



Bio-Data

was satisfied that unlike their neighbour's son, Abhishek, Anil did not insist on wearing his hair long.

The recitation stopped. By then, Vinaya had made up her mind. Today she would once and for all decide the question of Anil, his Papa, and her *dehatipan*. Nisha had told her on the phone that if she was ready she could consider herself selected. Throughout the day, the telephone conversation continued to echo in her mind.

It would hurt Anil's Papa and his self respect. He would be hurt that his salary had been proved insufficient. Then he would, without warning, bring a few new saris and, dumping them in front of her, would say: "You are taking a job so as to buy a few extra saris, aren't you? Look, here they are. Silly needless insistence on taking up a job!"

Perhaps if he was in a better frame of mind, he would resort to humour, and say: "You think your boss will be a nice, understanding fellow? Not like me, constantly quarrelling and shouting, huh? Well, let me tell you something, *shrimatiji*, I am in fact quite popular among my subordinates. Why do you think that Joshibai runs

ANIL was reciting his *mata stotra*. "Mummy, how do you know what we are quarrelling about? Don't put on airs! Do you know what is 'in'? You just see Amitabh on TV and think you know all about which of his styles is 'in'. Keep quiet, Mummy, and keep out!"

The recitation had started early in the morning. Today, Vinaya kept quiet. Every day, she had to think up new ways to make ends meet. And every day, a new couplet was added to the *stotra* repertoire. Listening day and night to the recitation, she had come to a decision. Yes, she was going to take up a job, any job that came her way.

Vinaya disliked exposing her arms. So she never wore sleeveless dresses. Neither did she like dressing gowns. Yesterday, Anil had flung her *dehati*

lack of culture in her face. "Mummy, it's so warm. Why do you keep wearing these nylon saris? Get into a gown. At least, start wearing cotton saris!"

Vinaya thought that Anil had really grown up now. He no longer cared how he spoke to his mother. Of course, he did not dare speak that way to his Papa. With Papa, all he needed to do was stand with an innocent look on his face, accept the pocket money or the school fees and get lost. Papa was then sure to be proud of his son's obedience.

At school, he got good marks so he did not feel ashamed of asking Papa for money. And to keep Papa in good humour, once in a while, Anil asked for money for a haircut. Papa could seldom make out whether or not Anil had actually had a haircut. He

after me? Here, why don't you join our section? That's an idea!"

When she came to know of it, her mother-in-law would say: "Oh, this woman! She has a husband with a brilliant career and a fat salary and what does she do? Instead of looking after his house and food, instead of bestowing care and love on her gem of a son, she has to take up a job!" Her mother would say: "Beti, what has come over you? Why take up a job, and that too in your declining years?"

In the evening, as she gave Papa his cup of tea, she finally told him about her decision. Behind his newspaper, Papa gave no sign that he had heard anything of importance. She sat down, facing him, at the table. In her mind she turned over the various possible reactions of her neighbours.

She started. In front of her, Papa stood, laughing. "Shrimatiji, you'll have plenty of time to snooze when you finally land a job. But you haven't landed one yet. Meanwhile, here is the boss waiting for orders from you. I am going out. Tell me what you need. And, Vinaya, do write it down. I don't want to land up in trouble in case I forget to buy something."

Vinaya sat up and began preparing the list. She knew this was only a beginning. Should she overlook an item, she knew what was coming. "Can't handle simple things like making a list and yet keeps talking of taking up a job. What does it mean? That bosses like me should be considerate!" Vinaya carefully finished the list.

Nisha's words still rang in her mind as she worked. After everyone had gone to sleep, she mopped up the remaining chores and turned eagerly to the task of fishing out her papers. Deep inside a cupboard she found them. Her marksheets, old letters, photographs of herself with her colleagues, letters of recommendation and reference. Vinaya felt nostalgic.

But she had very little time at her disposal.

She put all the papers on the table. She pushed away the papers not connected with the job. They became part of the untidy heap of Anil's and his Papa's papers. For the first time, Vinaya's papers, rescued from the cupboard, lay on a writing table. She



felt as if she had reconquered her right to read and write.

Vinaya began compiling her bio-data. She scanned her marksheets. Good. A number of letters of recommendation and reference lay before her. She sorted them out according to their dates. The last one was dated 15 years ago. And she thought, how was she to account for the intervening years? In her mind,

she began to turn over the items of the balance sheet of those years.

—A son she had nurtured with love and care, who now made her aware of her *dehatipan* whenever he got a chance.

—Small mistakes made, and deep wounds dealt out to her under cover of humorous jibes at educated, working women.

—A clean house, maintained with each day's labour.

—And thrice, or was it twice, the decision to take up a job. Papa, hurt by the decision to opt for a job rather than give full attention to her only son, had ceased talking with her. Then, after a few days, Papa had brought home three or four saris. Followed further humorous stories and jibes. Further tightening of belts because of the unexpected expenditure, and the constant bickering of Anil and his Papa when they felt the pinch.

—Withdrawal of the decision to take up a job. End.

Anyway, Nisha must have already arranged the job, else why would she have spoken as she did, on the phone? Nevertheless, how was she to account for the intervening 15 years? Probably, they would not ask. And even if they did, it would not matter, if Nisha was to be believed.

Vinaya's thoughts raced ahead. But could she cope with a job? Could she muster the required openness and freedom in behaviour with her colleagues? Could she muster the required, small but nevertheless definite courage to reply to memos and yet to keep on working? Or would she have to remain bowed and silent at the job the way she was at home?

The night deepened. The references before her said: "She is a hardworking, conscientious worker. We recommend her without hesitation." And Vinaya's fears about the job continued to grow.

(translated from Gujarati)