

The family is looking forward to the Ganesh Chaturthi festival and making 'modaks' with their special ancestral recipe. Just then, grandfather discovers that the ancestral notebook is lost! Will the family find the stolen notebook? Read the story of how four intrepid children with their sense of curiosity and adventure unravel the secret of the lost ancestral notebook.



The Secret of the Lost Ancestral Notebook

❖ Sunil Bhatambrekar ❖

In the bustling town of Kolhapur, Atharva, Gauri, Tanmay, and their cousin, Anaya, were excited about the upcoming Ganesh Chaturthi festival. Their family was famous for making the most delicious *modaks*, a traditional Maharashtrian sweet delicacy. That year, they had planned to offer to Lord Ganesha this *modak* made from their special, ancestral recipe passed down from generation to generation.

The modaks prepared by them had a unique taste. Besides grandfather, only grandmother and Gauri's mother knew the recipe. The main ingredient was made in

a strictly confined area of the home. And most interestingly, the recipe was well-written in an old notebook by their ancestors. The notebook had not only the recipe of the modak, but also many more articles, maps, figures and pictures. Nobody was aware of exactly how old



the recipe was.

Like every year, a day before the Ganesh Festival, grandmother reminded grandfather – fondly called as “Aaba” – to take out the notebook from the closet so as to prepare the modak in advance. Aaba nodded promptly and carefully opened the closet and was shocked! Not only the notebook but also the jewellery box and a few currency notes were missing! It was all stolen!! He exclaimed loudly, “Are Deva! (Oh my God), there is a big theft!!”

Hearing him shout, everyone gathered and asked, “What happened Aaba? Are you okay? Is something wrong?”

Aaba explained to



them with distress, “All the jewelry has been stolen. Further, the ancient notebook is also stolen. I do not know who took it, when it has been stolen.. what to do now...”

Atharva – who was now in high-school- was listening to Aaba. He understood it thoroughly.

They went to the police station and registered their complaint. Everyone at home started cursing the thief and their fate. But Atharva decided to track down the case. He called all his friends and secretly told them about the incident. Determined to solve the mystery, Atharva, Gauri, Tanmay, and Anaya set out to find the lost jewelry and notebook.

They noted that the closet was opened by the thief from the backside. After searching, they found one butt of used beedi (thin cigarette or mini-cigar filled with



tobacco) lying on floor. They observed closely, the *beedi* was made from special leaves. Then they took that *beedi* and enquired at few paan-stalls. One stall owner told them, only a few people staying in the outskirts were fond of such *beedi* and often they bought it from him.

Atharva and his friends took their cycles and went to the outskirts of the city. They found a few abandoned houses there. While they stood watching from far-off, suddenly, two-three people wearing masks drove in on old

motorcycles. Atharva asked his friends to hide behind a wall and watch them without uttering a word.

After some time, those people came out with another person from within the house. Incidentally, Tanmay identified him! He was their old milkman!! Tanmay knew where he lived. Immediately, they rushed to his house, which was just a few hundred meters away from the place. Within minutes, the milkman arrived at his home. He collected a leather bag from inside and handed it over to his companions. When the companions went away, Atharva and Tanmay



Must Know : Wildlife Wonders - Honeybees can flap their wings 200 times very second.



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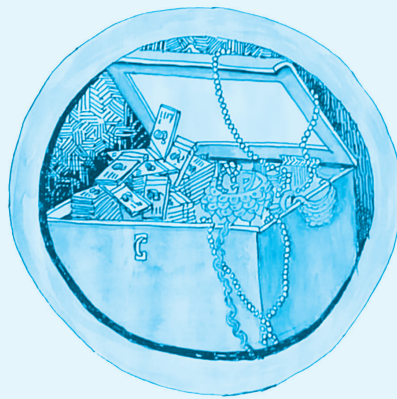
Chhatra Prabodhan
English Diwali Issue
Sake 1946,
2024



rushed towards the milkman's home and peeped over the window. The milkman was seated on his bed and counting some money.

Then, he put all the money in an old cupboard, and while he did so, Atharva caught a quick glimpse of his family's ancestral notebook lying there. After the milkman closed the cupboard and went outside, the four buddies followed him covertly.

By taking a different route, the milkman hurried to the temple of Goddess Mahalaxmi, talked with someone and went straight to an old big "waada" (an old style house). Atharva never knew this road to the temple and the *waada* although he had been to the temple umpteen times! For a moment, he was amazed to discover the secret roads. The *waada* had an obscure basement. He went in the basement and returned with a heavy



bag. This time he looked quite content. He now started walking back home. Atharva and his buddies found his every movement suspicious.

By this time, it was dark everywhere. Instead of going after the milkman to his house, they decided to go the *waada*. It was a deserted place. They put on their mobile torch and went to the basement. There was a big wooden door with an equally big lock, which could not open. But incidentally, they found one sharp nail-type metal rod lying on the floor. Using that, they made a small hole in the door to see through the same! Once

the hole was big enough, they put on mobile torches and to their surprise, they saw a big wooden box inside full of currency notes and jewellery! "O my God!" – all four exclaimed!

The moment they shouted, it was almost heard by the milkman's companions, who were nearby. Atharva and others ran for their lives. They reached their home panting heavily and described everything to Atharva's father. He was shocked to hear it. They went straight to the police station again and narrated their experience to the police inspector. He then ordered his constables to come with





him and take along the four children also with them. They went to the *waada*; the thieves had anticipated this, so they had been hastily collecting the money and the jewellery and were about to run away. But the police reached well in time and nabbed them. The police then went to the milkman's home and arrested him as well, and took all the

jewellery and mainly the notebook from his cupboard.

At first, the milkman and his companions denied the theft, but after a few strokes of the baton, they accepted the crime. They were asked why they stole the notebook. To this, they said that they thought there could be a secret map to some big treasure in the notebook. Everyone laughed their heads off! All the jewelry



was safely handed over to Atharva's family. Aaba was happy. And mainly the notebook was safe! Next day, Grandmother made delicious *modak*, presented them as *naivedya* (food offering to God). Then she gave one to Atharva and his friends for their bravery!

Everyone bowed down to Lord Ganesh and thanked Him for His blessings!

Atharva and his friends cheered, "*Ganpati Bappa....*" And everyone joined to a louder chorus by saying "*Moraya!!*"



- Sunil Bhatambrekar

sunil_bhatambrekar@rediffmail.com

Illustrations - Mihir Deshpande

