

## ...‘coz Philosophers are Madmen

*Chitra Raghunath*

*The usual concept of a play is of a stage full of gesticulating individuals, putting life into a story. The purpose of any story is to convey an idea and that idea when conveyed verbally, with actions in front of an audience, constitutes a play. This effort is no different. What might be unique is the fact that this “play” does not belong to any popular genre. Neither drama, comedy, action nor a commentary on socio-economic or political issues, this is merely a conversation between the “protagonist” or “Sutradhar” (whom we shall simply call the “Speaker”) and the audience.*

**Speaker:** I am here to narrate an incident. There’s nothing too incredible about it. I mean it’s one of those things that happen everyday. But you never realize that it does. Don’t think that this is just another product of an over-imaginative mind, which looks for a philosophical insight into trivial happenings like the fall of a sparrow. Nah. Philosophers are madmen. Like the one whom you’ll find in sky sometimes, during the afternoon- you’ve seen him, right?

**Audience:** no, no

**S:** the madman who sits and keeps rambling about how all living things are bound to life by their worldly desires? Come on, you must have seen him!

**A:** no, no.

**S:** ah! That’s because you don’t observe. You see, a philosopher is one who thinks he can classify all that happens in the world into a pre-defined schema of cause and effect, right and wrong; one who believes that he knows the reason why a seemingly brilliant boy decided one fine morning to do drugs, or why an otherwise pretty girl goes on a crash diet and finally becomes anorexic. I am not a philosopher. Just an observer. I observe and like an impartial reporter, I give an account of all I see. For instance, have any of you noticed that when you are lonely and without a friend, everyone else seems to have some sort of company?

**A:** yes, yes.

**S:** and how whenever you decide to *guss* your favourite class and type out that really long and important mail to your best friend in another continent there’s a power cut in the IPC; just a few seconds before you wanted to press Ctrl + X.



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**A:** yes, yes.

**S:** but these are mundane observances that we all make. What make me a specialist are the small things I notice. Literally small.

**A:** in size?

**S:** yes in size. Like how moisturizer attracts flies to your arms but sunscreen doesn't.

**A:** oh, really!

(Aside:) This person is totally off. Why are we putting up with this?

**S:** what thinking of leaving already? Well, I haven't even started my story. Okay, I'll get to the point. And I'll make it fast. Just stick around, okay!

**A:** all right! Go on.

**S:** now when I was in school, we used to have needlework classes. Not one of my fortes but something I enjoyed. There's a strange mystery in how a bird or a flower finds life in a weft of threads. Or, looking at it from the other perspective, how a long uninteresting piece of thread suddenly becomes an integral part of a work of art. However, something about the first five minutes of all these 'projects' that I started in class always intrigued me. Somehow the end of the thread never used to enter the eye of the needle at first go. There would always be this battle, this struggle that would ensue between the two. So one day I decided to use my extra-alert senses and figure out what really happened.

**A:** well! That's easy. You didn't hold the needle with a steady enough hand, and you didn't make the end of the thread sharp enough by rubbing it between your fingers. That's what happened.

**S:** no I did, I did! Anyway, I am the one telling the story. You are the audience. You are supposed to "listen".

Now here is what really happened: -

*The thread stood firm and asked the needle, "Why, why must I enter?"*

*The needle replied, " 'coz if you don't then the person holding us cannot sew and then you will miss being part of that wonderful motif on the table cloth."*

*The thread was hesitant. "Why should I be part of anything? Am I not good enough on my own? My existence should be worthy in itself."*



*mirror, mirror on our world...*



*“Well, it isn’t!” said the needle. All of us have a purpose in life. Mine is to go in and out, leading the way for you, and yours is to follow me, twist and turn as I do and in the end you will be part of a creation that will be admired through eternity.”*

*“What about you?” the thread seemed to enquire. “You get out of the whole deal pretty clean right? You aren’t part of anything “grandiose” that you help create; yet no one would underestimate your importance.”*

*“I am a needle; a needle that can prick your finger and cause you to bleed. I have an evil side too, you see,” the needle sighed. “ That is the price I pay for my lone existence. That and the fact that someday I’ll be dropped somewhere by accident be snapped into two by excessive force or worse still wear out because the atmosphere and the moisture in the air choose to oxidize my metal coating. And then there will be a new needle to replace me. As for you, once you are part of this motif being sown, you will in a way become immortal. “*

*The thread’s defiance soon turned into desperation. “ But is it really that bad? You live your life; serve your purpose and then move on. All I do is lose my individuality and conform to pre-set patterns. Where is my nirvana? I am so menial that I could not do anyone any harm.”*

*“Hey thread!” the needle retorted. “Why are you speaking like those unconstructive human beings- those completely jobless creatures who are never content, despite their superior mental faculties and physical abilities? Why do you and me have to whine about what our lives mean, and the why and what of our deeds? Why are we perturbed about whether our lives ‘mean’ anything or not? Does it really matter? Will it stop us from doing what we normally do? Can we really claim that if we do receive some sort of spiritual awakening we can and more importantly will change the world? You and me are just instruments,” he said, “tiny nuts and bolts in a giant machine.”*

*The thread by now was defeated and listened in mute admiration to the needle’s confident sermon.*

*“And you know what”, the needle unabashedly continued, “If someone actually could listen in on our conversation, do you know what they would think? Well, for one they’d find it bloody funny. A needle and thread discussing life’s deeper meaning!”*

At this point I chuckled. Actually it was really funny. And more so because I was actually listening in on this inane conversation.

Well then, after a few more hesitant dodges, the thread entered the eye of the needle and I continued with my work.

(Pauses)



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**A:** then what?

**S:** then? Then nothing! End of story!

**A:** what is the moral?

**S:** no moral.

**A:** no, no, there must be a moral.

**S:** see, I told you I am neither a philosopher nor a preacher. There's no moral.

**A:** invent one. We need a moral, or else our entire exercise of listening to you will become futile.

**S:** okay fine! Let's think. Now, if I were a philosopher I'd probably scale up the story to a human perspective and tell you that all people in the world are either needles or threads. The threads are confused souls, who don't know why they are here, but do know that they want to be important. So after initial attempts at originality, they finally reconcile by fitting into whatever pattern or motif is available. And sometimes, they end up fitting so well into the time- tested grooves that their endeavours actually go down in history as significant achievements.

The needles are the less- ambitious ones who go about performing whatever function they are assigned without worrying about the longevity of their efforts or existence. They always need a hand to guide them, but when on the right track they could even make path-breaking discoveries that others cash in on. But when they are left alone, they lose their way and the slightest misdirection leads them to cause hurt to others. Such loners, come and go, and nobody really miss them much.

**A:** bravo, bravo! That's a brilliant allegory!

**S:** no it isn't. It's a philosopher's conclusion. I am just an observer.

**A:** what is your deduction then?

**S:** nothing. Just that I've seen a lot of people, animals, and insect; inanimate objects too; and they are all not very different. Really! Each one is looking for a deeper meaning, an explanation to why they are what they are. Everyone is complaining and everyone is philosophising too. Me? I don't like speculation.

Let me ask you something. Do you believe in God? Or at least an external power that controls the world?



*mirror, mirror on our world...*



**A:** (in parts) yes... No... Maybe...

**S:** well, I do. And as long as that Someone knows the reason why I am here, I don't need to worry. I am just an observer. For before we know what happens, we can't really begin to question why. And as of now, I have seen just a miniscule part of the 'what'. So that's all I have to say. Goodbye.

(Vanishes in a puff of smoke.)

**A:** I am really touched by this story *da*. And even so by the speaker's attitude toward life. He's god *ra machi!*

What nonsense? It's some *gen* crap!

Nice time pass anyway.

Shit! Look at the time! I have to go write my MT2 record! Why did the ending have to be so drawn out?

Well it would have helped if we had got to the beginning faster in the first place.

Needles and threads... what are they going to think of next? Mice and cheese?

(Voices slowly fade out.)

(Speaker re-enters.)

**S:** remember me? I am the observer. Guess what I just observed. That different people who go through the same experience at the same time, perceive it and react to it so differently.

Why? That you would have to ask a philosopher... I am not a philosopher, you see. Philosophers are madmen...



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