

## Preface

It all started with the search for a subject for a film...

Moulin Mehta said to me, "In one line it is 'a love triangle with two men and one woman! A story in which all are proven right!'"

In any case I have always been accused of being too inclined towards love-triangles!

So, this is where the seeds of this story were sown

First, I wrote a screen play of a story divided into forty-four scenes. I kept going over it repeatedly for quite a long time.

One day Bela asked me if I had any new novel- a love story.

And that was when Priyam began to take life and breathe in the pages of the 'Madhurima.'

Aditya and Shailraj became such intrinsic parts of my life that it was as if I myself was Priyam and ...perhaps so were the readers!

Priyam- was a free spirit, like the wind spreading her fragrance all over. She was as real as the blood flowing in our veins, bubbling and energetic!

Aditya Bhagwat- A man who desired to live his life through Priyam's existence...A successful businessman, a faithful and dedicated husband but someone who wanted to own his wife and got entangled in relationships. He is a sort of man who we see very often amongst us.

Shailraj Singh Rathore- Lived on his own, all alone and had the moist fragrance of the forest. He was fierce and passionate like the tiger, but at the same time had a gentle tenderness that he himself was unaware of.

It was a mystery as to how the threads of these three individuals came together!

As the story developed, I realised that this wasn't a triangle but three parallel relationships-like straight lines that start from a single point and end at another!

All three lines coming from three different directions are going in three different directions...but there was something common that touched all three...

And that was the bridge, the centerpoint- 'The Madhyabindu' connecting all three.

'The bridge to nowhere!'

I have never liked the term 'extra marital' and I have never accepted it! I have always felt that this is actually 'post marital' and that is what such relationships are.

In every person, especially women, there is always something incomplete, something missing...And a vast majority of them are incapable of identifying it and even if they do, they live their lives not having the courage to express it. There are multiple reasons for this- from society, culture, freedom to security...!

Those women who do express these missing pieces or find these missing pieces and live life on their own terms face a lot of challenges. A woman gets into such a relationship only if she is mentally prepared to accept and face the consequences of her own decisions...

Not every woman is fortunate like 'Draupadi' and it may not even be considered a fortune by many women- but the truth is that Priyam is and was completely different from the definitions of 'fidelity and faithfulness' that our patriarchal social structure has set.

I have attempted to write what I liked and the way I like to and I am glad that it has appealed and struck a chord with my readers.

- Kaajal Oza Vaidya

## A Bridge to Nowhere

It was an early November morning with the sun crawling up the horizon at six forty in the morning and as the sky turned saffron. The early morning light was slowly spreading all around. A cool breeze wafted across while a mild chill filled the air.

A small crowd of forty or fifty people milled around the 'Arrivals' board at the Ahmedabad airport. A few taxi drivers and auto drivers lazed around smoking, sipping tea and gossiping. The flight was ten minutes late today and the people stood there eager for it to arrive. Among the crowd stood a man, around fifty years of age and dressed in a driver's white uniform. He paced around so restlessly that every person standing there noticed him. He was very agitated and the ten-minute delay felt to him like ten hours. While people were impatient, his uneasiness was unusual.

The arrival of the 9.40 flight from Mumbai was announced. The autowallahs and the taxi drivers suddenly sprang to life throwing their bidis, wrapping their shawls, straightening their sweaters while they began moving towards the arrival gates. A warmth suddenly spread in the air.

The Jet airways ground crew in their blue skirts and printed shirts were alert with their walkie-talkies in hand. The conveyer belts soon began moving.

At the tarmac, while the ladder was getting attached to the aircraft, the passengers inside started getting up. The air hostess's announcement continued in her usual monotone, "Welcome to the Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel airport. ...the temperature outside is 7

degrees Celsius. Please take care while opening the overhead luggage bins...’ Even before her announcement ended the sounds of the mobile phones being switched on filled the cabin, while pending messages started pinging and all kinds of ringtones began chiming. Even before the passengers could get out of their stupor and prepare for leaving, a man got up from his J-class seat and nudged his way to the door...his body language betraying an extreme sense of urgency.

The J-Class passengers pay one and a half times the regular fare to fly in comfort. Their seats are soft, wide and they are served special meals. Obviously, these people are a class apart. The regular J-class or Business class passengers were taken aback at the behaviour of this man. It was least expected from a man of class! A model-like woman wearing low-waist jeans said to no one in particular, annoyance writ large on her one, ‘Uff, these uncouth people!’

Another middle aged man who had been elbowed by the young man quipped, ‘Easy young man, easy...we too have to get down.’ But all this seemed to have no effect on youth! Seeing his haste, and his impatience, the airhostess too couldn’t keep quiet.

“Anything wrong Sir?” She asked with concern. She had observed that the man had been restless throughout the flight. He would glance at his watch time and again, look out of the window and wipe his tears. He hadn’t eaten anything and had refused tea, coffee and juice, despite the airhostess’ repeated requests! He had had water five times!

“No, it’s ok,” he said.

“Take care,” the air hostess said with her practised Jet airways smile. The man rushed down the steps as soon as the door opened and ran to the airport terminal without bothering to board the bus. His chest was heaving and all he could see was the airport exit!

There was a strange anxiety in his bearing as he ran pushing people out of his way. As he came out his eyes searched for his driver waiting at the arrival gate.

## A Bridge to Nowhere

About six feet tall, wearing a tan leather jacket, blue jeans, fair... a Roman sculpture like chiselled body, broad shoulders and slender waist...short haired thirty-eight year old young man with a business man like appearance...the same man who had elbowed his way out of the flight in a hurry... was still running. All he had in his hand was a Samsonite laptop bag and a small bag for files and papers.

His eyes were perplexed. His dry eyes had dark circles owing to a sleepless night and worry. They were just waiting to well up as his eyes met his driver's. Perhaps the driver couldn't stand the look on those eyes; he lowered them and took a step forward. The youth came near to the driver to see a strange emptiness and silence reflected in his eyes. Unable to bear the look he asked, "What...what happened?"

The driver placed his hands on the young man's shoulder and shook his head gently. As the driver took the hand luggage from the youth's hand, the man held the driver's hand. The youth bit his lower lip so hard that it began to bleed. ...he took out his sunglasses from his pocket and put them on. The driver quickly opened the rear door of the Oxford blue BMW parked in the VIP parking and dumped the bags in the back seat. The young man, without warning, snatched the car keys from the driver's hands and sat in the driver's seat...

The driver, sitting in the passenger seat, gasped at the way the young man started the car and got it out of the parking and moved towards Shahibaug...

The car raced below the brown board saying 'Welcome to Ahmedabad' and turned towards the city...

The young man's face was stone like...almost expressionless. He was wiping the tears that welled up in his eyes again and again. His breath was faster than the speed of the car...

The sun's red rays shone through the rows of trees and turned yellow as the sun moved upwards. A soft sunshine seemed to be waking up the city gently and reminding people to get to work. The streets of Ahmedabad were gradually springing to life.

The area between the airport and Shahibaug was wide and peaceful. With little traffic, the car cruised past Sadar Bazaar, the cannon outside the cantonment gate and the Hanuman temple. Though the car was zipping, the young man felt as if it was crawling. The BMW appeared to be more impatient than the man himself. The man seemed to be lost in thoughts and hundreds of images flitted past his mind and several voices echoed in it. He suddenly looked out of the window to see a face appear on the horizon....A woman's face, a fresh, beautiful, smiling face with her pearl white teeth gleaming. The larger-than-life face filled the sky end-to-end, but was getting blurred because of the tears welling up in the young man's eyes. The dancing and talking eyes, the beaming face...fair, soft, chiselled marble like face with its perfect nose, lips and chin seemed to be looking at him. Long, thick, dark, waist length hair spread over her face and covered time and again. She was laughing aloud ...the man involuntarily extended his hand to move the hair off her face...It was as if his fingertips could feel her touch...

Her silky, soft skin was spreading a strange feeling through his body as if his fingers had come alive just by that mere touch. Her entire existence seemed to pulsate in his fingers. Her cheeks, her chin and her lips...Uff! Was this a woman of a live volcano? He had been experiencing the same feeling for the past so many years. There had been high tides in that madness, but never an ebb in them!

He extended his hand out of the car. He moved the hair away from the woman's face, he grabbed a fistful of the hair roughly and pulled her face close to his....Her lips were parted! But the smile on her face had vanished. The beautiful woman was ready to surrender herself fully with her parted lips, her eyes closed and her face turned upwards waiting for another pair of lips...that could melt her...

"Bhai!" the driver screamed. The car was close to hitting the road divider on the right side. The young man came to his senses as he controlled the car. The driver asked hesitatingly, "Shall I drive?"