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A 'pat' for his 'danda'

by Suchita Malik

HE sat uncomfortably in a rickety chair behind the pile of files, interacting with a friend in chaste Oriya and giving instructions in broken Hindi to his subordinates. Allowing his glasses to rest mischievously on the tip of his nose, he would let the shawl droop carelessly over his stooping shoulders.

Yet, he would not stoop an inch when it came to taking decisions which were seemingly innocuous but bold, immediate and effective. For, he was a great believer in the concept of instantaneous justice and refused to take a cue from the cumbersome and tedious procedural rungs of the Indian system.

Unlike the doyens of administration and justice, he appeared to be the least amenable to pressures from above and seemed to care a hoot for the tricks of the trade. The simplicity of his demeanour and disposition totally belied the tight-lipped, white-collar inherited culture that he was expected to represent.

He liked to help others without expectations of reciprocity. Understandably, people could

dhoti and *kurta*, barging in and out of his room with the ease of a leopard in his den. It was but natural that I mistook him either for a simpleton treading the corridors of power for redressal of his grievances or some wily, portly, *dhoti*-clad politician wooing his prospective 'prey' to dance to his tunes.

Only when he occupied his shaky, old, dilapidated chair without a jerk, did I realise that he was there to 'occupy' and stay. It did not take him long to comprehend the supposed complexities of my case, invented by the lower rungs and put up as PUC.

Again, unlike an officer shaped only to sign the lopsided analysis of the *babus*, Dr Dandapat seemed to like using his own mind effectively; much to the discomfort of his subordinates and, probably, seniors too.

My carefully drafted representation was before him and I started explaining my case. He listened and appeared to be accepting the reasonableness of



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make a bee-line to his office as he was easily accessible and available.

He was Dr Dandapat, a senior officer in an autonomous organisation where everything else moved in a government-like fashion except the governance of Dr Dandapat. I had gone to meet him in connection with some work, hoping to see a sophisticated officer seated comfortably

my representation. I asked, “Sir, how long is it likely to take for you to issue the clarifications to the university?” Now, it was his turn to raise his eyebrows. “Why should it take time? I believe in instantaneous justice. Since you have come all the way from Chandigarh, you should take the ‘advice’ with you.” I thought he was being sarcastic.

But, lo; He went out, brought

check against the requirements, so that it did not suffer from any technicality of expression. We had tea after the steno left, at his expense.

The typed manuscript arrived, he signed and handed over the ‘advice’ along with the envelopes, I who had helplessly been witnessing the upward and downward movements of my file at my place of work for the past six months, flattered my eyes in utter disbelief. I was almost in a state of trance.

To get justice and that, too, in an era of manipulative stocks and ‘scams-came as an absolute shock. My sense of total dismay for the past couple of months was being replaced with a sense

justice was there and also His powerful law of retribution will never fail us. He only chose to function through His selected proteges. Dr Dandapat happened to be one such and his powerful ‘danda’, though companionless, surely, thundered in the highest echelons of power.

My husband, himself an administrator, who had accompanied me, was speechless all throughout, probably trying to take his lessons in administration of instantaneous justice from Dr Dandapat.

I do not know whether he or others of his clan imbibe something from him or not, but you have acquired the status of “Mr Unforgettable” for me, Dr Danda-