

**(Awful Horror)
Real Story**

BORDER TOWN

A Memoir of War, Survival, and the Cry for Peace

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*“Peace be prevailed beyond the borders of the nations,
races and religions.”*

Dedication

Dedicated

To

My

Parents

Yellamma Tati

Yellaiah Tati

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge my thanks to:

- My wife Martha Shekar. This work would have been incomplete without her cooperation.
- My son, Moses Shekar, for his contribution in the computer work.
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Contents

1. The Journey	1
2. Dreams.....	5
3. On the Way to Iran	11
4. Border Town	15
5. Plight of Daily Life	20
6. Friday's Frightening.....	23
7. War Casualties	32
8. Awful Horror.....	36
9. Back to India.....	44
10. Ghost Town	49
11. The Mother.....	52
12. Cruel Act.....	60
13. Pleasure Trip.....	68
14. Invasion of Kuwait.....	77
15. Wars	83
16. God The Almighty	93

1.

The Journey

I was about to begin my journey to Iran in the year 1986. During that time, the country was ravaged by war. It had started soon after Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah (king) of Iran was dethroned by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shiite Islamic religious revolutionary. The secular monarchy of Shah was turned to Islamic republic of Iran, a theocratic state.

The war continued from September 1980 till August 1988. It was dragged on for eight years, lasting even longer than the II World War. The Second World War lasted from 1939 to 1945. Coincidentally, the Second World War started in September and also ended in September.

The apparent reason for Saddam's invasion was a territorial one. Iran wanted to gain control of the Arab Al Shattal waterways. It is a confluence of the Euphrates

and Tigris rivers of Iraq. It is the main portal for oil transportation into the Persian Gulf waters. Both the countries were trying to maintain hegemony in the waterways. This water body is referred as the Persian Gulf In world history. But the Arab world prefers to call it as Arabian Gulf. Iran is a powerful nation, owing to its military and abundant oil resources.

Saddam might have thought that he could win the war easily since the powerful Shah regime was dethroned. He began the war unilaterally, anticipating weakened military power of Iran. Saddam's forces occupied the entire stretch of 100 kilometers deep inside the Iranian territory, starting from Azerbaijan province in the north to Khuzestan province in the south. Of course, Iran liberated those entire areas within short duration.

However, the real reason for the conflict was a different one. It was oriented on the religion-sectarian lines. The entire population of Iran including its regime were followers of the Shiite sect. People of southern part of Iraq were also Shiites. The two pilgrimage Shiite shrines are also centered in the southern part of Iraq. One is Karbala, the place where Hajrath Imam Husain, the son of Hajrath Ali and grandson of Prophet Mohammad was martyred. Hajrath Ali himself was martyred at Najaf. Shiite influence is thus high in these areas. Saddam Husain, on the other hand was a staunch

Sunni follower. Shiite insurgency started in the southern part of Iraq, once the Shiite regime took over in Iran. Shiite militia in Iraq started their movement against Saddam's regime. Many Iraqi Shiites were seeking refuge in Iran, to avoid the tyrannical oppression of Saddam Hussain. In fact, Saddam gave shelter to Ayatollah Khomeini in the initial stage of Islamic religious revolt against the Shah of Iran. Then Saddam sent Khomeini out of Iraq as Shiite influence was increasing with the presence of Ayatollah Khomeini. Then Ayatollah Khomeini went to France from there he started the revolutionary activities.

Our Indian doctors were working there before I go to Iran. Many Indian doctors were going to Iran to have better earning, despite fierce fighting was going on with bombing civilian areas. I was one among them who decided to travel to Iran which was fully engaged in war. There wasn't a second thought, or a dilemma facing the war. I was determined to leave for Iran.

One day I met one of my doctor friends who was about to leave for somewhere. On asking him about his destination he answered that he was going to Iran Consulate to get an application to write the exam for working in Iran. I, too, accompanied him to get an application for myself as well." I got the application and wrote the exam and got through. By that time, I was

working as a surgeon in a Coal Mine Company Hospital. I received a visa and got it stamped in my passport and prepared to leave for Iran.

2.

Dreams

As I said, I was about to take my journey to Iran despite the war. The war started in the year 1980, and it was 6 years old war when I reached Iran. My friends were a bit anxious. They kept on asking me, “Is it safe to go there when the war is going on? There is no hope that the war will be ending in near future.” “God is great and He will take care of me,” I used to say.

One may ask me, “What was the need to go to a country ravaged by war.” But I had my own problems. My wife was away from me, in Saudi Arabia on her job assignment. I was alone there in Hyderabad, India. I could not go and join my wife in Saudi because I was an inexperienced surgeon. Therefore, I was forced to travel to Iran in search of a better living.

‘Dreams come true’, how far this statement is true I don’t know. However, one dream had come true within

hours. It was during my college days. I had a dream wherein I got arrested by police and I was put under lockup. I was trembling with fear that the inspector may come and beat me. That was the dream. In the meantime, my friend was knocking my door, calling me, "Brother! come on, get up! It is 7 o'Clock!" I got up. It was indeed 7 o'Clock in the morning when I looked at my watch. I was little disturbed with the dream which I had. One can believe it or not, but by 2 o'Clock I actually got arrested, for being involved in a student quarrel. I was astonished to find such a resemblance of my dream to happen in such a short time. I was put in a same cell which I saw in my dream, trembling with fear that the House Officer may come and beat me. However, that did not happen. House Officer let me go with a simple warning.

I used to get bad dreams frequently before I was leaving for Iran. One of such dreams was, in which I was walking on a narrow strip pathway surrounded by large and deep waterbodies. There seemed to be every chance that I might fall in to the deep waters and die if I was not alert.

There was another dream which I used to get frequently where I was entrapped in a battle zone where heavy air raiding was going on. I was running for safe shelters to save my life. At times I was trying to shoot

the enemy war plane with a gun in my hand, while hiding behind the big rock bolder.

These dreams would always confuse me because I lived in Hyderabad, located in the center of the country with no borders around and with no chances of war taking place in and around it. This realization would always put a question mark to the strange war dreams that I got. Above dreams testify that there will be a threat to my life.

Hyderabad's history goes back to over 434 years. Area-wise, it is the fifth largest city in India. It is a provincial capital of Telugu speaking people i.e. Andhra Pradesh and now Telangana state. Indian states were divided on the basis of the language, the people speak. Each state had different language. Before independence, Hyderabad was also a capital of Nizam's state, ruled by Nezam of Asaf Jahi dynasty. Farsi was the official language in Nezam's era, later replaced by Urdu. Now Telugu, Urdu and Hindi are the common languages that are being spoken. However, English is also a communicating language among literates. Hyderabad is the city having true cosmopolitan culture. People of all the states, both south and north India stay here indicating unity in diversity.

Hyderabad city also hosts Farsi Zoroastrian community and Shiite Muslims. These people were migrated from Iran in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Two fire temples and Farsi Dharmashala (a rest house for Zoroastrian Persians) are also present in Hyderabad. Eid Navroj is celebrated with gaiety among the Farsi community.

Hyderabad is known for its famous Irani chai. One will come across outlets of Irani cafes on every major street. The aroma of chai with creamy milk, tempt everybody to enter in to the café. People enjoy sipping the steaming, creamy chai, served with bun maska and biscuits. Cafes around busiest spots function almost 24 hours. The greatest legacy of Hyderabad to the country's delicacy is the Hyderabadi Biryani. Its flavor is widely appreciated worldwide.

In recent past, Hyderabad Haleem has also become famous. Haleem is served during the month of Ramadan in every hotel outlet. Hyderabad is also listed by UNESCO as a 'Creative City of Gastronomy' i.e. people like to choose, cook and eat good food they want. Hyderabad also goes after its nick name 'City of Pearl' because of its pearl industry and pearls marketing.

Hyderabad is a twin city, one is Hyderabad and other is Secuderabad. The two are separated by Hussain sagar

lake and its bund called tank bund. Four lanes road runs over the bund. It carries heavy vehicular traffic during rush hours. The expansive lake lies above the bund, with a 50-foot-tall Buddha statue installed at its center. Another smaller pond located below the tank bund within the sprawling Indira Park. This park is named after our late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Small pedal boats are available at the lower pond where people enjoy pedaling the boat in the shallow waters. Large number of tall trees, bushes are located around the pond. Tall trees of *pandanus kewda* flowers are also grown in the lower pond side, releasing a pungent smell in the air.

It is a place for evening recreations. City people throng in the evenings to view the Hussain Sagar waterbody above the bund and small lower pond with green bushy area below the bund. It is marvelous to view Sagar in the evenings during sunset. One can see two suns in the west. One red wide sun is in the sky just above western horizon and the other one sparkles on the surface of the water. A variety of eateries are available on the other side of the road where people eat and enjoy.

I had a horrible dream Right before a week to my departure to Iran. The dream in which, I was going on my two wheeler over the tank bund road. Suddenly bund started swinging (undulating) like wave. It was terrifying. In a split of moment, another event of dream started in

which I was crossing the river on foot near my village. Flood water was gushing towards me when I looked towards the upstream. I was hurried to reach the other edge of the river and reached safely. Then I started walking through the paddy field to reach the road where my two-wheeler was parked. I reached my home safely on my scooter. That was the dream.

I woke up after the dream I started analyzing about the horrifying dream. Swinging bund and gushing waters are definite threat to my life, but my life will be safe as I reached to my home safely. I never thought that all these events could occur during my stay in Iran. Yet I remained confident about my journey and unconcerned about all these disturbing dreams. I recorded this dream in my diary and added a caption beneath it: “When this horrible dream will come true?”—a clear indication that there will be a threat to my life.

3.

On the Way to Iran

After all the preparations, I was ready to board a Indian Airlines flight to Bombay (Mumbai). The flight was delayed for an hour due to heavy rain. A group of twelve doctors including me boarded the flight and reached Bombay. Then we boarded the Iran Air flight to Tehran. The flight staff announced that it would be four-hour journey from Bombay to Tehran. We had our lunch in the flight, a courtesy of Iran Air. I had not travelled such a long distance by air before.

Then I started recalling the things about Iran and Tehran which I had read. Tehran was a focal point during the Second World War II. Tehran conference flashed in my brain which I read in a novel of II World War. The Prime Minister of England, Sir Winston Churchill, USA President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Joseph Stalin of Russia participated in the Tehran Conclave on

behalf of the Allied group, to plan war strategy to counter Germany. Joseph Stalin coordinated the conclave. All the three names had greater significance in the history of the World War II. The conference was held in the USSR (United Soviet Socialist republic of Russia) embassy. I was little excited to travel and to see such a historical city.

The cabin crew announced that we'd reached Teheran. It was about 4 PM in the evening. Ministry representatives came to the airport to receive us and drove us to the Health Ministry guest house after completing the necessary formalities. It was eleven in the night by the time we reached the guest house. We were hungry since we had not have proper meal since morning. We went outside to eat something but nothing was available since all the eateries were closed.

The next day we went to office of the director of ministry of health to complete our appointment formalities. The director wanted to assess our surgical skills. I along with a friend got posted in a hospital under the supervision of a senior surgeon to asses our surgical skills. Then the language problem arose. We didn't know Farsi. On the other hand, Iranian doctors were not fluent in speaking English since Farsi language was the medium of instruction in Iranian medical colleges. The para-medical staff other than the doctors didn't know English at all. Because of this, we could hardly communicate our

thoughts to the hospital staff. We had practically become dumb for all purposes. Fortunately, the professor, under whom we were posted, was well versed in English, but his accent created a drift. I used to draw figures to answer his questions.

Everything was going on well, except the food. I was averse to taking Iranian food since they used to mix the rice with vegetable oil, that added an unpleasant smell to the food that did not fit to my liking. My stomach would be empty most of the times and I used to get light headed because of low sugar levels in my body. I lost 5 kg of weight in three weeks.

We got assessed by their surgical team which took three weeks of long period. My friend fumbled in performing surgery during the process of assessment. I was given the clearance to be a consultant based on my surgical skills and was posted in the south-western provincial headquarter, Ahwaz in Khuzestan province. That province was terribly affected by war because of its close proximity to the border, rich oil resources and oil refinery. Ahwaz was the financial center city of Iran for all the practical purpose. The war started from this region and it was known as the bloodiest war.

The ministry did not arrange any travel conveyance and I had to travel on my own convenience either by bus

or train to Ahwaz. The place was new. I didn't know Farsi and the local people didn't know any language other than Farsi. One can imagine my tragedy. One day I went to a bus station to purchase a ticket to Ahwaz but I returned with empty handed as I was not able to communicate to them in Farsi about my need of a ticket. Next day I went to the bus station with a piece of paper, with a written request in Farsi 'Please give me a ticket to Ahwaz'. It was written by the caretaker gentleman of our guest house. I could finally get a ticket. Next day, I boarded a bus to Ahwaz city and it took me fourteen hours to reach Ahwaz.

Before starting for Ahwaz, one of my friends advised me to call on a doctor from Pakistan who would guide me in Ahwaz. I looked at him in suspicion keeping enmity between our two counties. 'Hey! Don't bother about the enmity between India and Pakistan. We are all one here' he replied. However, I was reluctant to meet the Pakistani doctor. A surprise took place later in Susangerd, where two Pakistani doctors became friends of mine, in the later part of my stay in Iran. One was Dr. Mohammad Asgar from Karachi and the other was Dr. Zafar Saeed from Lahore.

4.

Border Town

After overnight journey, I reached Ahwaz the next day at about 8 o'clock. I called the Pakistani doctor as suggested by my friend at Tehran but I couldn't get any help from him. Eventually, I landed in the office of the Director of Health, at the provincial headquarter. I met the director. The director posted me at Susangerd. I met some of the Indian doctors in the director's office. They advised me not to accept the place, saying, "It is deadly area, near the border and one may lose life at any time." They also told me, "One of our Indian doctor is an Anesthesiologist working there." I realized that I was not in a position to refuse against the posting as I was already suffering from low levels of sugar in my blood." I helplessly accepted my destiny.

They arranged a conveyance immediately and dumped my baggage in it as they knew very well that I might

protest against my posting if they made any delay. The vehicle was running fast on its way to Susangerd. My giddiness had increased. My first priority was to reach the destination and eat something to avoid my giddiness. I started thinking, “Why did I come to this country? What made me go to such a dangerous place? Of course sure to die.”

I was already told that my town Susangerd was a border town. The line of actual control was hardly less than hundred kilometers from my town. It was 60 KM away from Ahwaz. Actually, this area was occupied by Saddam’s forces in the early part of the war and was liberated later by Iranian forces. After the liberation, the area was called as ‘*Dasth e Azadagon*’—a Farsi term which means liberated land from the hands of enemy. The hospital where I was working was named after Shaheed Dr. Chamran, as he was immortalized there, during the liberation of Susangerd. The name was coined in the memory of Dr. Chamran martyrdom.

Ultimately, I reached the town Susangerd. I was welcomed by the hospital staff with great joy and happiness, who were whispering among themselves, “New surgeon has come.” They need a surgeon very badly since war casualties were regularly coming there. They took me to casualty to see the patients. I was astonished to see that all the patients lying there were

soldiers. They were in their military uniform, lying on the cots with multiple iron splinter injuries “Hey! Shekar you are gone; you have landed in the battle field.”. I told to myself

I was then taken to the dining hall which was located within the hospital premises to have my lunch since it was lunch time. One good thing I observed that entire hospital staff would get their breakfast and lunch in the hospital without any payment. Every hospital had a kitchen and dining hall. But the tragic thing was that I was not accustomed to eating their food. I hardly touched the food as I couldn't tolerate the smell of the food provided.

Somebody took me to doctor's quarters where I could see my fellow Indian doctor Raman who was a child specialist. I had an interaction with him during our stay in the guest house at Tehran. He and a doctor from Bangladesh were cooking their food together. Coincidentally, they were preparing chicken at that time. A nice aroma coming from the cooking bowl further stimulated my hunger. They invited me to have food with them. It was really the happiest moment that I was having the food of my choice after three weeks. I thanked them in my heart, for their generosity inviting me for the lunch for which I was waiting badly. I forgot all the tragic moments of the last three weeks. I had a bellyful of meal

after three weeks. The situation did not seem that much scary as I had thought it would be before starting for Susangerd. Doctor Raman (the child specialist) and I were staying in the same quarter.

The town was relatively small. Around thirty to forty thousand people were living in that town. A silent town looks like a big village ambience. The people living in the town were all forming community. The staple crop grown was wheat, and vegetables included tomato, brinjal, lady's finger, cabbage and cauliflower. They used to prepare Nan (roti – thin bread circular or rectangular in shape). Nan-preparing centers (Nonvois or tandoors) were located at multiple places for the people's convenience. People used to form a queue in front of the Nonvois to purchase Nan was so cheap. Most of the families depended on Nonvois. Their eating habits were simple. One would only need Nan for a meal. They will eat the Nan with whatever they had at hand, i.e. roasted tomato or a brinjal with a coke. Indian food habits are different. One has to lit a stove and cook, to have food. Their food eating habits felt simple and faster.

A river flows in the northern part of the town. So, fish was also a part of our staple foods. Watermelon, grapes, and oranges were the main fruit grown. Watermelons were big and heavy, weighing around 5-10kg each. My house used to be full of watermelons during the season.

The farmers on whom I operated used to get me watermelons as a complementary present. Pistachios were also grown. We used to get raw (not dried) pistachios during the season. Farmers used to breed the cattle and have poultries. Dairy and poultry farming was the main business for the farmers. People were so friendly, readily extending their help to the foreign doctors.

5.

Plight of Daily Life

The other side of life was so miserable. The Saddam war planes used to come 2-3 times a day. Siren used to be blown whenever planes was passing over our town. It acted as a caution for the public to run for safe shelter to avoid bombardment. Our bad luck was that the siren used to be blown when the plane was already crossing our town or when it was over our town. The local people used to cry out loudly, “Dhage Thayira” (“plane sound” in Arabic) as all the locals in my area were Arabs.

There was only one bunker within the hospital. All the doctors, paramedics and patients used to run to bunker for safety. This was our everyday routine. We used to run to the bunkers two to three times a day, particularly in the morning since the planes used to come in the mornings between 10 to 12. Nights were safe as there was no possibility of night bombardment since the target

site could not be approached precisely at night. But one night, we heard the siren sound at about 9 PM. We all ran away from our houses and took shelter in the open area within the hospital campus. A plane was hovering in the sky. We spent about half an hour in the darkness, outside our houses. We all went inside our houses once the plane vanished from our sight. Probably, that was a reconnaissance plight.

Generally, bunkers were made up by digging out wide and deep trenches inside the ground. The roof of the bunker is laid by bomb proof fortified concrete slabs so that inmates are saved from aerial bombardment. Our bunker was made on the ground itself because our town was below the sea level. Water would come out if we dig 2-3 meters' deep. Semi-circular bomb-proof concrete rings were laid down on open land and the bunker was camouflaged with grass to conceal the area. It looked as an elevated grass landscape when viewed from above. It was not as safe as an underground bunker. Yet we used to run and take shelter in the bunker hoping we would be saved. We heard the news that even bunkers were being bombed. One such incident occurred in some other province where a bunker was bombed. The inmates were school children. All the children in the bunker were killed.

War used to be more severe in the winter months probably because the atmosphere is so congenial for the advancement of troops. It was better than the scorching

heat in the summers, where temperature may go beyond 50°C in the Middle East. Winter would be so chilly that what we called it as ‘bone biting cold’. We had to wear three to four layers of clothing to beat the chill. Yet we used to feel so chilly. One day, I was standing near the electrical heater, facing my back to heater to beat the chill and warm up myself. Mean time my coat caught fire since it was made up with a mix of nylon. Luckily, I was able to save myself by removing my burning coat.

One fine morning, I was standing in the sunshine to warm up myself as it was so chilly. At that time, a war plane was passing over our town. The anti-aircraft machine guns started firing missiles. The missiles were bursting just below the aircraft, releasing white smoke. The pilot was just going upwards when the missile was about to reach the aircraft. Probably the pilot knew the range of missile. I was hiding in a safe place and watching that fantastic funfair going on the sky.

The sound of the anti-aircraft gun fire was more frightening than the sound of war planes. Anti-aircraft gun fire used to come from multiple sites whenever the war plane passing over our town. We used to tremble more with anti-aircraft gun firing sound than the sound of enemy war planes. It was a routine for us and a terrifying one. However, we were accustomed to it.

6.

Friday's Frightening

Friday was a holiday for us. It was like a Sunday in the Islamic world. Thursday would be the weekend as our Saturday. The week starts with Saturday. We used to wait for Friday to relax ourselves and enjoy a holiday special meal. Usually the chicken and fish used to be the special part of the meal. We used to prepare fish kebab and chicken curry, rice and roti with soft drinks. The soft drink would be a coke. Me and my two friends, Asgar and Zafar Seed used to enjoy the food together. Asgar was staying with his wife. Bhabhi (sister-in-law) used to make very delicious dishes.

Consumption of alcohol is prohibited in Iran. The person would get whiplashed eighty times if they were found drinking alcohol. Of course, nobody would get caught while drinking. Usually, hot drinks were not available in Iran. But hot tea was available around the

clock. The pot will be boiling continuously in every office and Hospitals. One could drink any amount of tea. Sipping black tea from a cup, while biting sugar cubes was pleasant and I used to enjoy it.

Friday was also more frightening one because almost all bombardments took place on Fridays. Saddam Husain used to announce the declaration on Iraq TV channel about the cities that he was going to bombard. Our town's name Susangerd was invariably present in every declaration. The declaration would come on Thursday evenings. After hearing the declaration, all three of us, i.e., Asgar, Zafar and me, used to sit in a place in agony and distress. We used to discuss what strategy we should follow and how to save ourselves if bombing occur. "Shekar bhai (bhai means brother) what to do?" Zafar used to ask me. "Will go home and ask Bhabhi Shahanaz what to do," I used to say.

On reaching home I used to ask her, "Bhabhi, what to do? Saddam is going to bombard our town tomorrow." She was a daring personality. She would simply say, "Shekar Bhai nothing to worry; we will stay outside of our home in an open land. We'll cook there and eat there until darkness comes." Luckily, our hospital had a large open area. Vegetables and leafy vegetables were grown in some parts of the open area. The idea was to stay outside the home, to avoid death from collapsed houses during

bombardment. Entrapped inmates would die under the rubbles. All the people would run away from their homes to avoid that possibility. I already mentioned that night bombardment was least possible.

Me and my Indian friend Raman used to stay in the same quarter as we were staying without our spouses. We did not bring our wives as the area was so dangerous to live with families with continued intruding of war planes. We could run away easily if we are alone. That what we thought. Raman was too scared of bombardment. The bomb phobia didn't leave his mind ever. He was afraid of getting killed all the time. He used to see always towards sky anticipating the arrival of the war planes.

He used to sleep below the cot in the nights. He used to elevate the cot by keeping clay bricks underneath the legs of the cot. "Hey Raman! What is the fun of sleeping underneath the cot when I am sleeping on the cot? If we die, we die together. Don't be scared so much," I used to tell him. "Hey Shekar! This cot will prevent the rubbles falling on me and save me to some extent," he used to say.

Iranians are very fond of eating raw vegetables leaves as salad. One day, we were invited to a wedding ceremony of a local friend. The guests were sitting in two

rows on the floor facing the other with a gap of a meter. Clean plastic sheet was placed in the gap on which food items were arranged along with the cleaned-up leafy vegetables. It appeared to be a little funny to me, but it was their custom. Here what I'm trying to say is that Iranians eat a lot of raw leafy vegetable with their meal.

The friendship among three of us, i.e., me, Shekar from Hyderabad, south India, Asgar from Karachi, and Zafar from Lahore, Pakistan, needed a special mention here. Generally, the two countries India and Pakistan have had strained relations ever since independence. The two countries are hostile neighbors. But the feelings of the people of both the countries are very different. I was initially reluctant to meet the doctor from Pakistan for guidance, when my Indian friend advised me to meet him in Ahwaz.

As the days were rolling, we had become so close to each other, and our friendship had become a sacred one. We were inseparable by all means. Asgar was a unique person. He used to entertain everyone who ever meet him. Bhabhi used to prepare delicious dishes and Asgar used to entertain the guest. I used to get a call from Asgar, sharply at about 5 PM, "Shekar come, tea is ready!" Then I would go to his place used to have tea along with snacks. The tea was not the black one that Iranians routinely take, but milk tea, which is

traditionally served in the Indian subcontinent. Not only tea, I used to have my dinner almost every night with them. He also used to insist me to get my anesthesia colleague for dinner. Sometimes I used to protest saying, “We shouldn’t be everyday affair.” “Hey! have it today. Rest we’ll see tomorrow.” This used to be his reply.

It was not possible to have a guest every day. Many times, we try to avoid unwanted guests. But Asgar never did that. His only wish to entertain others. Here I would like to share one anecdote of his generosity. It was post war period. I and Asgar went to the market to purchase some vegetables and fruits. There one UN (United Nations) vehicle was parked in the market. Probably they also had come to the market to purchase something. UN forces guarding the border immediate post war period to ease the escalation between Iran and Iraq forces. One gentleman got down from the UN van and approached me, “Are you an Indian?” “Yes,” I said. He then started talking to me, “I am a Colonel (his name has escaped me now) of Indian army and I am posted here as one among UN peace keeping force.” “Here is my friend, Dr. Asgar from Pakistan,” I introduced Asgar to the Colonel.

After the pleasantries were exchanged, I was about to bid farewell to the Colonel but Asgar did not do so. They had become so close. The closeness further strengthened when they came to know that both were Punjabis. They

started conversing in Punjabi. He invited that colonel to his house. He arranged a good feast for him, in which I would undoubtedly be a participant. The Colonel spent nice time with us up to 10 PM in the night. Then he asked his leave from us.

Being an Indian, I was about to get rid of my army officer whereas, Asgar still fully entertained him. That military officer was so euphoric to have such a delicious dinner that evening while completely ignoring me despite mine being from the same country as his. It is wrong if I say probably a language bonding shared them both and the borders did not come in between. But Asgar is such a person that he entertains every person who ever comes in contact with him.

I apologize to have deviated from the tale I was previously recounting about Friday's frightening. One Friday we went to the market and purchased fish to prepare our holiday special. We came back to our quarters in the hospital premises. We were relaxing in our friend Rashpal's quarter. I was relaxing in a sofa and watching television. It was around 10 AM. Rashpal was doing something and Zafer was in the wash room. Suddenly I could hear a shout from the washroom, "Shekar bhai, plane is coming." He and Rashpal ran out of the house towards the bunker as they were in pyjamas. I was in my south Indian traditional wear lungi

(dothi). I could not run out as it is, because such clothes are against the Iranian culture.

I ran inside my quarter to change my clothes. By that time, anti-aircraft shelling started towards the aircraft which was hovering over the sky. I ran out of the house after changing the garments. I lied myself on the ground and started crawling towards bunker on my knees and elbows since the aircraft was still hovering over our town. Panic engulfed everyone as the sound of anti-aircraft missile gun fire intensified. “Doctor come-on! Come fast!” One of our Iranian doctors shouting from the bunker. Ultimately, I reached the bunker by crawling for some distance, and running for the remaining. After sometimes, the plane went off, the sound of anti-aircraft machine guns subsided and we relaxed. But, we’re no longer in the mood to prepare our Friday special.

I was supposed to be on call for emergencies despite Friday being a holiday, since I was a single surgeon there. I was relaxing in front of the emergency care center after having my breakfast with my doctor colleagues. It was about 9AM in the morning. Suddenly, war plane started coming over our town. The siren was blowing on the communication system. We all ran to the bunker to save ourselves. We heard a big sound of explosion after the plane crossed our town. “Hof! That fellow bombarded somewhere,” I said while catching my head in agony.

“What doctor? Why are you so worried? You should be happy that we escaped the bombardment,” another doctor said. “Doctor, you don’t know my tragedy. As a surgeon, I got two tragedies. One is saving my life and the other is the patients’ load after bombardment,” I said.

As I had expected, ambulances had started rushing to casualty with five patients. We rushed to the emergency room and started examining the patients. Three patients had already died on the way and we declared them as brought-dead. One of the surviving patients were severely injured. His belly was torn and a loop of intestine was coming out of the abdominal wound. He was in deep shock, i.e., no pulse, no blood pressure recordable. His pulse and blood pressure returned after the initial resuscitation. We shifted that patient to the operation room for surgery. Unfortunately, we could not save the other patient as he died in the course of the treatment.

On that fateful day, I did not have my anesthesiologist since, he was on leave. I requested my anesthesia technician to give anesthesia. She was a young lady without any experience in giving anesthesia. She was reluctant to give anesthesia. Of course, as per the rule she was not eligible to give anesthesia on her own. Her duty was only to assist the anesthesia doctor. I

encouraged her to give anesthesia, keeping aside all the rules. I told her the importance of saving the life and I said to her, “We have to save the patient with all our efforts. I am responsible, if any legal problems arise.” Ultimately, we started the surgery. It went on for three hours. We repaired all the damaged part. We transfused required blood. We were all happy because our patient had survived. I extended my thanks and gratitude to my anesthesia technician for obeying my order. It was definitely beyond her skills. I adored her in my heart for her commitment and humility.

After enquiry, we came to know that the explosion was not due to bombardment but it was a mine blast. Iraqi army had planted mines there when they had occupied that area. Mine injuries were common in that area particularly when farmers were tilling their land for agriculture purposes. The youngsters were playing near an abandoned army tank on that fateful day. One boy had pulled a wire which was under the ground. The wire incidentally, was connected to the landmine, which exploded, killing three people on the spot while two died in the hospital and one fortunately recovered.

7.

War Casualties

Every day a few injured soldiers used to come to our hospital with minor injuries. Out of these, splinter injuries were most common. Multiple small iron pellets penetrate through the patient's skin. Some of them will be at the skin-deep level and some of them will be at muscle-deep level. It was not possible to remove all the pellets. We used to remove relatively bigger pellets under local anesthesia. Otherwise, cleaning and dressing was the only treatment. We used to find a lot of iron pellets under the skin of patients, when X-ray is taken for some other reason.

One day a young patient, about 16 years of age was brought from the battlefield with heavy bleeding from his right leg. His right leg was mutilated from a crush injury. We had no option other than removing his injured leg to save his life. My heart was in agony when I thought of

removing his leg comes to my brain, in such a tender age as he was just a teenage boy. “Why have you gone for military service at such a young age?” I asked him. “My country is in danger. We have to kill Saddam Hussain and liberate our country from his hands. So, I went,” he said. He continued by saying further “Marburg (Down with) Saddam, Jung... jung... tha peruji (war... war...until victory).” I finally removed his leg from below his knee with pain in my heart. Yet, I appreciated the patriotism he had in such a young age.

On another day, another soldier was brought in, with a chest injury. His right lung was filled with blood mixed with air. Chest X-ray is must to diagnose in such cases. It was a surgical emergency where the doctor had to act within minutes otherwise, death is eminent. I put a tube in his chest to drain the blood and air. The patient was relieved and I was relieved because my patient survived.

On another occasion similar patient (soldier) was brought. Patient had breathlessness as he, too, had a chest injury. My operation room staff arranged everything for the chest tube insertion. I sent the patient to the X-ray room to confirm the diagnosis. To our bad luck patient died before taking the X-ray. We rushed to the X-ray room to put chest tube but in vain. We were late by minutes, and in the processes, we lost our

patient. It was so painful as we lost our patient due to delay of 2-3 minutes.

Another patient was brought from war front with abdominal injury. The bullet had entered the upper part of his belly and passed through the right loin (just below the rib cage on the right back), where his right kidney located. The patient had a wide irregular wound on his right loin and blood was coming out from the wound. The patient was in deep shock. We resuscitated him by blood transfusion. We operated him once he was stable. We found that his stomach, his small intestine, and his large intestine were injured, and his right kidney was badly damaged. We removed his damaged kidney and repaired his stomach, the small, and the large intestines. We referred him to the higher center, for the kidney specialist to have a look, because the blood was still oozing from the site of injured kidney. Later we came to know that the patient had died as the bleeding persisted.

The authority used to inform us to 'be ready', whenever the war intensified. We used to rearrange the special casualty to receive wounded soldiers. The entire staff including the doctors, nurses and paramedics used to be on their toes.

One day a soldier was brought in with severe injuries. He was in deep shock. He needed urgent blood

transfusion. There was plenty of blood in the blood bank. Blood was readily available for transfusion all over the country, as the nation was in the grip of a long-running and seemingly never-ending war. Coincidentally the injured person was an Iraqi soldier. He was wounded and caught by the Iranian forces. As per the Geneva agreement, we have to respect the enemy who is caught as a prisoner of war and required treatment is to be given. The patient was reluctant rather refusing to have blood transfusion. He did not want to be transfused by blood of a Persian as he was an Arab. We begged him to cooperate so that he could be saved after the blood transfusion. “I am ready to die but I don’t want to be transfused with blood of a Persian” he said. He died ultimately.

Racial fanaticism – Persians are not Arabs, though they are Muslims. I think even today; a Jew will not accept the non-Jew blood to be transfused. Same goes for the Arabs who would never like to have the non-Arab blood to be transfused. Both Jews and Arabs are descendants of Abraham, the ancestral forefather of both the races. Jews are the descendants of lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob while Muslims are of Abraham and Ismail. Rivalry between Arabs and Jews is similar to a sibling rivalry which is notorious, and is continuing even today.

8.

Awful Horror

It was Christmas Eve. I was engaged in arranging a Christmas party for my friends (foreigner doctors). Bhabhi Shahnaz prepared a delicious meal and we all enjoyed together, forgetting our war ordeal for a moment. We welcomed the New Year, 1987 on 31st night. I was alone in my quarter after all my friends left. In reality, the situation outside was tense and grim as war at the border had intensified. We did not know what would happen. A sense of impending grief loomed everywhere. We were reminded of “*amadebhashi*” meaning ‘be ready’ to receive war casualties. The hospital was prepared to that extent.

In fact, I was preparing to come India on a leave basis. My exit and re-entry visa was at my hand. I was supposed to depart on 16th January from Tehran. I didn’t

know whether they would allow me to travel or not. A surgeon is badly required in such emergency situations.

I recovered from awful thoughts and I opened my diary. My eyes were running page after the page of my diary. My eyes got struck at one page where I had noted down my horrifying dream I had, before coming to Iran.

The dream about the swinging tank bund, while I was travelling on my two-wheeler on it and gushing flood of river water on to me. The dream was suggestive of definite threat to my life. Outside situation was supporting the same. I gathered my mental strength hoping everything would be better for us in the long run. Hope helps us to move further to overcome all the ordeals of life. The human survival is not possible without a hope of better survival; it helps the individual to move further towards a better future.

I already mentioned that war had intensified at the border. We were busily engaged in treating the war casualties. The fear of bombardment also looming around us. A team of Iranian surgeons also arrived to assist us, as the number of wounded soldiers increased. My journey back to India was full of uncertainty. I knew they would never allow me to travel. However, I was silently preparing myself to leave for my vacation.

It was about 10 AM on the 11th of January, 1987. I went to the market to purchase something as I had a little free time, after arrival of the Iranian surgeons. It was a chilly morning. I dressed in a thick suit to beat the cold. I was walking in the market in an upright position. Suddenly people started to run hither and thither. One military jeep coming opposite to me suddenly stopped. The soldiers hurriedly came out of the jeep and lay down themselves on the ground. I could not understand why the people were running hither and thither. I kept walking steadily in an upright position. Suddenly, one of my hospital employees started shouting from behind in Farsi, “Doctor, lie down; the war planes are moving over us.”

Now I could understand the threat. I laid down on the ground immediately. I crawled to the nearby open area taking support of stem of a big tree so that my head would be safe from the splinter injuries. People would die of splinter injuries and the heat generated by the exploding bomb.

I then realized that the place not safe for hiding as it was a partially open area. I heard a big sound of explosion from a distance of about 200 meters. Everybody, men and women, old and young, children along with their parents were running to save their lives crying out loudly. The cry resonating everywhere. The

existing diction of mankind may not be able to describe the horror of the threat to life which I saw that day.

I was also one among them crying and running to save my life. Exertion and deep respiration was not allowing me to run fast. I used to lie down whenever a sound of explosion I heard. My clothes were completely soiled with mud. The chilling cold of the winter was making it harder to stay stable. I was running whispering only one sentence, “Oh God! Save me. Oh God! Save me.” Another sound of explosion I heard after running another 100 meters. I laid down again on the ground. I was running in the direction of the bus terminal, where the first explosion had took place. The entire structure of the bus terminal was ruined in to a pile of debris, including buses stationed there. A wisp of smoke was coming out from a pile of debris.

I heard the sound of third explosion after reaching the bus terminal. The place where I stood first was totally demolished by third explosion. The six buildings located on either side of the road had been turned down to ground level. I would have died and my body would have been in pieces, if first bombing was targeted at the place where I was standing first. 11th January 1987 would have been my last day. I am thankful to the God, even to this day, for saving me from that horrific bombardment.

I was crying and crying and sat down on an elevated land, surrounded by a pool of water, near the bus terminal, hoping bomb will not explode if it falls in the water so I would be saved. That's what I was thinking in that agonizing moment. My conscious was not allowing me to sit there when I saw the army ambulances running towards Ahvaz, carrying wounded patients. It was ridiculous on my part being a surgeon to sit there. Even in that agonizing moment, my heart was not accepting my inaction and my conscience kept cautioning me, "You are a surgeon; your presence is badly needed."

I started running to the hospital. My hospital chief, Mr. Samadi was waiting for me. His eyes were searching for me and he was eager to know my where about. He embraced me letting out a cry of relief, saying, "Doctor, where were you? We thought you were dead in the bombardment. Thank God we could see you again." We both cried hugging each other. Then I rushed into my quarter to change my clothes. My entire quarter was filled with broken glass pieces from broken window panes, due to the impact of the bomb explosion. I changed my clothes with care not to injure my feet by broken glass pieces, spread across the floor of my quarter. I then rushed to the operation room.

The entire town was wrapped in a gloomy silence. Susangerd was draped in distress. All the people of the

town drowned in a sea of sorrow. The cry of people resonating to reach the heaven asking Almighty, “What sins have we done to receive such a grave punishment?” About 20-30 dead mutilated bodies were lying in the hospital open area. Hands were separated, legs were separated from the dead bodies. Bellies were torn exposing the intestine. No words were sufficient to describe the horrific scene. People were crying for their dear ones who lost their lives in the bombing, beating their chests, while putting dust on their heads. People’s cry was reverberating into the sky, “God, please listen to our cries. Why has this happened? For whom sake?”

The entire village was evacuated putting tents as temporary shelters in the open fields. They had to live outside the town in an open area in that bitter cold, where the temperature was 6 to 7^o C, while the cold breeze blowing. The dream that I had before coming to Iran had come true within five months. The horrific dream foretold the truth, where I was almost caught dead in that bombardment.

All the medical staff including doctors were stationed in the operation room treating the injured. Some of the surgeons were operating on severely injured who required immediate surgery. I could see Raman, my fellow roommate when I first entered inside the operation room. We hugged each other and cried bitterly. He was

happy to see me alive since he had thought that I was lost in the bombardment. Rashpal was busy in treating the patients. All the cases which required major surgery were shifted to Ahvaz. We were in the operation room for three days treating the minor cases. We used to have our breakfast, lunch and dinner in the operation room itself. We used to relax on a sofa whenever we felt tired.

My departure scheduled for 16th January was approaching fast. I have to travel all the way from Susangerd to Ahvaz to Tehran. I did not have any hope that they would allow me to leave in such a grim situation. It was not ethical to ask them permission to leave under the current state of events. Honestly speaking, I was so afraid to stay there, as it was a deadly area to live. Rashpal said “At no cost they will not allow you to leave. you have to leave this place without anybody noticing and I will arrange everything for you.” Escape was made easy as the exit and re-entry visa was with my hand. I had decided not to come back to Iran and it was my final decision. I had seen the horror of the bombardment. I had seen what is death and how to run for life. After all, I had come back from death. I informed the same to my friends of the inner circle.

Raman started crying and he said, “You are leaving. What about me?” I had no way to leave this place. I gave him four hundred dollars to purchase a ticket to India.

Rashpal arranged everything, as he had been living in that area for a long time and knew the people well. He instructed me to walk out of the town and wait by the main roadside. I went away from the town as he advised, waited for ambulance driver to come. He came in a private van with my baggage to pick me and drop me in the next village. From there I reached Ahvaz, then to Tehran by road in a travel bus.

9.

Back to India

I came back to India by Iran Air flight on 16th January 1987, saying goodbye to Tehran and Iran. A curious thought was rumbling in my brain that any missile from enemy side may come and hit the aircraft in which I was travelling. Though it was a remote chance to have such an eventuality but my war phobia forced me to think so, since I had been badly trapped in the bombing before. The same fear persisted till my Aircraft crossed the Iranian territory. Finally, the Aircraft landed safely in Bombay (Mumbai). I was little jubilant to land alive and to see my motherland. I met my wife in Bombay as she was coming from Saudi Arabia for a one-month annual vacation. We both reached Hyderabad to spend a happy one-month vacation. My wife requested me not to go back to Iran. I obliged her and promised that I will not go to Iran again.

I was alone after my wife left for Saudi Arabia. I went to my previous employer to ask my job to rejoin. They said, it is not possible as I had left the job without any prior permission. My life was the same old frustrated one where I had no employment and no practice.

Meanwhile, my friend Rashpal wrote two letters, one after the other requesting me to come back as the situation had settled down. He assured me that there would be no threat of life the way we had before bombardment. He wrote me by saying, "I am your fellow Indian and your friend. If you come back, we would live together; if death comes, we would die together. Please come soon. After all, death is not in our hands. It is already destined. If death is certain, it is bound to occur. Nobody on the earth can stop it." "Yes, he is my friend and my fellow Indian," I said to myself. His advice was seemed logic enough. Then I opened my passport. Only a week's time was left over for my visa to expire. I purchased a ticket to Iran, boarded Iran Air and landed in Tehran, then reached my hometown Susangerd. People were still living in their tents when I returned back to Susangerd. They had spent the entire winter under the tents, leaving their households. They might have faced an untold misery in that freezing cold weather.

The local people and my friends were laughing at me for my silent departure to India, saying in Farsi, "Doctor,

farar kerde? (Doctor did you run away out of fear?)” “No! No! I went on my routine leave,” I used to reply to them. It was a fun affair All the locals used to love me so much. Raman had left the place by the time I reached Susangerd. They posted him in a safest place, where not even a single air strike had occurred during entire war period. He had brought his family, i.e., his wife and two children, a son and daughter and they were living happily there. We used to communicate with each other very often.

Here I would like to share an anecdote of my fellow hospital staff's love for me and how much they rallied around me. Soon after the war was over, one Iraqi refugee who was also a surgeon was posted in my place. I also received a telephonic message from provincial medical director regarding my transfer and order to leave as early as possible so that Iraqi surgeon will be accommodated in my place. I was disturbed so much about my transfer from Susangerd since I had inseparably bonded with the place and its people. Then I said to director, “I have got a legitimate right to stay in Susangerd because I worked hard during the war and I served honestly. Please give me the exit visa if my services are really not required and I will go back to my country.” It was frustrating moment for me.

The Iraqi people who were opposing the Saddam regime took shelter in Iran as refugees. The Iran government gave them special privileges because they were opposing the Saddam regime and they were all Shiites. This doctor surgeon was also in that category. He entered into my quarter asking me when I was going to vacate, so that he could occupy. He persuaded Imam Jumme, head priest of the local Majid of the town and Parvandar, the district magistrate, for his posting in Susangerd. There was little delay in his joining since my area chief of health, Mr. Ameen was on leave.

To my surprise, the entire hospital staff was behind me, and against my transfer from Susangerd. The staff claimed that I was helpful to them and they trusted my methods of treatment. My hospital head, Mr. Samadi convinced me not to worry. "Everything will be settled once Mr. Ameen comes from his leave," he said. A week later, Mr. Ammeni came and gave him a refusal letter stating, "We have got our own surgeon; we are satisfied with him, and we don't require any other surgeon." This was the level of patronization I received from my hospital staff.

The war was going on, and we used to get occasional war casualties. We settled down, but the fear of bombardment persisted. War planes used to come and on hearing the siren, we used to run to the bunker for

protection. It had become a daily chore for us. Life was rolling fast. We spent two years under the shadow of death, anticipating the warplanes all the time.

10.

Ghost Town

The War was intensified. Saddam Husain started chemical warfare as he was on losing side. Chemical bombs contain nerve gases (Mustard, Sarin and Tabun). The gases will be emitted into the atmosphere once bomb explodes. People would get breathing difficulty after inhaling emitted gases. They may go in to respiratory failure, coma and death, resulting in mass casualty. People would run for their lives to escape from bomb explosion. More they run, early they die because they inhale more nerve gases while running. People would die like flies, after spraying PF-PAF insecticide. That was how Saddam forces massacred the people by using chemical bombs.

On June 28, 1987 Iraq dropped mustard gas bombs in Sardasht of Azerbaijan province. Bombs were dropped on two residential areas, killing 138 people and eight

thousand people were injured. It was an attack of inhuman brutality. The news of chemical bombing spread like a wildfire all over Iran. Fear of chemical bombing also haunted us as our town was very close to the border. Susangerd was the most favored hunting place for Saddam Husain.

Local authorities asked the people to vacate the town as our town was at eminent risk of chemical bombing. The entire people vacated the town. People took shelter by erecting tents in their farm lands. Hospital staff not allowed to leave the town since their services are essential if bombing occur. In fact, we didn't know how to deal with the patients, who suffer from chemical bombing as we were not trained in that line. We protested addressing the equal threat to our lives as we too were human beings. They assured us saying, "We will shift you first to safe place if any chance of dropping chemical bombs." They provided face masks to protect ourselves from inhaling toxic gases. People vacated the town along with their livestock. All houses were locked. streets were deserted. The entire town was looking like a ghost town without any human folk, except street dogs. The occasional cry of street dogs further ignited our fear.

I and Zafar Saeed stayed in our quarter since, Asgar and his family left on vacation. The fear of death gripped us and we waited for when the plane would come and

drop the chemical bomb. We were sitting with gloomy faces watching television and without any food. We didn't have any patience to prepare our food. We were depending on the food available in common hospital kitchen, though we were not accustomed to eat that food. The fear of losing life was greater than the type of food we eat. The deserted town further aggravated the fear of losing life. Luckily, Hindi film was being played on the television on that day, eased our anxiety and tension to some extent. This situation continued for a week but by God's grace, the tension eased out slowly. Not a single event of chemical bombing occurred in Iran. Situations had become normal and we were attending our routine work.

11.

The Mother

‘M other’ is a simplest word. It holds a deeper meaning, and unbending connection. This bonding not only present in the human world but also seen in the animal world too. Mother is the sweetest word in the universe because she tries to give everything to her children. In poverty too, when the time comes, she feeds her children, even keeping her stomach empty. Life comes through the mother. She will take care her children up to aging stage. She is ready to give everything without expecting any returns. One cannot get the thoughtless comfort anywhere else but in mother’s lap.

Mother’s lap is a child’s paradise. Mother’s love is unconditional. She never asks for a return from her children for all the years she gives away for them. All a mother ever prays the wellbeing of her children. That is

the greatness of a mother. Therefore, the word ‘mother’ is so sweet and so dear to the mankind. Her love is holy, selfless and sacred.

It was June 1988. I lost my mother in the month of June. It was coincidentally my birth-month as well. I got a message of her demise by telegram three weeks after she passed away. Those days were like that; no cell phones; landline phones were only available mode of communication. We have to book a call, then wait for hours in the telephone booth. Finally, a frustrating reply used to come from the telephone operator “Sorry lines are busy not able to connect.” Telegram was another way of communication and that would take weeks to reach.

It was about 8 AM in the morning. I and Rashpal were going to the operation room to finish our list of surgeries for the day. A gentleman from the hospital’s information Centre handed me a telegram while we were crossing the information Centre. As I opened the telegram, the cursing words glared back at me – “Mother expired” I kept quiet. I didn’t know what to express and how to react.

“What news?” Rashpal asked me. I showed him the matter. “Go to room and relax,” he said. How I reached my room I don’t know. I laid down on my bed, cried and cried by saying “Amma aa aa aaa!” (‘Amma’ means

mother in my mother tongue). The agony what I felt in that moment was difficult to describe by any terms available in the world.

In the meantime, Asgar, Zafar and other Bangladeshi doctors came to my room and started consoling me. I was thinking how my mother would have felt my absence in her last hours. It was my duty to perform last rites to her as the youngest one. It was so painful to lose performing the last rituals. My soul was recollecting all the routine events of the last journey rituals. How unlucky was I! I lost that opportunity! I know that she was aged and bed-ridden while I was returning to Iran. I was expecting to lose her early.

Superstitions—most of the educated individuals don't agree with superstitions including me. We are bound to believe, ironically when they come true. Everybody is bound to feel an inclination towards believing them. It is prevalent all over the world and among all the nations and races, but observed and practiced silently. Superstitions are more prevalent in India among all the religious people. Of course, some of them are silly and seems like nonsense.

There is a story of lizard falling on a person, written in my mother tongue Telugu. It foretells the future events that are going to happen in the life. This story can also be

available on Google. Rashpal and me were returning from Asgar's house after having dinner with him. A small lizard fallen on my shoulder and ran down over my body to the ground, while I was entering through outdoor of my quarters. I suspected some ominous event going to occur. It happened in the night before, when I was about to get the sad message of mother's demise. I took bath and went to sleep. The next morning, I received a telegram bearing the tragic news of my mother's demise.

Memories of visiting my mother in last vacation were resurfaced in my brain. I had gone to my home in my village to see my ailing mother. My village is about 70 km away from Hyderabad city. She was bed-ridden and sleeping on a cot helplessly, not even having the stamina to talk to me. I knew that she was going to die soon. But, I had to leave her and proceed to Iran as my vacation was about to over. I decided to leave, with a hope that my two elder brothers and my sisters-in-laws will take care of my mother. Still, my heart was weeping for her. I kept mum in an apprehension of losing her.

My two-wheeler got punctured just after crossing my village while coming back. I thought it was an ominous sign foretelling that I am going to lose my mother. Of course, it looks silly and superstitious, but the gravity of the situation and my fear of losing my mother made me to think so. I went back to my home after getting the tire

changed. This time I couldn't resist and started crying. I cried and cried having fallen on my mother. Other members of the family also started crying and they tried to console me.

I started again coming to Hyderabad with my wife. I didn't know how I travelled. My mind was flooded with unanswerable thoughts. One overwhelming question kept echoing in my brain. That is 'Can a mother ever leave her child when her child is about to die?' No mother on this earth could do that. No amount of money or promise of a better life could tempt her to abandon her child in such a moment. And yet, as her son, I was prepared to leave her behind in pursuit of a better life. How selfish we are as children!

I was very much attached to my mother, as I was the youngest child of our family. Youngest ones always have special status in the family. The child grows up with pampering and extra care. My mother was incredibly special to me. She breastfed me until I was seven years old. I remember, I was crying for milk, sitting on the edge of a paddy field, while she was at work. My maternal uncle tried his best to stop my breastfeeding. They even applied a bitter neem paste to her breasts to discourage me to take the feed, but it was all in vain. She always saved the best portions of meat and fish from her own meal for me, whenever I sat beside her while she eating.

In fact, she wouldn't start eating until I said that I'd had enough.

I never slept away from my mother till I was fourteen years of age. I used to insist my mother to face me during nights. I used to take her arm as my pillow to keep my head and sleep. Once I went to a nearby town along with my friend to purchase books. I was twelve years old. We slept in the house of my friend's relatives. I woke up in the middle of the night, started searching for my mother. I started crying as I couldn't find her. We were inseparable.

One day my mother got fed up with my mischievous behavior. I was about eight years old then. "I cannot cope up with your behavior, so I will die by falling in to the well," she said, and started walking towards the well. It scared me so much. I ran before her grab her legs and cried profusely, promising her not to do such things ever. Later, I came to know that the well she intended to die was a dried one. She only tried to reprimand me so that I should behave properly. I used to laugh whenever I used to see that dry well thereafter.

Mother is the first and best teacher in the world, who teaches what is good and what is bad and how to behave. Though my mother was illiterate, she used to teach us how to grow, how to behave and not to do bad things. I

silently learned and followed my mother's approach regarding life's truth. Hard work was her priority. Working hard and earning something for the betterment of her children was her motto. I acquired the same thing from my mother. As I grew up, I became the child of my mother's choice, had always hoped for, and she took great pride in me.

She used to become restless, worrying whenever I didn't eat properly due to lack of taste of the food served. She would then cook something special for me and feed me. Such a great mother I had lost in my absence. What a mother I had! Of course, every mother is great to their children because 'mother is mother' for everybody. Mother is a wonderful creation of God, who cares for her children in the selfless way.

Mother is equated to God in Indian culture. The well-known Sanskrit shloka emphasizes mother as God. It reads as '*Matru Devo Bhava*' – 'Mother is nothing but God.' Mother is the most revered figure in the Hindu culture because of her unconditional love and service rendered to her children. Ultimately, the mother is supreme and her love is eternal.

The role of the father comes after that of a mother. The shloka further says, '*Pitru Devo Bhava*' – 'Father is like God to his children'. '*Acharya Devo Bhava*' – 'The

teacher is like a God' and '*Atithi Devo Bhava*' – 'Guest is also like a God'. All of them – the mother, father, teacher, and guest – are regarded as God-like, deeply respected, and honored in Hindu society.

12.

Cruel Act

I was mourning my mother's death by staying in my living quarter. On 4th July, I got up early and sat in front of my house, enjoying the cool morning summer breeze. In the meantime, Kalyan a Bangladeshi doctor approached me with a newspaper in his hand. He said, "Shekar bad news for us." "What happened," I asked him. "The Iranian Air Bus was brought down yesterday in the Persian Gulf (3rd July, 1988) by the US Navy. Dr. Raman and his family was also in that aircraft."

I opened a newspaper and started searching the names of the Raman family. To my horror I could find the names of Raman, his wife, and two children, eight-year-old boy and a six-year-old girl. All of them had drowned in the waters of the Persian Gulf. As I mentioned earlier, Raman and I initially stayed in the same quarter. We used to cook our meals together, eat

together, and sleep in the same room. He was very fearful, always worried that he would be killed in the bombardment. He used to sleep under the cot to safeguard himself from the falling rubble in case bombing occur.

He was transferred to a safest place in Iran by the time I returned from India. The place has never been bombarded not even once in the eight years of Iran-Iraq war. Raman made a blunder by bringing his wife and children to stay with him, He might have thought that the place was safer to live. He used to give tips of civil defense to his children, how to save themselves, if the bombardment occurs. He shouldn't have brought his family as there was a threat to life for every passing moment during war. At least his wife and children would have survived if they were in India. He was constantly running for safety, trying to save his life, but destiny responded on other way. All the foreign doctors living in extremely dangerous areas like Susangerd were safe, where the threat of bombardment was imminent. But the man who was desperately seeking safety, died tragically in a shootout of the plane and water graveled along with his family.

It was common route for Indian doctors to travel to India via Dubai, to purchase some valuables there. Raman also chose this route on that fateful day to

purchase something for his family. He contacted me before leaving for India and told me that he was going to India via Dubai to purchase valuables, and admit his children in the school in India and return.

“When death is eminent, certainly one cannot escape from death; that is what we call destiny,” I told to Kalyan. I recalled a beautiful poem which I memorized during my school days that speaks about the destiny. The poem, in my mother tongue Telugu, tells the story about a bald-headed man traveling in the peak summer. He ran to take shelter under the shade of a palm tree (that bore ice apples) to beat the scorching heat. Mean time the ripen fruit dislodged from its cluster fallen on his head with loud sound. He died as his head was broken in to pieces.

The poet’s conclusion is striking: “Misfortune follows a man who is cursed by fate, no matter where ever he goes.” The same seemed to be true in case of Raman. He went to a safest place to protect his life. Tragically, not only he, but entire family lost their lives, not in bombardment, but by a cruel acts of evil men.

The news of Raman’s death spread like a fire in our hospital; everyone grieved his horrible, untimely, and unfortunate death. The ill-fated Airplane started from Tehran to Dubai while stop at Bandar Abbas. The flight took off from Bandar Abbas, crossing the strait of

Hormuz, mouth of the Persian Gulf to land at Dubai International Airport. It hardly takes forty to fifty minutes to reach Dubai from Bandar Abbas. Two surface-to-air missiles fired at Air craft from a U.S. Navy vessel, when it was flying over the Persian Gulf. The plane exploded, killing all the people on board. Within minutes 290 people on board met their water grave. Out of the 290 passengers, 16 were crew members; and others included Iranians (238), UAE passengers (13), Indians (10) that included Raman's family, Pakistanis (6) Yugoslavians (6) and an Italian (1).

The US navy was guarding the oil-carrying vessels in the Persian Gulf waters, to provide safe passage from two warring groups Iran and Iraq. Their duty was to see that no missile should hit the oil tankers moving in the Persian Gulf. Capt. Williams C Roger was a captain of the US ship guarding the Persian Gulf waters. He was the one who ordered to fire the missile at Iranian Air bus. He was known for his aggressive behavior. He used to indulge to react adversely, even for minor altercation with Iranian vessels. He was reprimanded by his superiors to change his behavior but he continued to behave the same way. However, in 1990, he was honored with 'Legion of Merit' for his outstanding service in the Persian Gulf operations, forgetting that he was the one, responsible for death of 290 innocent civilians.

It was described as deadliest aviation disaster involving an Airbus. It was also described as 'the deadliest shoot down of passenger air craft until 2014'. The Captain of the navy vessel termed it as the Airbus was mistaken for F14 fighter jet of Iranian air force. The navy vessel Capt. Williams C Roger III made it clear, that plane was approaching fast the US vessel, did not heed the commands. The plane was approaching at a much faster speed, directed towards US vessel. It was also not in the aviation route. These were the lame excuses he made.

One can easily appreciate between the size of Airbus with that of fighter jet on the radar screen. It was described as 'a tragic and regrettable accident' by the American diplomatic angle. The Iranian government filed a suit in the International Court of Law against the crime of horror. The US government was forced to pay millions of dollars as a compensation. But, whatever the compensation may be, it will not bring back the lives of innocent people on the board, who died in the Persian Gulf waters including our Raman and his family.

Iran Airbus was brought down by America on 3rd July, 1988. The war ended on 20th August, 1988. Brought down of Airbus hasten the peace process. The decisive victory was also elusive for both the warring groups even after

eight years of war. Both the countries had colossal economic loss in millions and loss of man power as well.

Both the sides helplessly accepted the UN-sponsored peace agreement in August 1988. Whatever the reason may be, what mattered was that all the people including me were happy with the end of the war. We were happy that we could move happily without fear of war. We did not need to look towards the sky for the coming of warplanes and running to the bunkers. War stopped soon after the death of Raman. People of our hospital were also talking the same. Everyone was living happily and peacefully engaged in their daily routine work. Life had become joyful since there was no fear of war and no more war casualties. We were spending our time happily. Me and Asgar were working in Susangerd while Zafar was working in Huwaise. It was 15 kilometers away from Susangerd. The battle of Huwaise was also significant in the Iran and Iraq war, which took place in 1982. The Iranian army had succeeded to push back the Iraqi forces from the occupation of Huwaise.

Bhabhi Shahnaz was expecting a baby by the time Martha arrived. We welcomed a baby girl on 27th March, 1989. It was the happiest moment for Asgar and Bhabhi. Martha was the first one to take baby in her lap after she born. She was named 'Anaam' but Martha used to call her 'Anne'.

Martha developed a special bond with Anaam. Anne was everything for her. She always used to move around her; she was nothing less than a mother to her. Anaam could never use to accept if Martha holding some other kid. She used to cry until Martha would take her in her lap. The little one had become a focal point of our happiness. She was so cute, moving around in a small pram making everybody laugh with her adorable actions. Sometimes, she used to cry whenever she fell from the perambulator; the other times, we were amused with her giggles, exposing her wide open, toothless jaw.

Asgar was transferred to Huwaise where Zafar was working. We used to meet in Huwaise for the weekend dinner. Asgar knew Martha's attachment to Anaam. He used to bring Anaam to our home in Susangerd and Martha and Anaam used to be in their own world. Little kids never stay at one place. They move all the time, sometimes sitting at an elevated place, other times on the bonnet of a car or on a chair, even lying on a carpet and rolling. Martha would follow her helplessly, making her to eat some curd rice. Asgar used to ask Martha for tea while lying on a Persian carpet, lighting a cigarette, puffing the smoke into the air. Martha used to engage Anaam. Martha used to take Anaam in her lap and start kissing her by saying '*Naa Chakkara Konda*', a Telugu phrase. "Bhabhi, what is this '*Chakkara Konda*'?" Bhabhi

Shanaz used to ask Martha. “‘*Chakkara Konda*’ means a mountain of sugar, so Anaam is my mountain of sugar,” Martha used to reply. I used to come home for Anaam. She used to peep from a glass door, dancing and saying, “Shekar *chachu* is coming, Shekar *chachu* is coming”, in Urdu. *Chachu* means uncle in Urdu. She used to put her tiny arms around my legs and I used to lift her up to my chest to embrace her.

13.

Pleasure Trip

The days were rolling happily as peace prevailed all over the country. Asgar planed a trip to northern Iran. The north is called as *Shomal* in Farsi and people living in the north had the special privilege to call themselves as *Shomalis*, and they feel happy to be called so. Northern Iran is known for its cool weather in the summer, and its breezy snowing winter.

North Iran is described as nature's paradise. The Caspian Sea coast starts from Rasht, extends to Gorgan. Caspian Sea is a largest inland waterbody. It is place where nature's grandeur is on full display. The long Caspian Sea coast has sandy beaches, lush green forests and beautiful tall Alborz mountains ranges. The steep view of nature's beauty starting from the mountains and the green forest and sea have picturesque view in the

summer, while snow-covered mountains in the winter is added beauty.

The northern belt of Iran has the most fertile lands, where paddy rice is grown. This belt is declared as one of the wetlands as per the wetlands' convention by UNESCO. It is a popular destination for local and international travelers.

Asgar, Bhabhi Shahanaz and tiny Anaam; Zafar Saeed and Simi Bhabhi and me and my wife Martha, started in a minibus. The minibus was a better option, convenient, and the vehicle can be stopped at our will, anywhere and anytime. We used to stop our vehicle on the way for breakfast and lunch. We used to stay at the hotels at nights.

We started from Susangerd, reached Hamadan city. Hamadan is one of the oldest cities of Iran. It was known for its handicrafts such as, leather, carpets, and ceramic products. Early history tells that Hamadan was invaded by Mongols and the Turkish rulers. We visited some of the important site seeing places. We went to see the tombs of Esther, the biblical queen of Persia, and her cousin and foster father Mordecai. The tombs are located in a Synagogue in Hamadan. As per the Bible, King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) married Esther who lived in Susa (the present town of Sush).

From Hamadan, we reached Ramsar city. It is known as paradise on the earth. It is a popular sea resort for tourists. It attracts more tourists in all seasons because of its proximity to forests and sea. It offers hot springs, the green forests and Alborz mountains apart from sea shore. It is called as cloudy city as the clouds hangover on tall mountains with green valleys and lakes. It was a holiday resort for Shah Pahlavi. Ramsar hotel is a famous one. We stayed in the hotel for a night. We enjoyed in the sea waters and walked some distance on the shore. We also visited Ramsar Palace, Ramsar Water Park and the amusement park.

The next day, we started for Chalus, a green city. The area was covered with mountains, forest with a mix of green, yellow, and red colored leaves. The road journey through the forests was enjoyable. Lakes of variable sizes, surrounded by mountains, stream of water falls, falling from a height was breathtaking.

Our journey continued towards Babolsar city. This city was also on the shore of Caspian Sea. The Babol river originates from the Alborz mountain ranges and passes through the city. It was wonderful to see the river bank. Babolsar suspension bridge was another attraction.

From there, we reached Mashhad city. Mashhad was one of the oldest cities of Iran, located in the valley surrounded by high altitude mountain ranges. It is a pilgrimage city, where Imam Reza was laid to rest (8th Imam as per Shiite version, 12th Imam as per Sunni version). It was the busiest city because of the floating pilgrim population. The shrine was built with high elevated golden domes and minarets. It was wonderful to see the shrine at night after the flood lights were on. There was a big bazar nearby the shrine to purchase mementoes in memory of visiting the place.

King Nadir Shah was one of the greatest rulers of Iran and an invader. He ruled Iran from Mashhad. As per the history, he invaded and defeated the Mughal emperor 1738-39 and took away the Kohinoor diamond from the Moguls (Wikipedia). We saw life size statue of Nadir Shah, and his mausoleum in Mashhad.

Later, we visited the tomb of Firdausi a magnanimous structure constructed with marble stone, in a high elevated place with a row of steps to reach the tomb. The tomb was surrounded by bushes of green, red and yellow colored leaves. Firdausi was one of the greatest Persian poets who wrote *Shah Nama*, an epic poetry related to Iranian kings. *Shah Nama* is a famous literary masterpiece in the world of literature and the most read poetry all over the world. It was translated into most of

the world languages. A part of *Shah Nama* was also translated into my mother tongue Telugu by a poet, Gurram Joshua. I was fortunate enough to read it when I was in school. The poetry was filled with passion of grief. Shah Mansur I (one) had a deal with the poet, to pay one gold coin for each poem written, to glorify his name and fame. Later the Shah dishonored his deal and paid him in silver instead of Gold. Then the poet wrote a letter, condemning his dishonesty.

Some of the snippets which I remembered goes like this. The poet says “I spent one drop of my blood for each poem I wrote to glorify your name. But mischievously you decided to pay the silver instead of gold. A person who keeps his word is a real person in this universe”. The poet finally wrote a poem in agony on the wall of a Majid before he died. It explains the deceitful act of the king. It reads, “I dived many times in to the Sea, in search of pearls thinking, the Sea is the treasury of pearls. I was so unfortunate as I could not get the pearl, but the Sea opened its mouth to engulf me”. What a fantastic message the poet gave to the world about the importance of honoring one’s word and standing against deceitful action! We also visited the tomb of Omar Khayyam, a celebrated poet, philosopher and mathematician. From there, we reached Susangerd via Tehran and Ahwaz.

We also visited Shiraz city later, a provincial capital of Fars province. Fars province was the original homeland of Persians. The name Persia originated from this land. It was a seat of Achaemenid Empire. Koresh (Cyrus the Great), founded the Achaemenid Empire. His grandsons, Dariush the Great, and Ahasuerus (Xerxes the Great) ruled the vast Persian Empire comprising 127 provinces. The Empire extended from the Mediterranean Sea to India, i.e., west of river Indus. India always means part of Punjab and Sind and not entire India. Pasargadae was the capital of Achaemenid Empire under the Koresh (Cyrus the great). Takht-e-Jamshid (Persepolis) was the ceremonial capital of Achaemenid Empire under Darius the Great. It was built by Darius the Great. Persepolis was known for its architectural grandeur. It is located 50 km away from Pasargadae. A magnificent tomb of Koresh located in Pasargadae. Both the monuments Pasargadae and Persepolis were reflections of the Achaemenid archaeological marvel. They are declared as World Heritage Centers by the UNO. Both the monuments are the famous tourist attractions. Lakhs of people throng every year to visit these places.

The Persepolis was destroyed by Alexander the Great who invaded Persia during the reign of Xerxes the Great. We also visited the Susa (present town Shush), the capital of Persian Empire for more than 200 years. It

served as a winter capital of the Achaemenid Empire. Susa was also the capital of Elam. It is extensively mentioned in the Bible in the book of Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah and Ezra.

The name 'Koresh' is a national pride even today; Koresh is a synonym for Iran and Iran is a synonym for Koresh. Iranians who visit the tomb proudly say in Farsi "*Koresh shuma bekhav ma bedarhustim*", which means "Koresh, you sleep well; we are ready to defend this nation."

Koresh's name is mentioned more than thirty times in the Bible. Isaiah prophesied about Koresh, as a messiah to liberate Israelites from Babylonian captivity. (*Isaiah 45:1-8*) reads "*The God of Israel has called you by name although you don't know me. I appointed you to help my people of Israel*". The prophecy had come true. Koresh defeated the Babylonian king Nabonidus, and freed the Israelites. All the Jews then came to Persia and settled there. He allowed the Jews to go back to Israel and even helped to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and restored the temple treasure. He was known for his compassion and benevolence towards non-Persians. He used to respect other religions and maintained inter-religious tolerance.

Prophet Daniel lived in Susa, the south-western part of the Iran from where he wrote about his vision which foretold the future four kingdoms. Daniel saw four beasts coming out of sea in his vision. The one with a lion with eagle's wings was the Babylonian kingdom. The second one was a bear indicating the Medo-Persian Empire. The third, a winged leopard with four heads was Greece and the fourth, a beast with ten horns and three additional horns representing the Roman Empire (Daniel 7:1-28). Xerxus, the Great who married queen Esther, a Jewish heroine also lived in Susa (Sush). Denial tomb located in Sush and it is also a pilgrim center. Many Muslim devotes visit the tomb daily and offer prayer (Namaz).

Sometimes later, Zafar's and my family visited the south-west cities, Abadan and Khorramshahr. Abadan is located in an island in the Persian Gulf. It had its own importance during the Shah regime. It was a beautiful place to visit and a holiday destination. The city was known for its cosmopolitan culture, because of its location and oil refinery, where different country's people, mostly Europeans used to work there. It suffered a heavy damage during war. It was sieged for several months by Iraqi armed forces but could not succeed to capture. Most of the city and the oil refinery were badly damaged from day-long shelling. The ruined and half broken walls

with shattered windows stood as mute witness, testifying the density of war.

We also visited Khorramshahr city. Actually, the Iran-Iraq war started from Khorramshahr city, followed by Abadan and spread to Susangerd and Ahwaz. The battle at Khorramshahr was known as one of the bloodiest urban battle. The occupation of the town went on for two years. The Khorramshahr war was referred in Farsi as '*khuninshahr*' meaning 'City of Blood' where war was fought hand to hand and street to street. The city was completely ruined by Iraqi forces.

The Iraqi forces looted the stored valuables and sent them to their port city Basra. The two cities, Khorramshahr and Basra are located opposite each other, on either side of Al Arab Shuttle Waterways. The waterways separate both cities. We witnessed ruined houses, half broken walls, and walls having multiple holes on them, due to heavy shillings, indicating the gravity of the war. We could see the house buildings of Basra city while standing in Khorramshahr, such a close distance between the two cities.

14.

Invasion of Kuwait

Saddam Hussain was born on 20th April, 1937. He was almost an abandoned child since his father left his mother before he was born. He was taken care by his maternal uncle since his mother married another person. He might have grown up without love and affection. Probably that was the reason for his aggression and violent behavior. It was his habit to fighting against the people whom he wouldn't like. He used to believe that violence was only the way to settle the issues, and to gain prominence. To start with, his fight started with his opponents with in the Baath party. He became Vice President of Iraq in 1969. Then he ousted President Ahmad Hussain al-Bakr in a bloodless coup and became President of Iraq in 1979.

Saddam Hussain was a political activist, a revolutionary who joined the Baath political party, based

on socialist ideology. He served the party at various levels. He became President in 1979 and continued till he was dethroned by the American army in 2003. He was a resolute leader determined to fight till he achieves his goal. He dominated Iraqi politics for over thirty-five years. He was obsessed with the pan Arab nationalist ideology. He acquired pan Arab support based on that ideology. Many Arabs revered him because of his pan Arab ideology. He rebelled against western imperialism and opposed the Israel's occupation of Palestine. His last words before his execution were: "*Allah u Akbar*, Muslim Ummah (community) will be victorious, Palestine is Arab." This reflects that he was a Muslim as well as an Arab.

He was an arrogant and a brutal dictator. He was a tyrant, known for his tyrannical rule. His repressive authoritarian actions against Shiites and Kurdish people was unbearable. His anti-Shiite and anti-Kurdish vengeance was so great that it made him so unpopular, and finally led to his unceremonious death, by hanging.

Saddam was a focal point in the middle east turmoil. No Iran and Iraq war, no Kuwait invasion and no Gulf war would have taken place without Saddam Husain. He waged a war unilaterally against Iran Soon after he became President. He invaded Kuwait and annexed it for two years. He was forced to fight with America because

he was adamant, not to vacate Kuwait. He provoked and invited America to invade Iraq. The end result was to lose his power and his life as well. This reflects upon his fighting nature and 'never say die' attitude.

Saddam Hussain's last days were marked by capture, trial and execution. He was dethroned by the American power and its allied forces sponsored by Shiite Iraqi leadership. He hid in a small underground bunker near his hometown Tikrit with a spider hole to enter. He stayed in the bunker for nine months. He was caught on December 13th 2003. He was tried for his crimes against humanity by high tribunal. The main accusation was the Dujail massacre of the Shiites, where 140 Shiite Muslims were killed in 1982. Other crimes included illegal imprisonment, detention and torture of his adversaries. Mass killing of innocent people by chemical bombing. He was hanged to death on 30th December, 2006. Saddam did not show much resistance before his execution. He was calm and composed, eating muffins, listening to music and tending garden.

I was a little busy with my patients. At about 10 AM, Dr. Azman, a Bangladeshi doctor called me on phone saying "Dr. Shekar, great news for us! Mr. Saddam Husain walked into Kuwait, Kuwait has fallen to him." "Is it! How could it be?" I said with great astonishment. The reality was, no news of invasion till 11PM. Usually, we

hang on to television up to 11 and 11.30 PM to pass our leisure time. How could it be possible that one country invades other country within hours? Probably Kuwait did not have a well-trained army because of its small size. They did not anticipate the need to have well organized army to face the external threat.

Iraq had been known for its military might ever since ancient times, dating back to the Babylonian era. The eight-year war between Iran and Iraq further strengthened its military capabilities. That was the reason why Iraqi forces just walked overnight into Kuwait City. It was a cake walk for Saddam's forces. All the royal families had escaped by that time. Kuwait was captured and annexed and become a part of Iraq. The occupation went on for seven long months. Saddam refused to withdraw from Kuwait. Saddam's forces burnt almost six hundred oil wells. The oil which was flowing on the surface reached the Gulf waters, causing major ecological devastation. Sea birds, fishes and turtles died because oil mixed sea waters. The sea water had become thick and sludgy because of admixture of crude oil. We used to see all these on TV, how the birds were struggling to fly out of the oily water. Birds could not stretch their wings as they drenched with oily waters had become heavy.

The apparent reason for the Kuwait occupation and annexation was a financial one. Saddam had received

financial aid from his Arab friends i.e. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates during the Iran and Iraq war. What we used to hear that Saddam Hussain had borrowed 10 billion dollars from Kuwait for war expenses. In reality loan amounted to 37 billion dollars. The Kuwait leadership thus started pressing Saddam to pay back the loan amount. All the four nations met in Saudi Arabia, and negotiated him to pay back the loan amount to Kuwait. Saddam Hussain demanded for another 10-billion-dollar loan to clear his financial debts keeping aside existing loan. Instead of paying he invaded and captured Kuwait. His forces also advanced quite a deep into Saudi Arabian.

Another allegation made by Saddam Hussein was that Kuwait was stealing Iraqi oil through slant drilling from the Kuwaiti territory. How can slant drilling possible in such long-distance. He also claimed that Kuwait was originally a part of the Iraq since the Babylonian era. He used to claim that he was the great, great grandson of king Nebuchadnezzar, a famous Babylonian emperor in biblical time. Nebuchadnezzar was supposed to be the first emperor of the World. He ruled the vast empire starting from the Mediterranean Sea to Punjab, Sindhu of India. Saddam even started renovating the Babylon city with the same feeling of an extended dynastical view.

The American President, George Bush (senior Bush) declared war against Saddam Husain in support of Kuwait and other Arab countries particularly, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. 42 other countries were also participated in the war.

We used to hear the bombing sounds as our place was so near to Iraq and Kuwait. Our house buildings used to shake whenever the bombs were exploding. The smoke emitted from the burning oil wells used to hang over on our town Susangerd.

It was 11 AM in the morning. Dark thick smoky clouds covered the entire Susangerd, and it resembled the night. Travelling vehicle drivers were forced to put on headlights due to the darkness. It started raining soon after. It was black rain, as it was coming from the clouds formed by the soot, generated from the burning Kuwait oil wells. My white shirt turned to black, which I wore on that day, while I was walking in the rain. That afternoon, we heard the same news on BBC Radio: "Black rain fell on Susangerd as it was covered by dark, smoky clouds."

15.

Wars

Nations are framed by manmade, artificially demarcated boundaries. After all people live on either side of the boundaries, though their language, religious customs might be different. The so-called leaders indulge in waging wars to satisfy their personal ego in the guise of national and religious pride. They never thought of the well-being and welfare of the people. All the wars were fought for the personal glory of the ruling elite. Unfortunately, most of the war heroes had met their end by tragic death. Yet the world leaders do not learn any lesson from the history. The same mistake had been repeated from the time of Alexander to Napoleon, Hitler to Saddam Hussain.

Success leads to ego. Ego leads to aggression. Aggression leads to oppression. Oppression leads to revolt. Revolt leads to tyrannical rule, resulting genocide

of innocent people who revolt against the oppression. This what had happened in the history of the world, irrespective of region and religion.

The war-heroes are all megalomaniacs, i.e., the people who have strong desire to hold and enjoy the ultimate power. Napoleon even crowned himself to be an emperor. Adolf Hitler turned himself from an elected chancellor to a dictator to gain ultimate power. Saddam Hussain was a dictator who not only suppressed the opposition, but also oppressed the Shiites and Kurdish people to gain ultimate power. Eventually he enjoyed ultimate power but ended up in a tragic death. We have heard and read that Saddam Hussain used to enjoy having his meal on golden plates and his sofas were made with gold too. The verse from Bible reads *“Pride (ego) walks in front of destruction and arrogance leads to down fall”* (Proverbs 16:18) that was what exactly happened in the case of Saddam Hussain, Hitler and Napoleon. The same arrogance led them to their downfall.

War causes bloodshed by killing scores of innocent people. Millions of people are displaced as refugees. People run to save their own lives and to save the lives of their dear ones. They cry in agony and pain when their dear ones die right in front of their eyes. People run for safe shelters as their shelters were demolished by

bombardment. People run for food and water as they suffer from hunger and thirst. Yet, they neither get water nor food. Food and water are supplied by organizations on compassionate grounds. People throng around these food distributors, but only lucky one will get because of scuffling with in the refugees to gain accesses for food and water. Even then, hundreds to thousands die of starvation. Some people venture to run away into the neighboring countries by sea-route on boats. Sometimes, some of them die as boats are capsized due to overcrowd. The refugees who survive will not be allowed to enter the country they wish. They would starve to death. The children who survive, became malnourished. Scores of people remain as disabled and crippled due to war injuries. Women are subjected to sexual violence. Sexual assault is a common war crime which needs to be condemned by all the right-minded people. The women who were already in great distress, having lost everything and running for their lives, forcing them to be sex partners is an extreme heinous crime. The agony of these women is unimaginable who get subjected to sexual abuse.

Financial loss is great apart from the colossal loss of man power. Financial loss leads to bankruptcy. People suffer from high rising prices of daily commodities. The people are overburdened by heavy taxes imposed upon

them to overcome the financial exchequer of the war. These are the events seen if we open the pages of history of war-torn countries.

But nothing short of an amazing life style of the ruling elite. They enjoy royal repast or an ostentatious display of their personal life. They move in luxury motor cades. They live in safe palatial heavens while their people are fleeing for safe shelters. They eat the food of their choice while their people running for bread. They have intoxicating beaveries while their people suffer from thirst due to unavailability of water to drink.

Though we condemn wars and war excesses, we are still obsessed with the war-heroes like Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler. Saddam Hussain also comes under the same group. We get obsessed with the heroic personalities, forgetting the brutality they committed to mankind. But history tells us how they met their end at the last. It is a great lesson to the world leaders, but leaders in power never learn anything from history. They repeat the same mistakes to gain ultimate power and indulge in waging wars.

Alexander the Great of Macedonia, a great general who changed the course of world history and created a vast empire, extending from Macedonia to Egypt and Greece to Iran and the Punjab province of India. His sole

aim was to conquer the world to become emperor of the world. Scores of people died in fulfilling his personal ambition. However, he left a great lesson to mankind when he was on his deathbed. The final reported request was 'His body should be carried while hands are dangling out of the coffin. His best doctor should carry the coffin and the treasury he acquired be spread on the way to his grave (google). A great message he had left for the world. Dangling of hands indicate that man came to this world with empty hands and goes with empty hands. A good doctor cannot treat every ailment. Material wealth what we earn will stay on the earth.

Napoleon Bonaparte was another great general who wanted to conquer the entire Europe. He rose from an ordinary military officer to a level of army general. He fought war after the war to stay in power at the cost of millions of lives. He mercilessly executed many people, who were caught as prisoners. He was a person who believed that nothing is impossible and anything can be achieved by self-effort. He said, "The word impossible is not in my dictionary. It is found in the dictionary of fools." But destiny took a different track for him. He was caught after his defeat at Waterloo and was exiled in Saint Helena island in the south Atlantic oceans. He spent his final life lonely and depressed and died as a

common prisoner. “What a novel of my life!” He finally exclaimed.

Adolf Hitler, German chancellor of the Nazi party became dictator, who smashed the democratic institution and crushed the communist movement. Coincidentally, the idea of communism was conceived by Karl Max, a German philosopher, in the form of Communist Manifesto along with Friedrich Engels who was also a German philosopher. Hitler’s antagonism against Jewish community was well known to the world. His hate against Jews was due to their financial holdings in the German society. He believed that the Germans had become subordinates to the Jewish community in Germany, which he did not like. Nazi racism- Nazis used to believe that Jews were the inferior race. This resulted in mass killing 6 million Jews. It was known in the history as the great Jewish holocaust.

Hitler was obsessed with Aryan supremacy. He used to feel that Aryans were the superior race, he belonged to Aryan race and all Germans are the Aryans. ‘Swastika’ was his war symbol, which is also a symbol of Hindu Sanatan Dharma. This was an essential part of the Nazi Germany ideology. The person who felt that he was supreme and belonged to a supreme race was forced to commit suicide at the end. He killed himself by his own bullet leaving his every desire to dust.

All Europeans are Caucasians, not Aryans. Caucasians inhabited Europe and some of them migrated to north America and Canada. Caucasians are white skinned people with light hair and good height. Aryans are tall, fair complexioned, pointed nose and silky hair. Aryans were in habituated in Iran, and parts of central Asia. Some of the Aryans initially migrated to India and settled in north-west part of India. They migrated later to Gangetic planes. Their language was Sanskrit. Even today Persian language is based on Sanskrit grammar with a culmination of Arabic terms. Even today, Persian language contains 40% of the Sanskrit words. The feeling of Aryan supremacy is also prevalent in north India, beyond the Narmada river. They also feel that they belong to the Aryan race which is supreme.

War strategies – there is no permanent friend and foe in the political arena of the nations. Their stand changes according international policies among nations. The world was divided on the basis of communist socialist and capitalist countries in the cold war era. But communism was almost eliminated from the world's political scenario. Whatever communism is left over it is for the name sake. China and North Korea are only the communist countries. These countries have also turned towards capitalism. North Korea has become a dictatorial regime, whereas China's communism is for

name sake. It turned as a dictatorial capitalist country. The state run the business and make money. Such cadre of business community was fondly called as bourgeois in the early part of the communist movement. It was a sort of humiliating word in the communist world. Of course, that word has totally vanished. Presently, the wealthiest persons are adored and appreciated in society.

The rich countries like China and America are try to do business and become business tycoons. Their wish is to become a super power to maintain hegemony in the world's political order. From the beginning of the cold war, arms sales had become a good fetching business for major powers. They create conflicts among the nations and sell the arms to kill innocent human beings. In this scenario America, Russia and China have become a major obstacle in the bargain of world peace.

Shaw of Iran was a strong ally of America. The revolutionary regime maintained a bitter enmity with America. They took control of the US embassy in Tehran soon after the revolution. The inmates were taken as hostages. The embassy was burnt by revolutionaries. We used to see the burnt out remains of US embassy buildings when we were moving in Tehran. The enmity continues even today. US was an ally of Iraq by all means during the Iraq-Iran war. Though America did not provide any arms or ammunition but it provided intelligence

support to Iraq. In the bargain, US gained billions of dollars from Iraq.

There was Arms embargo promulgated by America, not to supply arms to Iran, during Iran and Iraq war. But America sold the arms to Iran secretly, forgetting the enmity. The infamous Iran Contra Affair also called the 'Iran Contra Scandal', where America secretly sold the arms to Iran against their own principle, not sell the arms to Iran. The amount gained by this arms sale was sent to Nicaragua contra rebels group who were fighting against the socialist regime of Nicaragua. The monetary transaction was carried out by Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, who was then a member of the American National Security Council. Oliver North became a hero overnight after the contra scandal got exposed. People went on to screen picture on him. That was how America tried to maintain the monopoly in the world power struggle. This event indicates that countries may go to any nasty deal to gain the supremacy over power-oriented politics.

The war between Ukraine and Russia and the war between Israel and Hamas group of Palestine, are heartbreaking. Places are being bombarded. Continuous destruction and demolition of buildings and merciless killings of innocent people are still going on. We could see on the television, how the people were running for food and shelter. Our hearts bleeds when we see those

horrible scenes on television. But world leaders are behaving like spectators. Economic loss will be in billions of dollars, apart from the destruction and demolishing of houses and the loss of human lives. Millions of lives could be saved, if there was no war. There would be no hunger and one could make fine shelters for their people with the money they are wasting on wars.

16.

God The Almighty

There is no scientific evidence of creation of this universe. As per science, it is believed that the universe was created on its own by various changes that occurred in the void. Religion and science contradict each other. The religious system tries to contradict the scientific system. For example, well known scientist Galileo directly saw that the earth was round like a globe. He observed that It rotates on its own axis and also moving around the Sun. All the planets are moving around the Sun. But people used to believe that the Sun was moving around the earth. The Sun is the focal point that never moves but earth moves around the sun in the orbital revolution.

Church never accepted this truth since they strongly believed that the earth was created by God and it is the center of the universe and the sun moves around the

earth because of apparent movement of the sun resulting in sun rise and sun set. This phenomenon was later confirmed by Nicolaus Copernicus. Galileo was put under house arrest until his death for his factual observation. His final wording worth to remember. He said in Latin: “E pur si muove or eppur si muove” it means “And Yet it moves or Although it move”. The church accepted the truth three hundred and fifty years later. Human excesses had already been exceeded by that time, that could never be rectified.

Man proposes, God disposes. Man makes of his own plan of his better life but the ultimate outcome will be different which will be influenced by an unknown power. Men do hope for better future but it is seldom serves him well. For example, one will expect a good monsoon, but to his surprise, drought will prevail. One will expect good yielding from his farming, but suddenly his crops will be destroyed by hailstorm deprives the individual of his gains. The sudden death of an earning member in a house, shatters the family. Rich suddenly becomes poor, faces financial crunch. Unexpected happenings shatter the hope of a man in this way. These are not in man's hands. These uncertainties which are guarded and guided by an unseen force. Man feels this unseen force as God.

In adverse conditions, man thinks that God may provide good fortune ahead. Faith in God promotes the

hope, and that hope makes the individual to move forward in his future life. Faith strengthens the mind, heart and body, and encourages the man to work hard, to see a new dawn with bright feature. It is nice to remember that night may be long and troublesome, but morning brings a new hope which may lead to new and comfortable life. Therefore, man has strong faith in God. Life will not move further without hope in God.

I am no one to advocate of anyone's faith or its perks. Religion is a choice for the millions of the people all over the World. But it should be noted that World Health Organization has included spiritual health as the promoter of physical and mental strength, that helps man to fight against all odds.

Every religion proclaims the same that 'God created the universe'. God, the 'ALMIGHTY' or the Most 'HIGH GOD' who is merciful and benevolent. Iranians passionately say "*Khudha e bujurg meharaban*" in Farsi, which means 'God is great and merciful.' "God is love. He loved the world so much and his love is eternal" (Psalm 117).

God created man in His own image expecting human beings should live with the same love and harmony so that love will be prevailed all over the world.

Unfortunately, man's greed, arrogance and hatred dominate the human society, forgetting God's great love.

Apostle Paul in the Bible, wrote about faith, hope and love. He wrote the wonderful passage about love that every religious fellow must observe and practice. Though faith, hope and love are more important for any religious faith. Faith in God encourages us to have hope in God. But love keeps the society in good harmony so that every section of the society lives in peace with harmony

Among three, faith, hope and love – Love is greatest of the three (I Corinthians 13th chapter).

Because

- Love is sacred and eternal.
- Love tolerate no evil.
- Love does not have ego
- Love never seems to be grandeur
- Love never overflow with pride
- Love is not ill mannered
- Love never thinks about self-profit
- Love never shows anger
- Love is kind

He further adds that even if one has faith strong enough to move mountains, or offers his body to be

burned for a noble cause, it amounts to nothing without love. Such is the greatness of love but unfortunately the world is devoid of such love. Instead the world is filled with man's ego and hatred which is the root cause for every evil in the human society. God intended to create heaven on earth through His boundless love. Yet, religious leaders across faiths have turned the world into a kind of hell by sowing division among believers, twisting sacred laws to serve their own interests.

Every religion began with its own set of laws to control human excesses and protect the meek and vulnerable within society. All religious documents were nothing but validated constitutional rights and duties of that particular religious' people at that given time. It was imperative for individuals to observe religious orders and rituals. It may help the society in maintaining peace and curb human excesses. Thus, all religious teachings were crafted for the welfare of humanity. No religion teaches to kill fellow human being, it rather teaches to love your enemy. It helps to create a heaven in this universe. Religious laws endorse humanity, equality and brotherhood among all the people.

All the religious and faithful people chant hymns from morning to evening in praising God and glorifying His name, asking for their every desires to be fulfilled. But off the worshipping place they engage in creating inter-

religious tensions. They quarrel among themselves, claiming their religion is the true one and their God only the real God.

Inter-religious hatred is so high which is leading to massacre of fellow human beings. Sometimes, sectarian violence within the same religion, surpasses inter-religious hatred and they kill their own (belonging to the same religion) people. The best example is the rivalry between Catholics and Protestants, Shaivites and Vaishnavites, and Shiites and Sunnis. People interpret and use the religious laws for their selfish motives. This results in rivalry among the religions and sometimes within the same religion, leading to social unrest, and killing of human beings in the name of faith.

Human beings are the deadliest animals in the animal kingdom. It is proved on number of occasions, that animals are better than human beings. Animals maintain their natural habitat for their better survival. But man's intention is different. They want to earn in any way possible to become rich, to gain name and fame, and to have extraordinary power, to maintain supremacy over others. He dictates the people to be submissive, to maintain the hegemony which may lead oppression of the people. The same religions had become a curse to the human survival.

Middle East is an ever-burning pot from time immemorial. Judaism and Islam keep wreaking havoc in the Middle East. All the people of the Middle East are progeny of Abraham, their patriarch, if we go through the religious history of Middle East. It is also called as Semitic religion, originated from Noah's son Shem (Genesis 9:18). The Semitic descendants are Jews, Arabs, Armenians and Assyrians. Semitic languages include Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic. They share the monotheistic belief emphasizing single God theory. They believe in prophetic culture, where God reveals the message to prophets and preached to their people.

Jews and Arabs are sons of Abraham by virtue of their blood. Gentile Christians and Gentile Muslims claim that they are the sons of Abraham by virtue of their faith. One religion and one faith of Abrahamic origin had become three religions i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They read and recite the scriptures of the same religious origin. They accept the same God, the God of Abraham (Ibrahim), the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (Yakoob) but fight relentlessly for hypothetical differences and rituals in their respective religions.

Continuous combat had been going on between the Jews and the Muslims. So many wars had fought from time and again. Wars had also fought between the Shiites and Sunnis, killing the fellow religious people mercilessly. The reason is that every religious group feels

that their faith is great, resulting in inter-faith friction and infightings. Saddam's eight years' war with Iran was nothing but Sunni and Shiites differences. Religion must pave the way for the peaceful coexistence of mankind. It should promote peace and harmony, and not to promote hatred and destruction.

After all what can one achieve from war? The end result of Iran and Iraq war was the death of scores of people, destruction of scores of habitations, and leaving the heartbroken people, without shelter and food. More than 1000,000 people died, probably 500,000 people might have died from each side. The cost of the war was more than one trillion dollars.

One could achieve miraculous progress for the people of both the sides if that money would have used for people's welfare. Unfortunately, the money was wasted in waging a futile war.

We must pray to God, let the people know and taste the eternal love of God the Almighty. *Peace be prevailed beyond the borders of nations, races and religions* so that people may have dignified survival. Let there be no more wars. No genocide and no more bloodshed. No more destruction of human habitations. People should not run for shelters, food and water. Human dignity must be prevailed at any cost.