

# The Comet I

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I

## Dibya's Magic Spell on Duttada

It was a moonless night in December. A cool breeze from the window disturbed the sleep of Indrani Debi. She was the wife of an amateur scientist, Duttada. She felt for the adjoining pillow. Duttada was not there. He was busy observing stars through his telescope, called Dibya Chakshu. He did not bother even to close the door. Nor did he put on a sweater to protect himself against the cold. Dibya had cast a magic spell on him.

## Duttada's Ambition of Life

Indrani Debi found Duttada looking through his telescope. To her the telescope was like a cunning woman who had ensnared her husband. It was his ambition to have enough money to buy a telescope. He also needed spare time to observe the stars. At retirement, he got both. Now Duttada spent long dark nights in observing stars.

## Characteristics of a Comet

Duttada had a secret ambition to discover a new comet. Comets can be new as they come from the distant corners of the solar system. Like planets, they orbit round the sun. When a comet comes near the sun, its longish tail shines in the sunlight. Then it disappears for many years.

## Duttada's Optimism

Duttada was optimistic about the discovery of a new comet. The reason was that professional astronomers were more interested in galaxies. In fact, amateur astronomers often discovered new comets which professionals had missed.

## Duttada's Discovery

Duttada thought that that night was going to be a big night. The reason was that he had seen something faint behind the 'same old stars'. He made some calculations on his calculator. There was no mistake. It was a new comet.

## News in 'Ananda Bazar Patrika'

News about Duttada's discovery was published in the 'Ananda Bazar Patrika'. It was reported that Duttada had discovered a new comet. He had informed the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bangalore about its location. Duttada claimed that the comet could clearly be seen in the next few months. He used his eight-inch

telescope, Dibya Chakshu to make this discovery. The IIA confirmed the discovery. It was named Comet Dutta.

### Problems of Duttada

Duttada was an introvert. He felt disgusted with the many receptions and functions which he had to attend. He wished not to have made this discovery. Indrani Debi also agreed with him. He asked why she wanted so. She said that comets bring bad luck. So she did not want Duttada to have made this discovery.

### Duttada's Explanation

Indrani Debi was an M.A. So Duttada was surprised at his being superstitious. He told her that the arrival of a comet had nothing to do with calamities on the earth. There is nothing harmful about them. Duttada assured her that his comet will do no harm to anybody. However, he was not fully confident.

## II

### King's College, Cambridge

In King's College, Cambridge, the butler gave an envelope to the Provost. The Provost called James, an astronomer, and gave him the envelope. When James opened the envelope, it had a brief note. It was sent by John Macpherson. He wanted him to come to his office in London that very night. He told him to keep his visit strictly confidential. It was a note from Defence Science Advisor.

### Visit to Whitehall

Johnson, security officer at Whitehall, had come to take James to London. Soon his car brought them to Whitehall. They soon reached the office of Sir John Macpherson. Johnson introduced James to Sir John and went out. Sir John gave him a typescript. It was meant to be published in 'Nature'. James was surprised to see the original manuscript in his hand. He asked him how he had got it.

### Sir John's Explanation

Sir John told him that Taylor, the editor of 'Nature', was his friend. But James said that he had asked 'Nature' to publish it without delay. Since it was important, it should not be published in this hurry. In fact, Taylor had asked Sir John's opinion about the manuscript before publishing it. That was why, it was in his hand now.

### Possibility of Catastrophe

James had predicted that Comet Dutta would collide with the earth. This would be a

great catastrophe. He told Sir John that he had made his calculations very carefully. Except for some rare circumstances, the collision would take place certainly. But Sir John asked what those circumstances were. James said that it might collide with some asteroid. Secondly, it might break up or evaporate near the sun.

#### How to stop collision

Sir John said that they should stop this collision. It is going to happen in a year. In fact, ten months, to be exact. So living beings have only ten months to survive. But James asked him how they could prevent that natural catastrophe. Sir John suggested that they should call a meeting of experts. They should maintain total secrecy. Otherwise there would be panic in the world.

#### Sir John's Suggestion

Sir John suggested that James should tone down the paper. He should show the conclusion appear not so certain. He will request friends in other countries to use restraint for sometime. This would be done till the comet was safe. He asked James if they should call an International Conference within a week's time. James thought that it was an impossible task. But Sir John began to make preparations.