



The Man

By: Arindam Nath

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I don't know his name. Nor, did I prefer to ask him his name. At times, our dress is an indicator of our economic condition. All through the seasons I find the man clad in only one trouser and a half-sleeve shirt and with bare feet. In winter, the man just adds a sweater to his frugal dress habit. His lean and thin figure and untidy grey beard made me confused about his age. First, I thought him a sexagenarian. But, the man is little younger. He is from poor economic strata. In contrast, I am an officer. My bureaucratic mentality prevents me from becoming easy with him. Yet, I can't abstain from thinking about the man whenever I come across him.

I gave him a nick-name, 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin'. It's the subject of a legend. It's concerning the departure or death of a great number of children from the town of Hamelin, Germany, in the Middle Ages. The earliest references describe a piper, dressed in multicolored clothing, leading the children away from the town never to return. In the subsequent periods the story was expanded into a full narrative. The piper is a rat-catcher hired by the town to lure rats away with his magic pipe. When the citizenry refuses to pay for this service, he retaliates by turning his power that he put in his interment on their children, leading them away as he had the rats. This version of the story spread as a fairy tale. The story may reflect a historical event in which Hamelin lost its children. Theories have been proposed suggesting that the Pied Piper is a symbol of the children's death by plague or catastrophe.

There may be other theories, but the reason behind the bestowal of this name by me lies in my first encounter with the man. It was in course of morning walk in a chilly morning in early December I had first seen the man. He was coming from opposite side, and behind the man there was a queue of local youths who now and then pleased him asking some questions. The man was holding a stick, probably for protection against stray dogs. But, it brought my nostalgic memory of childhood days when I preferred to see the coloured picture of books. I compared the sight with the cover-page of classic, 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin'. The Pipe had been replaced by the stick and the children with youths.

The man has many amenable qualities. In course of his morning walk, he carries out another task. The man switches off the street lights for the portion of four to five kilometer road which he generally covers during his worship round. I thought him to be either an employee of Power Department or a casual worker of Agartala Municipal Corporation.

But I loved him and didn't prefer to ask his name. I am a moody person, and his actual name may pose not a suitable one for me. So, I continue to appreciate the activities 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' during morning walk, which both of us performs religiously. One day, I got him alone coming from opposite side. He showed me respect by raising his hand in

the posture of saluting. This pleased me; especially my police personality had been rejuvenated. I said, 'Are you an employee of Power Department?'

He smiled and said, 'No, it's not the case. I do this just to prevent wastage of energy. By putting off about twenty twenty-five switches everyday I can breathe some fresh air as well.'

It pleased me immensely, 'Why can't we emulate him!' On another occasion I was walking just behind 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin'. My intention was to observe his activities. One lady crossed us with her school going kid. She was in a hurry lest the boy miss the school bus. The boy was holding the right hand of her mother and in the process he was coming to the road time and again, and thereby making the boy vulnerable to road accidents. Generally, such mundane issues do not attract our attention. But, the man pointed out this to the woman in polite tone. Apparently, the lady expressed her annoyance, but she brought her son to her left.

It pleased me yet again. I continued my pursuit in the same manner. This time, a group of young boys were coming from opposite side. Seeing the man, they were elated, 'Dadu, Dekha Geche Ni...Dadu, has it been visible?'

He grinned and said, 'Hare Krishna, Hare Rama!'

The answer left me confused. It was the mid of Ramjan. None of the boys looked Mohammedan. So, it was certainly not the question of citing crescent of eid. I asked one of the boys what did they mean by 'Dadu, Dekha Geche Ni...Dadu, has it been visible?'

I was not prepared for the answer. The boys knew that the man got up very early in the morning when there might be some stars studded in the sky. So they enquired if any star was visible that day when he left his house for morning walk. Every question has its human touch and it manifests the mood of questioner.

Another occasion, this time it was a holiday in connection with Deepawali. In the afternoon, I was crossing by the road in front of Dasharath Dev Stadium. I was on foot. The man was in conversation with a middle-aged lady. Her daughter is also married. She seemed to be annoyed with him for interfering in their personal affairs.

'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' is a neighbour of the lady and he knew her daughter from her birth. The girl came to her parent's house in the morning with the promise that she would return father-in-law's house by the time of lighting candles. Both the houses are in close proximity. At the advent of twilight her father-in-law was pressing her for return to which she was hesitating. The man said to the young lady, 'Look, at your house you have your brother and his wife. It's a festive occasion and now you are married. I suppose you should catch a cycle-rickshaw and go to your husband's house.'

Her mother bowed down to the proposal of the man and bade her daughter adieu, but not before uttering some unpleasant words against the man.

Next winter we witnessed unprecedented cold in our State. In the evening I had a meeting at a Government Department which I don't want to name. But, it was an important meeting. Just before I was coming out after the meeting, I received an instruction from my office over my cell to meet with a senior bureaucrat. Since, it was an official assignment I couldn't defer despite my ennui. The fresh mission was in the same complex. Going there I met a surprise. 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' was standing in front of the room as an orderly. He saluted me which I received gleefully. Inside the officer's room, the ambience was kept quite warm with a room-heater. The young bureaucrat had a long chat over telephone with some one of echelon. He was complaining about inconvenience he was facing at his office. So, I had to wait for some time. But, he offered me tea. His tea has some interesting specialties with which I was accustomed. For the sub-ordinate officers' milk-tea are served and for middle level officers' tea-liquor, sugar and milk will come separately. Sometimes, it may accompany lemon pieces. The office orderly can distinguish the type from his order. The personal secretary will be placed into service for Darjeeling tea or coffee for senior officers of his stature. 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' served tea for us treating me in the second category. But, he received some scolding as the tea was not too hot. May be due to my Bengali mentality I found it alright. However, I kept mum.

'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' again paid me respect smilingly when I came out of the room. But, the chilly wind at the corridor didn't pose friendly to me. I felt pity with the man and it made me sad. At night, I sat down before my desktop with intent to read 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' from internet. I had read it long back. But, instead a new story caught my attention. It's a real story. This I am quoting: A VIOLINIST IN THE METRO-A man sat at a metro station in Washington DC and started to play the violin; it was a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, since it was rush hour, it was calculated that thousand of people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

Three minutes went by and a middle aged man noticed there was musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried up to meet his schedule.

A minute later, the violinist received his first dollar tip: a woman threw the money in the till and without stopping continued to walk.

A few minutes later, someone leaned against the wall to listen to him, but the man looked at his watch and started to walk again. Clearly he was late for work.

The one who paid the most attention was a 3 year old boy. His mother tagged him along, hurried but the kid stopped to look at the violinist. Finally the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. All the parents, without exception, forced them to move on.

In the 45 minutes the musician played, only 6 people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew this but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars.

Two days before his playing in the subway, Joshua Bell sold out at a theater in Boston and the seats average \$100.

This is a real story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station was organized by the Washington Post as part of an social experiment about perception, taste and priorities of people. The outlines were: in a commonplace environment at an inappropriate hour: Do we perceive beauty? Do we stop to appreciate it? Do we recognize the talent in an unexpected context?

Unquote, we do not have a moment to stop and listen even to one of the best musicians in the world. Like wise, the man continues to serve the society despite his poverty, unnoticed. It's also the fact that all such characters like 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' didn't get their dues all through the Ages.

About the Author: Arindam Nath is one of the most popular writers of Tripura. He is an IPS Officer. He is presently serving in Tripura as Assistant Inspector General of Police. He wrote both in English and Bengali. His first book is Tarmuj Pagla O Anyanya Galpa (Bengali, published by BOOK WORLD). His second book is Bridging Souls A Journey From Mahabharata To Bharata, in English published by Peacock Books, New Delhi (Atlantic Publisher & Distributors). He regularly contributes short stories, plays and essays in newspapers and journals. I Adore is his second English book. This is a collection of short-stories. You can write to Arindam Nath at arindamnath1962@gmail.com