

A SPECIAL FATHER'S SPECIAL SON

"BREAKING NEWS: The nation's highest literary award, the prestigious 'Gyanpeeth Puraskar' has been conferred posthumously to Shri Surya Mohan for his unparalleled contribution in the field of Hindi poetry." – flashed the leading television news channel. This was great news for the millions of admirers of Hindi poetry and especially for the admirers of Shri Surya Mohan. The office of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Government of India, had already informed Avinash, for whom, this was a great moment of personal satisfaction, success and glory.

His eyes were glued to the television set, but his mind was taking a trip down the memory lane.

Shri Prakash Mohan had left behind enough wealth and property that could sustain his only son, Surya. But never did he think that this very 'fact' would become the most important 'factor' in destroying his son's life. Surya, right from his childhood, was very introverted, emotional and extremely sensitive. Even the slightest of mischief or a prank or a joke played on him by his classmates would make him sad. And yet, this manufactured grief of his would only find an outlet in the form of tears, but never ever in the form of anger or violence. Otherwise, he was a man of most desirable humanly qualities like politeness, humility, modesty, honesty, compassion and always helped anybody who came to him for help. But, most of the time he preferred staying alone. Whenever asked about this, he'd say, "I love my own company too much to be desirous of others!" He hated most of the things that others so loved doing. On the other hand, he was deeply interested in some of the things that the others considered as useless waste of time. Writing and reading Hindi poetry was one such thing. He spent hours together sitting alone on a park bench, rhyming his thoughts into poems, poems that were different. Most of those, however, were regarded by his friends as utter rubbish and insulting to Hindi poetry. But, Surya hardly bothered.

After graduation, all of his friends found jobs for themselves. Surya didn't want to, but had to under his father's pressure. Shri Prakash Mohan knew his son well enough to understand that if not forced to stand on his own feet, Surya may well be content at doing nothing but sit at home and write poetry. After all, money was not the problem. Surya hated his nine to five, stereotypical job. He continued it for around three years till Shri Prakash Mohan was alive. After that, it was only Surya and his poetry.

The pattern did not change for quite some years during which the volume of his poetry work kept increasing, until the time he agreed to marry, that too under his relatives' pressure. Unfortunately, his wife, though named Sulekha, was hardly inclined literarily. As days progressed, she got more and more frustrated with her husband, who did not do any productive work that could get some income into their household, like in her other friends' families. She'd often ask him to at least get his poetry published and earn some money that way. Lots of persuasion saw him knock on the doors of a few publishers. But, as was the case with most of his friends, they rejected most of his work on the pretext of being 'totally different', 'not pertaining to the subjects that other established poets wrote on', 'departing from established literary conventions', 'the public would not accept your work' and a thousand other reasons. That was it. He gave up his efforts and said to himself, "To hell with the world! I write for myself and I like my work. That's the end of the story."

Poetry for him was no longer a hobby. It had taken the form of a life-long passion. What's more, so engrossed was he with his poetry work, he didn't even give his wife the attention and affection that she believed, she deserved. Obviously, the marriage didn't work due to a total lack of understanding between the two. She left, leaving behind the couple's two-year-old son, Avinash, to start her life afresh. Surya's friends, neighbours, relatives and all who could criticised him. Things reached such a stage that people started ridiculing him, whenever they saw him on the streets or met him at some other place. But, Surya hardly gave a damn! He was indeed very contented with the joy and pleasure that his poetry gave him. He lived in a world of his own. There was only gaiety and satisfaction. No mockery affected him.

The added responsibility of bringing up his son changed Surya, albeit very slightly. As days progressed, his love for his growing up child grew out of bounds. This kind of overflow of feelings happens to people who are not all that adept at expressing the same in normal situations. The same happened here. He realised soon that his first love was not letting him do all that he wanted to do for Avinash. So he sent him to a boarding school. He really missed his son in all these years of separation. Most of his poetry written in this period dealt with the issue of a 'father – son' relationship at the emotional level.

After completing his schooling, Avinash came back to his father. Surya showered him with all the love that had accumulated over the years. But, little did he know that Avinash had grown up with a feeling of absolute hatred for his father. Avinash had felt neglected all the time in the boarding school. Where on one hand, his other friends had their parents come over during each and every vacation, his meetings with his father were very few and far between, and that too when Avinash himself would come down to meet his father but never the other way round. Surya's comfortable financial position was no longer so. The money he was shamelessly sitting on had started to diminish slowly. Avinash's friends would often make fun of him, when the monthly school fees did not reach on time, cruelly calling him the son of a 'good for nothing' father. As he became more mature, his yearning for his father turned into disgust and anger. He more or less sympathised with his mother and blamed Surya for the failure of the marriage. One thing led to another and finally, Avinash concluded that his father was the most useless person on this earth. He hated every thing that Surya loved, especially his poetry, which according to Avinash, was the root of the problem.

Now that they were together, the closer Surya tried getting to Avinash, the farther Avinash went. Avinash often hurt his father with his behaviour, sometimes deliberately. All this was weighing down heavily on Surya. Such was the hostile situation when Surya's monetary mess got in the way of Avinash's higher studies. Avinash finally dropped out of his engineering course, in spite of being exceptionally good at it. This hurt Surya more than anything else.

For the first time in his life, Surya repented giving up his stable job early in his career, and with it a stable money flow. Also, for the first time, Surya cursed his poetry. Avinash once saw him speak aloud to himself, "Surya Mohan, what have you done with our life? It was fine till you spoiled yours, now you have done the same to your son's life. You must be the cruellest father to ever surface on this earth!" Then he turned to his poetry collection and scanned the heap of notebooks from top to bottom with fiery eyes. "Is this what you gave your entire life to? Is this what you chose over your career, your wife and your son? What good is it? What is its worth? Can anyone tell me? Nothing, absolutely nothing! No one will even appreciate it, because no one will read it, because no publisher will publish it. Why? Simply because its not good enough. Surya Mohan, Congratulations! You've successfully spoiled your life writing a few hundred stupid poems!"

Avinash was horrified to see his father, who had not even raised his voice his entire life, suddenly firing punches one after the other on the walls of the room and sending his only earning of his life, his big pile of poetry notebooks, crashing to the ground. He was about to tear them apart in this sudden fit, when Avinash intervened. For the first time, Avinash could see in his father's tears the amount of love he had for his son. It was one of those cases in which a single moment of genuine emotion washed away decades of misunderstanding. They hugged each other, and wounds healed very quickly. Avinash assured his father that he'd take over the responsibility of repairing the financial condition of the family and relieved him of his feeling of guilt. This was the happiest day in Surya's life, and so was it for Avinash.

Avinash wanted to start his own business. But, what kind of business? He was searching for ideas. After his patch up with Surya, Avinash took to reading his works of poetry. Slowly but surely, he began liking them. As he kept reading, he was mighty impressed by the poems. Not because they were written by his father, but because they were really terrific to read, and yet so refreshingly different from the run of the mill stuff being dished out by the so-called established poets of that time. He was so impressed with the writings that he hit upon this idea of starting a

publishing house. He approached Surya with the idea of publishing his works as the first product from his publishing house. Surya warned, "No Avinash, experienced publishers have told me more than once that my poems are useless. Don't risk it. It's not worth it." Avinash was adamant. He was confident of his own marketing skills and his father's literary prowess. Surya was persuaded.

BINGO! Avinash's conviction had paid off. After a cautious initial response, 'Shri Surya Mohan's poetry collection' was selling like hot cakes. The critics as well as the buyers were bowled over. The very same rival publishers, who had once written off Surya's literary career, were chewing their fingernails to extinction and 'Surya Publications', quickly made its mark in the business.

Surya's never ending amount of work accumulated through years of single minded madness fuelled the rise of Surya, the poet, and Surya publication to the top spots in their respective arenas.

A loud commercial break in the news programme brought back Avinash to the present. Avinash was feeling very proud that day, and deservedly so. After all, he had performed his duties as a son, to almost perfection. He'd shown to the world that even if a father fails to discharge his duties, he still deserves respect. How wonderfully, he took over the responsibility from the drooping shoulders of his father, and eventually ended up bolstering those very drooping shoulders!

Avinash was very happy today. He had managed to get his father the respectability and appreciation that he deserved from this world, something that was being denied to him for all the wrong reasons. Finally, at least somebody managed to understand the true feelings of this very special poet! It had to be a special son to do so.