

Let's Check the Pulse(s)

By : **Juggernaut**

Abid was a graduate student at a prestigious educational institution established well over a century ago on the banks of a sacred river. He is Muslim in predominantly Hindu student community. But this didn't bother either Abid or his friends since he was considered as a dove. Abid though Muslim attended Hindu temples and Churches with his Hindu and Christian friends though he preferred attending Hindu temples over Christian churches because only at the temples at the end of prayer session, a highly buttered sweet dish prepared with cracked wheat was offered to the temple attendees.



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Subba Rao

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Dark skinned and thin built, Abid's command on languages including English was impeccable. With no regional influence on his accent, he could be from anywhere in the country or even outside the borders.

Abid was pursuing research in Entomology or science dealing with Bugs. His research work was on mating habits of mealy bugs. He said he liked mealy bugs because they were quite and worked undersides of the leaves, sapping the plant juices and in the process making a defensive white wax like material for their own protection from predators. Was that a good reason for choosing one bug over another? One would think working on attractive Ladybug would be more interesting.

Veera in short for Veeraraghavan was from South of the country. He was Abid's side kick. If Veera were not to open his mouth and speak out, he could be mistaken for a person from up North because of his very fair skin. With heavy emphasis on pronouncing letters like 'R' and 'T', made him readily recognizable as a person from South. Whether he spoke English or any language for that matter, it pretty much sounded like his native language since his speech pattern was the same.

It was a tradition on the campus for senior students to show the new comers the town attractions that include good eating places, places to congregate to watch girls, temples that serve free food and other places of interest including market places.

In the evenings Abid would gather the new arrivals to the campus particularly those from the South for a chat and a short tour of the town. Among many temples in town, one or two were selected for a quick visit on bicycles for blessings and more so for free edible offerings.

As usual, one evening, Veera rounded up few new comers to his room for Abid to address them.

'To day we are visiting Hanuman temple and then we are going to old town to check the pulse(s),' announced Abid.

'Whose pulse we are checking and why?' asked Juggernaut, a short light weight from South with no knowledge of local language at all.

'Follow and learn, no questions,' it was Veera's turn for leadership.

After a quick visit to the temple, the small student group with two students sharing each bicycle was headed for old town, spearheaded by Abid and Veera. On turning into a narrow, winding and dusty street, one cannot ignore the strong pungent odor of frying mustard oil emanating from the road side food shacks.

Dismounting from the bicycle, Abid made an announcement 'This is the pulse market also called 'Dahl Mundi' in local language.'

Juggernaut with his fellow freshmen looked around only to see brightly lighted shops with several gunny bags opened at the top with its sleeve folded down to expose its content; beans or also called pulses in all colors from bright yellow split peas to red kidney beans to cow peas or black eye beans and many other varieties of legumes with colors ranging from white to black and in between.

'Now check out the pulses,' ordered Veera.

Juggernaut and others started checking the pulses in the open gunny bags with their fingers to get a feel. 'Not in the bags you fools; look up at the buildings,' shouted Abid.

All the buildings were two or three storied with dimly lighted balconies attached to the windows. The students stopped meddling with the pulses and gazed at the balconies protruding from the buildings only to

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see women waving at them. Some just sat on stools in the balconies and others stood waving their hands as an invitation to come upstairs into dingy upper floors on the store front.

Veera smiling with his gum line exposed made a pronouncement â At the pulse market, in the shops downstairs money change hands for protein rich pulses and money changes hands upstairs to rev up your pulse.â

The ladies were still shouting and throwing their hands in air inviting the students to come upstairs to have fun. Apparently, the pulse market is also the red-light district. A rare combination of commodities market in holy city known for miracles.

Abid and Veera with difficulty steered the unwilling students to ride behind them waving back their hands to the women on the balconies.

Since then, Juggernaut and the other new arrivals at the campus understood a whole new meaning for the expression â Letâ s check the pulse(s).â

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