

# **Autobiography of a Mad Nation**

**A Novel**

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## Book 1 **Sentenced To Death**

### CHAPTER 1

I was born in a mentally retarded country.

Way back, long ago, several years, nothing changed now, as when it did it only became worse, we had – then and now – imbeciles, idiots, knaves, charlatans, mountebanks, petty-minded donkeys, untrainable apes, brainless feather-headed dodos, stupid, silly, deranged morons for We, The People. These indeed were my family, friends, relatives, neighbors, peers, colleagues, mates, comrades, partners, compatriots, strangers and fellow citizens.

Within a few years of my birth I bitterly realized two things: brains weren't just low priority concerns in the Sovereign, Socialist, Democratic, Republican Morondom of India – they were absent.

My own intelligence, like my inane cleft lip and scaly psoriasis, made me an outcast, the elite untouchable, a pariah, ridiculed, punished and tortured. Each time I'd think, say or do a brilliant thing, it was High Treason against the Idiot Paradise of the Multiplying Amoeba of One Billion-Plus Indians.

If my country was mentally retarded at my birth, it progressed alarmingly into a zombie before I was a kid, then a terrifying descent into lunacy by the time I was a teenager.

Even by the low, mad standards of the world, where asylum inmates merrily roam madhouses like the presumptuous United Nations; or the irrelevant Non-Aligned Movement; or perverted psychos like Iraq, Iran, Syria, North Korea, Pakistan or Afghanistan, or such nannies suffering from Civilization-scale Parkinson's like England, France, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, or the Alzheimer's-addled once-upon-a-timers like Italy, Greece, Norway, Spain, Korea or Sweden, or megalomaniac retards like the USA,

Russia, Germany or China; amidst even these, my Moron India stands out for the hollowness of its skull.

Did I mention Switzerland, the Helvetica Confederation of? It is that unclassifiable, absent-minded, lost backbencher, who draws pencil landscapes in chemistry class, God bless its indifference to the world disguised as neutrality.

By the time I was a legal major, when my comprehensive package of citizen's rights were passed on to me from my parents, its guardians for my first 21 years, my parents – who never cared a hoot about rights (courtesy the Constitution of our Republic), my country was beyond therapy or counseling. It was brain dead.

Brain dead.

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Not that India is fully comprised of idiots alone.

Or knaves.

Or the wicked.

Or the blind leading the short-sighted.

Or the legless led by the lame.

Or incompetents led by the lazy.

We did have brilliant people, smart ones, intelligent ones. They left for a Green Card, and have become, for the first time, Citizens, of better countries afar.

But even that is not all true; neither is it complete as truth goes. We still have 8.24 independent intellectuals of integrity. They subsist alongside these 999,999,991.76 morons. They have no chance.

One of them is 0.24 percent intelligent and 0.76 percent drunk.

Then we have a Booker winner writer, busy with tribal rights, jail trips and international awards. One is a weirdo President, busy with children, visions, nukes and teaching politicians universal virtues from holy books.

One is a singer who never got a career break, one is a painter who will die starving, one is a human rights activist, one is a TV anchor, one is a finance manager working in one of those Tata companies, one is a little boy preparing for a future that will never be, and the last one is a still-to-be-born girl, who will in all probability die as an

aborted fetus; or if birthed inadvertently, to be strangled by her horrified father who cannot afford the dowry, the great India marriage-bribe; or if she manages to survive a few years, she will die as part of a human sacrifice ritual by her parents bribing some dead god with a dead daughter to grant them a son instead; and if she succeeds in getting past the potential horrors of early years, to be child-abused and raped and murdered; and if she can circumvent all these disasters, and goes on to school then college, she will be the victim of a spurned lover, who might throw acid on her face or stab her; and beyond all this, if she inadvertently lives and gets married, her in-laws will burn her after torturing her for years for not bearing a son, or not begetting more dowry; but she has to, and will, die without a meaningful chance in life.

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Then, there is me.

Waiting for the cops to come and arrest me, charge me, put me up for trial, find me guilty of murder and sentence me for life, or to death. But all that's okay. For I have just now, at the acme of my frustration with life, with hatred for my own intelligence and my country's lack of it, axed, yes axed like Raskolnikov, axed the teenage moron next door.

See, I'm writing this poem and a page is missing. I search my home inside and upside down, my books, my bags, can't find it. I step outside a moment and I find that moron with my paper, with my poem on it, metamorphosed, my poem and paper, like a Kafka character, like Plato's Philosopher's Stone instead changing gold back to lead, like Immanuel Kant's wicked theory that set Western Civilization against Reason and Enlightenment, like the socioeconomic reversal program of Karl Marx, like his inverse intelligence pyramid, with the most intelligent man at the bottom, bleeding, supporting thanklessly, the bulk of humanity turned rats, like guinea pigs forcing their scientist into experiments of purposeless pain for vanity's sake... my poem and paper, no longer serving its profound purpose, now instead like the destructive theories of Keynes, like government welfare policies, like everything in this world that denied, insulted, ignored and destroyed the mind's marvels, the anti-reason-thesis of mankind, here he is, that village idiot, making a boat out of the paper and my poem -- his act the summary and

synopsis of all anti-reason and anti-life and anti-man movements, and he, in his last act of mindlessness, their product, their final perfection, the boy who never grew up, who never went to school, who at age 19 still needed his mother to brush his teeth, the boy whose stupidity gave him license to scandalize my intelligence with evil, grinning, sailing my paper boat in the mud puddle, splashing mud on himself and smacking his lips like an untrainable ape while I swung my axe into his uncomprehending head.

Hoping to kill with him all that he represented and benefitted by, Marx and Keynes and Plato and all the other verbose forefathers of the imbecile, he died of the axe in my hand, his head crooked in my other arm, a dead grin, still daring me...

You see, the poem was my answer to Robert Frost's *Fire and Ice*.

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## CHAPTER 2

The President stopped reading and slowly looked up at Vidyasagar.

"Incredible, isn't it?" he remarked to the man sitting respectfully across the huge table.

Dr. M Vidyasagar nodded, still wondering why he had been summoned.

"Sagar, you've heard about Vikrant Vaidya?" the President asked, incredulous.

"Sir, who has not... it was news."

"Good. What are your views about this murder?"

"A nut-case? A lunatic?"

"Lunatic? Which of the two of them is a lunatic? The young man who committed this murder or the teenage boy he killed?"

"Both of them sir, actually, though, in different ways. The boy Iqbal who was killed was mentally retarded, described as they do these days as 'alternately skilled' or 'special'. This killer, Vaidya, was supposedly highly intelligent, a case of neurotic excess... a dangerous kind who reads a lot of books and thinks this gives him extra rights... a special right to kill, perhaps..."

The President smiled.

"Like Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, whom he invokes, eh?"

"That file you were reading...?"

“It was a page from his diary. He sent me that and this long personal note instead of a pardon petition. Rather interesting, I thought. Will you read his note for me?”

The President passed Vikrant Vaidya’s the note across the desk. Vidyasagar took it and read aloud; first with a trace of surprise, then contempt, even anger, ending with bewilderment.

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**“Doctor Abdul Kalam,**

They call you the People’s President, and even I, generally a bitter critic of yours, am forced to acknowledge that you have added an enigmatic quality to the office of the Head of the Indian State. You might know from media reports and some correspondence to you that soon, very soon, I am to be hanged... to death, the sentence awarded to me by our country, confirmed by the Supreme Court a few days ago.

“When I think of it, not many in the world might appreciate this -- but we have a nuclear scientist for a president and an economist for prime minister. Not bad, eh? My lawyer, a typically small-minded pygmy, forgive this candid appraisal, does not have the guile or cunning even of a small-town legal fox; predictably, he wants me to seek mercy. Of course, I neither seek, nor will accept, mercy.

“I have written to you once before, demanding you not consider the stupid Ahmed Farooqi woman, yes, that very old woman, the one who gave birth to the neighborhood pain that was Iqbal for nineteen years when my axe ended our misery. He was an embarrassment to society, causing misery to everyone whose life he would smear with his dirty fingers. He was the kind of person who according to me I could have brought up better. Anyway, since there is no point talking about the finer points of motherhood and upbringing of children, at least not between two unmarried men like you and me, let’s move on to the real reason why I am writing to you.

“This is my emphatic assertion and a consistent continuation from my previous letter to you: no, it won’t do, sir, it won’t, no mercy for me, thank you.

“You see, one of the many things I find wrong with our world is MERCY.

“It’s in such poor taste, very unpoetic if you like. Incidentally, I don’t like your poetry at all. You are too un-poetic for poetry. In any case, poetry is dead in our century.

It died with the Victorians. Our age has discovered communications, SMS, text messaging, instant messaging. You see, everyone communicates these days; therefore few orate, write, emote, express, or anything like that anymore.

“Besides, to critically summarize your poetry, it is not good because you say too many things without being charming or stylish. You see, poetry is about style, about saying a lot without saying it really. You may not understand all this, but I won’t try to spoil your mood with my views on poetry.

“Anyway, let us revert from this digression to the central issue at hand: my life, which our Nation has decided to discontinue; but in case you want me to comment on the politics of the issue before I continue, let me state clearly, and with moral emphasis: I am all for death sentence, per se.

“Not for me a sissy so-called humanitarian view that killing, even by the State, is murder. No sir, a man who respects not another’s life suspends all his own rights in the process, surrenders them to the State, and with it goes his right to seek protection for his life.

“Finish!

“I have never condoned or forgiven wrong thinking on any matter, on my, or anyone else’s part; nor will I ever err by claiming that circumstance gives anyone a special right to a wrong premise. It is amazing how often this actually happens. You would have noticed this, especially if you watch TV, though I doubt it, for even I don’t watch TV, not much anyway, but from the few times you have seen some news on TV, you will know what I am talking about. I am sure you have been noticing too, how when a murder or rape takes place, I am talking of those which are reported on TV, the rest don’t matter anyway, relatives of the victim of the crime become natural supporters of death sentence. Some even demand horrendous punishment not available in Indian law, like death by public stoning, while the family of the perpetrator, naturally become champions of a humanitarian perspective, and go on and on about the immorality of killing by the State.

“The irony grows bizarre. Remember that case when a brother killed his sister, honor-killing the media blokes called it, because she was in love with a man of another religion. Now, consider how divided their father must have felt.

“He had no precedent to follow. He did not know whether to grieve for his daughter or defend his guilty son; whether to seek a harsh punishment for his daughter or to seek mercy for his son.

“In any case, my political view is that death sentence is the moral right of the State, even its responsibility, if it truly wishes to protect innocent citizen’s right to live. What I, therefore, now seek is not pardon – one thing I have never sought, and therefore won’t do now, is to live on a wrong premise – but justice.

“JUSTICE!

“How much nobler, the word and its meaning, sir, how much more noble for those who can understand, this justice thing, more than mercy or forgiveness can ever be, in its fullest and final implication.

“You see, Mr. People’s President, the truth is I did not kill that boy, nor ever thought of killing anyone. I am asking you to use your powers to help me prove my innocence. Else let me die, it won’t matter, as the gadfly of Athens would say, if your country, like ancient Greece, sins against wisdom, even an aspiring one, even a bitterly aspiring one, wise-wannabe, for that is what I may end up becoming before the dark cloth covers my neck, and I go from this world like Wilde’s Reading Gaol ballad hero, wearing his cricket cap on the trip to look at the sky for the last time, now, that is poetry but let us completely ignore poetry for now, it would be a small inconsequential error of society if they hang me, wrongly, but society, despite its right to sentence a guilty man to death, must be passionately guarded against even the tiniest of errors in this route to exercise its right to sentence a man to death.

“I learned from the few newspapers I get to occasionally see that you are on the way out, is that right, Mister People’s President, that politicians in power can’t stand you. You must indeed be a good man, then?

“So here we are, both about to be kicked out, if in different ways. In both cases, the powers that be don’t want us. We are unwanted, you see, and perhaps guilty of the same sin, intelligence, backed with moral conviction, integrity and a courage to act. What an explosive combination!

“Hey, Mr. President, I almost forgot: that word must have a strong implication for you, EXPLOSIVE. I keep forgetting, you are some kind of a nuclear scientist, are you

not? Wow! Did you actually let go of a few nukes in the air, or soil, or water, or wherever you do explode them?

“Really, wow!

“Did you actually press the button? Now what all is that also called -- Panic Button, Sovereignty Button, National-Pride Trigger, Red Button, wow, how political stances impact vocabulary. But in any case, I am very impressed. If I was not lodged in this high security prison awaiting untimely death, and you were actually not a President waiting to demit office, I would have liked to have perhaps met you; we could have talked about nuclear weapons, deterrence, war and peace... no, I will stop this rambling now and get back to my business with you.

“Me, as I said, did not kill that boy, in any case.

“Come on now, you might be setting yourself on thinking, is it not what they all say, and you have only my word that I am not ‘they all’ too. No, I don’t expect you to believe it, nor anyone else.

“You see, that day, that fateful day as one editorial in a newspaper wrote, fate, ah, fate, oh no, I won’t ramble on about fate, or say anything about fate being just a few lines on your own hand which even a palmist can read, nor stress that these are but lines on YOUR hand, no; let me continue in as simple a narrative as I can, for the moment that is. You see, I was sitting on my balcony writing yet another page in my diary, hoping to get it published as a novel one day, when I was also handling this camera, a digital videocam to be precise, a gift from a friend living in America.

“Ha, America! No, I won’t go off again, or talk about immigration and brain drain and outsourcing, nor of capitalism nor Columbus, no, nothing more, a gift from a friend living in America, this camera.

“I was using it, yes, it was me, aspiring amateur philosopher writer, who became for the moment under the nice warm winter sun an amateur film director, and guess who my model and actor was; it was this tin drum from house opposite.

“Sorry, I am not supposed to be insulting to the dead, or Nobel laureates, but he really was a dud, anyway, he was smiling and waving his hand in his usual way, his head shaking without purpose, his tongue hanging out, but I was too preoccupied with my filming, I was kind of enjoying it, so preoccupied was I that I did not even give my usual

shout to him; yes, for over 12 years since they settled in next door, I have been shouting at that mad moron, ‘heeeeeeeeeee.....y MOOOORRRROON’, and then this loud noise.

“Yes, the sudden noise startled me.

“My camera moves all around just for a few seconds and you get all these blurred images of a white bright sky, a few bally dirty soulless homes of my neighborhood, then the bike again, caught on camera, a real loud one, like the ones these mechanics are bound to drive, is that not amazing too... how most mechanics in India are Muslims, they are good, these Muslims are, as butchers and mechanics, no, no, I must not say all this, it is blasphemous and so un-Secular, but then I don’t know if it is compulsory to be secular in a secular nation, anyway, here they come, these two guys on this loud bike, startled the mad moron too, they did, and now, here they are both on a charging bike, two guys, and yes, crazy dolts they must have been too, wearing masks, yes, you can see them, screaming, yes, I have them captured, all in the one single frame, and now, I do the crazy thing, often do such things I must confess, keeping the camera steady, like those groovy MTV veejays, you know, veejays, don’t you, no, of course you don’t, it is not a botany term, sir, I am not talking of birds or flowers, veejays are these guys and girls on TV, who wear weird stuff, have crazy hairstyles, now, don’t get personal and take me wrong, I am not talking about you, anyway, these veejays, they speak some language that sounds like English, teenagers across the globe ape them and all, right phrase too, ape, but anyway, like these veejays, I bring my face close and then into the camera, sir, you must not confuse this cinematic technique, it is not the camera zooming into the steady face, no sir, instead, it is my face zooming into the steady camera, anyway, I am sticking out my tongue in this classic veejay pose, hand held steady, held firmly in hand this new camera, yes, gift from America, now, my face, yes, my own face, tongue out and all, staring dead close into it, now this bike comes close to the moron, the second guy, the pillion, yes, the guy sitting behind the rider, takes an axe, and...

“Yes, he did the mad guy, the bike slowed, I hid, thankfully they did not see me behind the terrace, or maybe they did not care, with masks and all those things, slowed down the bike, made an unerring shot, boy, was he a professional with the axe, a classic swing, like a golf stick, the mad boy, see, he did not even run in the face of danger,

terribly mad, tin drum, idiot, dolt, remained squatted on ground next to a mud puddle, grinning, and off his head went; he must have died the very instant.

“They stopped, the masked pillion guy jumped down, frisked the dead moron, looked into his pockets and shirts, and satisfied, as if the tin drum was hiding a treasure; he retrieved it and they shot off.

“Why, you ask, Mister President, should you believe all this? Because, sir, I am enclosing the film, now, to you, right there, for you to see and judge. With four weeks to go, can you, People’s President, honor my rights and try to get me justice? It is, of course, fine, if you just don’t care, I know you presidents have all those protocols to take care of, ceremonies of exit, preparation for handling over of power and all that Constitutional highbrow stuff, but if you can find the time and do something for an innocent youth, it would be nice and fair and all.

“You see, I am innocent and I believe it should be an important point to consider.

“What would you have to say, though?

“I will, needless to say, eagerly await your reply.” Signed: Vikrant Vaidya, the condemned as of now... wrongly, of course!

“**P.S.:** Have you read *The Catcher in the Rye*? If not, you should. What’s the point in life if you can become the president of a country but have not read Salinger?”

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**END OF EXCERPT**

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