

POWER OF WORDS & PERSONAL STRUGGLE

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At that time I was studying philosophy in Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth (JDV), Pune. I had already developed my habit of reading a lot on a variety of subjects. For the book-lovers like me JDV was a paradise of books and hundreds of Indian and foreign periodicals. Over and above, the JDV Librarian, Fr. Josef Schleigal, S.J. was a waking encyclopedia of knowledge. He knew the contents of thousands of books and periodicals! If you want to read books or articles on a particular topic, you tell about it to Fr. Schleigal. He will get you the books and periodicals on the topic and even tell you the page numbers of a particular book or the title of the article in a periodical and their author!

The Chennai based news weekly 'New Leader' announced an all India level essay competition. According to the conditions of the competitions I wrote and sent an essay of about 1000 words. The topic of the essay was something like "The Place of Rituals and Worship in the Life of People".

Before writing the essay I had taken the help of the JDV Librarian Fr. Schleigal in finding and reading some books and magazine articles on the topic.

I was able to write a good essay as I was much enriched by my readings. With knowledge gained from books and magazines I combined my observations and personal experiences. So I was happy with my essay and I was thrilled with the result of the essay competition that my essay fetched the first prize!

There was also a similar essay competition announced by the same New Leader in the second year of my philosophy study. This time the topic was "The Importance of Reading and Periodicals in the Life of People". Again I took part in the essay competition and once more I won the first prize! Then, my joy was boundless when I saw my whole essay printed with my photo in the New Leader which was widely circulated in India. With the prize money I was able to help a friend then studying journalism in Poona University. Actually, I had totally forgotten about helping my friend. So I was pleasantly surprised to read in an article written by my friend in DOOT mentioning the help I gave him with the prize-money when he was in need.

During the summer holidays in 1972 before going to study philosophy at Pune I had gone to Chennai and worked in New Leader office for six weeks under the guidance of the Editor, Dr. James Kottoor. Dr. Kottoor was then among the very few professionally trained journalists in India. He had a post-graduate degree from Marquette University in USA. Then, during the following summer vocation I had worked in the editorial office of Poona Herald (now Maharashtra Herald) under its veteran Editor, Mr. David for a month and a half. Then, on every Thursday, that is, on our weekly off day, I used to go to the journalism department of Poona University and attended the lectures of some professors with special permission.

With these kinds of engagements I got interested deeply in journalism and I decided to study it professionally. Examining various prospectives of journalism courses offered by different universities, I thought that the Poona University was the best with one year of post-graduate

degree course of Bachelor of Journalism. My best friend had done the B. J. course.

I was convinced of the power of the written word by winning two first prizes in national level essay competitions and by working two summer holidays in newspaper offices at Chennai and Pune. People appreciated my mastery of the English language for its style and word-power. So much so, before finishing my three years of philosophy, theology combined studies at Pune I wrote a long letter to my Provincial Superior at Ahmedabad expressing my desire to study professional journalism at Poona University. I felt that I have put before my superior my case in great detail with all necessary informations.

“Brother Varghese, now without thinking of journalism you fully concentrate on your philosophy studies. I will see to the rest”, I got a very short reply from my superior. I was very upset with my superior’s letter without any concrete reference to the things which I have written in my letter. I had worked hard to collect a lot of information about various journalism courses available in India and I had explained in my letter that the Poona University offered the best journalism programme in one year. I have often heard my superiors in Gujarat that we need a professionally trained young journalist to work in Gujarat especially to edit and manage the Jesuit family magazine, DOOT.

I was thinking that my letter will have a good effect on my Provincial Superior and he would appreciate it. I thought that I made my superior’s job easy by choosing a much needed area of service and a most suitable training programme to prepare myself for it. When it was difficult to find young Jesuits to enter into professional journalism I have been very helpful to my superiors in offering myself to enter into the field and do appropriate study. So I was hoping that without any hesitation my superior will grant me permission to study journalism in Poona University.

But, instead of thanking me for my letter and appreciating the things I have written in my letter, my superior in a short note just reminded me about my duty and responsibility to study philosophy! I felt very bad about my superior’s letter. I thought that there is no resemblance between his talking big and the reality. I even told a few of my Jesuit friends doing philosophy with me that the Superior’s talk of the importance of the mass media and wanting to young Jesuits in the media is all rubbish and hogwash. It is all empty talk and nothing more!

I was very angry about such double talk of my superiors. I have proved my competence in writing by winning not once but twice in all India essay competitions. But instead of appreciating and encouraging me, my superiors have just put me down! I had worked hard in collecting all necessary information and had written the Provincial Superior a long letter. But I did not get the desired response! I was shocked and totally disappointed.

For many days I experienced an internal commotion and intellectual struggle in my mind. “Varghese, you have done your part of the job well. You have presented your case in all clarity. Now let your superior do what he thinks best for you. You have taken the vow of obedience to live according to his will and command. In obedience you lead your life happily accepting both what you like and also what you do not like. It is not proper for you to grumble against the desire and the will of your superior. While you try to walk on the foot steps of St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus, who wishes you to accept joyfully even the wishes of your superior, your

protest is not becoming of you”. With such reflection and meditation, I found peace of mind. So I plunged once more into my study of philosophy as if nothing has happened.

After two months of these traumatic experiences, I got a second letter from my superior. The letter said that arrangements have been made for you to go to England and study journalism at London. So you may start working to get a passport and visa to England.

This second letter from my superior brought me double the joy than the experience of great shock and inner torment with his first letter! I had not even dreamed about going abroad for studies! For me it was not a small thing to study professional journalism abroad. I accept the proposal of my superior with great joy. I felt at that moment that my getting upset by the superior’s first letter was totally unnecessary. I repented my complaint to my friends against my superior. It was good that my complaint fortunately remained limited to my close friends and me.

As suggest by my superior, I started correspondence with London School of Journalism and got admission. Meanwhile my Superior through his contacts in Spain arranged to pay the fee to London School of Journalism and for my stay at Southwell Jesuit House at London. (contact the author: ciss@satyam.net.in)

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