

# Param

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The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.

- Hellen Keller

I had the first opportunity to attend several of Swami Samarpananandji's lectures in a course for the executive participants at IIM Indore. Swamiji is a champion of the rare art of presenting deep spiritual thoughts and lessons smoothly through simple anecdotes and stories. After "Tiya - A Parrot's Journey Home", he reveals his knowledge and talent once again in Param. While the story is full of soothing anecdotes and words, it also brings out some tough lessons of life.

Admired by everyone for his technology savviness, Param is a person who has lost his real identity somewhere in the cyberworld, realising this only at his surprise answer to his friend Jing's question - what would you like to do if you were to die in seven days (and with it the thought, what stops you from doing it now, in Param's mind)? This sets Param off on a life changing journey during which he meets numerous characters and lives unforeseen experiences.

Through thought provoking one liners (a selected collection is presented in the following Table) Swamiji persuades the reader to reconsider the unsocial impact of the largely accepted 'modern' style of living. Today's bizarre truth that "people of The City never stuck to a job or relationship for long" represents the restlessness in people's minds while moving from one place to another, and from one person to another, in a never ending search for the elusive mental peace.

Poppy, the continuously barking dog, represents our inner voice, the conscience, which is always trying to guide us to do the right thing, but which we human beings often choose to ignore, just like we ignore a dog barking in the street. Poppy leads Param to The Village, and later, also back to the railway station, representing our conscience's continuous faithfulness to us; of its being with us in all our journeys.

The story of the fight between jackfruits and pumpkins, which is resolved when both of them realise that they are fruits, reminds one of the otiose struggle between segments of mankind across the planet, however, with little hope of their being as lucky as the mentioned fruits! The story of the clod of earth and the worm highlights the purifying pain that one has to go through before achieving proximity to the Divine, for which there are no short cuts.

Swamiji hilariously redefines friends as "close, casual, and cyber" (neither close nor casual!). The megacity's citizens sleep overnight and "get up drained and exhausted" in the morning! The plight of new generation is brought out in the words: "India, the land of wisdom, is struggling to become the land of illusions. Everyone is trying to become what he is not, instead of being what he is." A concept elaborated further in the Mask party later in the story.

Chilli and Polta, two village kids, remind one continuously of the immature child in each of us. Polta is in continuous pursuit of money and fame, the short-cut way! And, Chilli, reflects our 'get the desired result, somehow, anyhow' side pulling the meaning of 'ends justify the means' a stretch too long! Once, Chilli brings in a (stolen) pumpkin as gift for Param to get good marks in his exam!

Subtly, Swamiji raises the concern that "...young people in India seeking employment never asked what job they were supposed to do. They only wanted to know the pay and perks"!

Polta's creative thinking, which we perhaps systematically drain out from our children in the schools, is demonstrated in his mutiplicity of answers to the numbers that can be derived from the use of only two and three (two thirds, 1, 1.5, 5, 6, 8, 9, etc). In my own

experience, I have tried asking students, what would be forty nine squared (only one student, who had had some lessons in Vedic mathematics from a Guru, was able to answer in one of the sections I taught). And, once explained how a common formula learnt by all,  $(a - b)^2$  whole squared, can be used to find it mentally in a few seconds, students are awed! Surprisingly, on asking what would be one hundred and fifty seven squared next, extremely few are able to use  $(a + b + c)^2$  whole squared to work it out mentally!

Swamiji points out the drop in our society's moral values and its cause through Kisan's voice: "...the morality of a moralist lies in finding the immorality of others." Also, through the Pandit's voice, Swamiji explains that "Achievement inspires awe in those who understand it, and invites ridicule from those who do not understand." "I will shoot you" coming from the village drunkard, Tarang, reflects in the precise words how human beings feel several times every day in interacting with their bosses, colleagues, and so on!

### Table

- Jing and he (Param) had grown up together and continued to be good friends, which was rather unusual for the younger generation of The City.
- People of The City never stuck to a job or a relationship for long.
- Yesterday's real is today's virtual, and today's virtual is tomorrow's real. There is no real difference between the real and virtual.
- Collective cheating is mere inflation, while individual cheating is cheating - something that must not be tolerated.
- The train has existed even before this earth was born, and will continue to exist even after it dies, because it is an idea. And ideas know no death.
- Behind the suavity lies the savage. Scratch a little, and you get the fangs of the barbarian instead of the smile of the gentleman.
- Poppy, the dog: "To be loved and caressed we must be owned and chained..." represents the human dilemma about love which often reduces to being a desire to own and possess (or lust?).
- I can't read. That saves me from encountering a lot of lies.
- Spoken through Chilli's voice: "Those who can, bribe and cheat; those who cannot, pray." and "Success matters; not the path we take to attain it", similar to the profound quote "The end excuses any evil" by Sophocles (in Electra, c. 409 BC), and more popular in another form as "Ends justify the means".
- Through Chilli's voice again: "Tell us something about your vices and sins. We don't have much of those here in the villages!" Also, not failing to take a dig at Param's impatience by asking him whether he is married and following it with "My father says he learnt patience only after his marriage. Now it is clear to me why you are so impatient with us."
- Everyone is trying to be what he is not!
- Through Ludo Baba (partially re-worded): "Society teaches to serve yourself and talk about others. But the hidden dimensions of life lie in serving others and talking to your own self - silently".
- Ordinary people feast, but the great ones fast.
- Mobility sometimes requires the support of stability.

The introduction of Maddhu is subtly followed by the example of a bird, Mynah, trapped in a bush. Param takes care of the trapped bird and heals her with just a little effort, demonstrating the little help, support and guidance that today's lost souls, like Maddhu, need to return on the right track but which our society is unable to provide. Polta's desire to keep it in a cage reflects our society's system of dumping criminals in jails and forgetting about them instead of developing effective mechanisms of corrective and curative systems. Param gets bruised in pulling the bird out of the bush reflecting the mud slung on anyone in our society who tries to uplift a lost soul. We have rapidly forgotten the words of our wisest, Mahatma Gandhi, "Hate the crime, and not the criminal."

Suyash, the wise cobbler, reminds us of the dignity of work and that it is not important how others look at you; what is far more important is how you look upon yourself! The village idlers at the tea shop, who have learnt to blame the government, karmas, and god for everything, portray today's misdirected youth in our society.

The example of Ferris Wheel portrays inevitable ups and downs in our lives, with the common complaint of dearth of happiness and abundance of sorrow, represented through the words: "...how can a kilo of delight compensate for the giga of fright?" It teaches

us that the ride is circular and an up after a down, just like a down after an up, is inevitable.

The debate between a river and a tree represents the link between perpetual motion (the river), eternal stability (the tree) and their connect with all life forms in the universe. Sona, the deer, represents the large numbers of (gold like) distractions that sway us from our goal, at times even making us forget our friends and family (Poppy, in the story). Swamiji reminds us how fragile the thread of relationship between two human beings is, one storm and it is broken. While it can be repaired again but a sore 'knot' remains in it permanently. Indra, the rope climber, reminds us not to forget our childhood dreams and pursue them. I already see that the story has many more dimensions which will reveal themselves when I read it again!

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