

What Were They Thinking

By : **Juggernaut**

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Subba Rao

Getting a diploma from a college was easy part, getting a job particularly if one was considered as an outsider, for whatever reason, will be challenging, to say the least. Contrary to what many believe, higher the degree, say a Ph.D., or an M.D, tougher it gets to get a job, a real challenging job.

The external evaluator, an American Professor was all praise for Juggernaut's graduate work. The visiting American Professor spent a week giving lectures and participating in other events on the Campus. On one occasion, Juggernaut caught up with the American Professor in a conversation. Juggernaut was hoping to open a dialogue with the Professor that can lead to an inquiry into possibilities for a post doctoral fellowship with the Professor in the United States.

“ We have lots of graduate students from South Asia particularly from your native country,” said the Professor.

“ Oh.”

“ There are fine institutions in your country, I don't understand why they come to US, you know.”
“ I believe they come to US to get jobs and permanently settle in America,” the American Professor continued his monologue. “ The graduate students from Middle East pay tuition fee and on receiving degree, they go back to their countries, not so with south Asians.”

“ Middle East countries are rich with oil money,” Juggernaut expressed his humble opinion without offending the Professor in anyway. The conversation was not going well at all, thought Juggernaut. The American; an immigrant himself from England several decades ago appeared more like a hyena not wanting to share the stolen kill with anybody. That evening Juggernaut thought about the conversations he had with the Professor, after all, the Professor himself told him that he came to America as a young student and now after several decades working in one of the best universities in Midwestern United States, had such an opinion about south Asian students aspiring to come to US. What was he thinking? The idea of asking for a post doctoral fellowship was dead even before asking the Professor.

Tom White, a student from England, and Juggernaut were both post-graduate students in a related field, and both applied for a job in a developing country. At the time of job interviews, the University Academic Committee has already approved Juggernaut's thesis to award Ph.D. degree whereas Tom was still working on his thesis. Though both were equally qualified, since Juggernaut's thesis was approved and immediately available for the job, Juggernaut expected to be selected. After the interviews, Tom was offered the job.

After Tom accepted the contract, the University Academic Committee rejected his thesis and he was asked to repeat some portions of his work for re-validation. The position for which Tom was selected could not get off the ground since Tom had to continue his graduate work. The selection committee had no choice but to give Tom a year of absence from the position even before he started the work. The selecting committee members in selecting the candidate for the job were highly educated, no non-sense professionals and yet used simple reasoning in decision making; the job went to the person from the country of origin of the selecting committee. Here, the well-trained minds acted in a simplistic manner to arrive at a decision that was too

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obvious.

A team of researchers from an Ivy League University in the United States were working on a project in an adjoining lab to Juggernaut's. Dr. Lowentoff was one of them. An opportunity to work at an Ivy League would be a dream comes true for anybody.

“We love to have you join in our team in US, but your professor here instead wants a local student for the fellowship, we were disappointed, Juggernaut,” said Dr. Lowentoff.

Juggernaut was pleasantly surprised, he was not aware that the research group from US was considering him as a potential candidate for the fellowship. It took some time for this event to sink into Juggernaut's head. There were no local students in the program at all to take up fellowship, irrespective of eligibility.

Months passed by, scores of resumes sent resulted in no positive response, Juggernaut was in real bind; has to pay monthly bills etc. He contacted his friends in neighboring countries to see if they could help find vacancies. Juggernaut met Leela and Narayana, a couple from his native country on the campus as fellow graduate students. The friendly couple completed graduate programs just two years before, and left for an unknown country to take up jobs. They left overnight. No body, including their close friends knew where they went. Juggernaut never heard from them again.

In response to a job application at the Department of Agriculture in Suriname, a small country on northern fringe of South America, Juggernaut received an interview letter. In the letter, the Director of Research mentioned about Leela working in their department and was impressed with her work. It was comforting to know that his old acquaintance Leela whose whereabouts were unknown thus far was now employed in a neighboring country.

The visit to Suriname was an eye opening to Juggernaut. The country on the South American continent was largely uninhabited except for the capital city Paramaribo. Juggernaut was given a short tour to the interior of the country to show field projects. A visit to native tribal community was educational, the people are known for their exceptionally clean personal hygiene and sanitation around their huts. Every member of the touring party purchased a bottle of bootleg rum from the natives at a cut rate price.

People from India, African and Indonesia brought to Suriname to work on sugar plantations make the bulk of the population where as the natives were a minority. The Indians in Suriname were referred to as Hindustani and speak modified Hindi (Indian language). The Surinamese speak English and the official language Dutch. The city of Paramaribo was more European than either South American or Caribbean. Practically every Indian dish was available at the vendors at the open daily market. A local dish “Bami”, made with noodles and vegetables with a meat option was delicious.

The Director of Research at the Department of Agriculture was a kind person; he gave a tour of the facility to Juggernaut and in the process introduced Leela to Juggernaut. Leela appeared very surprised to see Juggernaut of all the people. On her invitation, Juggernaut spent the evening at her home meeting with her husband for the first time after a long time. There were some uncomfortable moments at the beginning since the couple left the Island after graduation suddenly without informing their friends about their whereabouts.

Leela drove Juggernaut to the Department next day for the Job Interview with the Director. On completing the interview, Juggernaut joined her in her car about to take him back to the hotel.

“How the interview went?” asked Leela.

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“ I would say pretty well,” “ The Director was impressed with my Ph.D., work,” replied Juggernaut casually.

“ You think you will get a job here?”

“ He offered me a job,” Juggernaut answered in a matter of fact way. Leela went into a dreadful silence for few minutes, then she said “ well some gets a good job easy, just like that.” “ To get a job as head of a department at this place was a big deal you know.” “ You were very lucky.” She appeared totally unhappy and downright mad, and made Juggernaut felt as if he did not deserve the position offered to him.

After her outburst, Juggernaut sat in silence next her in the car. He did not expect the event would turn into an emotional outburst. He expected that she will be happy for him and will congratulate for getting the job offer. Instead her negative emotions got better of her. Then she calmed down and said “ I am sorry my emotions took over me, I am glad you were offered the job.” Then she drove Juggernaut to the hotel.

During that evening, Juggernaut’s thoughts went over the event that took place in the car with Leela. It was odd and totally bazaar, what was she thinking, he thought.

Even after three decades, whenever the above events come to mind, Juggernaut had tough time understanding the people involved. For example, the American Professor, a highly distinguished scientist from a prestigious institution; what thought process that made him to believe that people of a particular nation were less deserving to come to America than his own native country of England. And, juggernaut’s professor, a native son of Caribbean of Indian descent, earlier in his own career was disappointed for not getting a suitable job in the United States, later preventing his own student to work at a prestigious institution in the United States. Lastly, Leela went into an emotional outburst on hearing a job offer to Juggernaut. All these individuals were highly educated, so their thoughts were nothing to do with lack of intellect. There was no way to rationalize their behavior except to say what were they thinking.

Education to be qualified for a trade (accountant, teacher, engineer, lawyer, doctor etc.) does not change the basic trait in a person. If a person is a jerk before getting a diploma, after getting it, the person will be a jerk with a diploma.

According to Sri Aurobindo, “ spirituality is not high intellectuality, not idealism, not ethics or moral purity or austerity, not religiosity. Spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than mind, life and body.” Lack of spirituality makes people behave the way they do. A Little bit of spirituality at any age would make people to be more human.

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