

Staples

"No, Papa, you can't buy that!"

I looked at the tin of Ovaltine in my hands and then at Archana, "Why not, *beti*?"

"Don't call me that, Papa," she replied, pulling at the beads on her hair. I still cannot believe that I gave her permission to use her Diwali money from Dharani and Chetan for this ... this ... African hairstyle. Shiva! such an age she is going through.

"Please tell me," I took a deep breath and smiled, "Why I cannot buy this chocolate powder?"

"You can't buy that brand. It has a reputation." I looked around the supermarket. I wondered, where was Latha? How long to find a chicken? Thank the heavens only the old couple at the end of the aisle is there. No one else to be seen.

"Now please tell me in detail *beta*," this was accidentally and she made a face, "what is the reputation of this brand."

"Papa – we're studying about it in our sociology paper. They're not good in the Third World".

I let my irritation out in a deep breath. Shiva! Shiva! For the past two months this is all we have been hearing. Third World, First World, western, non-western. Even poor Aakash has had enough from his sister. We should have sent her for engineering in Madurai.

The older couple were pushing their trolley towards us. Biting my lips, I quietly returned the tin.

"OK, you choose which one, ok, *beti*?"

Archana stood in front of the chocolate shelf picking up different tins. "Hey, look, this has got a chocolate lamington recipe on the back."

"Are, hurry up, ok," I leaned over our trolley and pulled out the eggs from under the rice.

Finally, she selected a purple coloured tin and put it into the trolley. I looked at the tin, and asked her, "What makes THIS chocolate alright?"

"It's Fair Trade."

"Fair what?"

"Third World people are not exploited. Really, Papa."

I looked at the shelf. "Are! But look at the price? It's \$3 more than the other one! What fair is that?"

"Don't you care about Third World exploitation, Papa? What is three dollars? Nothing. But look at the good it is doing."

Good? Good for who? Where did she think money comes from? AND WHERE IS LATHA?

"Third World exploitation?" My voice was rising. "I care about MY exploitation, OK? And – I am also Third World, you know."

She hissed. "No you're NOT, Papa. Not anymore. You are a petit bourgeoisie. A BROWN skin petit bourgeoisie."

I gasped. My daughter! To insult me!

"Yes", I was roused, a *Kathakali* dancer, eyes and fingers in full action, "and DON'T FORGET that. I am brown skin and YOU are brown skin." Saliva sprayed but I did not stop, "what you think? Coming to a new country is easy? Nobody was waiting here with open arms, ok ... you think it was homecoming, *hai*? We had nothing, ok. And your mother and I struggled, ok. Blood, sweat and tears, it was. So now I am bore-joycy, *hai*? Let it be. Why should I give my money to some ... some ... lazy bugger in the Third World, *hai*?"

Archana looked at me with wide eyes. Too much I am keeping quiet, and children taking advantage.

My palpitations began. Enough. Be calm. Change the subject. "See, you have good values, ok. Civic duties about our planet and ... this humanity. It is our Hindu philosophy also." I left the purple tin in the trolley and started to move.

At that moment Latha poked her head from the corner of the aisle. She walked towards us with a large frozen chicken in her hands.

"There you both are. I met Chiranjib's mother and father near the frozen chicken section and they started talking. They are going to Bangalore next month. Cathay Pacific is having sales, we should als..." Latha stopped mid-way and looked at us.

"Is everything alright? You both look a little –",

"No, everything OK". "Yes, Amma, we're fine". We did not look at each other. I pushed the trolley forward and Latha kept talking. Archana walked sulkily alongside us.

Near the end of the aisle some blankets were on sale. Latha stopped and looked at them.

"We are always needing blankets especially when guests come to stay." She was talking just generally.

"No, Amma, you can't buy those." Archana suddenly came back to life.

Latha was startled. "Why I can't buy those?" she repeated.

"They're Chinese made."

"So?" her mother asked.

"We must buy Kiwi, not Asian products." Archana's voice was rising again.

"Asian? But I'm Asian, no?" Latha said, looking at me confused.

Shiva! Not again! I studied the cans of asparagus on the other shelf and started to move to the far end.

Archana was pulling her beads.

(803 words)