



## The Cockroach

Dr. K.V. Raghupathi

One early morning, as the sky was yet to yield to the breaking of the night, I woke up and went to the kitchen, and my exultation and surprise I found half a dozen rogue cockroaches roaming freely on the floor as if there was no law to control them. As I switched on the light, hearing my footsteps, they scurried around and slid into the narrow thin gap between the marbled floor and the rising wall at the bottom of the sink. But one cockroach couldn't and I decided to catch it and release it outside as I am an *ahimsavadi*.

One of the cardinal principles of yogic life or saintly life is not to harm any creature, however insignificant and tiny it may look. It is an extreme form of the practice of *ahimsa* (non-violence) in life. Harming in its extreme form is killing. Killing a creature in nature is

a sinful act. It is a serious violation of life in nature. In a way, it causes a serious disturbance in ecology. Balancing life in creation is not killing any creature. It is treated as a great virtue and made mandatory in all Eastern religions for leading a pious life; I have subscribed to it.

Since I have been leading such a life, I am extremely self-conscious about not harming any creature. For this reason, my house is a haven for tiny creatures like cockroaches, lizards, and ants, and of course, outside my house on the verandah and in the premises frogs and other nocturnal insects freely move and crawl although I drive them out without injuring their body.

These cockroaches are never seen in the day time. They hide under the sink in the kitchen. But at night after zero hours, they become active, sometimes hyperactive, come out one after another like crabs and wander freely in the darkness, looking for thrown out waste in the bin. If the day breaks, they all disappear, where they hide I haven't been sure for long.

Even before I attempted to catch the one that was roaming freely fell on its back while crawling on the wall. I was desperately trying hard to put it back on its legs. Its legs, sharp, eating like the baby said, help, and help. It was struggling hard, beating its sharp legs in the air under the burning light. It was an inch in size with six legs, three on either side, flattened body, reddish-brown, two large compound eyes, and two long, flexible antennae. This was my first close-up look at one of the most inhospitable creatures of humans. Its three pairs of legs looked sturdy with coxae and fine claws each. The front legs were the shortest and the hind legs the longest. I could also see its abdomen with a pair of spiracles, obviously used for respiration.

Help! Help! Said those struggling legs. It began to crawl back, it tried to stand on its legs but failed. As the floor was slippery it couldn't succeed. I stood and watched at it how it was struggling and I did not lend my hand to help it to come back to its normal position. I bent my head to have a close look. The more I leaned forward the more it struggled to beat its legs as if calling for help.

The little creature seemed absolutely cowed, stunned, and afraid to move because of what would happen next.

Taking pity on it, I took a thin and sharp stick and gently placed it on its belly. No sooner had I placed the stick close to its belly than it held the stick with its three pairs of legs. It felt happy that I, at last, responded to its plight by lending a clutch. I held the stick parallel to its belly and allowed its sharp legs to get a firm hold. As soon as I realized that it got its firm grip, I gently lifted it, turned the stick, and soon it rolled back on its legs and lay there on the floor motionless for a while. It lay there still in that position to gain its strength. It started crawling, it thus moved a while but as it started scurrying it fell back again and began to beat its legs once again, waving, taking hold, and pulling its spiracled belly up and down like bellows. Then there was a pause, then tried hard to expand its wings. It succeeded, at last, standing on its three pairs of legs, it began as a little pup to clean its chewing mandibles with its front legs that rubbed each other lightly and joyfully. The horrible danger was over, it thought, it had escaped; it was ready for life again. As it began to move as if painfully, it dragged itself forward, moved slowly this time. I felt a real admiration for all the cockroach's courage. As it dragged itself forward, it moved a little, it stopped again it moved, it tried to climb the wall to reach its community but fell once again flat on its back. This time it became motionless. It might have been tired. It lay there, it did not stir as if dead.

As my lashes drooped, I went back to my room leaving the cockroach still on the floor. I thought I would return to it and discover how it would have struggled; with this idea, I fell asleep.

In sleep, I felt abnormal crawling sensations all over my body as if infested by cockroaches. Not one or two but many like an army invaded my body. The sensations were pricking, at times scrapping. But one among them must be a group leader, giant in size, four inches long was taking the lead, the others were simply following like soldiers. The giant cockroach went up, off my right shoulder and landed on its mound, it stayed a while, then crawled slowly and steadily and reached the chin, then moved upward and reached the

bridge of my nose crossing the left cheek. Squinting my eyes, I looked at it, it looked double much larger than what it could have been. It made a dramatic decision, with the savagery proportionate to my frantic condition and my horror as I seized it and held it tight between my fingers and began to press. But it offered an unbelievable resistance. I pressed and pressed and pressed but it slithered out from my fingers. Soon, its followers reached the spot to assist their leader and from all sides they started attacking me like Lilliputians, pricking, biting, and stinging. Such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized me that I felt positively frightened. I was almost blinded by the blood streaming through my nostrils. I finally yielded, helpless, almost half-fainting, I woke up with a shudder. I frantically checked my shirt and my nose and mistook beads of sweat formed on my face for blood. I rushed to the mirror in panic and saw in it if I had been attacked during my nap. There was no blood, nor were there any markings of biting and stinging.

I walked to the sink in the kitchen and looked down. On the floor, the cockroach that had been left on its back was not found. I looked around and wondered where it would have gone. It was not traced. But I discovered its antennae flapping like birds' tails in the hole.

## **Dr. K.V. Raghupathi**

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Poet, short story writer, novelist, book reviewer and critic, K.V. Raghupathi holds Ph.D in English Literature and writes in English. Since 1985 when he began writing, he has published twelve poetry collections, two short story collections, two novels, eight critical/edited books besides four books on Yoga and numerous stimulating and thought provoking articles in various international journals, both on line and print. Add to this, he has delivered lectures and talks as a resource person at various universities and colleges of excellence. He is a recipient of number of awards for his creativity at national level.

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