



My Conversation with an Uber

*Driver By
Musafir*

On a recent visit to Washington, D.C. area I took an Uber ride to the Ronald Reagan (National) airport in Washington, D.C. Nihili was a middle aged Sinhalese female - quite genial and loquacious. She drove me to the airport from Germantown, Maryland. It hardly took me any time to realize that she was divorced, had two grownup sons and she owned a small townhouse in Colombo (capital of Sri Lanka) where she goes to vegetate every winter.

"From India?" She asked.

"Yes!" I get asked that question quite often which defies all the norms of PC (political correctness).

"I get many Indian customers. They don't talk much. They are always on their computers or cell phones," she remarked. That was a case of blatant micro aggression, but I decided to

remain civil despite Hillary Clinton's recent suggestion.

"Yes, you are right. I come across many like them too, especially in India. Ever been there?" I asked.

"Yes, I go there very often to purge my mind when I store too many stinkers and things to gripe about. I go to Bihar where Buddha got his enlightenment."

"I am from there, but I trained my mind mostly to be vindictive and quibbler. Are you a Buddhist?" I asked to continue the conversation.

"Yes, I am," she answered.

"You know that Buddha was a Hindu prince, so how is Buddhism different from Hinduism?" I was curious.

“Buddhists believe in cause and effect which is similar to Hindus’ concept of karma. We suffer also because we constantly struggle to survive. We are constantly trying to prove our existence. We may be extremely humble and self-deprecating, but even that is an attempt to define ourselves. The harder we struggle to establish ourselves and our relationships, the more painful our experience becomes. “

“But cause and its effect will always be there. They cannot be ended, no matter what,” I said.

“We believe that cause of suffering can be ended. Our struggle to survive, our effort to prove ourselves and solidify our relationships is

unnecessary. We, and the



world, can get along quite comfortably without all our unnecessary posturing. We could just be a simple, direct and straight-forward person. We could form a simple relationship with our world, spouse and friend.”

I wondered how she got divorced despite such a pragmatism. “No matter what you do, misery is a fact of life. How does Buddhism explain that?” I was eager to know.

“We can end suffering through meditation. Meditation is the practice of mindfulness and awareness, we practice being mindful of all the things that we use to torture ourselves with. We become mindful by abandoning our expectations about the way we think things should be and, out of our mindfulness, we begin to develop awareness about the way things really are. We begin to develop the insight that things are really quite simple, that we can handle ourselves, and our relationships, very well as soon as we stop being so manipulative and complex.”

Probably, by handle she meant end. I was a little confused. “That’s wonderful. If the Buddhists are so enlightened, why is there a fight going on between the Tamils and you?”

“Sri Lanka is a very small country. We are just a dot in the ocean. Our population is less than the population of Mumbai, the largest Indian city. The Tamils want to divide our country and be independent. You tell me, how would the Indians feel about losing Kashmir, the Punjab, Meghalaya and Mizoram? Moreover, if you live in a country, you should believe in assimilation rather than exclusion.”

Sensing that things were getting sensitive, I

tried to change the topic

. I asked, “Do you guys think that the evil king Ravana existed and Lord Rama killed him to get his wife, Sita back?”

“Yes, Ravana and Rama really existed. By the way, Ravana was our king and he was a noble and learned person. Rama was the evil king of India,” she shocked me with her blasphemous statement.

“Come on! I am a Hindu. You are offending me.”

“Alright, tell me why did Ravana abducted Sita?” She questioned.

“I know, but I am interested in knowing your point of view.”

“You know that Rama’s evil brother Lakshmana cut Ravana’s sister’s nose? How would you feel, if someone cuts your sister’s nose? Our king was so powerful that he came to India and abducted Sita as revenge.”

“But you shouldn’t steal someone’s wife.”

“That was just to make a statement. Ravana was so noble that he never ever touched Sita. He kept her in a special palace in a beautiful garden. You can still visit that garden. It is there as a tourist site, she explained to me.”

“So you think that Rama and Hanumana really crossed the sea with their army?”

“Yes, the distance between Dhanushkoti (the southernmost part of India) to the Sri Lankan shore is only 20 miles. I have visited the point. The ocean is very shallow there many sand

“And know what? Hanumana was not a monkey. He was an ugly aboriginal, so the Indians called him monkey. They were so cruel!”

Her strange strutting was giving painful jolts to my mind and guts. We arrived at the airport. “Nice talking to you.” I said. She winked in triumph.

dunes that can be stepped upon depending upon the ocean current. Not only have that, one can easily traveled by boat to the two points.”

“That’s amazing.”

“If you want you can accompany me to Sri Lanka. I am going there next month. I can take you to Sita’s place and to the sand dune bridge,” she offered.

“No thanks! My wife won’t like that,” I replied.