

The Zamindar And The Dagger

Seth Girdharilal was the zamindar of Kalivana village. He possessed vast tracts of fields where he had engaged farmhands to work for him. He was not a miser. of the usual type , just thinking of amassing wealth. But he enjoyed being miserly in spending money. He would not pay his workers full dues; or he would delay making the payments under the pretext or another , for one reason or another.

The poor workers, finding that they would not get work elsewhere , remained with him without raising their voice. The crafty Seth would wait for an auspicious day or a festival when he would call his workers home and dole out a part of their dues.

This he did , so that they would not curse him. And , on their part , they would go away silently , somewhat happy that at least that they would have a full meal at home, and hoping that one day the Seth would settle all their dues, as he had enough and more money.

One day , Girdharilal set out for the town to buy cattle at the monthly market. The cows back at home seemed to have gone dry and they were not giving enough milk for himself , his wife , and his two growing up children. At the market , he chose two young cows and bargained their price and thought that he had made a deal. Suddenly , he realized that he had forgotten to carry his velvet money-bag with him. He was in a dilemma. He did not want to lose the bargain; he also knew the cattle-trader would not wait till the next day . He might even sell away the cows or take them to another market. The Seth knew he would have to raise money somehow or other , so that he could take the cows with him that day itself.

Girdharilal went in search of a moneylender. He found one not far away from the market . But he asked for someone to stand surety for the Seth or some security. He had had at that time his gold - hilted dagger with him . It was a gift from his grandfather. He took it with him wherever he went out as he was always afraid of being waylaid by robbers. The moneylender agreed to accept it as guarantee and gave him the money he wanted. Girdharilal went away promising to return the loan and take back the dagger in the next few days. He then went back to the market , paid the price of the cows and took them home with the help of a young man who volunteered to go with him for a meal in return.

Girdharilal , of course , failed to turn up at the moneylender's the next week , or the next. He waited patiently for the zamindar for a month and then for another month , still there was no sign of the Seth. He held in his hand the dagger with the golden

hilt, wondering what he should do with it. Would he be able to sell it and retrieve the loan amount and its interest? Moreover, who would buy a dagger from a moneylender? If he were to produce it to anyone, it would only help tongues to wag and he might lose his prestige.

So, he kept quiet about the dagger and decided to send his servant to the zamindar. The man returned as he sent his servant to the zamindar. The man returned as he could not find the Seth at home and he did not want to waste his time, waiting for his presence. A few days later, the servant was sent again. That day, he was told that the zamindar had taken ill and was asleep and he could not be disturbed.

The moneylender held on, more patiently, hoping that Girdharilal, who must have been informed of the visits of the moneylender's messenger, might at least now return the loan and claim his dagger. He waited for a few more days and then thought of a plan. The next time, the barber Sukhram called on him, during the haircut the moneylender told him of the loan taken from him by Seth Girdharilal and how he failed to repay the money even after the two or three months. He also told him about the dagger with the golden hilt given to him as security and how it had gone missing from his house. The moneylender said that he would feel safe if the Seth did not turn up with the money! As long as he did not repay the loan, he also would not be asked to return the dagger!

The moneylender knew that barbers are purveyors of news and many people would soon come to know of the Seth, the loan which had not been repaid and the dagger that had mysteriously disappeared. Sure as enough, when Sukhram went to Girdharilal for his monthly haircut, he did not forget to share the 'news' with the Seth.

Girdharilal till now had not felt any shame that he had not repaid the loan to the moneylender. But now he guessed that many of the villagers would have already come to know of the whole affair and decided that he would confront the moneylender and ask him to produce the dagger if he wanted his money back. However, while going to the moneylender, he kept enough money to repay him, though he was sure he would not have to part with even a single paisa (money) out of it.

At the moneylender's place, Girdharilal raised a hue and cry when he was told that the dagger had been stolen. 'Who would expect a moneylender to keep a dagger as security?' he shouted at the top of his voice, taking care not to refer to its golden hilt. 'Who would want to steal a dagger from a moneylender?' He raised his voice still higher. Girdharilal also sneered at the moneylender and laughed aloud to attract a crowd.

When he saw that there was a sizeable crowd around the house , he told the moneylender, 'Why dont' you go in and search well?' He was hoping that the moneylender would soon come out only to tell him that he would not insist on Girdharilal repaying the loan amount , and he would consider as if the transaction had been closed.The moneylender meekly went inside and was not coming out for a long while.Girdharilal in the meantime was every now and then flaunting his velevt money bag , so that the crowd would know he was serious about repaying the loan ad he was an honest fellow.He would then have retrieved his name.

Suddenly, the moneylender rushed out.'Sethji, I've found the dagger! Here it is !! had kept it safe, but had forgotten where I had kept it.Here, take it back! Now can I have the money, so that we can close the transaction which had remained unsettled for a long time!' He laid stress on the last three or four words for the benefit of the crowd.

Giridharilal now had no option than to pay up the dues - the loan and the interest thereof. He was later seen walking out , head bowed down.He did not raise his head to watch the crowd boing at him.But he had learnt a lesson , and those who really benefited from his consternation and feeling of shame were his farm labourers who now promptly got their full wages.