



Oil on canvas
Viraj Karnik



Geeta Rao

REALITY *check*

THE SENSE OF BEING SOMEONE IMPORTANT IS
A WONDERFUL COCOON – TAKE IT AWAY AND WE
ARE LEFT FEELING HOLLOW AND INCOMPLETE

by **Geeta Rao**

Sometimes brutal honesty is the best dose of reality though it may not always seem so.

A friend called me up recently to tell me about an event that neither of us had been invited to but to which many of our com-

mon friends had been. We both laughed and exclaimed that we were off the social calendar and were the better for it. Five years ago, I would have been miffed and felt left out. I am sure everyone has experienced this at some time in his or her life. This is because we often have an exaggerated sense of our own importance in the larger scheme of things. Invites where the invitee may have innocently bypassed our names can become smouldering coals of resentment. Ask anyone who has tried to put together a list of wedding invitations and missed out some so-called 'important' people in the process. Information that is withheld from us, or if we are the last of a group to know something has the same effect. What is it that makes us so insecure? The term VIP is loaded with meaning. VIP seats, VIP passes, and VIP darshan at temples make us feel as if we belong to some special class of the human race. The sense of being someone important is a wonderful cocoon – take it away and we are left feeling hollow and incomplete.

My own reality check came when I bumped into a well-known filmmaker with whom I had worked on many projects, which had brought him and me some degree of recognition. We had stayed in touch all through my advertising days, which were reasonably successful. At that time, I also wrote a well-read column in a leading paper, and was on television occasionally so my face was fairly familiar amongst my professional circles. The speaking and social invitations poured in and it was quite a pleasurable ego stoking time. However, that was a phase and I moved on to newer less well-known things. Therefore, when we bumped into each other again I was not 'someone' any more. We met cordially and I spontaneously asked him to join me for a coffee or dinner.

He considered my offer carefully and then said, "I don't think I can, you see you are no longer important and I have very little time when I visit the city so I don't want to waste my time. I want to meet only important people."

What honesty! Brutal as it was, it put into perspective my own inflated sense of importance. Here was someone who was clearly focused on his priorities. It was not 'I' who was important but the role I had been playing when we knew each other. I could only admire his complete clarity. He had let go of my old image and was dealing with me in my new reality. Yet I still expected to be treated as if nothing had changed. Ayya Khema, the inspiring Buddhist nun, talks of this in her book, *Being nobody, Going nowhere*. The Buddha is stated to have said that the two great fears humans have to conquer are the fear of going through life being nobody, and the fear of going nowhere. The Buddha asks us to let go of these fears (more difficult than we assume and the task of many lifetimes) and examine our own parameters of success in an impermanent world. As I moved deeper into other things, I saw old friends and colleagues fall by the wayside. Invitations that came pouring in dried up once I stopped writing the visible columns or voicing my opinion as vociferously as I used to. I had made my choices but this honest encounter prepared me, as nothing else would have, to let go of the old and accept the change I was embracing. It had nothing to do with importance or insignificance, success or failure; it was about not being relevant in a certain context anymore.



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