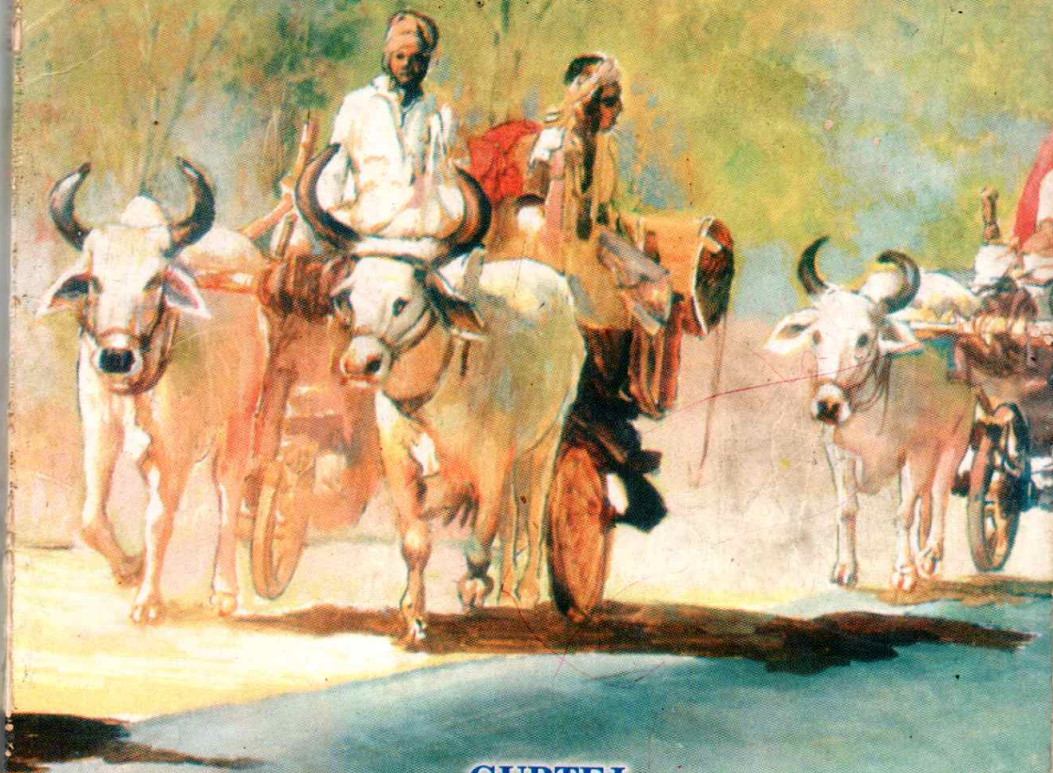


# TRAGEDY AND AFTER

'A book based on the Dabwali Fire Tragedy'



GURTEJ

'Not to learn from some tragedy is the  
most tragic tragedy in itself'

*The caravan had gone by \_\_\_\_\_!*

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**GURTEJ** M-99-910-48046

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*This book is dedicated  
to the loving memory  
of my wife Ranjeet,  
my son Gagan Deep  
and my daughter Raman Deep  
and to all those  
who were burnt alive  
in Dabwali Fire Tragedy  
on December 23, 1995  
along with them.*



## **PREFACE**

This is the first monograph written by a sufferer of the Dabwali Fire Tragedy who has lost in it all the three beloved members of his family including wife, daughter and son. What the author writes, is the voice of all the sufferers of the Tragedy!

By going through the pages of the volume, the reader can well imagine : How the consequences of the Tragedy are painful for the near and the dear of fire victims & similar tragedies.

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## FOREWORD

My wit fails and imagination staggers to contemplate that a person who received his formal education from an ordinary school and college could produce such a master- piece of literature in his very first attempt and that too in English entitled 'LIFE- AN ART'. It was widely acclaimed by the intelligentsia the world over. In fact, the writer in him has been awakened and shakened and his hidden talents and potentials are gradually coming out. As Shakespeare says," Some people are born great.....here is a shining example who seems to be heading towards the line of a seasoned artist. The present book depicts his purely personal experience and his encounter with this wily world.

He finds himself very close to the spirit of Nature. As a matter of fact, he has spiritualized Nature or Naturalized the human spirit which is reflected throughout his writing. According to him, the present man has himself invented misery and pain by adopting unNatural, sophisticated and complex life style and by going against Nature and even his own very nature leading to an eternal split life. The more he drifts away from Nature and his own very nature, the more he exposes himself to pangs and pains. Unless and until man follows both of them, his such state will go on from bad to the worst till.....

His two children viz Master Gagandeep (Romy) aged eleven in class 5th & Baby Ramandeep (Rosy) aged eight in class 3rd were brilliant gems of our school. They were apple of their parents' eye and darling angels for all the teachers who taught them. Mr. Gurtej was an exceptionally caring father and very often visited the school to apprise me of their achievements and discussed about their further prospects in life. He spared no pains, if he found anything going against their interest in school, to point



out that we were lacking in our duties towards the children. Sometimes, he was a little harsh too, but with no ill-will as it generally happens with the parents who are emotionally concerned about their children. He too had a dream of their future and had a lot of expectations and aspirations. All his hopes came crumbled down like a house of cards on Dec. 23, 1995 when the conflagration broke out during the annual function of D.A.V. Centenary Public School, Mandi Dabwali and took away many innocent lives within the twinkling of an eye. Along them, the writer's better-half along with her two sweet children were burnt to ashes leaving behind a trail of sorrows for him. I say with all my forces at my command that these two children were extraordinarily pushing and promising. The loss was too unpredictable, irreparable, colossal, uncompromisable and irreconcilable. The writer after a crazy spell of many months probably learnt the art of living and leaving and channalized his energies by reading and writing and this brought solace to his agonised soul.

He got remarried as the life means living and living means living usefully and purposefully. So he adapted himself in the new environs accepting it as a natural phenomenon and started life denove and now he is father of a son. But his past is so deeply embedded in his heart that it has left an indelible imprint and the whole catastrophe remains in front of his eternal eyes all the time. His segregation or liberation from the past seems to be impossible and he cannot sever his ties with the cruel past, probably he finds solace or peace in expressing his experienced views.

He is unusually simple, soft spoken and straightforward. There seems to be a blend of complete harmony in what he thinks, speaks and does. So, he is rarest personality in society who kindles his heart's light to dispel the darkness all around. His concept about Nature is quite clear and unambiguous. He is ahead of his age and times. His technique of expressing his ideas is inimitable and eloquent. The outbursts of his emotions are very

heart touching, natural and impressive. Pearls of wisdom seem to flow from his pen. He possesses a unique quality of striking balance between past and present with scintillating association of sensibilities and farsightedness.

My visit to his home is just like a pilgrimage for me and conversing with him is a beauty and joy which infuses in me a spirit of new life and boosts my morale. A love for living springs in me inadvertently. Truly speaking he is a true friend, philosopher and guide to all those who come in his contact.

I express my deep sense of gratitude for his reverence to me and offer my abundant, bountiful blessings and good wishes with all measure and pray to 'The Existence' to shower Its choicest blessings on this young and prolific writer so that he may continue to march ahead with zeal and enthusiasm.

His present book is also an epitome of knowledge and reveals the ills of society which are eating into the very vitals of humanity in the name of the so-called progress. The author has been very honest in his approach in describing the human weaknesses like hatred, distrust, false ego, the leg pulling, rampant corruption etc. in every field. May he be blessed with a coveted success in his mission !

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Gurtej made his mark as a writer with the publication of his maiden book, "LIFE-AN ART". As a student and a keen observer of life, he has always been alert and aware in picking up the vital facts and their under-current. His fine sensibilities have made him alive and restive. He finds great relief in pouring out the observed realities of life with a natural spice.

I don't want to dwell upon the biographical details of this budding but successful writer. I am of the opinion that these biographical details have no relevance for men of letters when they earn immortality by sharing their experiences with the entire world. He has travelled almost all over the globe through his maiden work. But like every artist, he has many 'Miles to go before I sleep'. Fire tragedy in Mandi Dabwali on Dec. 23, 1995 proved a turning point in his life. As fire purifies gold and all dross is consumed, the fire tragedy proved an acid test for his blooming genius. It tore him apart and almost finished him but he appeared like a phoenix out of the ashes. The experience offered him a cup of poison, he was no Socrates, but he drank it. His poison-soaked heart is turning out elixir of life for the benefit of the whole of humanity. His words carry weight and are too authentic. His message is to live naturally so that Nature is in a position to guard man against all unnatural misfortunes brought about by the selfish and hypocritical world. He is no revolutionary but he has the guts to call a spade, a spade.

I wish him a grand success.

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Principal

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## TO THE READER

I have to write this piece with too heavy and too bleeding a heart. Nature hath helped me immense in setting aside my grief and exhorted me to create such an eternal memorial to those who were made to burn alive for no fault of their own as hath never been created so far. It is too easy to construct a memorial as it needs but only means but to create one needs a feeling heart . But even a memorial has not been constructed even upto now even after six years and when....? I have tried my best not to hurt anyones' feelings and emotions as I too have suffered a total and irreparable loss. I myself being a severe victim of the tragedy, it is but natural that there may be some emotional outbursts, so don't misunderstand me. I have not included any photo of any victim, the sufferer and of the tragedy site keeping in view the sentiments of the affected ones as old wounds begin to bleed if scratched . Even then if any of my observations hurts anyones' feelings, I seek apology in advance. I hope that all will understand my predicament as the subject is too tender and emotional.

I write only that which I have myself experienced or observed. So, mine these views are just spontaneous and not intentional. One thing more; I don't being so well-bred, well-fed and well-ed.; my command on English language may be somewhat less hence some errors might have crept in hence bear with me and guide me accordingly. I invite with open heart your valued views, comments and suggestions about this piece. Such a kind gesture on your part will help, guide and inspire me in my further endeavours. I solicit the valued support of all of you as it will encourage me to write somewhat more and that too with more precision. May Existence bless all !

## INTRODUCTION

Tragedies and calamities, whether man-made or Natural, go on striking humanity every now and then causing irreparable loss. They leave a trail of death and disaster behind them. The bereaved and the incapacitated ones go through an untold ordeal. Orphans, widows, widowers, destitutes, maimed, crippled and the alike are what is left after some catastrophe. Many lose their bread-earners thus live a life of utter misery and penury. Many are uprooted and have to face untold sufferings. The affected ones bear the trauma for whole life. The whole humanity stands with them instantly and attends to them by all means and ways. But as Time goes on, the affected ones' real ordeal begins as people get involved into their own affairs. Every new tragedy draws peoples' attention towards it setting aside the previous ones. In this way, old calamities are buried deep in the due course of time. Man is the only creature to fall in the same ditch time and again. He never learns from past and goes on committing same follies repeatedly. That's why tragedies of similar nature go on causing havoc each eclipsing its predecessors in magnitude. Reason?; man's selfish and greedy nature. He always grinds his own axe whatsoever may be the effect. Natural calamities too strike humanity off and on. Some of these may be caused by some in-built mechanism of ' The Whole Existence ' whereas some may be caused by the callous approach of man towards Nature. Whatever may be the reason , the nature of the loss remains the same.

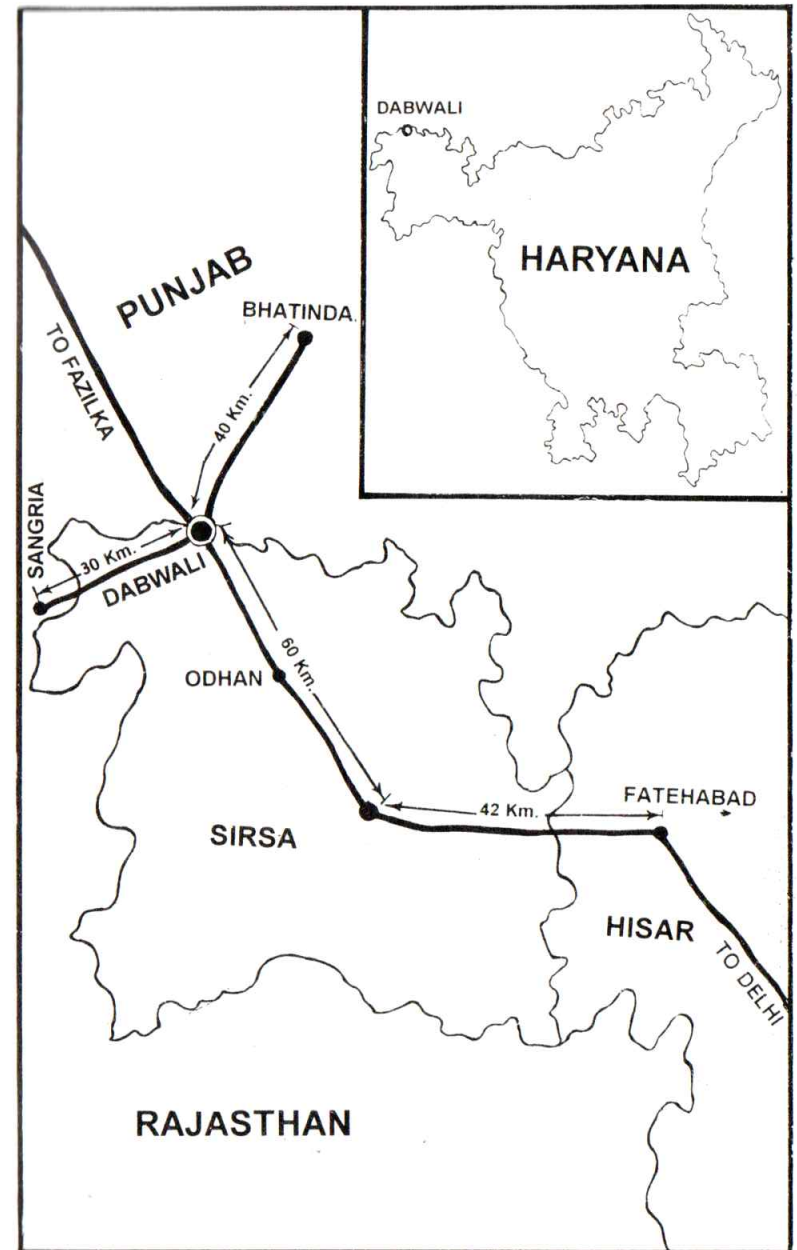
I myself have lost my entire family in the Dabwali Fire Tragedy. That's why I want to share my experienced and lived views with humanity. I have tried to make man aware about the reality of the things. In today's world of scientific and technological explosion,



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day- to -day life has become insecure, risky and prone to sudden mishaps. From the hearth to the Super-Computer, all is just hazardous. Fast and cut-throat competitive life style is making man blind towards himself and the surroundings. Life is sitting on a volcano and man's wrong priorities have caused so. If we scan media moment to moment the only inference which can be drawn is that-violence, death, destruction and all sorts of inhuman events go on happening too regularly and too vastly; life, creativity and the beauties of life and Nature are kept at the fag end of the priorities. If man does not awaken now, then the last tragedy is not too far. I have set my grief aside to awaken man by writing this book. I have full faith in 'The Existence' which may bless man with deep insight and save life from extinction on this beautiful and unique planet, and do remember, only this planet has the privilege to have conditions conducive for life. It is now or never, over to man —————!

## DABWALI MAP



## **DABWALI IS HERE**

Most of the towns spring up near some village thus named after it. Dabwali town too is born out of village Dabwali. It is situated on N.H. No. 10 which leads from Delhi to Fazika near Pakistan border. It lies on Bhatinda -Suratgarh railway line. It is about 300 kms away from Delhi and about 280 kms away from Haryana State Capital Chandigarh. It is divided between Punjab and Haryana states thus neglected by both. The border of another state Rajasthan too is just about 35 kms away. So, it is just like no- man's land. Due to its proximity to so many states, it is but natural that inter-state bus and railway routes connect it well with the other parts of the country. But even then it has not developed much due to its positioning at the western far-end of Haryana State. The British put it on the railway map because the area is a rich cotton-belt. Agriculture is the main vocation of the people of this area. Industrial progress is almost nil here. Infrastructural facilities are too poor, so the town's outlook is just rural, it being surrounded by villages. The town meets to the needs of the rural peasantry. People are just simple, hardworking and cooperative. Sweet social and cultural ties are a symbol of people's deep interdependent and emotional attachment.

The bug of modernity and blind materialism has not poisoned this sweet social fabric as yet. So, people are just simple and Natural. Its population is about fifty thousand. People of many castes, creeds and vocations live here very amicably. The social fabric is very well-knit and sweet. The advent of liberalisation is changing life-style to some extent now. Educational facilities are of medium order. There are two colleges for women and the only college for men lies in Punjab catering to the needs of



the local youth. There are about thirty schools, some of them are Govt. while others are either recognised or affiliated run privately, the street schools excluded. About nine thousand students receive education in them. The ill-fated D.A. V.C. Public School was one of them. It was situated just near the main bus stand on Chetak Defence Road linking Bathinda and Suratgarh Cantts. It was being run in an old building hired on rent and was affiliated to C.B.S.E. upto tenth class. The site of the fire tragedy 'The Rajiv Marriage Palace' too was just two hundred metres away from it on the same road. It proved to be the burning graveyard of hundreds of innocent school children, their loving mothers and some others. The school management and administration, the Rajiv Marriage Palace's owners by bribing the local administration and violating all safety and precautionary norms and the cruel callous behaviour of the then D.C. at the tragedy site played havoc with so many precious lives and caused the name of Dabwali appear in black-ink on the pages of history forever. What an ill name .....!

## TRAGEDY AND TRINITY

' Tragedy is Caused either by  
' The Earthly Trinity or by  
' The Natural'.

## TRAGEDY AND TRINITY

An unexpected sudden mishappening leaving behind a trail of death, disaster, destruction and untold misery may be termed as a tragedy, it may be on individual or social level; loss is loss. Mostly, individual loss goes unnoticed whereas the social one becomes known to all. Moreover, the tragedy which affects more people shakes the whole humanity as it is a human loss which is irreparable. The whole humanity stands as one with the victims of such calamity with all means. Multiple problems follow which are to be attended to on a large scale and only a collective effort can manage them. Humanity is struck by some man-made or Natural calamity off and on, 'Effect can't visit sans some cause.'

There are two Trinities, The Earthly and The Otherwise. At first, the latter. The Whole Existence exists on some laws of Its own. The law of change ensures the smooth functioning of such an infinite and mysterious Show. Three functions of creation, sustenance and destruction too happen due to law of change. The whole system is such as act on cause and effect theory. It is a show of energy and energy never dies. All goes on changing moment to moment except the law of change. Life on this unique planet only too became possible due to continuous changes in 'The Universe' for an immense length of Time. Conditions conducive for life had not appeared overnight on this tiny organ of the body universe. 'Every change leads to some other change'. In my view, life appears there, wherever conducive conditions happen due to constant changes. Now it is on this planet, then it may be on some other object. When some star is so positioned as The Sun is to The Earth, then energy is transformed into life over too long a period of time. All Natural bodies and objects



remain on a constant move in their own respective orbits. The system is so harmonious and rhythmic as acts automatically as per cause and effect theory. There is nothing which operates It. Human body is itself an exact replica of The Universe. How smoothly it works automatically! Does man do something about its functioning? All organs act on their own as per their respective speciality both independently and interdependently automatically. When all organs function well, the body remains well but when even a cell is disturbed, the body begins to feel ill. Similarly, The Whole Existence consists of a fantastic system which functions too smoothly. The whole is body and the objects the organs. When all objects function well, the body remains balanced but the slightest disturbance causes imbalance. The system is so harmonious and well-knit as not to bear even the slightest imbalance. Such a grand and mysterious show goes on so smoothly and accurately due to some in-built automatic mechanism. Many automatic adjustments and alterations go on happening within the system and the balance is restored automatically after some imbalance. In fact, 'balance sustains only on some imbalance'. Whenever there is some disharmony in The System, It responds as per the nature of Its laws just as human body gains balance after vomiting out the unwanted. What the doctors do? They just restore the balance by giving some medicines. Why the people who live a Natural life fall less ill? Their body functions as per Natural laws. Most of the present ills are by-products of unnatural way of life. When some system uses some discretion, the disaster is bound to follow. The super-system is bound by the nature of Its own laws hence can't use any discretion. That's why such a grand show is going on too smoothly. To me, the word 'Universe' seems too pregnant with meaning; uni for 'unity' and verse for 'versatility'; a united and versatile system. That's why The System functions so superbly and without any fail.  $H_2O$  will be water and nothing else, no question of any compromise or bargain. Science too originated

and survives due to the uncompromising nature of laws of Nature. Man has come to this point of unbelievable progress by observing Nature and learning from It. That's why science will always remain dependent on Nature. It can go on exploring Nature to any extent but can't conquer it which it is trying to do. If it did not mend its ways, it will meet its waterloo, an ant is trying to conquer The Himalayas. 'Beggars can't be choosers'. But if it acts on as per laws of Nature, then the infinite treasure has abundant surprises in store for it. The whole system is just intelligent, sensitive and responsive beyond words. It can be but felt with clarity of vision and awareful observation.

The eternity of this system is sustained through in-built adjustments and alterations which ensure eternal balance. Natural calamities are caused due to such nature of Natural laws. There are billions of celestial bodies and objects moving constantly on their respective paths. The scientists imagine that there are about one hundred billion galaxies each having one hundred billion stars and other objects. The Sun whose light reaches Earth in about eight and half minutes is just a pygmy by the side of other stars and light travels at a speed of 1,86,000 miles per second. There are millions of stars whose light reaches here in millions of years and still there are some whose light never reaches us and they are finished. What an infinite and splendid show! It is just mind boggling. This is just that which has been explored by science upto now what about the unexplored? Even the potentialities of this tiny planet have not been explored fully so far what to say about The Whole Show. We know only about some of the upheavals of this pygmy planet, what about The Whole System? Such changes may be necessary to keep The System eternally eternal. The Super Trinity of creation, sustenance and destruction functions as such as to run the show of energy. Energy always flows leading to many changes which in turn leads to many more thus forming a chain. The organs function regularly and



automatically as per laws of Nature to sustain the Eternal Body. I understand so but The System is too mysteriously mysterious? Man can never know about Its origin what to say of functioning. There is no way to know about the mechanism of a cyclic entity.

If Natural upheavals are caused by The Mechanism of The Whole System, then these may be a must to maintain the balance. Life on this very planet may exit sans those changes. Mind accepts this reality or not is immaterial, it can think but only of its own self. The Whole System has to take care of such a grand show. Mind is too shallow but The System too deep and vast. There is nothing futile in The Existence. Has body anything useless? From where minerals, chemicals, gases and of course water, the source of life, and other musts for life appear? How are Natural resources get replenished? They are due to that cyclic functioning of the whole system and upheavals are bound to happen in the process. It may seem unpleasant to the immediate generation but may be a must even for the happening of the incoming gens. The Wheel is too giant and on constant movement to be comprehended. So, the law of change of Nature ensures life and replenishes Natural resources. Could life have existed and become so comfortable and enjoyable sans Natural resources?

Do all Natural calamities happen due to the such mechanism of The Whole Existence? No, a very big one at that. Those might have been Natural till the birth of mind. It began to interfere in the functioning of That System, it is even trying to conquer It too. It is using even That Very System's laws even against That Very System. It is taking That for granted. But for how long...? Whereas man must have been the most grateful species as only he is blessed with consciousness but mercifully he is the only ungrateful one and that is going to be his undoing in the near future. On the contrary he is robbing Nature for his own self. Man has been blessed with the potentiality of rising high above angels as well as

falling down lower than animals. Similarly, he can improve upon Nature as well as disfigure It and woefully he is doing the latter. He is committing a sort of rape on it. Whereas all creations are playing their respective Natural roles in maintaining ecological balance, only the so-called super species is trying all its best to undo it. He can go to any extent to grind his own axe whatever may be the after-results. He is causing untold damage to The Sweet Fabric of The Existence. Flora and Fauna are being invaded causing extinction of many species. Every creation is created for some specific role as there is nothing useless in The Show. Natural resources meant for life and making it comfortable are being ill-used for death. Ozone layer is being damaged. Global warming is threatening the very continuance of life due to disturbances in Green House Effect. Blind Industrialisation, ever growing population growth and boom in machinery is leading to multiple pollution leading to multiple dreaded diseases in the process. The ill list is too long to be worded. In fact, almost all the activities of man are aimed at minting money and attaining power at all costs. He pays scant respect to the beauties of life which lie only in Nature and Its balance. His lust is continuously poisoning The Whole Nectar and Eco-balance is being disturbed constantly. The situation is becoming too grim and fatal. So, it is crystal clear that the seed of some Natural calamity had been sown in the remote past. The system is too giant to react fast. Man's life is too short before the giant, slow and invisible hands of clock of Time. That's why man is unable to find correlation between the present and the past. 'Present is as was Past and Future will be as is Present'. Present calamities visit due to some ill-deeds of mind in the past. How man is behaving with Nature today will must bear fruit tomorrow. Nature acts on cause and effect theory. Denudation of forests shall result in drought. The existence can't use any discretion but automatically acts and reacts as per given conditions as per laws of Nature. The



System's such helplessness ensures the fool proof functioning and management of such a vast Show.

Now to tragedies caused by 'The Earthly Trinity' that is social, political and economic set-up. Who manages it? Of course, man and institutions follow man. 'To err is human but not to learn from it is just assish. Man is a selfish creature. He has become just blind and insensitive in the rat race of gaining pelf, power and prestige at all costs. He does not hesitate even to kill or abet it for gaining this or that and what not —————? The life has become too materialistic, fast and competitive to relax for a while. He has become just a machine. He always remains on constant run and never finds time for relaxing and to ponder over. 'Hurry always leads to worry and worry to some wrong decision'. He remains too overtaxed, in his effort to gain all, to sleep as per Natural schedule. He has become just a total psychosomatic wreck. The errors are bound to creep in such a messy situation.

He is caught in the vicious circle of shallow parochialism, communalism, castism, fundamentalism and bigotry due to cast, colour, creed, race, blind faiths, myths, superstitions and language considerations etc. He is made to fight, kill, arson, riot and indulge in many other inhuman cruelties in the name of this or that. He always remains on a constant fight in one form or the other to gain pelf, power and name. Five thousand known wars in the last three thousand years stand a witness to this fact and the insanity goes on unabated. In my considered view, constant fight in the name of above man-made considerations have caused more human loss, destruction and disaster than all Natural calamities combined together ? Man must have erred somewhere in managing "The Earthly Trinity" on this beautiful planet.

The modern and sophisticated technology has, no doubt, made life too comfortable and meansful but has brought in many problems in its wake. The East is on more slippery ground than

the West, it being not so advanced and developed thus lacking in infrastructural facilities. It is copying its elder brother blindly. Here safety and precautionary measures are not taken beforehand, as is the routine practice there, due to callousness and carelessness and people are not so safety conscious. Moreover, It has not sufficient means to have the latest too much expensive technology which remains ever-changing. People too being not so meansful here can't afford to adhere to modern safety and precautionary standards. So, it is but natural that man-caused tragedies are caused more here than there. Industrial revolution has brought in in its wake multiple pollution thus multiple diseases due to non-adherence to precautionary safety measures. The raw materials and in-puts used are too accident-prone and even the slightest error on someone's part can cause untold loss.

So, tragedies either Natural or man-made have come to be a way of life. But their occurrence can be minimised and so can be their magnitude. Man has to change his vision towards life. He has to learn from his errors so that, at least, tragedies of similar nature do not go on occurring every now and then. He has to curtail his lusty lusts and cultivate a sense of aestheticism. He has to rever life and Nature. Freedom from blind bondages and love for 'The Whole Existence' have to be made a way of life. Just a glimpse of awareness can reveal the reality of things here. If man does not really change himself now, then 'The Earthly Trinity' in its present form is leading towards the ultimate catastrophe. Oh! Man, change with the change otherwise law of change will change the presence of life from here to somewhere else, you are the captain of the ship of life here .....?

## **MAJOR TRAGEDIES**

‘ Man itself is the most major tragedy ’



## MAJOR TRAGEDIES

'History repeats as well as defeats itself.' This proverb reveals the nature of human nature. The first part of it reveals that man never learns from past but goes on committing the same follies repeatedly. The second one tells that every new tragedy defeats its predecessors in terms of magnitude and destruction. The whole proverb shows man's indifference towards realities of life and his deep slumber. That's how the show is going on moving from one tragedy to the other. But now the situation has become too explosive to be complacent. Oh! man, either be awake or face perishment.....?

The earlier man had to struggle against vagaries of Nature. As he went on evolving, he began to observe Nature and learn from It. From the discovery of fire up to now, he labored too hard to be worded. From the three B-needs to the present age of computers is a journey of success to success. Then the population was sparse and Natural resources abundant and man's needs too few, so the struggle was too minimal. Moreover, the life was simple and Natural and barter economy and mutual co-operation took care of basic needs of man. As mind and science began to develop, the situation began to change. The industrial revolution of the eighteenth century began to change life and man too. Needs began to yield place to wants and wants to luxuries in due course of time. The tragedy is that population explosion and scientific explosion exploded almost simultaneously. The mother of the basic hell, the population bomb gave birth to poverty which is the basic tragedy. The population which grew to only one billion up to 1804 since the birth of present man but tripled in just next 156 years i.e. up to 1960. It has touched the six billionth mark in 2000. It began to prove a dangerous drain



on Natural resources thus precipitating cut-throat struggle and competition. The advent of science and technology began to change life-style. The market began to be flooded with all sorts of productions leading to a rat-race. Man began to run after this and that and what not intensifying the fight. By and by, money began to be a power unto itself, so man began to fall in the trap of blind materialism. To have pelf, power and prestige became his obsession. He can go down to any low to gain this and that and what not.....? In my view, he has become just a wreck. Is it not too tragic? So long as man is such, tragedy after tragedy will go on going. Man himself a tragedy will generate more tragedy. Can a tragic creature lead to bliss?

Many upheavals have confronted humanity causing too much loss of life and untold misery and disaster. But I would like to mention only those which affect many people at a time and shake the whole of humanity and also affect other creations. Natural calamities such as earthquakes, floods, droughts, famines, storms, tornadoes, typhoons, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, cyclones etc. hit some specific zones that are prone to them due to geographical and Natural factors. Different climatic conditions lead to different kinds of upheavals. As certain pockets are hit by certain calamities, so somewhat can be done for them by taking safety and precautionary measures. Some long-term measures can be taken to lessen the loss. In today's world of sophisticated technology and computerisation, Natural calamities can be forecast in much advance, so, much can be done beforehand and afterwards too. But man believes in temporary measures and calamities go on repeating themselves. His ill-behaviour towards Nature will go on inviting Natural calamities unendingly each eclipsing its predecessors.

Though man always remains in search of bliss but he has never acted for it but has ever acted otherwise. 'Bliss or misery lies in life-vision'. He always preaches love and peace but

behaves exactly otherwise. He will get what he does and not what he preaches. That's why he is becoming too miserable. He has to live as per his preaching to make life a joy affair. He goes on fighting and inciting violence under this pretext or the other to become rich and powerful so that he can dominate others. This planet has never witnessed even a moment of peace so far since man's arrival on the scene. Every moment there is some sort of fighting going on somewhere. Millions of precious lives have been lost and the game is on and on....? Much damage has been caused to Nature and the effort is on to ————? Has man got something so far out of his such nature? Yes, Of course; death, destruction, disaster and to cap it all depression and misery. But he will never learn, I am dead sure about it. He shall learn but only when life becomes extinct here. When table is to be used in the end then why not in the beginning? The people who want to dominate and prosper exploit the lusty nature of common man and go on making him fight in this or that name. The wars can become extinct only if common man begins to look through their mischievous game-plan and becomes aware enough not to fall in their trap. If we evaluate human history so far then it is nothing but a saga of constant wars resulting in mass death, destruction and disaster in the name of this or that crusade only to gain social, political and economic power; a total domination. There has been some error on the part of man in managing the affairs of life on this planet which needs to be corrected if man wants to get rid of both kinds of catastrophes to some extent otherwise the ultimate tragedy is not too far off.....?

I would like to take into account a few of those human tragedies which occurred in the twentieth century; a period of unparallel scientific and technological boom in which man has the only opportunity to be both meansful and blissful; a period during which the hell of poverty, starvation, ignorance and diseases could have been wiped out completely; even the word 'hell' could have



been deleted from the dictionary forever making this very planet a living paradise. But ————? That which could have been used for creativity has been being misused for destruction. About seventy percent of means and resources are being spent for destructive purposes, then for how long this ill-investment will remain sans some ill-output. The first man-made misadventure based on science and technology which affected almost the whole humanity was the first world war. Sophisticated weaponry and machinery was used for the first time on such a large scale inflicting heavy losses of life and property. About nine million people were killed and millions were seriously wounded and uprooted. Business activity came to a virtual standstill. A trail of misery and ruins was left behind. It lasted for about four years prolonging the trauma. It was fought for expanding respective empires and to gain control over means of production and a market for produce thereof, a mixture of capitalism and imperialism. Such a precious loss only for mundane things such as money and power? The war ended on a usual note, round the table. When all the problems are to be solved on the table but only after ————, why not before? I go bananas to think why man does not learn just a very simple and easy lesson? To resort to mayhem just for the whims and fancies of some inhuman people? The next twenty one years were wasted in preparing for the next global encounter in 1939. In fact, the so-called peace-time was just preparatory period, a sort of proxy war. It may be said safely that man always remains in some sort of war. The second world-war was fought with a vengeance as the period between was just preparatory. Highly sophisticated and modern devastating weaponry, planes, tanks, submarines and even atomic bombs were used for the first time. About fifty million people were brutally eliminated for no fault of their own. Millions of people were just evaporated inhumanly. It was just a sort of genocide. Millions were wounded seriously and millions were uprooted and incapacitated. Two bubbling

cities were razed to the ground within no time, just evaporated. Even Flora and Fauna was destroyed completely. Such was the impact of atom bombs that even upto this day soil has not regained its fertility in full. The offsprings still suffer from multiple deformities. What will happen if third world war occurs? No one will survive to relate? Today, nuclear bombs are powerful by umpteen number of times than those atomic bombs. This world war too ended on the same note in 1945. Since then upto now, wars are going on in different pockets of the world killing millions of people and affecting the other millions who were spared somehow. In my view, the loss during the interval too is too grievous and vast. I myself have not witnessed even a single moment in my life which can be termed as a moment of peace in the real sense. There are always some multiple confrontations going on constantly waiting for the last world war which is not too far as things stand today. May Nature awaken man.....!

The side effects of some war are just horrific and hair-raising. Exodus of people begins and the beast in man comes out into full form. Killings, arsons, lootings, rapes etc. become too rampant. Millions of people are displaced leaving behind the whole earnings of their life. The naked dance of death and destruction begins to unfold itself and all the hell is let loose. At times, many have to kill their own blood for fear of being treated inhumanly and humiliated brutally. The people have to live in refugee camps in totally unhygienic and gaol-like conditions for no fault of their own. Those who were living with their families happily and were earning their own livelihood have to suffer for the ill-deeds of —? Does the child know about —? Women, children, the old and the incapacitated ones have to suffer the most. Even the beast feel shy on seeing such ill-doings of man. The living ones begin to envy the dead as they have to face the cruel world. Starvation, diseases, exploitation and many other ills follow. Those who perished begin to seem to be fortunate enough not to see the



aftermath of some tragedy and the real face of the so-called superspecies. Alive corpses, the maimed, the disfigured, the burnt, the crippled, and the incapacitated seem to be just like living ghosts. Widows, orphans, destitutes, widowers, walking skeletons and the like ones are what is left after some catastrophe. Some lose their all, some their only earning-hands and some are left to shoulder the responsibility of those who become handicapped for life. Can hell be more hellish than this? The after partition situation in India and Pakistan, the present situation in Afghanistan and the similar situations of the past and present are a testimony to this fact. Are man-caused tragedies Natural? No, not at all, these are manufactured by a handful of ill-minds only to become numero-uno. Many creative minds have tried to awaken the ill-mind but they have always been made to suffer and perish at the hands of the destructive minds. Wars can be lessened to much extent on this planet but only by revering life and creativity. So long as death and destructivity are revered, wars will continue. Man as it is now, there seems to me no hope except the last war. May Nature bless man...!

I will not mention any specific tragedy either Natural or man-made as the list is eternal. Man has so far accumulated misery and destruction beyond words. The creative people can be counted on tips as they are too few. But as this book is based on a fire tragedy, I will like to mention some of the fire tragedies. I am doing so because the future is going to be an ill-era of fire-related mishappenings. The modern life is too prone to fire-related catastrophes because all is vulnerable to fire, from the hearth to the super computer, from the cracker to the nuclear bomb. Power, petrol and its products, acids, chemicals, synthetics and what not all are potential fire hazards. Unplanned industrial and population explosion is bound to explode dangerously. Sky-scrapers and sensitive installations lie in the high risk zone. The modern glittering, showy, glamorous, dazzling and meanful

but blind life-style has to face the onslaught of fire accidents. The recent spurt in hotels' cinemas', parties' and gatherings' fire catastrophes is a testimony to this fact. The situation in the under-developed and still developing societies is just alarming as they have no proper infrastructure and are not so safety conscious as are the developed ones. Moreover, they value life more than anything else though of their own citizens only. But here in this part of land life comes at the bottom of priorities. So lack of latest technique and means along with poor mentality is resulting in constant untoward incidents. Death due to fire is too painful and horrifying. Moreover, there is no immediate system to put off fire, only precautionary preventive measures can save humanity from the wrath of fire tragedies which are increasing menacingly. Their plight is too terrible who are severely burnt in some fire-related incidence as the vital cells of body are burnt irreparably. There is no permanent cure for grievously burnt victims if there is some, it is beyond the reach of the common man. So, fire has no cure but for prevention.

Mankind has witnessed many fire catastrophes but the last century has seen a spurt in them. I am taking into account only a few of major fire tragedies. A ship carrying explosive arms and ammunition exploded at Heliphex, a coastal city in Canada in 1917 killing about one thousand and five hundred people on the spot itself, the city too remained caught in it for two days. A devastating fire took away four hundred and ninety two lives at a night club in Boston (U.S.A.) on Nov. 28, 1942. About five hundred students of a high school were charred to death in a cinema house at Urumkie city in China on Dec. 8, 1978. Again six hundred people were burnt to death in a cinema house in Zinziyang State (China) in 1979. The Dabwali Fire Tragedy is the most tender tragedy as it swallowed mostly the angelic children, their heavenly mothers and some others when they were in such a festive and joyous mood. It is also the fiercest one as it just roasted



three hundred and eighty eight people on the spot itself just in a flash leaving hundreds grievously burnt. What a horrific catastrophe? After it, fire tragedies are occurring one after the other. Some of them come to my mind. Hundreds of Haj pilgrims were burnt alive when their tents caught fire at Mecca (U.A.E.). Many people lost their lives in a hotel fire in Manila (Philippines). About two hundred people were killed at a congregation in Orissa (India). About sixty people died in Uphar cinema -house fire at New Delhi (India). A ghastly fire tragedy occurred in Nigeria where about five hundred people went aflame trying to collect some petroleum product from a leakage in the supply pipeline. Similar tragedy struck again that very country very recently and the time gap was not big...? Recently, about fifty people were killed at a marriage ceremony in U.A.E. when tents caught fire. Small fires has become a day- to- day affair killing many people especially the hut-fires. The list is inexhaustive and is lengthening day after day. Are not most of the fire tragedies caused by man? The same is true about most of The Earthly tragedies. His indifferent, callous and cruelly careless attitude combined with ever insatiable lust will go on causing incidents and accidents every now and then. If he does not change his such ill-attitude then the ultimate tragedy is not too far off. In my view, the ensuing times will witness more of fire-related tragedies than the others, the indications are as such and so is the state of present mind. Moreover, all is just fire- hazard all around every here and there. Global warming is threatening life here. So much explosive material has been piled up as can finish this planet by any number of times, nothing is being left to chance. It shall happen, only the time gap is there, if man goes on behaving as such. The life has never been in so much danger as it is now. Is it progress? The world is sitting on a self-made pyre, just an ignition and ——— ? No one will be there to see this interrogative mark.... ?

### THE DABWALI FIRE TRAGEDY

‘The flame is to light but if some fire is caused by it anyhow, then what can it do?’

## THE DABWALI FIRE TRAGEDY

The Dabwali Fire Tragedy was caused by ill-nature of man. The lure of pelf, power and prestige just blinded all those who were instrumental in causing it extinguishing the lights of many a homes. It is not an isolated incidence but depicts the mentality of the so-called super-species, the man. I want to depict the before and after of some tragedy and 'The Earthly Trinity'. I hope it will awaken all those who matter towards the realities of life. Who manages 'The Earthly Trinity', Of course, man. May Existence awaken him. ....!

I am starting from the roots as it will shed light in totality on the tragedy. If every tragedy is handled from the seed, then similar tragedies can be eliminated completely, of it I am sure of, but only if man is open to learning through experience and act as per it. But if we observe human nature so far then ——?



### About Private Schools

As this fire tragedy struck at the annual function of a private school, it is a must to start from the nature of private educational institutions in this part of land. Two types of private schools function here, street schools and public schools. The street schools can be seen almost in every street or ward. Some unemployed hand hires some unoccupied house, arranges some furniture and some other required articles. To find some more unemployed hands in not too difficult a job in this land of abundant heads. Decorate and furnish the office, find a good and smart receptionist, start admissions and all other will follow. A very good means of make-shift income. The teachers are mostly young girls who themselves have just rolled out of some school after passing the tenth standard or somewhat more. They being not so well off have to work on paltry wages. There is no need for any registration, recognition or affiliation for opening a primary school. Primary education is the foundation but ——— ? The innocent victim is the child who has to suffer for whole life for no fault of its own. 'The roots decide the fruits'. Here health too is taken too casually like education; the two most important and primary aspects of life treated so ? Work in some any clinic for sometime and then open your shop, cram the names of some medicines of daily use and have them in a bag and be on the move. Anyone can have any medicine at will from any medical shop ? Even the chemists themselves act as doctors and treat patients....! Patients and students are a plenty here due to some grace of some super-power. Where health and education are treated so casually, think of about other aspects of life ? Physical and mental ill health is what follows such an ill-system. Now somewhat about the so-called public schools. They are a refined version of street schools. Whereas the street schools are managed by an individual, the public ones are mostly managed by a group of individuals. The first ones are a sort of small-scale industry and

the second ones are a large scale one. Most of them are started in some rented building which is not too spacious. Surprisingly, most of them spring up their own buildings within a short period ? Those which are run on a state or national level have good standards and means but I am taking the situation as a whole. The schools which are run on the local basis are alike initially whether they are street ones or public ones. The building is not specially constructed for the school purpose but any random building is hired. Rooms are fewer than required and are just small. Only the office room, the reception and fee clerk's window are well decorated, the other rooms are just ignored. Class-rooms being not too spacy, the children are just packed into them, some unlucky ones have to sit in the verandah and even under the sky, such innocent captives! Sun, air and hygiene are the last words. There is no proper arrangement of drinking water and lavatory. There is no adequate provision for library, laboratory, firstaid and recreation. Space for games and sports is almost absent. Is it education ? Look at their ads, all on this planet is promised to be found only here. Huge amounts are amassed from the hapless parents in the name of admission and other charges as well as unrecorded donations as they have no choice. In today's era of globalisation, the knowledge of English is too necessary, it being a link-language. Govt. institutions mostly start the study of English only after the primary level whereas private schools start it right from the beginning. So, the parents have to but get their wards admitted in these poultry farms. Lack of uniform and objective education system comes in handy for these schools to cash in on the helplessness of the bewildered parents. Stiff competition in today's fast and modern life compels the parents to fall an easy prey to their exploitative tactics. Many unethical and unhealthy practices are adopted by these shops to attract the customers. They can go to any length and breadth to earn the maximum and beat the rivals in the game. The staff of these schools is handpicked



and is supposed to rope in the children of their neighbours, friends and acquaintances. They too are to be benefitted by tuitioning those very children. They have to do so as they are not paid handsomely but are made to sign on the dotted lines for a certain amount so as to fulfil the norms. They have to work as such due to rising unemployment as well as high cost of living. They, mostly being ladies, remain in position till they get some govt. job if already trained or get admission in some teaching related course if not trained already as teaching experience counts for the purpose. Those who are unmarried leave after being married and those who are married already pull along anyhow. All just a make-shift arrangement. The child too is often bewildered to see new faces too often at regular intervals. Is it teaching or cheating, service or self? The child is the mute and helpless spectator and sufferer but who is concerned about its life? The child is the seed, when it is treated so, then what of the fruit? So long as child is treated so, it can't be joyous in life howsoever meaningful it may be. The school must be a temple of education for life and not just a place for mere literacy meant for earning. It should create the child as per its innate intrinsic worth. There may be very few institutions in this part of land which are sensitive to this reality. Generally, most of the private institutions remain insensitive to the needs of the seed. Voluminous syllable completes the ill-task. The parents too are to be blamed as they treat the child as an investment and not as a seed. They impose their will with impunity in deciding the path of the child killing its intuitiveness and intrinsic worth. They want the child but to be meaningful only whereas the child must be grown for both means and bliss. For it, the child has to be listened to. Such an ill-system is making the life a tragedy unto itself what to say of the Dabwali Fire Tragedy.

D.A.V. educational institutions are well spread and successful. These are reputed for their good all round performance. Most of the parents opt for them due to their such nature. Many

institutions were opened in 1988 to mark the centenary of the foundation of D.A.V. institutions. The Dabwali version of such schools too was opened in this year in a rented building. It started with just forty students but rose sharply to have 546 students and 26 teachers within a span of seven years. Mrs. Bannejee, an intelligent and able administrator, was its founder principal. She put the school on a sound footing and became popular among students and parents. Mrs. Naresh Kamra was the next in-charge principal. Mr. D.R. Monga, a very hard-working, honest and principled person was made the principal in Sept., 1991. He was a good teacher and an able administrator who put the school on a sound footing. He was adept at developing quick rapport with the children and their parents. He never compromised with his principles and had to pay for it when he was made to go on March 31<sup>st</sup> 1993. Mrs. Naresh Kamra stepped in on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1993 and was in the chair till the tragedy. Surprisingly, Mr. D.R. Monga was reinstated but as the principal of D.A.V. Public School Mansa in Punjab? The new principal belonged to a well-to-do family and was a prominent social figure and took keen interest in co-curricular and cultural activities. She was instrumental in bringing the children of the well-to-do families of the town to the school due to her extraordinary receptional qualities and personal influence. She was resourceful, a good manoeuvrer and had good rapport with the central management of the school. All this helped her in swelling up the strength of the school. She ran the school at her own free will and was in the saddle till she herself perished in the tragedy.



### The Tragedy Site

The annual function of D.A.V. School Mandi Dabwali was slated to be held on Dec.24, 1995 at school's new site in the open. But it was changed at the last minute as the chief guest-to-be expressed inability to attend it due to some other engagements and the new chief guest accepted the invitation but only for Dec.23,1995. He okayed his consent only on Dec.21<sup>st</sup> 1995. So, the school management and administration opted for Rajiv Marriage Palace in a hurry and hired it for Rs. six thousand for the day which was just 200 metres away from the school premises. The land for this ominous marriage palace was bought on July 18, 1994 and the building plan was okayed on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1995. The structure was completed in a hurry, say three months, and it became operational in Oct., 1995. Only four functions were held in this before this function and the school function was just the fifth one. It seems that no one knew that a burning graveyard was being readied too hurriedly....?

The structure was mostly made of tin and G.I. sheets. Its length, breadth and height was 101', 92' and 23' respectively. It was supported by iron girders and the roof was made of iron-sheets., P.V.C. sheets, bamboos and cloth was used for artificial decoration, all just a potential fire hazard. It had brick walls on two sides which were about 9' high and were barbed wired above this height. The third side was made of tarapauline sheets supported by bamboo poles and decorated with curtains within. The fourth side was having hanging curtains and the main entrance was in the middle of it. The stage was facing it which was 24' in length and 17' in breadth. A tiny door (3' x 6.6') was nearby the stage which remained often shut. So, all the site was covered from all sides too strongly having virtually a single entrance-cum-exit. A false ceiling was made of P.V.C. sheets and polythene was used in between it and the roof to make it water and sound proof and it was decorated with glossy and beautiful

cloth. All the sides were well-decorated with glossy and beautiful cloth curtains except the stage side which had the green room which too was made of the alike material. There was only a single open space opposite the entrance measuring 100' x 48'. The entrance 12' in breadth and 12' in height was having two exotic curtains hanging on both sides of it which were made of D-China cloth. A special arrangement was made to illuminate the interior of the morquee after causing voluntary darkness. Artificial and highly decorative material was used all around to make it look attractive and dazzling. Thirty five chandeliers were hanging each decorated with one hundred watt bulb. Two halogen lights were fixed on the entrance and two on the stage. Special arrangements were made to throw multicoloured lights on stage programme. All those electric arrangements were of temporary nature thus a plethora of hanging loose wires every here and there having a plethora of joints every here and there which were casually adhesived. All was too prone to fire, nothing was left to chance. Two 5kv generators were there as a stand-by arrangement to ensure continuous electric supply. But there was no arrangement for meeting any emergency. About eight hundred chairs were put in rows, of these seventy five were cushion chairs which were placed in the first three rows, the rest in the hind rows. Two sofa-sets were there in the first row meant for the dignitaries. The main passage was separating the rows in the middle and was covered with jute mats. Four tiny passages were left after some rows. The whole of the area was covered with mats and carpets having wires underneath. All these arrangements were completed on the eve of Dec.22<sup>nd</sup> itself. The venue was opened for the function at about 08.00 A.M. on the fateful day. All ill-preparations were made waiting for that fatal spark ——!



### The Black Day

The sun rose as usual dawning the morning of the ominous Dec.23, 1995, the Saturday. The air was fresh and full of life. There was a chill in the atmosphere, it being the peak of winter. Flora and Fauna were breathing with freshness and divinity. The angelic birds were acrobating at their free will in the blue open sky. The routine hustle and bustle of life began to unfold itself. There was a special flavour of festivity in the air of Dabwali town. The annual function of the local D.A.V.C. Public School was slated for the day at that ominous marriage palace. Streams of blooming children began to flow towards the school premises. The innocent tiny-tots were all joy knowing nothing about the impending holocaust. Dressed neatly and assiduously, they were lending colour and grace to the streets. They were just in an ecstatic, festive and carefree mood. They were those children who were to show their mettle in the function while the others were to follow them somewhat later on. Their family members, mostly mothers, were escorting them to the school carrying their required accessories. They were brimming with activity and joy with a sense of some pride and satisfaction. The school premises was flooded with such flowers of variety, beauty, charm and grace. They were completely involved into themselves oblivious of the fact that it was their last dawn; The last journey, never to return ———?

As most of the students had arrived, the school teachers began to guide and lead them to the marriage palace. The road leading to the venue was bustling with activity. Even the strangers could work out that some school function was going to be held somewhere nearby. The function site began to bubble with life. Children in groups were hopping like butterflies lending colour to the site. Their chirping and naughties turned the air just lovely and lively. They were in a fantastic, upbeat, joyous and merry mood. The sense of carefree ecstasy was writ large on their innocent

lovely faces. They were moving about briskly in groups attending to their allotted roles smartly and agilefully. In fact, the annual function of some school is an occasion for the children to feel free and show their mettle in various forms. Those who had performed extremely well in some field throughout the session are to get a pat and recognition. Obviously, the parents and other family members too feel joyous and tall when they see their children performing on the stage and receiving prizes and accolades for their performances in various fields. 'Ecstasy can't be put into words'. Even the utopian heaven too could have felt shy of and even jealous on seeing such a gala, splendid and beautiful sight. Such a festive atmosphere and such a sudden catastrophic turn ahead....!

The mothers, friends and others began to trickle in from 11.00 hours onwards to join their dear ones. The men-folk were to join as per their convenience as it was a working day. Most of them were not familiar with the inside topography of the morquee as they were attending some function in this marriage palace for the first time, it being opened just recently. The interior was really dazzling as it was decorated exquisitely and artistically. It seemed as if someone had wandered into some wonderful fairyland. It was beyond the imagination of the people that such a beautiful marriage palace could exist in such a small town. The morquee was almost packed by 12.00 hours. People were just moving inside outside in the wait of the chief guest. The children were loitering non-chalantly, their dreamy eyes expressing their aspirations and hopes. The chief guest arrived at about 12.25 P.M. as is usual here. The customary reception ceremonies over and he was escorted to the seat meant for him. After that, the usual opening ceremonies were performed. The programme started straightway after it with a devotional number. Speeches by some dignitaries went on in between the stage items. The next in turn was a classical dance. The gathering had swelled upto about one



thousand and three hundred by 13.00 hours. All were enjoying the proceedings with keen interest and rapt attention. Seats being fewer, the small children sat into the laps of their mothers. Some children and almost all the teachers were moving around performing their respective duties. Scores of children were always in the dressing room and the green room as they were to perform on the stage. The parents, friends and relatives were too eager to see their beloved ones perform on the stage before the select audience. Almost whole of the cream from all walks of life from the town was there to be seen as the children of most of the well-to-do families were the students of this school. The women folk had come attired in their choicy best robes. They were fully decked up with costly exquisite jewellery and other accessories. All were wearing costly warm clothes, it being winter, and most of the wintery attires are made of such materials as are prone to catch fire speedily in case it so happens. The morquee too was just a bundle of costly and fire-prone cloth. The programme was beginning to blossom into its youthfulness. The audience were lost deep into the sea of enjoyment, their eyes fixed keenly on the stage. All were in a very celebrative and enjoying mood enjoying every bit of the proceedings oblivious of the outside world. The present man finds time only on such occasions to sideline the worldly anxieties for some time. Item after item followed enthralling and spell-binding the fixed audience. The school's annual progress report was read by the principal in between them. The eighth item approached in which a child in a fancy dress resembling a parrot tells about the gloomy future of the country from within a cage knowing nothing about his own impending catastrophic future. There is no way to know even about the split of a moment ahead. Those who claim to know about future deceive, misguide and rob the gullible. The ninth item was to unfold itself as the announcement for the same had just been made by the compere. The innocent tiny-tots for the item were stand-

ing ready in their fine dresses and spirits knowing nothing about the outside world as they were behind the curtain in the green room. In the meantime, the shouts of Fire ! Fire !! Fire !!! rented the air at about 13.47 hours. What happened ? how happened ? why happened ? No one had the time to know as all was finished in a flash and no one will ever come to know ?

The fire sparked off at the main entrance and it engulfed the whole morquee within no time. The people were caught unawares as they were not able to see the fire as they had their back towards the main entrance. As they began to stand up, the stage managers requested them not to panic as fire would be put off immediately. The stage managers went on repeating the appeal and it made the people halt for a while which proved too fatal. The fire roared menacingly enveloping the whole area in a flash. Even a split of a moment could have made all the difference thus the constant appeals from the stage not to panic made the people halt for a while which proved too fatal. Had they been left at their own perception, the loss could have been less colossal. In the meantime, fire almost reached upto them and they began to run haphazardly. There followed a commotion which resulted in a stampede. People began to fall on each other and were encircled by fire from all sides. Burning pieces of polythene fell on them and clung to them till the last. They were wrapped in a flaming shroud within a twinkle. The flames went on swirling within because the site was closed from all sides. The blanket of poisonous smoke and the sunny heat had no space to escape. Suffocation, heat and burning pieces caused most of the deaths. Almost all was burnt as all was too prone to fire. The P.V.C. chairs, mats, carpets, curtains and polythene sheets etc. all added fuel to the fire. All was finished within under three minutes. No one had the time to react and most of the audience was just swallowed. The fire extinguished on its own instantly and a thick black cloud-like blanket of smoke pierced through the roof causing a night-like



situation in the nearby area. Only those could escape who reacted instantly. The mothers died with their children clung to their bodies in their vain bid to save their own organs. The children were just trampled over, they being too timid and weak. The dubious role of the chief guest which caused such a vast loss will be taken up afterwards. Some were saved by the quirk of fate being out for some purpose before the fire broke out. There lay a big heap of dead bodies near the tiny door. Some corpses lay scattered here and there too. The horrific sight of scattered smouldering bodies and organs emitting foul smell was just like that of a battle-field one. The ferocity of the inferno can be gauged from the fact that some people were charred on their seats itself. About three hundred and eighty eight people, mostly school children and their mothers were roasted like chickens on the spot itself and about two hundred and fifty were grievously burnt. The sight was just horrifying and gruesome; can hell be more hellish? Such a tragic and sudden turn within no moment! The cheers turned into tears, the songs into sobs and dreams into screams! The place of celebration and joy was turned into a burning graveyard. What happened inside, no one knew, nor even those who perished, such was the speed of the blaze.

People of the nearby vicinity rushed to the spot instantly. All the traffic on the main road came to a screeching halt and people alighted and hurried to the ill-spot. The news of fire spread like a wild fire in the town. People raced to the ill-site straightway as and where they were taking with them all that on which their hands lay upon. What they saw on reaching there was just horrifying and unbelievable. People were just stunned and frozen on seeing such a ghastly and hellish sight. The meek just could not bear the sight and made a hasty retreat, some fainted on the spot. Then regaining some poise, people started rescue operations with trembling hands, their hair raised on their ends. A sea of humanity gathered on the spot affecting the rescue operations.

A nearby labourer felled a portion of a wall with a tractor. The neighbours rushed out of their homes instantly leaving their doors wide open. People picked up hammers, iron rods and the alike from nearby doors to make room. But most of the damage had already been done. They were just dazed, shocked, stilled and frozen on seeing the gory sight inside. Heaps of dead bodies charred beyond recognition were still smouldering and emitting foul smell. Corpses lay hardened in their last positions, just a ghost-land. The scattered limbs and things within were revealing the woeful tale of the happenings inside. They were the testimony to the fact, how the hapless and innocent victims scurried for life and how painfully they had died. To whom had they called up for help? Prayer has never been met; who is there to respond? Whose name was on their lips at the last moment? How had the mothers borne the gory sight of their very organs burning before their own very eyes? Even a cannibal could not have borne such a hellish sight. People helped the still burning victims by bringing them out in the open space. Most of them were sans clothes and were burnt beyond description. Those who had rarely ventured out in the sun were burnt alive! They were too incapacitated to call for any help. The situation was such as beyond words. The nearby people gave their costly clothes to cover the naked bodies. The sight was just like a slaughter house; Can hell be more cruel? Cursed were the eyes which happened to witness it ....!

People from nearby areas too began to trickle in for lending helping hand. The injured ones were attended to immediately on an emergency basis. They were rushed to immediate and faraway hospitals as per their respective conditions. 'Nothing can be done for the dead but much can be done for the still alive'. All sorts of vehicles were turned into ambulances for transporting the injured as well as the dead. Almost all the town was there for contributing its mite in some way or the other helping by all the means at its disposal. No govt. official was there to be seen what



to say of help! People handled the whole situation at their own and more efficiently than the so-called govt.-people. In fact, bureaucracy knows better to interrupt than act. All the hell was let loose on the town roads as vehicles carrying the dead and the injured sped past chaotically but the whole traffic was controlled and guided by people in a good way. The whole of the town and nearby areas remained awake for the whole night lending all possible help and consoling the bereaved. Tonnes of food, clothes and other required items were brought by the people from nearby areas. The petrol pumps, the medicos, the clinics, the P.C.O.'s, the vehicle unions and cloth shops remained open for the whole night and charged nothing. People opened their vaults as per their respective capacity and no one died for want of means. Blood donors remained at hand all the times here and also at faraway hospitals too. People from all walks of life setting aside petty considerations joined hands in this hour of common grief. They attended to all the affected ones on an emergency basis as the situation was too grim and fluid. All except the so-called govt. helped beyond their means and capacity. Many precious lives could have been saved only due to their timely help and attention. Such a show of humanity is rare to be found in the present selfish and myopic world. May such a show become a way of life....!

Vehicles carrying the seriously injured were roaring past other vehicles menacingly towards their desired destinations with headlights on in all the directions. People on the way just could not work out what had happened. There seemed to be a war-like situation. People began to rush towards the direction of the incoming vehicles and were taken aback on reaching the ill-site seeing such a hell as they had never seen or even heard of or even dreamt of. All began to help as per their respective ability and capacity. In fact, the people who removed the injured and the dead were strangers and they just picked up whosoever came their way and started straightway, no one had the time to think,

the family members attended to later on. Many families were too ruined to attend to their own ones what to say of others. Moreover, most of the affected families were supposed to help each other during times of some crisis. The people of those distant areas where the seriously injured were being treated emulated the noble example of the people of Dabwali town and its adjoining areas. They attended to the victims as their own kins with too much care, attention and dedication. They too opened their purses and helped by all the means at their disposal. Food, clothes and other required articles were provided by them without break. They nursed and took care of the victims round the clock. Many precious lives could have been lost but for their timely allround help and care. May Existence bless all.....!

The town wore a deserted look. Shrills, cries, wails and sobs rented the air. Deep anguish, angst, grief and utter gloom was writ large on all faces. The children were just bewildered and dumb-found looking on blankly. There was a deluge of people at the civil hospital where dead bodies were kept which lay scattered on the ground in a chaotic way. These were loaded and unloaded like those of cattle. Where life is treated so, there death — ? There was utter chaos there, no arrangement was made to regulate the crowd, no information was made available and no one was there to help, guide and console the affected people on the official level. Here too people themselves helped, guided and consoled the bereaved and did whatever was possible to show respect to the dead. The hospital looked more like a mortuary than a hospital. In normal times too no one dares to visit them for treatment except the very poor and the legal cases. The sight was just horrific and hair-raising. Naked dance of death, how nightmarish...! Heaps of dead bodies in ghost-like positions lying haphazardly and that too mostly of mothers and children; what a dreadful sight.....! It was too difficult to identify the dead bodies and people did so only on the basis of some of



the remainings of some of their belongings on their bodies. How hellish it is to carry the charred bodies of the children and their mothers jointly.....! But they had to be carried anyhow for their last rites. What was left to be cremated.....?

All began to hurriedly dispose off the dead bodies of those very whose absence from home even for a little while began to torment all! To cremate such a mountain of the corpses and that too of the innocent ones! This painful, unbearable and onerous ill-task was staring in the barren eyes of the survivors. Dead bodies lying in front of the eyes of the bereaved go on tormenting them grievously and they tend to decay fast, so they have to be disposed off at the earliest possible; such is the nature of the worldly relations! The first corpse reached the crematory at about 17.00 hours the same evening. It had the capacity to cremate fifteen bodies at a time, but here lay about three hundred and twenty five corpses. Joint pyres one after the other were lit continuously and even then it took about thirty six hours to dispose off all of them. It may be a sort of ill-record to cremate so many bodies and that too mostly of the children and their mothers and that too of already charred ones. What a long and agonisingly harrowing trauma was it for those who remained there till the last arranging for and performing the last rites! They were really persons of great composure and poise. Many could not have had the last rites of their beloved ones performed in time but for their efforts. The people of nearby areas brought loads of dung cakes, wood-logs and the alike in all sorts of vehicles. The farmers whose land was adjacent to the crematory offered their cropful lands for the purpose. The dead bodies were carried in vehicles in multiples. Here too, the people themselves handled the too poignant a situation. A sea of humanity attended the cremations horrifically. Heart-rending cries, wails, shrills and shrieks turned even the stones melt. So many cremations at a time and in such a way! Children and their mothers sharing the same pyre! What a relationship!

The people were just stunned, a tormenting and stony silence prevailed all around; for how long one can go on wailing? The bereaved returned to their nestles empty handed and dejected with swollen eyes and parched throats. Some bodies were cremated at their respective native places. It seemed like a wild-fire as smoke went on billowing continuously for such a long time engulfing the nearby areas. A tormenting and foul smell filled the air over a vast area. The sight was just horrific, dreadful and nightmarish. May such a mass and tender cremation never take place...!

The next days too were too testing. The whole town remained drowned in the sea of tears and fears for too many days. Almost all the town was affected as about every twelfth family was hit. People just shuttled from door to door to be with the bereaved from dawn to dusk. No hearth was lit in many homes in the town for two days and the people from nearby areas brought eatables for the living ones. The living ones have to take food sooner or later as it is a biological need. Almost all the affected were known to each other but could not be with each other in this hour of untold grief! The whole town remained shocked and puzzled for days together. The whole market remained closed for full ten days, a sort of world record and it was all voluntary. Even a single tiny shop was not there to be seen opened, even the vendors and hawkers did not operate, a hundred percent closing. Such a solidarity! No one dared even to venture out leave alone opening the shops. All were just depressed and shaken. The haunting stony silence was broken off and on at the arrival of some dead body of those who were undergoing treatment at faraway hospitals. The wounds were again made to bleed profusely; the loss was too colossal! The bereaved too had to be attended to round the clock as they were in a very fluid situations especially those who were left all alone. Many families were wiped out entirely and many suffered too many casualties. Locks at many



doors and personal belongings of the departed were awaiting the return of their little masters. Toys, school bags & dresses, cycles, bats, racquets etc. were awaiting the divine touch of their little masters. But the way they had gone is one-way. Human error caused the extinction of a generation? The plight of the incapacitated ones was too pathetic. Theirs was the real ordeal as they have to face the harsh realities of the world ahead. May existence never be so cruel....!

Leaders of all hues and cries began to touch the town every now and then. All departed after beating their own respective drums. The first to visit the town next day was the head of the state govt. He visited the tragedy-site straightway and then the civil hospital as is customary on such circumstances, made usual rhetorics, promised all help and left. He announced an ex-gratia of Rs. one lac for each dead to the next of kin and the help of Rs. fifty thousand for those seriously injured who lost some of their limbs. He promised treatment at govt. expenses for the injured. Govt. job too was promised for one member of the bereaved families. Formation of a committee of some ministers to oversee the treatment facilities too was announced. The construction of one hundred bed hospital was promised to be completed within six months. He also visited the district hospital on his way back and retreated to the state capital. After this, some who's who of many political & social dispensations began to visit the town to be with the affected town as is usual. It is unfortunate that they don't hesitate to draw political mileage even out of such a tragic situation. The then prime minister of India too joined the people in their hour of grief after about a week. He was visibly shaken and shocked on feeling such a grievous loss to humanity. He said in a choked voice that he had neither seen nor heard of such a ghastly tragedy in seventy five years of his life. He made the following announcements – The Centre will bear all the expenses of the treatment and plastic surgery too of all the injured being treated

anywhere in the country. A befitting memorial will be raised on the tragedy site as per the feelings of the local people. An indoor stadium will be constructed in the memory of the departed. The demand for a medical college was turned down due to technical reasons.

The prime minister, a person of letters and poise, left with too heavy a heart. Many more political, social and religious figures and some prominent personalities went on visiting the town in the days to come. The last prayers for the departed were held which were attended by a large number of people. The markets began to open after that after ten days of non-stop closure. The people did so with too heavy a heart. Even though the market opened yet the hearts were still closed. A pall of gloom still enveloped the town and grief and anguish was writ large on the lost faces. A stony and tormenting silence prevailed; what was left to talk about? But the show of life has to be made to go on. Slowly, slowly, people began to adjust to the harsh and cruel reality. Many after-rituals were performed by too many worshipped persons of too many creeds. People did all whatever they could do for the injured, the bereaved and the dead on the immediate basis. But for how long could they have remained with the affected ones? They began to get involved into their own affairs of life and the sufferers into their own personal grief. Those who were severely burnt had to remain glued to their beds for too many days undergoing too much pain and agony at too much expenses. They were ruined physically, psychologically and financially?

The govt. announcements began to meet their usual fate. The people had to run from pillar to post for getting the reimbursement of medical bills as bureaucracy is bureaucracy. In fact, those who matter become expert enough to make some immediate, some relevant and some irrelevant too, announcements to sooth the ruffled and hurt feelings of the people as well as to



buy time. The usual practice after some mishappening which affects the masses is to grant compensation and order some inquiry and arrange for some immediate relief and rescue operations. The formation of some committee to suggest measures to avoid similar ill incidences in future too is formed. All is begun to be pushed under the carpet in due course of time as public and media begin to retreat. Here someones have to sacrifice their lives in order to awaken those who matter e.g. - suppose, a bridge on some road hath got some cracks, it will not be attended to until it gives way causing some casualties. Even then, only some make-shift arrangements will be made waiting for the next mishappening to repeat the same procedure and the show goes on as such from tragedy to tragedy..... Something has to happen to make them awake who are supposed to do something beforehand.....? Even then, only that very bridge will be attended to, the other in similar state will not be touched until they take their own share of blood.....? What a system indeed.....! The people have to put even their genuine demands, before those who matter, after some mishappening.....? Only the sufferers themselves have to live with themselves till the end, all others leave on the way.

Though much noises were made by those who matter at the instant time of tragedy but even the Deputy Commissioner who was the chief guest and was the main immediate culprit was not even transferred even though public organised too many protest rallies for his termination because he happened to be the relative of a minister in then state govt. If one has the means and right connections in this part of land then one can do away with any sort of crime howsoever heinous. He can buy time till death! That's why bad elements are not afraid of any law and go on committing all sorts of crimes at leisure and even they do matter with those who matter! He had to be suspended after the inquiry officer indicted him in his report. The public, the media and the

intelligentia all had demanded his immediate termination but ———? The person who was responsible for throwing a budding generation into the jaws of demon of fire was just suspended and that too after full seven months on July 25, 1996? Later, a CBI inquiry was ordered due to pressure from all quarters of life. It laboured too hard to complete the complex task and has submitted its report and an FIR was lodged at a designated court in Ambala on May 28, 1996 against the palace owners and two electricians under sections 304A and 338 of Indian Penal Code. A writ petition for seeking justice was filed by Dabwali Fire Victims Association in the Hon'ble Punjab and Haryana High Court on Aug. 29, 1996. The proceedings are going on and the sufferers are going on crawling on with life. A case has also been filed in the National Consumer Commission in this connection which is also going on. The palace owners have opened yet another marriage palace at Malout city in Punjab? The school management has constructed a large and mansion-like building at a cost of about Rs. seventy five lacs only; how? The D.C. too is roaming freely. What if suspended? He has since been reinstated and is in office? All the culprits are enjoying life meansfully but the fire victims are experiencing a nightmarish life anyhow. Mostly, 'Man has to suffer for the ill-deeds of others'...?

The convention of the rights of the child was adopted by the General Assembly of the U.N.O. on Nov. 20, 1989 and the Govt. of India acceded to this convention on Dec. 11, 1992 which stipulates under its article No. 6 that :-

1. The state parties shall recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.
2. The state parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

But see the plight of the child here from child use to child



abuse, from malnutrition to maltreatment..... The Dabwali children fire tragedy is just not an isolated story in the eternal list ; but who cares ?

### **Who was responsible ?**

So much loss in such a short time ? No tragedy crops up overnight but the seed for it is sown in some distant past. The sad tale of the ill and insensitive system here had already been told in detail in this very book. The school function was scheduled for Dec. 24, 1995 and the venue was the site for the proposed building of the school, a vast open plain ground which was even levelled too for the purpose. The would be chief guest, the local M.P. and the then minister of state for education at the centre, expressed her inability to attend the function at the eleventh hour due to some other engagements just then when all the preparations were going on in full swing. Then followed the hunt for the new chief guest in a frantic way. The then D.C. of Sirsa district was approached who agreed to be the chief guest but only for Dec. 23, 1995. He okayed his consent for it only on Dec. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1995. So, there was little time left to make necessary arrangements in the open distant space. Therefore, the school management & administration selected the ready-made and self-decorated Rajiv Marriage Palace for the purpose in a blind hurry and hurry always invites worry. No one knew at that time that these man-made erroneous changes will prove too fatal but life is a game of buts and ifs. Even invitation cards were delivered only on the afternoon of Dec. 21<sup>st</sup>. All was done in such a hurry that no one even thought of looking into the safety and other precautionary aspects of the function meant for children who can't respond quickly to some emergent situation. The interior of the morquee was not inspected thoroughly to see whether there were proper safety and precautionary arrangements within and whether it was a right place for school children's function. I have heard that the school authorities just visited the venue only once in a state of hurry and okayed it just at that very moment on the spot itself. They being too status-conscious were fascinated by its grandeur and showmanship and overlooked all other aspects. Is



a marriage palace right venue for some school children's function ? As far as I can recollect never had a school function been held in a marriage palace before it anywhere in the whole world. Moreover, some parents including me too pleaded with the school administration to hold the function as pre-scheduled on Dec.24, it being Sunday, for the convenience of the people to attend it but it remained as adamant and insensitive towards the feelings of the parents as ever. So, were the parents responsible ? if not then who else was ? Whose job was it to see for itself whether all safety and precautionary measures were taken inside and outside the venue ? Why no fire- brigade, ambulance, security and other facilities were arranged to attend to some emergency even though almost all the top most govt. officials of the tehsil and the highest district official were invited to attend the function ? Although the local administration too could not be absolved of its cruel carelessness but the safety of the school children was the sole responsibility of the school administration and management. If things are as such for those who are supposed to protect the life of the people, then think of the ordinary mortals ? Moreover, a small fire was caused in this very school's annual function in the previous year too which was put off instantly. Why no lesson was learnt from it ? If it had been so, then the marriage palace would never have been selected, it being wholly fire-prone. 'To err is human but to repeat the same error is too cruel' So, the seed of the fire tragedy was sown by the school administration and management [ill]...?

There is one more ill-point. The land for the construction of school's own building was bought only some time back. I have heard that the D.A.V. institutions construct their buildings with their own respective means and the central management helps little. The construction work on the proposed site was to be begun shortly. It was in the plan of things to raise funds for this purpose on this occasion of school's annual function as most

of the parents and other invited dignitaries were resourceful and well-to-do. So, when someone suggested the name of Rajiv Marriage Palace as an alternative venue, the school administration and management were thrilled as they had found a befitting place just by chance to impress the high citizenary of the town as it was highly dazzling and glittering, so they okayed for it just at the first instance overlooking all other aspects of the function. There was a complete mess-up even during the function. Most of the school staff was busy in attending to the children in the dressing room and the green room preparing the participants. Some were managing the stage whereas some were looking after the arrangements for refreshments meant for the invited dignitaries. Many school children too were loitering every here and there performing their respective allotted duties. So, there was less order and more chaos. All other school children except the above mentioned were left at their own to be taken care of by themselves or their parents or others. Such a mess-up led to the stampede when fire broke out. Whose responsibility was it to organise function in an orderly way ? Moreover, all focus was on collecting funds, so parents and other dignitaries were being attended to more than the children, all other aspects of the function were not attended to at all. It looked more like an aristocratic get-together than some school children's function. All such negatives were got together and they all combined in causing the carnage. Mad race for materialism and status led to the ghastly tragedy which snatched away the future of humanity. Who knows, who would have become what ? Only a very few people have often changed the course of humanity. May be some of the victims of the tragedy would have been those very few.....?

The marriage palace owners nurtured the ill-seed sown by the school administration and its management by their ill-deeds. They committed irregularities and flouted rules at every step right from the beginning with the connivance of all those who matter in



the local administration. They resorted to all unhealthy and unethical practices to invest less but earn more by bribing all those who came on the way in constructing & running the marriage palace. They constructed the structure in utter violation of the building plan as okayed by the concerned authorities. Iron sheets were used for the roof although no mention of it was made in the B-plan. It caused intense heat and suffocation due to swirling smoke and fire within as there was no outlet. Moreover, as most of the structure was supported by iron-materials, an all-around electrocution was caused. Some more examples of glaring irregularities resorted to by using foul means and practices by being hand-in-glove with the authorities. Both single and three phase power connections were installed illegally and their seals were tampered with impunity. The power-bills were issued to them irregularly and at random. I have heard that they used power directly from the main supply line and it was going on so even at the time of the function on that black day. Moreover, they employed inefficient and ill-trained electricians for such a sensitive job as they charged less than the experts. All the material used for this purpose was of too poor a quality. All the fittings were made in a wild manner with a plethora of loose and naked wires. The load factor was not taken into account while doing so which was about 15 kws and the used wires were not capable of withstanding such a heavy load. Almost all the wires and joints were just touching the curtains throughout. No safety precautions were taken and all was done in a haphazardous manner. In fact, every ill-preparation had been made beforehand just waiting for some spark which incidentally happened on that ill-moment on that fateful day. No provision was made to cope with some emergent situation. No fire-fighting gadget was installed within such a fire-prone morquee. No proper arrangements existed such as water, sand, first-aid etc. There was virtually a lone entrance-cum-exit and that too to the rear to

the audience, the other was just a tiny door, just a sort of service-window. The so-called arrangements were not sufficient even for normal times what to say of some exigency. It was virtually an all-closed death trap devoid of any safety precaution just waiting for that deadly spark. All this shows that the palace owners were fully responsible for such a precious loss to humanity. They resorted to all unethical, unhealthy and illegal practices in the dictionary to save money and to earn more but invest less by using all means fair and foul. They made full use of loopholes in the law and the prevalent ill-system. Had they constructed the structure as per specifications, electric fittings been done by experts using quality materials, safety precautions been taken, specified power-load been adhered to, at least four gates been there and cotton curtains been used; then the loss would have been too less. They had not spent even a pie on any safety precaution. They did not make any arrangement for coping with some urgency. They too were as interested in minting money and publicity as were the basic culprits. They too did not ask for fire-brigade, ambulance, security and other required services even though only they knew about the vulnerability of the morquee to fire. It was their such cruel careless behaviour and blind selfish approach which completed the ill-job of the prime ill-doers.....?

The D.C. who was the chief guest became the immediate cause of so much loss. Had he acted responsibly and humanely, the loss would have been too minimal. As fire was following the hapless victims menacingly, they had only one option, that tiny door ahead. So, they began to rush blindly towards there and most of them had almost reached just near that door but were made to halt by the baton-wielding policemen to make way for the D.C. to escape. They withheld and pushed back the timid ladies and children by blocking their way with their batons while forming a ring around that ill-official in their ill-bid to make room for his exit. The poor and tender ladies and children became



frightened and nervous out of fear and horror and were just frozen, thus began the fatal fall. Heaps over heaps were formed within that very moment which was wasted in evicting just one person at the cost of so many precious lives out of whom many D.C.'s or even more could have been created. Even a split of a moment can change the face of situation during some sudden mishappening. The green room was just adjacent to the tiny exit and there were about seventy children at that ill moment and they could have been saved very easily if the way had not been blocked by those who are termed as the so-called protectors of life of the people. They were behind the curtains ready for their non-appearance. If the way had not been blocked even then the D.C. could have been saved as he was among those very firsts who made it to the door instantly as they were sitting in the very first row which had much space in its front. In this way, many more people could have hurried through the tiny exit and no stampede could have been caused. The heap of dead bodies just near the lone exit bear testimony to the fact that the first blockade proved too fatal. So, the D.C. was the immediate piece of villain whose cruel and inhuman conduct led to so much loss of precious lives. Had he acted humanely and responsibly, the loss could have been too less? It was his official and human duty to protect and help the people especially during such a bizarre catastrophe but instead of it he himself pushed them into the jaws of a fiery death. He committed yet another criminal act by instantly fleeing from the site. After rushing out, he got into his official vehicle and fled leaving those very people burning to whom he was supposed to save and help. He did not even look behind even for a moment and he was the first and the only person to flee whereas the other people rushed to the spot for lending helping hand. If he had acted sensibly even after saving himself and had led the administration present there and the people in the rescue operations even then many people could have been brought out of the jaws of

death. His such ill-role was just unworthy of such a high official as of an I.A.S. officer. He did not bother even to send an S.O.S. His this late contention that the wireless set of his official vehicle was out of order was just concocted afterwards only to save his skin. Moreover, the official vehicles of the D.S.P. and the S.D.M. were parked just outside the tragedy site and had fully operational wireless sets. Why did he not make use of them for sending an S.O.S. and the urgent message to the higher-ups? He was the only and the highest official at that too as the S.D.M. had died and the D.S.P. was seriously injured. Then to whom to look up for help and guidance? His vehicle sped past in front of the police-station which was just three hundred metres away and he did not even halt there for contacting the officials present there. He sped on and on till he holed himself in at the Govt. Rest House at village Odhan some thirty kilometres away from the tragedy site. He did not contact anyone overthere too even though a police post existed there as well. He did his all the best for death but all the worst for life. A hunt was launched to locate him and a police officer became able to bring him back to the tragic town at about 16.00 hours. All rescue and relief operations which were handled by the people themselves too were almost over on the site, even most of the dead too were removed to the civil hospital. When he was made to visit the tragedy site there was nothing but the ruins. He did nothing even after returning to the town but remained put up somewhere. He acted as a captain of some sinking ship who deserted it leaving all others to end up in the blue waters. The one who was supposed to leave at the last left at the very first, then to whom to look up for help? If some boat miswanders in the middle of the waters then the boatman tries all his best to take it to the shore but if that very person himself drowns the boat then ———? Do remember, there is nothing any otherwhere which saves, only man or some other Natural creature at the most, can save man in some hour of crisis. Messiah is



one who saves, Devil is one who does the otherwise. All the above facts show that the D.C. was fully responsible for all the carnage on the site- spot. If he had shouldered his official responsibility leave alone human duty, then many precious lives could have been saved. He went on committing lapses one after the other since his selfish escape. The office of such a high rank is supposed to save and help people during some emergency even at the risk to his own life. If such a high office does not perform his duty well in such a tragic situation, then think of his conduct in normal times? Would that he had not been the chief guest ————? Compare it with the recent noble example of the fire -brigade personnel who themselves perished while trying to save people who were trapped in The World Trade Center catastrophe in New York [U.S.A.] and they numbered over three hundred and fifty,.....! But here,.....? So, this trio was fully responsible for this gruesome tragedy in their own respective ways. If they all were not responsible for making the tender and the soft people burn, then may be the audience was so?

The state govt. too can't be absolved of its responsibility. The fire safety laws as enacted by the govt. of India in 1958 and 1984 have not been fully implemented even upto this day. Whatever laws are there, they are applicable only for cinema houses, petrol pumps and L.P.G. and fire crackers' main storages etc. Places of common use are kept beyond it. Even the skyscrapers which house govt. offices, leave alone others, have no proper fire -fighting equipments within what to say of other precautionary advance measures. The building- plans of such high rising buildings pay scant respect for fire safety and precaution. Routine public gatherings of gigantic size are a way of life here in this part of land of infinite heads but no fire- safety measures are taken beforehand to tackle any untoward happening. In fact, almost all safety and security measures are reserved for those who matter. Who cares for the common creatures? As is

the practice here in other fields, the fire- brigade stations have insufficient means and manpower. Moreover, the fire personnel too are not well-trained to handle modern gadgets and techniques and too grave modern situations. It was not so difficult a task to put off a fire sometime back but it is not so now as all have become too complicated and sophisticated. As far as I have observed, mostly the fire- brigade reaches only after most of the damage had already been done. It happened so here too, the fire- brigade reached the site only to sprinkle water on the dead and the wreckage. Passivity is the mentality here. Many fire-related incidents had occurred in the country and the state too before this tragedy but no lesson is ever learnt. Just a single incidence for example, a fierce fire broke out at Krishna Fire Works at Rohtak and claimed twenty four lives on May 23, 1995 just seven months before this fire tragedy. All the usual was done. An inquiry was held which suggested some measures to prevent fire incidences in future. What action was taken on that report has not been made public even upto now? Here, responsibility is never fixed, then to whom to be made accountable? That's why no one is afraid of and all go on grinding their own axes putting others' life at risk. The Dabwali Fire Tragedy stands a testimony to the above reality as no one was held accountable for the Rohtak incidence and no lesson was learnt thereof. If no lesson is learnt from this tragedy, then who knows what will follow and followed it has as so many fire tragedies have followed it at regular intervals. But who cares for life here...?

The local administration, that too an organ of the state govt., too failed miserably in carrying out its duties. The D.C., the local S.D.M. and D.S.P. and some other prominent citizens were invited to the function but no special arrangements were made to tackle any emergent situation what to say of precautionary measures. No on the spot visit was made by anyone to take stock of the situation within and outside the morquee. If such a casual



approach is adopted for the highest govt. officials, then think of the ordinary mortals? Whose responsibility was it to take care of the above factors? Some other lapses of local administration, when the construction was made in violation of the sanctioned building-plan, why was the marriage palace allowed to operate? Why no one ever visited it to check whether sufficient safety precautions were taken to face any emergency as it was meant for public use? The role of state electricity board too was of dubious nature. Why both power connections were allowed to carry on even though they were illegal? Why regular meter readings were not taken and the bills were issued at random? Why power supply was not disconnected even though arrears of eight thousand units were still to be paid upto the tragedy time? Is such leniency showed to the common creature? The sanctioned load was 5.98 kws whereas it must not have been less than 15 kws? All in disorder? Whose responsibility was it to ———?

All the above factors reveal the sorry state of affairs here. Corruption, red-tapism, nepotism, and all other negatives are the hallmarks of governance here. The blood of corruption is circulating in the body from head to toe. The owners of the marriage palace made full use of such an easy system. They bought all concerned since laying the foundation stone upto the tragedy time and did whatever they wanted and it is not an isolated story. Most of the tragedies are caused by such nature of things here and will go on as such. May Existence bless those who matter here....!

Some other sad aspects. It is said that some cruel people did not hesitate to rob the corpses. The D.A. V. school management did not visit the bereaved except their own staff members' survivors or some special ones. Most of the visiting dignitaries tried to fish in the troubled waters. A senior minister of the then state govt. reacted thus, "Incidents like Dabwali Fire Tragedy do happen often." If it is so, then what is govt. meant for, if it can't

protect human life? Almost the whole govt. machinery remained busy in attending to the who's who's leaving the victims at their own merciful mercy. Radio and T.V. channels controlled by the central govt. went on relaying their programmes as usual even after knowing about the tragedy. Even 'The New Year's entertainment programme was aired and telecast as pre-scheduled. When the whole humanity was too shocked to switch on their gadgets, the so-called largest democratic set-up remained too insensitive to the collective grief of their own countrymen. In deep contrast to it, in the neighbouring country Pakistan, two trains rammed into each other in 1994 killing many people, then Pakistan television suspended all its scheduled programmes instantly and the newsreaders covered their heads as a national mourning sign. The state govt. announced three days state mourning. Why not National? Was it not a loss to the Nation? If it is not then what will be? Compare it with the recent tragedy in U.S.A., a national mourning was declared instantly. When a politician of no consequence dies, a national mourning is observed, howsoever corrupt, inefficient and cruel the person might have remained. In my view, loss of human life on such a big and tragic scale is a loss to the whole humanity and such a loss should be mourned on international level. But like all the idealists, I am talking utopia, a sort of idiocy in this selfish world. I forgot to remember, 'Sorrows are certainly subjective, joys may be collective'.

The Earthly Trinity attended to the tragedy victims by all possible means on the instant basis. But it began to retreat as is usual to attend to its other respective jobs. The sufferers began to feel the pangs of sorrow on their own. The real ordeal began now worse than that inferno. The dead go forever but the living sufferers have to suffer moment to moment. The dead need nothing but the living ones need at least needs. They have to face the cruel and selfish world at every step. Those who are left



behind have to taste the hell, the dead know no hell or heaven as hell or heaven are nothing but manifestations of sorrows and joys respectively. Those who were seriously injured began to return to the town after being treated. The govt. paid for it initially but began to withdraw its hands by and by. Those who were disfigured beyond words losing their vital senses and organs were to pay and suffer for life for no fault of their own. In fact, 'Man has to suffer more for the ills of others' than his own'. Such is the worldly system? Those who were incapacitated for life began to feel a burden unto themselves and other related ones. Those who had lost their entire family and were left all alone were too depressed to carry on with life. Those who could not face and bear the reality bade last goodbye to life, numbering four. The so-called blood-relatives of those who perished along with their whole family began to quarrel among themselves for grabbing their left property. 'Here all relations are selfish and economic in nature'. The so-called love is merely a word found only in the dictionary. The true face of man began to unfold itself in due course of time, only the sufferers can feel it.

Some scape-goats were found to appease the enraged public which raised every hue and cry to bring the guilty to book. Some employees of the local administration and state electricity board were suspended. All of them were reinstated after some time as people began to involve into their own lives. The behaviour of D.A.V. school authorities after the tragedy was just a slur on the face of humanity. They did not visit all the bereaved families. They, who ruined the whole town, again opened the school after some days. Why did the so-called law allowed such a murderous institution to carry on? At least, they had spared only this town as a penance. They pocketed lacs of rupees sent by many philanthropic persons and organisations from far and wide for helping the victims and treatment of the seriously burnt. Almost all the D.A.V. institutions collected money from their students and staff

members and sent the same to D.A.V. school authorities for help purposes. Many industrialists of local origin and settled elsewhere sent money too generously. Just an example for the sake of example will be enough. The Japanese, living in Delhi especially the students, collected Rs. 1,76,832 and sent this amount to the principal of the school on Jan. 17, 1996. People send help in cash or kind during some calamity ignoring all barriers, man being sensitive and emotional is swayed instantly by feelings. How that help is spent is another matter? No record of such pourings was maintained by those concerned. Those who pushed hundreds of blooming children and tender women and some others into the charring grave collected money in their very name! Their purpose of collecting funds for the construction of school building was served anyhow and the amount too exceeded than what they could have got if tragedy had not struck. Death too is sold here and it gets more price than life'?

The town streets began to be haunted by ghost-like disfigures. Initially, people did not dare to venture out especially during the night but slowly they began to do so. People used to have nightmares and hallucinations and the help of some psychoanalysts had to be sought. The tragedy site became a deserted and ominous place and no one has the courage to pass by it. Its neighbouring people became too horrified as the ill sight haunted them day in, day out. But 'Time is a great consumer'. By and by, people began to readjust as per given circumstances. The sufferers who decided to face life began to pick up threads from here and there to reweave the fabric of remaining breaths. 'Broken pieces of a thread leave a knot when joined together'. The fire which burnt hundreds of people alive instantly will go on burning the sufferers inch by inch, moment to moment, till the last moment.

The Sun, source of life on this planet, went on being revolved around by Earth resulting in dawns, dusks and nights



and so on. The town people went on shuttling between days and nights as usual. The giant wheel of Time went on moving at its leisurely and indifferent pace. The people including the sufferers began to feel involved into the game of life. Some who were left all alone have to readjust with new life partners to carry on with the voyage of life. It was the real- life ordeal for both of them to readjust to the new situation having a shadow of nightmarish past. 'Only the woman is so largehearted as to sacrifice all for the sake of her man'. 'Family is run by woman only, man just helps her in his own role.' 'Man cannot live if he can't leave his past because life lies only in the present'. 'Past can neither be undone nor forgotten but it has to be left behind'. There is no other way to carry on with life.

Time never stops even if all is annihilated. In fact, the word 'Time' is coined by man for convenience, The Whole Existence remains on constant movement eternally. Man termed this constant flow as 'Time'. Similarly, past and future terms too took birth due to the term 'Time', but only present is present eternally. The first anniversary of the fire tragedy was drawing near in this Show of constant movement. The real face of man began to unfold itself. People were divided on ideological basis on the issue of paying tributes to the departed ones on that day. Many attempts were made to bring people on a single platform but in vain. Different functions were held at different places in different ways making the whole exercise a mockery. 'Even death is traded here'. Only the sufferers do suffer for life, the others just begin to play their own games in due course of time. No memorial was in sight as yet on the tragedy site. It bore a deserted and ghastly sight as it was almost in the same ruinish condition and has even worsened after a year of utter neglect and apathy. People especially the bereaved ones were at a loss where to pay their tributes to their beloved bygoners; whose responsibility was it to raise the memorial? Memorials are not just a place for paying annual

tributes but are raised to remind humanity of past events on a constant basis. If they are raised after some tragedy like this caused by human error, then they go on awakening man not to commit at least the same type of error. But has man learnt from past errors so far? In my view, certainly not. But he goes on repeating errors each eclipsing the other in disaster. He goes on becoming blind and selfish unlimitedly. Memorials too begin to fade away with the passage of time and by and by memories too. In my view, the dead remain remembered for three generations as there remains a direct link and after that ———. There had been no major function in the town during the whole year upto the first anniversary of the tragedy. No festival and public get-together was observed, even the marriages too were conducted too gloomly and hesitatingly. People showed such a unity willingly throughout the year. But the bug of ideologies began to bite them on the first anniversary of the catastrophe. Man is the oldest prey to them, he can but resist for some time and then again made to fall in the vicious trap?



**Then and now**

Life has begun to go on as usual in this sleepy town. The affected ones are trying to carry on anyhow. The disfigured and the incapacitated ones are still stalking the town streets in a terrible and horrible condition. Many have to seek treatment even for fifteen years more, beyond means and words! The school going children who remained dumb-found for too long still feel the pangs of the memories of their departed pals. In fact, their tender brains had been stamped too deeply to be erased. The bereaved parents, the orphans, the widows, the widowers and the other bereaved ones have to face the vagaries of this vicious world. It is too difficult to do so even during normal times what to say of the abnormal ones. Those who are incapacitated for life are trying to learn to live with the realities of life and the world. Those who have to make new adjustments for living have no choice but to reconcile. Almost all the other minus the directly affected have become deeply involved into their own lives. The tragedy victims are crawling on to the last rung anyhow. Such are the ways of the world.....!

A palatial building has sprung up at the cost of ——— ? I am talking of D.A. V. school's new building which is named as 'D.A. V. Children Memorial School'. Why not 'D.A. V. Fire Tragedy Victims' Memorial School ?' Simple logic; to hide the reality from the future generations. Even a mention of the ill-incidence has not been made anywhere in the school premises. No memorial has been raised there within the school. Nothing has been done to preserve the memories of those who once were the vital organs of the body of the school, no space has been reserved for the purpose ? All this shows their sense of guilt and deceit. The school is being allowed to run on even after ——— ? When such cruel carelessness, which caused such a grave and vast loss, can be allowed to go scot-free, then any one can be. Not only that, the amount spent on the building worth Rs. about

seventy five lac., came from where and how ——— ? It was prayed even in the public interest litigation filed in the Hon'ble High Court to instruct the school management to keep records of the amount which was pouring in then for help purposes. Whether such a record has been maintained is not made public so far ? But here 'Ones' flesh becomes anothers' meat' prevails. 'Palaces are mostly built on the graves'. Is man really the super-species... ?

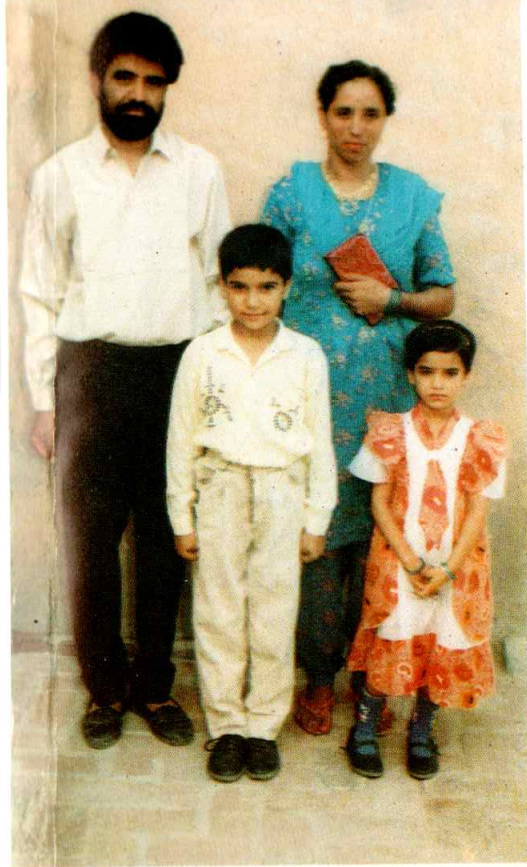
People spare some moments out of their individual life to attend to the annual ritual at different places as there is not even a sign of any memorial as yet even after about six years of the ill-happening. What a system indeed! Not a single platform for paying annual tributes even after such a long ordeal and time ? Has man become really civilised ? The tragedy sight is as ruinish as it was on that black day and has got even worse due to constant neglect and apathy. Where the dead are treated so, just think of the living ? To me, there seems no possibility of any memorial even in the far future. Are those not unfortunate who survived the blaze to see such nature of the super-species ? Some so-called VIP's belonging to different shades of life too don't forget to be among the people on that annual ritual. The Fourth Estate too covers this ritual but remains dormant in between. The tale of woe of the sufferers remains untold to the insensitive world. It so happens after every calamity. Why to repeat the same story when there is no dearth of tragedies each surpassing its predecessors in magnitude and sensation ? So long as man, as it is today, is there, there can't be any shortage in supply. The whole system retreats after some tragedy and just waits for the next, doing and learning nothing from it. The show goes on going as such, the sufferers do change but not the system. The filed cases are hanging fire at various forums and the sufferers are surviving in the wait of their fate. One case has been decided by the Hon'ble Special CBI Court sentencing one of the marriage palace owners [the other died during the course of trial] and two electricians

who did the fittings to two years rigorous imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs. five thousand each on them under Section 338..... It has stated that the morquee caught fire due to faulty and loose electrical connection and inflammable material and the PVC wires were of sub-standard quality hence the fire spread in no time and the PVC chairs started melting. The Hon'ble High Court has directed the state govt. to bear all the expenses for the treatment of all those who still need some treatment at some designated medical institutions and hospitals and to set up four separate courts for taking up case to case evaluation of the losses suffered by the affected ones as the tragedy was too vast and grave. Order to this effect is likely on Dec. 18, 2001. The system knows very well when to do what, to wait till the people forget and then ——!

### **THE TRAGEDY AND ME**

'The grief of being ruined is got aggravated by becoming it the subject of common tongue'.





Family Photo



Rosy in Action



Romy and Rosy as Students



## THE TRAGEDY AND ME

I am relating my life story from the beginning to today in my bid to make the victims of some tragedy face life, howsoever hard it may be, boldly and coolly, this is the only way. This world stands with those who stand by themselves. Moreover, most of the sufferings of the victims are similar, and mine experienced views may be of some help for some of the misfortunates. At some times, I may seem to be somewhat pessimist and harsh but it is bound to be so as the loss is too tragic and vast and reality is always harsh. My whole bid is to awaken man and the earthly system. May Nature help me....!

Man's life is mostly destined by birth and grooming, almost fifty percent is decided by these two. The remaining half is determined by the surroundings and the circumstances which are shaped by The Earthly Trinity. What man can do is to manage the affairs as per given situation. There is nothing any otherwhere which writes the destiny. Everyone goes on living a given life barring a few exceptions. Those very few dare to take risk to live life in their own way.

My life has been hard right from the word go. 'Beginning almost decides the end'. We were four brothers and equal number of sisters and my parents had meagre means. So, my grooming had been just creaturey. I have always remained devoid of the family and other relatives' love because of too much big size of family; how can love happen in absence of intimacy? Love, care and attention are the last words found in such a chaotic climate. Society treats you so as does your family. Moreover, selfs begin to clash in such a vast army hence poisoning relations. 'To produce more than two children is a crime against humanity and



the child.' The whole life of the children such as me is got wasted in arranging the B-needs thus missing too vital other dimensions of life remaining poor socially, economically and politically for life, the three most important aspects of life. The parents who produce too much children too remain themselves in penury and misery for whole of their life and so does their offspring. Lesser the children, more the affection and the vice-versa is also true. I have to suffer too much at the hands of my so-called own ones due to my nature of calling a spade a spade. One's life-vision is decided right from inception and grooming that's why I say that almost fifty percent of life is destined right from the beginning, from womb to tomb. Parents and surroundings stamp the too tender and clean brains of the child as can never be erased by any means whatsoever. I was put into the routine school and began to do well. I graduated at the age of nineteen and I am the only one to do so not only in the family but among all the relatives too. 'Relatives too are relative in this economic world.' The meanful have alike relatives and the otherwise the otherwise. It is so because relations are made by man himself keeping in view his own status. In this way, the show of poverty and riches goes on going. I have to face many hardships as I was the odd man out among all of them. Moreover, I did not get any job for eight years. My parents could not afford to send me for further studies as they have to dispose off such an army of children and they did so at their own will and dictate, they being too hard-headed and obdurate. I have to work in the fields till I got a job anyhow. In between it, I was forcibly married off as per my parent's choice as I was helpless because I had no means of livelihood at my own. 'Economic slavery kills individuality'. 'Economic slavery is worse than poverty'. 'To marry without means means to mar life'. I am relating my life events prior to the fire tragedy to show that my life has remained tragic throughout and this tragedy ruined me completely. 'Both sorrows and joys do multiply in

this mathematical world'.

My married life too went on as the life of a married person goes on who has no source of livelihood of his own. And all this in such a big crowd! I carried on anyhow and a son was born to us in Sept. 1984 after seventeen months of the marriage. I landed a job in Oct. 1984, so two good tidings for the first time in my otherwise harsh life so far. Now I began to feel somewhat easy as I had my own means of livelihood, a good wife and a son. 'Woman too evaluates her man by his means'. Her behaviour reveals it. Our son began to grow nicely. I was fortunate enough to have a motherly wife and a promising and healthy son. One more windfall. A daughter graced our home in Aug. 1987 making the family balanced. We had not expected such a sudden turnaround. What man should need more than this? Our daughter too began to grow up promisingly. Now, I began to feel fully contented with life. We brought our children up with utmost love, care and attention. They too responded equally and began to grow wholly. By and by, they grew to school-going age. I am in favour of sending the child to school at the age of atleast six. Before it, it is just cruel and punishing and snatching away the blissful and precious period of childhood. In 1991, we decided to settle at Dabwali town for ensuring good education for our children. We got our son admitted to this ominous school in Aug. 1991 directly in the first standard. He got off to a flying start and began to shape well in studies, games and other co-curricular activities. He was very amiable, obedient, sober and sincere. He did his job with keen interest and care at his own. He had an enquiring brain and original intelligence. All the teachers, students and those with whom he came into contact loved and admired him. He had all these qualities blessed by The Existence. I only helped him to develop these. He always got top positions in the class and excellent remarks. He never crammed but understood. His sister too joined him in April 1993 and she too in first standard directly. She too



followed in his footsteps and began to do extremely well in studies, acting and dancing. Dancing was in her blood and her feet always seemed to dance. In fact, all her actions were just dancy. She was very alert, charming, naughty and active. She knew the art of making friends and winning the hearts of people. She used to spell a magic in her very first interaction with someone. She was adept in mixing with people in no time. She was very fond of fancy living and always remained smartly decked-up. She used to stand before a mirror whenever she found time and started putting on this and that at her ownself just at the age of eight. We always inspired and encouraged our children in honing their original skills and talent. We allowed them Natural growth acting just like a gardener. I am never in favour of imposing on the child, it is just a sort of crime. I simply used to observe them and tried to know about their original intrinsic worth so that I could promote that very talent. I can say from my personal experience that this is the only and right approach to groom the child to make it meansful, healthy and blissful with effortless effort. Our children were growing as per their own seed and at their own. We began to feel just ecstatic and contented. Both these buds were beginning to open up when the year 1995 set in. Our son was studying in fifth standard while his sister was in the third. He was preparing rightly to take the examination for seeking admission in Military School, Chail (H.P.) in the sixth standard. The exam. was slated for Feb. 1996. I was surely sure of his making the grade as he cherished to be a pilot and he had the original worth for it. His sister too began to touch every stage of the town and soon became a household name. Dancing was Natural to her and her every movement revealed it. I just inspired and never imposed. 'Inspiration is more efficacious than coercion'. 'Imposition cuts just at the very roots of bliss'. She was so instrumental in winning people that many adults too were her friends although she was just eight. The people around us know about all the traits of our

children and were too impressed and fond of them. We were immensely happy that they were growing wholly as per their own and at their own but ——— ?

The Wheel of Time moved on to the dawn of Dec.23, 1995. My wife prepared their food and put it in a tiffin knowing little that it would be consumed by the flames. She readied a suitcase by loading it with all the required accessories meant for some items at the function as our daughter was taking part in many items. Then she prepared both of them for the last function of their life attiring them finely. No one knew at that time that it was going to be their last departure from home. The mysteries of The Existence are really strange! My wife personally took them to school carrying the suitcase at about 08.00 hours and I too left for my job after it promising to join them at the function at about 11.00 hours. I kept the promise for the last meet. There was hustle and bustle all around, a fair- like sight. The children were moving around merrily oblivious of the impending doom. They knew little that they were together for the last time. Their mothers too were in a jolly mood having high airs about their children. I had never seen such a glittering show in my life so far but little did I know that all this will end up in such a dreadful and gory sight. I went straight to the dressing room to see my daughter. She was standing in front of a mirror inspecting her wardrobe and outlook too carefully as she was too strict in such matters. She was wearing a greenish top-skirt for a certain item to be staged. She did not notice me as she was completely lost in her job. She was looking just fantastic and superb and I felt too tall on seeing her. I went near her and she bubbling with joy, excitement and confidence hugged me too passionately. I had never even dreamt of that such an ecstatic moment too can visit me in the otherwise barren journey. But it was not to last too long. I took her alongwith her pals to a hawker for some refreshment. I bought them some readymade salty snacks of their choicy taste.



They went off my sight in no moment and it was our last meet.....!

The function began at about 12.30 hours. It was going great and all were enjoying it too deeply. The item in which my daughter was to appear was just to touch the stage. I came out to have water and asked my son to accompany me but he declined by saying, "The item to come has my sis in it." On the way out I met an old friend whose son was studying in some military school. As I too was to send my son to such school, so I thought of having some first-hand information about such schools and went with him upto some distance talking about them. As he was to see some of his ailing relative at some other place, so he left for the bus stand on a scooter of some of his friend. I turned to return and what I saw froze me completely. The fire had started just after we went out some steps. The most of the damage had already been done in the meantime. The fire had almost swallowed the whole. My whole body got stiffened and my feet left me, the short distance began to seem too long. I faltered to the spot anyhow with a trembling and numb body. People had gathered in good numbers in no time and they were not letting anyone in the burning grave. None had imagined that such a colossal loss could ever occur in such a short space of time. The fire extinguished on its own after doing the carnage and all was finished within about three minutes. People came to know about the magnitude of the loss only now. There was hell let loose all around beyond words. I could not withstand it and got stony. People began to run helter-skelter in search of their own ones. I too gathered myself and began to run madly in the search of my family members. I too had not even imagined that so many people could have died in such a short time. So, I was more than hopeful of their escape and was making rounds and rounds every here and there in their vain search. I inquired about them here and all but ———! Some of my friends too had joined me upto now. We all searched for them outside and inside the site. The dead

were charred beyond any recognition, so, we left the site in the hope of their being injured and shifted to some hospital. Because, if they were dead then they were dead but if they were injured then something could be done and must be done instantly. So, we rushed to the local govt. hospital immediately. Some of us went to the houses of our acquaintances to inquire about them. A sea of humanity had engulfed the whole town and it was more so in the govt. hospital. We scanned the whole hospital but ———? Then we rushed to other private hospitals wherever the injured were admitted. Almost all the hospitals of the town were flooded with the injured and the people. We found none of mine even in these hospitals too. After it, we motored down in all directions to the nearby towns wherever the seriously injured were taken to, the lists of those who were shifted to the faraway cities were displayed in these hospitals. No one out of us could find anyone of mine even in these hospitals nor their name in the displayed lists. We all returned empty handed but full (tear) eyes at about midnight. I was completely stunned and was at a loss; what happened, why happened, how happened? Sleep was miles away from my eyes and the ensuing reality was haunting me constantly. The past reel of my joyous life went on unrolling itself continuously. I kept on thinking of the life ahead sans them. The dawn was appearing to be too far off. 'Time begins to hang on in adversity.' But it does not stop though it may seem to do so to a man in trouble. The hellish dawn dawned and we again started for the lone last hopeless place, the civil hospital, where the corpses were unloaded. What I saw there turned me just into a statue. The horrific hellish sight had been described elsewhere in this book. We had to scan all the bodies as the eyes were just blinded. I was just moving on dejectedly, the people with me did the all. One of my brothers-in-law who lives in Canada identified the bodies with the help of some of the remainings on their bodies. He had come barely a month ago. What an ill-visit! My wife was completely



charred but my children were just crushed to death. I had not the courage to face them. They loaded the bodies into a jeep and we left for my ancestral village which was just eight kilometres away with what I had earned. The whole village was simply stunned. This might have been the first such major tragedy in the whole history of the village. The young mother and her two too extraordinary children lay charred, the mother on one cot and her son and daughter on the other! Only the so-called head of the family remained alive to see all this hell! The elders of the society made arrangements to dispose off the dead bodies at the earliest possible. Such is the worldly practice! A joint pyre of the mother and her two children was lit by one of my friends. I could not muster even enough strength and courage even to have a last look on them, What to say of lighting the pyre. What an end? All was lost and turned into ashes. On the way back all but me began to talk otherwise. They began to disperse by and by after performing their social job. Only a few, mostly neighbours were there to console the bereaved. Almost all the relatives left after the funeral as is the practice here. Almost all left after putting the hearth on out of some regular social obligation. I was left all alone again.

The night began to dawn and I was growing restless and nervous. Some close persons came to sleep in our house as is customary here. All the house-mates took their meals and went to the bed but for me. I remained tossing the whole night having live nightmares. The only one living out of the whole family! For what to carry on? What should and will I do? The idea to say goodbye to life went on haunting me continuously during the night. The night seemed infinite to me, but the dawn dawned as usual. The routine of life again began routinely. As the day progressed, people from all walks of life began to descend in hordes as per their convenience. It is too torturing to repeat the same sad story again and again and again ———? All go on asking the same even though knowing all fully well. What can they do? Just ritual!

They remained somewhat serious only up to the third day, the day of collecting the remains left after the cremation which are put into some the so-called sacred water-course faraway. All just rituals for the mental peace of the survivors. After this day, the visitors began to talk mostly of their private life, politics, economics and what not I was just stunned to see the real face of man. I had to swallow all this but to remain just a listener under such circumstances is the real & only option. People came, talked irrelevantly and left making nil difference to me. I felt at somewhat ease whenever I was spared their presence. The so-called relatives too descended with many heads on some fixed days. They all want just to show their grief with an army of such persons as are not even known to the bereaved. The local people came whenever they had spare time, talked about these and those and left. They talked otherwise but thought otherwise, such is the nature of the super-species. Most of the visitors mostly scratch and salten the wounds by their own oily ways, it is my gory experience. Only a few did feel but they talked nil. They just sat by my side and tried to help me in facing the reality. Can a feeling person wail? The throat is just parched and choked. Do the outside women really wail? They just want to show, just a sort of competition. Can someone chit-chat after the show, if that one is really in grief? In fact, there are some expert ones in the group and they are specially taken along. The last prayer was held on the tenth day after the cremation as is the practice here in our caste. In between there were many unnecessary rituals, visits and cross-visits, just customary and unnecessary rituals. Such practices only add to the cup of woes of the bereaved, 'To lengthen the rituals is to lengthen the grief'. All the rituals must end on the third day itself, it is my experienced experience. It will help the sufferer in coming to terms with the realities of the situation in less time. 'Scratching the wound time and again leads to make it cancerous'. Moreover, the bereaved are spared of many undue



torturous harassments in this way. The tenth day arrived, people gathered as usual to be in the last prayer and departed after going through the ritual. The dead are finished instantly and the after rituals ——— ? All departed after showering too many do's and don't on me just as to forget them, it was some Super-power's will, it was the outcome of some past deeds etc. all just absurdities. Is it easy and possible to forget the total loss ? Only I know, how I ——— ? Only the exit will ——— ?

Again I was left at my own and more so forever. All was seeming simply absurd and futile. I had with me but only past. I was to choose, live or leave. I have absolute faith in 'The Existence' only and it helped me a lot to carry on. 'Life is a one-time precious gift of Existence, so it should not be wasted'. Moreover, I was spared and given a second lease of life. Who knows Its ways ? May be for some purpose. So, I who had experienced both life and death too closely at such a tender and younger age decided to go deep into the realities of life. The quotes of some great men guided and helped me too deeply; such as- "Some make opportunity a calamity, some turn calamity into opportunity". "If you want not to be rotten and forgotten after death, then either do something worth writing or write something worth reading". I read the works of great men extensively and too deeply during the period of recovery. It helped me too much in understanding the realities of life through experience and keen observation. 'The life-energy always needs some outlet, negative or positive'. I began to pen my earned views and it resulted in some diversion. Both reading and writing proved a positive outlet. 'Only creativity makes life interesting and worth-living'. By and by, I began to venture out and some of my friends enabled me to face the outer world. 'Loneliness and idleness form the worst combination in accentuating grief'. 'Be a bee to be healthy and happy.' 'Only the positive attitude towards life can enable man to remain evenly-poised in joys and sorrows'. In fact, all is

the game of mind. I had to face untold, untoward and unhealthy situations at the hands of the vicious world.

'This world is too wicked

Here the dead are worshipped

But the living kicked'.

Moreover, 'the losers had to bear and hear much'. As I was left all alone, So I had to make some rearrangement if I wanted to carry on with life because my other brothers were settled separately and my parents were too old. Three basic needs; food, clothes and shelter are a must for survival. Only the woman has the patience, perseverance and sacrificial instinct to turn house into home. Man just spoils life sans her presence in so many and diverse roles. Moreover, 'Man has to be kept busy otherwise he may go astray. The sacred institution of marriage helps both man and woman in living life co-operatively and easily. 'The tensions of family life are better than depression'. I decided to live the rest of life amidst bouts of alternate bouts of yes and no. So, I had to make some sort of rearrangement. Being employed handsomely, many fat offers came my way. Again, I did not follow the worldly ways and okayed for that person who knew my earlier family very deeply and also the nature of loss even though she came from not so meansful a family. I have never preferred money to man nor I will do so ever. That's why I always failed on worldly scales but not on individual which I cherish more. 'The odd one has to suffer against the majority'. I too had to say no to my many so-called relatives, friends and even my parents who came with fat offers. Most of them even got offended forever and beyond repair and they were those very people who cherished my first family too much ? 'All relations are worldly thus selfish and economic in nature'. They all left me high and dry to fend for my ownself. My earlier in-laws totally snapped all relations with me saying what relations they have now when their daughter and her



off- springs were gone, they did not invite me even to the marriage of their son. In fact, neither they nor my parents were on good terms with my former wife due to our not following their dictatorial commands, and they both showed more grief instantly but began to show their real colours after some time! I told my parents and former in-laws to donate all the goods of our home but what they did stunned me- my former in-laws gave all our belongings to their younger daughter who happens to be married to my younger brother! Anyhow, I began to live with the second arrangement even though I was a person of only one arrangement by nature. Adverse circumstances forced me to swallow even this bitter pill. Now began the real ordeal, to readjust under such trying conditions. My second partner, though not so matured and so-called educated one, went to each and every length and breadth and made every sacrifice to bring me back into the mainstream of life. In fact, she had staked her life and had agreed to ruin her own life to save mine. Such an example is rare to be found in this otherwise selfish and cunning world. I often feel pity for her and a sense of guilt for me. At times, I think of the dark future of my wife and son in case somewhat happens to me unipely, I do often pray to Nature for sparing me for enough time till my son becomes able to take care of himself and his mother. It is not my fault to be in relation with them, all this has happened due to circumstances; 'man is but a victim of circumstances'. I too tried all my best not to cause any grief to her. 'Grief is a very private affair'. I buried my grief too deep to be visible. I shared it only with my ownself in utter solitude. It is easier to say than to live such a double and split life. I tried to divert my attention by always remaining busy in some creative work or the other. All others had disappeared by and by and got involved into their own respective lives. People began to think that I have begun to resettle in my life but much lay brewing underneath. I too have to put on a good face as I did not want to cause grief to anyone.

The Time went on moving at Its leisurely pace. 'Nature is certain but Its Clock moves too slow to be felt'. My grief went deep down the cells which begins to eat into the very vitals of life and it has happened so. I have developed some life long problem in my spine and doctors told me that sorrows are buried too deep in the unconscious and they go on weakening the whole system as both physical and mental health affect each other too intimately; in fact both are just one- a psychosomatic entity. Now the saying goes on as such- 'self [character] is lost nothing is lost, wealth is lost something is lost, health is lost all is lost- the reality is such ,all other is just a worldly and wordly game. I lost my social life when I lost my family, the economic life was already so-so and the political life I never cherished myself being not so lusty, hence became totally bankrupt on all the three vital fronts of life i.e. The Earthly Trinity. But life can't go on by weeping alone, one has to laugh away the problems. 'The only solution to some problem is to laugh it away'. Those who go on weeping all the times got isolated in the process. 'Life is a fight'. I too had to fight hard against the wily world. I had to swallow so many unhealthy street comments on my new arrangement. 'Sympathisers turn into exploiters during adversities'. I scarcely ventured out as memories of my bygone family were written every here and there. Moreover, the tragedy site haunted and tortured me every moment. I tried by every means to leave the town for good. But is it so easy? The source of livelihood was here sans which life can't survive. I knocked on every door of The System but who listens? So, I have to suffer here till the grave. 'Sufferings follow omnipresently'. But somewhat diversion helps in diverting the attention for sometime. They were made to exit in no time but I was left to crawl inch by inch to the exit. I was caught in such a trauma as to carry my own corpse on my own shoulders. I could neither attend any get-together nor remain always glued to the bricked house. The gathering revived the whole bizzare sight



before my eyes and I would begin to feel nervous and horrified whenever I have to attend any meet. Man, being a social creature, can't live in isolation. So, I have to overlook many things in life. 'One has to kill again even the dead so as to carry on with life'. 'The bereaved have to kill even themselves too to carry on'. All those who want to live in the present have to kill the past and themselves too as life lies only in the present'. 'Past has to be ignored to be in the present'. 'The sufferers are the best prey for the hunters'. I too was tried to be pushed into the abyss of blind beliefs, myths, illusions, superstitions and what not..... Too many sermons and theories began to be heaped on me almost by each and everyone. 'Even the worthless people heap sermons on the sufferer.' But I was made of some other stuff. I never follow but learn from my own experience. 'Words can never lessen the sufferings, they can aggravate them at the most'. 'Only self-experience is authentic, all other is just phoney'. Mine such practical approach helped me too much in escaping from the dragnet of the cannibals, I was often branded as an atheist due to my such unworldly ways. 'Only the aesthetic & the creative are the real theists'. And I am so from all cores of my being. 'Only awakening can undo the misery.' I began to talk and listen selectively as it helped me to be more with my ownself. 'Lesser the words, lesser the problems.' 'Remain compact to remain in your own contact.' I learnt all the authentic lessons from the book of my own life itself. 'Words deepen the slumber, experience sharpens the awakening.' The holocaust by a massive earthquake in Turkey and then recent cyclone and a massive earthquake in India shook me too deeply and my loss began to seem to me too less and too less-tragic. 'Feel others' grief to measure your own'. Reality dawned on me and I began to live as per it.

I wrote to almost all the organisations the world over related to the cause of human rights, children & women for coming to the help of the victims of the tragedy but very few of them came

forward; then for what have these bodies been formed? When I expressed my intention to donate somewhat to those very bodies, they did respond simultaneously? I suggested to some of them and even to those who matter here to observe Dec. 23rd every year as the fire safety day / the children's rights day / mother's day etc or somewhat else as can be so that their memories can be maintained as well as to keep humanity awake from time to time for preventing atleast similar catastrophes. When nobody came forward, then I decided to create such an alive memory as is more authentic and eternal than anyone could have built.

I did whatever I could do in their memory. Their sudden and tragic disappearance shook me too deeply as to bring in an authentic change in me. Nothing can shake me now. Even the birth of a son to us now made nil difference to me. But some issue is a must for the mother as she is much younger to me and there must be someone to take care of her after my exit which might be prior to her if law of Nature is allowed to prevail. I also got a house constructed for her extinguishing all my means so that she might live securely afterwards. I tried all my best to repay for her rare and bold sacrifice by all means at my disposal, but such sacrifices can never be repaid by any of the means. I have to hear & bear much as people talked of me using those three lac rupees in constructing the house. But I had used and will use the amount in doing something in their memory. I damn care for the world. Some more sour experiences... Almost all my relatives [so-called], friends and even acquaintances came to me to have money [borrow], having an eye on that amount, what a world indeed! Too many social servants approached me when they heard of me and my intention to donate the amount for some good purposes. I fell an easy prey and agreed to depart with a hefty amount and came to know about their nefarious ways of earning name, fame and means very later. They are truly the worldly people. When I came to know of their reality, I stopped paying to any of them but



decided to do it at my own instead. Now I will spend the remaining amount in writing books ends on and getting them published and circulated at my own cost. I am too much stumped to learn about the real man! People don't hesitate in teasing and hurting my feelings even now by all means and I have become sure that they won't relent as I have come to understand human nature in real terms. They think and even talk about it that I have a good wife, a son and a good house, even my parents, relatives and friends say so to me whenever I talk of my irreparable loss! I could never have understood the realities of this world but for the Dabwali Fire Tragedy. But what about the time gap? Everything has a time to happen. Will I be able to perform the marriage of my son and be looked after by him in the old age? I myself have to marry at that time when my children were nearing adulthood. My son would have been studying in eleventh standard now and the daughter in ninth but my this son is just four. When my this son will be nearing eleven, I will be nearing heaven. 'Death is heaven for those who have lived hell.' Nowadays, I am making him write A.B.C., starting just from naught and having very little time at my disposal! 'Nothing can make for the loss of time', What a loss? Nothing can fill the time gap. Would that they had not born! The prime of my life had been wasted in setting my last family, the last part of my life will be wasted in setting this one? 'All hell and heaven is here whatever comes one's way is just incidental and accidental; there is nothing elsewhere. My daughter used to ask me often if some Super-Power would come to her rescue during some exigency as happens in films and teleserials. She was just innocent and unworldly. No one had ever appeared nor it will ever, it is all absurd and nonsense. Some earthly creature may appear and help at the most. I am measuring time very cautiously and coolly taking all in my stride. Some people think and even say that my expenses are less than theirs because their children are grown-up and are to be settled. But have I ever begged from

them when I had grown up children to be attended to? Circumstances have offered them chance to say and I can but hear and bear. I am grateful to The Existence for sparing me and my family members a dead life. What could I have done if any or all of them had been burnt so seriously as to live a crippled and dependent life? 'Death is better than a dead life'? I am always for a total life and a total death. May all be blessed with totality?

These are my experienced experiences after the tragedy. But, in my view, the sufferers of some tragedy do face almost identical situations in the journey of life at the hands of the worldly system. One's vision towards life and personal circumstances count much in how one tackles the aftermath. 'To face is the only escape from some problem' I hope that my approach and experience will help the victims of some calamity in facing the remaining life by living as per the reality of the situation. 'The system helps those who help themselves'. 'Play the game of life and play it well'. 'Accept the truth and don't waste life in searching for it as it is very much here and now' 'Be creative to be alive'. As far as I am concerned, I would have instituted an 'International Creativity Award' if I had but means. I would also like to institute two more awards 'Universal Ecological Preservation Award' and 'International Population Control Award' – as these are the need of the hour, at first, for saving life here and then making it beautiful, meaningful, meansful and blissful. If means ever visited me I would institute the same. May someones somewhere who have the means and brains will take the initiative! 'Only creativity can create life'.



## **CONCLUSION**

**'Do learn or do perish'.**



## CONCLUSION

Every tragedy leaves behind a trail of death and disaster but also of lessons. The Earthly trinity should do all its possible to save the injured first and attend to the sufferers by all means to resettle them in life psychologically, socially and economically. A pragmatic and practical approach should be adhered to while doing so. It should try to make them feel constantly that they are the inseparable organs of the body-system. All this will help the sufferers to live the remaining life in a positive manner. Secondly, the system should learn from every calamity and take concrete and durable steps so as to avoid at least similar occurrences. But man learns only but one lesson and that is not to learn, it is my considered view. Has man ever learnt from the past calamities? If 'yes' would have been the answer, then tragedies would never have repeated themselves. History can't repeat itself if man begins to learn from experience. Only an example will do. Massive earthquakes that recently hit some areas in Turkey and India which are earthquake prone areas resulting in massive death and destruction almost decimating two cities almost completely. The system has chartered the same old path taking momentary steps. But, in my view, that these cities should not be reconstructed at the same very site but be shifted out of the quake-prone zone. Such an approach should be adhered to universally for all kinds of Natural calamities such as ravaging floods, cyclones, tornadoes, typhoons etc. The severe cyclone in Orissa (India) causing severe holocaust is the recent example. The prone-zones should be well settled in the relatively safer places. The vacated areas should be treated as per their nature such as planting trees in the flood-prone areas. I am sure that if proper and Natural



measures are taken then the prone-areas will be freed from the enigma over a stretch of time. Such an approach will save immense lives and means too. But what is normal practice. It is to spend millions on resettling the people at the affected places once again? What happens is that the similar calamities go on hitting those very areas at regular intervals with more force causing more disaster from calamity to calamity..... It is bound to happen as nothing has been done to balance Nature. The imbalance goes on increasing and so goes on the devastation. It is a vicious circle and it has to be broken by restoring ecological balance. In this way, humanity can be saved from the wrath of Natural calamities every time and again. 'If you go against Nature, It will react vengeance'. Man has to understand Nature first and then behave as per nature of Its laws. Nature itself is helpless as it is bound by the nature of Its own laws, It acts and reacts as per them. So, man should identify such areas as are prone to some sort of Natural event and then take steps to remove the causes and the effects can't be otherwise. The whole show of Existence goes on on cause and effect theory. So, it becomes apparent that man himself is responsible for at least recausing Natural calamities if not causing it at first. The whole humanity should chalk out a common programme to evict people from the areas prone to some recurring Natural calamity and settle them at safer places and then take steps to do the needful. Financial constraints should not come in the way as it is a global and human problem. The west which is spending so much on science and defence can help humanity in relieving it from the repeated onslaught of Natural calamities. If it is not done right just now then the ultimate calamity is bound to follow, I am talking of nature of laws of Nature as a whole.

Tragedies caused by human error too can be minimized by learning from past ones. For it, man has to change his vision towards life. He has to forego his lust and self. It seems difficult but is not impossible. It can be made possible by dispensing

justice quickly and punishing the guilty of some tragedy severely so that no one can dare to put at risk the lives of others for his own self and lust. No one should be spared howsoever meanful he may be. 'Where teachings fail, fear succeeds'. No one should be allowed to play with the lives of others due to his error, incidental or intentional. If one who is responsible for the loss of lives of others is not spared adequate punishment, then by and by people will begin to be more careful and cautious. People can be taught to be so through education, inspiration and media too. The main purpose is to awaken humanity towards the realities of things by all means. The present state of mind is such as is leading humanity towards common grave. Is it not a human error?

In sum, both Natural and human-caused calamities are multiplying due to wrong approach of the Earthly System leading to only one end and it is not very far off and the responsibility will lie on none other than man itself. Not only humanity will perish for good but also life and there shall be no after to this tragedy. May Nature awaken those who manage Earthly System and the whole humanity as well! The Show of Existence is eternal, what comes one's way is just ..... ?

The Caravan of Time ever goes on and on and on ..... !





# TRAGEDY AND AFTER

This book is not merely a narration but an experience. I have tried to depict the fore and after of some tragedy as per my own experienced experiences experienced by me from the Dabwali Fire Tragedy, I myself being a victim, losing my whole family in the inferno on Dec. 23, 1995. May mine this effort be of some help in awakening man .....!



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