

Asha was a nurturer, her daughter, Sana, her priority in life. Walking in the back garden, planting the seeds she'd been given under the towering jacaranda where she and Rukmini had been married, she made the conscious choice to keep her thoughts positive, not be paralyzed by fear. Paul Osprey, Jane Green and Raoul Lapin were in constant touch, doing everything they could to help. While in Bhutan, she'd written a list of things she wanted to ask her mother and father (an environmental engineer) when she returned home. She would say prayers every morning and evening at the local temple, visualizing their safe return.

Rukmini had endless questions. "What was the purpose of changing your skin color? Do you know when the next outage will begin and how long it will last? What did you write on the back of the new wall panel?" Asha - "So we would be easily noticed. No. I wrote "The earth laughs in flowers."

Asha's new skin color wasn't the only thing that had changed. Following Shilli's suggestion, she began talking to herself, asking question after question aloud, answering and debating with each reply. Once baby Sana was asleep, Rukmini was hesitant with his news. The Animal Welfare Board of India had called for him to leave in a few days for Shola National Park. He would be away for two months. The morning he left, Asha woke to find a loving note next to a basket filled with different kinds of berries, a pineapple, star fruit and crunchy candied walnuts, her favorites.

India is the world's most populous democracy. One of many ironies, all its *free* services require a bribe, some done nicely, others not. Everything from renewing a passport to getting a simple permit, any transaction with the government or local merchant, demanded the same. Someone stood at the door. "The person you want to see is not in." After money changed hands, that person suddenly became available.

Asha and Lapis had spent an afternoon in Bhutan talking about how prevalent homophobia was in Russia and India, how ordered rapes of young women were taking place in both countries, as was sex trafficking. Having become aware, for the first time, how widely corruption was accepted, they now looked at their countries in a very different light.

The day Asha returned to volunteer at the Animal Shelter, a spirited conversation about tissue engineering, biofabricating laboratory grown meat, was in full swing. “In thirty years, it will take over one hundred billion animals to provide the human species with eggs, dairy, meat and leather goods. What toll will that take? How can the planet possibly maintain this?” “The civilized way is to stop killing animals for meat and leather.” Asha spoke up. “Did you know Winston Churchill suggested laboratory grown meat in 1931?”

Walking home from the Shelter, Rene Hibou’s words came to mind. “Don’t try to change the whole world, start with one person.” Her friend Mita had been raped and was terrified to do or say anything. Asha would begin her work for women’s rights by empowering her friend, helping her through the process of filing a charge in court. When Mita refused to even think of such a thing, Asha did something uncharacteristic. “Please sit here. This is for you.” Beginning an elaborate dance, graceful hand gestures, pointing then lightly stamping her right foot, finishing kneeling with hands raised over her head, Asha was successful. Mita - “If you’ll help me, Asha, I’ll do it.”

The question remained. Could a young woman even be heard, allowing the process of justice to begin? Later that afternoon, Asha took baby Sana for a walk in the Rose Garden. Passing a giant lion topiary, she heard a voice. “Outsmart them. Take an animal with you.” Asha asked if the new volunteers at the Animal Shelter would be willing to help. One agreed, setting a time and day to meet outside the Court.

As Asha and Mita walked to enter the building, a tall man walked behind them, a large gray wolf at his side. Before either of the guards could speak, the man began. “Let me quote our Constitution. Every citizen should treat animals with kindness.” Asha and Mita entered the courthouse. No one asked for a bribe. The legal papers were filed successfully.

In the weeks that followed, Mita introduced Asha to three young women, Malati, Laksha and Neeraja, all had been abused. Their names were no coincidence, jasmine, white rose, and lotus. Getting to know one another, the five decided to begin a small flower business. With her parents away, Asha offered the temporary use of their house and garden.

One afternoon, working together to fill orders for two upcoming weddings, the idea was born. Change a culture, one woman, another and another. It would not be a march. There would be no signs, no placards, but simply a quiet walk on a designated date and time. No one would speak. Asha and her new partners would leave her parent's house, walk quietly to the center of town, continue to the Rose Garden, then return home. The word was spread, quietly.

No one could have imagined either the numbers of participants or the impact. Women of all ages, girls just learning to walk, their older sisters, teenagers, mothers carrying their baby daughters, older women, all joined the group as it passed by. Arriving at the Rose Garden, then retracing the route, returning to their homes. The message was clear.

Asha knew well that, of all the senses, smell is both the most powerful and the least used. She burned incense daily surrounding herself with memories of her mother and father. On the flight home to India, she'd read that the average daydream is fourteen seconds long, a person having about two thousand per day. She promised herself to use her imagination in creative and positive ways.

Reading the applications, her thoughts turned to when she had first met Shilli, Emilie, Julian, Samuel, Lapis, Marcus the Labrador and Snug the cat. A lifetime ago.

The decision was unanimous. A quadrilingual girl from South Korea and a seventy five year old American woman were each awarded a grant to study the Interspecies Internet.