

I admit I am one of the most gullible persons you would ever come across.... perfect fodder for advertising agencies of the world! When the jingle says buy this oil or that to ensure a luxuriant lock of hair, I am among the first to queue up at the local groceries', eager to part with hard earned cash. When during promotional 'breaks' between soaps, television channels show middle aged men carry themselves off with the energy and drive of teenagers, I wait for darkness to fall before visiting the neighbourhood park, well fortified with the diet supplement advertised, to see if I have stopped panting after a couple of rounds of brisk walking.

A firm believer in the dictum that everything that has come out in the papers or been said on TV must be true, I went to the market the other day to buy 'Greatness', inspired by the familiar jingle that said that money could buy you anything. First stop, the neighbourhood grocery!

The shop owner looked at me from tip to toe, and out of concern for one of his regulars, who always paid in neat crisp notes, refrained from speaking his mind. Between measuring a quarter kilo of fenugreek seeds for a customer, he simply tilted his head and gave it a sad, forty five degree shake on either side.

"Do you care to stock 'Greatness' here...?" I asked in the Queen's language, careful all the while about the correctness of my diction. I was now after all in the precincts of the sensational new mall in the city, where salesmen sported trendy ties and always gave one a complex, by the aloofness of their attitude.

"You sure, you don't want to see Dr. D...", asked the high priest of the Marketing and Customer Support unit at the Mall, indicating perhaps, that I was in need of a psychiatrist. On my insistence that I was in complete control, the Management School alumni diverted me to an antiquities shop in the older part of the city, from where I returned with a lovely old rocking chair, but not the object of my primary quest.

Never one to give up, I next reached the front office of the recently opened, foreign sounding deshi university whose claim to fame was the 143 'courses' it offered to prospective students, almost like the recent trend among city restaurateurs to offer an ever increasing number of dishes as part of their 'buffet lunch'.

The Quest

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"Greatness is not part of the curriculum here, at least not yet, but don't worry, we will get it for you, if you are that desperate...", assured the 30 something 'Vice Chancellor' of the university, advising me to fill in the form regardless, and deposit the requisite fee with the cashier. Pitying my choice though, the young VC offered to get me into some of the other courses that had better prospects and were more market friendly!

The cute curator at the Art Gallery where I went next was a patient man. In his dishevelled hair and crumpled, designer Kurta get-up, he listened carefully before taking me straight to the display area where with a triumphant raise of his eyebrow, he pointed towards a huge canvas on the wall.

Now let me confess that my understanding of modern art is next to nothing. All I could see on the expensive broad sheet were the contours of colours from right across the spectrum, spilled in what appeared to me, a random fashion.

"This", said the curator pointing his index finger for added emphasis, "is Greatness-I and the other picture across there, happens to be Greatness II".

For the sake of record, Greatness II was a careless white scratch across the length of the canvas immersed in a sea of black ink.

"15 K if you want them individually and 25, if you take the Greatness set", the man of art explained the economics of it. It took me quite a while to clarify to the disappointed expert that my life's mission was to find out and identify greatness of a completely different and non-tangible kind! With a shrug of his hand, the maestro showed me the way to the exit.

My efforts to search the object of my desire at international venues of great promise and repute have met with a similar fate. The endeavor has taken me far and wide. I have roamed the neighbourhood and beyond only to return home with a memorabilia or two, but little else!

Friends, the writing is clearly on the wall. It's only my eternal optimism that does not allow me to see it. No one stocks greatness these days, no one wants it either. My insistence on getting a glimpse of it in the world of the living is entirely my own fault. The smooth talking Sales Manager at the shopping mall was probably right. I really do need medical attention.

Dr D..., here I come!