as stagnant as a pole. On closer observation, one realize that people who travel to Kedarnath usually travel in groups, so actually 1 youngster from the group is standing in the queue and elderly folks, women, children who are part of his group are sitting somewhere nearby. As the line moves closer to the temple, they start joining and become an active member of the passively moving bizarre.

Shivgaura observed the entire phenomenon with all her patience. This looks hectic and troublesome to a city girl who doesn't even remember when was the last time she stood in queue? Immediately she started to wonder upon her heedless and ignorant approach towards digital revolution.

Feeling hungry? Cool. Call McDonalds. Party at home; let's buy some pizzas from Pizza Hut app. Feeling bored? Time to shop from Amazon. Need money; here we go with top class banking from Axis Bank. Name it and she has it on her phone. Just a thumb away from all the pleasures and delights on earth. She already had e-books like Shiva trilogy, 7 secrets of shiva in her phone. Even mythological excitement of a sophisticated level is also available online; she was merely a few clicks away from blockbuster shows like Mahakali, Devo k Dev- Mahadev. Unfortunately this time Shivgaura was looking for some real life experience. In the real world which is not as swift as her virtual reality she has to stand in line for the next 4 hours.

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