

The Undiscovered Holiness

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Dedicated to

Shivaay.

For you inspire the ethics, honesty, integrity and eternal beauty within every being.

A short introduction:

The beauty of life is hidden in its interpolation, perception and interpretation. Even small incidents have a great meaning provided we are open to introspecting them with an uncorrupt mind and a non judgmental approach. The story is about a voyage. It is a simple story of a simple girl, who is infatuated by the primitiveness of her holy deity- Shiva. In a hope to surmount her existence by experiencing the divinity of the lord of lords who resides in mountains, she dwells a pure desire to reach the holiest place. Did she happen to find her Shiva in the ceremonial mystery of Hinduism?

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Whether you are spiritual or an atheist; the story has something to speak to you. The journey is all about giving a meaning to your own connection with the goodness deep rooted within you.

Meet Shivgaura , the inquisitive, naïve lover , finder, seeker of God!

Chapter 1- It All Begins With A Search

12:21 – Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I am not sure how life is for other folks in their late 20's but if you are philosophical, sincere, responsible, broken and a psychology loving geek; I can definitely conclude it for you.

Simple, it's complicated!

Shivgaura is typical in her own ways, she is intelligent yet silly, she is happening yet boring, she is passionate yet lame, and she is intense yet mild. How difficult it is to define a woman who is beautiful and ugly at the same time.

In order to uncomplicate the story, we need to go for character assassination of Shivgaura without any further delay.

She was like a vibrant wind, unsettling, ambitious, chaotic; wild and free.

The problem of sapiens is we are always encroached by the ideas of finding our own vitality and uniqueness. We hate the notion of mediocracy and obsolescence ignoring the irony of the fact that we are mortals. Just like any other young beautiful girl in her late 20's, Shivgaura was also looking for a meaning in her life. The allurements of modern lifestyle left a deep black hole in her soul. Perhaps she failed brutally in love and she was busy in personal development. A B-school graduate with a handsome salary, she was now 27, that age of life when a majority of your so called friends leave you. Some of them are married, others

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immigrated, and the left ones living with the concept of schadenfreude in some distant world. Shivgaura was single. From being a lucid extrovert to a self proclaimed introvert, she was living a mundane life of 5-days working and practicing crocodile yoga on weekends. Don't be too surprised if you haven't heard about crocodile yoga before, it is an art which we all practice but we rarely brag about. The art of sleeping without paying any concern to any nonsense happening around on weekends is the gift of our corporate bonded lifestyle.

One fine Sunday, when she was trying to get over the guilt of being a staunch crocodile yoga expert, she landed up to uplifting musical verses- " Atma Shatkam."

Goosebumps flashed her skin; she was in an exotic state experiencing a heavenly trance. This rarely happens especially at this highly active libido stage of life. An age when all your friends and colleagues are busy doing PDA (public display of affection) on social media bragging about their luxurious yet vain honeymoon experiences in Bali, Prague, Fiji etc etc. The love is so deep and true that it almost floods all your instagram, twitter, facebook news feeds; it is so intense that it automatically unlocks the phone and jump on to status update while the innocent account owner was busy kissing hugging his better half. Of course, this is the reality or how else can someone who is on a personal holiday with family to spend quality time be found posting on these social apps. There must be some trap.

For Shivgaura it was not about flaunting about kissing her beau in Bali in half pants! It was not a vague experience; she felt an inner turmoil of action. The love and the purest form of energy flowed from within. The movement felt like a snake crawling her backbone, climbing up with the speed of light all the way to her sahasrara as if she was meant to spontaneously meet the divine. Like any other normal person, she was left dumbstruck!

If she was living in some interior village of Deccan plateau, the story could have ended up with some hypocritical occultist, witch or maybe a shrewd quack pundit.

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Thankfully! Shivgaura was a rational educated Indian from suburbs, someone who would trust Google first before trusting an erudite pundit and his interpretations.

An inquisitive mind, opened the chrome browser on her app n typed- Atma Shatkam

Bingo ! Here it is! A plenty of links to open, browse, study and understand.

Thank you Google! We can now find the meaning of our own spiritual or metaphysical experiences without being judged by our religion, category, and class and most importantly in the absence of any so called religious guru.

Interesting! She exclaimed.

Atmashatkam also known as Niravanashatkam is a composition dedicated to divine coming from the Hindu Philosophy of non-dualism. "Ātma" is one's soul - True Self. "Nirvāṇa" is complete equanimity, peace, tranquility, freedom and joy. Non dualism is a wondrous thought of aesthetic spiritual nature which simply teaches that the multiplicity of the universe is reducible to one essential reality.

Be it your ego, intelligence, attention, riches, ruins, sins or good deeds, everything as per the 6-fold verses of Atmashatkam is compressible to single unclouded reality- Shivoham!

I am Shiva!

According to Hindu mythology, Shva is the supreme majesty within Shaivism . He is the omnipotent being who creates, protects and transforms the universe. Lord Shiva in his highest form is formless, limitless, transcendent and unchanging absolute and the primal soul of the universe.

Shivgaura was actually enjoying her religious pursuits and mythological research for the first time. She was busy in finding meanings of the verses, the hidden philosophy, the said and the unsaid meanings. She was lost in her prolific search for her existence. It all started with simple music- a YouTube video but she felt so connected as if it was a part and parcel of her being since ages. She rarely visited temples, she never believed in customs and rituals. She was a rationalist- a 20th century girl, busy living a

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logical life. All of a sudden she was feeling different, a euphoric pleasure encroached her mind. There was a state of awareness, empowerment and most of all peace. All this was happening even without the sight and smell of Cannabis sativa.

Is it really possible to relate with divine in such an abrupt fashion?

“What you seek is seeking you.”- Rumi

**Ahaṃ nirvikalpo nirākāra rūpo
Vibhutvāca sarvatra sarveṃdriyāṇaṃ
na cāśangata naiva muktir na meyaḥ
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham.**

I am all pervasive, and without any form, pervade all senses and world.

I have neither attachment to the world, nor to the liberation (mukti).

I am "Shiva"

Sat-Chit-Ananda

Ever existing, ever consciousness, ever new bliss

Beyond all these.

The holiest sixth verse of niravanashatkam

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Chapter 2- The Hippocratic Thrust

The only thing worse than a liar is a liar that's also a hypocrite!

- Tennessee Williams

The truth begins from within. No matter how raw or mature you are, if you believe in the factual adequacy of time and space; certain things are meant to happen. For Shivgaura, apparently- everything was falling in line, as if all the cosmopolitan energy has taken the responsibility of her life. The longest relationship of her life has finally ended up, the so called BF got married to some rich daughter of a rich father, though she wasted almost 4 precious years of her life on a moron who failed to take a stand for her at the right time, there was no signs of regret on her happy – woouoa I m so lucky face!

Not that she found a new guy or her parents bought a groom for her with some lavish amount of dowry. She was in an extreme state of satiation when she got a perfect job at a dream destination. Bang on! She was flying to Australia in the coming month. All set to be placed in a new country and start a new life, in a new culture with new people in an exotic world.

Shivgaura was the lucky one! The first stroke of luck is visible in her name, she owe her name to her loving grandmother who beautifully blended the two names- Shiv and Gauri (mothe nature, the most respected wife of Lord Shiva). To add the element of indigenousness and infuse love with usher freshness the Gauri in her name was modified as Gaura.

She is definitely lucky as categorized by all her acquaintance. These acquaintance who usually know someone, merely by the Hi-Hello gestures of the individual, their academic and career success, the way one communicates in those far away formal discussions. None of them have any clue about the abusive childhood experiences of the poor child, they barely know that her father was a very aggressive man who paid no heed to the tender heart of little Shivgaura. She was lucky to have a caring mother who helped her to survive an impoverished childhood and she was really really lucky to find some role-models in the form of

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grandparents, aunts and uncles as she was living in a joint family. She never had those expensive toys and delicious candies but she often had a nurturing woman around her. Sometimes her mother, sometimes her aunts would be listening to her naïve stories of childhood fantasy and help her to live an ecstatic life based on future aspirations and fantasies.

One fine day, you will become a doctor and all the problems would come to an end.

She wanted to fly high but unfortunately she failed. She could not become a doctor and became a subject of sheer disdain for her father. She never received the paternal love she deserved but she kept working, fighting, and improving herself. The folks who know her formally have always seen her pretty smiling countenance, perhaps her mother was the only witness of her tearful nights full of pain, loneliness and longing for support. Maybe that's why she never called her lucky!

All's well that ends well, the delicate, sweet, sensitive Shivgaura is now a full-fledge independent women. World calls her lucky- because she is finally going abroad to live her dreams. The self-serving bias of the masses has tagged her hard work, persistence, efforts and mental strength as her luck!

This is how our society works but finally Shivgaura was happy. After so many failures she could taste success but her life was quite different now. After that mystic Sunday, the day she first encountered Atmashatkam, she was experiencing a different level of love in her veins and peace in her heart. A soulful symphony captivated her mind, she became fond of the sounds of Atmashatkam and other devotional songs dedicated to the beauty and exuberance of Shiva.

In her free time, she was listening to divine music, reading holy contents, writing poetry and painting Shiva. She was at peace with the pace and the momentum of life, nurturing the Shiv within. The thrust was natural. Who won't fall for a deity who is free from all sorts of materialistic bondages? The one who demands nothing, apart from the purity in heart and devotion in thoughts. He is

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worshipped for his simplicity is so magical, his approach so raw and his divinity so divine that even the breeze around Holy river-Ganga enchants the mist of his extramundane affectionate existence.

The healing effect of time was so powerful that it was pampering and consoling the childhood wounds of Shivgaura. As she was growing up; her bond with her father was getting better and better with time. Lately, she realized that it's not easy to earn the bread and butter for an entire family of 10-12 people. World beyond home is very harsh and a man, no matter how soft or kind at heart will get affected somehow by the deep and gigantic atrocities of this mean materialistic world.

Empathy is a remarkable ability; it helps to understand the world in different manner with multiple frames. A sensible sensitive heart is never left untouched by the finesse of empathetic life. For shivgaura, this was a perfect time to inculcate the natural instincts of loving bonds.

Shivgaura wanted to travel!

Travel to Far East, to the alluring natural beauty of Uttarakhand, India. She wanted to visit to Kēdārñāth Mandir (Kedarnath Temple) - a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is on the Garhwal Himalayan range near the Mandakini River in Kedarnath. The temple was built by Pandavas and revived by Adi Sankaracharya and is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, the holiest Hindu shrines of Shiva. She wanted to go with her father. Shivgaura's father, being an army man was a robust person with great physical abilities and stamina, he had visited the temple thrice in past.

Those were old days Shivagu ! Your father was young. Now he is retired army personnel, living on medicine and practicing yoga for dealing with daily life and its hassles. I think you should not plan this trip now. Shivgaura's mother tried to explain her. She wanted her to make pragmatic choices and not to fall prey to sudden emotions all the time.

But Momma, this is what I truly want!

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I think I am capable of taking care of Dad; it would be a perfect trip to content our drenched souls. I think you should also join us and make this trip more memorable. Unwilling to hear any excuse, Shivgaura was determined to take the voyage.

6:00 AM

Wednesday Morning!

Trin...Trin...Trin...Trin.

The phone rang.

Who the hell can call me so early in the morning?

All the anger and rash on Shivgaura's face turned to a blissful pleasing smile as she heard the voice of her favorite cousin- Shashi on the other side but the happiness didn't last for too long for the sassy shashi came up with an unpleasing news.

I heard Koyla (Coal) aunty is all set to ruin your travel by joining you.

Koyal aunty is mother in law of Shivguara's favorite nina aunty. Basically her parents named her as koyal which means the cuckoo bird, sweet soothing pleasing creature. Unfortunately, koyal aunty was not as sweet and nice as her name in fact she was an owner of all the dark traits, and hence the honest cool kiddo troop renamed her as koyla aunty (shhhh! It's there top secret!) . Koyla probably suits her more, it stands for coal. Although Shivgaura was against naming her as Coal aunty for she had a developmental perspective towards coal. Coal is an amazing substance, it transforms into invaluable diamonds when it faces high pressure and high temperature. When it comes to Koyal aunty, no such transformation was possible at any cost as she was as stubborn and sullen as possible. She was like a typical vamp found in Ekta Kapoor type daily soap operas. She can get you divorced in minutes; she can spoil your healthy loving relationships. Her gossips and networking abilities are world famous but owing to her prestige and reputation she will never use it for anything good. The infamous

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old witch was reborn but she looked far better as if she blossomed herself with too many botox injections.

Anyways! This was the deal; Koyla aunty was going to Kedarnath along with Shivgaura and her father. One day later, she was here, at Shivgaura's home with all her luggage and travel baggages.

Ab apko toh pata hi hai bhaisahab. Vinit ko kaha fursat milti hai ! (Talking to shivgaura's father- you know it brother, Vinit (her son) has no time)

Sab hamari Shivgaura ki tarah achi kismat wale kaha hote hai.

The very obvious dialogue, not everyone is as lucky as our Shivgaura, Koyla aunty stood as per her name from the moment she entered. Poor Shivgaura need to tolerate all this for the next 4 days.

10:30 PM

On the dining table, when all the other people have left for their bedrooms. Koyla aunty was in conversation with Shivgaura's mother. There was an expression of dismay on her face, she sounded broken and for the first time in the history of time Shivgaura felt empathetic for her.

Our lives are so vain Manju. I never really wanted to travel at this age of my life, with my arthritis I am going to create a lot of trouble for the poor father and daughter but perhaps innocent Shivgaura has no clue how much I was pressurized from my in-laws and family to go to the pilgrimage. 49 years of life and I am still craving for that one day of my life when my life is actually mine. Your childhood is ruled by parents, adulthood is dominated by husband and old age, it is at the mercy of your kids and lost in the cobweb of social norms and custom. They murdered my childhood dreams, they killed my youthful instincts and now when I want to die in peace, they still hound my soul. Sometimes I feel as helpless as a domesticated animal.

Koyal Aunty immediately wiped her tears as she saw Shivgaura coming towards the kitchen.

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The three lovely women were surrounded by the mystic yet comforting chills of pin drop silent. One good thing has certainly happened Shivgaura doesn't hate Koyal aunty now.

She is no more Koyla aunty. At least not in her eyes!

Nobody's born rotten.

You just don't have bad kids. It's not true. There is no such thing. But we can make them bad.

– Jean Liedloff

Chapter 3- Shivaay Calling

Finding is reserved for those that search- Jim Rohn

3:00 AM

The chilling winds hit her face with a smash as soon as Shivgaura woke up and went near the window to locate the moon on the morning sky. She was excited about the journey to come. The news paper and the social media updates were sufficient enough to confirm that the journey won't be easy. Wherever you go in the world you cannot escape the law of demand. Undoubtedly, the beautiful and divinity of Himalayas are unquestionable but it cannot retain too many people at the same time. The current status of Kedarnath as depicted in the news reports is crowded. Lack of resources and too many folks to demand is going to create some complexities for the travelers for sure but then good things, they don't come easy.

4: 00 AM

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Shivgaura left home with her father and Koyal aunty. Finally the journey has begun but how weird it is to face a setback as soon as you take your first step. The 4:45 AM bus that fetches tourists from Rishikesh to Gaurikund was houseful.

But we had a pre-booking with you. How can you deny us all of a sudden? Shivgaura's father expressed his anguish.

I am so sorry babu ji, but I am helpless. 15 people from my wife's village came last night to our home, they are very old people, and my wife has blood relations with them, I need to cancel your seat and let them take the first bus possible.

Aap fikar naa karo Bhole BaBa apke liye kuch intezaam zarur karenge (Don't you worry; Lord Shiva will certainly find a way for you.) The conductor left, leaving Shivgaura and her family with his words of consoling. With a pathetic beginning that had to move on, the next bus to Gaurikund was at 7:00 AM but the booking agent was way more pragmatic. He denied instant booking.

I cannot confirm you, your seats sir. It would all depend on the number of people who already have some pre-booked tourists with us. If I am left with a few seats, I would help you out but I just suggest you better cancel your plan, this is peak period and I don't think you will find any seats now-said the booking master.

It was already 7:00 AM and the bus hasn't arrived yet. By now, the city girl Shivgaura couldn't control her inquisitive instincts. Unlike the normal culture in mountains where women are not supposed to enquire and take the lead, the literate Shivgaura saw a smaller bus with an Imprint on it - "Kedarnath."

She walked out of their personal vehicle and went straight to the skinny conductor who was wearing a green t-shirt and grey pants. Is there any possibility to get a few seats in your bus, she asked humbly.

Chances do exist but you need to contact our booking head, he pointed to a middle aged whitish man, the one with a white cap. Shivgaura immediately ran to him.

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At first, she felt a bit insecure because the moment she questioned the booking agent about seats, he looked at her in a strange unacceptable manner. No man of professional etiquettes would look at a woman from top to bottom sticking his eyes to such areas where he shouldn't. At least this is the basic social decorum in cities and towns in India.

How many seats? He questioned

3. We are three people travelling. Such 3! Can you please help?

Go. Get inside the bus. The tickets shall be given in the bus itself. He remarked.

Shivgaura and her family quickly grabbed their seats only to wait for the next 2 hours in a still unmoving bus. Shivgaura was still puzzled about the way booking agent looked at her. Did he think I am an alien? Was he really a wolf like bad man who looks at woman as a sex object analyzing their assets? Or was she measuring my enthusiasm and devotion for lord Shiva by looking at me from top to bottom, how genuinely I want to travel?

She realized that these questions will die with her like a mystery but she was thankful to God for she was not gifted with beautiful assets that grab the attention of men who lack character and integrity. As a woman you need to be so tolerant, it takes a moment to identify any disrespectful behavior and it takes years to ignore such memories. In search of a comforting heaven, Shivgaura grabbed her female, Koyal aunty. She embraced her with motherly warmth.

At last at 9:00 AM the bus started moving and the spirit of the traveler rejuvenated the hearts of tourists. An old man in the bus began to cheer. Bolo Kedarnath baba ki ! And the other travelers whoop- Jai ! A positive ambiance of triumph and happiness was created in the bus.

After a 100 kilometer, the journey became more fascinating. Shivgaura was left spellbind with the freshening smell of greenery and the soothing palpitations given by the swift strokes of blissful winds. 11,000 ft above the sea level, she was pleased to be surrounded by the nature. Amazed by the beauty of Ganges at one

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side, bewildered by the twist and turns of the mountain roads, the young lady was lost in the magic of phenomenal landscape.



The captivating view from a journey to Kedarnath

In every walk of the nature one receives far more than he seeks. – John Muir

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Tantalizing Ganges.

The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness. – John Muir

The Journey has just begun. Shivgaura's father smiled at her and said, "The journey has just begun sweetheart, you will be delighted to explore the scenic

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beauty ahead. It was a blessed gleeful atmosphere but after a few miles the air became a bit polluted. The smog surrounded the entire area.

One of the localite traveling in the bus informed others about the fire in the forest. This is a phenomenon that often occurs in the summer season. Owing to the greatness of deforestation, global warming, misuse of natural resources forests are meant to suffer. Sometimes the fire occurs naturally and many a times it is initiated by wicked men who then fake it out as if it was natural.

These mountains hide a lot of greed and malicious intents. People are ready to kill each other on the name of development and materialistic pursuits. These are just forests, they can't even complaint. The old man uttered sorely. The sight of burning trees and fumes was saddening indeed. While the nature tries to give us plentiful of love and warmth, we are mean enough to pass on pain, brutality and harm in different forms.

In June 2013, Uttarkhand faced a huge tragedy because of heavy rain falls and cloudbursts, the region was flooded. Landslides, due to the floods, damaged several houses and structures, killing thousands of people; causing immense destruction. After 2004 tsunami, this was a worst natural calamity faced by India. The infamous Kedarnath yatra was restricted for quite some time with an intent to reconstruct and reestablish roads, shelter and means of communication. In 2018, you can still feel the shattered soul of tragic occurrence. The roads, they still don't feel safe. A number of times Shivgaura was frightened by the fragility of the route and astonished by the skills and acumen of Bus drivers who drive in these mountains.

They are severely accident prone areas. I think I can give it in writing that even the best drivers from New York, New Delhi, Taiwan or Beijing cannot drive on these meticulous paths. Shivgaura exclaimed. Look at the sense and sensibilities of these bus drivers, how patiently they give way to each other and take ownership of our security. Hats off!

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As soon as the bus stopped Koyal Aunty was delighted that she would finally be landing at the holy land of Gaurikund.

Wait! What! What did you just say? We haven't arrived to Gaurikund yet. Hell why? If you are getting married in this town Mr. Conductor, let me tell you. I am not at all interested in attending your wedding. Drop us to Gaurikund Now. The Koyla (Coal) of impatience started to burn within koyal aunty as the conductor told the tourists that the bus won't go further.

After seeing the scenic beauty of Rudraprayag, Devprayag, Gupt Kaashi, they were in the beautiful village of Chamoli district- Sonprayag. The conductor was not a selfish man, he was a considerate guy who doesn't want all of them to die and meet God directly because the roads ahead are way too smaller and steep. A bus can't go further unless you have plans to reach hell or heaven directly. The 5 km journey to Gaurikund is covered by Jeeps available after a 1km walk.

You only realize how far is 1 kilometer when you have to carry 5 Kg of weight on your back. Shivgaura was now enlightened by this amazing fact because she was now experiencing it. While she was busy moving with one-set of luggage, Koyal aunty and her father were also torturing each other while pulling a 2-kg suitcase. We are so fond of our materialistic pursuits that they scorch us till the moment we breathe our last. All the philosophical theories related to luggage and last breaths came to an end when they saw the Jeep stand. The passion to travel to Kedar and the dream to visit the holiest temple is soon going to be a real experience.

**The things you are passionate about are not random. They are your calling. –
Fabienne Fredrickson**

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