

FALLEN FLOWERS WHISPER

amarnath

A journey to the past in search of fallen flowers



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Fallen Flowers whisper

Amarnath

My Identity



Yours Sincerely,

I am but a traveller-a simple soul born into an ordinary family. For over three decades, I journeyed far from home, wearing the garb of an expatriate in search of life's meaning. A mere traveller, nothing more.

Letters and language have always been both a refuge and a vulnerability for me. During the days when life appeared as a mirage-boundless, undefined, and indescribable-the garland of words lay dormant deep within me. It was only at the close of my life abroad, as the scent of my homeland once again filled my heart and veins, that those sleeping letters began to stir. They flowed outward, and thus, my first literary work was born: *Manichithrathaalukal*.

Its inspiration came from a simple, yet unforgettable moment. One quiet night, as I sat on the steps of my home, I noticed a rose in full bloom in the garden. Enchanted by its delicate beauty, I carried that image into my sleep. All night, my dreams were filled with the charm and grace of that single flower.

I woke unusually early the next morning, compelled by an urge to see it again. But when I looked towards the garden, it was gone. I rushed outside to find the rose had wilted and fallen. I picked it up, this small bloom that had stirred my soul so deeply.

With gentle curiosity, every petal that unfolds to my wonder, I saw that each one seemed to whisper fragments of its life. In each petal, a memory-an emotion-was etched. In that moment, the timeless verses of Mahakavi Kumaran Asan's *Veena Poovu* came to mind. The birth and fall of a flower echoed through the strings of my heart.

“Ah, flower-how resplendent you once were on that lofty path, like a queen in all her glory.”Aashan wrote....

In that moment, I too became a flower.

From this point in my life, my thoughts wandered backward. I felt drawn to return through time-to walk the paths I had once travelled. Searching for each fallen flower of memory, I journeyed through the alleys of my past. Each bloom I found, each petal I touched, awakened a forgotten moment.

I walked and walked, until I stood once more at the threshold of life itself-my mother’s womb. There, I became a child again. With the weight of memory resting upon me, I rose and began walking forward once more.

Through forests of truth and across unseen borders of the soul, the world journeyed with me. I translated all that I experienced into words. And thus, my journey among memories and fallen flowers took the form of a book. That is *Manichithrathaalukal*, first published in Malayalam.

Now, this work finds new life through its English translation.

Presenting one’s mother tongue in another language is never easy-I know that well. But I have done my best to preserve its soul and sincerity.

Many people helped me along the way. First was my dear friend Dasettan. Then, my elder brother Mohanettan. And above all, Prof. Khader Mangad, former Vice-Chancellor of Kannur University, whose deep bond with me and mastery of the English language played a vital role in shaping this edition. His contribution fills me with deep gratitude and pride.

Even now, there may be flaws. But I have tried with all my heart to make this a meaningful and immersive reading experience-one that resonates not only in thought but in feeling.

With faith that this effort will not go in vain,

I dedicate this book at the sacred feet of my father-who shaped me into who I am.

This edition also includes a translated version of the foreword graciously written by former DGP Shri Alexander Jacob, who praised my first work with warmth, penned a beautiful introduction, and encouraged me immensely.

I firmly believe that the true wealth of life lies in knowledge, and in the blessings of those who walked before us. That belief continues to enrich me.

And so, I offer this book-humbly and reverently-as a sacred offering in the dream-landscape of my mother's memory. She was the first to understand the pain of my birth.

To me, Mother is the essence of all creation.

With that unwavering faith...

I present to you *Manichithrathaalukal.as:-*

‘Fallen Flowers whisper’

-Amarnath

Foreword

Dr. Khader Mangad

(Former Vice Chancellor, Kannur University)



Amarnath's "Fallen Flowers Whisper" reflects the author's life and nostalgic memories handpicked from various points of time. The book is basically a celebration of his youth which was full of vigour and vitality. The author gathers his memories which are too close to his heart.

Amarnath dextrously depicts his childhood with sweet anecdotes around Elayavoor village and the nearest town, Kannur. The author takes us to recall Kamala Das' *Balyakalasmaranakal* in its style and diction. The sensibility of the author expresses unique. Each instance brings back our own experiences into our mind. Amar has no life without mentioning his father Vanidas Elyavoor who himself is a great writer of many books and a renowned speaker and thinker. The memoir is arranged in a systematic way along with the gradual growth of the author from his birth till the present. Every chapter is organised as 'leaf'. Even his birth, without any 'prophecy, flash, lightning and thunder' stands testimony to the fact that he is going to tell his experiences honestly. The beauty and innocence of his village and the frolic and mirth he led in his childhood are reminiscent of the meadows and streams found in Wordsworth's poems. The arrangement of the book is made in such a way that the reader sometimes doubts whether the book is a travelogue or a memoir. A fast reference about

the history of the particular area gives the essential knowledge of the country and the place he visited.

At the beginning of the memoir, Shri. Vanidas Elayavoor, a proclaimed public speaker in the state of Kerala, in a meeting at Kannur, curses the famous actresses Jayabharathi that she should not be endowed with 'Urvashi Award' as there was every chance of her deserting Malayalam film industry. He was recalling the incident of another famous actresses Sharadha who kept away from Malayalam film industry after being accoladed with 'Urvashi award'. This was an indirect and strong method of complementing Jayabharathi in her presence. The gradual growth of his village from a slow, sleepy and idyllic one is beautifully portrayed by the author. Formation of the village road, incoming of electricity and the festive mood it brings in and people's swarming into his house to listen to radio programmes remind us of the other remote villages found in many corners of Kerala of those times. Amar's visit to Cochin is an interesting account of a small boy Amarnath who lost his direction and the agony he felt on the separation from the group though for a short while. The reunion after a hectic search and the stampede it brought in, arrests the breath of every single reader.

M.V. Krishnan Nambiar, the grandfather of the author instilled literary taste among the members of the family. The method in which how the then teachers used to punish the students is a lesson to the present generation. There was a fight among the students and someone approached the headmaster to complain that Amarnath had used foul language against another boy which was in fact not true. To resolve the issue, the headmaster assigned Narayanan Master, a wise teacher, to mediate. He devised a creative solution based on the story of Mahatma Gandhi's three monkeys: The one who sees no evil, the one who hears no evil and the one who speaks no evil. Four of them were involved and each was assigned a role, covering their eyes, ears and mouth to symbolize the lesson. The author was

assigned to narrate and explain the moral, pointing at each one of the three symbols of restraint. They had to perform the 'lesson' in every classroom. This activity filled them with the feeling of guilt, turning them into actors in a live drama of "See no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil.". These types of inflicting creative punishment to the students if introduced in our times could resolve many issues among our students.

The author's long stay in UAE and the emotional suffocation that 'diaspora' brought in, are discussed in detail at the later part of the memoir. Amarnath, a sensitive person with extra ordinary sensitivity who has been floating over the high seas of life like a hyacinth flower, is one among the many similar expatriates. He was not led by avarice or greed. Values and ideology of life instilled by his parents and teachers were enough to stop him from entering into wrong deeds. At one occasion Amar claims himself that his mind is clear and he does not keep any grudge towards anyone. The incidents in his life stands testimony to this self-awareness. He confesses that he also had succumbed to small pranks and mischiefs as a part of his youthful joys. Amar's honest narration would really fill the reader's mind with joy. The hilarious account of the unfortunate events on the Karnataka State Transport bus also gives us ample scope for laughter. He explains himself of the mischievous incident happened at the five-star hotel in Mysore.

Amar's father must be a lucky person as he considers his father his hero at many instances in the memoir. He does not have a world without his father. Heated discussions are going on today about youth letting down their parents. The number of old age homes are increasing day by day and aged parents have become liabilities to the new generation. The story of Amar and his father has to be emulated by our youth. Amar draws inspirations from *Ramayana* to apply the values of *dharma* which guides the youth to respect their parents. It is evident from his

later decisions to settle back in India ignoring lucrative benefits of life in UAE. Amar's life in the desert presents us both hope and despair.

Amar, after his leaving UAE for good had to encounter the unexpected death of his mother. Even the trauma he came across at the knowledge of his mother's cancer disease is one of the biggest agonies in his life. He himself writes, "It was a great task for me to inform the truth to my father. I was worried about his response while hearing the seriousness of the disease. But there was no other way for me, so I led him to my room and explained slowly. He didn't speak a word but hugged me, weeping silently. He was trying to suppress his emotions so my mother should not get a hint of it. I really did not know how to overcome the situation". The truth that his mother would be with them only for a little more time only terrified him. "I firmly believe that it was God's will that made me to resign from my job abroad and to return home at the right time. God loved me so much that I was given the opportunity to be with my mother during her times of need. It was only for this reason that I could be in India". These words would come only from a person with good intentions and righteous life. Amarnath is gifted with the skill of writing and a clear heart to pen his feelings. Books like this should be produced in future also so that humanity can tread on the right path with good lessons. I wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

Dr. Alexander Jacob IPS

(Rtd. DGP of Kerala Police)



Congratulations on your great achievement, Amarnath! I thoroughly enjoyed reading your autobiographical notes “Fallen Flowers Whisper” in one sitting over three hours. It is often the life stories of ordinary people that inspire us the most, and your book is no exception.

When writing a biography, the writer usually asks a series of questions to uncover the subject’s life story, including details such as their birthplace and childhood, any noteworthy accomplishments, significant ideals, and beliefs they held, as well as any significant events in their life leading up to their death.

While some great men write their own autobiographies, others like Gandhiji and Nehruji inspire us through the written accounts of their lives by others. Nirad C. Choudhary’s ‘Autobiography of an Unknown Indian’ was a standout in this genre, and I believe Amarnath’s book has the potential to become just as memorable.

One of the most striking aspects of ‘Manichitrathals’ was the insight it provided into matrilineal families split before the 1975 Joint Family Reform Act. Your book fills a critical gap in documenting this era, and I commend you for bringing these stories to life for readers.

Your descriptions of life in the Gulf were vivid and accurate, and as someone who has travelled to all Gulf countries many times, I appreciated your ability to transport me there through your writing. The incident where you sent your first salary home to your parents and the joy of

coming home for vacation touched my heart.

I was particularly intrigued by the chapter where you meet your wife Shanthi, and the story of how you fell in love at first sight was captivating. The fact that your mother spoke so highly of your wife also stood out as a unique and heart-warming aspect of your story.

Your writing style is commendable, and I appreciate how you wove together your life story with that of India's history. The section describing the major cities of Great India felt like a good travelogue, and I enjoyed reading about your experiences visiting them.

Overall, "Fallen Flowers Whisper" was a fantastic read, and I wish you all the best as you continue your journey to the past in search of fallen flowers.

Reflections of an insightful reader

K. Mohandas



This writeup is not a book review.

Just an attempt by me to express in words the feelings & thoughts I have about the book “Fallen Flowers Whisper”

Worth reading especially for youngsters as they will come to know how a person can achieve his dreams by committed hard work.

All happy & tragic moments in the life of the author, along with a brief history of every place where he has lived or visited are well penned.

Story of a person who left for gulf at a very young age leaving his dear ones back home. Not for his personal achievements, but his determination to support his family.

There are many funny incidents narrated in this book which makes us laughing.

I have heard before Pranks like uprooting the temporary sheds made at fields where youngsters used to gather & sleep over night. But it is the first time I have heard about a gentleman sending a love letter to a girl (whom he wish to marry) without knowing her address. I could not help but laugh.

Many heart touching incidents narrated in this book will make our eyes wet.

The agony of a son when he knows that his loving mother is having cancer and his untiring efforts to save her life till the day she left for another world.

I could not stop my tears while reading about the feast prepared by the ailing mother for all the family members knowing fully that she may not be able to do it again. what all emotions, thoughts and feelings might have had in the minds of she and others at home on that day. May be beyond words could express.

It reminds me about the title of a book read by me which was authored by Mr.Arun Shourie . “Does He Know a mother’s heart”

Yes, it is very true that even God may not be able to know.

After reading a book we may forget about it and its contents, but not with this book. This book will make every reader to introspect” how I have lived my life.” That is the success of the author of this book.

Congratulations & best wishes to my dear brother Amarnath.

.....

E. Devadas

Shri Devadas has always felt like an inseparable part of my life. A person of great heart who not only inspired me to write but supported me immensely in that journey. I offer my deepest respects before that love and generosity.

Leaf 1

Sixty-five years ago, in the village of Elayavoor, Yeshoda gave birth to a baby boy. There was no prophecy, lightning or thunder. Amidst the chorus of frogs, a new born baby's cry was heard, that was mine, the elder son of Mr.Gangadharan and Mrs.Yeshoda.

Elayavoor Village belonged to the Chirakkal Kovilakam family. This family collected revenues in the name and pride of the Kolathiri Rajas. Those were transformative years as generations witnessed the shift from monarchy to the refreshing ideals of democracy in our beloved Kerala. My village is a true reflection of beauty, adorned with the traditional art form of Theyyam which drapes the land like a hand- woven tapestry embroidered with golden threads. There is no doubt that Elayavoor is a place where beauty and innocence walk hand in hand. Wherever they are Malayalees are much attached to their native place and always have sweet dreams and deep affection for it. Our land has been home to many great names like Veera Pazhassi, Oyyarath Chandu Menon, Cherusseri, Herman Gundert, Thacholi Chekavar, Sanjayan, Mahakavi P, Kesari and S.K. We are fortunate to be born in the same soil where these great legends once walked.

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Krishnapuram



Family Re-union photo

Leaf 2

It was a time of growth in all fields of education, a period when India was climbing the ladder of progress through the Five-Year Plans. While rulers around the world usurped power through war and dictatorship, India stunned the world by setting an example through visionary policies and development. Our country upheld the sanctity of our Tricolour National Flag with an impartial policy of non-alignment.

My education began in the well-known convent of Kannur. Korjan U.P. School where my father was the head master. However, my convent education lasted only a year as my father took up a new assignment at Koodali High School. which is located far from home. I was then admitted to Varam U.P. School which is closer to our home. Varam U.P. School was well known for its commitment for quality education and it was where my interest in language and storytelling began to flourish. My journey in communicating with public started with storytelling. Gradually I began to develop a skill in oratory for which I am indebted to my beloved teacher, Smt. Saudamini who helped me to refine my presentation skills including the art of using body language to enhance communication. My father was the editor of one or two publications and was actively engaged in writing poems, articles and even books. I had the responsibility of making fair copies of his manuscripts, a task that fuelled my own literary ambitions. Every evening, I would read aloud my father's works, immersing myself in his creative world. Copying his manuscripts not only improved my handwriting but also helped me to appreciate the clarity and beauty of language. These experiences introduced me to the elegance of expression and I was fortunate to participate in speech competitions representing my school at both the district and state levels. All these experiences were new and exciting for me.

The state of Kerala was formed by merging the regions of Thiruvithamkur, Kochi and Malabar on November 1, 1956. Shortly

after, a Communist-led government, with E.M.S. Namboodiripad as Chief Minister took office, only to be later overthrown by the *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation struggle) led by Mannath Padmanabhan. This period from 1957 to the dismissal of the Communist Ministry in 1959 was challenging for Kerala. Although the first Communist government in Asia, it's life lasted only until July 1959. After that Pattam Thanu Pillai government took office, followed by a Congress-led government under R. Shankar in 1962. Amidst these turbulent political times, the towering figure of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who had devoted his life for our nation, made an everlasting influence on me. I can never forget Nehru who influenced my young mind deeply.



Leaf 3

I was in the 6th grade when I participated a speech competition at Chovva Dharma Samajam School, dressed as Jawaharlal Nehru. With Nehru in mind, I crafted my ideas to form an effective speech, reflecting the responsibility of representing such a towering personality in Indian history. Jawaharlal Nehru was a man who spent many years in prison for India's independence. His sacrifices were profound. During his nine years of incarceration, he used to write letters regularly to his beloved daughter, Indira Gandhi. The contents of those letters alone are enough to reveal Nehru's greatness. His messages ignited her thoughts and actions for the country's progress and social good. Nehru foresaw India's future, embodying progressive ideals, by bridging left and right politics and had earned global respect throughout his tenure of 17 years as Prime Minister. His life was a monumental chapter in our history, one that the new generation should internalise and cherish.

My childhood was full of memorable experiences. We are four brothers. Our father used to call us *Chathurmughangal* (four faced). I have fond memories about my father's mother whom we used to call as Amamma, who had a special fondness for me. Our village was a blend of greenery and simplicity, a place where togetherness thrived. Paddy fields stretched close to the town and every face along the walkway was familiar. Chovva, Mundayad and Varam were our bustling local markets, filled with shops that had all the essentials. Names like Moitheenka, Kanthi Moosan, Uppikka, Kittettan and Pavithran still shine in my memory. I recall savouring beef curry at Nair's Hotel, tea-bites at Noorjahan Hotel and gooseberry pickles from Vydiar's shop. Our village even had a cinema theatre. Our nearest town is, Kannur, which is seven kilometres away, to where we used to make a trip only on special occasions. Whenever we planned a visit to Kannur, I had the thrill of having a celebration. I would eagerly rush home from school, to get ready fast. Our family

would head to Kannanchal, about a kilometre away, to catch a bus to Kannur. We would alight at the old bus stand and go straight to Prakash Hotel, run by my father's best friend, Salikka. Dining in the special room with a fan and savouring rare food like chicken, prepared in various styles, I felt like being taken to a different world of joy. After our meal, we would head to Sangeetha or N.S. Theatres to watch a movie. There were five theatres at Kannur: Prabhath, Sangeetha, N.S., Central and National Talkies. After the movie, we would buy a booklet of the film's songs, which I used to take to school and hide it from teachers and share secretly among classmates. Those were the golden years of Malayalam cinema, with stars like Sathyan, Madhu and Prem Nazir dominating the screen. Later, Vincent, Soman, Sukumaran, Kamal Haasan and Ravi Kumar joined the list. Leading actresses dominating the screen were Sheela, Sharada, Jayabharathi, Ambika, and Vijayashree. Almost all Malayalam films were adaptations of famous novels.

I remember a special occasion on which Jayabharathi received the State Award for Best Actress. A grand reception was held at Sangeetha Theatre in Kannur and my father, an ardent cinema lover, was invited to deliver the keynote speech. As he praised her talents, he surprised everyone saying, "Sharada is a talented actress whose performance is like textbooks. Unfortunately, after receiving the prestigious *Urvashi* award she deserted Malayalam cinema. Hence, I curse Jayabharathi that she should never get the *Urvashi* Award."

The crowd was stunned. My father explained that Malayalam cinema needed Jayabharathi's talent for years to come and he feared that, like Sharada, Jayabharathi also might desert Malayalam film industry if she gets the award. The audience, understanding his sentiment, erupted in applause. In her response, Jayabharathi, visibly moved, said it was the greatest honour she'd ever received, more precious than any other award. Her face, then glowed with joy.



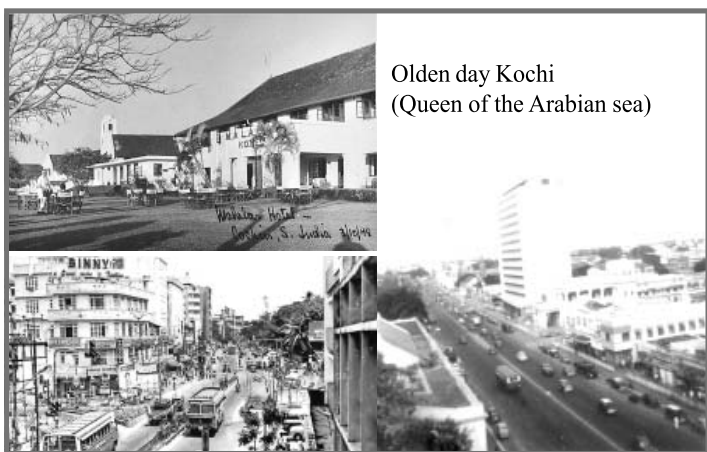
Leaf 4

When I was in the 5th grade, C.P. Narayanan Master was my class teacher. He planned a study tour for the 7th-grade students to Kochi and I was thrilled. At the same time, it was disheartening to know that students of my age weren't usually allowed to join such trips. However, I was an above-average student and had earned a good reputation for my elocution skills, I gathered my courage and expressed my desire to join the tour. Thanks to these favourable factors, I, a junior 5th grader was allowed to join the higher, 7th-grade group. My excitement was beyond words. With a sense of pride and the thrill of adventure, we began our journey. When we finally reached Eranakulam(Kochi), I felt as though I'd arrived in a foreign land! We settled down at our lodging, took a bath, changed our clothes and eagerly set out for our tour. Our first destination was a large American cargo ship that had recently arrived, used for transporting cotton. After gathering ourselves at one spot to ensure everyone was present, we set off in two rows.

It started drizzling and after a short distance I realized that I had left my umbrella at our meeting point. I quickly informed of it to one of the elder students assigned to look after me. He advised me to go back and retrieve it since we hadn't moved too far. I rushed back, only to see an elderly woman picking up my umbrella and walking away. I convinced her politely and seeing my pathetic condition she was kind enough to give my umbrella back. Hugging my umbrella on my chest I quickly ran to rejoin the group. But by then, my group was nowhere to be seen. I hadn't realized that the group had taken a right turn, so I ran straight gasping like a rabbit and enquiring a passerby if he had seen our group. Nobody knew. Fear crept in my mind and soon I found myself on the verge of tears. Suddenly, a man with a large moustache appeared and asked what was wrong. I explained my plight and he assured me he had seen my group and offered to help me to find them. I felt relieved and followed him. He led me to

a lonely huge building and asked me to wait outside. Remember, I was only a ten-year-old boy. My fear rose to a higher peak. I wanted to cry aloud and covered my face with both hands like a praying mantis and waited silently. He went inside with grave face. The moment was really terrible and I wanted to rush back to Kannur, steal myself on the lap of my mother and weep. I realized that he had brought me to a police station. After a moment, two officers came out and began questioning me, while the man with the moustache whisked away unnoticed. The police put me in their jeep and started driving around, asking if I recognized any of the roads or had seen my classmates. After a while, to my astonishment I spotted Kunhunni Master and Narayanan Master in another jeep coming from the opposite direction. I called them up with joy and the policemen turned their jeep around, chasing down the teachers' vehicle. After calling out over the loudspeaker, they finally inched up behind their jeep and we all went back to the police station. The police officer questioned my teachers until they were convinced that they were my real guardians. The teachers were relieved to have found me. However, my thoughts were still with the kind man with the moustache who had helped me. Those were the times when newspaper reports about child kidnappings were too common and I felt incredibly fortunate to have been spared of such an ill fate.

We continued exploring the grand city of Kochi, known as the 'Queen of the Arabian Sea.' Back then, Kochi encompassed Fort Kochi, Mattancherry, Wellington Island, Vypin Island, Kannamaly, Chellanam, and Kumbalangi. The British had called it 'Mini England,' while the Dutch fondly referred to it as 'Homely Holland.' It was believed that once you see Kochi, you would feel contentment, as though you had tasted a piece of heaven. For us, born in God's Own Country, every place there holds a special charm. Our land is rich with folklore, prosperity and beauty, a true gift. With the memories of Kochi's wonders etched in our minds, we returned north, our hearts filled with pride and joy.



Olden day Kochi
(Queen of the Arabian sea)



Canal through Cochin town

Leaf 5

When I try to recall my younger days, a flood of memories fills my heart with joy. Life in our village back then was defined by simplicity; we marked our days by the natural rhythm of sunrise and sunset, as there was no electricity to bring light after dark. Development seemed to bypass us and we relied on kerosene lamps and a petromax lantern at home. Only my father knew how to light the petromax and its warm, milky glow filled the house. Near our home, there was an old British-era government chicken farm, called *Kozhiyappees*, a name that even the local bus stop adopted. The farm spread across several acres and was one of the few places with electricity. Our grandfather told us stories of villagers gathering at *Sarkkar Paramb* to catch sight of the *Saippu* (the British man) arriving in a procession of motor cars, a rare sight indeed. Our daily routines were simple yet structured. Every evening, as soon as the lamps were lit, we all gathered for prayer and recitation, ensuring we memorized arithmetic tables up to 20. There was strict discipline at home and there was a cane, brought all the way from Guruvayoor, that was used as a tool for correction of our faults. I was lucky enough to be the first one to receive punishments. My grandmother would often try to protect me from the strikes, sometimes even enduring a few strikes herself.

I remember one evening my father's elder brother, Vallyachan, visited home. The mango tree in our courtyard was laden with ripe fruit and he climbed over it and picked a few of them for us before leaving. Not long after, we received a distressing news that he was suffering from severe chest pain. We rushed to his side, but without a road, we struggled to carry him to the main road, from where we finally got him to the doctor at Kannur. Tragically, he had passed away on the way itself. This loss hit my father hard, as Vallyachan had always been his confidant. This tragic incident compelled our village to rally for a proper road. Soon after, my father and other

friends in the village began their efforts towards to bring electricity to our homes. My father was an active member of the Indian National Congress and a local leader during those days. He devoted himself to both political and literary pursuits. My mother's younger brother was serving in the Indian Army, who was given priority in accessing electricity connections. We managed to get priority for electricity line for our village through him. When the electric posts finally arrived, everyone volunteered themselves to help. Using arecanut trees as makeshift sleds, the villagers transported each post by hand, led by my father and his friends. When lights flickered for the first time, it appeared like a festival. We celebrated with a movie screening organized by my father, using a simple white cloth as a screen. People came from far and wide to watch. Nehru and Shastri appeared on our "screen". It looked as if they'd landed right in our courtyard. It was actually a newsreel, but the sense of wonder was real.

The construction of the road was another joyous occasion. My father invested his own money to see the project through, shovelling off the initial scepticism away. The sight of the first car driving into our village is a memory that still shines brightly in my mind. That was when everyone began to understand the impact of development. Our house was also the only one in the village with a radio, a black-and-white GEC model with a speaker that had a yellow curtain. We'd hang it on the wall and turn up the volume so people could gather and listen to the news. Announcements of election results were particularly the exciting time and I was in charge of announcing them on the megaphone, energising everyone.

Our village awoke on the sound of my maternal grandfather, Shri A.O. Narayanan Nambiar, reciting *Ramayana*, and the *Bhagavatha*. We called him Achappan. Tall, strong, and dignified, he walked the long distance of almost ten kilometres to his job as a teacher working in Kannur Municipal High School. He was often joined by my grandfather, Shri M.V. Krishnan Nambiar, a Sanskrit scholar and an assistant to an advocate. We never met him, as he had passed away when my father was only 16. But I felt his presence through his handwritten books in elegant green ink, though we never had a photograph to remember him. Our family's legacy of literature and learn-

ing is a gift from him and my father carried it forward. These memories are treasures, I hope will be cherished by future generations. Reflecting on those days, I feel that our village's journey from darkness to light, from foot paths to roads, holds lessons in unity and resilience that the younger generation might learn.



My parents in 1960

Leaf 6

The journey of human life is unpredictable. Time runs on, bringing both joys and challenges that none of us can escape; which, we often call fate. We wish for something, but God delivers something else, leading us to seek comfort in prayer.

I reached the 7th standard at school and for the first time in our school's history, I became the School Leader through an election. My main contender was a student named Arun but I won by a margin of 38 votes! I felt proud, though I had to remain humble, as many of the teachers were related to me in one way or another. One incident stands out in my memory. One day, there was a quarrel among the students and someone approached the headmaster to complain that I had used foul language against him which was actually a fabricated story. I always avoid using unparliamentary words, even during conflicts and have kept this principle from childhood till this day. To resolve the issue, the headmaster assigned Narayanan Master, a wise teacher, to mediate. He devised a creative solution based on the story of Mahatma Gandhi's three monkeys: the one who sees no evil, the one who hears no evil and the one who speaks no evil. Four of us were involved and each one of us was assigned a role, covering our eyes, ears and mouth to symbolize the lesson. I was assigned to narrate and explain the moral, pointing at each one of the three symbols of restraint. We had to perform this 'lesson' in every classroom, which filled us with embarrassment and guilt, turning us into actors in a live drama of "See no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil." Looking back, I'm struck by how insightful and effective Narayanan Master's decision was. Had he chosen to punish us with the cane, the incident would have been quickly forgotten. Instead, his wise approach left a lasting impression on all of us. Even today, I remember his wisdom and feel grateful that he chose such a meaningful way to teach us.

I was actively involved in both drama and elocution competitions.

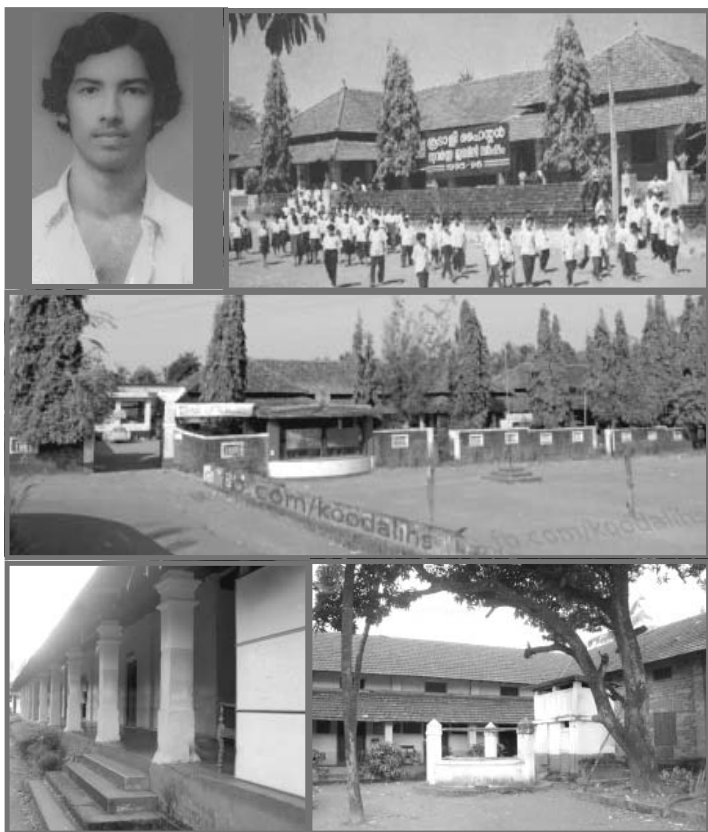
When we left our U.P. school, we took with us fond memories of those years. Soon, we were stepping into high school, eager to experience the next stage of life. Koodali High School in Kannur, where my father was a teacher, was one of the best schools in the area and had even won the prestigious Chakkeeri Trophy. It was where the famous poet P. Kunhiraman Nair once taught, adding to the school's reputation and prestige. Koodali High School's legacy dates back to 1881, when Guru P.T. Kunhiraman Gurukkal founded an elementary school in Kumbham. Four years later, it became a Higher Elementary School. After relocating to a new building, the school was transformed by leaders like K.T. Padmanabhan Nambiar and Kannankutty Master, who turned it into a high school on June 6, 1935. Incidentally, my own birthday fell almost on June 6. My mother expected to give birth to me on that day and my father even had a name picked up in advance, *Joonar*, meaning "born on June 6." (6 in Malayalam is *Aaru*) But, I 'landed' a day later, on June 7 and thus became Amarnath instead. If I hadn't shown that small act of disobedience, I might have been called *Joonar* today.

During the prime years at Koodali High School, it was famous for sending maximum students for SSLC exams and achieving excellent results. That is where my friends, R.N. Anil, N.V. Ramesan and I began our high school studies. One memorable day, we, a few students travelled with my father by train to Kasargod to attend the grand 'Sahithya Parishath Literary Festival' a gathering of writers. During the journey, an elderly man dressed in a *jubba* and *veshti* sat with us and engaged in conversation with my father. It was then that we realized we were in the company of Mahakavi P. Kunhiraman Nair, a renowned poet. We were awestruck. Seeing our silence, the poet asked our names and then posed a question: "How many rivers have you crossed from Kannur to here?" It was my first time traveling north of Kannur and I could only think of Valapattanam Bridge. Although I didn't know the names of the rivers, I tried to recall a few from social studies. But the poet wasn't testing our knowledge; he was simply looking for a conversation starter. He began to narrate the history of each river, its origins and the meanings behind each name. We listened in awe feeling that we had reached Kasargod in no time. When we arrived, we bowed at his feet and bid farewell,

still marvelling at his kindness and knowledge.

It was dreamlike to meet the same poet who, through his writings, expressed human sufferings and self-criticism in such depth. I remember meeting him in 1973 or 1974, by the time he had authored numerous poems like *Kaliyachan*, *Thamara Thoni* and *Vasantholsavam* and had even received the title *Bhakta Kavi* from the Raja of Neeleswaram. His contributions weren't limited to poetry; he also wrote dramas, articles and stories, enriching Malayalam literature. Sadly, he passed away in May 1978, alone in a lodge in Thiruvananthapuram. The Kasargod Sahithya Sammelanam was one of the greatest experiences of my life, where I encountered many eminent writers like Olappamanna, ONV, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Balamaniamma, Sugatha Kumari and others. Back then, educational institutions prioritized nurturing students' natural talents, producing icons like Vijaya Lakshmi, Balachandran Chullikkad, and Sachithanandan. Opportunities were plenty, enabling students to excel in diverse fields. Today, while "*Kalotsavanga!*" are still organized, they have taken a different direction, focusing more on securing grace marks than on genuine talents. Students often compete in five to eight categories, with vast sums spent to win the title of "*Kalaathilakam*." What was originally intended as a celebration of the arts has unfortunately become commercialized. In our time, schools had dedicated classes for arts, crafts, music, and sports, fostering allround development, but now, education seems focused on examinations rather than on gaining knowledge, which, sadly, crumbles the potential within each student. I recall an analogy my father once shared. He compared modern education to making *puttu* (a rice cake). Imagine the student as the cylindrical *puttu* mould. The school adds a layer of social studies, then a layer of mathematics and so on, filling the student's mind with subject after subject. On the examination day, he empties all that information onto the answer sheet, leaving his mind as blank as it was before. This is the limitation of the current education system: students study just to pass exams, secure jobs and live comfortably, not to gain true understanding. Similarly, with the arts, students aim for grace marks rather than lifelong skills. Once they secure the marks they need, they leave their art behind, with only a few choosing to pursue it seriously. Due to this misguided

approach, Kerala risks losing many gifted individuals, who, if encouraged correctly, could have enriched our culture and society.



Koodali Chronicles

Leaf 7

The problem with youth lies in its contrasting nature: a small figure but grand expressions. It's a transitional phase, particularly in boys, moving from childhood to adulthood. Girls, on the other hand, tend to show signs of maturity a little earlier. I had two girls in my life, Sujatha (daughter of my uncle) and Shylaja (Shylaja (*daughter of my Mother's elder sister*), who were of my same age. We were three close friends, while we three attended Koodali High School. I was just an average student, never exceptional. My status as Vanidas Master's son often forced me to maintain a semblance of discipline. I entered Koodali High School during the time of Head Master E.M. Damodaran Nambiar, a man known for his strictness and never seen smiling. The students feared him. Among my classmates were Jayadevan (his son), Salam, Pradeepan, Manoharan, Vijayan, and Majeed. Anil, my close friend, was a huge fan of cricket. Back then, Test cricket was all the rage and Anil would bring a small radio to school to follow the live commentary. Though we couldn't fully understand English, we'd catch the essence of the match. Sunil Gavaskar, Patoudi, Mohinder Amarnath and others became familiar names to us. We started playing cricket every evening, despite having only one bat in the school. To ensure we got uninterrupted playtime. Anil and I would hide the bat in the Science Lab. Naturally, Khader Master, the teacher, would often punish us with a cane, but we cared more about the game than the pain.

There was a certain social segregation at Koodali High School, with classes separated by gender. If boys and girls had shared classes, it would have fostered a sense of brotherhood and equality. Without this, the boys often felt isolated and unable to interact freely with the girls. Koodali High School boasted of one of the best laboratories of the time, with an elephant skeleton displayed in a standing posture. The school also had a vast playground, which was used for various activities, including NCC. I joined NCC under the leadership of

Chandrasenan Master, though I often found myself running laps as a form of punishment for mischief. The real reason for my participation, however, was the irresistible aroma of groundnut curry and *puttu* (rice cake) from the canteen that beckoned us after NCC training.

My elocution talent continued to thrive at Koodali High School, where I had a formidable rival, Vijayan Chalode, a classmate who spoke well. We frequently contested at school-level elocution contests and M.K. Ramakrishnan Master, who later headed the Chinmaya Mission, was my mentor. In 1974, I participated in the state-level elocution competition at the All-India Exhibition stage in Kannur Police Maidan. The topic, announced just ten minutes before the contest, was “Vivekananda.” Despite my initial nervousness, I believe, had performed well and earned second place and received books worth Rs. 250 as prize. It was a proud moment for me. I consider public speech to be an art which demanded talent and knowledge, not just memorization. Winston Churchill, once a young orator, faced a moment of failure at the age of 29 in the House of Commons, when he lost his lines in front of a huge audience. He later became one of the greatest orators, learning from his early experiences. Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr. and John F. Kennedy captivated their audiences with powerful speeches. In Malayalam, speakers like Sukumar Azhikode and Vanidas Elayavoor made significant impact, using their mastery of language to enthrall their audience. In Koodali, I still remember the teachers who shaped our education. Figures like Abdullakkutty Master, Purushothaman Master and Khader Master, who were strict but caring, remain in my fond memories. They contributed to the warm relationships that made school life memorable.

The years spent in Koodali High School, filled with honest friends, were full of youthful joy and challenges. Even the most beautiful flowers eventually fall. We bid farewell to Koodali after completing our 10th standard, crossing river of time and moving forward. English poet P.B.Shelley in his ‘Ode to a Skylark’, expresses a longing for the happiness and freedom of the bird. Similarly, we often look back at the simpler, carefree moments of our youth with a sense of longing.

Leaf 8

I returned home after school, excited about the long vacation ahead. For us, school vacation wasn't just a time to relax; it was also a chance to revise and prepare for the upcoming exams, a huge responsibility on our shoulders! I studied diligently and appeared for all the exams. Then began the long wait for the results. During this period, Shri M.K. Ramakrishnan Master was engaged in writing a book on 'Koodali Yogini Matha.' For several days, Master used to visit our house, bringing along the script of the proposed book. Each morning, as soon as Master arrived, he would enter my father's office room and read aloud what he had written. My father would suggest corrections and Master would rewrite the lines accordingly. This process continued until the book was ready for publication. I used to eavesdrop from outside the room, listening to everything and gradually learned a bit about Yogini Matha.

While we were studying, we had heard stories about the 're-birth' of the Yogini at a place called Kumbham, near Koodali. Local rumours circulated about her miraculous powers. One tale even claimed that stones would move up to Lord Krishna, who incarnated in Kumbham and played in the courtyard. This place soon became a pilgrimage site, drawing many visitors, including us. We once visited the place and I saw a lady sitting there with bushy hair, but I couldn't notice anything extraordinary about her. Piety is a powerful intoxication! When the truth of the time is infused with belief and poured into faith, it becomes an enigma, an endless search for the 'original' in vain. Human beings, in search of God, has turned every universal power into a divine entity, discarding each one in turn, declaring, "Not this, not this!" When a greater force is identified among the lesser ones, it becomes the image of God. Even as generations pass, human kind continues searching for God. Though the years roll on, the unknown lover remains hidden in the minds of many, unmanifested. Looking at the devotee performing *Shayana Pradakshinam* (a

physical prayer exercise), reciting the mantra *Thathwamasi* (meaning That is you), the deity in the temple smiles silently without any response. Perhaps the deity's silent advice is to "go ahead and realize that you are Me." When devotion transforms into practice rather than belief, it gives way to human Gods. Devotees make grassy fields into flower gardens, creating epics of faith and encouraging others to chant them. This is how the atmosphere becomes sacred and prosperity accumulates. Through devotion, luxury is bought not only with money but also with consideration, a universe built on belief. The disciple feels the presence of God before them. What more could one ask for? It is in such places that we hear about godly figures like Koodali Yogini Matha, who are believed to possess divine powers. From her life story, we learned that her parents arranged a marriage for her. On the day of the wedding, she walked away from her house, travelling first to Palani and then to Koodali, where she established a small ashram. The Yogini Matha never answered her disciples verbally but instead wrote responses in the floor with a stick. It is also known that she reserved half an hour every evening for smoking. Whether these stories are true or not, the worship and belief surrounding her helped to establish the Koodali Amma Ashram. Over time, these tombs of belief became part of history. Whether we believe in them or not, events continue to unfold with the growth of any place. I neither refute such happenings, nor do I possess the knowledge to claim they are meaningless. So, I will leave the matter here. After all, belief is everything.

Until the 10th standard, I wore short trousers, but by then, I felt I had grown enough to wear a *dhoti*. The only problem was how to present it before my father. From my childhood, my grandmother had always been the go-between when it came to matters like this. She would speak to my father on my behalf, whether I needed money or wanted to go for movies. So, I asked her to make my request for a *dhoti* and through her, my father approved it. Thus, I got my first staple *dhoti*, which had a slight yellow shade, resembling silk. Wearing the *dhoti*, I walked with pride to the tea shop near our house, a place where my friends and I always assembled. The shop was owned by sadanandettan. There, we would meet daily, Sasi, Balakrishnan, Vikraman, Jyothi, Manoharan, and others. It was at

this tea shop that Sasi (N.T. Saseendran) became my closest friend. We discussed everything under the sun, from local matters to national and international events. Our elders, like Ananthettan and Balettan, also used to join us, and we often debated politics, especially attacking our friend, Anandettan (whom we called “MLA”), a staunch supporter of Communism. I would read out loud from ‘Veekshanam Daily’, a pro congress newspaper, to keep the conversation lively and raise their blood pressure! Our playground, *Mavilakkulam*, (a big pond) was right next to the tea shop. *Mavilakkulam*, a well-constructed traditional pond, witnessed of many of our childhood stories and Sasi and I were regular visitors there.

Elayavoor village, where I grew up, consists of two hills with a valley in between, surrounded by vast paddy fields. During the cultivation season, the whole place will have a festive atmosphere. Our family had several acres of farmland, most of them inherited from my grandfather, who had passed away many years ago. He left behind six children, five girls and one boy, Gangadharan, born after prayers at Mannarassala. The management of the land was handled by my father’s cousins, who were both teachers. Kuttiraman Vallyachan, the clever one and Govindan Vallyachan, the Dhritrashtra of our family. After my grandfather’s death, my grandmother and her six children were left orphaned. They started their new life in a tent in our compound and later they built a small house, which they named ‘Krishnapuram.’ However, what followed was a series of injustices and betrayals. My grandmother and her children faced hardships from their own family members. When the bill of ‘land ceiling’ was introduced during Indira Gandhi’s government, forced them to give up their land. The government redistributed the excess land as part of the ‘Laksham Veedu Padhathi’ (One Lakh House Project). Though born into privilege, my grandmother and her children were subjected to poverty and struggles, but they endured through God’s grace. Those with innocent hearts always find peace. That’s the truth of the universe.

The monsoon seasons filled our hearts with the lush green of nature. The memory of that time brings many experiences, harvests, cultivation and even the vegetable crops that followed. We would set

up tents to guard the vegetables at night, where we the youngsters often had gathered. Our favourite food was *avil* (smashed rice) mixed with *sarkara* (unrefined sugar), ripe plantains and ghee, an incredibly delicious dish, now unknown to the younger generation. Mischief was never far behind, such as uprooting someone's tent while they slept and replanting it elsewhere, only to see their surprised expressions in the morning. We would jokingly blame the unseen powers like Chathan and Gulikan, making them too frightened to approach the spot. These pranks were often organized by Raviattan (son of my Valliamma). When there was a death or marriage in the village, the entire community came together, not for payment, but out to help mutually and for cooperation.

Glimpses of
past weddings



Leaf 9

The House of Ilayamma was one of the most important places where I used to go to play during the vacation. It was located in a place called Chala-Thalavil. My father's younger sister, Gouri, whom I called "Gouri elemma" took care of me during my younger days more than my mother. At that time, she was living with us. As far as I was concerned, she was like a second mother. I used to say I had two mothers. My own mother would leave for school early in the morning and return only at 5 o'clock in the evening, so I had the presence of Ilayamma with me for much longer than my mother. Ilayamma and her younger son, Madhu lived with us for about 8 years. My mother was a woman born to work hard. My father required two or three sets of Khadi dresses every day, one set for school and another set in the evening for public meetings. Certain days, there would be two meetings, so the number of dresses would be three. Additionally, there were our clothes to be washed. Without washing machines back then, my mother's main task was washing and ironing clothes. She would start her day by doing all these chores and then leave for school at 9 AM. After finishing her work, she would run one kilometre to catch bus at the main road. From there, she would take the bus to Thana and then board another bus to Korjan School. If she missed the connecting bus at Thana, she would run again for more than a kilometre. When we saw our mother running, we would joke, saying "look at the horse." My mother never seemed to enjoy the happiness of life; her life was devoted entirely for the family.

My mother was also a great Malayalam teacher and the students of her class would testify this. She had also learned many Sanskrit poems and Malayalam verses. She could recite the entire poem *Veena Poovu* by the famous poet Kumaran Asan! In the evenings, my mother, father and grandmother would organize Akshara Sloka (poem reciting) competitions in the centre room of our house. We children

would sit around, enjoying the program while eating fried groundnuts brought by my father. Most of the time, my grandmother would win. Occasionally, my father would win by reciting his own poems, though others wouldn't realize it at first, until he was caught red-handed. This became one of our favourite pastimes. When the schools were closed for vacation, Gouri Ilayamma's children would visit our house. That was a time of celebration! There were five of them at that time: Girija, Mohanan, Prakashan, Regitha, and Madhu. The house would be filled with noise and all the children would sleep together on mats in one room. We enjoyed reciting stories until midnight. We became quiet when the final shout of "Go to sleep" came from Ilayamma. Later when she returned home to Thalavil, I also went there during my vacation, spending a few days where we had everything for enjoyment, like cashew gardens and a *kulam* (pond). It was an experience that made my childhood colourful.

I passed the 10th standard and got promoted from wearing knickers to a dhoti. I used to visit Kannur regularly to watch movies with my bosom friends. Gradually, it became a habit to watch every movie that came out. The problem was shortage of funds. When we reached Kannur, biryani from Cool-land Hotel was a must, not just one platefull, but one and a half. Only then my stomach would be full. I found several sources to meet the financial crisis. One was the cashew nuts in the compound. I would secretly pluck the cashews, dry them and sell them at a nearby shop. Another source was the empty bottles. My father, mother and grandmother used different Ayurvedic oils and *Arishtas*, which would be collected, washed, packed in gunny bags and carried them to the bus stop to catch a bus to Kannur. There, I would sell the empty bottles at a reasonable price to an Ayurveda Ashram on Haji Road. I also used to collect old newspapers and weeklies. We had subscribed *Mathrubhumi*, *Times of India*, *Manorama*, *Kalakaumudi*, and The Illustrated weekly. All the old ones were sold at Kanthi Moosan's shop at Varam by me at a good price. After deducting my commission, I would hand over the money to my father. I had my justification for taking commission because I was the one to bundle it and carry to the shop. Another source of income was my father's payment for memorizing *slokams*(poems) at the rate of 10 paise per *sloka*. Additionally, I

was tasked with copying the editorial from the 'Times of India' every day, which became the foundation of my friendship with the English language. At that time, 'Times of India' was an impartial critique of politics and national developments. My father kept all the editorial articles in a file.

This was the time when Indian politics was at a boiling point, with Indira Gandhi at the centre of it. Indira was born into the lap of Indian politics. As a young girl, she followed the great Jawaharlal Nehru everywhere. The shy and charming Indira learned much from watching and listening to him. Nehru, through his articles, taught her world history and the developments in Indian politics. Indira travelled with her father to several countries, meeting political leaders from all over the world. She entered active politics for the first time in 1955 as the President of the Mahila Congress and later became the President of the Congress Party in 1959.

After the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri became the Prime Minister In 1964 and Indira Gandhi was appointed as Minister of Information and Broadcasting in his cabinet. Two years later, she became the Prime Minister of India. After the 1971 war with Pakistan, Indira led India to successfully liberate Bangladesh. The world listened to her as the powerful Prime Minister of India, who declared that she would not allow the killing of people in East Pakistan. During this time, the United States, aligned with Pakistan, sent its Seventh Fleet to Indian Ocean, but the Soviet Union stood by India. Indira's bold leadership was acknowledged by many, including Mujeebur Rehman, who said, "Indira is not only the Leader of the people but also the Leader of the entire humanity." Indira's tenure was marked by bold decisions, such as nuclear tests in 1974 at Pokhran, which stunned the world. Despite protests, she nationalized the banks, a decision that was initially criticized but later proved to be wise. Indira also pushed India to the forefront in space science, by the launching of Aryabhata, preparing Indians for space travels. Her policies, like the Green Revolution, transformed India's agricultural landscape. In spite of challenges, including criticism from the opposition and allegations of corruption, Indira's leadership was unmatched. She faced immense political opposition but managed to steer India through tumultuous times, including the Emergency de-

clared in 1975, which, was seen as a necessary move to maintain national stability. Indira's courage and determination has left an indelible mark in the history of India.

.....Indira's Journey



Leaf 10

Colleges are truly the places where the talents get explored! They are the Houses of Arts. Youth enter college like powerful horses, unmindful of anything at that age. It is a time of duel between childhood, reluctant to leave and youth, proudly trying to establish its power. Suja, my cousin and myself joined Pre degree at S.N. College, Kannur. Suja was in the Second Group, but we still shared the same Malayalam class. A few students from Koodali High School were also with us. It was a new atmosphere, new friends and students from different places and schools, including a few from St. Michael's School. When they spoke fluent English, I felt like a fool. At first, I kept my distance from them, but later realized that there was nothing big about that and was just to impress upon others. Balu and Majeed from Koodali were studying in my class. On my left and right, I had Balu and Sreesan, who came from Mundayad. We became good friends. The classes were chaotic and I felt like being thrown into water without knowing how to swim! I couldn't distinguish head or tail and I wandered around in the college compound like a hen lost in the moonlight.

It was during this time that politics began to influence me. But declaration of Emergency restricted everything. M.V. Jayarajan, a well known CPM politician was studying in my class. We experienced the monotony of the time without any protests! Everyone looked like hippies with long hair and bell-bottom pants, but I wore only a *dhoti*. I used to board a KSRTC bus from Chovva which would directly take me to the college. One evening, after the last period, we saw the police forcibly taking all the hippies into a van. I, too, had long hair. When we saw the police, everyone got scattered into different directions. We ran towards Kizhuthalli to escape, only to run into a police van waiting for us. Inside the van was a barber, who shaved the heads of all the hippies with an old trimmer, cutting their

hair in a line from forehead to the back, resembling a river running through a forest. There was no choice but to shave off our hair. It was during the Emergency period and Pulikkodan Narayanan was the police officer in charge. Escaping his grasp wasn't easy! I can say I narrowly escaped! S.N. College was the birthplace of political agitations and even violence.

The desire for a college in Kannur had begun in 1953, leading to continuous talks and fund-raising. In 1956, a society was registered under the Madras Society Act, with Shri Haridas Govardhan Das as president. Others like K. Bharathan, K.C. Koran, P.K. Kunhikannan, K.P. Gopalan, and P.M. Kunhiraman Nambiar were also involved. Shri Haridas Govardhan Das had generously donated 20 cents of land for the college in memory of his late father, Shri Govardhan Das Kimji. The land was named *Govardhana Giri*. The foundation stone for the college was laid by the then Governor of Madras, Shri Shreeprakash on 26th September 1956. However, due to political storms, it wasn't possible to establish the college as planned. The then Chief Minister E.M.S. Namboodiripad declared that there was no chance. Finally, when the government was replaced and Shri R. Sankar became the Deputy Chief minister, the college was granted. This happened because of the significant support of the businessman Shri Kayyathu Damodaran. On 5th July 1960, under the banner of the Sree Narayana Educational Society, Shri R. Sankar inaugurated the college at the P.C.C. Building with 240 students and 12 teachers. R. Madhava Rao became the first principal. In 1961, thanks to the hard work of Shri Kayyathu Damodaran and others, the college complex came to Thottada. From there, the college grew up steadily, becoming a renowned institution in Malabar, largely due to the sincere efforts of those behind it.

We joined S.N. College after Shri Ramachandran took over charge as the principal, following Shri S. Sivaprasad's departure. P. Sasi, T.P. Hareedran from CPM, Khalid, Mani and V.C. Radhakrishnan from KSU, along with the famous storywriter T.N. Prakash, were our seniors. We had the misfortune of witnessing a stabbing at the college premises. Outside, the atmosphere remained peaceful. Many interesting events were unfolded, under the cashew nut tree on the left side of the college like playing cards, smoking cigarettes and

engaging in romance. Many of those involved, later climbed the high ladders in society. I, however, remained a very ordinary person, a silent spectator, simply enjoying the spectacles. I was lost, searching for something my school years had left behind, like a traveller caught in a whirlpool with no way to swim out. I was searching for love that had once filled my eyes, mind and heart, like the great lovers of history, Juliet of Romeo, Mark Antony of Cleopatra, Majnu of Laila, Saleem of Anarkali, Shajahan of Mumtaz, Remanan of Chandrika and Dushyanthan of Shakuntala. I confess that I too was in quest for love, neglecting my studies. At the same time, the world of cinema lured me into a dreamy, fascinating realm. I remember watching the movie *Veera Pandya Katta Bomman* at the lowest-priced ticket of 75 paise, sitting on the floor, while others had high class seats. Every Friday afternoon, during the General Education hour, we would find ways to sneak out. We would arrange someone to throw mud at the roof tiles, to distract Macki Sir to give us a chance to escape. We managed to climb over the compound wall and dash straight for the cinema, spending the money we had saved by skipping lunch. Watching a movie on the day of its release was our greatest pleasure. When I returned home, I would narrate the plot of the movie to my younger brothers, which brought me great joy. This was the time I had completely neglected my studies. To please my father, I would read aloud or do some chemistry drawings, but the truth was that I often extracted money from my father under various pretexts. My daily allowance was one rupee. Of that, 20 paise went for the bus fare and I had to manage the rest for meals, canteen expenses and everything else. Borrowing money from friends was the only way out.

The Party Office of the Congress, located in front of Janatha Talkies in Varam, was also near to the Communist Party's office. In 1977, the Janatha Party opened their office there as well. We would all gather there in the evenings. It was a time of peace, where no one hated the other. Everyone held their own ideologies and there was no murmuring or hostility. It was a place where good hearts came together.

Leaf 11

Kaumudi Ilayamma (my father's younger sister) lived opposite the Cinema Talkies. We affectionately called her '*Anty* (Aunty).' Her husband, T.C. Kunhikrishnan Nambiar, was the Village Officer. *Anty*, who loved me deeply, was like a close friend to me. She was a Hindi language teacher at Chirakkal Raja's High School and I had the utmost freedom in her presence. To me, she was not just a sister of my father but also a close friend and a guardian who truly understood me. During earlier days, *Anty* lived in the neighbouring 'Thoovath' house, her husband's residence. She would pass by our house on her way to school. When I was very young, I would often accompany Antee to Chirakkal Raja's School during my free periods. It was on one of those days that tragedy happened. Antee's eldest son, Aneesh, passed away. I was studying in Koodali High School at the time and we received the devastating news from one of our relatives. Aneesh was only 8 years old, a bright, well-behaved boy. His death shocked us all and Antee, especially, was completely down. It was an unbearable loss. Death is indeed an enigma. As late M.T. Vasudevan Nair wrote in his book, death is like a fool unaware of the stage, follows us like a shadow, even though we cannot see it. We try to ignore it, but it continuously wounds us, especially in moments of loneliness. *Anty* carried that pain in her heart for the rest of her life.

I confess that I had only very little interest in my studies during my college days. I don't remember how I got demotivated. After skipping classes, I would often go to Antee's house to leave my books there before heading to the movies. It was a secret that I shared only with her. In the evenings, I would return home pretending to be exhausted from the hectic day in my college. Ammamma (my grandmother) often urged me to leave for college quickly and return soon, as she longed for my company during the day. I always obeyed her. Thus, my two years in college came to an end. Since I

hadn't studied much, I felt no anxiety about the exams. One Friday, on my way to the exam, I saw a poster for a new Amitabh Bachan movie. I decided to skip the examination and go to watch the movie instead, bidding farewell to college by indulging in all the things I shouldn't have done. But I can't say that I truly left my youth behind in that place. It is true that I had built castles in my troubled heart but it took me a while to realize that what I had felt there was just a one-sided love. My two years in the college were marked by detachment and lack of goal. By the time my father started a cultural weekly called 'Sangam.' Before this, there had been a publication called 'Socialist View,' printed at Enpees Press, owned by Umbayikka. One of my father's poems was ready to be published, but it was altered by the proof-reader P.V.K. Nedungadi, which upset the poet. The matter was taken to court, prompting my father to consider starting his own printing press. He eventually bought the Desa Mithram Printing Press in Trichur, which had a Heidelberg machine. This marked the beginning of 'Sangam Printers' in Kannotheemchal, near Thana in Kannur. My father brought my mother's cousin, Sreedharan Nambiar, from Bangalore to manage the printing and Pradeep Ettan (also known as Lallettan) coined as an assistant. The name 'Lallettan' was something I had coined during my childhood, changing 'Nalla Ettan' (Good Brother) into 'Lallettan.' During his 10th grade, Lallettan lived with us to focus on his studies. We became good friends, but when I was in the college, Lallettan went to the Gulf, who instilled new hopes in many of us.

Sangam Printers became famous in Kannur, particularly for wedding invitations and souvenirs. We had a distinctive style and our slogan was, "The price will be higher for better printing. Please don't approach us for cheap printing." It was an advertisement that reflected the confidence we had in our work. Printing in Kerala has a rich history, dating back to the Portuguese-established press in Kochi in 1575. The first Malayalam newspaper, Rajya Samacharam, was published in 1847 by Rev. Herman Gundert. By the late 19th century, over 50 publications were printed in Malayalam, such as Bhasha Poshini and Vidya Vilasini, along with many others. Printing was not only a business in Kerala but an art, rooted in history and was celebrated for its craftsmanship.

As my parents and friends were anxiously waiting for my exam results, I had already resigned to the outcome. I had no doubt about my oncoming failure. I began going to the printing press daily. I would go to Kannur and Thalasseri to purchase printing materials and pick up typesetting from the Kallippadam Type Foundry in Shornur. It was an exciting routine. I'd stay in a nearby lodge, watch a second show at Pushpa Talkies and then sleep along with the mosquitoes. The next morning, I would trade the old types for new ones and return to the press. Gradually, Sangam Printers expanded, acquiring a new machine. Paulose, also known as Peter, joined as the printer and he had a tendency to take leave three days a week. Once, while the Teachers' Organization's State Assembly was taking place in Kannur, we had to print posters, notices and souvenirs, but Peter was unavailable. That's when Somettan, a compositor from Chovva, encouraged me to try printing. After several failed attempts, I finally learned the craft. There were no offset presses in Kannur at the time and typesetting hadn't yet started, so the experience was challenging. Eventually, I became skilled enough to handle every mode of the press. Sreeni and Sivadathan, my new friends, would come to the press every evening. We would walk to Chovva High School and sit on the compound wall, chatting. Sreeni was a heavy drinker and chain smoker, often smoking *sami*. His laughter was infectious after a *sami* session. Nevertheless, I never joined his passion in such behaviours. Still, I never hesitated to join him in toddy shops to share food with friends. My favourite beverage was Thums Up.

When the examinations results were published, as expected, I failed in all subjects except one. The question arose in my mind, "What now?" The answer was clear, studies should be continued, but not locally. I had an urge to leave everything behind and go far away. My heart still clung to my beloved. Around this period, I heard about a college founded by the well-known educational figures Achuthan Nair and Balakrishnan Nair, with branches in Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram. I decided to make my way to Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala, leaving home for the first time. Ammamma, my grandmother, was deeply affected by my journey.



Leaf 12

The long journey from Kannur to Thiruvananthapuram, with my heart heavy and filled with a sense of loss, began. P.P. Balan Nambiar (Balalechan), the husband of my father's younger sister Prabhavathi (my Kunhamma), accompanied me. Kunhamma and her husband were both teachers. Kunhamma had completed her TTC from Mysore, but the certificate was not recognized in Kerala. My father tried to have it recognized and eventually, Shree C.H. Mohammed Koya, the then Minister of Education, helped to get recognition. When I was very young, I lived with Kunhamma. Every evening, after lighting the lamp, she would sit by my side and sing the devotional song 'Devi Sreedevi' for me.

Arriving in the capital city, I was overwhelmed by a new atmosphere and a sense of suffocation, especially when Elayachan returned to Kannur. My mind was full of thoughts of my village and home. It was my first experience of loneliness, an overwhelming feeling of bereavement in the heart of a 17-year-old youth. The most terrifying enemy was loneliness. As Mother Teresa once said, "The most terrible poverty is loneliness." It was also a time when I felt there was no one to love me. Only very few must have not experienced this. Britain appointed Tracy Chrouch as "Minister for Loneliness," in 2018. Theresa May, the Prime Minister at the time, acknowledged that for many people, loneliness is a sad reality of modern life. A report from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies revealed that among the youth in India (aged between 15 to 34 years), 12% suffer from depression and 8% experience continuous loneliness. My mind and heart hesitated to reach out to the world of friendship after the hell of loneliness. I made the decision to return home with all my bags and belongings. I was staying in a hostel at Thampanur, which had been converted from the first tutorial college in Kerala. The college, established by a multi-millionaire named

Ponnan, provided coaching for students from 10th standard up to civil service exams. Mr Ponnan, who used to fly on special flights from Thiruvananthapuram to Cochin, for shopping and watching movies, lost everything due to a betrayal by a close friend. Despite his losses, he remarried his wife's younger sister who holds a land in town and built a hostel on the land set aside for her. Through this man, news of my plan to return home reached my father, who phoned me up and told me not to return but to stay where I was. He was on his way to meet me. At that time, my father was actively involved in politics and travelled regularly to Thiruvananthapuram for meetings and other activities. He used to stay at Bhaskara Bhawan, located on the way from Thampanur to Ayurveda College, for several days at a time, with the intention of holding me back in Trivandrum. Gradually, I began to get out from the whirlpool of loneliness. I called back Sasi, my best friend to be with me. He too had lost a year of studies. There after Thiruvananthapuram became our home.

Thiruvananthapuram, popularly known as the "Green City" by Mahatma Gandhi, was not only a political hub but also home to several great educational institutions. The name 'Ananthapuri' was derived from the Sree Padmanabha Swami temple, where the deity Mahavishnu is depicted reclining on Ananthan, the serpent with a thousand heads. The name evolved into 'Thiruvananthapuram, with the respectful prefix 'Thiru' was added later. Historically, Thiruvananthapuram was ruled by the Aay Kingdom and later came under the Venad Kingdom in the 10th century. In 1684, during the reign of Umayamma Rani, the English East India Company was established in the area. Under King Marthanda Varma's rule, the city began to modernize and in 1729, Thiruvananthapuram became the capital of the province. The city flourished during the 19th century under the reign of Kings Swathi Thirunal and Ayillyam Thirunal. During this time, several important institutions were established, including the first English school (1834), the Space Study Centre (1837) and the General Hospital (1839). The city also played an active role in the Indian freedom movement.

When the British rule ended in 1947, Thiruvithamkur joined the Indian Union in 1948 and with the merging of Thiruvithamkur and Kochi, Thiruvananthapuram became the capital of the new Thiru-

Kochi state. When Kerala was formed in 1956, Thiruvananthapuram continued to be the state's capital. The MLA Quarters, the Secretariat and the District Congress Committee office, which I used to visit regularly are situated in this city. The cinemas, such as Sreekumar, New, Sree Padmanabha and Ajantha, drew me to the city and I became a frequent visitor to Aroma Hotel, not far from the Secretariat, where actor Madhu often visited. My days were spent watching multiple shows at the cinema. There was a restriction in the hostel that no one should go out after 7 PM. The compound wall was high, but we managed to sneak out by placing a long wood on the wall as a ladder. We would climb out, leave the wood behind and head to the theatre, returning the same way. Many politically influential senior students were also staying in the hostel and though everything seemed fine, my studies were not progressing. Once I returned home borrowing a pair of pants from my friend Jacob. This was the first time I wore pants (long trousers), a bell-bottom style. I held my head proudly walking through the village in my oversized pants and shirt with a big collar. It was a memorable moment. I visited Suja, the town, the press and met my friends, feeling a sense of accomplishment. When I returned home, I realized my clothes were badly soiled and had to be washed thoroughly. Wearing the washed clothes, I set out again the next morning with a sense of pride. Eventually, I put an end to my pranks and wayward life. I completed my studies and returned home, feeling like a soldier returning from war. We are guided by our age and emotions; both desirable and undesirable. Sometimes, emotions overpower reasoning, leading us to wrong actions. we find spirituality and drawn towards the almighty with this wisdom which helps us to recognize the transience of life.



Frames from
Ananthapuri



Leaf 13

I became active again both at home and in my village, engaging in politics. I regularly visited the printing press in the mornings and worked from dawn until dusk. That's when I truly began to experience the harshness of life. I was only 17 years old then. We had heavy work at the press, often managing 2-3 publications at the same time. Additionally, there was a quarterly magazine published from Kannur called 'Thalam'. Kalamandalam Vanaja, a renowned name in dance, had a famous dance troupe. She was a prominent figure in dance, music and drama in Kannur. Her husband, Shree Raveendran, started a magazine called 'Thalam', appointing my father as its editor. It was to be published quarterly. Along with this, the 'Sangam' literary cultural weekly was also published regularly. Around the same time, All India Radio, Calicut, established the 'Vallathol Sahitya Vedi' and sharing my father's view that there should be a journal representing this platform, Shree N.N. Kakkad (renowned writer) led the effort to start a mouthpiece journal for AIR. The inaugural event took place at Guruvayoor Sathram Hall. Packing the first publication myself, along with Vallyachan, my father, Balelachan, Ammavan, and others, we reached Guruvayoor. The inaugural ceremony was filled with literary beauty, followed by discussions, recitations of poems and speeches. Famous writers, authors and poets published their works through 'Sangam'. Lots of promises were made on stage by the authorities to popularise the publications. My father returned home dreaming of a new horizon. Initially, we received good number of literary creations for publication, which was all published. However, over time, writer's interest slowly died out and 'Sangam' gradually fell into a pathetic stage. My father was deeply disappointed when we stopped receiving materials for publication and we were forced to stop many editions. Thus, the publication that had started gaining momentum in Kannur ultimately had a natural death. My father's original plan was to start with a weekly publication and eventually

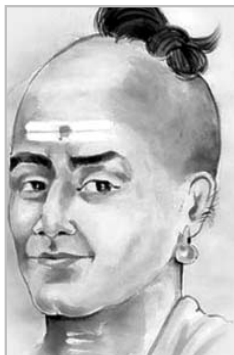
transition to a daily newspaper, but the weekly's life was tragically short.

The general elections were announced in 1977, after the Emergency. By then, Shri A.K. Antony had locked horns with Indira Gandhi and we in Kerala supported Antony, as his decisions were based on principles. This led to the formation of a new Leftist alliance and we were working hard for this coalition. Our area was part of Edakkad Mandalam (constituency), where O. Bharathan was the candidate. One day, he came to our house and I overheard a conversation between my father and Bharathan. "Master, you know I am the Leftist candidate in this constituency. The locals call me 'Kolayali Bharathan,' meaning 'Killer Bharathan.' Because of this, crowd will be lesser in the meetings. I need you to help with the election campaign." My father availed leave from his teaching job for a month, as sanctioned by the Education Department. In the election, the new Left Democratic Front had won and Nayanar came to power, though his government had a short lifespan. The Congress, under Antony, merged with the "Congress I" and after the Emergency, the entire country boycotted the Congress party, except in Kerala, where they supported Antony's leadership.

During those days, Gulf dream was the trend in the minds of young people. People believed that if you just dig the earth, you get oil and you become rich. Many young people were flying to the Gulf countries and their luxurious lifestyles tempted me as well. The desire to go to Gulf countries naturally budded in me also. As I had mentioned earlier, there was no offset printing press in Kannur. Determined to establish one, I reached out to HMT, which was producing quality printing machines at that time. They sent me a quotation: the price was around 5 lakh rupees, a huge amount. My father couldn't afford it. Therefore, to fulfil this ambition, I decided that I would go to UAE to try my luck there. I kept this desire in my mind and conveyed it to my father through my grandmother. In the meantime, Lallettan (Pradeep) had returned from the Gulf and was informed about my desire. He promised to help, even though obtaining a visa was difficult. After waiting for some time my father presented the matter to our neighbour, Moidu Master, who was working in the Sharjah Défense. Though not a teacher, Moidu Master was edu-

cated and that's why we called him as 'Master.' Suddenly, a telegram arrived, saying that we needed to send Rs.15,000 to the agent Mammu and a visa would soon be arranged. This was a large amount for us and my father did not have the means at that time. The partition of my mother's family property was underway during this time. A portion of the land was sold and we received Rs.15,000. This money was sent to the agent Mr. Mammu. Although there was strong objection from the family over selling the property, my father stood firm in his decision. Money is a significant factor in life, anywhere and anytime. It is the foundation of all relationships. Those whom we consider close to us, money can show how distant they are. I believe it is money that created the word selfishness. "If you have money, you have relationships. If you don't have money, you have no relations. You have no value even if you possess divine abilities, without money." (Quote from *Pancha Thanthram*) "The son may deceive the father and sometimes the father may kill the son. The younger brother may kill the elder brother. These are the deeds of human beings." (Quote from Kunjan Nambiar) "When I had no money, I could smile. Today, I am a rich man, but my tears never stop. What a change, what a pity!" (Quote from *Changampuzha*)

Life is silly like this, but who takes time to reflect on it? "Every day, I check the list of millionaires in the newspaper. If my name is not on the list, I go to work." (Words of American comedian Mr. Robert Orban) Money not only makes a person cruel but also makes them lazy. We worry about earning 100 when we already have 10 and 1000 when we already have 100!



Kunchan Nambiar



Changampuzha



Robert Orban

Leaf 14

The generation especially the youth in the late 1970s fondled the dream of becoming Gulf expatriate. There was a convincing reason for this. Kerala was struggling with poverty while simultaneously yearning for development. Every person returning from the Gulf countries came home with stories of luxury and people were awestruck by their life style and transformation. Before the advent of Gulf, destinations like Singapore, Malaysia, Ceylon and Penang were calling us, but opportunities to settle down in those countries were limited. Migration, especially for earning money, became a significant phenomenon starting in the 19th century. With the industrial revolution, the quest for job opportunities became more urgent. The search for employment was the primary reason for migration, but the circumstances encouraging it were equally important. Such migration could only occur in favourable environments, which were initiated through education, exposure of people from different places and yearning for extensive travel. These experiences contributed to new ideas and aspirations for improving one's standard of living. In short, the desire for development fuelled migration and population growth reinforced this trend. For centuries, Malayalees were content with fulfilling their basic needs. Thanks to nature's abundance, they had plenty of resources. Mr. Warden Corner, who conducted a survey in 1820, noted that Malayalees had relatively modest desires and they satisfied most of their needs locally. Due to this nature, they were less inclined to migrate. The 1901 census of Thiruvithamkur further highlighted this by stating that a section of people found happiness living close to their families, with all their needs met locally, making the idea of migration rare. However, circumstances gradually changed. The advent of the 20th century saw significant changes in education, particularly with the spread of new education systems throughout Kerala. As education improved, people began to seek financial advancement. Traditional jobs were increasingly disregarded and fi-

nancially well-off individuals started business, industrial ventures and commercial agriculture. The rise in the prices of commercial crops further helped this transition, as farmers turned to crops that could fetch better export prices. As conditions improved, migration to other states and foreign countries increased. Malayalees migrated to cities like Madras, Kolar, Bombay and Ahmedabad to work in newly established factories and industrial units. Along with migration within India, international migration also gained momentum. During the British colonial period, many Indians, including Malayalees, migrated to countries like Burma, Ceylon and Malaysia in search of work. After India's independence, several events promoted migration. The integration of Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram into a unified administrative structure allowed people from these regions to seek employment across India. Additionally, India's Five-Year Plans facilitated job creation throughout the country, giving Malayalees access to a wider range of employment opportunities. By 1960s, Malayalees were migrating in significant numbers to other parts of India, with the number rising from 9.09 lakhs in 1961 to 21.98 lakhs in 1991, and reaching 22.06 lakhs by 2000.

Sri Lanka was a prominent destination for Malayalees in the early 20th century, despite initial boycotts and resistance. Meanwhile, Malaysia and Singapore became popular migration hubs. As these countries were under British rule, migration increased. Many Malayalees found employment in government and private sectors, often working as clerks, supervisors, or technical assistants. Notably, Devan Nair, a Malayalee, became the president of Singapore and the grandfather of Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was also of Malayalee descent. The Gulf countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia etc. became major destinations for migrant labours after they began industrializing in the 1970s. These nations, rich in oil resources, required workers to support their rapid development. This led to a massive influx of workers from many countries, like India. By the time India gained independence, around 13,777 Indians had migrated to West Asia. By 1978, this number had grown to 21,400, with the trend continuing to rise. Though migration was happening from other Indian states as well, Kerala sent the largest number of human resources to the Gulf, primarily due to the high levels of unemployment

in the state. The long-standing historical and cultural ties between Kerala and Arab countries also played an important role. Additionally, the devaluation of the Indian rupee made Gulf money more attractive. For example, while the Gulf salary was modest, the favourable exchange rate made it significantly more lucrative when converted to Indian rupees. As a result of these favourable circumstances, the Gulf became an economic powerhouse for many Malayalees. The money sent back home played a key role in Kerala's financial growth. In the early years, the per capita income in Kerala was lower than the national average, but over time, it crossed the income levels of all states except Haryana. The rise in income helped people to come out of poverty and led to greater financial stability. The influx of Gulf money also led to an increase in consumer expenditure, with Kerala becoming a major consumer state. Today, the state is known for its high-expenditure on-luxury items such as modern homes and home appliances.

Unfortunately, many tend to forget that these developments were made possible by the toil and hardships faced by Malayalees working in the deserts in the Gulf countries.

Leaf 15

My dream of becoming a migrant had been on hold for a long time finally, one day, I received a message that my visa was being processed. It was the fulfilment of a great desire! Suddenly, I felt like a guest in my own home, as I had to leave all my beloveds very soon. Before my departure, my friends and I decided to make a trip to Mysore. I got a couple of pants stitched for the foreign trip and I wore them during the journey. Mysore was just 170 kilometres from Kannur, but back then, it felt like a distant place! We stayed at the Mysore Woodlands Hotel, owned by Mr. P. R. Krishnan, one of our relatives.

We booked seats on a bus belonging to the Karnataka Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) for our sightseeing. However, when we boarded the bus the next morning, we found that our reserved seats had been allotted to foreign tourists. We were asked to sit at the back, but we refused and insisted on sitting where we had originally reserved. Only Pradeep, our friend knew a little Kannada and informed them of our decision. Unfortunately, the bus employee, ignored our demand. Pradeep spoke to him in broken Kannada and he was suddenly provoked. Immediately the employee pounced upon us like an animal and started offering punches on our faces. The first blow landed on my nose followed by similar punches everywhere around my face. Blood started gushing out profusely. The KTDC man was so liberal to give me further heavy punches on my back also. Someone brought a towel to stop my bleeding nose, but of no use. Everyone got panicked. I was taken to the medical college hospital in an auto-rickshaw and bleeding was stopped there. Later on, we learned that the Kannada words Pradeep used were highly offensive. We were determined not to surrender. We contacted a relative in Bhadravathi and within no time, six of them arrived at the scene. We marched to the KTDC office, armed with sticks resem-

bling lathis, with the intention of confronting the officials. Imagine, an aggressive group of people walking into an office with weapons in hand. Fortunately, the officials, realizing the gravity of the situation, immediately apologized and promised to solve the issue. As compensation, they arranged an Ambassador car for us for sightseeing. We looked at each other, shook our heads in assent and were happy with this offer. The car and the driver were at our disposal for the whole day. Later on, when we returned to our hotel room my friend snatched the car key from the driver, insisting that he must come the next morning also so that we could continue our sightseeing. The next day also we enjoyed to use the same car to visit rest of the tourist spots.

Let me share another interesting incident. During our trip, we stepped into the Vrindavan Hotel in Mysore, a grand palatial construction. That hotel was the first of its kind we'd ever seen! We sat in the garden on a sofa and ordered for tea and noticed that tea was served with water, sugar, milk and a spoon separately, a common practice in five-star hotels. As in a thunder bolt, we learned that a cup of tea was priced at rupees 36.50 plus tax. Shocked by the price and having no money to pay after drinking tea, we had no other option but to take a practical decision. We were young people and were always looking for some or other adventures. We arrived at a well churned out democratic and historical decision. We had nothing else to lose but our pride. We quickly dashed out of the hotel at super speed as if in a university running race, without paying the hotel bill. The waiter was unable to make out what was really happening. He surprisingly enjoyed our Marathon. I turned back to confirm that every one of our team was following my great example and was inching up closely behind me. We were competing each other to reach a place of safety. Had anyone of us was running at a university running race competition he would have definitely become the champion. Such was the speed and the pace at which everyone of us was running for our life. It was evident that we weren't caught and thank God we were saved from the danger of being forced to work in the kitchen! Mischief during youth knows no bounds.

Now, a bit of history about Mysore: The Wodeyar royal family established Mysore in South India around AD 1400. Initially, it was called *Erumayur*, and its ruler was known as *Erumayooran* Over

time, this name evolved into *Mahishapuram*, which was later shortened to “Mysore.” The Wodeyar family ruled Mysore until India gained independence. The region gained independence in 1565 with the fall of the Vijayanagar Empire. The kingdom flourished during the 17th century under rulers like Narasa Raja Wodeyar and Chikkadeva Wodeyar. In 1761, Hyder Ali seized power from Krishna Raja Wodeyar. During his reign and that of his son, Tipu Sultan, the kingdom was known as the Mysore Sultanate. Under Tipu, Mysore became a superpower, excelling both in military and financially. The region expanded to include parts of Tamil Nadu and South Karnataka. Mysore fought several wars against the Maratha Empire, the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Kingdom of Travancore, as well as multiple Anglo-Mysore Wars with the British. After Tipu’s death in 1799, the British took control and the Wodeyar family was reinstalled as rulers. Mysore continued its progress under British rule, particularly from 1799 to 1947, known as the capital of art and culture. One of the legends related to Mysore is the “Curse of Thalakkad,” attributed to a woman named Alamelamma Rani. Before her death, she cursed the Wodeyar family, that they would lose their heirs. This curse is said to have caused generations in the royal family to have no heirs, forcing them to adopt successors.

The city of Mysore is known as the “City of Castles.” The grand Dasara festival, celebrated every winter, takes place in the Mysore Palace. The festival features traditional dances, music and cultural programs, with the highlight being the illumination of the palace with over 100,000 light bulbs. The celebration costs millions of rupees each year. Finally, after spending four days in Mysore, saying goodbye to my friends was painful. The thought of leaving behind loved ones and going to faraway places was unbearable. I found myself hoping for a delay in the visa process, being reluctant to accept separation from my loved ones. Life often presents us with challenges and we must adapt our thoughts and actions to fit the changing circumstances.



Mysore dasara



Leaf 16

The festival celebrations at Elayavoor Temple begins in the last week of March. Elayavoor Temple is the major temple in the village and is famous for its rituals. It is one of the Bhagavathi temples, with Maha Vishnu and Bhagavathi as the main deities and Bharathan as the accompanying deity. The festival lasts for three nights, concluding on the final day. A selected committee oversees the celebrations. When the committee becomes corrupt, the people raise their voices. A group of us decided to take charge of the canteens and took over the *Palthari Chantha* (Shanti). Money is involved everywhere. Look at the word *Kodeeswaran* (Millionaire), which includes *Eswaran*, meaning God! *Chantha* (Shanti) was a unique experience; such festival celebrations are rare now. In those days, there was competition between two villages, Mundayad and Elayavoor sides during the celebrations.

During the procession (*Kazhcha Varavu*), our group would shout “Govinda, Govinda” through the amplifier. Now, everything is just for a ritual. Even though the celebrations have faded, the number of temples has increased. Astrologers now lead the way to devotion, armed with the so-called *Swarna Prasnam*. They claim to uncover things we’ve never imagined and offer remedies for every problem. People accept different rituals to satisfy their wishes. In the past, Elayavoor Temple was the only temple in the area, so the crowd was huge. The festival grounds served as a meeting place for the entire village. The dance with the *Thidampu* (statue) was truly beautiful. Two *Thidampu* (statues) would be used for the dance. At the end of the dance, which lasted up to two hours, the *Koodippiriyal* (meeting and departure) of Maha Vishnu and Bhagavathi was a sweet and beautiful moment. The artists performing the dance came from Palghat. During this time, we started a club called *Swarasudha* at Ammathe Peedika, a building close to my home. We offered activities like caroms, music classes for children and public speaking train-

ing. Later, the club also became the office for the Youth Congress.

In the end, the most important event happened. The visa arrived. This was the end of the youth's fun. It was a shock to me even though it was expected anytime. May be in my subconscious I had prayed that it should never come because it would mark the end of my happy life. A telegram arrived from Moidukka with a group visa for 13 people. I was asked to go to Bombay. Life was at crossroads. Ultimately the bus to Bombay (Indo-Arab Travels) departed from near the Training School. I was the youngest in the group and was setting out on a journey across the sea at the age of 20 in search of a new life. Our house was filled with relatives, villagers and friends. Everyone's face was pale. My mother and grandmother were struggling to hold back their tears. My grandmother's words, "This house will go to sleep and slumber," make me sad even today. Many people, including my father, came to Kannur to see me off. I was also sad to part with everyone. When their emotions became uncontrollable, I too could not stop weeping. My father I was sure, had been struggling to hide his emotion but could not pretend to hold feelings for so long and broke into tears like a child. I knew he loved me like anything but his sudden change to the level of a child left an indelible mark in me. As the bus moved, I felt as though my heart was being ripped off. The journey was to an unknown place and as a 20-year-old youth, I was alone. I couldn't control myself and wept loudly as the bus moved on, pushing my dear village behind, my city, my loving parents, my grandmother who cared for me as her bosom child, my dear friends and my younger brothers and everyone else. It was a journey in search for new pastures. When the bus reached Mangalore, it stopped for fuelling. A man in a white safari suit approached me. He had been watching me for some time and asked if I was going abroad for the first time. He said, "You youngsters should go to Bombay first and stay there for a while. After experiencing life there, you will have no problem going anywhere in the world." Though there might have been some truth in his words, his advice did not bring me any peace. The unforgettable moments I witnessed at my native place haunted me. After crossing the Poonai Ghat, the bus reached Bombay. A great city, full of modern amenities. Good roads, a hub of wealth! Business was written on the faces of the people. Bombay is a wonderful city. Our visa issues were being handled by

a travel agency owned by a man from Kannur (I think his name was Salam Haji). We, 13 people, were accommodated in a room on the first floor. There was one cot in the room. A few of us slept on it, while the rest spread sheets on the floor. Once slept, we couldn't move. If you need water, you have to go downstairs and bring it in a bucket.

Emigration clearance was a big issue at that time. Most of the travel agencies tried to bypass it. We stayed there for 13 days. After being told that everything was fine, we were taken to the airport, only to return back without being able to travel. Meanwhile, people returning from the Gulf came with coolers and tape recorders, staying at expensive rooms. To experience the cool breeze and aroma coming out from their rooms, we hid behind the door. The travel agency owner would secretly buy Taka cloth, watches and gold, from them and will sell them on profit. It was from Bombay that I watched the newly released movie Shaan after Sholay, which had been playing at the Minerva Theatre for six years. Our food consisted of items from wayside shops; Panipuri, Vadapav, Bhel Puri, and Ragda Pattis. Our main activity each day was walking around the city.

People believed that the name Mumbai came from the Hindu deity Mumba Devi and "Aayi," the deity of the Marathi people. When the Portuguese invaded Mumbai in the 16th century, they referred to it as "Bombaim" in their records. After the British arrived in the 17th century, it became known as "Bombay" in English. Still, the city is called Mumbai by the Marathi people and Mambai by the Gujaratis and Bambai in Hindi. In 1995, the name was officially changed back to Mumbai, though many residents and institutions continue to call it Bombay. The word "Bombay" in Portuguese means "Good Bay" (Bombania). Historical records show that people were living there as early as 250 B.C. The area was known as "Hepthanesia" (meaning a group of seven islands in ancient Greek). It became part of the Maurya Empire under Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century B.C. Over the centuries, control of Mumbai passed through the hands of Indians, Iranians and the Swathavahanas and later, the Silhara kings. Mumbai was part of Gujarat at that time. The Elephanta caves and the Walkeshwar temple were built during this period. In 1534, the

Portuguese took control of Mumbai from Bahadur Shah of Gujarat and constructed the city, naming it Bom Bahia (Good Bay). In 1661, Catherine of Braganza, the daughter of the Portuguese king, married Charles II of Britain, who received Bombay as part of her dowry. Initially seen as a liability, Charles II leased the city to the East India Company, receiving 50,000 pounds as loan. The British East India Company built a harbour on the eastern side and the city's population grew from 10,000 in 1661 to 60,000 in 1675. In 1675, the British East India Company moved its headquarters to Bombay from Surat. By 1817, a major project was underway to join all seven islands, known as the Hornby Vellard, which expanded the city to 438 square kilometres. The first railway line, connecting Bombay to Thana, was established in 1853. Cotton and textiles played a significant role in transforming Bombay into a business hub. Initially, cotton was exported as raw material, but later, the city exported it as finished textiles. In 1854, Bombay had one spinning mill; later, it had numerous mills employing more than 10,000 workers.

Geographically, Bombay's proximity to the cotton-producing region of the Deccan and its harbour facing Europe contributed to its rise as a business centre. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 further developed Bombay as one of the largest harbours in the Arabian Sea. Over the next 30 years, the city developed into a central business hub. Educational institutions were established during this period and by 1906, Bombay's population exceeded 1 million, making it the second largest city in India after Calcutta. The city also witnessed significant historical events, such as the Quit India Movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Bombay is indeed a great city, India's business capital. It reflects the speed of life, the truths of the day, the challenges of life and the philosophy of solitude. In the past, young Malayalis would come to Bombay after completing their SSLC and typing exams, believing it was a halfway point between India and the Gulf countries. Many who didn't succeed in their Gulf dreams found shelter in Bombay. Those who mastered typing reached high positions in government and other fields. Others succeeded in business. Bombay gave Malayalis the opportunity to showcase their talents in media, cinema and various other fields. This great city has a magnetic pull that attracts anyone who visits. Once you go there, it's

hard to resist the pull of its charm. Bombay is made up of several regions: South Bombay, including Colaba, Malabar Hill, Nariman Point, Marine Lines, and the Gateway of India; South Central Bombay, including Baikula, Parel, Dadar, and Worli; Central Bombay, including Byculla,

Mazgaon and Lower Parel and Suburbs such as Kurla, Bandra, Andheri, Juhu, and Borivali. The bustling, always busy Bombay can be summed up as a city that doesn't allow anyone to rest whether you're a millionaire, a labourer, a beggar, or a student.

Old
Mumbai



Leaf 17

The days we spent immersed in the beauty of this great city were slowly fading away. Along with my dream of becoming a *pravasi*, my hopes were also fading. Watching people return home every day without securing employment, my heart fluttered with disappointment. Despite the pain of separation, there was still hope in my heart, an oasis of shelter, though small. On the 14th day, the order arrived. Everyone was to reach the airport the next morning to make our dreams a reality. The remaining money given for expenses was sent to my father via the Post Office, as carrying Indian currency was against the rules at that time. Despite the drizzle of happiness fluttering in my mind, my heart was heavy with the thought of parting from my mother.

We all boarded the aircraft, carrying a bundle of expectations. My first experience of flying. I felt as if I had been lifted into a magical world. Everyone rushed to occupy the side seats, as if we were boarding a local bus in Kannur. Only then did we realize that we had to sit on the allotted seats only. The faces of those who managed to get the side seats expressed their pride and satisfaction. Fortunately, I too got a side seat. We were amazed as the mechanical bird soared through the blue sky. Beautiful air hostesses in half worn costumes brushed past me and I wondered how my age could withstand such an experience coldly as I did, though I can't recall it clearly. A poem by the great poet G. Sankara Kurup came to mind at that moment. The poem, *Ammavanodu*, describes a mother showing the moon in the sky to her child and telling them, "It's your uncle and one day, you also will go to him." I felt as though we were traveling towards the moon in the blue sky, our journey reducing the size of the Earth, a trip in the sky. After three hours of travel, the flight landed at Dubai Airport. Everyone grabbed their bags and exited the flight. At the door, a lady was thanking each passenger with folded hands. I thought I should thank her for giving me such a good experience. Due to the group visa, the immigration process took a

little more time. Once we were cleared, we exited the airport. A Pakistani man was waiting for us outside and he led us to the vehicle. We all expected an air-conditioned car in a country like Dubai. Instead, we were taken in an open pickup truck, exposed to the hot sun, like shepherds traveling through a barren land. We passed by small buildings and not far from the airport, there was a large building stretching towards the sky. At that time, it was the tallest building in Dubai, the Dubai Trade Centre. To us, Dubai seemed like a city of modernity. As our vehicle fled through the streets, we stood on the back, holding the iron bars, sweating under the intense sun. The vehicle finally reached Rolla square in Sharjah and I was asked to get off in front of the Palace Hotel. I stood there alone, feeling like a stranger. After a while, a man came and called me. He was “Pola mammu,” our agent, whom I had never met before. He took me to a nearby paint shop where he worked, offering me tea. Moidukka, whom I hadn’t seen for a long time, arrived shortly after. I felt respect for him I had never felt before. Despite having many blood relatives, only Moidukka was there to offer help, playing a key role in a significant change in my life. I realized that true relationships are not about religion or caste, but about love from the heart. Humility and kindness reside in people like him. From that moment and forever and after, I considered Moidukka my elder brother. I maintained that respect for him until his death.

Moidukka took me to a room in Rola, where everyone was from Kannur, including two people I knew. One of them was Suresh, who used to run a food stall at Valiyannur before coming to gulf and the other was Premettan. The rest were from Kannur and

Parassinikkadavu. We were altogether nine people, accommodated in two rooms. I understood that the accommodation had been arranged in advance. I was given some pocket money for my basic needs and Moidukka left. We cooked food together and a new chapter of life began, filled with nostalgic feelings. Still, there was an aim in my mind: to earn some money within five years and to establish an offset printing press in Kannur. These were my dreams and dreams sometimes don’t bring immediate rewards.

Below our building, there was a shop run by a person from Thiruvananthapuram, selling essential items. Rola Market was also nearby. In those days, we used to send home the Post Box number

of any shop as our Gulf address. The shopkeeper would visit the post office every evening to collect letters. So, in the evenings, everyone would be busy looking for their letters. There was a coin operated phone in the shop, a larger version of the landline phones at home. It was convenient to insert coins to make calls. I contacted everyone I had on my list and informed them of my arrival in Dubai. My next most important goal was to find a job.

The next day, I told Venu Ettan about my biggest challenge; employment. Venu Ettan, the son of Saudamini teacher who had cared for me, told me that there was a vacancy at a typing centre in Sharjah and I should inquire about it as soon as possible. I went there the next day. There were many typing centres near Rola Square, where immigration and visa papers were prepared. When I had carried my Dubai dreams with me, I had been glad that I knew type writing. After some negotiation, I was offered the job, to commence the next day. The centre was run by a Malayalee and he mentioned that my salary would be discussed later. I was happy to have secured a job on the next day I arrived, especially since many people had been searching for months without success. Everyone praised my good luck. Many in our room mates were still unemployed. That same evening, Moidukka came and took me to another place. It was a large printing press Dhaid Printing Press, owned by Hashim from Valapattanam, located near Sharjah Cinema, a bit farther from our room. The job there was also confirmed: salary 800 Dirhams, plus overtime. Now I had two job offers at a time. After discussing it with many people, I was advised to choose the printing press job, as the typing job would have no future. So, I joined the press the very next day. Around ten people had worked at the press. Although I joined as an employee, I felt as if I was the one managing the press though I was only an assistant printer. I joined as an assistant to Mr. Thomas and learned the tasks quickly. The working hours were from 8 am to 1 pm and 4 to 7 pm. At noon, I would return to the room and cook rice, then make some curry for lunch. On the way back, I would pick up curd and a tomato from the ground floor shop. Curd and tomato with green chilli made a fantastic combination with rice. After lunch, I would return straight to the press. I earned overtime from 2 to 4 pm, which helped increase my salary from 800 Dirhams to 1200 Dirhams. The days passed by quickly and I received my first salary, a new and exciting experience in life!

Leaf 18

Although my journey was in search of a livelihood, I was also eager to learn about the place. I will try to share what I have learned about UAE.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates, with its capital in Abu Dhabi. Before the discovery of oil in the 1950s, the UAE was a group of underdeveloped states, protected by the British, known as the Trucial States. The discovery of oil opened the door for rapid modernization and development. In 1971, under the leadership of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the ruler of Abu Dhabi, six emirates joined together to form an independent federation. The seventh emirate, Ras Al Khaimah, joined later. The seven emirates that make up the federation are Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, and Ras Al Khaimah. Abu Dhabi is the financial powerhouse, producing the largest volume of oil. The UAE occupies an area of 83,600 square kilometres, including its islands. The borders of the UAE, mostly through the desert, remain either disputed or undecided. There are no rivers or lakes in the UAE, but underground springs have been found in places like Al Ain, Liwa, and Falaj Al Mualla. Drinking water and water for other uses are obtained through the desalination of sea water. The highest legislative body in the UAE is the Supreme Federal Council, made up of the rulers of the seven emirates. They meet once every three months. Since the formation of the federation, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan was the president. After his death, his son, Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, was elected by the Supreme Council to succeed him. The Prime Minister and Vice President is Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum. The UAE also has a Federal National Council consisting of 40 members, which serves as an advisory board to the Supreme Federal Council. The members are selected by the President. This council plays a major role in discussions on national issues. The country's legal system is based on Sharia

law, though there is a clear influence of American and British laws in business and industrial regulations. Although the UAE is not a revenue generating country in the traditional sense, it generates significant income through oil. Around 10% of the world's oil reserves are located in the UAE, with 90% of it is found in Abu Dhabi. The UAE also produces 3% of the world's natural gas and its oil reserves are estimated to last for 100 more years, while natural gas reserves are expected to last for 200 years. Dubai, in particular, is a major business hub in the Persian Gulf. The UAE currency is the Dirham and 1 Dirham is equal to 100 Fils. The Central Bank of Abu Dhabi distributes the currency and 1 US Dollar is approximately equal to 3.674 Dirhams. Sharjah is considered the cultural capital of the UAE. The official language is Arabic, but English, Hindi, Urdu, Parsi, and Malayalam are also widely spoken. Although the UAE is a Muslim country, its constitution allows for religious freedom, with Christian churches, Hindu temples, and Sikh gurdwaras in various emirates. Women in the UAE enjoy the freedom to work, run businesses and even drive vehicles, a privilege not common in other Gulf countries. The migration route for many Indian workers seeking employment in the Gulf used to be from Bombay, then to Pakistan by cargo ship, from there to Iran by large boats and finally to Dubai. Bombay was once considered the dream city for many immigrants, a stepping stone to a better life. Before the liberalization of the economy, any product from around the world could be found in the Gulf markets, which then made its way to houses in Kerala. Gulf products, like radios, emergency lamps, and perfumes, were often brought back as gifts and were considered a mark of social status. The money sent back from the Gulf to Kerala amounts to around 73,000 crore rupees. It is undeniable that the remittances from Gulf migrants have significantly impacted the per capita income of Keralites. The influx of Gulf money contributed to the boom in the jewellery industry in Kerala, with many migrants becoming entrepreneurs in the gold market, both within Kerala and the Gulf. Today, many jewellery businesses in the Gulf are owned by Malayalees.

Despite frequent flights to and from the Gulf, it wasn't until 1991 that the first international airport in Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram International Airport, was officially opened. This was a huge blessing

for Malayalees, who previously had to endure long journeys by bus and train to reach their homes. Later on Kozhikode International Airport, located in Karippur, Malappuram district, was also opened with international status in 2006, serving as a major transit point for Gulf migrants, especially from Malabar. For centuries, Malayalees largely depended on agriculture, but the migration of the younger generation to the Gulf for better job opportunities, regardless of caste or religion, led to a labour shortage in agriculture. People began to view agricultural work as inferior and the society began to recognize Gulf workers in high regard. The migration to the Gulf sparked great progress in the construction sector, with people shifting from traditional houses to concrete houses and even large buildings, thanks to Gulf money. Many Gulf migrants usually aspire to own a house by the riverside. The Gulf migration also empowered the middle class in Kerala, as the inflow of Gulf money changed the state's economy. The existence of the middle class in Kerala can be attributed to the remittances from the Gulf. This shift also influenced the education system, with many Gulf migrants sending their children to the best schools. The migration provided opportunities especially for Muslim girls for education and many schools were established, particularly in Malabar. The development of Malappuram district is a testament to the positive impact of this migration. The rise in real estate investment was another major outcome of Gulf migration. Many Gulf migrants purchased land as a safe investment, leading to a significant increase in property prices. People blame Gulf migrants for this rise in land prices. Changes in food culture is another development with Gulf migrants introducing fast food like *Qubbus* and *Shawarma* to Kerala. Traditional Malayalee foods such as *Parippu Vada* and *Pazham Pori* gave way to these new culinary influences. In the Gulf, Malayalee migrants often named their food creations after Gulf cities, such as “Sharjah Sheikh” for a type of juice sold during the Sharjah Cup Cricket match. Gulf migrants also embraced a lifestyle of luxury, showcasing their wealth and status through grand weddings, often displaying their riches and prosperity. In the marriage market, a Gulf migrant's son or daughter is considered a desirable match. Today, every Gulf Malayalee reminds us of “Narayanan” the hero in the Malayalam movie *Pathemari*, where the migrant is seen as the backbone of the family, sacrificing everything for their loved

ones. However, despite their contributions, Gulf Malayalees have no right to vote in Indian elections, as they must return to India at their own expense if they wish to vote. The Gulf Malayalee remains an island unto themselves, an isolated figure, yet their importance in the family and the economy cannot be underestimated.

As I reflect upon my own life journey, I remember the moment I received my first salary. I felt like a star and self-satisfaction glittered in my eyes. The thought that this money was the result of my own hard work filled me with pride. At that moment, I thought of only one person; my father. No one understood his true struggles more than I did. My heart is filled with emotions that words cannot express. I often joked with my mother, saying, "Pride, or the colour of false pride, is white, just like my father's clothes." He may have lacked many things, but his dignity was never compromised. He was always there to help others, a constant, inexhaustible source of support.



Father receiving National Award for the best teacher from the Honourable President Sri. Gyani Sail Sing



Winners with The -Then prime minister Sri. Rajiv Gandhi

Leaf 19

With my first salary in hand, I returned from work a little early and went straight to the Invest Bank in Rollah to send money to my father. At that time 1000 Indian Rupees required 502 Dirhams as conversion. I kept some money for my personal expenses and the rest was sent to my father through a bank draft. Returning to my room, I wrote a letter to my father and posted it along with the draft, a great moment of happiness! Days and months passed by and I enjoyed my bachelor life. We had a TV in our room and every Thursday night at 10 PM, a Hindi movie would be aired. After finishing dinner on Thursdays, we would sit in front of the TV. Amitabh Bachchan was the favourite actor of the Arabs and mostly his movies were shown. The movie Sholay was aired hundreds of times. Around that time, VCRs (Vedio Csette Recorder) became available. Large, heavy machines! We heard they were available for rent. On Thursdays, we would rent a VCR for 100 Dirhams for one day. We had to pledge our work permits to get the VCR. The cassette rental was 20 Dirhams per movie. We would watch the movie, often staying awake the entire night to get the maximum value for our money. We would watch two or three movies without sleep to fully utilise the rental amount. Every evening, I would visit Moidukka's textile shop (Vibjiyor). Many people from our place would gather there and on Fridays, the shop was crowded, with people from various regions speaking different languages coming together like in a festival. Those living far away would meet and exchange news and those who had recently returned from India would bring items sent by relatives. The crowd would stay until late at night.

Rola Square was also a centre for street vendors. One day, Moidukka informed me that he was going to India and that I should move into his flat to keep company for his brother-in-law, Moidu. So, every night, I stayed at Moidukka's flat. One day, there was heavy

rain and I heard about the hailstorm for the first time. Big ice cubes fell from the sky and a strong cyclone drifted away the cars near Al Mulla Plaza. Many cars met with accidents, a frightening sight that still haunts my memories. The next morning, the flat was filled with mud, sand and water and I had to clean it up with great difficulty. While I was making an omelette for the breakfast, I accidentally touched the pan and the boiling oil splashed onto my right hand. Moidu had been to work and I was alone in the flat. Since I knew nothing about cooking, I had used too much oil. My right hand was severely burned and I couldn't bear the pain. I ran to my room, Suresh and Premettan, accompanied me to Kuwait Hospital in Sharjah. By the time we arrived, the burn had worsened. I had to cut off the sleeve of my shirt for the sake of treatment. I stayed in the hospital for three days and when I returned to my room, my right hand was bandaged and was put in a sling. I spent three weeks in my room, unable to even write a letter to my father. The burn marks are still visible on my right hand. The doctor told me that I might not be able to continue my job at the press, so I began looking for another job. Suresh had a Lebanese friend, Waleed, who ran a company called "Marge Arabian Gulf." I got a job there as an office assistant in Ajman, which was about a half-hour journey from Sharjah. At that time, shared taxis were available for 2 Dirhams. The work was fine and I took care of office matters, typing out quotations and handling small tasks. I continued working with my injured right hand, using my left hand for all purposes. The company's main business was selling marble imported from Italy and Beirut and it also had a factory in Ajman. Gradually, I was allowed to visit the market to promote sales. I would approach construction companies with marble samples, walking for kilometres carrying heavy sample bags to save on taxi fares. This way, I could send the full amount of my salary back to my father. During those days, to travel to Abu Dhabi, we had to pass through a checkpoint at Jebel Ali. Dubai taxis would drop passengers there and then they would switch to Abu Dhabi taxis. The road was narrow and when there was a strong wind, the sand would cover the road, making the journey difficult. Development was in its first stage and the desert people were trying to create an oasis with whatever they had like magic! The country was turning fuel into

money. Abu Dhabi was known as a city of rich people, with higher salaries but also higher expenses. That's when I started thinking about moving in there, I knew that I needed a driving license to secure a good job. Back then, it was said that having a driving license was as valuable as an IAS degree in India. It was very hard to get the license, so I joined Al Qasmiya Driving School in Sharjah, which cost 1,800 Dirhams to learn until the license was obtained. Since I hadn't learned driving in India, I started from scratch. After two months of training, I passed the reverse, bridge and H-test. Then, I attended the road test two months later and passed it on the first attempt itself. It was a big achievement, as many people failed even after taking the test 10 to 20 times.

By the time I completed one and a half years in Sharjah, one memory still lingers in my mind of which I was feeling proud of. Every evening after work, I would visit Moidukka's textile shop. Moidukka's brother-in-law, Moidu, would wait for me so he could entrust the cash to someone reliable. My father heard from his friend Khader Master that Moidu considered me a person he could trust. This made my father proud of me. In life, trust and responsibility are essential and I consider that to be trustworthy is not just a duty but it must be part of our character. My father could take pride in knowing that I had upheld this. In the meantime, I joined the Sharjah Indian Association, but I wasn't very active. The association was involved in many social activities. I frequently visited Dubai and for just 25 Fils, I could take a boat from Deira Abra to Bur Dubai. Venu Ettan lived there and sometimes I would visit Khader's electronic shop (Khader Centre) in Dubai, a popular spot for Malayalees from Kannur. Dubai is like a second home to many of us. People from different parts of the world migrated to Dubai, which became the business capital of the Gulf. Dubai grew rapidly into an international city, known for its famous constructions like the Burj Dubai and Palm Islands. Its economy was once driven by business and oil, but now it is focused on tourism, real estate and financial trade. Dubai attracted global attention with its developments and became a hub for industry and commerce.

One funny incident happened when I went to get my driving license. I went early in the morning, submitted my papers and waited

for my name to be called. The time was approaching that is 11 AM and my name hadn't been announced yet. I approached the counter and the officer shouted at me, saying that my name had been called at 9 AM. I argued that I did not hear it. The officer then read out my name as "Ginjadharan Yasooda Amaran" instead of "Gangadharan, Yeshoda Amarnath." I thought it might have been someone else's name. Eventually, the officer realized the mistake and helped me to get my license without further delay. The same day, I resigned my job and decided to move on to Abu Dhabi. My friends in Sharjah were sad about my departure. People like Manoharan, Sadu, Suresh, Hareesh, Narayanettan and Ramettan had become like family members. We realized how close we had become and it was hard to leave them. I bid farewell to my local guardian, Moidukka and began my journey to the capital, full of dreams and hope for the future. I went straight to the room of Remeshu Ettan, the son of my aunt, where I used to stay whenever I had visited Abu Dhabi before. There were three of us living in a single room near the Indian School in Muroor. During those days, exorbitant rent in Abu Dhabi forced people to live in cramped spaces.

The next day, I started looking for a job. There was a large printing press near our residence, where the newspaper 'Al Fagr' was published. I got a job as a sales representative in the commercial printing section and started working the following day. My boss was a Sri Lankan named D'Souza. Working in the marketing section, I met many people, but my salary was modest. Still, I continued to practice driving and became familiar with the city, all while searching for a better job.



Pictures from Gulf Reflecting Progress

Leaf 20

There was a time when rain was rare in the UAE. Sometimes, a sudden shower occurred without any warning signs. The construction of the existing buildings did not match for rain and during the night, we realized that it was raining, only when water started leaking into the rooms from the terrace. Many nights, we could sleep only after draining water off the terrace. There were even nights when we had to sleep inside our vehicles. Certain days, when we returned to our room in the afternoon, we found it was flooded with gutter water to a considerable height. We, then had to bring in wooden planks and stand on them to bail out the dirty water using gunny bags. These are a few of the memories of a time in the Gulf. The present generation may find it hard to believe these stories of our hardships, but we lived through them. The seashore land in Abu Dhabi, filled with salt mines and swamps, transforms into flat desert land as you move inland. The coastal areas are extremely hot and humid, while as you go deeper inland, the humidity decreases and you experience more dryness. During the hot season, temperatures rise sharply and rain rarely exceeds 10 centimetres, often being irregular. Sometimes, there would be no rain for years. From winter until the middle of the hot season, strong sandstorms, known as *Shamal*, would blow. These storms are very dangerous. The opposite weather conditions, combined with a shortage of manure on the earth, were not conducive to agriculture. Inland areas of the Emirates are generally deserts, but in oases, date palms and *alfalfa* (a type of grass, a favourite food for cattle) grow. Other desert plants include acacia and salt-bush. Fruit trees also grew yielding profit. The larger Al Ain Oasis had developed into a residential and agricultural hub. After the Sahara and Australian deserts, the Arabian Desert is the third largest desert in the world. A major portion of the Arabian Peninsula is part of the Arabian Desert. This vast, sandy area keeps temperatures around 50°C and above, though temperatures drop at night. The harsh

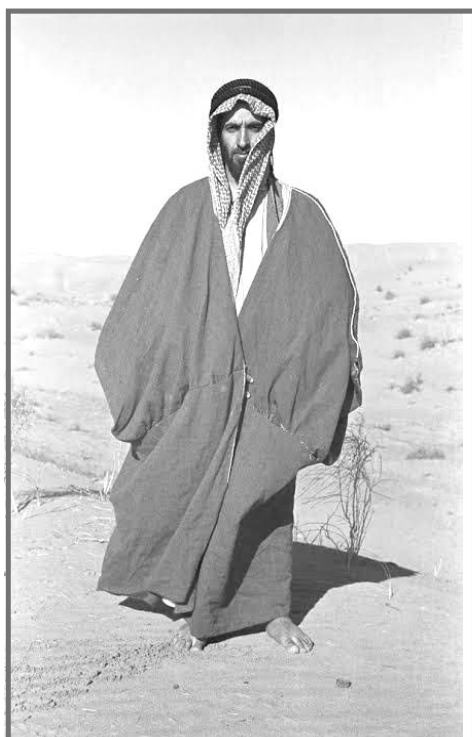
climate limits the possibility of plant and livestock existence in the region. Normally, only camels are found in the desert. However, despite being few in number, several mammals like the Arabian Oryx live in the inner areas of the desert. In far remote areas, where vehicles cannot reach, animals like hyenas, Arabian leopards, Arabian wolves, Arabian red foxes, Arabian sand cats, Arabian tahr and Arabian wildcats thrive. These mammals live in the oases and bushes. A camel's hump can store up to 80 pounds of fat, which is useful during unfavourable conditions when food is scarce. Local Arabs constitute only about 20% of the total population of Abu Dhabi. Migrants from neighbouring Muslim countries, like Iran, make up another 10%. The majority of the population consists of foreign workers who have migrated for employment, with Indians and Pakistanis making up more than 50%. People from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh are also common, while Europeans are the minority. The UAE's labour laws grant employment rights primarily to local Arabs, ensuring their standard of living and financial security. Given the changing times, the government is working to modify these laws.

Oil was discovered in Abu Dhabi in 1958. ADMA-OPCO (Abu Dhabi Marine Operating Company), partially owned by the UK, France, and Japan, is responsible for oil production in Abu Dhabi. The government holds authority over the oil producers in the Emirate. Foreign companies are involved in extracting oil from offshore deposits. Key extraction points include Um Al Sherif, Al Mubaras and Al Banduq. American companies have begun extracting oil from newly discovered deposits after extensive exploration. There is an agreement to share production from the Al Banduq oil fields with Qatar. The UAE's current policy is to freeze the concessions and technical partnerships granted to foreign countries. The UAE aims to invest a significant portion of the wealth generated from oil in promoting agriculture and trade, benefiting the Abu Dhabi Emirate. Water storage through borewells in Al Ain and neighbouring areas has helped significantly in cultivating fruits and vegetables, which has sparked interest in agriculture. The Arid Land Research Centre leads efforts to convert desert land into agricultural areas. As part of its strategy to reduce reliance on petroleum, the UAE established a Thermal Power Plant in Abu Dhabi that uses natural gas as fuel. The electricity produced meets the city's domestic needs and is also

sold to neighbouring countries. Al Ruwais, located 224 kilometres from Abu Dhabi, is the centre for petroleum refining and related businesses. Major business centres include ADMA-OPCO, ADGAS, Thakkeer, Atheer, Buruj, and ADCO, all functioning under the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). The uneducated local Arabs once saw their paradise in the rent they collected from their residential properties. They would use a large vehicle with a big bucket to collect rent from their tenants and once the bucket is full, they would count the money.

Often, the bucket would overflow. Arabs were happy with these informal money dealings. Even when provided with better accommodations, local Arabs known as *Bedouins* were content living in the desert with their camels. They maintain strong and sometimes intense relationships. Local Arabs regard Indians as trustworthy and loyal and they often treat them with great affection. The local Arabs were largely illiterate and innocent, keeping their relationships very straightforward. There are poor Arabs in the desert, who live modestly, attending their camels and cultivating date palms. The government helps them in various ways. In Abu Dhabi, there are about five communities of local Arabs and the current generation is a continuation of the older one. Most of the local Arabs reside in Al Ain. The new generation becomes headstrong or rebellious, often due to the abundance of money and luxuries. They focus only on the present, not the past. However, with the advancement of education, there is growing hope that they will come to understand of the changing world.

In the past, Arabs believed that Indians had come to the UAE in search of jobs due to poverty. The phrase *Hindi Miskeen* reflects this view. Many of us were responsible for this mistaken notion, as a few Indians fabricated stories of poverty to gain sympathy to secure jobs. Our inherent tendency is to decline work in India but to accept any menial job available abroad. Those who sought money at any cost contributed to making our country look poor. Furthermore, a few of our own elders taught the Arabs vices like robbery and cheating. Today, the situation is changing. Arabs are now studying in India and other countries and the ruler of Sharjah, Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, is a leading example of this trend.



Leaf 21

I had the opportunity to travel throughout the Abu Dhabi and gain practical experience during the first one or two months of my service as a Sales Executive. At the same time, I continued searching for a better job. One day, Pradeepettan (Lallettan) informed me about a vacancy at a company called 'Pipeline Services'. When I went over there, I found that the company had been relocated to another place. On my way back, I noticed a different company near the elevator. It was "Coflexip Flex Services," a name with a Western flair. Out of curiosity, I decided to visit the company. Knocked the door and entered the lobby. A white woman was sitting at the reception. I asked her, "Madam, do you have any vacancy here?" This situation reminded me of an old joke: A man, dressed in a coat, was asked by another if he could give the coat to him. The man ignored the request and walked away. The second man then said to a third person listening to the conversation, "Maybe my request was in vain, but if I do get it, I will get a coat, if I don't I lose just a word" Sometimes, luck appears in unexpected forms, like in the guise of a European lady. She asked me to take a seat and offered me coffee. Her name was Pola Saviour and she was from France. Shortly after, a French gentleman named Saviour Pradel came in. He took me into a room where I met another gentleman, Frederic Delormal, the company's Operations Manager. What followed was an interview. In those days, many people were on free visas and searching for jobs and I was not different. Eventually, by God's grace I was offered a position as Purchasing Assistant in the Logistics Department. It was an unexpected job with a good salary, car and other benefits. I thought my struggles were finally over. The company offered me one more offer too: If I could learn how to operate wireless radios, they would provide accommodation and a special salary for that. I gladly accepted. Coflexip was subcontracting work for ZADCO under the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). It

was a marine operation company with a 60% share owned by the French government and shares from ETPM and ELF Acquitina. This was one of the few companies in the world involved in laying underwater pipelines for oil, gas and even electric and telephone cables. The company also worked on projects transporting oil from oil wells to refineries. Additionally, they were responsible for laying telephone cables from the Gulf to India beneath the sea. They were the only company in the world with a submarine ship that could simultaneously cut channels and lay cables under the sea together. Hundreds of divers worked for this company in the deep sea.

In the office, there were four Indians, with the rest of the team being French and one British man, Alen Peter, the Finance Controller. The Indians were from Tamil Nadu: Ramanathan, Ravi and Farooq. Ramanathan was an accountant, Ravi was the telex operator, Farooq was a draftsman and I was the Local Purchasing Assistant, reporting to a French manager who handled international purchasing also. Telex was the only means of communication during those times. I saw a computer for the first time in my life at the company. It was a large box (CPU) with a screen with the size of a television and the printer was as big as a washing machine! The printing process was slow. One had to wait minutes to get it printed after loading the paper. It was a time when I felt the excitement of gaining new knowledge and experiences. My new office was located on Istiqlal Street in Abu Dhabi. I joined the company the very next day. The radio room had a cot and special arrangements. Communication with the ship's crew was done via wireless radio. Reports came in from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. and we had to record them and convert them into telex messages to send to ZADCO and ADNOC. Slowly, I learned how to operate the telex machine and also started to understand the French accents better. It was a new job, a new residence and a completely new environment. When the office was closed at 7 p.m., I would be alone in a large flat, with only a small TV. I would often call my cousin Mohanan in Saudi Arabia and our conversations would last for hours. Meals were from restaurants and the best Indian restaurants at the time were Emirates Casino on Khalifa Street and Arab Uduppi in Diwan Ameri. Having a good job is everyone's dream. Once I had that, peace of mind naturally fol-

lowed. When I received my first salary, I felt truly satisfied. I sent all of it to my father, as I didn't have a bank account. In fact, my father was my bank. The company paid salaries by cheque, so I opened an account at the Abu Dhabi National Bank and began cashing my salary. There was a money exchange nearby called Musandam, where I would take a draft in my father's name and send it by post. Those were moments filled with immense pride and self-satisfaction. At that time, getting a phone connection at home was a big deal. But we had a phone at home on account of the printing & publications license and it was the only one in that area. The company allowed me to make a 5-minute call home each week. There was no direct dialling, so I had to book the call-in advance. One of my friends, T.P.Abdul Khader, who worked at the Telephone Exchange often gave me extra time to talk. Speaking to my family was a special moment of joy. It took six more months before I could get leave to go home. I was returning home after two and a half years and started preparing for the journey filled with dreams.

For expatriates, going back home for a vacation is a grand celebration though very expensive. Everyone expected gifts and they had big expectations because they believed that all expatriates are all rich. We couldn't blame them, as the luxurious lifestyle of expatriates contributed to these perceptions. There was a strong sense of closeness amongst the relatives and especially the villagers as a whole. We used to share everything, our problems, our feelings and everything in our life, whether it is good or bad. We were a generation that felt like one big family, bound by love and simplicity. Today we hardly even know our neighbours. I had made preparations for my first trip to home which filled my heart with joy and warmth. The thought of homemade food prepared by my beloved mother, a cold bath with well water and the serene atmosphere of my village, no tall buildings, just the sky above and the rain during the *Karkitakam*(Monsoon) month; all were the much-awaited sweet moments. It was a vacation which stirred up deep emotions and made me spirited. For the expatriates, striving for the fulfilment of half-fulfilled dreams, the vacation is like a blanket woven with memories and expectations, waiting to provide comfort during times of hardships and shelter during the cold, dark days ahead.

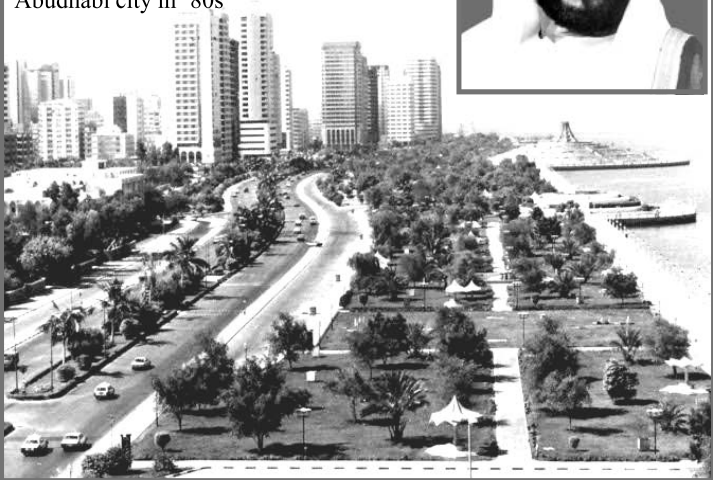
The Gulf



The Visionary Leader
who changed the UAE's identity-
Shaikh Zayed Bin Sulthan Al Nehyan



Abudhabi city in '80s



Leaf 22

It was a journey with my heart full of the mist of migration and with the fragrance of Arabia to adorn the umbilical cord of my home land! 3 long years of life in an unknown land had the weight of 30 years. The happy journey to Thiruvananthapuram was on 13th July 1983. The far away sky was drawing the pictures of near and dear back home. The smell of my house had an intoxicating feeling! An expatriate's first return to his sweet home with gifts for the loved ones and familiar faces. Back to my own birth place! A journey across the ocean to meet everyone waiting eagerly at the homeland. The much-awaited return of a sensitive young man who went to the desert with heavy heart and fallen eye lids. But the feeling that the vacation would last only for 15 days made me sad and dull. Even though the first international flight had landed at Trivandrum in the year 1977, the airport at the state capital had not yet been endowed with the international status. However international aeroplanes were operational. When I looked out through the glass window of the plane the sight of greeneries of our place made my eyes wet. My own earth and my own native place. This kind of feelings would be experienced by every Malayali who returns back home from the Gulf. I engaged a room in Jose International hotel in Trivandrum, travelled to Kannur next day in a Kerala state transport bus and reached home in the evening. When I reached the radiance and sanctum sanctorum of my loving mother, I sobbed in an unknown ecstasy. Three years of my feeling of loneliness, the sense of loss and the longing for my beloved; everything burst out as in a torrent of rain. My mind was filled with emotions which I cannot explain myself. When people reached home from the Gulf countries relatives and villagers used to flock around them. Many people came to my house including my teachers. I found a lot of modifications at my house and in my village. Gulf money had made a lot of changes around coupled with modern amenities. 'Opening box' of the expatriate was a great

formality in those days! It was my father's exclusive right. My father who was very liberal made everyone happy. The entire area came to experience the fragrance of *Athar* (Fragrance). My father was feeling prouder than me. Whatever sufferings I had to undergo in the past were all disappeared. I do not value anything else other than the happiness of my father, mother and my brothers and I was on top of that happiness. My father always used to say that the best relationship in this world is not between mother and son and not between father and son, but between brothers and sisters because they sprout from the same womb. There is no other relation above that. I am proud to say that we four brothers do keep and maintain that relationship even now!

15 days of vacation was not enough to describe the stories of 3 long years. I met relatives, friends, neighbours and villagers. My father had already started Sangam Book Stall in Kannur on the 2nd floor of Ayurvedashramam building in the old bus stand as the franchisee of current books. Every year Sangam Book Stall used to organise Book Festival lasting up to one week in Kannur Town Hall. The first Book Festival was inaugurated by Beypore Sultan Vaikam Mohammed Basheer. He came with his wife Fabia. Vaikam Mohammed Basheer was a Novelist par excellence in Malayalam literature. The common trait in his short stories and novels are simplicity and sense of joke. He hides joking criticisms between the lines in his creations which lead the readers from pleasure to deep thoughts. He had no parallels for that matter. He was a freedom fighter of India against the British and was also a fighter for human rights as well. He was crowned with a special position in Malayalam Literature. He was born as the eldest son of a Timber Merchant at Thalayola Paramba near Vaikom in Kottayam District. From his young age he was attracted by Gandhian thoughts and philosophies. When the fight against British was at its heights, Gandhiji came down to Vaikom and Mohmed Basheer left his house disregarding the objection raised by the Head Master and went to see Mahatma Gandhi. When he came back home, he told his mother proudly that he touched Gandhiji. That was a turning point. The unstoppable thirst for Independence made him walk up to Ernakulam and got into the train going to Kozhikode. He became active in the agitation for independence. He went to jail

in 1930 for participating in the Salt Sathyagraha. Then he organised an extremist organisation like Bhagath Singh. For the first time his write up was published on the "Title page" of the said organisation by name of *Ujjeevanam*. The pen name he used was "Prabha". The knowledge and experience he had from travelling across many parts of India was inspirations for his creations. Most of the books written by him were translated into other languages. That was how Vaikkom Mohammed Basheer of Malayalam became famous around the world. A few of his famous books are: Pathummayude Aadu, Baalyakaala Sakhi, Mathilukal, Ntuppappakkoranandarunnu, Prema Lekhanam, *Anargha Nimisham*.

His first story published in *Jayakesari* edited by Padmanabha Pai was *Thankam*. Basheer approached the Editor in search of a job. Editor replied that he was not able to give him a job. but if he could write a story that will be published and suitable remuneration will be paid. Hence, he was forced to write a story. With black complexioned and disfigured heroine and hero with lame legs, squint eyes and with hunch back. That was the story he wrote by name *Thankam*. The uniqueness of the stories written by Mohmed Basheer (called by the Malayalees with love as 'Beypur Sultan') were new ideas, character moulding without mistakes and presentation with no comparison. Love, poverty, hard truths of life etc. were the themes for his writings. Mohmed Basheer entered the world of literature with the story of Kesavan Nair from the high society and a jobless heroine from the Christian community named Sarama. This is a love story with humorous touch titled as *Premalekhanam*. Vaikom Mohamed Basheer showed the new stream of styles in Malayalam Literature. He was also one of the promoters of modern literature in Malayalam. It was because of his versatility that the literature of Vaikom Mohmed Basheer grew up as a special branch of literature in Malayalam. He made his readers laugh with his humour and at the same time took them to tears when he narrated the stories of those who were living deep down in the society. Basheer's was a world of fantasy of culprits, beggars, prostitutes etc. Up to that time, there was no place for such characters in the Malayalam literature. His questions and criticism to the societies were reflected in his humours. It was Mohmed Basheer who put an end to the practice of keeping

the people of high position as heroes and making the low-grade people as villains in novels. The gravity of severe experience in life made his characters everlasting! There was a specific reason behind changing his name to Vaikom Mohmed Basheer. In his own words, “I accepted my name as Vaikom Mohmed Basheer just to save a person. I wrote articles and dramas criticising and making fun of *Sachirothaman*. The Police was behind Mohmed Basheer for writing all these. Police were suspecting one of the Mohmed Basheers from Paravoor. I decided to modify my name to save that poor man. Thalayola Paramb is pretty long. Therefore, adding the name of the taluk, I made it as Vaikkum Mohmed Basheer. So Paravoor Mohamed Basheer escaped.”

Mohmed Basheer won Sahitya Academy Award in 1970. The country adorned him with Padmashree in 1982. Mohmed Basheer was a great artist who drew the pictures of emotions with great dexterity. He is taking eternal rest on the other side of the *Mathil* of life, he is still with every one of us as a loving young friend.



Sangam Book festival Inauguration

Leaf 23

How quickly two weeks of my vacation vanished! My heart grew heavier every day, but I knew life had to move ahead. I am not to stay more than the expiry date of my leave. Saying goodbye was very painful. I couldn't stop my tears. My father, uncle and Eleyachan accompanied me to Thiruvananthapuram. My house was filled with people who came to bid farewell. The only emotion on their faces was pain and sorrow which was a reflection of my own. As the plane ascended into the sky, it was like carrying away not only my body but also my soul. The heaviness of my heart that time was heavier than the one during my first journey to the Gulf. When my feet touched the ground at Abu Dhabi, I was longing for the next trip to home. How long would I have to wait for that? Again, I got immersed myself in my work. I had made it a habit to visit the Indian Social Centre (ISC) every evening with my colleague Ramnath. I also became a member of ISC. The ISC is the largest organization for the Indian community in the U.A.E, open to anyone from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. It is a platform to foster cultural activities, sports and arts for Indians abroad. Along with ISC, there were other state-level organizations also. The Malayalee Samajam was the most prominent. Unfortunately, due to political influences, these organizations often split into different fractions, such as Kerala Cultural Centre and the Islamic Centre. I became a member of the Malayalee Samajam too. Many prominent people visiting the Gulf would meet these associations and ISC had even hosted a visit of Indira Gandhi.

Before my commencement of my vacation, I was exempted from night duty, which made me search for another accommodation. I found a flat in the Tourist Club Area through a newspaper advt. It was a four-bedroom flat with 12 inmates, including my close friends with whom I built strong relationships, like Devadas (whom we affectionately called Dasettan), Hussain, Jalil, Rehman (Remanikka), Jacob, Gireesan, P.T. Kunhu Mohmed, Khaderkka, Salikka, Ibrahim,

Rahim, etc. Sadly, two of them passed away during their stay with us. The death of Khaderkka, due to fever, was especially painful. One day, when I returned from work, Khaderkka was sitting on the sofa with a glass of water in his hand. He hadn't been for work that day. I asked if he had taken food, but he said he did not want anything. I had my meal and took rest in my room. By the late afternoon, when everyone else had gone to work, I heard a noise and rushed to find Khaderkka had collapsed, still holding the glass. I immediately gave him first aid. Thinking it might be a heart attack, I kept calling his name, but my calls soon turned to cries as he did not respond. I rushed to find help, calling Veeravunni, a relative of Khaderkka by running to the adjacent building where he was working. There were no mobile phones then. When Veeravunni saw the scene, he fainted in shock. Then, I had two people to take care of; Khaderkka, near death and Veeravunni, who was unconscious. I managed to revive Veeravunni with cold water, then ran downstairs to call the people in the shop below and a known doctor too. The doctor confirmed that Khaderkka was no more. It was a harsh truth to accept. Khaderkka was scheduled to return home in just two days and had been busy packing up. I still remember that night, when Khaderkka, P.T. Kunhu Mohmed (currently a cinema director) and I had dinner together. Khaderkka was always making jokes and keeping us entertained, so his sudden death came as a shock to all of us.

Migration means different things to different people. For a few people, it is an escape, a door to a new life. But very few only reach their destination without stumbling along the way. Migration is a cycle, only to return. Migrants often limit their desires and live with endless worries and life is a battleground of hopes and disappointments. Society often judges expatriates by the luxurious way they live, but only a few understand the challenges they face. Some writers, like M Mukundan and Benyamin, have attempted to depict the true lives of expatriates. Khaderkka was one of them. He lived each day of his life as though it was a century. He would often jokingly ask, "Could I see my daughter again?" But the deeper meaning of that question was never fully understood. When his body jerked in my arms, I felt as if he had more to tell me, but I had lost the strength to hold on. What pained me more than seeing his lifeless body was looking at the box containing gifts he had gathered for his family. During those

times, house rent was escalating rapidly and we watched as our rent, initially 20,000 Dirhams, increased year after year, to 100,000 Dirhams. When that happened in our case also, we had to vacate the flat and move to a building near the Modern Printing Press on Electra Street. Abu Dhabi had become one of the world's most expensive cities at that time. Our new location provided us with many interesting experiences. Deepak, my best friend from Elayavoor, was always by my side. He had a knack for preparing delicious dishes every day. We would choose someone to wash the dishes by drawing lots, but we would always make sure that the unlucky person was selected without them knowing.

I continued my job without any issues and I went home once or twice in between. In 1983, the first television and video system arrived at my house, along with a washing machine. At that time, we had to get a license to own a TV or even a radio and the customs department used to impose heavy duties on these items. Thanks to our relative Damodaran Nambiar in customs, with whose help I managed to bring these items home. The company, which had a policy of only granting two weeks of leave, had good news during that period: They were awarded a major contract in India for the Thapthi River Project. Thapthi is the river that flows between the Godavari and Narmada Rivers. The project, which involved laying underground electrified cables from the Maharashtra Oil Field, was a four-year contract and the office was to be set up in Bombay. I was excited about the prospects of working in Bombay, as it would allow me to visit home frequently. However, my excitement was short-lived. By then, domestic violence had erupted in France, with extremists attacking the Indian Embassy, killing many Indians. To retaliate, Indira Gandhi cancelled all contracts with France, including the one with Coflexip, which was part of the French government. As a result, the project was also cancelled and we were disappointed. Meanwhile, the company faced difficulties in securing new contracts in Abu Dhabi and we feared that we might lose our job in the company after the expiry of our current contract.

Leaf 24

The arrival of television at home demonstrated the profound impact TV had on the news media. Hundreds of people gathered at our house to watch the funeral rites of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The funeral ceremonies of such a towering personality were deeply emotional and remained as an unforgettable one in my memory. In the morning of October 31, 1984, the famous British playwright Mr. Peter Ustinov was waiting for Mrs. Indira Gandhi for an interview at the Prime Minister's office at Akbar Road. Mrs. Gandhi was walking from the Prime Minister's residence at Safdarjung Road to meet him. The threat to Indira's life after "Operation Blue Star" from Khalistani extremists compelled her to wear a bulletproof jacket whenever she left her residence. However, on that day, she chose not to wear it, as she had to attend an interview. Within moments she left her residence and she was near the wicket gate, where the Sub Inspector Bhiyand Singh was stationed. Indira smiled at him, but he responded by firing bullet at her. Bhiyand Singh fired several bullets into her chest and stomach. Indira collapsed down. The constable Satwanth Singh also opened fire with his stun gun. Once confirmed that Indira was dead, Bhiyand Singh raised his arms and shouted, "What I wanted to do, I have done. Now you can do whatever you want." This was an act of revenge for Indira's military intervention at the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Peter Ustinov, who was only 78 meters away from the scene, clearly heard the gunshots.

Indira Gandhi was born on November 19, 1917 and her life ended on October 31- 1984. If asked who was the most respected Prime Minister of India, the answer would be naturally Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. But if the question was about the most respected yet most hated Prime Minister, the answer would undoubtedly be Indira Gandhi. Her life was extraordinary, full of power and pain, as explored in the book 'Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography' by Inder

Malhotra. In the mid-1960s, Feroz Gandhi introduced Indira to Inder Malhotra. Their friendship lasted until Indira's death, with the exception of the Emergency period. The book was praised by renowned economist and diplomat John Kenneth Galbraith as a clear account of Indira's life. Galbraith noted that her life was profoundly influenced by her father, Jawaharlal Nehru. It was also shaped by the foundations laid by her grandfather Motilal Nehru and her mother Kamala Nehru. Motilal Nehru, the head of the family, was initially shocked upon learning that his daughter in law had given birth to a girl. He, however, told his wife Swarup Rani that Indira would prove to be more capable than any boy. He named her Indira, in memory of his mother, Indrani. even when angry Motilal was always ready to meet Indira's needs. Indira grew up fiercely independent and defied any setbacks. Her early life was marked by her rejection of any submission. When her sons Rajiv and Sanjay went to England for their studies, Indira contemplated of moving England as well, but abandoned the idea upon sensing that she was being side lined in the Congress Party. Indira's resilience was largely shaped by the difficulties her mother Kamala faced in her life. Kamala was from a rural background and was not as educated as her husband Jawaharlal Nehru. This led to friction within Nehru's family, especially his mother Swarup Rani and his sisters Krishna and Vijayalakshmi, who looked down at Kamala. Indira's first fight was against those who insulted her mother, particularly Vijayalakshmi. When Kamala went to Switzerland for tuberculosis treatment, Indira accompanied her. On her second trip, Kamala passed away in Lausanne, Switzerland, when Indira was just 19 years old. After her mother's death, Nehru sent Indira to England for her studies, though she was later drawn back to India due to her growing affection for Feroz Gandhi, whom she had met in Switzerland. Indira's marriage to Feroz Gandhi on March 26, 1942, despite objections from her family, marked the beginning of a deep bond. They had their honeymoon in the Kashmir mountains, which Indira loved. Rajiv was born two years later, followed by Sanjay. Despite some issues in their marriage, particularly after Nehru's death when Feroz felt neglected, Indira remained committed to her family and her political career.

Indira's journey towards becoming the Prime Minister in 1966 was supported by the Congress Party's Syndicate, who saw her as a way to prevent Morarji Desai from taking charge. Initially, many leaders were sceptical about her abilities. Ram Manohar Lohia once dismissed her as an "idiot," underestimating her potential. Indira was a voracious reader, with Joan of Arc and French President Charles de Gaulle being her models. She had a strong sense of her own beauty and once she herself requested plastic surgery to reduce the size of her nose after an accident. She grew up under the shadow of Nehru, but after his death, she led India through major challenges, including the 1971 war with Pakistan, which earned her global recognition. The Emergency period of the 1970s marked a turning point in Indira's leadership. While it led to nationalization of banks and social reforms, it also tarnished her reputation, with accusations of authoritarianism and dictatorship. The people of India eventually brought her back to power, though by then, her leadership was often questioned. During her final speech, Indira spoke of her unwavering commitment to India, foreshadowing her tragic end. The television at our home allowed everyone to witness the nation's farewell to Indira Priya Darshini, a woman who had touched the hearts of millions.




Motilal Nehru Swarnp Rani Nehru

CHILDREN





Jawaharlal Nehru

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit

Krishna Kutchersing





Kamala Nehru

Ranjit Sitaram Pandit

Gunottam P. Kutchersing

CHILDREN






Indira Gandhi

Kajoram Sahgal

Harsha Kutchersing

Ajit Kutchersing




Feroze Gandhi

Helen Kutchersing

CHILDREN




Rajiv Gandhi

Sanjay Gandhi




Sonia Gandhi

Maneka Gandhi

CHILDREN





Rahul Gandhi

Priyanka Gandhi

Varun Gandhi



Robert Vadra

CHILDREN

Miraya Vadra

Raihan Vadra





Indira's Era

Leaf 25

When we owned a TV and a video player at home, cinema became a regular activity for our family and also for the neighbours. Video cassettes were available for rent back then. Krishna Kumar, the son of our former Chief Minister Shri E.K. Nayanar and a close friend of my younger brother Yeshodharan, was running a video shop next to our book stall in Kannur. The shop was called 'Waves' and we often borrowed cassettes from there. Suja got married on May 30th, 1985, she had asked me to be there early for the wedding. Shree Kutti Krishnan Nambiar, my mother's elder brother, was a teacher at Puzhathi School. He was married to Bhargavi Ammayi, who was also a teacher at Korjan School. Sujatha is their eldest daughter. Sujatha's marriage became a significant turning point in my life. After the wedding, I joined the marriage reception, which was held at her husband Radhakrishnan's house in Madapeedika, Thalassery. Radhakrishnan was a lecturer at Kerala Varma College in Thrissur.

Unexpectedly, my eyes were drawn as in a trance, towards a face at the reception function. I couldn't help but admire that face, longing to see that face again and again. I threw stealing glances, secretly and openly. My father used to mention that my marriage should happen during my next vacation. The new face I saw at the reception seemed to match with my father's wish. My mind kept asking, "Why not this girl?" But how could I approach her? We returned after the reception, but the aura of that new person stayed with me, though only in my thoughts. What I needed now was maturity, not the impulsiveness of youth. The next day, Suja and her husband visited our house. I saw this as an opportunity and told Suja about the girl who had captured my thoughts. She told me the girl's name is Shanthi, and her house was just opposite to Suja's husband's. Shanthi's mother was a teacher at Mahe and her father worked as a business controller for Brook Bond India limited. I asked Suja to

speak to Shanthi's family and inform me their response. My heart was filled with sweet vibrations of the new face. Two days later, Suja came to inform me that Shanthi's family had no objections for the marriage. I felt as if I had conquered the world. But the next challenge was how to present the matter before my father whom I, not only loved but also respected very much. Sometimes he might be still considering me as a toddler whom he caressed and pampered during my childhood. I was not sure whether it was modest from the part of boys to propose his own marriage in front of his father. I made up my mind to harbour on epistolary method which would be safer for our relationship in future. To be frank I did not have the courage to face my father. Hence, I wrote down everything in the form of a letter and gave it to my mother. At that time, the first floor of our house was used only by me, so I sent the letter from the first floor to the ground floor. I asked my mother to read it first and pass it on to my father. Then, I slipped to my room upstairs with all my might. My mother, too, was shy about the matter. I stood by the window like a groom, anxiously waiting for the developments downstairs, but there was utter silence throughout the night. I felt too shy to go down. I decided to wait till my father left for school the next morning. However, my father didn't leave until 9 o'clock, which made me even more tensed. There was no bathroom upstairs and I felt uncomfortable. Finally, I decided to go down answering the call of the nature.

My father was waiting to go to the bank, which would open at 10 'o' clock. To my surprise he casually told my mother, "I'll ask Kittettan to inquire." Kittettan was my father's close friend and my uncle. I felt a sense of relief at my father's words. When my father left for the bank and my mother went to school, I discussed the proposal with my grandmother, who said, "Maybe it's for the best." I remained restless, thinking about Shanthi and eager to see her once more. I told my friends Sreeni and Dathan and we went to Thalassery in search of the location of her house. We searched many places but couldn't find it. Disappointed, we returned home. Later, I wrote a letter to Shanthi, though I didn't know her exact address and posted it to an imaginable location. The letter began, "If you shake the flower tree of love, thousands of dreams may fall." Nevertheless, the letter

returned safely and unopened by post for want of the correct addressee after our marriage. A line from Kumaranasan, the great poet would explain my condition: 'World rises from love and looks for completion through love. Love is the power of the world and true happiness is nothing but love.' As my vacation was drawing to a close, one day before my departure, Shanthi's relatives came to visit me. After meeting me, they were satisfied. Things seemed to be moving in the right direction. I left for Abu Dhabi with a heart full of dreams, but upon arriving, I learned that the company I worked for was closing and our jobs would come to an end in two months. I was deeply disturbed. With my marriage set and my job in danger, to be on the safer side I decided to become a partner with Mr. Vidya Sagar from Palghat, who ran a company in Sharjah called 'Presto Electrical Contracting Company.' I invested a significant amount of money into business, but it turned out to be a disaster. The company's location in Sharjah, at Mother Cat, wasn't proper and the business didn't thrive as expected.

Despite these troubles, my marriage with Shanthi was fixed for February 9, 1986. I received Shanthi's address and we began exchanging letters daily. These letters were a reflection of our thoughts and feelings. As months passed by, all my earnings went into the business, leading to a big financial crisis. I returned home a week before the wedding, travelling through Bombay to Mangalore. The wedding was held at her house, followed by celebrations in line with my father's social status. There was a steady flow of invitees from various fields, including social, political and cultural circles. Life was at a turning point and I was preparing for family life and the responsibilities that came with it. Shanthi was welcomed to our home, as daughter to my parents, since they had no daughter. They considered her as their daughter only and never as their daughter-in-law. This was a rare fortune for her. The atmosphere at home became lively with songs and jokes, creating a joyful environment. Our first trip was to Ooty, where my uncle worked as a surveyor for the Tamil Nadu Government. We toured many places and though it might not have been a typical honeymoon, it was a beautiful, private trip filled with memories.

When my vacation ended, I returned to Abu Dhabi. The business had failed and my partner, Sagar, had taken advantage of my money.

Realizing it was better to stop before things go worse, I bid good bye to business. I returned to my old room in Abu Dhabi and sought a new job through an old friend, Bavakka. I found a part-time position and later a full-time job at the National Trading Company in their marketing department, though the salary was very low. I accepted the offer as I had no other choice. Eventually I found a new opening in marketing at NTDE Abudhabi. This job lasted for 21 years. Over time, I transitioned from sales to become the marketing coordinator at Gallaher International, a British firm. At the same time, I was determined to continue my education. I enrolled myself in a distance education program at Madurai Kamaraj University and completed both my degree and postgraduate studies (PGDM). I pursued further education not with the aim of a better job but for personal growth. In the Gulf, companies cared more about a person's ability to do the job rather than their academic qualifications. During this period, I brought my younger brother, Ajith, to the Gulf. Although I was facing financial difficulties, I arranged a visa for him through a friend in Ajman. The situation was tough, still I took up the responsibility.

On May 21st 1987, Shanthi being the mother of our new born baby elevated my position to that of a father. We named our son Vyshakh. Life was changing. I was in Abu Dhabi during this auspices moment and couldn't take leave to visit home and to see my child. I decided to bring Shanthi and the baby to Abu Dhabi. When I saw my child for the first time, I couldn't quite express the emotions I felt. My fatherhood had changed me, even though I didn't realize it immediately. We settled into a family life, living in a flat arranged through Mr. Hudson, who worked with the Abu Dhabi Electricity Department. Our life, though modest, was filled with love and affection. As responsibilities grew, I found myself increasingly focused on work and home, feeling the weight of it all. No matter how much we plan; life has its own unpredictable course and I had to adapt according to its flow.



Me and Mine



Beneath the stillness, our love blazes like a storm

Leaf 26

The UAE Desert Rally was a memorable experience. The UAE chapter of the rally, which featured world-renowned drivers, was held in the Abu Dhabi desert and sponsored by Silk-Cut, where I worked. I was selected as one of the markers, so I went to Dubai with my family and we stayed at the five-star Hyatt Regency Hotel. My brother Ajith also joined us. The five-day rally started from Hatta and extended up to the Saudi border, which was our assigned area.

Once the rally began, the vehicles had to travel a long distance across the desert, cross a main road and continue on to the other side. Our job was to be at the marking points and note the time as each driver passed. This had to be done quickly, much like passing a baton in a relay race. As the drivers slowed down, we marked their time cards. After passing the first checkpoint, they would continue their journey and we would move to the next point to repeat the process.

At the lunchtime, the vehicles would stop near the Jebel Ali Hotel, where we witnessed a fascinating scene. A few vehicles had their tires changed, others needed complete engine swaps and a few others attended to other repairs. I realized that rally vehicles were designed with engines mounted upside down for quick removal, enabling a change to be done within a minute. After the lunch break, the competition would resume, with the rally ending by 6 PM. In the evenings, there were disco parties and dinners. It was a great opportunity to meet and interact with world-famous drivers. Family was an essential part of the rally experience, so when I took Shanthi with me, Ajith stayed behind to look after the child, which was a great relief to both Shanthi and me. Ajith also had the chance to experience the luxury of the five-star lifestyle during those five days. I had a Silk-Cut-branded car and I became somewhat known by that brand name. Meanwhile, Ajith had just received his driving license. With someone to help, things became easier, especially financially. Ajith

worked at Emke Traders, part of the Lulu Group and had begun his work in the marketing department. It was a coincidence that I had met Mr M A Yousuf Ali, the founder of Lulu Group, when he had been working for just a small shop in Abu Dhabi. After couple of months Ajith shifted his job from Emke to Al Aoufouk Trading.

However, one day, while I was at work, I suddenly felt exhausted and decided to rest at my flat, where Ajit also was staying. Just as I was about to drift off to sleep, I received a call from Ajith's colleague, Mr. Jose, informing that Ajith had met with an accident on Al Ain Road. I immediately rushed to Al Ain, normally a two-hour drive, but I reached there in just 45 minutes. The accident scene was horrific, with the steering wheel twisted like a stick. The vehicle had veered off the road in the fog and struck on a date palm tree. A policeman told me that Ajith had been taken to Al Thawam Hospital. Upon arriving at the hospital, I found Ajith conscious, with a large bandage on his leg. The Swedish doctor, Dr. Smith, explained that Ajith had suffered a broken thigh bone, which required surgery. He had already been stabilized with bandages, but further tests and treatment were necessary.

The next few hours were a blur of worry and prayer. Ajith's condition worsened when he began struggling to breathe. Doctors quickly moved him to the ICU, where they diagnosed him with fat embolism, a condition where fat from the broken bone enters the bloodstream and blocks the lungs, preventing breathing. They used a dangerous procedure to clear the fat, inserting a tube through his nose. The doctor explained that if his body responded well to the treatment, Ajith might recover. For the next 13 days, Shanthi and I travelled to Al Ain, visiting Ajith daily. On the 14th day, Dr. Smith phoned me up with good news. Ajith had begun responding to the treatment and he started showing signs of improvement. We were overjoyed. His recovery was slow, but after several days, he was stable enough for surgery on his leg. The thigh bone is one of the strongest in the body, but the broken thigh required a long and complicated surgery. Ajith's recovery involved the use of traction, with a steel rod and weights to align his broken bones. The treatment continued for months, with the weight gradually reducing as the bone healed. We had not informed our parents of the seriousness of the

accident until this point. I phoned up my father using a borrowed mobile phone and downplayed the situation. Later, I wrote to him in detail about what had happened. His reply, which I still keep with me, explained the duties of an elder brother and offered comforting words for the difficult time I was facing. During this period, I arranged an assistant to stay with Ajith in the hospital, as he was unable to move or take care of himself. A young man named Abdulla from Kasargod joined our family to assist Ajith's daily needs. Each day, I used to bring him grilled chicken, as I was told it helped in the recovery of broken bones. My friend Anil's wife, Bindu, who lived in Al Ain, prepared the grilled chicken every day. After months of treatment and prayers, Ajith was finally recovered. The most remarkable thing was that the hospital did not ask for a single signature or payment from us; all the treatment was free. This gesture left us deeply grateful to the UAE government and its rulers for their generosity. We returned home, thankful to have Ajith with us and I will never forget the kindness and support we received from the hospital and from all my friends during that challenging time.



Al Thawam Hospital, Al Ain

Leaf 27

Ajith was discharged from the hospital with doctor's instruction to use crutches for walking. He needed additional rest to recover completely. By that time, I had gained the mental strength to face any challenge of life. Yes, experience is our greatest teacher. In my early days in the Gulf, the most valuable relationship I formed was with my dear friend, Dasettan (Devadas from Kozhikode). Although Dasettan was much older than me, in many ways, our bond was so strong that we felt like we were of the same age. When I was looking for a bachelor accommodation, I began living as a roommate with Dasettan. From that moment onwards, he became a part of my life and soul and it remains so till this day. There is a saying in Hindi: "Dane dane pe likha hai khane wala ka naam," which means that every grain has its destined eater. Similarly, God has already decided with whom we will grow close to in life and these people will become an inseparable part of our journey. This is the essence of true relationships, that transcend blood ties. Such bonds have no boundaries of religion, caste, or creed; unity is the true criterion in the great religion of humanity. When you fail to understand this "oneness," you become part of the "other" category.

Dasettan had a tragic story. Despite leading a peaceful life, he was devastated by the sudden and unexpected death of his beloved wife. I was a witness to his sorrow. I felt like we shared a bond from a past life. When the doctor advised Ajith surgery, there were two options: inserting a steel rod into his thigh bone, or traction. The first option was straightforward, but it came with the disadvantage that the supporting rod would stay inside for the whole life and there could be a difference in the length of his legs due to the bone's nailing. At that moment, it was Dasettan who reached out to foreign companies via email to inquire about the right steel rod. Unfortunately, it was not available in the UAE. A company in the US offered to send it via courier, but the cost was exorbitant. After consulting

several doctors, they all recommended traction though it takes more time. Dasettan stood by me, supporting the decision to go with traction.

Dasettan's company was facing a severe financial crisis. For 4½ years, he worked without salary. The owner of the company, Mr. Majid Al Muheri, was a kind-hearted man but also struggled financially. He owned a building in the Tourist Club area and I moved into a flat over there, offering one room to Dasettan. It was a two-bedroom flat, so Ajith and Dasettan occupied one room, while I, with my family stayed in the other. The flat was close to my office, marking the beginning of a new chapter in my life. It was a period filled with music, especially the songs of Yesudas. I was fortunate enough to attend the Navarathri Festival in Kannur, which was like a second Dasara, witnessing amazing talents on stage. This was also the time when I first experienced the magic of Yesudas's music. In 1987, I received a call from Sachi Ettan, inviting me to meet Yesudas. I rushed to the rehearsal camp, which was filled with the team of Joy, Radhakrishnan and Antony, under the sponsorship of Simon Chettan, the owner of Overseas Travels.

Meeting Yesudas was a dream come true. I believed that when music took human form, it is Yesudas who embodied it. It was an unforgettable experience, one that I longed for a long time. From that day on, I became increasingly involved in organizing musical programs with Yesudas. Together with my friends, we arranged several performances in places like Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Al Ain and Doha. Yesudas's songs filled our lives with joy and he even graced the *Harishree* of my son Vysakh. We cherished these memories, including the moment when Yesudas, like family, shared stories of his life with us. One of the cassettes he released, *Tharatt Pattukal* (Lullaby), had a picture on the cover with Yesudas holding my second son, Vivek. We organized concerts for other renowned artists like Ilaya Raja, Gangai Amaran, S.P. Bala Subramaniam, Pankaj Udhas, Unni Menon, M.G. Sreekumar and K.S. Chithra. But still, Yesudas remained the star of our musical world, an incarnation of music, able to excel in classical, light and music simultaneously. One of the memorable moments was when Yesudas allowed us to record his program, a privilege he had never granted anyone earlier. This

was a milestone in my life. Another unforgettable experience was the classical concert arranged in Dubai and a mega show at Abudhabi India Social Centre where Vijay Yesudas, his son, sang for the first time at a Gana Mela.

In the midst of these events, my life was also busy with club activities. I was actively involved in the India Social Centre and for three years, I served as the secretary of the snooker section. In addition, I had the privilege of publishing two souvenirs for the club. My wife, Shanthi, was also quite active. She taught at the Buds School, later moving to St. Joseph's School. Amidst our busy life, we managed to support each other. Eventually, I brought my younger brother Yeshodharan to the Gulf, arranging a job for him through my friend Eswaran. Shortly after, Shanthi's brother Sudhi also came to Abu Dhabi after completing his MCA and he quickly found employment. The flat grew more crowded, but everyone pitched in. Dasettan, for example, took on the daily task of ironing my clothes, a simple yet meaningful act of love.

After two years, we planned to return home for vacation and we bought tickets for the Abu Dhabi-Bombay-Mangalore route. We stayed in the Oberoi Sheraton Hotel in Bombay, but when we reached the airport the next day, we were told that the flight was full. After much frustration, we had to take a different route, traveling from Bombay to Madras and then to Coimbatore, before catching the final train to Kannur. At last, we reached home on the third day.

Upon returning to Abu Dhabi after my leave, I went to the Air India office to request a refund for the unused tickets. With the help of Mr. Sivaraman, the then Air India manager, I filed a complaint with the Civil Aviation, Air India and the Prime Minister's Office. This matter was reported in 'Khaleej Times' newspaper and I received a response from the Ministry of Civil Aviation, assuring me that action will be taken. A month later, I was informed that my refund had been processed and that the officials responsible are facing action. This experience taught me the importance of standing up against injustice.

My life continued, a journey full of music, learning and invaluable lessons.



With Padmashree Dr..KJ Yesudas and Smt. PrabhaYesudas



Shanthi - Amarnath

Leaf 28

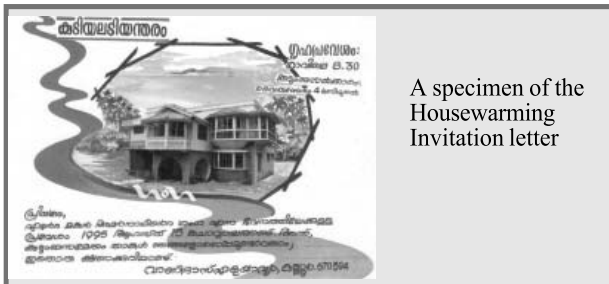
My dream was to own a house before my marriage, but that idea didn't work out. There is destined time for everything. While I was in India on vacation, I visited Antony Chettan and stayed with him to be introduced to Mr. Williams, who had constructed Antony Chettan's house. Mr. Williams took me to see a grand bungalow having spacious area. As I approached the house, lion faces greeted me at the entrance! The house was filled with architectural sculptures, created by Mr. Johnson, the owner of the first private airplane company, Air-Asiatics. The remarkable sight reminded me of a poem by Mahakavi Kumaran Asan, describing a bungalow in his book 'Karuna', with the only difference being that the poet spoke of a small compound wall, while in front of me stood a large one! The staircase's handrail was shaped like a snake and the dining table was supported by crocodile hands. The walls were adorned with art depicting forest life. Though this filled me with a sense of awe, it also created a feeling of unease rather than calmness. Yet, one couldn't help but admire the craftsmanship. When I reached the workshop, I found a group of artists from North India working with tools. They were engraving the famous 'Last Supper of Jesus Christ' on a large piece of wood. It was mesmerizing to watch them work. There is a saying, 'Tree is a blessing' and in their hands, the wood seemed as obedient as a child, responding to their artistic touch. It was a wonderful experience to witness their skill. An idea then occurred to me: a chariot pulled by five horses, driven by Lord Krishna, with the caption '*Geethopadesam*' (the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*). I discussed this with the North Indian artists and agreed to have the work completed before their departure. The front door of my house would be decorated with this concept. Later, we visited Mr. William's house, which was intriguing. Shanthi and I stayed there and I discovered a style I had never encountered before. I sketched each and every element of the design and with some modifications, I

prepared a complete plan. They sent us back by train from Ernakulam, gifting us a bucket of ‘black fish,’ marking the end of a journey full of beautiful memories.

When I returned home, another idea came to my mind. I had learned about Architect Larry Baker, who was creating houses with innovative designs, using materials like hollow bricks. With the help of Shree M.V. Devan, I decided to visit Devan’s house in Aluva. At first glance, Devan’s house looked more like a hermitage than a traditional home, with grass and plants growing on the brick walls. It was not like the houses we imagined. We were shown photographs of houses Devan had built for artist Namboodiri and cinema actor Nedumudi Venu and although we were invited to see them, we chose not to go. On return, we decided not to build a hermitage but to proceed with the Ernakulam style. For formality’s sake, we requested Devan to create a plan for us and he agreed to come to our house the following Sunday. We also planned to consult the famous *Koyithatta*, who had written books on residential house rules, known as *Thachu Shasthram*. Although we couldn’t meet *Koyithatta*, we met his son, Sethu, an expert in the field, who agreed to visit our house the next Sunday to decide where the foundation should be laid. As planned, Devan arrived in the morning. Typically, Devan would prepare the house plan by sitting in the exact spot where he recommended laying the foundation. However, we informed him that we had changed our plans and he agreed. We gave him a few books as gift. By then, Shanthi’s father, my uncle and others had arrived and the marking for the foundation began. Our compound was quite large and *Koyithatta* marked the spot for the house right in the middle. We told him that placing the house there would be problematic since other family members would also need space to build. He insisted on marking it in the centre, but my father, who held certain superstitions, moved the markings to one side of the compound. This was our belief and belief can vary from person to person. As a result, my house is now located in the place we decided upon that day, allowing my brothers to build their houses in the same compound. Next, I wanted to begin construction. I approached a known contractor, Shree Thampan Nambiar, from Kannur. Upon reviewing the plan, he wanted to see the house in Ernakulam that was the model for our design. My brother Yesodharan and I took him to Ernakulam, where we showed

him Mr. William's house. Thampan Nambiar thought some of the work would be complicated and difficult to replicate. Finally, I decided to bring Mr. Williams himself to Kannur. At first, he was reluctant, but eventually, he agreed. He arrived in Kannur with 60 labourers and a temporary shed was set up in our compound for them to stay. They worked tirelessly, continuing until the roof casting was complete.

By the time Shanthi's father passed away in 1991, the concrete work of the house was finished. To me, the house was a manifestation of my imagination, but I humbly acknowledge that it is my father's vision. Whenever my father undertakes a task, he completes it with great pride, which is a magic I can only marvel at! My house became a reality because of my father's dedication and for that reason, I named it "Ganga" after my father, Gangadharan. The name also symbolizes the Ganga River, which flows, carrying the essence of Indianness. A house is more than just a dream come true; it plays a vital role in the formation of a family. Primitive humans, who lived in caves, sought shelter on tree-top tents to save themselves from wild animals and natural disasters. Over time, tents became thatched houses and later, tiled houses. Now, we live in the concrete era and our houses continue this journey, fulfilling desires while keeping pace with modernity. Ultimately, peace in a house depends upon its inhabitants. If we embrace the truth and broaden our minds, both we and our country will improve. When houses become mere exhibitions of wealth and luxury, we become isolated, focused only on ourselves. If the nuclear family fosters selfishness, more destructive than the nuclear energy itself, it can disrupt the harmony of the household. Let us pray for new hopes and expectations from the younger generation.



Leaf 29

During our long years of life as expatriates, the mountains of memories bring back peace to us, a rare experience beyond words. Diaspora brings memories of happiness also. I had such moments of peace and happiness from my job and socio-cultural activities during my expatriate's life. The housewarming ceremony of my newly built house took place on August 15, 1995. I thought that Indian Independence Day was the perfect occasion for the housewarming; However, since the new house was in the same compound of my ancestral house, I didn't feel far away. My mother and grandmother lit a lamp from the old house, carried it to the new one and lit it at the new house. The milk boiling on the stove symbolized prosperity. All the people who had worked on the construction were honoured in the presence of the guests. The ceremony was simple but meaningful. Ajith and Yesodharan also got married around the same time, adding new members and happiness to our family. My father too, was climbing the steps of contentment with us.

My father received the National Award for the Best Teacher in 1986. He was presented with the award by the first citizen, Shree Giani Zail Singh. Sadly, I wasn't fortunate enough to witness the event in person. I had planned to go to New Delhi from Abu Dhabi, but my father asked me not to, fearing it might affect my job in Abu Dhabi. Even today I feel that it was a great loss for me. I missed the chance to see Rajiv Gandhi and other notable figures.

During one Ramadan period, I came across an advertisement in the newspaper about a competition for non-Muslims in the Gulf titled *Quran as I Understood*. I decided to participate. I knew it would be a challenging task, trying to collect a few pebbles from a vast ocean. But my passion for literature pushed me to dive into the vast revelations of Prophet Muhammad. I stood there in front of this immense ocean like a child who didn't know how to swim, just trying to dip my

toes into it. I wrote my thoughts in 40 pages and to my surprise, I won second place in the competition. At a proud ceremony at the Islamic Social Centre, in the presence of Mr Yousuf Ali, the Chief Advisor to the Sheikh Mr. Ali Al Shamsi presented me the prize. That rare and rewarding experience remains vivid still in my memory.

I believe that religions are created by human beings with the intention of promoting goodness. Religious texts are written to serve this purpose. When we understand this, we realize that all religions are one. In that spirit of unity, we can embrace the collective wisdom they offer. If we could see the differences between religions as different types and colours of flowers in a large garden, we would be embracing the idea of unity in diversity. I consider these differences as the waves emanating from the same source, God. Religious books play a significant role in this understanding. We name a child based on the colour of their breed or the environment into which they are born, but if we stop there, we limit ourselves. True progress lies in promoting a “Human Religion” under the flag of love. The present generation, which struggles with discrimination and segregation, must rise up and say, “My dear brothers and sisters, embrace the true bond of humanity”. The role of epics and historical novels in this context cannot be underestimated. We are all searching for the truth. To find it, we must lift the curtain of ignorance and let the light of truth shine through. Education is the key to this transformation. Our education system must evolve to break the web of narrow-mindedness, extinguish the fire of sectarianism and nurture the coolness of pure love. That will be called the day when education becomes truly meaningful.



Shanthi's Parents and siblings

Leaf 30

Can you imagine wishes and disappointments being performed on the same stage? Well, my experience proves that it's possible. For ten years, I had the privilege of bringing *Gaana Gandharvan* Doctor K.J. Yesudas to the Gulf. It was truly an experience of great satisfaction. Encouraged by this success, I decided to bring him again for concerts at five venues across the Gulf. I made arrangements and placed full-page advertisements in newspapers. My ambition was to make it more than just a concert; I wanted it to be a grand music festival. We secured sponsors for venues in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Al Ain, as well as in Qatar, Bahrain and Oman. The group 'Stage Dubai', led by my friend Kalam, was entrusted with organizing the events. We also planned to bring Smt. K.S. Chithra along with Shree Yesudas we discussed the matter with her husband, Shree Vijayasankar and confirmed the deal. However, I received a phone call from Prabha Chechi (Shree Yesudas' wife), which brought a great shock. She said, "Mani (she calls me Mani), hope you know the current program rates." Listening to her words, I felt uneasy. I replied that we are moving forward with the programs based on the rates we had paid last time. She responded, "No, no, now all payments are in dollars," which meant that the cost had quadrupled due to the exchange rate (1 USD = 3.7 Dirhams). I was stunned and disappointed, realizing that if I agreed to these new rates, the entire project would result in a massive financial loss. Despite my efforts to convince her, she was unyielding. By then I had already spent significant money on ministry permissions, tickets, advertisements, etc. Faced with the risk of severe losses, I decided it was better to cancel the entire program. This was a bitter lesson and I put an end to my efforts in organizing stage programs in the Gulf. So, Prabha Chechi's decision became my disappointment, but my admiration and respect for the legendary Yesudas remains the same

as before.

My third son, Vybhav (whom we call Unnimon) was born in 1999. We hadn't planned on having three children, but as the saying goes, "God dispenses and we propose" Unnimon was born with two teeth and brought nothing but luck and prosperity to us. Our lives were totally busy with children's education, Shanthi's teaching career and my work. Meanwhile, I purchased a flat in Kannur, which was a great deal at that time. Shanthi and the children moved into the flat when my eldest son began his Plus Two studies. He completed his schooling at Bharathiya Vidyalayam and later enrolled in an engineering college in Mangalore. During this time, I frequently travelled home on short breaks. One day, my friend Mr. Jagdish asked me to sign some insurance papers for him, so I parked my car outside the Kannur Officer's Club and went inside. Later, when I drove back to my flat, I realized that my bag which contained my passport, tickets, cheque books and some money, was missing. I was totally devastated. I had to return to Abu Dhabi the next day, but there was no trace of the bag though we tried until midnight. I went to the police station and they came to the area and made announcement requesting that anyone who found the bag should return it. We searched everywhere and checked with everyone whether they got any clue of it and my friends continued to help in every way they could. Once I realized that there was no possibility of getting it back, my father advised me to get a new passport. One of my friends found out post boxes alongside the road and we distributed slips with my phone number offering a reward for the return of the bag. The late Shri E. Ahmed, the Union Minister at the time, was informed and he promised to help. The Minister assured me that a new passport would be issued within an hour, but it required an FIR from the police. I went back to the police station to file a detailed complaint, but they required notary attestation as well. Throughout this ordeal, my friends were searching the roads for the missing bag. A few of them even rushed to the temples and prayed for its return. I rushed to see Notary Advocate Shree Rethnakaran, but just then, I received a call asking me to go to the Petrol Bunk near Muneeswaran Temple in Kannur. We rushed there and I found my bag lying on the table. A kind gentleman with a smile handed it over to me and asked me to check if everything was in order. I couldn't believe my eyes. After

checking, I found everything safe; my passport, tickets and cheque books inside the bag. The gentleman explained that after closing his shop, he had seen an Ambassador car turning toward the Pillayar Kovil road and found something had fallen down from the car, which turned out to be my bag. Inside, the passport, tickets and cheque book were all intact, but the telephone number slip was missing. The gentleman had recognized my name on the ticket and after some investigation, contacted the medical shop. We informed the police and the minister as soon the bag was retrieved. This incident filled my heart with immense joy and gratitude. I rushed to the airport with just two hours left to catch my flight. Kannur is filled with kind-hearted people and this incident is a classic example of their honesty. I am deeply indebted to so many people, especially Shree Mohan and his team at the Petrol Bunk. This incident is unforgettable and I still keep it as a treasure of love and sincerity, thanks to my dear friends like Jagan, Ciril and others, who have become a part of my life. Everything else is just a fleeting moment.



We two and Our's Three

Leaf 31

Time is the ultimate criterion for determining anything good in life and I had this in mind when the company asked me to move from Abu Dhabi to Dubai. The company had made similar requests in the past, but I had always managed to avoid them. However, this time, it wasn't possible. They wanted me to take up the responsibility of overseeing our business in Dubai and the Northern Emirates. I reluctantly agreed, although I was hesitant to leave the area where I had lived for so long and the friends, the club and the snooker games and everything else I cherished. But after all, Dubai is only about 140 kilometers from Abu Dhabi, so I could always visit whenever I liked. My friends also encouraged me not to miss out on this promotional opportunity. So, I decided to accept the position in the Northern Emirates. The company provided me with a good flat in Sharjah and covered all expenses. Since the place was familiar to me, I had no problems. My brothers and co-brothers would regularly visit Sharjah on holidays and when we were together, the atmosphere was always lively and full of fun. We took a trip to Muscat with my cousin Madhu which remains unforgettable. Oman occupies an area of 309,500 square kilometres (119,500 square miles) on the southeast of the Arabian Gulf. Most of its land is vast desert, with the majority of the population living in the valleys and mountains in the northern, southern, and eastern regions. Oman is located at the top of the Musandam Peninsula, with the rest of the area bordering the UAE. The Omanis have a unique style in both their customs and their way of preserving their environment. Oman once controlled Zanzibar, even though it was located far across the African continent. Later, Zanzibar joined with Tanganyika to form the nation of Tanzania. Oman has been an Islamic country since the time of Prophet Muhammad. It has always been an independent state in the Gulf. On Vasco da Gama's journey to India by sea, Oman served as an important stop over, much like a transit camp. It was also strategically positioned on

the sea routes to the Far East, Europe, and India. It cannot be forgotten how Fujairah benefited from this location. In a similar way, many of the Emirates, except Abu Dhabi, had small pockets of land in those areas.

The Portuguese invaded the island of Hormuz, part of Oman, in 1514. It was an important location, much like Kanyakumari in India, where the Persian Gulf meets the Arabian Sea. In 1650, Imam Sultan Bin Saif reclaimed Hormuz from the Portuguese. Oman lost Zanzibar with the death of Imam Saif Bin Sultan in 1856, but his son retained it with British assistance. The Sultanate of Oman officially began in 1741, when Imam Syed Bin Sultan started using the title “Sultan” instead of “Imam” in 1775. In 1798, Oman became a protected country when internal conflicts with the Imams led to an agreement with the British, allowing Oman to maintain its autonomy. In 1950, the Imams, with the help of Saudi Arabia, tried to establish Nizwa as an independent country. Then, in 1960, Communist forces from South Yemen attempted to conquer the Dhofar region, which bordered Oman. Oman began exporting oil in 1967. The Buraimi dispute between Oman and Abu Dhabi, a legacy of British colonial rule, still lingers. In 1970, there was a coup in Oman and Sultan Qaboos, with British, Jordanian and Iranian support, took over power, establishing the Sultanate of Oman. Before the formation of the Sultanate, there was an Indian Chief Minister, R.S. Malik, who served from 1932 to 1939 and an Indian Agriculture Minister, Hardiya Malik, who served from 1937 for two years under British rule.

Indian culture played a significant role in Oman’s history. The presence of Indian culture began with the story of Cheraman Perumal. To reach Khandap Beach, one must climb 3,000 feet. Watching the sunrise from there is a breathtaking experience, though dangerous. Nostalgic memories overwhelm me now. The pain of leaving home at a young age, the feeling of staying away from my parents, the responsibility of securing my children’s education and the need for financial stability: all these responsibilities weighed heavily on me and I couldn’t imagine distancing myself from them. I had often toyed with the idea of starting a business back at home in collaboration with my friends. One day, I received a call from one of my friends asking whether I was interested in taking over a distribution

agency of ITC which has its vast network across India. ITC's business model is similar to what I was doing at that time in Gulf. Taking up an agency required a substantial investment with sufficient space for office, storage and warehouse. After two years of deliberation, ITC confirmed that they would only proceed after thoroughly evaluating all aspects, not just financial considerations but also social background. Eventually, when the decision was made, my father and mother were visiting me in Sharjah. My friends criticized me for leaving such a prestigious job, even calling me a fool for giving it up. However, I was able to convince them that my goal is not just to make money, but to lead a meaningful life. My mother wasn't thrilled with my decision and I was unsure how to explain to my parents how much I missed them, especially at my age, when I was far away from them.



'Ganga' Elayavoor

Leaf 32

The duty of a son towards his parents is beautifully illustrated in the *Ayodhya Kandam* of the epic *Ramayanam*. It urges children to take care of their parents and protect them from all pain and sorrow. In *Ramayanam*, we can see how Lord Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha, Shatrughna and Shravana Kumaran perform their duties as sons. Lord Rama, upon noticing his father's distress, as a dutiful son sought to know the reason. Rama understood that Kaikeyi, the wife of King Dasharatha, had asked for two wishes: 1. Rama should relinquish the kingdom and her son, Bharata, should be crowned as the king. 2. Rama should go into exile in the forest for 14 years. Rama accepted Kaikeyi's demands without hesitation, solemnly swearing to give up the kingdom and proceed for 14-year exile. He reassured his father, urging him not to panic and explained that his decision was trivial compared to the thousand years of self-mortification his father had undertaken to honour his ancestors. The sacrifice made by his father, along with the sacrifice of Puru, who had given up his youth to restore his father's old age, exemplifies the duty of a son to fulfil his father's wishes. This sense of duty has become a fundamental part of our tradition. However, over time, we have lost many aspects of life that were once important. Maternal and fraternal relationships, the teacher-student bond and other such connections have gradually faded away and we must make an effort to restore them. Words like love, affection and care are rare in society. Love and care seem to have disappeared and even the teacher-student relationship is no longer valued. People who once maintained long-distance relationships through letters now have everything in their life but no time to express love to their parents, as they are too busy. Divine love, affection and care have been reduced to brief phone calls. Social media has become the new realm of connection and concepts like mother cradles and old-age homes have become very common.

Money has become the most important criterion and relationships

no longer carry the same value today. We have lost love and affection as time has changed. But, as the transition from dim moonlight to bright sunlight, relationships can be transformed into joyful and meaningful experiences. This change will not only benefit the family but will also contribute to the well-being of society. This is how a family should be: filled with love, affection and consideration. It is this kind of thinking that led me to internalise a nostalgic urge, pulling me closer to my family environment. So, I began preparing for my return journey, back home. I don't know how many people take their parents' blessings while resigning from their job, but I did. I bowed before my father and mother, seeking their blessings as I prepared to step into a new world, one filled with uncertainty and challenges. I believed that their blessings were essential. Despite criticisms from my office and new offers made, I did not change my mind. It was difficult to say goodbye to a place where I had lived for 30 years, a place that had given me the wings to fly. Bidding farewell to everyone was difficult and I was determined to meet most of them before I left. My strength had always been my friends and their blessings were important for me. So, on May 31st, 2008, with heavy heart I bid farewell to my foster mother, the United Arab Emirates. As I departed, I cannot say for sure if my eyes were wet or if my heart ached. My murmuring words of gratitude to the desert soil was boiling inside my heart as it had fed me like a second mother. However, I kissed that earth, the earth that gave meaning to my life and for many like me. The flight lifted me into the sky and in those three hours, memories of 30 long years flashed before my eyes as I transformed myself from being a *Pravasi* (foreigner) to that of a *Swavasi* (native).

Leaf 33

Life at home began with the recovery of relationships that had been lost during my life away as an expatriate. I shared this desire with my well-wisher and ophthalmic expert, Dr. B.V. Bhat. He introduced me to the Lions Club, a world-renowned social organization. Dr. Bhat assured me that at the Lions Club, I would meet good, sincere people and through them, I could build new friendships. I knew that Lionism was more than just an organization, it was a way of life, coordinating all that is good in life to help the needy and the downtrodden. The Lions' Club was founded by the respected Melvin Jones in 1917 in Chicago, Illinois. The organization's declared objective is social service and I became a member of this great organization. Starting from the bottom, I grew up through the ranks; Secretary, President, Zone Chairman, District Cabinet Member and eventually, District Additional Cabinet Secretary, Editor of Lions Magazine etc. The district of which I was part of, included Kasargod, Kannur, Wayanad, and Kozhikode. I had the opportunity to present several historical programs with new concepts and considered these achievements a great honour. These activities also brought me recognition in various fields. Looking for new avenues of activities, I decided to venture into business. This required setting up an office, warehouse, vehicles and employees. Everything came together smoothly and my second phase of my life began.

I commenced my business on September 14th, 2008, by the name and title as 'Ganga Trading Company' as a Wholesale distributor for ITC, at Taliparamba. The inauguration was done by the then IG, Shree Shantharam Shetty and my father presided over the function. A reception was arranged at the Taliparamba Dream Palace Auditorium for business community leaders, friends and relatives. It was a memorable occasion. The business began with 22 employees and earned a good reputation within a short time. We received appreciation from ITC, one of the leading FMCG companies in India. Run-

ning the business has not been without challenges, but we had continued to move forward. This new life brought me peace of mind, with my parents and family around, compared to my expatriate life. The sense of peace and relaxation was truly soothing. Meanwhile my father had been suffering from pain just above his hip joint. He had been treated by both allopathic and ayurvedic doctors, but the pain persisted. Numerous tests, including X-rays and scans, were conducted at various hospitals like Asoka Hospital, Koyili Hospital, Speciality Hospital and Amrutha Hospital, but none provided relief. My father stayed for one and a half months at the residence of Thaikat Moosad. However, Moosad was unable to diagnose the problem and the medical bills had accumulated into the six-digit range. A doctor from Mangalore suggested that the issue might be with my father's knee, so he underwent traction treatment but this provided temporary relief only. Dr. Shantharam Shetty, an orthopaedic specialist from Mangalore, identified the problem with the vertebrae and necessary surgery was performed at Sanjeevani Hospital. Throughout this process, Shree P.K. Mahmood, the owner of Western India Plywoods (whom we call Mammookka) and his sister, Afia Chechi, supported us. Their friendship and support were invaluable. Despite these treatments, my father's condition did not improve. Eventually, we sought the help of Dr. Jaleel Gurukkal, whom I had met in UAE. After listening to our description of the treatments so far, he displayed a flash of confidence. He assured us there was nothing to fear and that recovery was possible. He started treatment in an atmosphere filled with the distinct scent of Ayurvedic medicines. The treatment continued for 21 days and to our great relief, my father responded positively. It was a miracle to see him free from the pain that had plagued him for so long. Dr. Jaleel Gurukkal was able to make the correct diagnosis. His clinic, P.K.M. Hospital in Taliparamba, became a trusted place for us. Ayurveda, the ancient knowledge of life (*Ayussu*), is something we should all take pride in. It is not just about treatment but also about teaching us of a better lifestyle. Ayurveda's founders, Charaka, Sushruta and Vagbhata, created this system over 5,000 years ago and their works continue to be used today also.

Life has its ups and downs. For a while, my mother had been suffering from leg pain. Every time the pain flared up; my father

would take her to Dr. P.V.P. Nair at Asoka Hospital in Kannur. The doctor would prescribe some or other medication and the same cycle would continue. One day I accompanied my mother to the doctor as her pain was severe. After giving her medicine, I asked Dr. Nair why the pain kept recurring. I also questioned whether we should investigate the cause since the pain seemed to be focussed at one area. Dr. Nair suggested that we should conduct a scanning test. Later that day, the doctor called me up urgently. He had noticed something unusual in the X-ray and recommended a biopsy to investigate further. The word 'biopsy' filled me with fear. The doctor tried to cool me down, assuring me that it was just to confirm the diagnosis. He referred us to Dr. Rajasekharan at Ganga Hospital in Coimbatore, a renowned doctor in India. I was deeply upset and immediately contacted my friends Jagan and Pradeep, who arrived quickly to support me. I rang up the hospital in Coimbatore and arranged for an appointment. I told my father and mother that we should go to Coimbatore, but I did not disclose most of the details to them. My father asked many questions, but I managed to convince him to prepare for the trip.

On the way to Coimbatore, my mother vomited twice, which increased my anxiety. I drove with prayers in my heart and we finally arrived in Coimbatore in the evening. The next morning, we underwent several tests. At the X-ray counter, a medical student came up to me and told not to panic. He informed me that my mother's condition appeared to be at stage 4 and we would get the biopsy results the following day. Those words sent shock waves through me. I felt as if I received a sudden blow on my head. I felt numb and my eye sight faded. The medical student offered me water and I sat down, trying to pacify myself. I went to the bathroom, closed the door and cried like a child to vent out the weight on my heart. I couldn't sleep that night and had no appetite. I knew the biopsy report would confirm my fears, but I couldn't share it with anyone. I gave Shanthi, a hint of what was happening and her heart sank. I knew how much she loved my mother and how close she was to my mother. The next day, the biopsy report confirmed the worst: my mother was prey to bone cancer, scientifically known as 'Multiple Myeloma.' Dr. Rajasekharan tried to reassure us, saying that cancer had been treated

successfully in many patients. We decided not to tell my mother about the disease as it would be too much for her to negotiate. Despite the pain she had endured in silence, she never once complained about anything. It was a great task for me to inform the truth to my father. I was worried about his response while hearing the seriousness of the disease. But there was no other way for me, so I led him to my room and explained slowly. He didn't speak a word but hugged me weeping silently. He was trying to suppress his emotions so my mother should not get a hint of it. I really did not know how to overcome the situation.

We returned to Kannur the following day, with a driver at the wheel as I was too emotionally lost to drive. I pretended everything was fine, but my mind was immersed in thoughts about the treatment ahead. I firmly believe that it was God's will that made me to resign from my job abroad and return home at the right time. God loved me so much that I was given the opportunity to be with my mother during her times of need. It was only for this reason that I could be in India. As we drove back to Kannur, I firmly believed that there must be a greater purpose behind all of this.

Leaf 34

We all knew that there would be no complete cure for the disease, so everyone was cautious to keep the truth from my mother. Doctors and treatments became part of our everyday life at home. The atmosphere remained gloomy and silent, with nothing more to be done. Meanwhile, we came up with the idea of organizing a family get-together at home called '*Kudumba sangamam*'. This idea, proposed by Mohanan my cousin, aimed at bringing together all generations of our family members, many of whom had never met or communicated with each other. The purpose was to help everyone realize that all are part of the same family. We began planning for this and it became a reality on 30th July 2012 under the banner '*Ammalu Ammayum Thavazhiyum*.' The event took place in the courtyard of Krishnapuram Tharavad. Many relatives were meeting each other for the first time. The function was organized at three stages. In the morning, there was a *Guruvandanam* to honour the elder generation, inaugurated by Shree Ravindra Varma Raja of Chirakkal Kovilakam. The stage was graced by my teacher and President of the Pensioners Association, Shree C.P. Narayanan Master and P.P. Saseendran, Chief Correspondent of Mathrubhoomi. After the *Guruvandanam*, a cultural event was organized for the children. The arrangements were appreciated by everyone. There was a *Sakudumba Sangamam* for relatives and neighbours, conducted in the evening. A few of the people who were present on that day are no longer with us, making the event even more meaningful. It was a surprise for many, as they were meeting their own relatives for the first time. The event helped to strengthen the bond of the family and we were able to bring almost everyone together, except one or two. That day became an auspicious occasion, marking the prosperity of the *Padinhare Veedu*. (Our parent home),

We began to notice that my mother's condition was worsening. Her body was no longer able to resist the strong medications being

administered. We had tried Allopathic, Ayurvedic and Homeopathic treatments one by one and consulted various expert doctors. We took her to Asoka Hospital in Kannur frequently for injections. At first, she could still walk, but eventually, she was unable to do so. I had to carry her in my arms to get her to the vehicle and back. These moments were extremely painful. When Onam arrived, my mother expressed her desire to prepare all the dishes herself, saying that it might be the last opportunity she would have to serve us. Perhaps she had intuitions. She cooked everything by her own hands and it turned out to be the most delicious feast we had ever had. She was not just serving us food; she was serving us her love and thoughts through the meal. It became clear to us that she had realized the gravity of her illness. That was evident in her words. During this time, my father was working on a book titled *Kunhi Mayinum Khaderkuttiyum Pinne P.K. Mohamadum*, which chronicled the history of the Western India Group of Kannur. One day, Shree C.T. Basheer, a longtime employee of Western India, came to our house. While my mother was serving tea to Basheer, he said, “Teacher, I heard the news. Cancer is no longer a serious disease. With effective treatment, it can be cured. So don’t worry; be courageous.” This was the first time my mother realized she had had cancer. Until then, we had succeeded in keeping the truth away from her. This revelation capsized her mood and suddenly she withdrew into silence. We soon realized that her silence was the result of Basheer’s words. Unfortunately, Basheer didn’t know that we had been hiding the truth from my mother. As her condition worsened, my mother became fatigued and spent most of her time in bed. When a person’s mind is broken, the body also gives up.

I had to go to Bangalore and I thought it would be better to take my mother to my house, where my wife, Shanthi, would take care of her. I also employed a caretaker and another nurse to attend to her medical needs. She began to eat less, as she had to take more medicine than food. At the same time, we used to cultivate vegetables in the paddy field using organic methods. My mother often joked about what we would do with so much of vegetables. It ended up in sharing them with our relatives and neighbours. Those were some of the happiest moments we had, sitting together and cracking jokes.

One day, Shanthi, rushing in panic, beckoned me to come back quickly while I was on my way to the paddy field with my neighbour Asokan. We, dashed back like arrows. Ajith and Vidya joined us. When we entered my house, we found our mother was struggling to breathe. Maybe she wanted to communicate many things but she was not able to. The pathetic sight was unbearable for me. A moment which I never wished to happen. Slowly, her asking eyes closed down. Without being able to utter even a single word my beloved mother passed away peacefully. I felt as if the whole universe was revolving around me. My paradise fell down into fragments. God took my mother from us on the 9th of November 2012. I knew that everyone must eventually die, but it was impossible to imagine a world without my mother. Mother cannot be replaced by anyone else. A mother is irreplaceable. If we could define the ocean of endless love in just two letters, it would be *Amma* (mother). The loss of mother made me feel my life meaningless, but we have to continue our journey, carrying along the bitter experiences, both the joys and the sorrows with us. Life is a journey balanced with both gains and losses and we must move ahead, learning from both.



My Parents and my brothers

Leaf 35

Our Former President Late Dr. APJ. Abdul Kalam once said on birthdays, About the day of our birth “The only day in your life when your mother smiles as you cry.” No other occasion can a mother smile when her child cries. Birth is possible only through the mother, whether it’s a human being or an animal. Life begins through the mother and no one else. Mother is the truth. For any life, a mother is irreplaceable and her affection is without comparison. Whether the child is good or bad, whether a thief, cruel, or a fool, the mother loves her child without any bounds. The love and affection a mother have for her child cannot be defined.

That night was a dreadful one, the last night with my mother. She was resting inside the cold, silent coffin. My helpless father and the orphaned children; the situation was unbearable. Dignitaries came, offering words of comfort, including Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, VIP s like Pinarayi Vijayan, Kodyeri, V.M. Sudheeran, Alexander Jacob, Kadannappalli, Venugopal, Sudhakaran and the Jaya Rajans, C.K. Padmanabhan, Krishnadas, as well as many friends and relatives. But no words or presence could ease the pain of losing my mother. All we could rely on were our hopes, temporary relief from the pain. By noon, her body was taken to the *Tharavad* house. Fifty years ago, my mother had entered that house with my father on their wedding day. About two months ago she had left that house, holding my hand to the hospital for treatment. My mother would never have thought that she would never return to that house again. And now the last journey to Payyambalam began. It was the final journey. I am sure my mother’s heart would have been broken with the agony of leaving us behind for ever. For a son, the most painful moment in life is lighting the fire on his mother’s body. Even though we call it mortal remains, she is our mother; whether dead or alive. We handed over her body to the Fire God and returned home, to a home where she was no longer there. We had to accept the truth. We didn’t have

the courage to go and look at the room where she had spent her last moments. But I believed that my mother was still with us. Initially, I feared staying at home after her departure, but now I no longer feel that fear. I believe my mother is always with us and I am never alone. I still long for her presence, wishing I could have her with me, at least once more. They say 'heaven lies at the feet of the mother'. This is why the great poet urges us to bow before our mother's feet, for the mother is the Goddess of love.

I built a tomb in front of my house where she took her last breath. There, I placed a photograph of my mother so I can see her face every morning, which helps guide me towards goodness in life. Every year, on her death anniversary, I find solace by feeding the orphans. I consider this a meaningful act for a son who has lost his mother. I will continue this charity until my last breath, for I believe sharing life with others brings true contentment and satisfaction.

My father, who has lost both his mother and his wife, now lives among books. His life revolves around writing and reading. To protect him from life's harsh winds, we four siblings are always there for him, offering our support and attention. If you live your life with a smiling face and a thoughtful mind, life turns itself into an admirable poem! I remember the words of Osho: "There is no language for life. Life is silent. The only language left is silence. Life is a movement, a flow, like a river and it becomes polluted when the flow is stopped." What is going to happen, the seed does not know. It does not know whether it will become a flower or what fragrance it will have. The potential hidden in your mind should emerge fully and only then will life shower you with blessings. The moment you wipe the dust from your thoughts, you will find the right path and you will find the road to success. Animals are innocent, but humans can be cunning. A person can leap lower than animals, but at the same time, they have the potential to rise higher than God. We should aim to rise up and that will be our tribute to those who have left us forever.

Leaf 36

I always remember those who have passed the curtain of time and I cannot forget any of them. The painful memories were safely locked away in a box of forgetfulness, but now that box is open and the memories are coming back one by one. My grandmother passed away in 1996 while I was in Abu Dhabi. I received the news in the evening. I had just arrived Abu Dhabi from home a few days before that. During those days, Ammamma was very weak and my mother was looking after her. When my mother could no longer manage alone, we hired a home nurse. Ammamma was unconscious for many days. Ammamma was very close to me during my childhood. As I left home, I had a feeling that Ammamma wouldn't live much longer. She had lost her husband at a young age and through her sheer strength of character, had fought through life for many years. By the time Ammamma left for the abode of God, I had already submitted my passport to the immigration department for a visa renewal and it was a weekend. I couldn't travel back home without it. I decided not to return, thinking it was better to keep Ammamma alive in my memories rather than seeing her dead body. My wish was to cremate her body in our compound, but for various reasons, it wasn't possible and she was cremated at Payyambalam, the public cremation point. Of course, we must also listen to our neighbours and consider their opinions. For that reason, all bodies are now being taken to the crematorium at Payyambalam.

We witnessed another tragedy in March 2006. My uncle, who had gone to take bath, unexpectedly walked towards the compound wall. When he was not seen for a long time, others went searching for him and found him lying in the mud. He was no more. He had had a mild heart attack years back and that was his only health issue. This incident happened just a few days after I had finished my leave and returned to UAE. I felt sad on the feeling that I wouldn't be able to see my uncle again when I go home. As I loved him dearly and

was driven by a sense of guilt, I managed to get a seat on the next available flight to home. I wanted to see his face once more. In our society, the role of an uncle (the mother's brother) is very important. When I bowed and touched my uncle's feet, I felt that I had done my duty. Sometimes, it's difficult to explain why we feel special respect for certain people. I think it was the unique relationship I had with my uncle that made me travel so far to reach before his final journey. Balalechan (the husband of my second mother, Gouri Ilayamma) passed away on August 30, 2007, but I couldn't reach home in time. On January 19, 2016, I received the sad news of the death of Shri P.P. Balan Nambiar, the husband of my Aunt Kunhamma Prabhavathi. He was more like a friend to me and we had worked together in politics for some time. My second mother, Gouri Ilayamma, left us on June 15, 2016.

My mother passed away on November 9. My aunt also passed away on the same date in 2010. The coincidence of the dates was surprising. My aunt (*Antee*) had been suffering from a disease that caused memory loss and after her death, my aunt's husband, Shri T.C. Kunhikrishnan Nambiar, was left alone. My aunt had suffered a lot before her death. When we lose our loved ones, where deep relationships are rare, the bond of unity begins to fade. The heart-touching relationships of earlier years were full of love and dignity. No matter how far apart we were, our hearts were full of love and affection. We belonged to a generation that believed we are all one, the reason why affection always comes first. Let us put those memories aside and continue the journey of life.

After my mother's death, our home has been quiet, without the usual noise. In the meantime, the most celebrated festival, Vishu arrived. We couldn't imagine celebrating Vishu without my mother's presence. Although we had travelled to remote corners of the world, I had always been determined to travel in India first, which led us to travel to North India. Myself, with a couple of friends, along with our families, started our journey by car to Bangalore, then flew to Delhi. As arranged earlier, Babu Panicker, the owner of Panicker Travels in Delhi, was very helpful. He had sent a vehicle to the airport to receive us. It was our first trip to Delhi and Mr. Panicker had assigned the most experienced guide to take us all to the important

places.

Around 2500 B.C, Delhi was known as Indra Prastham, the capital of the Pandavas. It was later called Hastinapur, meaning the City of Elephants. A village of the same name existed until the late 19th century, but when New Delhi was constructed, the village was destroyed. Geological research suggests that Indra Prastham was located where the Old Fort stands today. The name “Delhi” is believed to have come from the word *Dillika*, though other theories exist. In the book ‘Satyarth Prakash’ published by Swami Dayananda Saraswathi (founder of Arya Samaj) in 1875, it’s suggested that Delhi was established by King Raja Dillu and a few ancient writers support this view. By the end of the 18th century, Delhi was in ruins. The British, attracted by royal luxury, took control of the city. Figures like Octor Lony adopted Mughal customs, while Muslim locals, who welcomed British rule, became employed in administrative roles. Some Muslim scholars even befriended Europeans. In 1911, the capital of British India was moved from Calcutta to Delhi and the construction of New Delhi began in 1920, and was completed in 1930 under the direction of British architect Edwin Lutyens. The area is still referred to as Lutyen’s Delhi. In 1947, after independence, New Delhi became the capital of India. Chandni Chowk, one of Delhi’s main streets, was once known as Shajahanabad (City of Walls) which was established by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in the 17th century. The planning and design were done by his daughter, Jahanara Begum. The street runs from Lahori Darwaza to Fatehpuri Masjid.

Visiting Delhi can be overwhelming experience because of the vastness of the city and its historical sites. We decided to focus on a few key places: the Parliament, Red Fort, Qutab Minar, Rashtrapati Bhavan and museums. We also explored the Golden Triangle tour, including Agra, Jaipur, Simla, Kullu-Manali, Chandigarh and Wagah Border. Qutub Minar, the tallest brick tower in the world, was built by Sultan Qutb-ud-Din Aibak in 1199, with subsequent floors added by his successors. The monument is intricately decorated with carvings and Quranic inscriptions. The Red Fort (Lal Qila) was built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in the 17th century and remains an icon of Delhi. It served as the capital of the Mughal Empire for many years. Nearby is Raj Ghat, the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi, where

he is laid to rest. We also visited the India Gate, a war memorial dedicated to soldiers who died in World War I and in the Afghan War. We visited the Lotus Temple, a Bahá'í house of worship that symbolizes religious harmony. We were marvelled at the architectural beauty of the Agra Fort, a blend of Islamic, Persian and Hindu styles. Our journey continued with a visit to the Taj Mahal, built by Shah Jahan in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. The construction began in 1632 and took 22 years to complete, symbolizing eternal love. Tragically Shah Jahan died in prison as his son Aurangzeb had placed him under house arrest at the Agra Fort.

We then travelled to Jaipur, known as the 'Pink City' and the capital of Rajasthan. The city was designed according to the principles of *Vastu Shastra*. Jaipur is renowned for its architectural wonders, including Amber Fort, Hawa Mahal and Jantar Mantar. Finally, we visited the Wagah Border, known as the Berlin Wall of Asia, where daily flag ceremonies take place, symbolizing the tension between India and Pakistan. From there, we travelled to the scenic hill stations of Kullu and Manali in Himachal Pradesh, famous for their natural beauty and adventure sports. Chandigarh, the capital of Punjab and Haryana, is a well-planned city known for its cleanliness and modernity. Its design, inspired by the human body, reflects India's post-independence aspirations. We swam through the river of happiness, new experiences and as a group, we cherished the calmness of our journey. It was a rare and wonderful memory in our lives.



My Father's 80th Birthday Celebration

Leaf 37

I love traveling to new places and learning about the traditions and cultures of different countries. These journeys not only bring me happiness but also improve my knowledge. I have had the privilege of visiting several countries, including China, Taiwan, Bangkok, Pattaya, Hong Kong, Tashkent, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, Jakarta, Bali, Uzbekistan, Russia and Vietnam. I visited Hong Kong in 2016, with my father, where my younger brother Dharmendran and his family were also living. My father received an invitation from the Hong Kong Malayalee Samajam to participate their Onam celebrations. After my return I had to visit the UAE twice. My second trip was to accompany my father, who was attending the Sharjah Book Fair. I received valuable experiences and insights through these journeys. My father celebrated his 80th birthday in 2014. He was honoured at a grand function held at Sadhu Mandapam, Kannur on 4th, June, 2014. The event was attended by notable celebrities like Shri V.M. Sudheeran (the former speaker of Kerala Legislative Assembly) and others and it was truly a memorable celebration. The reception committee, led by the late Shri P.P. Laxmanan, made it a colourful and remarkable event!

I was staying abroad when my father had completed 70 years of his age and could not attend the celebration. However, I sent him a letter of honour on that special birthday. Below is a copy of the message I wrote:

We are fortunate
Between life and death,
The messengers of God are born.
The purpose of their birth is unpredictable
Their ways are mysterious.
The truth of life remains unknown.
Birth occurs in this world every moment

Yet only a few become known.
They are the blessings of time
Those who have gained the fortune of human life!
Bowing before those
who have reached the heights of fame.
To be a name recognized worldwide,
to be the light of such an individual
O God, we salute you.
In the land of Malayalam,
Resting on the pillow of the Sahyadri Mountains
Blessed by literature
For 70 years you have spread
The fragrance of culture.
To be the sons of such a remarkable man
Is a great blessing for us.
You taught us
Not to see people for who they are
But to look for the humanity within them.
You guided us to understand the pain of fire
And spread its light to the world.
You revealed to us the true meaning of Love
Something not found in any dictionary!
You allowed us to soar in the sky of affection.
Womanhood is nothing but love
And you taught us this truth
And blessed us with a loving mother.
Your recognition by the President of India
Stands as a testament to your dedication to your profession.
It served as a lesson for us
Inspiring us to follow your footsteps.
In the vast sky of your speeches
We were fortunate to be the little stars surrounding you.
You showed us the path of a blessed life
By being a shining example of humility
For the next generation.
We are blessed by it.
Yes, our father is the blessing of our lives
And we are content.

Through these words
 What we have presented to our father
 Is our gift and we are happy
 That you accepted it wholeheartedly!

Today, my father is getting old and still continues to work tirelessly in the world of literature. He still finds happiness in writing books that astonish us. We look at him with admiration. The daughters-in-laws who joined our family have never felt lonely; they have become an integral part of our family, sharing the joy of our household as their own. Even in the absence of our mother, our father, sons, daughters-in-laws and grandchildren remain happy under the same roof. My father wrote a poem about me titled *Ente Manikkuttan* (My Manikkuttan) over six decades years ago. His works include *Raghaveeyam*, alongwith many other creations such as *Gandhiji Kavithayil*, *Ekaka Bodhini*, *Vadakkan Aythihya Mala*, *Qurante Munnil Vinayanwitham*, *Quran Oru Lalitha Saaram*, and *Gandheeyam*. Amongst these, *Vadakkan Aythihya Mala* and *Quran Oru Lalitha Saram* were translated into English with the titles as: *Lores and legends of North Malabar & Reminiscence of Holy Quran*.

One remarkable trait of my father is how he merges life with literature. He finds joy within the confines of his words. Many awards and recognitions have come his way. While a few people have had the honour of receiving awards directly from the President of India,

Governors and Chief Ministers, my father has been blessed with the opportunities to receive such honours so many times. We take immense pride in him.

I often recall this poem:
 “You awakened me
 From the darkness of sleep.
 You gave us a colourful life.
 You gave me the sky for my feathers to fly.
 You gave me a cage on the branch of your soul.
 I cannot separate myself from your heart, no matter what.
 Even if I am called by any heaven,
 My heaven is when I fall to the depth of your soul
 and end my life forever.”



The Last Interlude

My eldest son, Vysakh, after his B.Tech. degree in Computer Science, proceeded to Scotland for further studies and obtained his Master's degree (B.Tech., MS).

My second son, Vivek, completed his BBM. degree and then pursued his Postgraduate studies in Canada (BBM, MIB).

My youngest son, Vybhav, has been awarded B.Tech. degree from Manipal Engineering College-Jaipur (specialized in Mechatronics).

One day, Vysakh told me that he had fallen in love with a girl and wanted to marry her. I value true love and freedom, so how could I say no to my son? I simply said, "Yes!" With everyone's blessings, he married Ambika, a girl from Karnataka, on May 12th, 2014, in Bangalore. Ambika holds a B.Tech degree as well. Both my son and his wife, Ambika, are now employed and are living happily in London.

Vivek, is married to Jisha, daughter of Mr. Sree Gangadharan Nair and Mrs. Reena. Jisha is a qualified teacher, and both of them are currently working in Dubai.

When I retrospect on my life, I feel like touching the strings of a violin, where the music I hear is a blend of experiences, mixed with ragas of love, affection and coexistence. Life truly becomes a garden of various flowers when all these elements come together. While travelling in search of fallen flowers, I realized that the tree of life was shedding them one by one. I collected all those flowers and string them into a beautiful garland. I wish to continue this process, again and again, because I believe I am blessed with a clear and pure mind. I swear that I will maintain this belief and attitude forever, and I am confident that the blessings of my father and mother will always be with me.

As of now, I am taking a break. Even at my sixties I remain determined and focused, working with the vigour of a young man. My pen will continue to write, turning new experiences into words.

The great poet ‘Kumaranaasan’, who could recognize the fragrance of fallen flowers, wrote:

“Hey flowers, once upon a time, you shone like a queen in her royal chair.”

Each flower tells a unique story. Let us move into the past and pick them up and listen to what they have to tell us. Let us also try to treat yesterday as a signpost guiding us towards tomorrow!



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The Path where the Ganges flows



Sri. Vanidas Elayavooru



Smt. Yesoda



Amarnath



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Vidya



Maya



Asha



Vysakh



Vivek



Vaibhav



Jithin



Abhijith



Yeswanth



Swetha



Surasree



Sangeeth



Ambika



Jisha



Vishruth

*I who am sure to live until death,
will continue to pick-up fallen flowers
until i die...*

*I will go on creating floral patterns in the
tapestry of letters.*

To the One Who Gave Me Wings



You woke me from the great sleep of darkness,
And placed in my hands a feather rich with life.
You gave my wings the sky to soar,
And built for me a nest upon the summit of your soul.
I cannot be torn away...
No, not from the warmth of your heart,
Even if paradise itself were to call my name.
My heaven is not beyond the stars-
It lies in falling, melting,
Into the silent depths of your soul.
To rest in you...
That alone is the eternal truth.
-With eternal love and gratitude.....

...Amarnath
A Tribute to My Father

(Courtesy: Prof. V Madhusoodanan Nair)



‘The one who intends to fight in life
will always find opportunities ahead.’

- Amarnath