

ready for the last question. This will give you hundred crores. You have already won fifty crores, without using a single life line. This is remarkable. It has never happened in the history of Kaun Banega Shatkoti Mahamani. In fact, the last person to win the highest amount could win only ten crores. He used up all his life lines.” “Now, Mr Dev, get ready for the hundred crore question,” boomed Amitabh's invisible but very palpable voice. The audience watched with bated breath. The nation watched, on umpteen TV and LCD screens, Dev play the game for hundred crores. “The question, Mr Dev, for hundred crores, is on the screen.” The signature tune of the most popular game show had a special sensational ring to it. Bachchan read out the question and the four options. Nobody, not even those who had cleared their IAS Mains and were waiting for the Interview letter had even heard of this question. “Mr Dev, you have already won fifty crores. You have all your life lines intact. You can use all of them, one after the other. But play to win. Remember, if you lose, you'll come hurtling down to two lakhs. Please play only if you are two hundred per cent sure.” (Inwardly, Bachchan was calculating. He received three crores for three episodes every week which made him richer by thirty six crores in one month, give or take a few crores. And here was this fellow who stood to win, given his previous performance on the show, a hundred crores in one episode. Amitabh wished he were as bright as Dev.) Loudly he said, “So what have you decided? Will you play?” (He actually wished Dev would rather not play.) The crowd in front of TVs and LCDs all over India was on the verge of near-death due to palpitation caused by mixed feelings of fear and anticipation of proxy victory. “I'll go for D,” Dev replied coolly. “Computer mahashaya, D ko lock kiya jaye,” boomed Big B. All of India missed several heartbeats. Bachchan himself felt he was going to have a heart attack. (He had checked the right answer on his computer screen.) He made a long face, the crowd in front of TVs and LCDs had a near heart attack. But like a fine actor, that he is, he shouted, “Mr Dev you have won a hundred crores,” came the voice of Big B. Young and old, men and women started shouting and jumping. Men and women in the streets had a gay time. They caught hold of any man or woman and crushed them in tight embraces. Inside the KBC studio, it was a riot. The audience entered the prohibited area and Adarsh Dev crushed a young lady, (he took her, mistakenly, in the rush of excitement, for a young Mrs Dev) into his arms, on the sets, in full light. Bachchan was shouting something at the top of his voice but he could not be heard in the melee.

“What is this, who are you? Idiot,” a young lady was shouting at Adarsh Dev who had caught her in a tight embrace. There was bedlam in the Mall. “I have won a hundred crores, mam,” shouted Dev as he released the young lady whom he had mistaken for Mrs Dev. Like Archimedes, of

course with his clothes on, Dev was only shouting his Eureka words: “Hundred crores, mam.”

“This man is insane. Put him in an asylum,” the young lady in the Mall was shouting at the Security Guards who had come rushing on hearing the lady shout.



Three Experiences with Snakes

- KV Raghupathi

From my childhood days I have been taught that snakes are poisonous and a mere bite would instantaneously take away life from body. When I grew young and passed out from my university holding a postgraduate degree, I looked for a job and it never embraced me much to my disappointment. So, I was thrown into the world of freelance teaching from which I had earned a few bucks with which I eked out my living. Besides, I had undertaken freelance editing which fetched me a few hundreds that supplemented the income from my freelance teaching.

In the evenings I used to take long walks, often venturing into Reserve forest that abetted the university at the north side close to the Seven Hills, popularly known as Tirumala Hills abetting the foot of Tirupati town. In the long walks I followed field paths, fallow lands and roughened land with sparsely grown trees, watching the varied birds, gathering flowers and learning their names.

I dreaded these walks as much as I loved them. Sometimes I walked seven or eight miles in the lonely places with hardly any stick in my hand. I walked stealthily and cautiously watching some crevice in the rocks, high grass, boulders, tall twisted trees and thick bushes in fear of some slithering form would crawl or appear coiled or some loathsome head that would pop out. I found myself in a constant state of terror – terror so real that it actually caused sickness in me.

There was none to sympathise with me. But I became familiar with all creatures of the woods and fields.

The hour of deliverance from my terror came slowly and steadily as I came into contact with snakes. Three such experiences I would like to recount here.

First was a fateful experience. It was a sunless day and the sky was overcast. It looked all pleasant for me and I decided to walk eight kilometers to a nearest hillock across the fields on which a small temple was located. I decided to visit this temple. I undertook my long walk at three in the afternoon and I wore long sleeved white cotton *jibba*. I

walked along the main road, crossed it after a mile and entered into a rough path that went along the fields on either sides jotted with old neem, banyan and tamarind trees.

After walking four miles, I reached the hillock passing through a tiny village at the foot. And I was alone. A rough path had been carved on it with twists and turns leading to the top. It was four when I reached the foot and no human being had been sighted around. All villages must be having a siesta after having a Sunday afternoon spicy meal. Nevertheless, with redoubled self-prompted courage, I ventured to take the rough man-made path on the hillock leading to the top. As I treaded, I stopped after every few steps and watched the surrounding green fields. It was a feast to the eyes. As I climbed up and up, my joy knew no bounds as the beautiful landscape studded with green fields and trees had expanded.

On the top, the temple looked like a ghost place. The temple was open with no compound wall and I saw the presiding deity, Lord SubramanayaSwamy through the locked grilled door from outside standing at the *Dwajasthambam*. After sitting on the outstretched platform built with granite stone, mostly for conducting *yajnas* and *pujas*, I retraced my steps back to the foot of the hillock.

The fateful time had arrived. As I was coming down, I stopped at a boulder unable to resist the temptation of the beautiful landscape. I was keeping my two legs apart, watching and making an eagle's survey. The sky was still overcast. Suddenly a faint sound of some slithering form crawling stealthily from some crevice in the rocks fell into my ears at that hour of silence. Only a brown eagle was spotted soaring and enjoying the evening sky over the green fields.

Sensing some creature, my eyes fell upon the ground, and to my horror, a long snake was gently passing through the space between my two legs. I froze with terror. My heart pounded and a feeling of awful sickness swept over me. "I shall die", I thought. In the few seconds before I moved off, I heard the quiet but stern whisper of my inner voice: "If you dare show a sign of fear, you will be finished for good. Do exactly I tell you. There's not a thing to be afraid of. Stay there like a frozen body, like a statue. Let the snake pass, and then you are no harmed." At that moment I listened to the voice and obeyed the command without questioning.

My second encounter was much more frightening that ripped through my nerves. It was a literal death experience.

In my utter despair of not having got a job, I dabbled in spirituality. I read esoteric literature and contemplated on the meaning of existence. For contemplation I chose secluded places infested with moderately

grown trees and bushes.

The Botanical Garden in my university was an ideal place for my spiritual thrust. Every morning I used to stroll among the trees and varied plants and occupy the divan which was installed on a raised mound. The place was fairly grown with trees, creepers and thorny bushes. All that had provided me the ambience of woods and climate for contemplation.

It was a fateful September Monday. I walked inside the garden and sat on the divan, the much liked spot by me. As I was contemplating on the sounds coming from the bushes, the rustling of leaves, the falling of leaves, the flitting of warblers, babblers, doves, bulbuls and the blowing gentle breeze, some slithering form crawled its long body from low grass. It was a male cobra. The mere sight had created tremors in my body. Slowly dragging its long, fairly grown body, it came near me and paused and lifted its hood in my direction. "I am finished" I told myself.

The distance between me and the snake was hardly six feet. It raised its hood almost to a height of four feet and looked at me intently swaying the upper body gently in the zephyr. What more dreadful experience one could have in one's life!

I froze with fear. My heart palpitated fast. Nevertheless I was sitting erect with my two legs dangling. I thought it would soon move towards me and coil my legs and body. And that would be the end of my life, I thought. I prayed a while, I invoked the blessings of my house deity. All that was over, the snake was there before me with its hood lifted up and gently swaying its lifted body from the ground.

Soon I remembered the promptings of my inner voice at my first experience and sat like a frozen fish, motionless. All my thoughts of my saving myself had just melted like an ice cube in the hot sun. I became emptied and I learnt what a thoughtless state is - the Buddha state! Buddha must have been pleased, if ever he was alive in spirit around with my having achieved this blissful state effortlessly for which many monks waste their life by self-mortification, of course, with the help of a snake. Until then I had read it in esoteric writings, and it was a mere theoretical concept. So, I was excited at this marvelous achievement which I would never have thought of.

At this point my body almost gave way. The snake after long stay in that position - I did not know how long - shifted its gaze, downed its head on the ground, and crawled slowly dragging its long body, darting its forked tongue. "I am the one, I am not scared." I said hopefully. I shall never know what power in heaven came to my help at that frightful moment.

The third was still more dreadful. On a fateful evening, the sky was hazy, I was returning from my long walk like a tired bull after long grazing. I was particularly fascinated by the weaver birds' nests that looked like hanging bottles from an electric wire. For long I had a curiosity to look at