

## ON DHARMA AND DOGMA

Very few movies have actually made a difference in my life. But this one did. I was happy to have spent the evening at Bhavan's cultural centre at Andheri, where Bhavna Talwar's film *Dharm* was being screened in the director's presence. The film was a strong contender for India's entry to the Oscars this year. But that was not the reason why I went to see it. The reason was the tagline 'Come, question your faith.' The film did a brilliant job of showcasing the present-day misinterpretation of religion.

The story revolves around the life of a Hindu head priest who leads his life as per the written word in the scriptures. He is a hard-core disciplinarian, and his word is considered to be the final moral authority. The turning point

arrives when he adopts an orphan who turns out to be a Muslim. Then starts his inner struggle of idealism versus realism.

Indeed, the film's conflict touched me. There were so many instances when I used to read the Vedas and object to certain things. I never understood the necessity of renunciation or self-denial for attaining moksha, or the need to have a spiritual guru or the caste system. The only message I could relate to in the Vedas is about dharma, as Lord Krishna puts it, "When a man does the work God gives him, no sin can touch this man."

Also I loved the symbolism used in the film that shows a boat tied at the banks of the river. The tied boat symbolises the indi-

vidual tied down due to various religious dogmas unable to flow naturally with the river of life.

As Rabindranath Tagore said,  
*"Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!*

*Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!*

*He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and*

*where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust."*

**Priya Saraiya**, MUMBAI

## MY LIFE

I'm one of many children in the numerous villages that dot the dense forests of Aarey colony in Goregaon, Mumbai.

Forest and dense undergrowth bring in a unique set of problems. Just the other month, a leopard jumped on me from a tree. I was small and very thin and could do nothing but scream. Luckily, a few men in the nearby fields came to my rescue and saved me. But I was hurt badly, and spent days in a hospital. I swore to never step into a hospital again.

I loved to play football – a group of us enjoyed kicking the ball around, even on uneven terrain and steep slopes.

And then even when my father died, I could not stop playing. People scolded me, but I didn't know what else to do. I taught my sister too. In the beginning Aai (mother in Marathi) opposed, but what could she do. My sister too enjoyed the activity.

There were periods of silence in the house when no one spoke; there were two tear-dried streaks on my Aai's cheek all the time, and though she did her best to put on a smiling countenance, these marks always betrayed her. But when she saw Soma and me playing and

laughing and fighting, she too couldn't help but have a smile on her face.

There is something called destiny in every living being's life. You might think I am too young to be talking about destiny, but at the same time, fate has dealt me and my family such severe blows that I think the bad gods (I classify gods as good and bad) have had an extended appointment with my family. One day I was hit by a speeding bike, a black one, but beyond that I didn't know – in fact, never came to know – anything about the rider of the bike.

I flew off the bike and hit the pavement hard, head first. It hurt, and there was blood, and I hate the sight of blood. Luckily, some relatives were passing by, and I was admitted in a hospital. Since that day, I could not talk or breathe properly. I was in the hospital for three months, and my back was sore. If it had not been for one aunty, who regularly came to see me, who used to touch me and speak to me, I might not have lasted for that long.

She also gave me a water bed, so that my back would not hurt much. The doctors and everyone else said that I was in a coma, and hence, would not understand what people were

talking. How I wished I could scream out and say that I was not in a coma, I was just having difficulty talking, and moving my body parts. At times, I used to try hard and wink at the aunty – she almost went delirious.

I held on fast as long as I could. I could see that aunty and her friends were trying to save me. But that night, back in my home when I started to feel really uncomfortable, I could not help shake the feeling that the end was near. I prayed to God, for my Aai and my sister. The aunty was special, so I prayed for her and her family too. I just wished that I could stay for longer, but eventually understood that some things are irrevocable, like the injuries caused by a serious bike accident, perhaps! Everyone tried their best, but the Lord had different plans for me. He wanted me to himself, and I went to Him that night...silently, without a scream.

**Varun R**

*This piece is based on a true incident that happened to Avinash Thapad, a young boy. The author was a witness of this incident, and is one of the founders of Dream India, an NGO that works with underprivileged kids.*

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