

The phone-call came early in the morning, before Sharmaji had finished his first cup of coffee. Vijay Kumar was at the other end. “Hi! How are ya? I hope I didn’t wake you up or anything, but we figured you would be drinking morning coffee, right? Dad! You were right, he is drinking coffee, would you believe that? We... we are sitting down to dinner. Sharmaji! The good news is that Dad and Mom will be coming over for a month’s holiday now that it is cool enough over there, and go visit friends, places. Sharmaji, could you fix them up with a convenient self-managed apartment suite sort of thing?... You can? Wonderful! That’s what I have been saying, things are leveling up so *faast*, there would be no difference between there and here pretty soon. But there is a problem... listen, listen, Mom wants a Brahmin cook for the month they are there, could you fix that? No problem? Great talking to you, and listen, while money is a problem everywhere now that the boom is over, I guess I can afford anything they may ask over there. So long! Will be writing a detailed email to ya! Bye!”

Sharmaji had been shouting his answers over the phone, in the belief that a long-distance call, particularly from as far away as California, required extra lung power, and also to convey his eager compliance to Vijay. His wife came out of the kitchen with a frown.

“What do you mean by telling them it is easy to arrange a Brahmin cook?” she asked indignantly. “There is no Brahmin cook available anywhere in town. And why do they want a Brahmin all of a sudden after eating cows and pigs and God knows what else in America? Hy... This is not the complete story. To read further, please either register as a new reader or login now if already registered... my sister chasing out for...”

Sharmaji rarely took his wife seriously, and he ignored her this time as well. It was important to make Vijay Kumar’s parents happy and comfortable, for the Silicon Valley prodigy had exerted himself in forming a Friends of SERVICE Club, who sent over an annual Divali donation to the Society, which while not much, could be freely used by Sharmaji to meet his many incidental expenses. Further, Vijay Kumar had also paid his way over a couple of times to talk to the group about development, enabling Sharmaji to visit Hollywood and Disneyland.

In short order, Sharmaji had booked a suite in an apartment hotel with a nice view of the city, and also engaged a taxi and driver for the month, and paid an advance. He asked a few friends, and they promised to line up Brahmin cooks for him to interview. But days passed, and no one turned up for the job. He rang Vasanti, who ran a training institute for destitute girls.

“Sharmaji! Your requirement has been at the top of my mind for the last three weeks,” squealed Vasanti in her usual excited manner. “First I wanted only middle-aged men or women, you know, respectable types for your foreign guests, but they are all engaged. You see, the problem is that everyone these days wants a *permanent job*, no one is available just for a month. And as you know, young girls will not do, you know what I mean? They are *mad* about going to America! God knows what wiles she may use with a susceptible older man, and having been in America, with its constant high-pitched focus