



## The Story of Ajay

### Ashok Kulthe

Ajay was in high spirits after his video was appreciated by the local leader, Kamalakant. It was the kind of recognition any videographer dreams of, and he felt his efforts had finally paid off.

One day, Kamalakant visited Ajay's neighbourhood for some party work. As soon as Ajay heard about it, he rushed to the spot with a garland to honour his beloved leader. Kamalakant was busy conversing with his party workers, but Ajay approached him, introduced himself, and thanked him for appreciating his video. He then garlanded Kamalakant. Placing his hand on Ajay's shoulder, Kamalakant turned to his

party workers and said, "Ajay is a talented artist. I admire his photography and videography. We need people like him in our society." The party workers clapped, and Ajay's joy knew no bounds.

Kamalakant instructed his secretary to take Ajay's contact number, saying, "We need your services. Come to my office soon."

Ajay was thrilled that such a great leader was inviting him to his office. He shared the news with his parents, but his father was not pleased. He advised Ajay to stay away from political figures. "They're clever and use innocent youths like you for their benefit," his father warned. But Ajay was too captivated by Kamalakant's glamour to heed his father's advice.

At the office, Kamalakant ordered food from a five-star hotel while Ajay passionately explained his work. Kamalakant praised his talent, saying, "From now on, you'll manage my social media—editing and uploading videos for me."

Ajay, overjoyed, nodded in agreement while enjoying the meal. Kamalakant even arranged for his secretary to drop Ajay home in his car. Ajay soon became engrossed in managing Kamalakant's social media accounts, spending hours editing and uploading clips. His father, however, grew increasingly worried. Ajay had dropped out of his studies and was getting deeply involved in politics. Despite his father's efforts to steer him away from this path, Ajay remained confident that Kamalakant would eventually help him secure a good job. "After all, I'm his best friend," Ajay thought, his eyes gleaming.

Meanwhile, Ajay's mother tried her best to mend the growing rift between father and son.

One day, while crossing a busy road to buy groceries, Ajay's mother was hit by a bus and thrown several feet away. She landed on a pile of garbage, unconscious, with blood pouring

from her head. Fortunately, passersby rushed her to the town's top hospital.

Ajay and his father hurried to the hospital, where doctors informed them that her condition was critical. Ajay collapsed upon hearing the news. His father was called to the reception and asked to fill out a form and deposit four lakh rupees before the operation could begin.

Ajay knew his father couldn't arrange such a large sum. He remembered that Kamalakant had promised to help him in times of need, so he tried calling him. But Kamalakant's phone was busy. Desperate, Ajay rushed to Kamalakant's office and pleaded with the secretary to contact him. "At least ask him to call the hospital and authorize the surgery," Ajay begged. The secretary explained that Kamalakant was out of town for party work and had turned off his phone.

Ajay returned to the hospital and reassured his father, "Don't worry, once Kamalakant hears about this, he'll help." His father smiled weakly but said nothing. As Ajay held his father's hand, the old man broke into tears.

Later that afternoon, the doctors operated on his mother, and the news came that she was responding well. Ajay's father thanked God and cried with relief.

Curious about how the operation took place without the deposit, Ajay asked at the hospital counter. The receptionist informed him that the payment had been made. Ajay assumed Kamalakant had arranged it and silently thanked him.

His mother soon recovered and was discharged after two months of care. Ajay stayed by her side, attending to her day and night.

One day, Kamalakant called to inquire about her health. Ajay expressed his gratitude, thinking the leader had helped them in their time of need.

Later, Ajay's father warned him again, "Stay away from that man. He's selfish and manipulative." Ajay protested, "Baba, Kamalakant helped us! How can you say he's selfish?" His father sighed and said, "Son, you're blind to the truth. Kamalakant didn't give us a single coin. I went to his office, thinking he would help since the hospital belongs to him. But he refused to see me and had me thrown out." Tears rolled down his father's cheeks as he continued, "I borrowed money from friends to pay the hospital bills."

Ajay was stunned. His father's words hit him like a wave, numbing his mind.

His beliefs in the leader now shattered, as like a bulldozer crushing gravel on the road. Falsehood crumbled, and truth triumphed, paving the path to enlightenment.

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**Ashok Kulthe** is a seasoned academic and creative writer based in Nashik. As a senior lecturer in English at Amrutvahini Polytechnic, Sangamner, he shares his expertise with students. Ashok's literary endeavors include poetry and short story writing, with notable publications in The Indian Express (poetry), Contemporary Literary Review India (short stories: "A Little Brown Cat" and "A Memorable Picnic: Joys of Childhood")

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