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Book Reviews

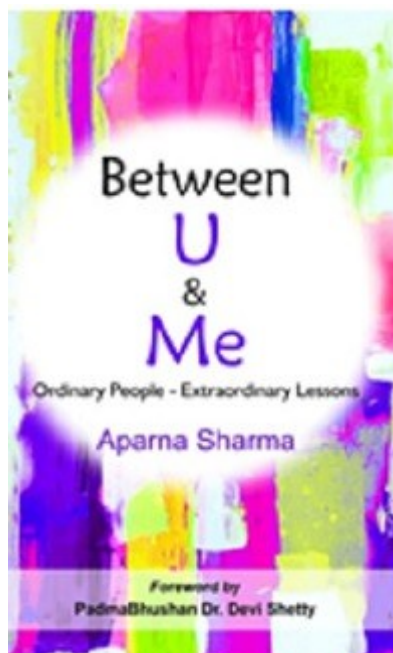
## *A Touching Tale between You and Me*

*by Prof. Shubha Tiwari*

### *Reading Aparna Sharma's Latest Book*

"Between U and Me, Ordinary People - Extraordinary Lessons" by Aparna Sharma is an inspirational book. It is also a book which tries to understand and explain the lives of fourteen great achievers who had humble beginnings. An actor's daughter/son becoming an actor or a politician's offspring carrying forward the political legacy is one thing. But it is an entirely different game and an entirely different story when a common Indian does and achieves uncommon things.

The foreword is written by the philanthropic doctor, Dr. Devi Prasad Shetty whose efforts to provide affordable health care to common people are well known. He has correctly pointed out that in the technological age, the human being has become lonely and vulnerable. Positivity, perseverance and strength of mind need effort. This book is one such effort.



Each story, each chapter is crafted in an interesting manner. The first part is Aparna's letter to the person whose life and achievements are being celebrated. The second part presents the record of the major achievements of the person. The third part is the person's story in the first person. Then there are summarizing lines under the heading "Life Lines". The chapter then ends beautifully by "Words of Wisdom". The arrangement makes the book highly readable.

The first story is of Vimla Patil, ex editor of India's leading women's magazine, "*Femina*". Aparna has given a personal touch to the letter that she has written in the beginning listing humane qualities of Vimla Patil. Patil's journey begins with her being sent to hostel at the tender age of six. She understands that life is not easy. She knows how to move forward in the labyrinth of life. She had the advantage of being a Mumbai girl. As a school and college student, she listened to and interacted with great personalities like Pandit Ravi Shankar, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and others. The right moves took her to journalism and finally to "*Femina*". Her special contribution lies in starting the Miss India contest and in raising the issues related to the rights of the girl child. She worked as a catalyst in bringing women of India into a united identity, the Indian woman. From a working woman she came to be working for women. She insists on inculcating a scientific bent of mind among women. What makes this book unique and touching is the fact that each celebrity comes with her/his regrets in life. Everyone has regrets and to express them makes the person more likeable. Patil says that she would have liked to devote more time to writing meaningful scripts, novels and stories instead of daily journalistic pieces. Humour, Patil says, is the mantra that keeps life going and flowing.

The second story belongs to HR guru, Dr. T. V. Rao. The story of Dr T. V. Rao is exactly a rags to riches story. It is touching the way he reveals that his mother belonged to a family of daily wage laborers. She was even abandoned by his father. From there, this real life heroine rose to become the state general secretary of a prominent political party. Rao says that from his father he learnt how not to treat a person who loves you. The profession of teaching was his calling. He believed in growing at every stage of life. He was lucky to have a teacher who discerned his special ability and guided him to education as a subject. Exposure and cooperation played key roles in the shaping up of Rao. He taught at IIM Ahmedabad, attended the best and most prestigious institutions throughout the world. He gave shape to the field of human resource development through his conceptual contribution. He visualized three modes of corporate leadership, namely, benevolent, critical and developmental. He values ideas and their free use. Rao talks of his failures as well. An institute which he started in collaboration could not take off. Academicians face severe problems in building institutions. It is only with the help of a rich philanthropist that an institution of reckoning can be built. He carried on with his journey in life and started T. V. Rao Learning Systems Pvt. LTD. a consulting firm. He believes in documenting experiences.

Then we come to the endearing educationist, Faiqa Saulat Khan. Dr. Faiqa Saulat Khan is a name in school education. A woman of substance, she is the personification of

perseverance, tenacity and patience. She has carved her way through the male centric world slowly, determinedly and laboriously. Denied opportunities early in life this woman of steel rose on to challenge patriarchy and scale her journey right up to the top in the field of school education. She owns and runs a renowned school in Bhopal. Decorated with various national awards, well-travelled across globe, Faiqa symbolizes how a human being can give meaning to her life even in hostile conditions. Born in a traditional, well off family, she was married against her wishes at the tender age of eighteen. Her dream of becoming an IAS officer was shattered. Given an opportunity to teach at a school, Faiqa made most of this opening and rose on and on.

She feels that communication, empathy and modernity of approach are essential not only for teachers but all those who want to make a mark. It is by helping her students and her school that she has helped herself. She knows what it means to be economically independent. I was particularly touched by her description of hostility, jealousy and opposition that she faced from her colleagues. The simple sentence, "I had to face hostility from the other teachers, who resented my success", says a lot. With all her exposure, ability, training and motivation, she finally opened her own school in Bhopal. The school has since then become a model in itself. She advises to keep away from negative people and thoughts.

The fourth chapter of the book is devoted to Dr. Radhakrishnan Pillai, the Chanakya Guru. His is a fascinating life story of spiritual awakening and material success.

Intrigued by existential questions from childhood, Radha had an initial upbringing of spiritual values. His parents were involved in Chinmaya Mission. His own ability and resolve, his association with Chinmaya Mission and his city Mumbai - these three things shaped Radha's life. People living at Mumbai, Delhi, or Bengaluru often do not realize that they meet great achievers early in life just because of the place. He grew up in the company of Swami Chinmayanand and Swami Tejomayanand. He was working successfully in Bengaluru as a young man when the dot-com disaster took away his job. However, he did not give up hope. Swami Tejomayanand inspired him to start his own business.

He along with his partner started a spiritual tour company "Atma Darshan". While working as an entrepreneur, his spiritual calling drew him to 3rd century BC intellectual giant, Chanakya. Radha dedicated his life to the study of this scholar and rose in life. He calls Chanakya one of the greatest strategist of the world. This is the power of ancient Indian knowledge. One author, one text "*Arthashastra*" changed his life. Radha has contributed in the field of management principles based on Chanakya's "*Arthashastra*".

Today, Radha runs a study centre at Mumbai University on Chanakya's philosophy. He is an entrepreneur, a business owner, an author, a motivational speaker, a trainer for armed forces, and a professor for various universities across the globe. A shining example of practical application of spirituality, Radha advises one to remain grounded and develop friendships. His association with Chinmaya Mission has been the backbone of his life.

The next story is that of Dr. Sarah Musavi. Sarah struggled a lot in her life and saw much failure. Her rise has been slow and painful. She secured 92 percentile in graduation admission test and took admission in the Indian Institute of Toxicology Research in Lucknow. She also battled intestinal ulcers and weakness. But she kept on with her efforts and went to do masters in health administration program at Temple University, Philadelphia. She also did her PhD from Indian Institute of Immunology, New Delhi.

She worked for the multinational giant Monsanto. She finally met success at health care. She also speaks fondly of her motherhood experience and how it changed her life altogether. Her focus is on dealing with obesity as a global epidemic. She has developed a system called STEM- SLEEP, THOUGHTS, EATING AND MOVEMENT. Through STEM a person can rediscover her/himself. Sarah says that conviction is charisma. Life can be changed 360 degrees by a force called conviction. Her methods are simple. Communication, surrounding oneself with positive people, good eating and sleeping habits, physical activity and continuous learning are her mantras.

We come to sixth chapter of the book dedicated to Raj Khilnani, a top cop and also the founder of Heart Quest Charitable Trust. Raj Khilnani begins the description of his journey by an incident too common in India. Indians, especially children are scared of police. They are taught to run away from police. Raj says he wanted to change that perception. As a Sindhi, his grandparents had migrated from Sindh province of newly created Pakistan in 1947. His family was both rich and educated. His grandparents had spiritual leanings. His scholarly father became a judge.

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His own career started after much zigzag as an IPS officer. As a human being, he tried to see the humane side of a criminal's life. Why a criminal becomes a criminal in the first place. Raj honestly talks about political interference in policing in India. He dealt with naxalism and even killed a naxalite. With ups and downs of an officer, Raj retired as DGP, Anti Corruption Bureau in 2013. He joined the position of Governor on the board of IIT Mandi. Life has been kind to him after retirement. He is an ardent follower of Meher Baba. He also started his Heart Quest Charitable Trust.

This trust is about individual aspirations and a meaningful spiritual journey. Raj candidly accepts that he did not know what lay in store for him when he joined the IPS. He regrets nothing. His advice is to live an honest life and believe in the higher reality.

The next saga is about a cheerful crusader, Vandana Jadhav. Born into a lower economic class family, Vandana has won a name for herself in Thane, a suburb of Mumbai as a snack

and food provider. She cooks herself and delivers home-made delicacies such as Theplas, Puranpolis, Modaks and also Chinese food. Her food is in demand.

Vandana's father was a construction laborer and mother a house maid. She was married off at sixteen to an alcoholic. Her years passed giving births to kids and working as a house maid or a laborer to support her family. The husband showed no sign of improvement, leave alone taking responsibility of the the family. Her life was horrible. Finally after years of suffering, she walked out of her husband's home. She built her life bit by bit, and educated her kids.

Her personal tragedies continued. One fine day she realized that cooking was her strength. She also learnt to ride a two wheeler. She became a full unit within herself, cooking and delivering. She says, "I often lost battles, but never lost courage."

The eighth chapter is on Tanveer Shaikh, the Director and Founder of Tanveer's Hair Studio and Academy. Part of the top notch fashion and film industry, the story of Tanveer is again a story from rags to riches. We can identify Tanveer by the buzz word of his brand (Tanveer's Hair Studio and Academy) "transformation" because he transforms personalities by transforming hairs. He is a "hair" magician.

From Bijnor in UP to Mumbai, his childhood saw upheavals as well as poverty. He never wanted to follow his father's profession and be a barber but ended being one. He describes the hypocrisy of India where we all need a barber to cut our hair and yet we look down upon the profession of a barber. Yet, through rigorous training, education and practice, Tanveer turned the profession of a barber into an art. Following the footsteps of Shahnaz Husain and Jawed Habib, Tanveer has become one of the best hair stylists of the country. He runs a successful hair academy. He has worked with best brands like Lakme Fashion week. He honestly shares the pits and falls of his life and how he rose above them. His life lessons are gems like, health is wealth, be passionate, and do not build walls with words, better build bridges with them.

The ninth story is of Ashiwin Pasricha. Ashwin Pasricha is an HR expert who runs his own human resources firm named 'Human Network and Associates'. According to him, he is a traveler of the less travelled road in life. He lays special emphasis on being from a joint family system which gave him a sense of team and sharing. His brightness as a student was evident right from his childhood. His college life was all about bonding, a trait so crucial for HR managers. His career has been a consistent tale of turning around businesses. He knew that delivering results masters the most. At a number of oragnizations, Pasricha developed courses, workshops and designed ways to improve human resources.

His emphasis has been on developing a common vision. Keeping promises is a sure way of managing people well. He trusted people and received trust in return. Pasricha initiated the reliable 'Alcoholics Anonymous' program for de-addicting alcoholics. He says that we must add value to whatever we do. In order to improve performance, we must measure it. If we

can measure, we can improve. That is the key. He advocates employee centric culture. Change alone is not sufficient. We must develop an ecosystem which sustains change.

We should take our decisions keeping twenty years ahead of us. In this way we can give future solutions. One of his mottos is, 'What Next After Now' which indicates that we must keep renewing ourselves. He says that he believes in writing autobiography in reverse. It is a tool of creating one's own life story.

The next chapter is unexpectedly on a religious guru, Mahamandleshwar Shaileshanand Giri. Dhyanehree Shailesh is by far the most out of the pack personality discussed in this book. A life of extremes, extreme indulgence, extreme punishment and extreme rewards, the story of Dhyanshree tells how many ascetics in India get into the lure of spirituality.

He was extraordinary right from childhood. Many times talents of our children do not fit into the boxes created by society. An overall fierceness of spirit seems to mark this man. He has been an involved student leader. He held posts. He organized morchas and dharnas. Then for years, he felt lost. He must have been typically the kind of boy whom society refers as "bigda ladka". Great heights come after deep falls. To me, Dhyanshree's life symbolizes this. After seeing imprisonment, humiliation, land disputes and vagabondry, finally he saw success in the spiritual field. He has successfully established the Shant Advait Ashram near Ujjain.

He has led successful social programs like Kartavya Kranti and Sadbhavana Mission. Many times, when one walks on the strange roads, marvelous results come. A large section of society needs a modern version of our religion. If we fast or put tilak or offer water to deity, many ask "why"? It is a legitimate question. Parallel spiritual veins try to answer the doubts of the modern mind in a language which is understood by all. These modern spiritual flows also do away with traditional evils of society like casteism, racism and communalism. This is the specific appeal of modern spirituality. Dhyanshree is one representative of it.

Then comes the story of Shri Pheru Singh Ruhela. Every word of what Shri Ruhela has written resonates as true and inspiring. Being a Professor and also being a daughter of two teachers, this chapter felt so familiar to me. Shri Ruhela brings to life the pure world of a teacher, hard work, honesty, sincerity of purpose and a selfless attitude. He has been a school teacher. He retired as Headmaster of the ACC Ltd. School, Lakheri, Rajasthan. He was named Pheru, the rotated one because his parents believed that they have again received his elder brother who had died.

His journey was loaded with lessons that a sincere person takes from every day happenings. The way he was brought up, the way elders chastised, the way he was punished, the way he failed, the way he faced problems in life- everything came with a lesson to him to improve himself. His is the satisfied world of an outstanding, dedicated teacher who gave all that he had to his students and in turn was loved by his pupils.

The example of Shri Ruhela exemplifies how much impact a teacher has. If the teacher is positive, thousands of lives are made. If not, then not.


The life story of Prakhar Sharma is what his name "Prakhar" means- bright, shining, outstanding. Prakhar's professional experience is so wide, varied and rich that it is difficult to describe who he is in one word. Usually, teacher, doctor, engineer etc are used to denote the profession of a person but what to call a person who has two masters degrees in management and public policy, who has worked for Philippines government, has briefed the White House on war ridden communities, has researched and tutored researchers in Afghanistan for a decade, who writes effectively and who is currently doing his PhD in Political Science from US. Much has been left out as to what this young man has been able to accomplish so far in his interesting and eventful life.

Prakhar's life journey is full of take-aways. He says that he has always been a person of abstract ideas rather than concrete ones. He did not fit into pre-decided career options. He kept searching his calling, his vocation, his choices. Through various experiences, he drifted towards international development and security. He rightly says that when the basic needs of humans are met, only then they can widen their vision and horizon. If hunger, shelter and security remain their concerns, how can we expect them to grow intellectually. Prakhar has not been a desk researcher. He spent years in war affected zones. Today he is doing PhD in Political Science from US.

He is someone who will bring solutions which do not exist. He is a potential writer as well. The best thing of all, he wants to develop high quality research institute in India.

I particularly liked the thirteenth chapter of the book, A Life Signifying Simplicity and Sensitivity: Arun Kaimal. This chapter and it's protagonist Arun are deeply philosophical. The tone is full of philosophy, wisdom and compassion. It immediately strikes a chord with the readers.

Arun Kaimal is a talented, young man, a certified level 2 situational leader, behavioral competence mapping expert, and someone who knows six languages. His philosophy of life is to receive all cultural influences and yet remain rooted in one's own culture. Spiritual rooting has perceptibly helped Arun. Language is a powerful tool. He quotes Federico Fellini, the film director, "A different language is a different vision of life." Sociability has been Arun's strong point. Twice, he has had near death experiences. He credits God for saving him.

I realized that the cycle of birth and death is something that no one can escape from. We all have to depart one day and no one knows when. Like it is said in the Bhagavad Gita (the Song of the Divine), the Soul is indestructible and keeps changing bodies, just like human beings keep changing clothes. It is the actions and deeds of an individual that determine whether one (one's thoughts and memories) remains immortal or gets pushed into oblivion with the passage of time. 

Currently he is at Singapore with Danaher. His work is still in progress.

As we can see Aparna's world revolves mostly around HR persons and teachers, in the fifteenth chapter we come to a Professor of History, Sarita Deouskar. A retired Professor of History from MP higher education department, Madam Deouskar has been an inspiring teacher, a support, an ideal not only for her many students but also her family and society at large. She firmly believes that history should be taught through stories, pictures and geographic references rather than by rote. Teaching history can be made very interesting. She proudly says that in her entire career spanning four decades, she has never taken a class sitting on the chair. That is something.

It feels so good that Aparna has chosen Madam Deouskar because she is one of the innumerable unsung heroines of India, women who build generations quietly performing their domestic and professional duties, passing on cultural values.

Madam Deouskar is full of wisdom pearls. She emphasizes on the quality of taking decisions. Preparation is important for a teacher. Life is about learning. One should face one's fears boldly. Women empowerment is the only way forward for India. Money cannot buy it all.





### Aparna Sharma Speaking at A.P.S. University, Rewa, Madhya Pradesh

The fifteenth chapter is significantly on Aparna Sharma herself. It is enriching the way she has written a letter to her own self, signifying how we all need self love. Aparna was sent to boarding school at a tender age. She understood world, it's give and take policy at an early age. She rightly says that there is no teacher like life. She was the second girl child and therefore was not much welcomed at her birth. This sounds so familiar even with me. Aparna comes out as an extrovert right from her childhood.

She has a special love for her early life mentor, her bua Dr. M. D. Vyas, in whose name she has started a scholarship at her school in Ujjain. Aparna has faced tough situations all her life. She has been a warrior all through her journey of life. Her PG from TISS, Mumbai gave her the edge and exposure which matched her talent.

Aparna has worked with Nocil, Monsanto, Novartis, UCB, Lafarge, and Greeves Cotton. Today she is a board member of a Tata group company. An HR person, Aparna has nurtured within her deep compassion and value for friendships. Reading her life,

one can easily see how much she values good people who have positively impacted her life. This book is a testimony of her love for her people. I read this book carrying it on my never ending journeys. I kept dotting notes. I wanted to write it's review as it came to me as a sincere person's tribute to the people she truly admires. So much so that I am myself motivated to write one such book.



Aparna Sharma with Shubha Tiwari

My meeting with Aparna at my University was short. In that short interaction, she came to me as a genuine person. She has no airs. And that is remarkable keeping in view how easily people develop a sense of entitlement and importance around themselves. A successful HR manager, an author, a philanthropist, Aparna Sharma as a person and her book both are highly valuable.

Note: All references in the above article are from the book, *Between U & Me (Ordinary People - Extraordinary Lessons)* by Aparna Sharma. Vishvakarma Publications, Pune. 2018. ISBN No. 978-93-86455-62-8

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