

STORY TO READ – 11 NOVEMBER

“Vikram and Deepak – The Two Roads to the Same Dream”

1. The Dream that Began Together

The year was 2018, and Delhi’s Mukherjee Nagar was alive with the sound of ambition. Rickshaws honked, photocopy shops hummed, and the smell of Maggi mingled with the dust of photocopied dreams. Among the thousands of faces chasing government jobs, two boys had become inseparable — **Vikram Singh** and **Deepak Tiwari**.

They were roommates, classmates, and dream-mates.

Vikram was the star of their coaching institute — sharp, quick, a walking

encyclopedia of current affairs. Teachers often said, “If Vikram doesn’t clear, no one will.”

Deepak, on the other hand, was slower. He forgot formulas, fumbled in reasoning, and often took five minutes to solve what Vikram cracked in thirty seconds. But what he lacked in speed, he made up for in sincerity. Every night, he sat cross-legged with his notebook, whispering, *“Bas ek din result aaega, sab theek ho jaayega.”*

For the first few years, they moved like two halves of one soul — sharing books, food, and laughter that only students surviving on hope can understand.

But dreams, like mirrors, reflect pressure before success.

2. The Cracks Begin to Show

By 2021, after four exam cycles, both still stood outside the gate of selection. The same rooms, the same mocks, the same “maybe next year.”

Vikram’s confidence began to crumble. He started skipping mock tests, saying, “Yaar, kitna padhun? Har baar kuch na kuch nikal jaata hai.”

Deepak tried to pull him back — “Chal bhai, last paper mein bas two marks se reh gaya tha. Is baar serious ho jaate hain.”

But Vikram’s smile had changed. The sharpness in his eyes dulled into something tired, bitter. He began spending evenings at *Rajesh Café*, the hangout for “burnt-out aspirants,” where

frustration turned into arguments about paper patterns and unfair cutoffs.

One evening, Deepak came home early and found Vikram sitting with a glass of whiskey. The table was a mess of cigarette butts and empty chips packets.

“Ye sab kya hai, Vikram?”

“Bas yaar, dimaag halka karne ka tareeka hai,” Vikram said, waving his hand. “Sab karte hain.”

Deepak shook his head. “Tu toh sabse disciplined tha.”

“Wahi toh problem hai, Deepak. Zindagi mein sabse disciplined log sabse pehle thak jaate hain.”

Deepak didn't argue. He just quietly cleaned the table.

3. Love in the Time of Failure

A few months later, Vikram fell in love with a girl named Naina — a fellow aspirant from another institute. She was smart, outspoken, and ambitious. But love between two frustrated dreamers is like rain on cracked soil — it doesn't nourish, it floods.

Late-night calls replaced mock tests.

Coffee dates replaced revision hours.

Deepak warned him gently, “Vikram, ek baar exam clear ho jaaye, fir sab kar lena. Abhi distractions mat le.”

Vikram laughed bitterly. “Distraction nahi hai yaar, motivation hai. Waise bhi, zindagi sirf naukri thodi hai.”

But motivation soon became obsession.

When Naina cleared SSC CGL prelims and he didn't, his pride shattered like

glass. They fought, broke up, and Vikram drowned himself deeper into alcohol and smoke.

By 2022, he had changed beyond recognition. The boy who once inspired others now mocked anyone who studied. “Bhai, life ka real test toh yahan peene ke baad bhi khada rehna hai,” he would joke, bottle in hand.

4. The Last Attempt

That winter, notification for *RRB Clerk 2023* was released. Deepak, still holding on, filled the form silently. He didn't tell Vikram till the exam date was near.

“Phir se RRB Clerk?” Vikram scoffed.

“Kya karega itni chhoti naukri leke? 32-33 hazaar mein Dilli survive karega?”

Deepak smiled faintly. “Bhai, pehla kadam chhota hota hai, lekin zaruri.”

“Tu pagal hai. Main toh ab bada exam hi dunga. IBPS PO. SBI PO. Ye RRB-vrrb chhodo.”

Deepak just nodded. But he could sense something dangerous brewing.

The nights were longer, the bottles more frequent, and the smile more forced.

Vikram started spending time with a new group — boys who boasted about “sources,” “shortcuts,” and “software tricks” to clear online exams.

Deepak once overheard them whispering about *screen-mirroring hacks*. He wanted to confront Vikram, but fear froze him.

Then came the moment that changed everything.

5. The Breaking Point

It was a hot May night. The inverter had failed, the fan stood still, and the air smelled of cheap tobacco. Vikram stumbled in at 2 a.m., drunk and muttering, “Saala system hi kharab hai... main bhi system tod dunga.”

Deepak sat up. “Tu khud ko barbaad kar raha hai, Vikram.”

“Barbaad toh main pehle se hoon, Deepak! Tere jaison ko lagta hai honesty se naukri milti hai? Sab jugad hai!”

There was silence — the kind that breaks friendships.

That night, Deepak couldn't sleep. He kept thinking: *If I stay, I'll become like him.*

At dawn, he packed his bag, wrote a note on the desk —

“Vikram, I’m going home. Maybe I’ll restart from zero. Take care, bhai.”

He boarded the earliest train to Kanpur, leaving Delhi’s smoke behind.

6. The Year of Solitude

Back in Kanpur, Deepak moved into his old single room near the railway station. His father, a retired clerk, hugged him and said, “Beta, wapas aa gaya? Ab kya karega?”

Deepak smiled weakly, “Padhai karunga, ek last baar.”

For months, he lived a monk’s life. No friends, no YouTube distractions, no social media. Just books, mocks, and silence.

Sometimes, when fatigue hit, he thought of Vikram — his laughter, his brilliance, his fall. The memory hurt but also warned him.

Every morning, he went for a walk near Moti Jheel, watching people jog, vendors shout, kids run. He told himself, *Zindagi unhi logon ki hoti hai jo ruk kar bhi chalte hain.*

When RRB Clerk Mains came in August 2024, Deepak entered the exam hall with nothing but calm determination. He didn't dream of miracles; he just aimed for consistency.

When results were declared in November, he opened the website with trembling hands — *Selected.*

The word didn't explode; it sank slowly, like light spreading in water. His mother

cried, his father laughed, and for the first time in years, Deepak allowed himself to breathe.

7. The News that Shook Him

A week later, while scrolling through his phone in the bank's training hostel, a headline caught his eye:

“Delhi Aspirant Arrested for Online Exam Fraud — Used Remote Access Software to Cheat in IBPS PO.”

Below it was a familiar face — **Vikram Singh**, in a faded T-shirt, eyes hollow.

Deepak's throat went dry. He read the article twice, hoping it was coincidence. But it wasn't.

The report said Vikram and two others had paid a tech-gang to log into their

exam systems remotely during the test. Investigators traced the IP address and caught them. He was now in judicial custody.

Deepak sat frozen. For a long time, he didn't move.

He remembered their nights under dim tube lights, their shared dreams, the promise they made: *Ek din dono select honge.*

That night, he couldn't eat. He kept picturing Vikram's face — brilliant, wasted, broken.

8. The Realisation

The next morning, while reporting for joining formalities, Deepak looked around at his fellow recruits — ordinary faces,

ordinary clothes, extraordinary relief.
None of them were toppers. None had
shortcuts. But each had endured.

He thought, *RRB Clerk might be small, but
it's honest.*

In the evening, sitting by the Ganga ghat,
he whispered, "Maybe I didn't get the
best job, but I got a clean mirror."

He realized the true test of competition
isn't clearing an exam — *it's not losing
yourself while trying to.*

He wrote a letter to Vikram's address in
Delhi:

"Dear Vikram,

You taught me everything — even what
not to become.

I wish you'd fought your demons instead
of fooling the system.

I'm in a small job, yes, but when I sleep at night, I don't fear a knock on the door.

Your friend always,
Deepak.”

He never received a reply, but he didn't need one.

9. The Visit

Months later, Deepak visited Delhi for bank training. Out of an old habit, he walked to their former room in Mukherjee Nagar. The landlady recognised him.

“Arre Deepak beta! Vikram ka kya haal suna? Bechara jail gaya. Baap-maa ka dil toot gaya.”

Deepak nodded silently. He looked inside the empty room — the same study table,

the same cracked wall, but no laughter, no books. Just echoes.

He stepped out and went to *Rajesh Café* — the place where Vikram's downfall began. The same boys were sitting, still complaining about cut-offs, still blaming the system. Deepak realised — some people never leave their traps, even when the door is open.

He paid for his tea and walked away, whispering, "Thank you, God, for pulling me out in time."

10. The Twist of Fate

Two months later, an article appeared in *The Times of India*:

"RRB Clerk from Kanpur Helps Police Crack Examination Fraud Network."

Deepak had voluntarily cooperated with the police, providing them with details of suspicious groups and telegram channels from his Mukherjee Nagar days. The inspector who led the case later said, “It’s rare to find honesty this fearless.”

When the article reached his branch, the manager congratulated him.

“Deepak, you might be a clerk today, but you’ve proven integrity doesn’t need a title.”

He smiled and thought, *Maybe this is what real selection feels like — not through exam marks, but through moral choices.*

11. The Meeting That Never Happened

A year later, Deepak received a message from an unknown number:

“This is Vikram’s father. He’s out on bail. He’s in rehab now. He wanted to meet you but said he isn’t ready yet.”

Deepak replied simply, *“Tell him, when he’s ready to start again, I’ll help.”*

Sometimes, forgiveness is harder than hate, but more freeing too.

12. The Full Circle

By 2026, Deepak had been promoted to senior clerk. He now trained new recruits — guiding them through paperwork, patience, and life.

One evening, while mentoring fresh aspirants, he told them, *“Competition doesn’t destroy you; comparison does. And shortcuts don’t make you smart — they make you small.”*

A boy raised his hand, “Sir, didn’t you ever feel jealous of toppers?”

Deepak smiled. “Once, yes. But then I learned, every topper has his story. Mine just took longer.”

Later that night, while locking the office, he looked up at the stars — the same sky he and Vikram once stared at from their terrace in Delhi. He whispered, “Bhai, I hope you’re rebuilding.”

The breeze carried the words away — maybe toward a man somewhere trying to restart.

13. Epilogue — The Two Roads

In a parallel universe, if you walked into that same room in Mukherjee Nagar, you would still find two chairs — one broken,

one repaired. They tell a story without words:

One man fought the world and won himself.

The other cheated the world and lost himself.

Both began together, both faced the same pain, but their choices made them different.

Deepak learned the final truth —
Frustration is not fatal. Escape is.

Theme:

Choices under pressure — how the same struggle can create two entirely different fates.

Twist:

The topper (Vikram) becomes a cautionary tale of cheating and self-destruction, while the weaker student (Deepak) becomes the survivor and the symbol of integrity.

Climax:

Deepak's selection in RRB Clerk juxtaposed with Vikram's arrest — showing the haunting contrast of honesty vs. shortcut.

Moral:

It's better to earn slowly than to fall fast. The true exam is not online — it's inside your character.