



Of love and the melon metaphor

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Have you ever chanced upon a fruit that goes by the name *kharbooja* in the northern parts of India? That round, firm, uniformly striped (though the stripes themselves could be a little awry), orange fruit? In English it is melon. If chosen meticulously, after having attended to the minute details of shape, size, aroma and colour, it could give a refreshing start to a hot summer's day.

But that's what everyone knows about the fruit. Nothing intriguing. What fascinates me, however, is the thought that this fruit could be a great metaphor of love. Let me pose a question, at this juncture. If you are ever asked to buy this fruit, would you lay your hand on a *kharbooja* that has already been sliced? It would surely not be considered worthy of the price with even the smallest chink in its wholeness.

Assuming that love is whole just as a *kharbooja*, we can arguably say in the same vein that love cannot become complete if it's missing any one of its dimensions; implying that there are 'many slices' to love, or dimensions, to put it in a more abstract way. Love between a daughter and a father is one dimension (or slice), between siblings it is another, and the love of a pet and its owner could be yet another one. The list is never-ending. So, no matter how you slice it, love can become whole only when it is experienced in its completeness.

Sometimes, however, it so happens that one dimension supersedes love's other forms at some phase in our lives. But even then we must understand (keeping in mind the *kharbooja* analogy) that the overpowering form is just one dimension, or slice. Love, just as a *kharbooja*, cannot be defined by one of its forms only, as that would be limiting love to just one perception of how it tastes. Understanding love in this way, as an experience like savouring a *kharbooja* in its wholeness, could be quite exhilarating a thought, and a less heart-breaking one for those who are not satisfied with a slice or two, and wish to experience other forms of love.

Therefore, to put things in perspective – go forth and partake in love!

Love manifests in varying forms and degrees, and all of them, not just one, make it a wholesome experience for us. That is how it teaches us to embrace people we love just as they are, because each of them is a part of that abstract bigger reality we try to define as love.

Despite this idea, we all have to pay a price, figuratively so to say, to know how it feels to be in love. So, even if we realise, during the course of experiencing love, that it was not worth the price, one need not give up on love, for there are other forms that we have not yet tried. If one slice of it has not stood up to our liking, never mind, there are plenty of other sides of love that we have yet to chance upon.

The only problem that I find in comparing love with a *kharbooja*, which is always the case with metaphors, is that *kharbooja* is a thing in itself. Once we have partaken of it, it's gone. We can always consume another if we are not satisfied with the first and relish the experience again. With love, it is not so. It is not a thing. To experience it, you've to give life to it, with the person through whom you are trying to find it. That's where the comparison ends. You can't consume it and be done with it; then you're seeing love through a narrow, selfish lens.

Love is a lived experience that you experience with somebody. One dimension of this lived experience could be more fulfilling than the other, but that's how and what love is. That is exactly what makes love complete. Should we forsake, therefore, one dimension for a better and more fulfilling one? The answer can't be a plain yes or no. It might be a bit allusive, but it's out there for all of us to seek and explore!

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The miracles of life and the tragedies of death

PINGALI GOPAL

An unwed mother underwent an illegal abortion and delivered a live 500-gram foetus. Someone noted a moving 'product' in the dustbin and brought it to our hospital. As a basic relief manoeuvre, the foetus got a table and a small bulb above for warmth. Everyone waited for the child to stop moving. It did not for 48 hours. So, we put an oxygen mask on the child and started feeding through a tube.

Undoubtedly, it surprised everyone as the girl refused to die – defying all scientific rules. The staff started feeding her randomly whenever any member had the time. The attempt was to make the baby comfortable in the 'last moments', which were simply not coming.

The cry became increasingly vigorous and we started a more planned sort of feeding. The only question, a mixture of hope and apparent cruelty, in the hospital those days was, 'Is she gone?' The answer remained firmly in the negative.

Later, the hospital owner took the girl to her house and started wonderful personal care. Six months later, she weighed a healthy 3 kg. Along the way were a few collapses, some near-death episodes, and a miraculous recovery each time.

A good couple later adopted the child. The child did not have the slightest physical or mental abnormality at one year of age, which is when we last saw her. This child who had no business to live defied every single law of medicine.

As a side story, the husband came to know about his wife's pre-marital affair and left her. The sad mother, facing loneliness and isolation, came to



ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

know that her attempted abortion had failed and made a gentle attempt to reclaim her child. But her parents simply dissuaded her from that.

Another child underwent a complex surgery related to an absent food-pipe, a condition called oesophageal atresia. The surgical aspect was fine,

but she had repeated post-operative collapses and went thrice on a ventilator. The unhappy parents accused us of neglect and improper care as their child was under the government insurance scheme. We were upset, but honouring the parental wishes, shifted the child to a private higher-level hospital in a bigger city.

Money quickly became an issue for the family and they got the baby discharged against medical advice after a few days. They did not come back to us, neither did they go to the government sector as they were advised to do. The family took the child home to

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die. In the village, the family underwent heavy criticism for bringing a dying child out of the hospital. They ran back to the same hospital with a blue, almost lifeless, child. The child revived after resuscitation and ventilation was re-started. Lack of money entered the picture once again even as the hospital went out of its way to help the family out. A very upset father finally took the child away, against medical advice, a second time.

We felt sad and helpless. These are typically difficult times for legally challenged doctors while dealing alone with unusual, aggrieved or sometimes violent families. Society, the media or the law-enforcement agencies simply stamp us guilty until proved

otherwise; and this is scary and depressing. A few weeks later I received a message that the child was doing well and feeding happily. A granny in the village had removed all tubes and started feeding as a solace in the 'end moments' of the crying child. The child, however, had help from other powers. There was no end-moment. One doctor commented wryly after all this saga, "Despite our best efforts, the child survived."

A doctor comes across miracles all his life; hopeless cases turning around wonderfully. The reverse also occurs disturbingly. An otherwise perfectly healthy person just collapses after just a minor intervention; an anaphylactic drug reaction sometimes, or a pre-existing undetected condition manifesting suddenly. In infants, aspiration of food contents into the wind-pipe with sudden death is one of the most distressing events which can happen to the child and the family. And if it happens in a hospital setting, the doctor has a torrid time too.

I realise quite clearly after some years of practice that life and death have their own methods of play beyond the understanding of humans, including doctors. Bless the few doctors who either say, 'I am god' or 'there is no god.' I have joined the majority – surrendering to a higher power – as patients and diseases often times disregard text books and scientific journals.

The miracles of life and the tragedies of death happen so regularly in a doctor's life that I sometimes wonder if we even have a role to play! We think it a cliché when we see on a doctor's prescription, 'I treat and He cures.' But, years down the line, I say, this is the only truth in medicine.

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That order and peace amidst the seeming chaos

Why on a cricket field the game becomes the faith, at least during the phase of childhood

SUNDAR S. NATHAN

Have you ever played cricket on a playground where fifty to sixty kids play all at the same time? You may not have played in one but you must have seen one such playground, for sure.

I've played in one such ground when I was a kid. The number may have crossed 100 today in a similar-size playground. Thanks to fast urban development.

I happened to pass by one such playground recently. The sight brought me a smile instantaneously, rekindled my memory and took me back to my childhood days of playing cricket. And interestingly, it made me draw a parallel between childhood and adulthood, though each on a different milieu.

At first glance, an outsider will notice that it's utter chaos on the ground. There will be five to six different groups

playing cricket at the same time. An onlooker will have no idea who is playing for which group. On watching closely, he or she'll be awestruck to find total order and peace amidst the chaos. What brings the peace to these kids?

Briefly, let's get back to the anatomy of the chaos. Each group is a mix of eight to 15 kids and everyone is completely aware of who the rest of the members of their team are. Each group needs just three sticks for stumps (three lines drawn on the wall does the job as well), a bat and a ball. The group will democratically decide on the rules that they abide for the game, that is, the boundary, total overs per side, team size, and so on. For example, one group will decide to have a smaller boundary but maintain a 2G, 3G (something that was invented years before the spectrum technology came to exist). For the unfortunate ones who don't know,



2G are basically runs granted. If the ball rolls to the shorter boundary, it's two runs granted.

Some groups may have a larger boundary but may play with 'one bounce catch', that is, the batsman is given out if the batsman hits the ball and the fielder catches the ball on the first bounce. Some groups

play only on-side field, where the batsman can get to score runs only on the on-side field. Most groups play with no LBW. Some groups may decide to play 15 overs a side and some other may decide to play eight overs a side. Some groups may shuffle players after a game but others may decide to stick to same side for the day. Some

may go with proper bowling and others may just go with throws instead of bowling. It's all the same cricket with different flavours.

Interestingly, every group very well know their boundary limits, though they are not clearly marked, even as the boundary of other groups overlaps like a complex Venn diagram. No group tries to dominate the other by resorting to violence or intimidate others by using sheer strength. No group tries to allure kids from other groups by playing with expensive balls, bats and stumps. No group canvasses others to follow their way of the game. No one group believes their way of the game is the only way to attain the bliss and the rest are not.

More important, no group ever wants or even intends to gather enough strength, drive others out and occupy the entire playground. Every group respects every other group

and never interferes. On bigger occasions like holidays, tournaments are conducted on the playground. Every group plays against other and the playground is akin to a festival ground.

When children play on such a playground, all that matter to them is their cricket, where the game is their faith and pitch is their *sanctum sanctorum*. It's the sheer bliss of playing cricket within their group. The bliss brings the immense peace amidst chaos. No wonder when people say cricket by itself is a religion in India.

I don't think I need to comment on the parallel that I drew between childhood and adulthood. I do want to mention the fact that we, deep down in our hearts, search for the bliss, which we lost at some point during the transition from childhood to adulthood. Don't we all?

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With next-door neighbours like these...

When you're in an apartment complex, the everyday dilemma involves loving to hate them for their ways

ADITYA MUKHERJEE

The biblical injunction that one should love one's neighbour definitely packs a punch in its intent. After all, nothing could be more edifying and ennobling than living in harmony with neighbours. But what do you do when your neighbours turn out to be uncooperative and insensitive to your needs, and on top of that, brazen it out to make light of your problems?

We live in a second-floor flat. Our third-floor neighbours are a working couple. Their two daughters recently got married. The lady is uptight and prefers to keep to herself. Her husband is genial and social. However, being moneyed and finicky, they frequently carry out re-

novation of their flat, which means everything from dismantling old sanitary fittings in the bathrooms to replacing not-so-old pipes with new ones. And as the labourers go at the job hammer and tongs, the constant assault on our eardrums is enough to reduce us to mental wrecks soon.

That apart, the problem starts when their bathroom drains get clogged, which happens often, and the blocked water find its way to our rooms and, at times, kitchen walls. Over the last eight years, seepage from the top floor to our flat has become a routine affair, with walls of a couple of rooms and a toilet getting damaged. Damp spots on discoloured walls at various places now look like a piece of abstract



painting conjured up by a maverick artist. Like tolerant neighbours, we showed them many a time the condition of our flat, which bore the brunt of

their innovative ideas. We didn't get into any arguments; all we did was to request them to spare a thought for us. But our ordeal was far from over.

One fine morning, my spouse got the shock of her life when she saw the damp balcony wall. On closer inspection, she saw water seeping from the common pipe running through from the top to the ground floor. I went to my neighbour's flat and told the flat owner accordingly. His wife got a little agitated and shrugged off my complaint as baseless, saying there was nothing wrong with the common pipe.

I asked both of them to come down and have a look at our balcony. They said they would but they never came. We called a plumber and tried to fix the problem. He expressed his helplessness saying that our top floor neighbour can only clear the clogged pipe. After a week or so the seepage stopped as

suddenly as it had started. It was clear the problem had begun from the top floor but they were not willing to acknowledge it.

Our patience has started wearing thin. My wife suggested some time back that we sell this flat and go somewhere else to live. She felt that our neighbour had been blatantly taking advantage of our good neighbourliness.

Ours is now a case of once bitten, twice shy. With paint peeling off damaged walls, we can't make up our minds whether to get the white washing done. These days both my wife and I inspect our rooms and balcony walls every morning to make sure there are no seepage from our top floor flat.

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