







**M SQUARE OF A V SQUARE**  
(Written to keep my mind awake, and  
yours pleasantly confused)



*“Brain exercise in progress----- Side effects may include nonsense.”*

**Balu**

*For Chinnu- my younger brother, lovingly remembered  
always*

## FOREWORD

**PADMASHRI DR.R.V. RAMANI**

A tribute to the Institution of “Family”, born out of fond memories and Nostalgia; a recollection interlaced with love, affection and bondage and his own inimitable humour and satire. This is Dr Narayanaswamy Balasubramanian’s wonderful handwork.

I am indeed honoured to pen this foreword to the book of Dr B, not as a formality, but more as a proud member of the family, of course as a lateral entry member.

In his journey through this book Dr B has fondly looked at the roots. Roots are the very basis of existence, but rarely seen and visible. He has pictured his folks and friends with ease giving the space for every member of the extended family. In his own sweet manner, he has brought out the hidden talents of every one of them.

Dr B has been a successful Veterinary Surgeon involved in the art of healing of those who cannot talk and communicate freely. At the same time, he has mastered the art of understanding and appreciating the people around. This book is the outcome.

While his original patients would not have given back much, perhaps other than an occasional kick! those of us going through this book, I am sure, will look at Dr B with awe and profound appreciation for the efforts he has put in with his ingenuity.

Let us pause for a moment and think; how many have tracked and documented their roots for posterity, that too with a tinge of humour. Not many, at least as far as I can think of.

Those who are born in 40s and 50s are blessed because they have seen the best of the past generation, then the gradual transformation into the present, a kind of metamorphosis, and witnessing the swift steps into the next generation.

Unfortunately, the next generation is left without much information or

experience about their legacy. For them this book is a rare gift. From joint families to nuclear families purely because of necessity, we all have moved and that has left a void for the future generations to know much about their roots. Books like this will be the best Bridge. Communication builds bridges. Capturing the individual member's unique qualities, sometimes with an adorable satire, Dr B takes us through this book.

The compassionate culinary queen Lakshmi Amma, the octogenarian Amanda mama and his devotion to Big Street Pillayar, dear Chinnu's brilliance, soft, loving and caring nature, extending a helping hand without expecting anything in turn, Dr B has beautifully portrayed all of them. You will enjoy this book.

I clearly remember Dr B's portrayal of my mother-in-law Saraswathy Jayaraman. Dr B once remarked; how a josier friend of his looked at his palm and exclaimed "You must be having a sister who is suffering from joint pains most of the time! "

Jokes apart, even today at her ripe age, dear amma is a stickler to time and discipline which she has obviously imbibed from her father, a genetic spread. Until her 90s she was taking care of the kitchen for her husband Mr Jayaraman.

Dear Lakshmi amma's culinary brilliance and innate love to feed everyone, Dr B has brought out vividly. I am witness to these hereditary assets in Radha. By sheer over feeding she has put every one of us at Coimbatore on an ongoing weight reduction spree.

Personally, I have had little interactions with other members of the family and this book have given me the opportunity to get to know them closely.

Dear family and friends, Dr B has given us a treasure to be cherished, incorporating the family values of the previous generation and the dynamic and optimistic forward thrust of the next generation. His power of observation and humorous narration makes an enjoyable reading.

On behalf of all of you, the readers, let me congratulate Dr Narayanaswamy Balasubramanian whole heartedly for this book for posterity.

Dr.R V Ramani

Padma Shri Awardee by Govt of India.

Founder & Managing Trustee, Sankara Eye Foundation India.

Former Member - Board of Governors in supersession of Medical Council of India.

President, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Raebareli, U.P

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I bow to the Almighty, who kindly gave me the strength, patience, and clarity to complete this book. I also offer my pranams to Kanchi Maha Periyava and Shirdi Saibaba, without whose divine supervision this manuscript would have taken another ten years — or quietly escaped into a dust-covered drawer.

With Their blessings, I somehow survived vanishing memories, a laptop that behaved as if it had personal grudges, and long, luxurious breaks that I proudly labelled as “deep creative thinking.” They also gave me the mental stamina to face rewrites that multiplied faster than my grey hair, and missing files that reappeared only when I no longer needed them. If this book has finally reached completion, it is because Their blessings gently pushed me forward whenever my enthusiasm—or my one finger typing speed—began to fade.

My deepest gratitude goes to Padma Shri Dr. R. V. Ramani, founder of the Sankara Eye Foundation, Coimbatore, and beloved husband of Dr. Radha, daughter of my sister Saraswathi. His graciousness in writing the Foreword is an honour I will treasure carefully. Given his hectic schedule—running the Sankara Eye Foundation, his role at AIIMS, and balancing enough responsibilities to make even a superhero sweat—I honestly expected a polite “Let me get back to you.” Instead, he immediately said yes, read the entire manuscript, and even responded thoughtfully. At this point, I am convinced he has unlocked a secret time-expansion formula unavailable to the rest of humanity.

His Foreword carries warmth, generosity, encouragement—and proof that he read every line. For this, I am both humbled and slightly guilty, and I solemnly promise not to ambush him with another full manuscript... at least not until he recovers from this one.

My heartfelt thanks to my wife Kamala, who, while bravely navigating age-related challenges, acted as my personal archive. She kept reminding me of stories I had misplaced somewhere between my 20s and last Tuesday. Several pages in this book survive solely because of her gentle nudges—and her unfailing ability to remember details I had long outsourced to fate.

To my daughter Latha, language expert, perfectionist, and unofficial grammar police—my sincere thanks. She polished my sentences, reined in my ramblings, and occasionally told me, with great diplomacy, “Appa, please write this

properly.” At times, she was my editor, at times my teacher, and occasionally, a traffic constable directing my wandering paragraphs back into order.

To my grandson Eshwar and his wife Viji, my heartfelt thanks for their encouragement and technical rescue missions. They patiently answered my questions, some of which may have made them question my technological survival skills. This book also owes its momentum to the months I spent in Atlanta, U.S., from May to August 2025—where they ensured I stayed fed, motivated, and, most importantly, seated at my writing desk.

To my granddaughter Janani and her husband Sai, the undisputed champions of proofreading and formatting—my heartfelt thanks for their patience, endurance, and saint-like tolerance.

And a special salute to Janani, who not only proofread but also took on the Herculean task of coordinating the printing and transforming this manuscript into an attractive, dignified, “looks-like-a-real-book”. Without her, this might still be a stack of confused pages wondering what their purpose in life is.

And of course, a gleaming golden star for little Rihaan, all of two years old, who graciously allowed his parents to work without delivering his usual “grand announcements.”

To each of you—my family, my inspiration, and my support system—my heartfelt thanks. You have all left your beautiful fingerprints on this book, some literally and some figuratively.

If this book has finally reached your hands, it is only because my family didn’t let me escape, rest too long, or pretend that watching TV was “research.” For all the love, laughter and reminders I remain forever grateful.

## PREFACE

In my earlier *Memoirs of a Veteran Veterinarian*, I bravely justified myself for writing, by declaring that Google assures me you don't have to be famous or infamous to write a memoir — and so I am qualified.

Now, with *M Square of a V Square*, the motivation is entirely different — and dare I admit it — thoroughly selfish. I am 89 years old, which means I live with a constant whisper in the back of my head: “Better keep that brain ticking, old boy, or else...” Every other day, my phone cheerfully bombards me with WhatsApp forwards: “Ten ways to fight Alzheimer's!” ... “Seven superfoods for memory power!” ... “Three yoga poses that will make your brain young again!” Not to mention endless articles about dementia prevention. All of them, in one commanding voice, say the same thing: Exercise your brain. Talk, talk. Write, write. Doesn't matter what nonsense you say or write.

Well then, here I am — an obedient student that I am. Armed with nothing more than a pen, a memory (sometimes faulty, sometimes overactive), and the divine license to scribble whatever I please, I have produced this book. If the outcome occasionally reads like polished wisdom, credit me. If it feels like absolute trash, kindly remember: the doctor prescribed it.

Before you give me too much credit, however, a small confession about the *mechanics* behind this book is in order. *M Square of a V Square* runs to over 200 pages and more than 67,000 words — an achievement that might suggest a skilled typist or advanced computer knowledge. I must confess to neither. My computer skills are limited, and my one finger typing skills even more so.

The real hero of this enterprise is my right index finger, which performed the bulk of the labour with unwavering dedication. The left index finger, though less industrious, made occasional but noble appearances — chiefly to assist the Shift key and to perform the life-saving ritual of Ctrl (with left) + S (with right). Together, these two fingers, working in careful coordination, managed to bring this book into existence. Any elegance you may find is purely accidental; the perseverance is entirely intentional.

So let me be honest: this book was written primarily to keep my brain alive, active, and perhaps just a little mischievous. Whether it ends up entertaining you, amusing you, boring you, or confusing you — that is purely collateral damage. If, by reading this, something strange happens to your brain... please

don't blame me. At best, consider it a cheerful side effect: a collection of squares — big, small, random, and sentimental — written with love, laughter, and a little desperation to outwit old age.

Jokes apart, the task I have set myself is to enlighten the younger generation about their roots, traditions, who is who, and their plus points, among other things.

So, fasten your seatbelt and come along for the ride. *M Square of a V Square* is ready to unfold. If nothing else, this book will ensure that when Alzheimer comes knocking, I'll at least be able to say: **"Sorry, no vacancy."**

### **The End-of-book Bribe**

#### ***To be Unlocked by Genuine Page-by-Page Traveller***

For those kind readers who travel with me patiently till the very end, I've placed a small gift on the last page, a tiny reward for tolerating all my squares, circles, and occasional nonsense. But one sincere request: please be honest. Don't jump to the last page straightaway. — read it in order, as God and the author intended!



# M SQUARE OF A V SQUARE

'Here lies proof that a vet's brain has more random thoughts than a dog has fleas.'



**“Not a life story—just a well-vaccinated collection of memories.”**

## INTRODUCTION

### M SQUARE of a V SQUARE

*"Here lies proof that a vet's brain has more random thoughts than a dog has fleas."*

So, you've got my book "M Square of a V Square" in your hands. Don't worry—it's not a math puzzle, nor a secret vet ...society!

**M Square** stands for my "Musings Mixture"—a collection of thoughts, memories, and funny moments gathered over the years. **V Square** is simply me—your Veteran Veterinarian.

This book isn't a straight life story. Think of it like a kitchen shelf where sugar might sit next to socks—random, but somehow it all belongs.

I've grouped my stories into "Squares"—each a window into my slightly quirky life:

**P Square: Peculiar Palate** – My very odd food habits (enough to shock even a goat).

**C Square: Colonoscopy and Colostomy** – My hospital adventures.

**K Square: Kith and Kin** – Family tales full of warmth, love, and delightful chaos.

**F Square: Fantastic Friends** – Mischief-makers, loyal companions, and unforgettable characters.

**A Square: Amazing Activities** – My stints in cricket and other games (yes, I know not everyone's a sports fan—so kindly endure my stories for the laughs!).

**R Square: Random Ramblings** – A drawer of scattered thoughts that didn't fit anywhere else.

**B Square: Backward Bytes** – Here, my nieces, nephews, and friends get to speak back.

**G Square: Gifted Giants**-- the zone where our family's finest members, stand shoulder to shoulder—sometimes taller in talent than in height. Think of this as

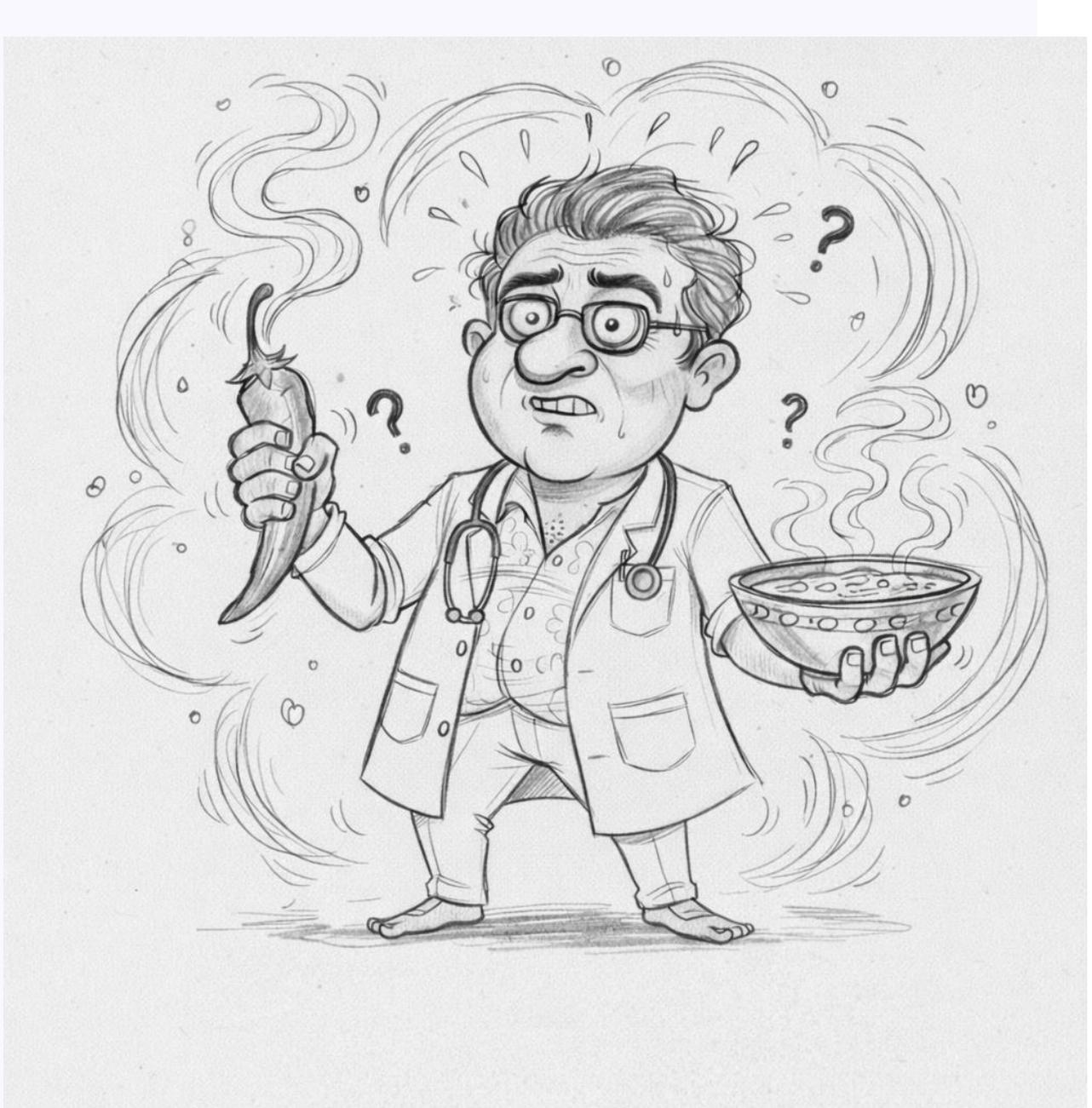
our very own hall of fame—minus the red carpet and ego, but with plenty of heart.

**T Square: Talent Treasury**--where creativity spills out in colours, curves, compositions, and curious expressions. From charming sketches to spirited scribbles and elegant artwork, every piece is a reminder that genes don't lie.

So, if you're ready for a light-hearted blend of memories, humour, and family anecdotes from a vet who has seen his fair share of curious pets and curious people, pull up a chair and join me. This book may not make you wiser—but it will surely keep you entertained.



## MY PECULIAR PALATE



*“My food habits confuse nutritionists, alarm relatives, and leave goats deeply offended.”*

## CHAPTER 1

### P SQUARE

#### MY PECULIAR PALATE

*“My diet is so strict, even the salad gets nervous.”*

Life has a strange sense of humour. Everyone who knew my late mother, Lakshmiamma, knew one thing for sure—she was a *master* in the kitchen. So good, in fact, that she even wrote her own little recipe booklet called “Samaiyal Kurippugal.”

And then... there was me. In a family of three sisters and two brothers, I proudly (or sadly) stand out as the odd one—blessed with food habits that can only be described as remarkably peculiar. Almost unbelievable, really.

I have been a famously poor eater all my life. Though I am 100% vegetarian, there exists an entire universe of vegetarian food that I have never touched.

Pickles? No.

Seppangkilangu? No.

Kathrika, vendakka, spinach? Absolutely not.

And please understand—this is only a small sample. The full list may require a separate booklet, possibly thicker than my mother’s recipe book.

Any attempt to taste—or even politely touch—these items has always ended in disaster. The moment they come near my mouth, my body reacts as if I am being attacked. Gagging is immediate and unavoidable. This has been the case for as long as I can remember, which remains a great mystery to the family, considering Lakshmiamma’s legendary cooking skills.

Spicy food? Please don’t even mention it. Even the smell is enough to set off emergency alarms inside me.

Now, to be fair, I did have my comforts. I loved tiffin items, sweets, chocolates, biscuits, ice cream, and all crispy fried delights like vadaam and appalam.

But fate, again laughing quietly, decided to pause even that joy. I am now left with three broken, uneven molars. My teeth clearly retired early—probably in solidarity with my taste buds.

This unfortunate food habit—sadly very low in fibre—eventually led to lesions in my sigmoid colon (part of the large intestine), which required emergency surgery. Quite ironic, isn’t it, coming from a family of culinary experts?

Thankfully, the biopsy (HPE) ruled out anything serious like malignancy. I strongly believe Lakshmiamma was watching over her peculiar child from above.

### **The Dosa Discovery: A Culinary Awakening.**

This story was told by my mother. When I was very young, I often went to play at our next-door neighbour's house. There was no compound wall separating the houses—only curiosity.

One day, the neighbour mami was making dosa. She gave me a small piece with a little sugar. I tasted it—and absolutely loved it. I rushed home and proudly told my mother that I liked the white item the mami gave me. My mother was overjoyed. After many failed attempts, her son had finally tasted dosa—and liked it! However, I became firmly convinced that this magical vellai (white) item could only come from that mami.

So, in the days that followed, my clever mother would prepare dosa at home and give it to me, confidently saying, “Next-door mami sent this for you.” And just like that, dosa entered my life—under false identity.

### **Family Feasts and Functions**

In those days, whenever the family planned to attend a wedding or any function, I would silently cry inside, thinking of the ordeal that awaited me while sitting in the pandhi.

I simply could not stop the endless parade of dishes being served. My mother, fully aware of my suffering, would sit beside me and quietly push away many of the items—items I would not even touch with a spoon.

She ensured I ate: Rice with rasam. Rice with curd. Appalam as the only side dish. Sweets and payasam, thankfully, were always accepted without protest.

Over time, a few more items slowly found their way into my menu—much to the relief of my mother, wife, daughter, and everyone else involved in feeding me. These included curries made from potato, carrot, chow chow, yam, plantain, and tiffin items like poori, chappathi, vadai, and adai.

I am fully aware of the daily difficulties faced by everyone who must cook “special” items just for me. I am helpless.

I apologise.





## THE BIG FLUSH

## CHAPTR 2

### C SQUARE

*“Who needs an adventure when you’ve got a colonoscopy? The scenery is just as interesting.”*

#### **Colonoscopy & Colostomy**

It’s no secret that I’ve always had a rather selective palate. My lifelong rebellion against anything green or healthy eventually led me to an adventure I never saw coming — a first colonoscopy followed by Colostomy emergency surgery at the ripe old age of 85! then another colonoscopy and then another.

Who would have imagined that a diet based entirely on what *tasted good for me* could one day lead to such drama? Being a medical man myself, I knew exactly what those blood-tinged stools meant. But did I act at once? No.

You see, my priorities were perfectly clear — two grandchildren’s weddings were coming up, and I couldn’t have anything as inconvenient as a health crisis spoiling the celebrations. Apart from the blood, I felt fine — good appetite, no weight loss, nothing alarming. So, I postponed seeing a specialist until both weddings were done and dusted — March and December 2021.

Then I consulted Dr Vijayan, my friend and Gastroenterologist on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2022. On his advice, I went to the Endoscopy Centre, where Dr Mani Veeraraghavan took charge.

At first, I dreaded the idea of colonoscopy. I knew it meant embarrassment, discomfort and pain — or so I thought. But within minutes of entering the centre, all that vanished.

Dr Mani, a very pleasant and understanding professional, explained everything calmly and clearly. I was not anaesthetised — just local — and was even allowed to watch the “grand tour” of my insides on the monitor, complete with live commentary by the doctor!

During my first colonoscopy it was disquieting to see those angry red lesions glaring at me, but the subsequent ones were surprisingly enjoyable — painless, smooth and with no side effects. Hats off to Dr Mani and his wonderful team for turning what I had feared into a friendly, almost educational experience.

#### **The Great Colostomy Adventure**

*“A colostomy isn’t an end — it’s just a rerouting project. Think of it as traffic diversion by the Department of Health!”*

Back to Dr Vijayan, whose quick decision and steady hands deserve special

mention. Performing a tricky colostomy on an 85-year-old is no easy task, but he handled it with remarkable confidence and care. I can't thank him enough for the way he approached and managed my case.

The surgery was a success — no malignancy, as later confirmed by biopsy. The only little nuisance: I had to carry around a small “accessory bag” for three months. It was attached neatly to my side, and though it made for an unusual fashion statement, I was simply glad the plumbing worked!

When the doctor was satisfied that all was in perfect order, the reversal was done — bag and plug gone, everything back where it belonged.

### **The Colonoscopy Preparation**

*“The prep for a colonoscopy teaches you two things: patience... and the location of every bathroom in your house.”*

#### **A Fast and Furious Flush!**

Now, this part deserves its own chapter.

I was instructed to take a “special drink” ‘Peglec powder 135.15 gm dissolved in two litres of water — early morning after overnight fasting, along with two laxative tablets. I had to sip 200 ml at a time, every ten minutes, finishing it in two hours.

Let me tell you, this magic potion turned my insides upside down. The bathroom became my best friend, and I began to wonder if I would ever be solid again. By the time I reported for the procedure, I was so light I could have floated.

#### **Round Two, Round Three**

After the reversal surgery, I had my second colonoscopy to confirm everything was working well. It was a smooth ride — all systems perfect.

Exactly a year later came colonoscopy number three, a routine annual check-up. By now it feels like a yearly pilgrimage, though I must confess, I dread the pre-colonoscopy “drink” more than the procedure itself.

#### **My Fibre Fix**

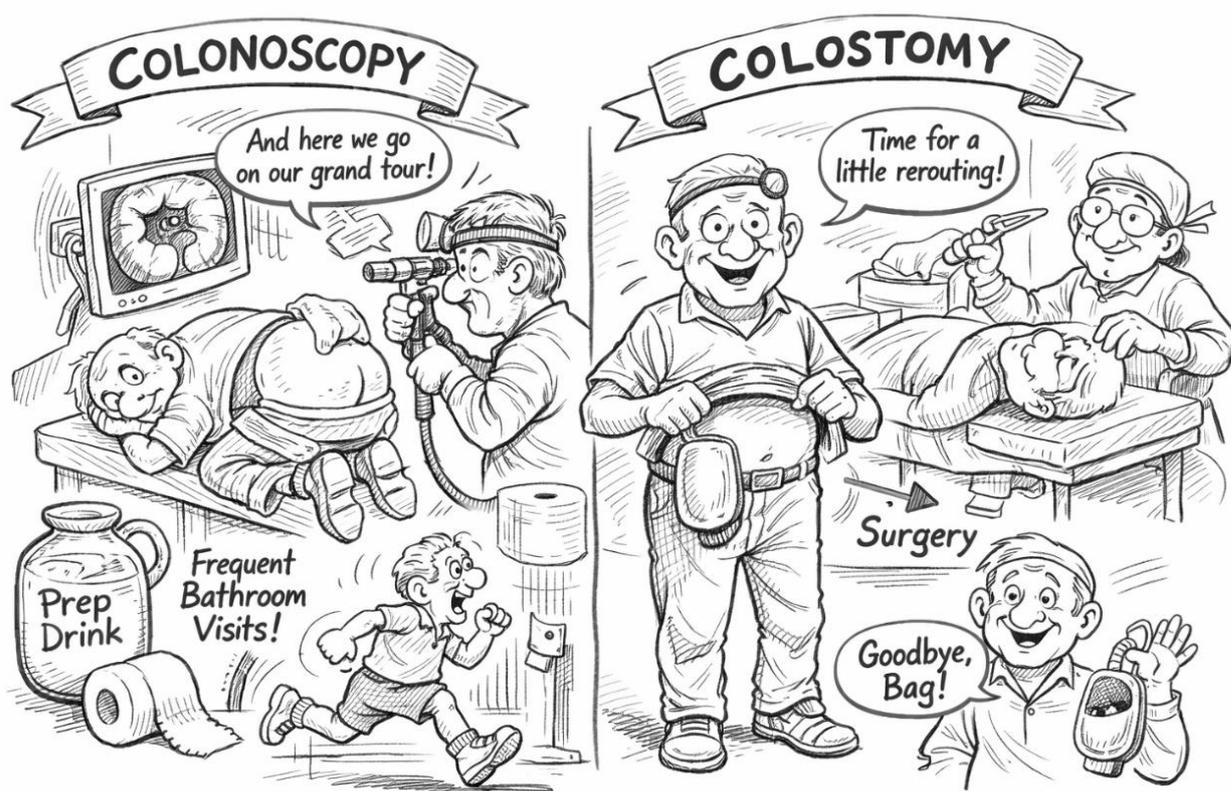
After all this drama, Dr Mani gave me one firm piece of advice — “More fibre!” Given my lifelong aversion to anything leafy or green, I now get my daily greens from a glass — a fibre supplement (Sat Isabgol) that's become my compulsory evening ritual. It's my version of “health in a glass.”

Endured colonoscopy no. 4 on 10 November 2025. This time, I went through

the preparation part with unexpected ease—perhaps age teaches us not only patience, but also acceptance.

The grand tour of my entrails was nothing short of a National Geographic special, at least to my eyes. Dr. Mani’s live commentary kept me calm, informed, and occasionally entertained. I came home holding an ‘everything normal’ report with quite gratitude. More than anything the 'fibre fix 'also according to Dr. Mani has done its job.

Dr. Vijayan, on seeing the report, in his familiar telegraphic style, messaged me with a single word: ‘Excellent.’



**That day, the bathroom and I became emotionally inseparable.**

**A colostomy isn't a setback — it's plumbing with a bypass**

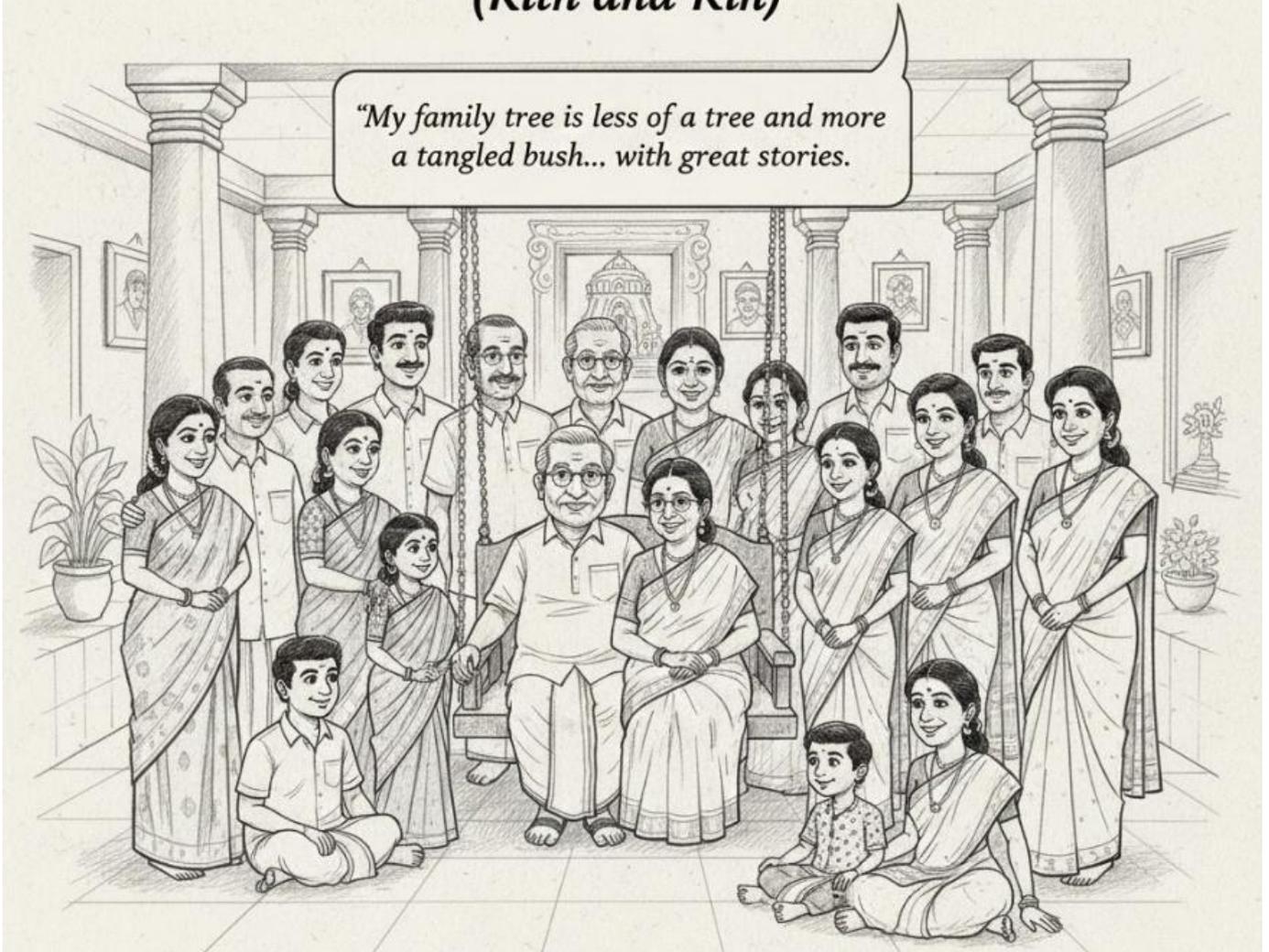




# K SQUARE

(Kith and Kin)

*"My family tree is less of a tree and more a tangled bush... with great stories."*



**“Warning: This family may cause laughter, nostalgia, and mild confusion.”**

## CHAPTER 3

### K SQUARE (Kith and Kin)

*"My family tree is less of a tree and more of a tangled bush... with great stories."*

#### INTRODUCTION

Well, after my eventful (occasionally bruising) tryst with my colon related adventures it is time to introduce you to the real stars of my life, my family. This family tree has more branches than a banyan tree and more stories than a library!

#### FIRST GENERATION

##### The Originals.

Let's start with the foundation: First generation, my dear Father Late T.R. Narayanaswamy Iyer and the heart and soul of our family, my mother Laksmamma. They were the ones who brought this whole circus into being, and I'm sure they had their hands full. They laid the groundwork for all the quirks and charms that would follow through the generations.

#### SECOND GENERATION

##### The siblings and their significant others.

Then there's my 2nd generation, a lively bunch indeed! Here is the list in the order of their birth. This list is mainly for the fourth-generation kids to know who is who.

1. Late Amandhan (Ramachandran), my elder brother and his spouse late Savithri – Manni to all of us.
2. Late Rukmani, my elder sister and her enterprising husband, late T.S. Narayanaswamy – Athimber to all of us.
3. Saraswathi, my elder sister and her thrifty partner late R. Jayaraman - Kutti Athimber to all of us.
4. Late Padma, my elder sister and her better half, versatile person late K.S. Guruswamy.
5. Myself and my wife, Kamala, navigating our own path through this wonderful family maze.
6. Finally, my younger brother, the genius late Radhakrishnan – Chinnu to all of us and his spouse, Raji.

We were quite the team, growing up and growing older together.

#### THIRD GENERATION

**The Next Wave of Wonders** – my nephews and nieces with their spouses!

They're the ones who truly carry on the family legacy of intelligence, charm, and sometimes, a delightful touch of eccentricity.

## CHAPTER 4

### FIRST GENERATION A TALE OF TWO GENIUSES

*"My dad was a math genius who could do a four-digit multiplication in his head, while my mom was the real genius who made a family run on pure willpower and a shoestring budget."*

Let me tell you about the originals, the people who started our family circus: my parents. My father, T.R. Narayanaswamy Iyer—or as we knew him, Nanu, Spencer Iyer, and T.R. Thatha—was a certified genius. I mean, this man was a walking, talking calculator.

He was a gold medallist in math, so smart he could add three-digit numbers faster than you could say "why?" And before calculators were even a thing, he'd close his eyes for a few seconds and tell his staff the exact bonus they'd get. As kids, we'd try to stump him by asking him to multiply two huge four-digit numbers. We'd be scribbling away, and he'd just tell us the answer from his head, leaving us with our jaws on the floor.

But his genius wasn't just in numbers. Without a watch, he could tell you the exact minute he'd be home from his morning walk. He was also a man of simple tastes. While the rest of us were using soap and combs, he swore by "kadalai maavu" for his showers and his fingers for his hair. It was a lifestyle choice that only a genius could pull off. He was a great, jolly family man, even if his temper was a bit short. He knew everything about every sport just from reading the paper, which he read from one end to the other.

Then there's my mom, Lakhmamma. My dad may have been a math genius, but she was the real pillar. She never went to school, but she had more street smarts than anyone I've ever met. A fantastic cook, a practical thinker, and the rock of our family. After my dad passed away, rather prematurely, with very limited funds and with the financial wizardry of a CFO, she got my sister married and made sure my brother and I finished our professional studies. She was a true force of nature, and we owe everything to her.

More of these two in the 'Random Ramblings' section.

### **Veterinary Touch for My Parents**

Appa was like a steady old bull — strong, dependable, and quietly leading the herd with calm confidence. Amma, on the other hand, had the gentle patience of a mother cow — always caring, always forgiving, and somehow managing to feed both the body and the spirit of a large, noisy family.

Together, they kept our family stable through every storm, teaching us

discipline, devotion, and a touch of humour. Looking back now, I realize that much of what made me a good veterinarian — observation, compassion, and the ability to stay calm in chaos — I first learnt at home from them.

## CHAPTER 5

### SECOND GENERATION

*"We were a lively bunch—part master sportsman, part post office hero, part teacher, part veterinarian, and part human calculator."*

Now that you've met my parents—The Originals—it's time to introduce you to the second generation. We were the lucky ones who got to inherit all their genius, their quirks, and their unique brand of family chaos. You could say that if the first generation was the foundation, we were the ones who filled the house with life, laughter, and plenty of memorable stories.

We were a lively bunch of brothers and sisters, and we learned from each other's mistakes (or at least, we tried to!). From a master sportsman and a wizard of budget-friendly communication to a fearless post office hero, a brilliant teacher, a dedicated veterinarian, and a certified human calculator, we covered all the bases. Our stories are filled with adventure, a little bit of drama, and a whole lot of humour.

### AMANDHAN

*"My brother was so devoted, he'd pay thousands for a temple festival, which is pretty funny for a man who tried to save a few rupees on a telegram."*

My elder brother, Amandhan, was born in 1924, a full twelve years before me, and he was quite the character. He married his wife, Savithri (manni), when he was just 23. She came from a huge family, and here's a funny bit: her family had so many members, they practically had a "family tradition" of being diabetic! Not to be outdone, Amandhan went on to have six children of his own, ensuring our family tree continued to grow at a respectable rate. Amandhan was a seriously talented sportsman, an all-rounder who could ace anything he played. But honestly, his sports trophies and medals were nothing compared to his real-life antics, which were far more entertaining.

I remember one time when we were kids, my younger brother, my sisters, and I were all gathered around my dad in the easy chair, listening to his stories after dinner. My dad had this special sense for knowing when Amandhan was coming home. He'd hear his footsteps and call out a welcoming "vanga sir, vanga." One night, he heard the familiar sounds and gave his welcome call. But instead of Amandhan walking in, our family cow, who had escaped from her shed, burst into the house looking terrified! My siblings and I scrambled onto the nearest bench, convinced the cow wanted to join the storytelling session. It was pure chaos until our servant finally came to the rescue.

Here's another gem. Back in 1944-45, my parents were desperately trying to get my older sister Rukmani married. She was about 17, and back then, that was considered late! Her horoscope had a little hitch called "sevvai dhosham," making the search even harder. Finally, they found a promising boy in Bombay, and they sent Amandhan to go check him out.

A little while later, we got a telegram from him that simply read: "BOY MANIRAM." Now, this was before mobile phones, and phone calls were super expensive. So, to save money, Amandhan had compressed the words together. But my parents and the whole family were completely stumped. What on earth did "boy maniram" mean? Was it the boy's name? A secret code? The family spent hours trying to crack the message.

Finally, after a long, frustrating wait, someone figured it out. Amandhan, in his brilliant, cost-cutting way, meant to say "Ma Niram," which means "medium complexion." So, he had literally combined two words into one just to save a few rupees! In the end, the "Ma Niram" boy didn't work out, so all that trouble was for nothing!

But for all his budget-friendly antics, Amandhan was a very devout man, just like our dad. Whenever he was in Chennai, the first place he'd go was the Big Street Pillaiyar temple in Triplicane. He loved that place and the Pillaiyar so much that he decided to pay for the annual festival on the ninth day after Vinayaka Chaturthi. He did it for years, and he was so loyal that he kept paying even as the cost went up from less than Rs. 100 to Rs. 10,000 by the time of his death in 2011. Now, my younger brother Chinnu and I have taken over, and we've promised each other we'll never stop. It has continued, even after the demise of Chinnu in November 2015 which is Rs 46000 this year.

And that, in a nutshell, was my elder brother Amandhan: a genius sportsman, a master of budget-friendly communication, and a true star of our family's best stories.

My sister-in-law, Manni, was the calm eye in the middle of our family's glorious storm. She was so unruffled and collected that it was a wonder how she managed, especially since she was also the unfortunate recipient of her family's "diabetes legacy." Sadly, that insulin-dependent diabetes took her before my brother Amandhan.

### **Veterinary Touch for Amandhan**

His famous "Boy Maniram" telegram reminds me of the kind of shorthand we vets use in case notes that no one else can understand.

## RUKMANI

Alright, let's talk about my eldest sister, the late Rukmani. She was a legend. Our parents had a real tough time finding her a husband because her horoscope had "sevvai dhosham." My dad would go on endless quests for grooms, and to make it even more fun, a bachelor marriage broker with a bunch of horoscopes would show up at our house. He would close his eyes and rattle off details, from memory in a monotonous tone about potential grooms without ever opening his bundle of horoscopes, or his eyes! My dad would eventually just slip away from him while the guy was still talking with his eyes closed. The irony was not lost on us: he was a pro at finding others a match but couldn't find one for himself!

Rukmani finally got married on 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1945 in Thiruvottiyur. Locating a wedding hall in the city back then also was an adventure.

Now, let us fast forward to Rukmani's husband T.S. Narayanaswamy (Athimber), same name as my dad, hailing from Tiruvarur, Tanjore district. As kids we were amused when we came to know the nick names in their family-brothers, Seenu, Pattu, Kittu, Mottai, and Ambi, sisters, Rajam, Poochi and Rukku! My athimber's moniker Kunju!!

Athimber at the time of marriage was employed in the Military Engineering Services in Bangalore. However, shortly after marriage, he resigned the job and moved to Madras (Chennai) to try his hand at the real estate business. My dad

did not approve as he was against business. But business was in athimber's blood. He made a significant mark in his chosen field – he knew exactly what he was doing.

**Here's a fun fact about my family:**

My parents had eight children, although two died in infancy. Of my siblings, Rukmani had the most children with seven, beating Amandhan's by one. Saraswathi ended this streak with three, followed by Padma with two. Chinnu and I each had one.

Back to TSN and Rukmani. Sadly, athimber's life was cut short prematurely after he bravely battled a rare form of cancer – multiple myeloma. After the expiry of TSN, Rukmani faced the daunting task of raising her seven children – five daughters and two sons, almost single handedly. The oldest daughter was only around twenty. Suddenly the income stopped, debtors were pressing and there was even the threat of their Lake area, Nungambakkam house being auctioned.

But Rukmani was a woman of incredible strength and determination. No doubt she had the moral support from Lakshmiamma and her siblings. Personally, I stood by my sister and her kids and did my best to my abilities.

Rukmani, on her part, faced the challenges head-on and overcame every obstacle. Credit should be given to the children, as all of them without exception were very good in studies, disciplined, became graduates, found employment and eventually married well. Her two sons presently well off and settled in the U.S. More about athimber and these nibblings in a different section.

Rukmani passed away in the year 2000 at the age of 73 after seeing her children with their families well settled, leaving behind a legacy of resilience and love.



**SARASWATHI**

*“No fear was greater than the fear of missing the mail”*

Saraswathi was born on 18th January 1931. Finding a match for her was rather easy. Saraswathi's husband, R. Jayaraman (Kutti Attimber), was a double

graduate from Triplicane. He worked as an Inspector in the Income Tax Department, eventually climbing the ranks to become an Income Tax Officer.

Their wedding date was set for the fourth of June 1948. Oh! Saras was only 17 then! Considered the right age in those days. The same day, my upanayanam was also fixed—a very busy day in Nanu’s household.

The venue for this double celebration was our Gopalapuram home. The hunt for an affordable marriage hall in the city was still proving to be a headache for my dad. For the wedding reception entertainment, my sister’s then music teacher—by the same name and initial as mine, N. Balasubramanian—was arranged. A few of my naïve friends believed me when I pulled a prank, telling them it was *me* who would be presenting the concert! All said and done, the double function went off well.

During World War II, when there were fears of Japanese bomb threats over Madras, we, like many families in the city, decided to evacuate. Our choice then was Thiruvengadu, eight miles from Sirkazhi in Tanjore District, where my maternal uncle Dr. Jayaraman lived. This uncle—known to his clients as “Kurangu Doctor” because of his eccentricities—was a very popular medical practitioner.

At that time, it was a wise decision on our dad’s part not to sell our Gopalapuram house. A few sold their properties at throwaway prices. Later, Dad admitted that he could have bought a house or two, considering how low prices were then.

Back to Thiruvengadu. We settled into a rented house; Dad and Amandhan stayed back in Madras due to job commitments. Saraswathi has always been bold and extremely active—this vibrant personality was evident from a very young age.

Those days, in most film songs, before the actual song started, there would be a long background music (BGM). Saraswathi, being the multi-talented and energetic person she was, could identify the song the moment the BGM began—her guess as quick and accurate as her running! Though others also tried (and sometimes succeeded), none could match Saraswathi’s speed and certainty.

As a teenager, she also showed her adventurous spirit. Village mud roads would be deserted in the afternoons, and we were warned to stay indoors—not only for safety, but also because a goat or hen was sacrificed almost daily at the nearby

Kali temple. Despite these warnings, Saraswathi would boldly dash out, running like a rabbit to the post office two streets away, just to collect the eagerly awaited mail from our dad or Amandhan. Truly, no fear was greater than the fear of missing the mail.

That same curiosity and enthusiasm followed her into later years—only the medium changed. Saraswathi became a voracious reader of almost every Tamil magazine available. One could always see a neat stack of magazines beside her—some “currently reading” and many marked silently as “to be read later,” thanks to lack of time. As if this wasn’t enough, she never missed Tamil serials across different TV channels. In this, she found a perfect companion in her daughter Vijaya, who shared the same addiction—to both magazines and television. Mother and daughter would happily exchange notes on stories, characters, and plots, sometimes knowing more than the scriptwriters themselves!

Our family’s very own “P. T. Usha” is now 95 years young, though reluctantly confined to a wheelchair—but her spirit, curiosity, and love for stories remain as lively as ever

### **MY BROTHER-IN-LAW: The Money Magician**

Let me tell you about our Chinna Athimber. He was a double graduate, but his true genius wasn't in books; it was in his wallet. He was what you might call "thrifty," or as I like to put it, a financial magician.

He was so good at saving money that he thought inland letters were a bit too fancy. So, as an example, he preferred sending postcards, even for important, confidential matters. I can only imagine the kind of family secrets that were aired on the back of a little card!

But he wasn't against spending on what was truly needed. He was a sensible saver who built up a sizable nest egg, making sure my sister Saraswathi and their children were always financially secure.

My money-magician brother-in-law lived a long, prosperous life, passing away at the grand old age of 96. His two daughters and son are all well settled with their spouses. More on him in a different section.

### **Veterinary Touch for Saraswathi and Chinna Athimber**

She was like a lively mare — bold, restless, and impossible to keep tied down. Chinna Athimber, was a different species altogether — a calm, calculating money-magician who could make a rupee stretch like a dose of multi-vitamin

## **PADMA**

*"She may have lived a short life, but she packed more love and light into 31 years than most people do in a lifetime."*

Shortly after the birth of my third elder sister Padma in the year 1933 our family moved to the newly constructed house in Gopalapuram from Sydoji street, Triplicane. The house was aptly named 'Padmalaya' Padma was clearly a bright spark, doing well in her studies and qualifying as a teacher.

She was dedicated to her profession serving as a teacher until she got married. Sadly, her life though impactful, was tragically short. She passed away prematurely at the young age of 31 in 1964 on a Vinayaka Chaturthi day. Padma was a remarkable woman – a devoted teacher, a lovable sister and a beloved member of our family.

Her lively personality, kindness and radiant smile are memories that are etched in the hearts of all who knew her. Padma's wedding in 1958 was truly a memorable occasion. The venue was Abbotsbury, Mount Road (now Anna Salai) a place in those days considered quite exclusive where only the affluent could afford. Equally special was the music concert by M.L. Vasanthakumari, the renowned Carnatic musician.

Padma's husband, K.S. Guruswamy was the perfect match for her. He was a vibrant and charismatic person who was a manager in Indian Bank. He was very close to M.A.M. Muthaiya Chettiar. Just six years into their married life, Padma passed away leaving behind two gems, Sumathy and Meena. Even though her time was short, Padma lived a life that was full of life and left a lasting impression on everyone around her.

### **Veterinary Touch for Padma**

She was like a gentle kitten — bright, affectionate, and loved by everyone who came near.

### **YOURS TRULY – MYSELF**

*"My two smartest decisions in life were becoming a veterinarian and marrying a financial wizard who could turn my meagre salary into a household budget."* Ah! now we come to my own adventures. Becoming a qualified veterinarian and a government employee in January 1960 with a 'princely' sum of Rs 199 per month, as my starting salary, considered decent then, evidently turned me into a hot commodity on the eligible bachelor market.

A retired engineer, one Srirama Iyer, happened to be our valued neighbour in Gopalapuram. The son-in-law of this engineer, Vembu mama approached my mother with an interesting proposition: he has a sister in Chidambaram whose

daughter was of marriageable age. This was in 1960. When my mother, who was interested, delicately inquired about my thoughts on this potential match, my response was a firm and decisive “nope, not interested” Apparently, I wasn’t quite ready yet.

Fast forward, a couple of years to early 1963, the very same Vembu mama decided to give another shot. He informed my mother that the Chidambaram girl was still unmarried. This time, for reasons that remain mysterious even to myself, I said yes!

After the usual round of family discussions and formalities, I married the Chidambaram girl, Kamala D/o Swaminatha Jatavallabar and Rajalakshmi on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1963. The wedding was at Chidambaram.

It is relevant to point out here that earlier I did agree to see a girl, on the compulsion of my brother Amandhan and others. I still remember, I reluctantly visited the girl’s house at T Nagar with my mom and sisters. As a ritual the girl sang. Oh, that was it – an excuse for me to reject the alliance.

Coming to my post marriage. Choosing Kamala as my life partner was one of the smartest decisions – next to my wise choice of veterinary course. Kamala’s education went only up to school final (S.S.L.C) satisfying my desire not to have the hand of a graduate. She is incredibly homely, remarkably intelligent, good looking and street smart. What truly amazed me was her talent for managing our household expenses with meagre resources to start with.

### **Veterinary Touch for Myself**

I’d say I’ve lived like an old family bull — steady, stubborn, but still curious about the next patch of grass!

### **CHINNU**

*"My brother Chinnu was so smart, he considered losing his civics textbook a memory test."*

Let me shine the light on my younger brother Chinnu (Radhakrishnan) Though he might have been the youngest in the second generation in our family, he certainly was not the least in terms of impact and influence. Born on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1938 in Chennai, he sadly passed away in November 2015 in Atlanta U.S.A., after a battle with bladder cancer. I had a special bond with him. It is our firm belief that Chinnu inherited the ‘genius gene’ from our dad. While he enjoyed sports and even excelled in table tennis, his focus was always academics.

Here is a wonderful story about Chinnu I would like to share.

In the fourth class he lost his civics text book. Instead of panicking and asking for a new one, he simply declared that he had already memorized the entire book! No need to purchase one. Such was his photographic memory.

His academic talent was particularly evident in Mathematics. From the very first grade, Chinnu, consistently scored centum and excelled in other subjects as well. He had a knack for solving all the math questions without even looking at the choice options, and will always hand over his answer papers well before the final bell.

Chinnu's academic journey began with a B. E in civil engineering from Guindy Engineering College, followed by M.Tech from I.I.T, Powai in Mumbai and finally a Ph.D from Austin, Texas, U.S.A (1966 to 69)

Chinnu had an arranged marriage with Raji, went on to work for the U.S Federal Government Organization, Waterways Experiment Station in Vicksburg, U.S.A.

In a family full of story-tellers, cricket enthusiasts, and amateur philosophers, Chinnu stands out as the one who changed the world. The rest of us are still trying to figure out how to reset the Wi-Fi router.

As a testament to his remarkable life, I have posted his bio-data – nothing short of a novel, in the 'Gifted Giants' section.

### **Raji - Chinnu's Better Half:**

Raji is very much a character worth mentioning. A B.Sceuro. graduate and the eldest among her three younger sisters, she was born and brought up in the lively neighbourhood of Triplicane. She was determined to settle in the United States.

That wish came true when she married my younger brother, Chinnu. Raji is intelligent, adaptable, and quick on her feet. She embraced the American way of life with remarkable ease and built her world there. With Chinnu deeply immersed in his demanding professional career, it was Raji who took on the prime role of raising their only son, Arun, exactly in the way she thought best. Her efforts bore fruit—Arun grew up to become a top-notch neuro-radiologist, a success story that speaks volumes for her dedication as a mother. Of course, like many children raised abroad, Arun's Tamil-speaking skills lag a little—perhaps even behind that of a two-year-old in Chennai! But let's be clear—this was never intentional neglect on Raji's part, just the natural consequence of life in a different land. Through it all, Raji has remained deeply connected to the family.

Even after Chinnu's passing, she has kept her bond with us strong and alive. That affection and continuity are something we truly cherish.

### **Veterinary Touch for Chinnu**

He was the most affectionate soul in our herd — gentle, loyal, and always ready to lend a hand, much like a faithful old dog who understands without words. Chinnu had that rare blend of heart and discipline — the kind every good vet wishes his patients had too!

**Thanks to my dad and mom – no more in the second generation.**



## THE NEXT WAVE OF WONDERS



**“They inherited our talents, improved our mistakes, and left us pleasantly unemployed.”**

## CHAPTER 6

### THE NEXT WAVE OF WONDERS

*"They've taken the family legacy of charm, intelligence, and delightful eccentricity and turned it into successful careers. We couldn't be prouder."*

#### My Nieces and Nephews

Now that we've finished with the second-generation, it's time to shine a light on the next wave of wonders: my nieces and nephews and their spouses.

This is where all the family genius, charm, and delightful eccentricity truly come together. They are a perfect blend of the best—and sometimes the most baffling—traits from the generations before them. They've inherited my dad's genius for numbers, my brother Amandhan's talent for sports, Rukmani's resilience and love, Saraswathi's bravery, my sister Padma's radiant smile and Chinnu's genius. Thank the Almighty, none of them seem to have inherited any of my bad traits! It's a wonderful, slightly overwhelming mix.

These kids are smarter than their smartphones, more adventurous than a travel blogger, and have somehow managed to take all our family quirks and turn them into successful careers. They've settled all over the world, from here to the U.S., becoming doctors, engineers, and so much more.

They are the next chapter in our family's great story. We, the second generation, are finally breathing a sigh of relief, knowing that the family legacy is in very smart, charming, and capable hands. The circus has new performers, and I can't wait to see what they do next!

#### RAJU - VIJAYA

*"Raju and Vijaya have the perfect balance in life: he's a day-trading guru, and she's a master of relaxing with Tamil TV serials. It's truly a marriage of excitement and calm."*

Raju and Vijaya are a beautiful example of how two branches of our family tree can blend perfectly. But getting them married wasn't so simple! I heard there was an honest, healthy competition between Saras and Rukmani's families over whose daughter Raju would marry. But in the end, it wasn't charm or intelligence that won; it was my brother-in-law Kutti Athimber's endless rain of postcards to my brother Amandhan in Pune that sealed the deal. He was a master of communication and a true victor!

From a young age, Raju was a favourite of my father and a very brave kid. I still remember putting him on a flight all by himself as a small boy. By the time I

got home, we had a telegram saying he had arrived safely. He was also a talented sportsman, just like his father.

But when it comes to hospitality, no one can beat Raju and Vijaya. I swear, they treated us like royalty when we visited them in Pune. The streets were full of amazing sweets and snacks, and we basically spent the entire day eating. Raju, who is a diabetic, threw all caution to the wind and joined in, which shows you what kind of amazing hosts they are.

Vijaya is a wonderful person with a perfect combination of gentleness and strength. She was another favourite of my dad, and a true artist. She was once a disciple of the famous veena wizard Chitti Babu, but for some mysterious reason, she quit. The world lost a veena maestro, and I lost my chance to see her become a star. I also remember her as a child wanting a parrot, and as the family vet, I went on a mission to find her one. I wonder what happened to that poor parrot, Vijaya?

Today, Raju and Vijaya live a perfectly balanced life. On weekdays, Raju is glued to his laptop, a day-trading master diving into the world of finance. Meanwhile, Vijaya is happily enjoying her Tamil TV serials, a shared past time with her mom, in between naps.

Raju and Vijaya found the perfect mix of relaxation and excitement, and I hope they manage their health as well as they manage their daily routine.

### **Veterinary touch for Raju – Vijaya**

Warm kennel hosts—everyone leaves well-fed, well-cared-for, and smiling like contented pups.

### **BABU**

*“Smart, swift, and full of heart — Babu made every short step count.”*

We now come to my younger brother, Amandhan's second son, Babu (Padmanabhan). He became an officer at Bank of Baroda. He was shrewd and smart, a financial genius in his own right. He wasn't content with just a salary; he always had a keen eye for opportunities to make a little "extra cash." He knew a good deal when he saw one and was quite successful at it.

Babu's life wasn't all about business, though. His marriage was a true love story, a beautiful testament to finding your perfect match. Sadly, his and his wife's lives were tragically cut short, a reminder that even the most conventional paths can take an unexpected turn.

Despite the shortness of his life, one memory remains particularly special to me and my wife, Kamala. We had the profound honour of performing his sacred thread ceremony. It was a beautiful, significant family occasion, and a truly proud moment for us to be a part of his life's journey.

Though our lives took different paths and we didn't have much personal contact with him in later years, the bonds of family always remained strong.

Babu was a remarkable man who, in his own unique and clever way, added his own prosperous and memorable chapter to our family's story.

### **Veterinary touch for Babu**

Sharp instincts and a gentle heart—gone too soon, yet leaving lasting paw prints.

### **UMA**

*"She wasn't a big fan of academics. She was smart enough to know that a good marriage was a lot more fun than a good report card."*

Now, to the story of Uma, the third child of Amandhan and Manni. Somewhere before or after her birth, I am not sure, there was another son, Seenu, who sadly passed away at a very young age. Here, I would like to share a titbit about Amandhan's belief after this loss – he seemed to think that keeping Ganesha's idol in the house brought some bad luck. He promptly returned one family Ganesha idol to my mom. That brass Ganesha is now with me, luckily showering only good things. Thank you, Ganesha!

Now, back to Uma. Amandhan with his family were settled in Pune, after his initial service for quite a few years in Secunderabad. As a young girl, Uma was smart and bright, but she wasn't a big fan of academics. My brother, who was living in Pune at the time, sent her to live with me in Madras for a "better education." But Uma quickly figured out that all that studying was not for her, so she packed her bags and gracefully headed back to Pune.

Once she was back, Amandhan decided to find her a good husband, and he found the perfect match: Anantharaman, a man who worked at Indian Bank, Pune. They were so much made for each other they even shared the same health condition—both were diabetic!

But their shared health issue didn't stop them from living a full life. They travelled all the time, going to family functions and on spiritual trips down south. You know how most people pack clothes first? Not them. The first things in their travel bags were their diabetic medicines and disposable syringes. They were a team, giving each other insulin shots. They were the original travel buddies, supporting each other through every journey and every jab. Sadly, both

Uma and Anantharaman eventually succumbed to complications from high blood sugar.

But their story is a testament to, how love and determination can keep you going, no matter what. They lived a life filled with love, travel, and a shared dedication to managing their health—and each other

### **Veterinary touch for Uma**

Steady hands and a caring heart—never missed a dose or a patient’s whisker

### **NANU**

*"My nephew Nanu was named after my dad, and while my dad's name is ancient, Nanu's love life was a modern fairy tale. It was the perfect blend of old and new"*

Now, let's talk about my nephew Nanu, the fourth child of my brother Amandhan. Nanu’s name, Narayanaswamy, is the same as my dad's. While my dad's name might sound a little ancient, my brother Amandhan loved his dad so much that he gave it to Nanu anyway. It's a nice tradition that links the generations—and it’s a good excuse to have the same name as a genius!

Nanu is a delightful and fascinating guy who could make friends with anyone—even a lamppost! He was a born salesman, and he was so good at his job that he was always in high demand. He became a "job hopper," always looking for the next exciting opportunity. I like to think of him as a professional free agent, selling his skills to the highest bidder and making friends along the way.

Unfortunately, even a charming salesman can’t talk his way out of family genetics. Nanu, like many in our family, got a visit from our "special gift"—diabetes. It forced him to retire early, a testament to the fact that you can’t outrun your family’s legacy, no matter how fast you change jobs.

But Nanu's love life was a sweet story that didn't involve any blood sugar. He had a love marriage with his college mate, Jaisri. Their wedding was a grand affair in Pune, but to make it extra special, my brother Amandhan decided to hold his own milestone ceremony, shastiaphapurthi at the same time. It was a true "two-for-one" celebration.

Nanu got a wonderful partner in Jaisri. She’s a devout wife and a very caring mother to their two children. It’s heartening to see how strong and happy their family is. Nanu might be done with his job-hopping career, but he's found a new, more peaceful path with his beautiful family.

## **Veterinary touch for Nanu**

An energetic charmer—roamed freely before choosing one happy lifelong nest.

### **USHA**

“She’s living proof that a happy ending is worth the wait, even if it comes with the family legacy of diabetes.”

And now we come to Usha, the final member of my brother Amandhan's family. Born and raised in Pune, Usha decided to follow her heart—and her heart led her right next door! She had a love marriage with her neighbour, Bipin Tiwari. This was a trend in Amandhan's family—Usha, Babu, and Nanu all found their own partners. It seems my brother Amandhan had a lot on his plate with all these children having love marriages.

Usha, a qualified teacher, was a perfect blend of gentle and strong. She was a ray of sunshine, but life decided to test her with a series of challenges. First, her husband Bipin's family property got tangled up in a big legal battle. On top of that, Bipin was in and out of jobs, which made money a constant worry. As if that wasn't enough, one of their sons was involved in a major accident. It felt like life was throwing everything it had at her, and she handled it all with incredible strength.

Just when life had begun to settle, Usha faced an unimaginable heartbreak. On 2nd December 2025, her husband, Bipin Tiwari, passed away suddenly due to a cardiac arrest while attending a marriage function. His unexpected departure left a deep void, but Usha once again showed the quiet courage that has defined her life.

But through it all, Usha never gave up. She navigated the legal headache, managed the financial worries, and stood strong for her family. Over time, her perseverance paid off. Her sons are both married and settled in life, bringing her immense joy and peace. The financial worries finally eased, and she was able to breathe a sigh of relief.

Just as she was settling into this peaceful new chapter, the family legacy caught up to her. The diabetes that seems to run in the family came knocking on her door, and she is currently on the path to recovery after a major health setback. But if there's one thing Usha has shown us, it's that she is a fighter. Her story is a testament to how love and resilience can carry you through the toughest times. She's an inspiration, and I know she'll face this new challenge with the same grace and strength she's shown her entire life.

## **Veterinary touch for Usha**

Calm in every crisis—built strength through care and quiet endurance, like a seasoned mare.

### **PATTA**

*“Some teachers age, but never retire!”*

Let’s talk about Patta — my elder sister Rukmani’s first daughter — a born teacher, quick-witted, kind-hearted, and with the stamina of a marathoner. Managing four younger sisters and two brothers was no small feat, but she did it like a seasoned headmistress — firm, fair, and with just the right dose of affection (and homework).

Her life’s journey, though, wasn’t a straight road. Her father’s untimely passing meant her marriage had to be arranged under difficult circumstances. Rukmani, with grit and grace, made it happen, and our whole family — Kamala, my mother, and I — stood shoulder to shoulder through it all. It remains one of those cherished family moments, full of emotion and quiet pride.

Patta married Raghavan, a senior officer at the Reserve Bank of India — steady, kind, and a perfect match for her practical wisdom. Together, they raised two sons and a daughter, all well-educated and happily settled. But life, as it often does, tested her again — Raghavan passed away soon after retirement, and more recently, she faced a major health challenge. Lesser mortals might have wilted, but not our Patta. She fought back with her trademark courage and calm determination.

And here’s the best part — her love for teaching never took retirement. Even today, at 78, she’s conducting online classes purely as a service, without charging a single rupee. Her students adore her; her family reveres her; and I, well, salute her spirit.

#### **Veterinary touch for Patta**

A lifelong teacher—still guiding, caring, and gently in charge of the flock.

### **CHANDRA**

*“She was so calm, I’m pretty sure she’d face a car accident and just ask, ‘Well, where are the cards? It’s time for a game.’”*

My elder sister Rukmani’s second daughter, Chandra, was a quiet and incredibly strong soul who I like to call “The Solitaire Queen.” Her life, I must say, was a bit tragic, but her reaction to it was truly remarkable.

She was in a terrible car accident that took her husband, Lakshminarayanan, but she somehow miraculously survived. Most people would fall apart after

something like that, but Chandra was different. She was a calm and collected person who faced life with a serene look on her face, and nothing seemed to ruffle her. It was like she had this amazing ability to just accept things as they were, without dwelling on them or letting worry take over.

I'm convinced her secret to peace was her love for playing solitaire. While the rest of the world was in a panic, she was calmly shuffling a deck of cards. For her, a deck of cards wasn't just a game; it was her way of life. When life dealt her a messy hand, she didn't complain; she just found a way to get all the cards in order, one by one. It was a beautiful thing to watch. She found a little world of her own in those cards, where things made sense and everything had a place. Sadly, she passed away without having any children, but her quiet, strong spirit left a deep mark on all of us. She lived her life as if it were a game of solitaire: you get a random hand, but you can always find a way to play it with grace, strength, and a little bit of peaceful concentration.

#### **Veterinary touch for Chandra**

Quiet strength and calm balance—graceful through every challenge, like a serene cat.

#### **PADMINI**

*"Padmini's husband and son are men of few words, I'm pretty sure their conversations are just a series of thoughtful nods.*

Next up is Padmini, my elder sister Rukmani's third daughter, who I like to call "The Quiet Achiever." Padmini is a math graduate who, in a truly genius move, worked in the A.G.'s office for a brief period, but enough to earn a pension! She's living proof that you don't need a long career to make it last a lifetime.

When it came time to get married, Rukmani picked a winner: Sivakumar, an engineering graduate. I'm proud to say that for their wedding reception, I personally arranged a Carnatic music concert performed by my close friend Ramji's mother. It was my little contribution to their big day, and it was a real hit. Together, Padmini and Sivakumar have two absolute gems for sons. They're both brilliant in their studies and are now doing very well. The second son even went on to settle in the U.S. It seems the family genius gene is still going strong, just with better job prospects!

Now, if Padmini's life sounds peaceful, that's because it is Sivakumar and their elder son are men of very few words. It's a house of calm and quiet. They're living in their own little world, unruffled by whatever happens. It's quite peaceful, really. Both Padmini and Sivakumar are dealing with the usual age-related health issues, but it doesn't seem to faze them.

Incidentally, Padmini is the only one left in the family's old ancestral home. While her siblings sold their shares of the flats built on that property, Padmini decided to stick with the family legacy—and a lifetime pension.

### **Veterinary touch for Padmini**

Padmini's husband and son speak so little, I sometimes wonder if they're secretly feline—mastering the art of silence and selective attention.

### **SAVITHRI**

*"She is so good at remembering dates, she probably has a calendar in her head for all her husband's doctor's appointments and his next allowed meal."*

Now, let's talk about my niece Savithri, who I've affectionately nicknamed "The Charming Calendar." At 73, she's living proof that some people don't just get older; they become a walking, talking source of pleasantness. Her good-natured spirit shines through in every conversation, making her a joy to be around and making disagreements as rare as a quiet day at the vet clinic.

Suri, her husband, was a very successful builder and realtor. It's a classic case of opposites attracting: she's the one building all the family connections, and he's busy building houses. Speaking of building, Suri recently had to rebuild his health after a major surgery. He's recovered well, but now he's on a very strict diet.

Despite her age, Savithri has her hands full looking after Suri, making sure he sticks to his new regime. But Savithri is a real superpower, her uncanny ability to remember every single birthday and wedding anniversary. Just like her mother before her, she never, ever forgets a date. If you've ever found yourself in a panic, trying to remember when your cousin's second son was born, you can rest easy knowing Savithri has already marked it down—likely in permanent marker—in her brain. The family is in good hands, too. Her only daughter, an IT whiz, is happily married with a son who has inherited his grandma's charm.

On her visit on 1st October 2025, I came to know of her grandson's exploits in tennis. Though only 12 years old, he has been consistently performing very well, bagging medals and trophies in tournaments for under-14 and under-16—clearly, in this family even the genes don't believe in retirement. He is equally good in studies.

### **Veterinary touch for Savithri**

The Charming Calendar," is the family's ultimate organizer—like a clever vet keeping track of every patient's meds and appointments.

## SHANKER RAM

*"He is an engineer who didn't build bridges; he built flats for his entire family"*

What a relief for the entire family! After four girls, the universe finally got the memo and sent us a boy. We had a saying that if you named the last-born girl Savithri, the next one would be a boy, and it was a true stroke of genius because Shanker Ram finally arrived.

Shanker is an engineer who, like his father, set his sights on business. He's one of those people who just makes things happen. He is also a true family man, which he proved in a big way when he took on the Herculean task of sorting out all the legal issues with the family's old home.

He and his builder friend didn't just stop there—they knocked it down and built seven brand new flats for the whole family. It's a true testament to his love for his siblings, and his ability to see a problem and build a solution.

He's married to Geetha, who is a yoga and music expert—the perfect partner for a man who probably needed to learn how to relax after all that house-building. They're now settled in Los Angeles, and when he's not busy making business magic, he is off with his family, trying to visit as many countries as possible.

With two sons and a daughter, one son a doctor, and the daughter a lawyer it seems the family tradition of brilliance (and a little bit of quiet determination) is still going strong.

### **Veterinary touch for Shanker**

Builder of safe spaces—turning houses into comfortable homes, brick by brick like a beaver.

## KUMAR

*"Our six-footer didn't just stand out; he slept his way to a doctorate"*

Here comes Kumar, Rukmani's second son, who I like to call "The Brainy Sleeper." While other students were cramming right before an exam, our six-footer, Kumar would be taking a nap. He would wake up, walk into the exam, and get top marks. He truly slept his way to success, a strategy that somehow landed him a doctorate and a professor's job in the US.

He's married to the equally talented Usha, a charming former bank official who has a knack for flower photography. Theirs was a love story, and even though Usha is from Karnataka, she manages to communicate with her charm, proving that a smile is a universal language.

Kumar's affectionate nature shows itself in many thoughtful ways. His greetings during every *Kanu Pongal*—always sent with cash to Latha through Raji—never fail to arrive, a tradition that keeps bonds alive across the miles.

Right now, Kumar is walking through one of the most testing and difficult chapters of his life, standing strong by his dear wife Usha as she faces health challenges. It is truly remarkable to see how, single-handedly and with quiet strength, he manages everything at home while caring for her with total devotion.

All of us extend our heartfelt prayers for Usha's speedy recovery. We are sure that the ever-endearing Usha will soon regain her strength—and be back behind her camera, capturing the world through her warm and creative lens.

Kumar's best friend is his college mate, Gopu. These two are so in sync (except height) that they both managed to marry Kannada brides—proof that great minds think alike, especially when it comes to picking a partner.

Whenever Kumar is in Chennai, he enjoys Gopu's five-star hospitality, and the two couples often go on world tours together. It seems that when a Brainy Sleeper and his best friend get together, the world becomes their playground.

#### **Veterinary touch for Kumar**

Thoughtful and observant—knows when rest is the best remedy, like a wise owl.

### **RAJI**

#### *“The Lucky Last and the Best”*

Rukmani's luck finally ran out, and the magic of the name Savithri lost its power. But Raji, the seventh child, proved to be better than any boy could ever be! They say that if a man has five daughters, he'll become a pauper even if he's a king. But Rukmani, the "iron woman" she is, proved that wrong, with help from her other children she kept the family afloat.

Raji certainly lived up to the family's smart reputation. She graduated from S.I.E.T. college and got a job at the Bank of India. And I must take some credit here—I helped her get her seat at S.I.E.T. Not only is she smart, but she's also so talented; her creative annual 'golu' settings are a real treat.

She's happily married to Kannan, who is an advocate. Their only son, Arun, is an engineer who studied in London and is now well-settled here and recently got married.

Raji truly broke all the old sayings and proved that sometimes, the last—and the seventh! —is absolutely the best.

## **Veterinary touch for Raji**

Youngest yet most organized—manages life with calm confidence, a clever cub.

### **RADHA**

*"Being a doctor is a demanding job, but she decided to add Bharatanatyam, writing, and co-founding a foundation to her to-do list. Just to keep things interesting."*

Now, let's talk about my niece Radha, my sister Saraswathi's first daughter. She's a certified powerhouse who, I'm convinced, was born with more talent than a single person should be allowed to have. A medical graduate, a Bharatanatyam dancer, a writer, and a public speaker—she is the Bharathi Bhaskar of our family.

In her childhood, even her "normal walking" looked more like running! This, of course, led to frequent falls, and every time, it was her poor head that hit the floor first. As if that weren't enough, she was also prone to repeated head infections, which often ended with her being tonsured. In fact, in many of our old family portraits, you will spot little Radha with a mottai thalai. But let me assure you—her charm and beauty shone through regardless. The tonsured head only highlighted her natural grace.

Her childhood home was right next door to Saraswathi Gana Nilayam, a music and Bharatanatyam school. That happy accident shaped her destiny. Gifted as she was, Radha would spend her free hours at the school, absorbing the rhythms of music and dance. Soon, her arangetram was performed, marking her formal entry into the world of Bharatanatyam. Even as a child, her mind seemed to strike a rare balance—half immersed in the sciences of medicine, half lost in the grace of dance.

Radha was also an incredibly studious girl and went on to study medicine at Tanjore Medical College, staying in the hostel. Later, she married Dr. Ramani, a man whose brilliance matched her own. Soon after marriage, Radha moved to Coimbatore with him, where together they opened their own clinic. I still remember with pride being present at the inauguration, along with Alagiri, son of the late Kalaignar Karunanidhi.

Radha and Ramani—their is truly a partnership of equals. As if medicine and dance weren't enough, the two of them went on to co-found the Shankara Eye Foundation in Coimbatore, now a name synonymous with service and excellence. Their combined talents and achievements are so vast that if I were to start listing them, we'd be here till tomorrow. Appropriately, their detailed bios have been placed in the *Brains and Creations* section of this book.

Looking back, it seems Radha started life quite literally *head-first*—whether it was a fall, a tonsure, or a new challenge. And true to that pattern, she has gone on to “head” achievements in every field she touched—medicine, dance, writing, and social service. Some people make history; Radha, I think, makes it look easy.

### **Veterinary touch for Radha**

A natural healer—balancing care, creativity, and service with the energy of a hummingbird.

### **RAM**

*"He's a professional globetrotter and a drama scriptwriter, proving that his life is basically a series of very well-written adventures."*

My sister Saraswathi's son, Ram, who is now 63, is what I like to call a "traveling son"—and I don't just mean in the physical sense. He's a professional globetrotter, but his most important journey has always been his love for his mom, who is now 95. Along with his wife, Gowri, and his sister, Vijaya with her husband Raju, he looks after Saraswathi so admirably that it's a testament to their love. They leave no stone unturned to make sure she's comfortable, which is more important than any of his passport stamps.

Now that Ram and Gowri have their Green Cards, they must shuttle between Chennai and the US, which is a bit of a worry for all of us. But there's a huge consolation: Saraswathi is presently in the safe care of her other daughter, Dr. Radha, in Coimbatore. She's in good hands, and we're all very grateful for that.

When he's not flying across continents, Ram is busy writing about them. He's quite the travelogue, and his travel accounts are so engaging that they've become very popular. But his talents don't stop there. He's also a drama scriptwriter and director, and he was so good at it that even after he retired from Unilever, they still haven't let him go! He's still busy writing and staging plays for his old office, proving that some people are just too talented to be allowed to retire completely.

Ram, has come a long way from the days when he was remembered as the family's “cry baby.” Life, however, has a charming way of transforming people, and today he stands out as a deeply affectionate brother—both to his own sisters and to the army of cousin sisters spread across the family.

One of his endearing qualities is the way he never misses a chance to express his love and thoughtfulness. Come *Kanu Pongal*, without fail, his sisters will

find his wishes and little gifts arriving right on time, reminding everyone that traditions are not only to be observed but also to be cherished. To make sure that these bonds don't fade in the busyness of everyday life, Ram took a step that speaks volumes about his nature. He created a WhatsApp group, very aptly titled "Precious Sisters." Through this space, he keeps alive the warmth of siblinghood, ensuring that laughter, affection, and updates continue to flow freely among them, no matter where they are.

From a teary child to a doting brother, Ram's journey is proof that some "cry-babies" grow up not just fine, but into the very heart of a family's love and togetherness. And while the sisters revel in their "*precious*" tag, I can't help wondering—when will someone think of us and start a group called "*Precious Oldies*"?

Ram and Gowri are ardent devotees of Puttaparthi Sai Baba. Their only daughter, Pavithra, married Dr. Satish, who also comes from a family of Sai devotees. So, it seems that a love for devotion and a flair for drama are two things that run in the family!

Speaking of family traits, there's one more I must mention. Pavithra recently had a new-born who is reportedly a bit of a cry-baby. I had a good laugh when I heard this, because I know exactly where that comes from. In my book, *Memoirs of a Vet Square*, I wrote about Ram's own crying episodes when he was a baby and how he was miraculously cured after a visit to my place of work then, Kaliampoondi. So, I would like to give Pavithra a very serious piece of advice: maybe it's time to take the little one on a road trip to Kaliampoondi. After all, a family-inherited cure is worth a thousand modern remedies!

Dr. Satish manasilayo?

### **Veterinary touch for Ram**

Always present, no matter the distance—family care without borders, like a migratory bird.

### **SUMATHY – MEENA**

*"One niece now travels the world as a professional 'super-babysitter,' while the other has retired to a life of spiritual bliss. It's the ultimate 'work-life' balance story."*

Now we come to the final members of my sister Padma's daughters — the truly inseparable duo: my nieces Sumathy and Meena. They had a tough start, losing their mother when they were less than five years old.

All of us were devastated after the loss of Padma. Lakshmiamma was deeply worried about the two infants. Circumstances were not conducive for her to take care of them. But much to everyone's relief, they were admirably looked after by their paternal grandmother, their father, and other family members.

Sometime later, their father remarried — and what a blessing that turned out to be! Their foster mother, Meenakshi, brought them up as if they were her own. Truly, Meenakshi was a godsend — a mother by heart, not just by name.

That shared tragedy forged a bond so strong that you rarely saw one without the other. They were a team — a dynamic duo of young women who decided to take on the world together. And what did they do? They both became bankers! It's as if they had a secret sisterly pact to count other people's money. Sumathy joined the State Bank of India, while Meena found her niche at Canara Bank — proving that blood may be thicker than water, but interest rates are just as binding.

Today, their lives have taken different directions, but their bond remains unbreakable. Sumathy found love and married her colleague, Chandramouli. Presently, she discovered a new mission in life — becoming a global super-grandmother. With one infant grandson in Vienna and a newborn granddaughter in the U.S., her passport is probably more stamped than a customs officer's notebook. Her life is a constant dance between jet lag and baby giggles — a loving grandmother who refuses to let geography get in the way of affection.

Then there's Meena — the maths wizard of the family. She married Shanker, who retired as the Accountant General. Naturally, a woman who dreams in numbers would find a husband fluent in the same language. After retirement, the two have taken a more spiritual route, dividing their time between Chennai and Govindapuram, near Kumbakonam. While Sumathy zips between continents, Meena glides between temples — one sister chasing flights, the other chasing peace.

These two have faced every challenge life threw their way with courage, laughter, and quiet strength. They've built wonderful families, earned love and respect from everyone around them, and proved that sisterhood is life's best insurance policy — no premium, lifelong coverage!

### **Veterinary touch for Sumathy and Meena**

#### **Sumathi**

Calm, capable, and everywhere—handles little ones and long journeys like a steady camel.

## **Meena**

Gentle, steady, and wise—believes in healing by example, like a patient tortoise.

## **LATHA**

*"With a little parental support (and a lot of grit), my rock star daughter proved that a single mother can conquer the world."*

But before we get to the achiever she became, let me share a lighter childhood memory. When she was little, Latha had what we might call a phobia of the silver screen. This was in the pre-television era, when going to a theater was the only way to watch a movie. The moment we planned a family outing to the cinema, she would fold her tiny hands, tears brimming in her eyes, and plead: "Please leave me at home, don't take me to the movie!" We would end up going without her, feeling half-guilty and half-amused. For reasons known only to her, even the thought of a movie frightened her!

But time and television worked their magic. As she grew up—and especially after Doordarshan, YouTube, and the whole digital circus arrived—she transformed. Today she can tell you who directed what, which singer hit the high note, and even who did the background score! Talk about a complete U-turn — from running away from the cinema to reviewing it!

Latha is an academic overachiever who seems to enjoy collecting degrees. She's got a B. Com, a B.Ed, a postgraduate diploma in Computer Applications, and she's even a higher English stenographer and a spoken English trainer.

After getting her B.Ed degree, she took on a big role as the principal for the junior section at La Chatelaine. And because she wasn't busy enough, she also took on part-time spoken English classes.

She married a Cost Accountant, but sadly, that marriage didn't work out. The silver lining, however, was that she was given custody of her two beautiful children—a son who was four and a daughter who was just one. As a single mother, she faced some serious challenges, like financial struggles and the emotional weight of raising two children all on her own. It wasn't an easy road, and I'm sure it felt overwhelming at times.

But life decided to test her strength in a completely different way. In January 2012, she was in a major accident while driving her scooter. She suffered a serious spinal injury that required the replacement of a cervical bone. It was a terrifying time, but Latha, with her incredible grit and a strict nine-month physiotherapy regimen, fought her way back. She's living proof that a strong will can literally rebuild you.

My wife and I decided that we weren't just going to sit on the sidelines. We were her personal cheerleading squad, her emotional rock, and her bank! We

gave her 100% of our support—morally, financially, and in every other way imaginable. She had a full-service support system, and with us as her back-up, she was ready to face anything.

And did she ever! She raised her two children, and they are now incredibly well-educated, with professional degrees, and both are happily married and well-settled in life.

It just goes to show you that with a little (okay, a lot of) parental backing, a rock star like Latha can overcome anything. She's a true inspiration.

### **Veterinary touch for Latha**

Strong and resilient—rebuilding life with courage, leading the pack.

#### **ARUN**

"The Invisible Nephew,"

"He is so body-conscious he's in the gym all the time, but he's also so well-mannered that he probably apologizes to the weights for lifting them"

Finally, we come to the last of our third generation, my younger brother Chinnu's son, Dr. Arun. I like to call him "The Invisible Nephew," and for good reason! He was born and raised in the U.S., and in his lifetime, he has probably only visited India a handful of times. Most of his close relatives have never even met him in person, which makes him a charming puzzle to the family. He can't really speak Tamil, which makes our conversations a fun game of guesswork.

But despite his invisibility, he is a well-mannered and charming guy. He is a highly qualified Neuro Radiologist, which is no surprise given the genius genes that run in the family. He was a late bloomer in the marriage department, tying the knot with his wife, Dr. Anita, at the age of 40. I suppose good things come to those who wait—or those who are too busy working out and brushing their teeth! He's so body-conscious that he spends hours in the gym and is almost always seen brushing his teeth during the day.

And here's where his heart (teeth as well) truly shines. He is a massive dog lover, which, as a vet, automatically makes me his favourite uncle. During one of his rare visits to India, he did something so touching and so unique that it's now a family legend. He brought the ashes of his dead pet dog all the way from the U.S. and immersed them in the Ganges in Varanasi, right alongside his

dad's ashes. Now, that's what I call dedication to a furry friend. He's got a vet-approved heart, and that's better than any degree in my books.

**Veterinary touch for Arun**

Quiet and kind—trusted instantly, like the dog everyone feels safe beside





## FANTASTIC FRIENDS



**“My friends and I share one talent: zero sense, full confidence.”**

## CHAPTER 7

### F SQUARE – FANTASTIC FRIENDS

· *"You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family. Luckily, my friends are just as crazy as my family."*

#### INTRODUCTION

If you've made it this far, congratulations — you've survived my weird food choices, my dramatic medical episodes, and my family's delightful chaos. You deserve a medal... or at least a strong cup of coffee. But life isn't only about the things that happen to you or the family you're born into. It's also about those wonderful, eccentric creatures we call friends — the ones who walk into your life and, before you know it, start eating from your plate and finishing your sentences.

These are the people who've stood by me through thick, thin, and the downright ridiculous. They've listened patiently (and sometimes helplessly) to my long stories, laughed at my jokes even when they weren't that funny, and somehow managed not to run away when I was at my most impossible.

Some of them are still around — still rolling their eyes at me. Some have drifted away, leaving behind memories that pop up like surprise guests at a reunion. Each one, in their own unique way, has helped shape my life into the beautiful, hilarious mess it is today.

So, buckle up — it's time to meet the Fantastic Friends who've filled my story with laughter, loyalty, and the occasional bit of madness.

Meet them!

#### VARADAN

*"A friend who knows all about me and still loves me"*

You know, I originally planned to kick things off with my childhood pals, those little rascals who probably taught me more about mischief than medicine. But as I sat here thinking, I realized I've got to hit the pause button on that plan. Why?

It is because there's one friend, a true gem, who deserves the very first spot. I'm talking about Dr. T.N. Varadarajan. This man has been more than just a friend; he's been a guide, a philosopher, and, I'd honestly say, a part of my family for over six decades. We're the same age, we've been colleagues, and

we've been through it all together. We've shared every good thing and consoled each other through every bad thing life has thrown our way. And let me tell you, his share of life's grind... well, it's immense, even compared to mine or anyone else I know. That's the truth.

Varadharajan, veteran veterinarian like myself, is married to his devoted wife, Kalyani. Together, they've navigated life's currents, including the profound journey of raising a child with cerebral palsy (CP). Anyone who's witnessed the dedication required understands that this path presents a unique set of challenges and experiences that evolve throughout a child's life.

Through it all, Varadarajan faced these immense challenges not just with resilience, but with remarkable grace. His unwavering commitment and strength in supporting his son are truly something to behold. He's been a steadfast confidant, always offering unwavering honesty and support.

Beyond his personal life, he's also a highly skilled professional and an articulate communicator, qualities that shine through in everything he does.

It's a true blessing that Varadarajan's other son, Manoj, is happily married and well-settled with his children in the USA. This provides a layer of comfort and joy to their remarkable family.

## **SUDHIR**

### *“My Childhood's Brightest Star”*

Before I dive into these next stories, I want to give you a little heads-up. You might read some of these tales from my childhood and think, "Well, that's a bit childish!" And you'd be right! But remember, these are stories from when we were just kids, and what might seem silly or mischievous now was perfectly normal, even adventurous, for us back then. So, bear with me as I take you back to those younger, wilder days.

Now, back to the planned path of my narration.

Sudhir (Venkatasubramanian) was truly the crown jewel among my childhood friends. He lost his father early, and with modest means, lived right opposite my house in Gopalapuram with his mother. His elder sister, Anandhi, was married to S. Rajam, the celebrated Carnatic musician and artist.

Now, Sudhir's mother — ah, what a character! She was a delightful mix of courage, eccentricity, and complete disregard for society's "rules." In the 1940s, widows were expected to live quietly, draped in dull clothes and stripped of

every joy. But this lady? She had other plans. She wore flowers in her hair every day, walking to the market with her head held high while the neighbourhood aunties nearly fainted with scandal. You could almost hear their whispers: “A widow wearing malli poo! The world is ending!”

To make things even more entertaining, she was diabetic — but that was just a small, irrelevant detail to her. Diet restrictions? Never! Sugar-free life? Absolutely not! Whenever my mother made tiffin at home, this brave lady would promptly send word for “a small sample” — which, of course, meant a generous helping of both the sweet *and* spicy varieties. My mother would oblige, and she’d enjoy every bite as if it were a personal victory over medical science. No wonder her blood sugar eventually surrendered in defeat. But you had to admire her zest — she lived life on her own terms, come what may!

Sudhir himself was a bright, fair, and handsome boy. We used to joke that he looked like a mini-Gemini Ganesan in the making. Even as a child, he had an impressive knowledge of Carnatic music, which gave him a certain air of maturity (when he wasn’t running away from teachers, that is).

Here’s one of those unforgettable stories:

Sudhir, my brother Chinnu, and I were studying at Gopalapuram High School — in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> standards respectively. The school had an Iyengar teacher who ruled the place like a dictator. His favourite hobby was hitting students with a plastic wire — yes, he carried it around like a badge of honour!

Now, poor Sudhir was the nervous type. The mere sight of that teacher made him go pale. Finally, one fine morning, he decided he’d had enough of education altogether. He’d start off for school with us, walk confidently up to the corner of our street... and then stop. While Chinnu and I marched on to face the plastic-wire terror, Sudhir would simply wait around all morning, pretending to be invisible. Then, at lunchtime and again at closing time, he’d quietly tag along with us back home — mission accomplished! His mother never suspected a thing.

Eventually, my father got wind of this great academic strike and took the matter up with the school’s correspondent. The plastic-wire reign of terror came to an end, and Sudhir, greatly relieved, returned to his rightful place in class.

Life later took a different turn for him. College was beyond his family’s means, and he remained a bachelor all his life. But Sudhir, ever determined, went on to master the German language and became a professional interpreter — not bad

for the boy who once bunked school at the street corner! Truly, my childhood's brightest star.

### **THE FAMILY OF FRIENDS**

*"Family by friendship, bonded by checkmates and carrom strikes."*

Speaking of friends, let me tell you about the family right next door. Our house was number 4 on Sadasiva Iyer Street, and right at number 2 was the home of a rather eccentric C.M. Srinivasan. Now, his second wife, Gnanam, his first wife's daughter Vimala, and his sons Subash and Vichy – they were all much, much senior to me. But despite the age gap, they were truly my friends. That's why I always think of them as my "family of friends."

This whole family was into indoor games like carrom, chess, and table tennis, and their big house had all the facilities for these games. So, on school holidays and during summer, almost every day, from around 10 AM to one or two in the afternoon, myself, Chinnu, Sudhir, and a friend from two streets away, Narayanan and occasionally Kuppu, would be spending our time playing games there.

The fun part was that the adults, Gnanam and Vimala, would *always* be the losers in carrom and chess when playing against kids like us! On a holiday, if we weren't present in their house by 10 AM, they would send word through their servant to come over. That's how much they enjoyed our company, even if it meant losing!

The added perk for us at their house was the telephone. Can you believe it? It was the only house in the neighbourhood with a telephone back in those days. They charge two annas (about 12 paise) for a call. Occasionally, I'd even get to call my dad at his office – a real treat!

Now, Vichy from this family of friends was a bit of a dimwit back then. He was studying B. Com, and in fact, he seemed to be studying it for years! He used to brag that answering a translation question in the Hindi exam was easy. He was made to believe that the answer for translating a Hindi text was found in the question paper itself – it was the English text given for translation to Hindi! And the reverse was true for translating English text to Hindi. It's really no surprise why he was in B. Com for years with that kind of logic! On the covers of his textbooks, you'd always find his name followed by "B. Com 1970." - his college register number. We used to jokingly say that he knew he would get his B. Com degree only in the year 1970, which was more than 20 years away at the time! Oh, the laughs we had.

## KUPPU

### *The Neighbourhood Terror (and My Best Friend)*

Next up is another neighbour and childhood friend, Kuppu (Kuppuswamy), the son of a C.I.D. officer. He was my age, and to put it mildly, he was a terror during our school days. You could call him a "brat" back then, given all the pranks and other wild acts he'd pull.

It still amazes me how Kuppu became my close friend, especially given my timid nature. The reason must be that Kuppu was doing all the things I wished I could do but never dared. He was the fearless one!

So, what was Kuppu up to back then?

On holidays, in the mornings, he would pick me up, and we'd go around the neighbourhood hunting chameleons. He'd somehow manage to kill one. And that wasn't the end of it! With a thorn branch from a bougainvillea plant, he would insert it into the abdomen of the dead chameleon and, while grinding it, repeatedly chant, "Killing a chameleon will fetch you an ounce of புண்ணியம் (punniam)!" He would then force all the other kids who had gathered by then to chant along with him. What a sight!

One of Kuppu's favorite pastimes those days was a strange "philosophical game." He would take a chart with the English alphabets written in a circle from A to Z, place a carrom striker in the center, keep his fingers over it, close his eyes, and chant: "Oh Socrates, please give me your answer to my question" The striker, of course manipulated by Kuppu's expert fingers, would slowly move toward different letters and spell out the "answer."

Now, after one school examination was over, Kuppu suggested to innocent, timid Sudhir, "Why don't you ask Socrates if you will be promoted?" Poor Sudhir replied honestly, "But I've already got the news that I have passed!" Kuppu, not one to let go, insisted: "Still, better to confirm with Socrates!" He caught hold of Sudhir's finger, placed it on the striker along with his own, and chanted the famous lines. Naturally, Kuppu manipulated the striker so that it spelled out one word: FAIL. Sudhir was stunned. Almost in tears, he kept saying, "No, no, this is wrong! Socrates has made a mistake!" But Kuppu, with a very serious face, warned him: "Doubting Socrates is dangerous. If you don't believe his answer, you will get a stomach upset... and start vomiting. And lo! The power of suggestion worked. Our poor timid Sudhir, nervous to the core, started vomiting! It took us a long time afterwards to console him and explain that the whole drama was nothing but a prank cooked up by Kuppu.

I told you about the telephone in the "family of friends" house, available at two annas per call. Well, Kuppu, after getting permission to make calls, would, after finishing his conversation, drop a gem clip or some other small object into the hundi (the coin box) to simulate the sound of dropping the coin. The unsuspecting Gnanam would later complain to us that while opening the hundi, she was surprised to see many gem clips and small metal objects, wondering who on earth dropped them in there! We just exchanged knowing glances.

And you all must know the actor Typist Gopu, right? As a kid, he was known to us as "Gundu Gopal," a rather stout boy residing in our neighbourhood. As kids, we looked at him in awe and firmly believed that nobody could ever hit him. But then it dawned on us: our Kuppu was the man for the job! Kuppu was no match for him in size, but on our request, he accepted the challenge to hit him.

One evening, when Gopu was wandering in the street, Kuppu walked behind him, provoked him by shouting, "Dei, Gundu Gopal!" Angered, Gopu attempted to confront Kuppu, but Kuppu, removing his shirt and handing it to us, started hurling blows at Gopu, who ultimately fell, much to the delight of all of us watching!

It was almost a running joke amongst our friends that Kuppu would end up in some line of work where his innate ability to bend rules (or at least, push them to his absolute breaking point) would be an asset. Perhaps a lawyer, we'd muse, or maybe even a politician, given his persuasive (and often manipulative) charm. Never, not in our wildest dreams, did we envision him in a position of authority. But life has a funny way of surprising you: he became an IPS officer, upholding the very laws he so gleefully flouted as a child!

I lost track of him after my school days. But, Saraswathi when she was on a visit to Pune to spend time with Raju and Vijaya was confronted by chance on the road by a police officer who was none other than our Kuppu. He recognised her and calling by name enquired about all of us and informed her he was an I.P.S. officer now. Seizing the opportunity Saraswathi sought Kuppu's help to get a cooking gas connection for Raju. True to his child-hood reputation Kuppu got Raju the connection the very next day.

My attempts to contact Kuppu failed and sometime later I got the sad news that Kuppu was no more having died of cardiac arrest while still in service.

To conclude the write-ups on my childhood friends, here are just their names and a brief note on them:

Raju, my next-door very close friend. He was the only boy to his parents amidst three sisters at the time when they came next door. Subsequently, before the birth of two more children to his mother, Raju revealed to me that only his prayers for the birth of girls were answered. He told me also that if he remained as the only male child, there wouldn't be any competition for parental properties. But alas, the third time he was not lucky, as he was "blessed" with a younger brother. His was a love marriage, and later they sold their house. Till now, no news of him or other family members. A wonderful, cherished friendship snapped abruptly.

**NARAYANAN:** One of the four friends spending our time in the house of the "family of friends," is no more. He was a funny fellow. As I said, our game session in the "family of friends" house would be over by 2 PM. Myself and Chinnu would return to our house, expecting some scolding from our mom for staying away from home too long. Added to this, Narayanan would also tag along with us and stay in our house. To get rid of him, when I tactfully told him I felt sleepy, hoping he would go, Narayanan would simply say that he was also feeling sleepy and would go to sleep in no time in my house itself!

**KUTTY RAJU:** Another friend from the house in our street called Thoppu house. Sudhir used to call him 'Studebaker' after the slightly elongated shape of his head, just like the car!

Okay, punishment over, no more of childish anecdotes.

### **MY GOPALAPURAM CRICKET CLUB FRIENDS**

As I mentioned in my sports section, my playing days lasted from 1948-49 to 1969-70. During this period, naturally, I made many friends, but only a handful of guys had a lasting friendship with me, even after my active playing days were over. They are Tummy, Sivaji, Babu, Ramji, Seshagiri, and Rajaraman. I'd like to give you a thumbnail account of these guys.

#### **TUMMI**

*"In loving memory of Tummi — a man of faith, loyalty, and quiet strength."*

He's no longer with us, having passed away from a sudden cardiac arrest while playing tennis. He was an employee at the British Council in Chennai and served as the permanent secretary of the Gopalapuram Cricket Club right up until his death.

Tummy was a worried man for years after his graduation, being unemployed. He was even planning to go to Bombay for job hunting. As a last resort, on some wise advice, he undertook 108 prathachanams (circumambulations) daily for a week at the famous Arasadi Vinayakar at Big Street Pillaiyar Koil in Triplicane. And wouldn't you know it, just a couple of days prior to his

scheduled departure to Bombay, he received his appointment orders! It was quite a story.

### **G.S. MANI**

*“Our last long conversation was not a goodbye—it was a reminder of a friendship well lived.”*

Next comes G.S. Subramaniam (G.S. Mani). Even though his residence was in Mylapore, Mani was a full-fledged and incredibly valuable member of our Gopalapuram Cricket Club. He was our very successful bowler and a true all-rounder. Of all the club members, he was closer to me than anyone else. It seemed like all his family members had some connection or other with us, too.

Mani's elder sister, Dr. Pitchammal, is married to Vishu, resident of Gopalapuram, the ace photographer and a non-playing member of our GCC. And his younger sister is wedded to Babu, who is Sivaji's brother – Sivaji being another one of our GCC members!

It was a small world, indeed.

Sadly, Mani, who was my age, is no longer with us. He passed away a few years back. I remember spending a very satisfying six hours with him at his daughter's house about a week before his death. It was a good farewell.

Now, for a funny incident involving Mani and me.

Both Mani and I were once selected to play for the Central Zone cricket team of the Madras (now Tamil Nadu) Cricket Association. The problem was, Mani wasn't eligible to play for the Central Zone because his place of residence, Mylapore, didn't come under its jurisdiction. But Mani, being Mani, simply gave my house address!

The Madras Cricket Association, being a bit suspicious, sent one of their officials for an enquiry. When he came to my house, I somehow, with much difficulty, managed to convince the official. I even showed him a room upstairs, pretending it was the one we had let out for Mani. The understanding official didn't make an issue of it, thankfully. And so, in the end, both of us proudly represented the Central Zone. What a caper that was!

### **THE SIVAJI BROTHERS**

*“They didn't just play cricket with us; they lived it, laughed through it, and left memories that still bat on.”*

Next in line are the Sivaji brothers. First, there's Sivaji himself, a true knowledge treasure. He knew absolutely everything about international cricket players. We used to call him our 'Wisden' – after that famous cricketer's almanac, often labelled the "Bible of cricket." He had all the stats

and stories in his head! His performance as a cricketer was, shall we say, much to be desired. He was a senior member and a truly pleasing person, endeared to all of us.

Sivaji sadly passed away recently at the ripe old age of 95. It was a double blow for us, as his younger brother Babu had demised only a few months earlier.

I can recall one incident which I'm recording with apologies to Sivaji, but it's too good not to share.

After one of our cricketing tours, we were all returning as a team in a van from Trichy. Sivaji, however, didn't join us. The reason? He wanted to stay in Trichy to visit the Utchi Pillaiyar temple. We were quite disappointed to miss his company, especially since, surprisingly, Sivaji had taken two wickets in one of the matches we played in Trichy! This was a rare feat for him and eligible for the match report in The Hindu sports column.

So, to register our playful anger against Sivaji for ditching us, when I was giving all our match reports at The Hindu office, I gave his name as 'Deserter' instead of Sivaji. And sure enough, it came out that way in The Hindu! Sivaji was often heard jokingly saying that "Balu has deprived me of a once-in-a-lifetime chance of my name being published!" Sorry, Sivaji, it was all for fun, you know that!

Then there's Babu, Sivaji's younger brother, who passed away recently, just a few months older than me. Unlike his brother Sivaji, Babu was an aggressive person, and a much more talented cricketer than Sivaji, too! Babu was a qualified postgraduate geologist and worked with Neyveli Lignite Corporation. Perhaps it's an occupational hazard, as sadly, Babu died of a lung infection.

Finally, Ramji, the youngest of the Sivaji brothers, was a more accomplished and stylish left-hand batsman. Myself and Ramji used to open our innings in the league matches – we were quite a successful duo!

### **My Late-Blossomed Professional Friendships**

*“In the long journey of my profession, a few friendships arrived later than expected but enriched my life far more than I ever imagined.”*

Among my many professional colleagues, there were two whose friendships blossomed a little later in life but were certainly worth a mention: Dr. P. Lakshmanan and Dr. V.S. Gajapathy.

It was during my tenure at the Artificial Insemination Centre in Saidapet that Lakshmanan, known to everyone as 'Dhaadi' Lakshman (because he sported a

rather stylish French beard), became my friend. At that period, I enjoyed quite a large clientele, and I needed a good hand. The calm, well-mannered Lakshman was the perfect pick to be my partner and assist me in my practice. This healthy arrangement, where he calmly helped me navigate the daily animal chaos, lasted for more than three decades until we both stopped practicing. He's no longer with us, but his calm demeanour and that beard is still clear in my memory.

Then there was Dr. Gajapathy. He was intelligent, with pleasing manners, and very well-regarded among the veterinary fraternity. These qualities in him were exactly why I sought his friendship – you always want smart, nice people in your corner, right?

Now, here's a funny bit about Gajapathy. He managed to purchase a Vespa scooter through a government quota. But here's the kicker: even though he was the purchaser, the vehicle was entirely in my possession, as at that time I had no two-wheeler! When the need arose, he would 'borrow' it from me. Such was the freedom and liberty I had with him. We had a truly unique arrangement! Dr. V.S.G. is also no more. My loss count, sadly, just keeps mounting. His daughter is presently running a tuition centre under his name.

And finally, Dr. Dhatchayani. Yes, the lady vet! She was posted as the second vet at the Veterinary Hospital Saidapet. She was disciplined, with an attitude of "calling a spade a spade" – no beating around the bush with her!

Overseeing the hospital, I admit I had some apprehension about how, as a woman, she could be of help in assisting me, especially with some 80 large animals on average coming in for treatment every day. It was a busy, often messy, place! But what a surprise she turned out to be! She performed her job admirably and assisted me wonderfully. She certainly taught this old vet a thing or two about judging a book by its cover!

### **DR. V. VISWANATHAN**

*“Viswanathan did not choose veterinary science—veterinary science chose him, and it chose wisely.”*

And now, let me tell you about Dr. V. Viswanathan, my closest friend all the way from Intermediate class. We even got our B.V.Sc. degrees at the same time and entered service in Chingleput District in January 1960. We were practically a package deal!

Now, here's the funny part about his career choice: veterinary study was not his first pick after Intermediate. He was practically forced into it because he managed to pass Intermediate with such low marks that, believe it or not, veterinary college was the only place he could get admission! Sometimes, life

just steers you where it wants you to go, even if it's by the lowest possible grade.

I got married before him, and my outhouse tenant, bless her heart, was quite interested in Viswanathan as a groom for one of her friend's daughters. So, among other formal enquiries, she casually asked Viswanathan about his salary. He, with a straight face, gave a figure that was almost double what I was drawing – which my tenant also knew!

Viswanathan then smoothly explained to her that his nature of job was "different" and he was "entitled to earn more" in his line of work. The truth is, he wasn't corrupt in any way, but there was indeed scope for earning more by legitimately claiming contingency expenses. Honestly, I never quite managed to earn that way, even though it was somewhat legitimate! He certainly had a knack for it.

Eventually, Viswanathan left field service and entered veterinary college service, moving into teaching. He even got his PhD while in service – quite the turnaround for someone who "only" got into vet college! He got married and had two sons and a daughter. And in a delightful twist, one of his sons, Mahadevan, was married to Nithyasri, the renowned Carnatic musician. What a talented family!

Sadly, both Viswanathan and his wife are no more. Yet another loss of a dear friend, but his memory, and those funny stories, certainly live on.

### SETHURAMAN

*“My Walking Veterinary Encyclopaedia”*

Among my friends, here's an account of **K.V. Sethuraman**. I truly feel lucky to have crossed paths with him. This was back when I oversaw the Artificial Insemination Centre in Saidapet, Chennai, from 1962 to 1969.

My immediate boss at the time was Dr. Venkatrajulu, a noted animal obstetrician and gynaecologist, who was the one who introduced me to Sethuraman, a science graduate. And let me tell you, I was absolutely amazed by his knowledge! To impress him (and maybe just to keep up!), I practically swallowed textbooks, thriving to learn more. So, if you're wondering why my professional knowledge expanded so much, the credit squarely falls on Sethuraman and Dr. Venkatrajulu. They were my unofficial, highly effective professors!

My friend Sethuraman possessed a truly remarkable depth of knowledge when it came to veterinary science and animal practices. While he may not have had the formal qualifications, his understanding of animal health and well-being was

nothing short of extraordinary. He could discuss animal anatomy, physiology, and diseases with an intricate understanding that rivalled many trained professionals. His memory was so sharp that he wouldn't just recount details; he'd mention the book, and probably even the exact page numbers! It was like having a walking, talking veterinary library, complete with an index.

I am truly indebted to him for helping me acquire so much more knowledge in my profession. Sadly, Sethuraman is no longer with us, and this is my heartfelt tribute to a truly brilliant mind.

### **NNB**

*“It has been a rare privilege to share so many milestones with my namesake, my twin, my B square.”*

This next part is about Dr. N.N. Balasubramanian (NNB), my very close buddy from veterinary college. It's not just our names that are similar; it's like we were destined to have parallel lives!

Get this

Both of us graduated in December 1959.

Both of us postgraduates.

Both of us entered service in January 1960.

Both of us got married in May 1963.

Both of us have only one daughter, and both were born in July 1964.

And to top it all off, both of our grandsons are married and settled abroad!

While we were in veterinary course, the faculty were a truly confused lot as to who was NB (that's me!) and who was NNB! I can only imagine the headaches we caused them.

Both of us, barring the usual age-related inconveniences that come with being 89+, are still leading a happy, contented life.

It's been quite a ride, sharing so many milestones with my namesake!

### **THE VVIP FRIEND**

*“If charm had a degree, he'd have topped the class — even if someone else wrote the exam for him!”*

At first, I thought there was no need to mention this friend again — after all, I had already written about him in my “Memoirs of a Veteran Veterinarian.” But then I realised that many relatives and friends who never read that book might miss out on this unforgettable character. And honestly, leaving him out would be like skipping the climax of a good story.

So, here he is again — without revealing his name. Let's just call him Mukaal. My connection with this VVIP friend began when I was around 32 or 33 years old, through his elder brother — a wonderful singer, budding film actor, and devoted dog lover. Naturally, it was through dogs that our paths crossed (no surprise there — most of my best friendships started that way!).

Now, this elder brother's name meant “gem,” but by behaviour he was more like an unpolished stone. Having lost his mother early, he grew up with too much freedom and plenty of pampering — a dangerous combination! Eventually, I had to end that friendship, but in doing so, I gained a far more valuable one with his younger brother — Mukaal.

Unlike his brother, Mukaal was kind-hearted, sharp, and genuinely caring. Through him, I got to know his whole family — his mother, sister, brothers, nephews and aunts — and before long, I was their family veterinarian. Their affection and influence helped me remain posted in the city, which, for a government vet, is nothing short of a miracle!

Let me share one unforgettable story — the Coimbatore Exam Adventure. When Mukaal didn't do well in his B.A. exams, his powerful connections arranged for him to “rewrite” his papers at the professor's own home in Coimbatore. Naturally, he picked me as his trusted companion for the mission!

We stayed at my niece's house, and soon a car arrived to take Mukaal to the professor's residence. The professor handed him a few blank answer sheets and told him to write the answers again.

Quick as ever, Mukaal said, “Sir, if I had known the answers, I would have written them during the exam itself! You dictate — I'll write!” That was pure Mukaal — bold, witty, and utterly unfiltered! Even the professor was too amused to be angry.

Today, Mukaal and his wife remain close to me and my family. Despite the miles and years, we still share that same warmth and laughter.

I'll let my readers guess who this VVIP friend really is — but let me just say, every veterinarian needs at least one Mukaal in life: a rare breed of human who makes you laugh, think, and occasionally question the meaning of education itself!

**REDDY and RAO**

### “The Unsung Heroes “

Two names that absolutely couldn't be left out of the friends' section are Dr. Subramanya Reddy and Dr. P. Krishna Rao. They might not have been in the cricket club, but their stories are just as memorable!

**Reddy:** The Transfer Whisperer.

Dr. Subramanya Reddy was one of our "three musketeers" (along with Varadan and myself, of course!). A true friend, he retired as Additional Director of Animal Husbandry, but sadly, he expired shortly after retirement.

I remember a time when I was serving as Assistant Director at Arni, and my efforts to get a transfer back to Chennai were failing miserably. It was Reddy, who was in the head office, along with Varadan, who spoke so highly of me to the Director that they practically insisted I get a posting at the head office itself! It pays to have friends in high places, especially when they're willing to sing your praises.

It was a real pity that Reddy, after he built a brand-new house in Sholingar, couldn't spend his retired life there as planned due to his untimely demise. He was a fine gentleman and always jovial. Even after more than three decades, he remains firmly in our hearts. He certainly knew how to get things done, even if fate had other plans for his retirement!

### **DR. P. KRISHNA RAO**

#### *The Private Practice Pioneer*

Then there was Dr. P. Krishna Rao, the renowned veterinary private practitioner. He was truly following in the footsteps of his uncle from the famous Pangal Veterinary Institute. Back in those days, it was incredibly rare for a veterinarian to depend entirely on private practice – most of us were government servants! But Dr. Krishna Rao was a very popular vet, and his Pangal Veterinary Institute was equally popular. His speciality was treating racehorses and small animals. He was also deeply connected with the Canine Club and all the fancy dog shows they conducted.

During my tenure at the Veterinary Hospital, Saidapet, I had the privilege of his acquaintance. He was so impressed with my professional knowledge that Krishna Rao had the confidence to permit me to attend to the large animal under his care, and at times, even his small animals. It was quite the compliment, being trusted with his prized patients.

Later, Rao was offered a full-time job at the Madras Race Club Equine Hospital. The appointment came with one big condition: he was not allowed to

practice privately anymore. And what did Krishna Rao do? He accepted the post, leaving his entire clientele and the institute entirely in my care! Talk about trust! He just handed over his whole business.

Dr. Krishna Rao is no more, but his pioneering spirit and incredible trust in a fellow vet are certainly unforgettable.

### **RANGANATHAN and CHANDRASEKARAN**

*“Every pension credited is a quiet salute to their perseverance. They may be gone, but their work arrives unfailingly every month.”*

Dr. Ranganathan and Dr. Chandrasekaran, both retired Joint Directors of the Animal Husbandry Department. They could easily have slipped into comfortable retirement, like many of us. But these two chose a different path.

With remarkable energy and conviction, they took up a cause that concerned not just themselves but every retired officer of our department. They became champions of pension reform — fighting for the rightful recognition and fair elevation of our service cadres.

Their mission was anything but simple. It meant endless visits to advocates and government officials, tireless correspondence, meeting fellow retirees to gather support and funds, and drafting what must have felt like a mountain of petitions and letters. Lesser men might have given up midway. But this duo was undeterred, bound together by purpose and by friendship.

And at last, their persistence bore fruit. The one-man commission, after carefully weighing our case, submitted a favourable report. The government accepted it. And with that, came a long-overdue revision — a substantial increase in our pensions. It was not just a financial relief; it was a moral victory, a recognition of decades of dedicated service by countless officers. For this, we remain ever grateful to Dr. Ranganathan and Dr. Chandrasekaran. Their names are etched in our memories not merely as colleagues, but as crusaders who secured dignity for us in our twilight years.

Yet, here lies the poignant irony. Both, having worked tirelessly to secure our comfort in retirement, had so little time to enjoy their own. Within a few months of each other, in the year 2021, they left us — Ranganathan to a sudden cardiac arrest, and Chandrasekaran to complications from brain clots. Their passing, so close together, felt almost as though their journeys — like their mission — could not be separated.

Their legacy, however, remains. Every month, as pension reaches our accounts, it carries a silent reminder of their service, their perseverance, and their sacrifice. They were not merely pension reformers — they were visionaries who saw fairness where bureaucracy had drawn a blind eye.

May their memory inspire us always... Om Shanthi!



## A SQUARE: AMAZING ACTIVITIES



**“I played sports for fitness, trophies, and lifelong proof that enthusiasm outweighs talent.”**

## CHAPTER 8

### A SQUARE

#### AMAZING ACTIVITIES

*“Little moments. Big joy. Amazing activities.”*

Welcome to Amazing Activities — the corner where fun refuses to sit still. This is mostly about cricket, with a little table tennis, chess, and tennis thrown in. Now, I know not everyone reading this is a sports enthusiast—so if cricket scores and silly mid-offs aren't your cup of tea, consider this my gentle warning. But don't worry, the stories here are less about trophies and more about the funny scrapes, misadventures, and laughs along the way. Endure it with me—you might even find yourself amused despite the sports talk!

From my very young age I have been a sports enthusiast. I have always been gameing for a bit of outdoor or indoor action. Outdoors it was all about cricket. My elder brother late Amandhan (Ramachandran), twelve years elder to me was my super hero. He was a sporting prodigy.

My starting point was the Gopalapuram Cricket Club (GCC). Our father, Narayana Swamy, was a big sports fan too. He knew a lot about almost every sport just from reading the newspapers every day. Because he loved sports so much, he even started a sports club called the Trades Staff Club for the people who worked in his office. He was the president of that club until he passed away. My younger brother Chinnu, who is two years younger than me, was a talented table tennis player and even captained his college team. So, you see, this love for sports runs in our family. But for us, sports never got in the way of our studies or our jobs.

Back to cricket! My starting point was Gopalapuram Cricket Club (GCC). My brother and his friends, L.S.Panchapakesn, E.K.Ramaswamy, B.C. Kumaraswamy and others founded GCC – a whole bunch of cricket crazy guys. From my school days, I would be at the Gopalapuram Corporation play grounds every evening. The GCC team seniors would practice there. I was mostly just the guy who picked up the ball. But I think I got a special attention because I was the younger brother of the great Amandhan. It was like having a VIP pass to the ball-retrieval squad. Occasionally I would also be allowed to bat for a few minutes.

One Sunday morning, when I was about thirteen, a member from GCC came to our house in a hurry. He needed me to go to the Arts College cricket grounds right away. GCC was playing a First Division League Match against Port Trust,

and they were missing one player. Guess who got picked? Me! I somehow managed to put on my only white pant, a white shirt and my old canvas shoes. Then I hopped on a friend's borrowed cycle and rushed to Arts College (7 kms), probably looking more like a confused vendor than a cricketer.

GCC led by B.C.Kumaraswamy was batting first against a formidable first division team – Port Trust and has already lost two wickets. B.C. told me I would bat at number four. I could not believe it. My dream of playing in a real First Division League Match was coming true. When my turn came, I went out there and batted freely scoring thirty-eight without getting out – all before the customary drinks break. Not bad for a rookie!

Every senior on the team congratulated me. One of the senior team members told me I was batting against some good players, some good bowlers, players who played for the state like Dhanuskodi, M.G.Bhava Narayanan and others.

When the game started again after the drinks break, I started thinking about the state players whose bowling I was facing. This got into my mind. I got out on the first ball I faced.

From that day onwards, I became a regular member of GCC. Of course, after much pleading, my mom arranged for a couple of white shirts and pants, strengthening my wardrobe. In course of time, much later, I even got to be the captain of the team.

Speaking about the family, my brother Chinnu two years younger to me, was also a talented table tennis player but his focus always was at academics. Our father was a big sports fan too. He knew a lot about almost every sport just from reading the newspapers every day.

So, you see, this love for sports runs in our family. This trait is evident even in our fourth generation, my grandson, Eshwar (Latha's son). He has represented his school in the cricket team with a fair amount of success. He is good at Shuttlecock and Table Tennis also. Amandhan's son Raju is also a proven talented cricketer and his son Dipak is a tennis player having the record of upsetting a 7<sup>th</sup> seeded India tennis player. In football he was called Pele in his school and in basketball also he excelled.

As for me and cricket, I had to stop playing regularly because of my job as a veterinarian became too demanding. It was a bit sad to give it up but saving animals had to come first.

Now, at my age, the younger people in my family and others do not believe that I had been a First Division Cricket League player. Luckily, I still have some paper cuttings reporting my cricket achievements, which I show them—though they whisper that Photoshop existed even in my time.

### CRICKET ANECDOTES

*“Between tending animals and chasing leather balls, cricket remained my Sunday joy—until duty finally asked me to trade my bat for blessings.”*

Eventhough my veterinary job was demanding, right from 1960 (the year I officially started my animal-loving adventures) I still had the passion for cricket, I managed to play a couple of League Matches a month, mostly on Sundays. Back then, from 1960 to 1963, I was working in Chenglepet district, which made it easy to dash to Chennai.

Then, around 1964, I got a transfer to Chennai and things got a lot better. My involvement in the game turned into semi-retirement situation. Here is how it worked. Mind you, our veterinary hospital works only up to 12 noon on Sundays. If we were batting second in a Sunday League Match, a substitute would take my place fielding. Then after I had finished patching my work, I would race over to the cricket ground just in time to bat. If we were batting first – forget about it. My priority had to be the animals. It was a tough choice, but duty calls.

This arrangement went on for about two years but by 1966, I finally decided to hang up my cricket bat for good. But don't worry, I did not disappear completely. I continued to be the team's non-playing captain and biggest well-wisher.

### CRICKET TOURS

*“We travelled as hopeful amateurs, met giants on the field, and returned with stories far bigger than our scores.”*

Where the excitement and occasional humiliation began. Our cricket club loved a good tour. It was our chance to escape the familiar grounds and pretend we were a serious team for a few days. Over the years, we bravely ventured to Bangalore (twice), Trichy, Karaikudi, Pudhukottai, Neyveli, Salem and Coimbatore. Our tour organisers were the dependable Seshagiri and his younger brother Rajaraman, two senior members who plan and execute things with precision. These Kannada Rao brothers with their roots in Bangalore, were the master-minds behind the itineraries, the opposing teams and our

accommodation. Everything was planned down to the last detail except for that one time...the day we met the Giants.

On one of our trips to Bangalore, for our second match, we were scheduled to play the Bangalore Cricket Club. It was only when we stepped on to the field that we realised we were facing a formidable side. Their team members among others had state players L.T.Adishes, his brother L.T.Subbu and the fiery test pacer Kasturi Rangan. Our dreams of a leisurely Sunday game turned into a scene from a horror movie.

When BCC started batting first, our real ordeal began. The onslaught from the bats of the LT brothers sent the balls all-round the field and beyond. Our long on and long off fielders started jogging backwards even before our bowler began his run up! The leather hunt was over by lunch time itself on their declaration after putting up a huge score.

Post lunch was not different. The menacing pace was no match to our skills. Those days the batters' protective gear was limited to pads, gloves and abdomen guard only. No fancy helmet, thigh pad or arm guard. We were basically relying on sheer will power and a bit of luck.

Soon enough, my turn to bat arrived. My stomach decided to host a bunch of butterflies. After taking guard, I did the customary look around the field. Kasturi Rangan looked like a tiny spec in the distance ready to unleash his thunderbolts. The slip cordon and the wicket keeper were also positioned far away-proof of the speed of the ball I must face. More butterflies joined the party. I somehow managed to survive a few deliveries without hitting the ball. But then, one ball decided to make contact- not with my bat mind you, with my left thigh, ouch! There was a huge appeal. I looked hopefully at the umpire, willing to be given out. But no luck. I had to endure the torment further. The pain and the soreness in the thigh lasted for a long period of time.

Finally, I was dismissed and made the long walk back to the shady enclosure which felt like heaven. Our team was ultimately skittled out cheaply. Our tour organizers faced some serious questioning for arranging such a tough fixture!

Let us talk about our 'state-of-the-art' kit bag. The old zip-up bag that housed three bats, three pairs of ancient pads, two pairs of gloves, missing their elastics a pair of worn-out wicket keeper's gloves and three out of shape abdomen guards. The pads and abdomen guards required generous amounts of tape to stay in the right place. At times the bamboo sticks from the pads would poke out

giving an appearance of a compound fracture. The funny part was we had a ‘materials committee’ responsible for the safe keeping of these ‘valuable’ items. Despite being a first-division club, we didn’t have a practice ground. But thanks to our club president’s efforts, we were eventually allowed to practice at the vast grounds surrounding the Jeypore palace in Gopalapuram.

### **THE CURIOUS CASE OF RANGAPPA’S RULES**

*“Under Rangappa’s rules, LBWs were optional, coffee was compulsory, and losing was guaranteed—but the fun was real.”*

One final cricket story from my school days takes us to Sabarmati Gardens, which had its own cricket ground. The owner, Rangarajan (whom we all called Rangappa), my age and belonging to *The Hindu* newspaper family, took a liking to me. He invited me to bring a team to play against his—but with some very specific rules.

#### **Rangappa’s Rules: Cricket with Coffee Service**

Ah, Sabarmati Gardens! Rangappa owned the ground and invited us to play. But there were rules:

He had to approve my team.

His side always batted second—no toss.

We need not bring our kit (as if we ever had one); they provided the bat, ball, stumps, and umpires.

Rangappa was a character. He would bat with a servant bringing him coffee right into the middle of the pitch. The umpires were 100% on his side—our LBWs were always out; theirs never. Somehow, his team always “won,” sometimes by the magical method of declaring a tie and then immediately scoring one more run.

Still, for us broke kids, it was free cricket and free entertainment. Who cared if the rules were rigged? Despite the biased games, we thoroughly enjoyed our afternoons there. After all, it was free cricket.

Rangappa was a man of many passions. An ardent animal lover, he was a certified judge at dog shows and owned race horses, with an uncanny talent for picking winners straight from the auction ring. He maintained a sizable kennel at his home, and I happened to be the attending veterinarian. Rangappa may have bent the rules of cricket, but he played the game of generosity straight—and that is how we remember him.

Let me add my adventures in the equally fun world of table tennis, chess and

tennis to my sports memoirs. While cricket was my main love, I did have a fling with other sports as well. Lakshmipuram Young Men's Association (LYMA), a local social and recreation club was located very near our house. The club had facilities for playing table tennis and chess. Naturally myself and Chinnu became members. LYMA used to host tournaments in table tennis and chess and we always threw our hats in the ring.

Now, let me just say LYMA had a certain soft spot for its local Lakshmipuram members. Chinnu and myself were considered as outsiders. This favouritism really shown through during a particular table tennis and chess tournament. Somehow, against all odds Chinnu, myself and a local LYMA member, Varada Chary, all made it to the finals. The tournament committee decided to give Varada Chary a bye, which qualified him as one of the finalists! Chinnu and myself had to battle it out, with the winner to fight the already rested finalist Varada Chary. I ended up losing to Chinnu. But to the disappointment of LYMA organizers Chinnu went on to beat Varada Chary. In a questionable move, LYMA decided to award cups to both finalists, but nothing for me.

In chess, adventures were equally memorable. I managed to reach the final, and found myself facing a local Hindi-speaking member. It was a best of five contest. I started strong, winning the first two games on the first day. On the second day when the contest started, my opponent suddenly seemed to have a whole team of Hindi-speaking supporters acting as his personal think tank. You know in a game of chess on-lookers usually anticipate moves. The LYMA judges remained silent despite the subtle coaching (in Hindi) happening. I ended up losing the next three games and became a runner up. And for this only a hand shake. No cup, medal or even a certificate.

Now, to tennis

A few of us from our GCC, gang- myself, Tummy, Sivaji and G.S. Mani, all had a common desire for playing tennis. We spent much time, searching for a tennis club to suit our pockets for membership. Luckily, we stumbled upon the tennis courts in Government estates near Rajaji Hall for a ridiculously low subscription fee with one small catch. We had to be off the courts by 8 a.m. This posed a mild challenge for me. As I was in my final year of my veterinary course and had to report for outpatient ward classes at 8 a.m. My mornings became a frantic race against the clock. I would pack a bag with a spare set of clothes, cycle to the courts by 6 am with my buddies, play my heart out until 7.30 and then pedal like crazy to college. My other tennis mates also had their own morning routines. Such was our love for tennis.





## CHAPTER 9

### RANDOM RAMBLINGS

“Think of this as a conversation with myself – you are just lucky to be overhearing it”

#### INTRODUCTION

Life has a funny way of slipping thoughts into our minds at the most inconvenient times — like a WhatsApp forward that pops up just when you’re in the middle of something serious. Some ideas float in gracefully, others crash land without warning. These are the “disruptive dreams” that gate-crash my everyday life.

You’ll find no logic here, only delightful detours. One minute it could be a memory of childhood marbles rolling across the red oxide floor, the next a grand theory about why cows prefer grazing near barbershops! (Don’t laugh – I have proof)

Think of this section as my personal junk drawer — full of odd screws, random keys, and the occasional hidden gem.

#### REMEMBERING MY FATHER

*“In every word I write and every memory I revisit, my father’s calm wisdom and gentle authority return to me.”*

After my dad passed away, I often find myself slipping into memories of him. Little incidents, scattered here and there, still come rushing back — like faded photographs that suddenly turn vivid.

You know, my father held a very high position in Spencer’s. In fact, he was the senior-most Indian, ranked just after the four British Directors. Quite an achievement in those days! But beyond the title and the authority, what defined him was his brilliance — a true maths wizard and an absolute master of the English language. He had a gift for letter writing, and he passed that art on to all his children. Even today, when I write, I can hear his steady hand guiding me.

His official attire was unforgettable. He wore a turban (which neatly hid his kudumi), a collarless white shirt, an old-fashioned tailored coat, a crisp *keezh paavadai* style white dhoti, and sturdy Bata slippers. Now, if you read this description on paper, you might imagine a rather funny picture. But when my father wore it, he looked imposing and dignified. His fair complexion, coupled with his confident bearing, gave him an aura of authority. Wherever he went, he

naturally commanded respect. Unlike me and my brothers, who were a few shades darker and far less commanding, my father stood out.

Speaking of his kudumi, I can't resist recalling a small family drama. During his regular haircut sessions in the garden, he would sit on a chair with the barber at work and suddenly announce loudly:

“Shall I ask the barber to do away with the kudumi?”

All of us children would instantly chorus: “Yes, yes, yes!” brimming with excitement. But much to our disappointment, he would always come back with the kudumi neatly trimmed and intact! Yet true to his quiet, decisive nature, one day without any fanfare, he simply returned kudumi-less. No warning, no drama — just action. That was my father.

Now, about Spencer's itself. In those days, they were the gold standard in confectionery. Their bread, cakes, cool drinks (we called them crush then), and ice creams were unmatched. In fact, Spencer's were the first to introduce chocolate ice cream on sticks. And as new items were released, our family was always the first to taste them. Mind you, my father was a man of great integrity. Although he could have brought home anything free, he never took a single item without paying for it.

On occasional Saturdays, cases of crush would arrive in bulk. The moment they landed, we children would rush to the nearby Nair shop to buy ice (remember, there was no fridge in those days!). A dozen bottles of crush would be poured into large vessels, and liberal amounts of sugar stirred in. Since my dad was diabetic, we used to joke that Spencer's cool drinks were specially made with less sugar just for him. Those were simple days, but such sweet memories!

And then there was cricket — my great passion during school and college. Whenever a Test match was played in Madras, I was over the moon. The Gopalapuram Cricket Club, affiliated to the Madras Cricket Association, was entitled to a complimentary member's pass. A thought struck me: as President of the Spencer's Trade Staff Club, perhaps my father could get me one. A week before a Test, I mustered the courage and asked him.

But my father had a peculiar habit — whether good or bad is for you to judge. He would never agree to any request made directly. He believed that giving should always come without asking. So, when I asked him, he flatly said no, that he wouldn't approach anyone for a favour. I was crushed and sulked quietly.

Then came the penultimate day of the Test. Casually, as though nothing happened, my father enquired about the match. A moment later, he told me to check something on the dressing table. With a mix of confusion and hope, I rushed there — and what a surprise! Sitting right on the table was the member's pass. My heart leapt with joy. Such was my father — firm in his principles, but overflowing with love in his own ways.

### **DAD and DIABETES**

*“Between my father's courage and my childhood syringe, a veterinarian was unknowingly born.”*

As early as I can remember, my dad was not a healthy person. He himself told us that even in his early thirties he had been a victim of tuberculosis, which he survived with some native treatment. Later, before he was forty, he was diagnosed with diabetes.

The doctors advised my dad to reduce intake of carbohydrates. They recommended Ragi to include in his menu. My mom, who is a culinary expert, used to prepare a variety of dishes with ragi like ragi adai, ragi thenguzhal, ragi omapudi, etc. The funny part was my dad was not inclined to relish these dishes; instead, we, children, would fight for them!

In those days, when insulin was first introduced, it had to be injected twice a day, just a few minutes before food. My dad became insulin-dependent, and from my school days onward, it was I who gave him those injections. In the mornings, I would cheerfully play the little “doctor,” poking him with the syringe as part of the daily routine. But evenings were different. By 5:30 p.m. he would be back from office, empty stomach and eager for the shot. That meant I had to abandon my cricket bat or marbles midway, rush home, and play the reluctant nurse. As a small boy, I sometimes cursed him — and his diabetes — under my breath. In later years, I felt ashamed of those childish thoughts.

My father was a man of numbers. Before getting his injection, he would first ask my mother what was on the menu. Then, with quick mental arithmetic, he would calculate the sugar content of the dishes and instruct me on the exact units of insulin to draw into the syringe. For all his calculations and his determined fight against the disease, he could not sustain. He passed away in his 58th year.

I can still picture his small but telling precaution: a lump of sugar tucked away in his pocket, to save him from dizziness if the insulin ever overdid its job. To

me, it summed him up perfectly — practical, cautious, and quietly fighting his battle, while I, his “compounder,” tried not to miss too many cricket overs in the process.

Those early years, with a syringe in my small hand and my father waiting anxiously for his insulin, left an impression far deeper than I realized at the time. What began as a boy’s reluctant duty slowly trained my fingers and steadied my nerves. Looking back now, I sometimes smile at the irony: the same syringes that once interrupted my games later became my trusted tools when I chose to be a veterinarian. Perhaps my father, unknowingly, gave me my first lessons in handling both responsibility — and needles.

### THE GREAT MATHS ESCAPE

*“I tried to escape maths, but my father’s quiet guidance turned my weakest subject into my strongest.”*

I was in 3rd Form (what we now call 8th Standard), and Mathematics was my sworn enemy. Numbers and I simply didn’t get along. Every time I finished a maths exam, my father had a habit: he would ask me to note down my answers in the question paper and bring it home. Now, I knew very well that most of my answers were destined to be wrong, but dad was sharp and would check them immediately.

One fine day, I came up with a “brilliant” escape plan. With the help of a classmate who was a maths wizard, I copied down all the correct answers into my question paper. That evening, my father went through it and his eyes lit up. He proudly told my mother and the rest of the family:

“See the improvement in our Balu! This time he will surely score more than 90 percent in maths!” I was floating on air with happiness. But alas, my joy was very short-lived.

When the report card came, I can still remember that merciless figure staring back at me: 12 percent. The cat was out of the bag!

Luckily for me, my father was not the angry or punishing type. Instead, he proved to be the most understanding teacher I could ever have. Rather than scolding me, he patiently started teaching me maths from the very fundamentals, one hour every day. Slowly but surely, the numbers began to make sense. And soon enough, I went from scoring 12 percent to a consistent 90 percent in maths.

All thanks to dad — for his patience, his faith, and his quiet way of turning a weak spot into a strong one.

### **DAD and NAVARATHRI**

*“Appa turned festivals into lessons in order and joy—strict when needed, loving always, unforgettable forever.”*

I am writing this on the third day of Navaratri, (24/09/2025) a festival that, in our younger days, meant nine days of pure fun and happiness—especially for us children.

For me, Navarathri and my father are inseparable. Every evening, he would arrange for mounds of fresh flowers from Parry’s Corner for the Lalitha Sahasranama Archanai. Then he would gather all of us around him to participate in the laksharchana. The rule was simple: the more voices that joined in, the more the mantra counts went up. This was perhaps the only time we children felt torn, because while our friends were out enjoying the festive evenings, we were tied to chanting along with Appa!

But once free, we would each grab a little cotton bag and go door-to-door, collecting sundal packets from every house in the street. Now, as you know, sundal happens to be on my untouchables list then, but that never stopped me from faithfully collecting those packets.

Deepawali was no exception. Even if Dad’s budget for crackers was generous, there was a system. We couldn’t just light them freely. Oh no — each cracker had to be lit at the time allotted by him, and usually under his direct supervision — almost like a military parade!

We grumbled then, but now when we think back, we laugh. That was Dad — disciplined, precise, and teaching us the value of control and order, without ever giving a lecture. Those little rules and restrictions were lessons we never forgot — though we only realized it years later, between bursts of laughter and memories.

My father’s preparations for the festival were meticulous. He would arrange, through his office contacts, for the electrician to come home and set up the golu steps and electrical fittings the day before the celebrations began. What always amazed me was how Appa managed all this without even moving from his office chair. With just his trusty office telephone, he could get everything done—festival or otherwise. I often imagine, had he lived in today’s age of mobile phones, the wonders he could have achieved!

Our dad was always planning, always calculating. We used to see him with a small pocket notebook, scribbling something or the other. That little book had all his “secrets.” One day we peeked inside and saw a note that said, “B & C for B & C – Rs.....”

We were scratching our heads — what on earth was that? Then we figured it out: it meant B & C Mills cloth for B(alu) and C(hinnu) — that’s us!

Soon he would call us proudly and say, “I’ve budgeted for three half pants and three shirts each!” We’d jump with excitement — new clothes! But the joy never lasted long. When the material arrived, it was just one big piece of cloth, all in the same colour and pattern. So, we’d look like twins in perfect uniform, marching around like we’d joined a school band!

And if we asked for full-sleeved shirts? Dad’s budget would smile and say, “Half sleeves will do!” The cloth was measured so tightly, it was as if he’d done engineering calculations for every inch

### **BUS and SCHOLARSHIP**

*“In Amma’s change calculations and Appa’s scholarship advice lay the values that shaped our lives.”*

Both Chinnu and I studied at Sri Ramakrishna Mission High School, T. Nagar, right up to our S.S.L.C. days. Our daily commute was by the good old bus number 13. It is interesting to note that even after all these decades, the route number has not changed!

The fare from Gopalapuram to T. Nagar and back was three annas — about 18 paise in today’s money. Amma would give us exactly that much every morning. Occasionally, if she didn’t have the correct change, she would hand us four annas. But rest assured, she would remember it the next day and give us only two annas, with a reminder: “You must be having one anna balance from yesterday!” That was her way of ensuring not a single coin went unaccounted for.

The school fees, if my memory serves me right, were about Rs. 6 per month for each of us. Even that amount was carefully budgeted. Once, Appa asked me to inquire at school if there were any scholarships available and to collect the application form if so. As a boy, I felt ashamed and embarrassed at the thought of asking — it seemed almost like admitting we couldn’t afford the fees. But for Appa and Amma, it was never about pride; it was about practicality.

They valued every rupee, and their thriftiness was a lesson. To them, availing a scholarship was not demeaning but sensible — why leave money on the table if it was rightfully ours? They wanted us to understand early that money had to be earned, saved, and respected. This principle guided their lives, and in turn, it shaped ours.

Looking back, I realize those little acts — Amma’s arithmetic with the annas, Appa’s insistence on exploring scholarships — were not just about saving money. They were about instilling discipline, humility, and resourcefulness. These were the quiet values tucked into our bus rides, pocket money, and school days, lessons that lasted far beyond the classroom.

### LAKSHMIAMMA 1

*“Even on the way to surgery she smiled like it was a picnic — and insisted no medicine begin without my ‘green signal.’”*

My mom was a courageous and down-to-earth person. In her lifetime, she went through several surgeries — cataract, mastoiditis, gall bladder -an attempt to remove— you name it. But here’s the thing: she was always completely unfazed. Her attitude was so unique that, even while being wheeled on a stretcher to the operation theatre, she would look at us with a confident smile and wave a casual goodbye. It was only we who were nervous wrecks; she behaved as though she was off to a picnic!

There was another side of her that used to leave me both embarrassed and secretly proud. Whenever the attending physician prescribed her medicines, she would calmly tell him, “My Balu knows everything. Only after he gives the green signal will I start taking the medicines.” Imagine my plight — the poor doctor, with his years of medical training, suddenly finding his prescription put on hold pending approval from... me  
Such was her faith and confidence in me.

### LAKSHMIAMMA – 2

*“Went for gallstones, got an appendix removed instead — my mom was probably the first person to get a ‘buy one, get one free’ surgery... without the ‘buy one’ part!”*

By the late 1960s, my mother began suffering frequent bouts of severe stomach cramps, mostly on the right side of her abdomen. Naturally, we consulted the famous Dr. N. Rangabashyam. After examining her, he confidently ruled out gallstones—but being a meticulous man, he still wanted a CT scan for confirmation.

Now, remember, a CT scan in those days was not the everyday affair as it is now. It was practically a shiny invention, with all the aura of a space-age machine. So off she went, and the report came back declaring multiple stones in the gall bladder.

With this “evidence,” my mother was admitted to the General Hospital, where Dr. N.R. himself was the chief. The surgery was performed with much seriousness, but here came the twist: not a single stone was found inside! Since they had already opened her abdomen, they decided to remove the appendix instead—what you might call a surgical consolation prize.

But that “bonus surgery” didn’t come free of cost. It led to severe complications, and for a tense while, her life itself hung in the balance. If it hadn’t been for Dr. Rangabashyam’s skill and presence of mind, my mother might not have made it off the operating table that day.

Remember, this was long before the era of neat little keyhole surgeries. Instead, my poor mother carried for the rest of her life a massive nine-inch scar across her stomach—a badge of medical misadventure. Along with it came a small, stubborn hernia, which she bore with quiet courage until her death three decades later.

### LAKSHMI AMMA – 3

*“From flash cards to family recipes, she turned every challenge into a legacy”*

After the whole gallstone “tamasha,” my mother was left with the after-effect of an abdominal hernia. But in typical Lakshmi Amma style, she wasn’t going to let that stop her. With her trademark courage and self-confidence, she decided to go ahead with her pre-scheduled trip to the U.S. to stay with her son, Chinnu, and family.

Here’s the catch — she had no escort. My mother had never been to school, had no formal education, and couldn’t read or write a word in English. Yet she packed her bags and got on that plane all by herself.

Her only companions? A set of flash cards Chinnu had cleverly prepared. On one side of each card, the request was written in Tamil, and on the other side, the English translation. If she wanted water, she’d just flash the card. Hungry? Another card. Need directions? Flip-flip, problem solved!

Armed with nothing but grit and those magical flash cards, this brave lady completed the long journey — up and down — with ease. When she returned after 3–4 months, we all heaved a huge sigh of relief.

During her stay in the U.S., to while away her spare time (and at Chinnu’s suggestion), she began scribbling recipes in Tamil in her own style and flow. Her writing skill was limited, but her determination wasn’t. Later, it was my daughter who patiently deciphered the manuscript, and with Chinnu’s effort, those family recipes were compiled into a small booklet — meant only for our close family circle. It became not just a cookbook, but a legacy.

She may not have had formal education, but she had the best degree of all — fearlessness, creativity, and the ability to leave behind something timeless.!

#### **LAKSHMI AMMA – 4**

*“Even flat on her back for ninety days, Amma never bent in spirit.”*

It was in the year 1977. My mother had gone on a temple visit with a group of devotees somewhere in Salem. Unfortunately, she had a nasty fall inside the temple. Though her back was in severe pain, in her usual brave style she somehow managed to complete the trip and return to Chennai.

Once home, the pain became unbearable. An orthopaedic surgeon examined her and diagnosed it as a spinal injury. His prescription was as tough as it sounds — a full plaster-of-Paris straight jacket and strict orders to lie flat on her back without moving, for three long months.

At that time, I was just about completing my first year of post-graduation. Suddenly, life handed me a double challenge — to prepare for my exams and to attend to the needs of my bedridden mother. Looking after a patient who cannot move an inch is no small task, and yet, by God’s grace and her unshakable spirit, we managed.

It still amazes me that despite lying flat for three months, she developed no bed sores at all — a true testament to her willpower, discipline, and our careful nursing.

On my side, it wasn’t easy either — a 41-year-old professional student trying to master two of the toughest subjects, Pathology and Microbiology, while doubling up as a caregiver. But in the end, we emerged victorious: I cleared my exams, and she recovered with her usual grit.

#### **LAKSHMI AMMA – 5**

*“She left us memories, love... and one last gentle joke for the crematorium fellow.”*

Somewhere in the middle of 1980, my mom had another fall—this time at Nungambakkam, in Rukmani’s house. The result was a left femur fracture (that’s the thigh bone). On the advice of Dr. I. Shanmugham, she was admitted to the hospital.

The doctors fixed the fracture with screws and a frame, and she had to stay in the hospital for about a month. Now, here comes the amusing part—during his rounds, Dr. Shanmugham would simply stand at the entrance of her room, ask in his booming voice, “How are you?” and my mom would politely reply, “Fine.” Within minutes, a small note would arrive in my hand, written in his famous scribbling style: “Visiting fees Rs. 300.” I soon realised that at this rate we would be paying a fortune just for him to say “How are you?” So, I came up with a strategy. Every morning, I would station myself at the hospital gates like a sentry. The moment I spotted him, I would rush to him and say, “Doctor, my mother is fine! Please don’t trouble yourself to walk all the way in.” Believe me, this little trick saved us quite a bit of money.

Mom carried those screws and frame inside her thigh right up to her last days. And here is the comic twist of fate: when she was cremated in the electric crematorium, the attendant collecting her ashes in a bucket suddenly got excited. The metallic clinking gave him the impression that he had struck gold—literally! Poor fellow, when he pulled out the screws and frame, the look on his face was unforgettable. His jackpot turned out to be orthopaedic treasure!

### **AMMA / SISTERS**

*“Our family arguments were thunderstorms — followed by sunshine and snacks.”*

As a small boy, I often saw my mother, Lakshmiamma, and my father getting into arguments. At that age I didn’t understand the reasons, but to my young ears the exchanges sometimes sounded fierce, even frightening. After my father left for office, Amma would still be fuming. I remember watching her hoist her freshly washed saree on the clothesline, muttering under her breath. Then she would turn to us and declare dramatically that she was leaving the house forever because she was upset with Dad.

Chinnu and I, being little boys, would burst into tears, thinking we were about to lose Amma for good. Only later did we realize the funny part: if Amma truly planned to leave us all and go away forever, why was she so carefully drying

her saree before setting off? Sure enough, within half an hour, she would return as though nothing had happened — the calm after the storm.

The same drama played out among my elder sisters — Rukmani, Saraswathi, and Padma. Their arguments could flare up like fireworks, full of shouting and sharp words. Chinnu and I would feel shaken, imagining the worst — that they would be separated forever. But then, as if by magic, only a few hours later, the very same sisters would be sitting side by side, laughing, chatting, and behaving as though not a single harsh word had ever been spoken.

That was the atmosphere of our home — full of life, tempers that blew hard but quickly passed, and a love that always resurfaced.

### **TWO GRANDMOTHERS – WORLDS APART**

*“One grandmother sprinkled water on everything, the other sprinkled castor oil on everyone. Between the two, our childhood was either purified... or purged!”*

Here’s is a story — about my two grandmothers, each unforgettable in her own way. My maternal grandmother was the widow of the late Panchapakesa Iyer.

Incidentally, I was supposed to be named after him, but just before my birth, my mother saw a snake. Following her wish, my name was changed to Balasubramanian instead — perhaps the first of many quick family decisions made on divine “signals”!

My grandmother was a strict follower of *madi* — the traditional state of ritual purity observed by orthodox brahmins. Her day started with a bath and a set of freshly washed clothes, untouched by anyone else. While in *madi*, she would sit in a corner, carefully avoiding contact with others, and always carried a *sombu* (brass water pot) by her side. Anything handed to her — food, clothes, or even money — was first given a generous sprinkle of water before being accepted.

For us, this was a source of endless entertainment. We would mischievously touch her just to see her dash off for yet another bath. My mother would scold us and call her, half in irritation and half in affection, “*Thannee Pisasu*” — the water ghost!

My paternal grandmother, affectionately known as *Paattimma*, was quite the opposite. She mostly lived with her youngest son, Mani Chithappa, twin brother of my *athai* Kamala, but whenever she visited our Gopalapuram home, it was an event — part excitement, part fear! The excitement was because she brought

stories; the fear, because she never forgot to give each of us children a spoonful of castor oil.

Her storytelling, however, more than made up for it. We would sit around her, wide-eyed, listening to her tales — even if we'd heard them many times before.

I can still picture her cataract surgery being done in our upstairs room in Gopalapuram — a calm and composed lady, strong-willed and down to earth. Unlike my madi grandmother, she was completely non-madi, and full of practical wisdom.

Two grandmothers — poles apart in habits and beliefs — yet both left deep impressions on our young minds. One taught us discipline and ritual, the other simplicity and warmth. Between the two, they added richness, laughter, and a fair bit of mischief to our childhood

#### **ATHIMBER No. 1**

*“He taught me banking, discipline, and responsibility—  
but thankfully never realised I also learnt reverse gear from a stranger!”*

My sister Rukmani got married when I was 9 years old. They migrated to Madras (now Chennai) from Bangalore. Athimber and Rukmani stayed for a short while in our Gopalapuram house. Very soon, Athimber became “Athimber” not just to us but to all and sundry in the street.

He was into construction and real estate business. As a small boy I fancied him and got attached to him. I sort of became his errand boy. He was the first in our circle to buy a motorbike – I still remember the make: Excelsior. Later, he went on to be the first to own a car in the family – a Morris Minor. Later he constantly changed cars from Vauxhall to Ambassador.

I always liked bikes and cars, and I used to keep his vehicles shiny, washing and cleaning them with pride. Athimber was also instrumental in training me in all work connected with bank transactions from a very early age.

#### **My maiden attempt to drive a car:**

Once, during a visit to our house, I noticed the ignition key left in the car after Athimber went inside. I knew it would take him hours to come out. Seizing the opportunity, I sat at the wheel and drove the car. Surprisingly, I managed to drive past my street and even went three streets further in Gopalapuram. But on the way back, I got stuck and was unable to negotiate a street corner.

I tried to reverse but couldn't figure out the reverse gear. By this time, a couple of cars had lined up behind me, their drivers honking impatiently. Embarrassed, I switched off the engine, got out, and explained my plight to the driver behind me. Graciously, he got into my car, engaged the reverse gear, and set the car in the right direction. No one – not even Athimber – ever knew about this secret adventure of mine!

Athimber was very brainy. He was the first person to think of and implement the idea of purchasing vast stretches of vacant land in prime city areas and selling them as individual plots, while earmarking space for roads, parks, schools, etc. Credit goes to him for developing thriving localities like Lake Area Nungambakkam, Chowdary Colony, Mahalingapuram, and Parthasarathyapuram.

“Real estate was his business, but he also invested in people – and I was lucky to be in one of his early projects.”

### **ATHIMBER No. 2**

*“Double graduate, half-pencil... and notes written on paper the size of postage stamps!”*

R. Jayaraman, B.A., B. Com – Saraswathi's husband – is my Athimber No. 2, affectionately called Kutti or Chinna Athimber.

My dad was very happy to get a double graduate son-in-law. As a 12-year-old, I used to proudly brag about this to my friends. In those days, seeing his deep interest in books, Chinnu and I would trouble him by dumping all sorts of books into his lap. He would patiently flip through them, and the most fascinating sight was how he would scribble down notes on the tiniest scrap of paper with a stubby pencil.

By nature, he was a thrifty person – almost a money magician. I would not call him a miser, because he never hesitated to spend on essential things. But he led a simple life, thought wisely, and always had the future of his family in mind. For himself, his needs were very little; for his wife and children, he ensured financial stability and peace of mind.

He lived a full life of 96 years, which in itself, is a testimony to his discipline and foresight.

I still remember his visits to our Gopalapuram house on his little moped, stopping by on the way to office. He would never miss relishing Lakshmiamma's delicious dishes, and the joy on his face was as memorable as the aroma of the food itself.

“He showed us that true wealth lies not in what you spend, but in how wisely you save and share.”

### **Athimber No. 3**

*“He carried sorrow with courage, family with love, and every room with laughter.”*

Padma's husband, K.S. Guruswamy.

You know the saying, “first impressions last”? Well, when he came driving a car to see my sister Padma for the first time, it did last! All of us were impressed – not just by his car, but by his cheerful and jovial nature.

He was working in Indian Bank then and later rose to become a manager. He was also a very close buddy of Kumara Rajah Muthiah Chettiar, which made him a highly influential person in his own circle.

Tragedy struck early when my sister Padma passed away and Guruswamy was only 40. Life dealt him a hard hand, but he carried it with resilience. Later, when he married his uncle's daughter, both he and his second wife Meenatchi became a strong support system for his daughters. They raised the girls with discipline, ensured they became graduates, and both secured jobs in banks. For that, the whole family owes them gratitude.

Guruswamy was an extremely witty person. His very presence at any function was enough to guarantee laughter. He had that rare gift of lightening even serious moments with humour.

### **A TRIBUTE TO MY BROTHER CHINNU**

*“He called my name till the end. I carry his echo in everything I do.  
He lived with dignity, laughed through pain, and loved without noise — that  
was my Chinnu”*

It was the end of October 2014. Kamala, Latha, Janani, and I were in Singapore, enjoying a short but delightful holiday. The trip, like so many other happy moments in our lives, bore Chinnu's invisible touch — he had meticulously planned our itinerary, ensuring everything was spotless and

smooth. That was Chinnu for you: thoughtful, precise, and always quietly taking care of others.

But on the very last day of our holiday, life changed in an instant. A call came from the United States — it was Chinnu, his voice heavy with sorrow. He broke the news that he had been diagnosed with bladder cancer. Even in that dark moment, true to his nature, Chinnu had already arranged our tickets, insisting we (Kamala and myself) come to Atlanta immediately. That was his way — he never left room for chaos, even in crisis.

When we arrived, Chinnu's face lit up with relief. With his trademark humour, he told every visitor: "My brother Balu has come with hammer, spanner, and all to mend the things affecting me!" That was Chinnu — using wit to disarm worry, choosing laughter over fear. For him, illness was not just a battle of the body but of the spirit, and he fought it with courage and dignity. We stayed with Chinnu and Raji until March 2015. Those months remain etched in my memory as a time of closeness, companionship, and silent prayers. I accompanied him to every chemotherapy session, every scan, every test. Outwardly, I gave him strength; inwardly, as a vet with medical understanding, I knew the truth — his days were limited. The doctors too shared that with me in confidence. Yet Chinnu, in his quiet way, carried himself with remarkable composure.

Even when we had to return to Chennai, he pleaded with us not to go. We assured him we would either return or bring him to Chennai for treatment. I consulted with specialists back home, who were willing and confident to take his case. For a moment, it seemed possible. But destiny had other plans. His condition worsened, and he was deemed unfit to fly.

I rushed back to Atlanta, only to find him in a coma, admitted in hospice care. Within a couple of days, Chinnu was gone. To this day, it pierces my heart when I heard that when he was conscious, he kept muttering: "Balu... Balu..." What did he want to tell me? What final thought did he wish to share? That unanswered call still echoes within me.

Chinnu was only two years younger than me. We went to the same school, and grew up sharing food, laughter, and dreams. He was not just my brother — he was my companion, my confidant, my mirror. Losing him felt like losing a part of myself.

What pains me further is that his funeral and last rites, conducted far away, felt rushed and impersonal. Deep in my heart, I was not entirely satisfied with the

way they were performed, but I know Raji and her family were helpless under those circumstances. In a country like the United States, one cannot expect the same depth of rituals or the emotional involvement we attach to such rites here in India. Within those limitations, they did their best, and I am sure it was the most heartfelt farewell they could give. In the end, no ceremony, however elaborate, can truly reflect the life he lived or the love he left behind.

Chinnu was a man of quiet strength, meticulous in thought, and affectionate in action. He found joy in caring for others, even when he himself was in pain. He had a sharp wit that could lighten the heaviest moment, and a heart large enough to embrace everyone around him. He worked with sincerity, lived with dignity, and left behind not only memories but lessons — of resilience, humour and unconditional love.

I still feel his absence every single day. And yet, in a way, he has never left me. He lives on in every story I tell, in every laugh I remember, in every thought where I find myself asking, “What would Chinnu say?” He was my brother. My Chinnu. And though death took him too soon, nothing can erase the bond we shared. For me, it will last beyond this life.

#### **MY VIEWS ON HEALTH CARE AND TREATMENT IN THE U.S.A.**

*“Advanced technology and expertise alone cannot replace the human touch in medicine; a patient’s care is measured not just in reports and procedures, but in empathy, attention, and timely compassion.”*

My observations on the American healthcare system are based on what I personally witnessed during the medical ordeal of my younger brother, Chinnu.

Around 2012 — or perhaps a little earlier — Chinnu was diagnosed with prostate cancer and underwent a series of radiation treatments. After several exposers, the doctors later informed him that he had never actually had prostate cancer. By then, however, the excessive radiation had caused bladder cancer, which was diagnosed in October–November 2014.

That was when my wife Kamala and I travelled to Atlanta, where Chinnu was living. What I saw there left a deep impression on me. Despite the advanced facilities and impressive technological capability, I found the overall approach somewhat impersonal. Greater importance seemed to be placed on lab reports and test results than on direct patient engagement. Emergency appointments with the attending specialists were extremely difficult to obtain, and medicines were prescribed strictly according to lab findings. Every consultation left my

brother distressed, as the focus was almost entirely on the gravity of his condition, with little emotional support or reassurance offered.

Chemotherapy was also initiated rather late. Eventually, Chinnu was moved to a hospice, fully aware of what that transition meant. He passed away there on November 14, 2015.

The medical professionals in the U.S. are undoubtedly highly knowledgeable and competent. However, I sensed that many were constrained by the constant fear of malpractice lawsuits, which seemed to limit their ability to apply personal judgment or compassionate flexibility in patient care.

This, I realised, is not a challenge confined to the United States. However, the situation I witnessed during Chinnu's time was very different from what we see in India today. At that time, I firmly believe Chinnu would have received better coordinated, timely, and humane care in India—and that belief continues to remain strong.

In contrast, what Dr. C. M. Manjunath, eminent cardiologist and Karnataka M.P. has highlighted recently, reflects the more recent trends that have slowly crept into the Indian medical system. He points out that the rise of internet-based “instructions,” the commercialisation of treatment, and the fragmentation of medical responsibilities—where one professional performs the procedure, another drafts the discharge summary, and someone else writes the prescription—are causing the patient to become increasingly neglected.

Dr. Manjunath's observation is a warning about the direction in which the system in India is heading, not a reflection of the India that existed when Chinnu needed care.

My honest belief is that during that period, India's medical environment was more patient-centred, more humane, and less fragmented—qualities that might have made a meaningful difference to Chinnu's treatment and his final journey

### **Concluding Reflection**

Healthcare systems across the world continue to evolve, shaped by technology, commercial forces, and changing expectations of patients and providers. What Dr. C. M. Manjunath cautions us about is not merely a criticism, but a timely reminder: that even the most advanced systems can lose their way if the focus shifts from the human being at the centre of care.

My hope is that as India advances in medical science and technology, it retains the compassion, accessibility, and personal attention that once defined it—so that no patient, anywhere, becomes just a file, a report, or a case number.

### **OUR ROOTS - GANAPATHI AGRAHARAM & ICHANGUDI**

*“Our roots lie not just in soil and water, but in temples, traditions, and the stories of those who came before us—threads that bind us to our family’s enduring legacy.”*

TRN family’s roots lie in two sister villages—Ganapathi Agraharam and Ichangudi (also spelled Echangudi)—nestled on the fertile banks of the River Cauvery in Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu. These may look like small, quiet villages, but they are steeped in stories and tradition.

Ganapathi Agraharam is especially famous for its Sri Maha Ganapathi Temple. Legend has it that during a time of terrible drought, the idol of Lord Ganapathi was unearthed here. Almost immediately, the rains came down, the crops revived, and prosperity returned to the land. From that day, the temple became the heart and soul of the village.

Ichangudi carries its own distinction, being connected to Kanchi Maha Periyava—the 68th Peetadhipati of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. Though Periyavaa himself was born in Vilupuram in 1894, his mother hailed from Ichangudi. The very house where she was born has now been transformed into a shrine for Periyava, along with a Veda Padasala. Tradition also says Periyavaa spent part of his very early childhood there, which only adds to the village’s spiritual glow.

Maha Periyava (Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Mahaswami) and the goddess Mathura Kaliyamman have a significant spiritual connection, as the deity is the **kula devata** (family deity) of the Kanchi Mahaswami's family. This adds yet another sacred connection between Ichangudi and the divine presence of the Goddess.

My father was born in Ichangudi, and I still remember one of my visits there. A village elder asked me quite casually about my gothram. When I replied “Srivatsa gothram,” he immediately nodded and said, “Ah, then your kula dheivam must be Siruvachur Madura Kaliyamman.” I was stunned—he was right! He went on to explain that for natives of Ichangudi, the kula dheivam is determined by their gothram. His own, for example, was in a village Tirunelveli

district because his gothram was different from mine. That conversation taught me how layered and fascinating our traditions are.

Speaking of our kula dheivam, let me note a few important customs. At the Siruvachur Madura Kaliyamman temple, there are certain rituals to be observed. It is a long-standing tradition to offer மா விளக்கு (maa vilakku)—a lamp made of rice flour, jaggery, and ghee. And there's a rule: all the items for preparing maa vilakku must be bought only from the shops in the temple village, not brought from outside. Another important tradition is that you must not visit the temple if there has been a death in the family or among those of your gothram, until the completion of Suba Sweeharam (the purification rites) (ie after one year). These may sound like strict rules, but they are rooted in respect—for the deity, for tradition, and for the rhythm of life itself.

There is also one more unique custom tied to our native place. On Ganesh Chaturthi, natives of Ichangudi and Ganapathi Agraharam are not supposed to bring home a clay idol of Lord Ganapathi for puja. Instead, they must go to a nearby Pillaiyar temple, perform the puja there, and offer kozhukattai as neivedyam. No home puja, no home neivedyam—strictly temple-only.

I share all this especially for the younger generation, with the hope that these small but meaningful customs are remembered and followed. They are not just rituals; they are the invisible threads that keep us tied to our roots, our ancestors, and the stories that shaped our identity. After all, it's these traditions that make our family tree strong—not just with branches, but with deep roots that draw strength from the Cauvery's sacred soil.

**Footnote:**

It is my earnest counsel to all elders to ensure that their children and grandchildren remain well informed about their kula dheivam (family deity) and their ancestral native place — its location, customs, and the rituals traditionally observed there. They should also encourage the younger generation to visit these sacred places whenever opportunity permits. In the event the elders themselves are not in full possession of such details, they may seek to gather the information from relatives or senior members of their native community.

**MY GOPALAPURAM LOVE STORY**

*“Gopalapuram isn't just a place—it's the heartbeat of my childhood, etched forever under its mango trees and street corners.”*

Having been born in our Gopalapuram house on 13th April 1936, and spending over five decades under its roof and mango tree shade, I can safely declare that

Gopalapuram is not just a place on the map — it is tattooed on my heart and permanently lodged in my memory. Nostalgia? Oh, it floods me daily like the Cooum in its monsoon mood (only, thankfully, much sweeter-smelling).

I have already written a few episodes here and there about those wonderful, joyous, and unforgettable moments. But each time I finish, I feel guilty — as though I’ve only plucked one jasmine from a whole garland. So, in this rambling, let me attempt again — not in neat chapters, but as the memories arrive: messy, jumbled, but full of life.

Let me begin with my very own Sadasiva Iyer Street. My earliest recollection? Our next-door “Dosai Mami.” Her family hailed from Palghat, were affluent businessfolk, and soon expanded their kingdom by buying the adjacent land at the street corner. On it they built a grand bungalow, which we all reverently referred to as the thoppu house.

But alas, the thoppu house had a curse of its own. Not long after shifting there, tragedy struck: their young son, barely 18, was taken by typhoid. Misfortune didn’t stop there — their business collapsed too, and soon they had to sell both houses and disappear from our street. Why this downfall, people asked? The elders, shaking their heads in wise agreement, pointed to the bane of “theru kuthu” — the house facing the street. And honestly, when you see tragedy repeated enough times, even the most logical mind begins to nod.

For, sure enough, when the house was later bought by one Sesha Iyer, an actuary by profession (actuaries predict risk, but sadly couldn’t predict their own fate), the misfortune continued. Their young daughter died soon after they moved in, followed by Sesha Iyer himself. Next came a tenant, the family of one late Aravamutham. And what do you know? Their daughter too, barely 20, was gone in no time, and the family business went downhill faster than a soapbox cart. The thoppu house has now demolished and converted as flats.

These are just the first few pebbles from the mountain of my Gopalapuram memories. There are more streets to walk, more characters to meet, and more laughter to share. For now, let me sign off with a promise: more Gopalapuram in my next ramblings.

## **MY GOPALAPURAM LOVE STORY 2**

*“Gopalapuram streets: where humor met everyday heroics.”*

Among the colourful characters who populated my Gopalapuram childhood was Subash, eldest son of C.M. Srinivasan. Now, Subash fancied himself a fast bowler. Only trouble? His bowling action was so “flexible” that every bystander, umpire, and street dog swore he was throwing. Poor fellow, stung by the criticism, he went in search of remedies. Someone advised him to strap a wooden scale under his right arm to keep it straight during delivery. Did it work? Oh yes, brilliantly — until the scale snapped in two! That was the end of Subash’s cricketing career, and possibly the state team’s only chance of producing a bowler with built-in stationery.

His younger brother, Vichy was no better. A slow-bowler by designation but an artist of “slow throwing” in reality. Experts suggested he reinvent himself as a left-arm bowler. He did. The result? Left-arm throwing! I sometimes wonder whether the cricket board missed a golden opportunity to introduce a new category: “Ambidextrous Throwers.”

Now, moving to our next street, we had Sivaji’s father, the short-fused Seetharama Iyer. He was a man of few friends, and to my good fortune (or misfortune), I happened to be one of them. In his old age, the doctor prescribed him a course of iron injections. His daughter Shyamala was a medical student, but apparently not a practical medical student — she didn’t have the nerve to jab her father. Who was summoned instead? Me, the neighbourhood veterinarian! After all, if I could manage buffaloes and bandicoots, surely, I could handle one cranky Iyer. Did the iron cure him? Sadly no. It only succeeded in turning him a darker shade of Seetharaman!

And ah, how can I forget our Gopalapuram Venugopalakrishnan Temple? It stood regally opposite the house of none other than C.M. Karunanidhi, the proud atheist. Rumour had it, though, that every time he stepped out, just before climbing into his car, he’d give the temple a quick, stealthy nod. Maybe that tiny bow was the secret ingredient in his long political escapades.

My father, was the reserved type. His circle of friends could be counted on one hand — and that too, not all the fingers. He had Sri Rama Iyer and the street-corner Mudaliar. That Mudaliar was uncle to my friend Palani. Now, here comes one of those “Emergency period” tales. One night, the poor man passed away. His family was close to the C.M.’s household, so the local doctors, fearing political entanglements, hesitated to come and confirm the death. Who did they turn to? Once again, their trusted friend — the vet! Yes, yours truly was summoned, and I solemnly certified: the Mudaliar had indeed gone to his heaven.

## **THE GOPALAPURAM HOUSE - Our Living Umbilical Cord**

*“A home that raised children, trees, and expectations equally.”*

My bond with our No.4, Sadasiva Iyer Street, Gopalapuram house (Padmalaya) was no less than an umbilical cord connection. That house was not just bricks and mortar — it was family. When it was finally demolished, all of us wept. Even today, the thought of it leaves a lump in my throat.

It wasn't just a “house.” It was a bungalow in every sense of the word: a sprawling around 5,000 + square feet of built-up space, proudly sitting on 4,800 square feet of land. Around it stood a mango tree, four coconut trees, one sapota tree, and a jackfruit tree, each with their own character. The mangoes were fiercely fought over by us siblings. But what made the house truly special was not its size or its trees, but its spirit. It was, without doubt, an auspicious home. In over five decades of its existence, not a single death occurred within its walls. Instead, it became the stage for seven births (with me being the very first), one wedding (our Saraswathi's, celebrated with grandeur), and three sacred upanayanams (mine, Chinnu's, and Babu's — Amarnadhan's son). If houses earned good karma, ours was positively glowing.

Inside, life was always buzzing. The red oxide floors had a permanent shine from being scrubbed daily. The central hall was our playground, our exam hall, our stage for mock dramas, and at times, our boxing ring. The dining area was forever filled with chatter, clanging plates, and the smell of freshly ground chutneys and rasam bubbling away.

Festivals were when the house truly came alive. Festivals meant the courtyard overflowing with kolams so elaborate they could have won prizes. Deepavali meant Lakshmiamma's special sweets and snacks — which, in true sibling fashion, disappeared faster than they were fried. Marriages and functions meant cousins camping out in every corner, even under the staircase, with laughter echoing late into the night.

And then there were the little everyday rituals waiting for the postman like he carried treasure, or playing cricket in the portico only to have the ball crash into the verandah. Every wall, every window, every tree seemed to know our secrets.

By the late 1980s, however, reality caught up with us. Maintaining such a large house was becoming more of a burden than a blessing. Chinnu, always the practical visionary, suggested selling it. We reluctantly agreed, though our hearts resisted. Then came our “master plan”: demolish the house, sell one ground, and build a new house on the remaining plot. Chinnu would take the

ground floor, and I the first. On paper, it was brilliant. It turned into a series of misfortunes.

The buyer of the other ground paid us in irritating little instalments rather than the lump sum promised. It was as though fate itself disapproved of us tearing down the house that had only ever blessed us.

Looking back now, I realize the Gopalapuram house was not just a building, but the anchor of our lives. It raised us, sheltered us, celebrated us, and perhaps even protected us. Its walls absorbed our laughter, its courtyard bore witness to our mischief, its trees shaded our dreams. Losing it was not just the loss of property — it was like bidding farewell to a beloved family elder.

Even today, whenever I pass that lane, I don't see the new structure that stands there. In my mind's eye, I still see our house — the mango trees swaying, the red oxide floors gleaming, and a younger version of myself chasing marbles in the hall while Amma calls out for the hundredth time to wash up before lunch.

**Footnote:**

As if the earlier misfortunes weren't enough, fate had one final twist waiting for us. After abandoning our grand construction plans, we decided to sell the almost-finished house. We did so at the then-prevailing market rate (1989), which at that time seemed reasonable. But in no time, real estate prices skyrocketed beyond imagination. Had we only waited, we could have proudly joined the ranks of the crorepatis!

**THE TREES OF GOPALAPURAM HOUSE**

*“Those trees didn't just grow fruit; they grew our childhood, every branch shaded a memory, every leaf knew our names.”*

Our Gopalapuram house was not just walls and rooms — it was also the trees that stood guard around it, each with its own story. Right in front, there was a grand tree that, during its flowering season, would shower the ground with golden blossoms. The sight was like a yellow carpet spread out just for us. Sadly, this beauty was felled later, along with two small mango trees, to make way for the house expansion.

But the true hero of our garden was the big mango tree in the backyard. It was everybody's favourite — ours, the neighbours', and perhaps even the street kids. The tree's birth, as family legend goes, was thanks to Amandhan, who had the habit of carelessly throwing mango seeds at one spot. Out of his casual throws grew this mighty tree, which in turn gave us years of delicious fruit. When it finally began to lean dangerously toward the house, we had no choice

but to bring it down. The stump, however, lived on — serving as a sturdy seat for many chats and daydreams.

We also had four coconut trees that generously yielded their crop. In contrast, one jackfruit tree stubbornly refused to cooperate — if memory serves me right, it produced only a single fruit in its entire lifetime before being cut down for our outhouse. Then there was the small sapota tree near the compound wall. Though it did yield fruits, most of them never reached us; the street urchins, nimble and daring, always got there first!

And then, the பாக்கு மரம் (areca nut tree) — tall, slim, and with a slippery trunk. As a young boy, I used to climb at least halfway up, clinging for dear life, a feat that none of my friends dared to attempt. It gave me a small but satisfying reputation as a daredevil. Amandhan once captured me in this heroic pose on his Brownie box camera — clinging like a stubborn monkey to the smooth trunk. Amandhan is gone, and so is that photograph, but the memory of both lingers fresh in my mind.

Looking back now, I realise that these trees were more than just providers of fruit or shade. They were silent companions of our childhood, witnesses to our games, our laughter, and even our mischief. If they could talk, I'm sure they would recall us as noisy tenants, greedy pluckers, and reckless climbers — but also as children who loved them dearly. Each stump, branch, and fallen leaf is stitched into the fabric of my memories of Gopalapuram.

### **GOPALAPURAM HOSPITAL**

*“Why go to hospital when the hospital comes home?”*

During the early part of the 1950s, one fine day, my younger brother Chinnu had a bout of severe abdominal pain. Dr. D. S. Iyer, the army-retired chief surgeon of the General Hospital and our next-door neighbour, was kind enough to examine him. He immediately diagnosed acute appendicitis and said surgery was unavoidable. The doctor explained that appendicitis could lead to serious complications — the most dangerous being a burst appendix. A ruptured appendix spreads infection throughout the abdomen, a condition called peritonitis, which is potentially life-threatening and requires immediate surgery. In view of the urgency, Dr. Iyer performed the surgery in our house itself. Chinnu recovered well, without any complications. Incidentally, this was not the first time our house doubled as a makeshift hospital. Some years earlier, my paternal grandmother had undergone cataract surgery in both eyes — one after

the other — right inside our home, which temporarily became an ophthalmic hospital.

Now, a little more about Chinnu and myself. He was exactly two years younger than me. From class one all the way up to school final, we both attended the same school. Poor Chinnu often fell sick. We used to joke that if it rained in Chingleput, Chinnu would catch a cold in Madras! Many a time, his illness would keep him at home while I trudged alone to school. Secretly, I would pray to fall sick like him and enjoy a holiday from school — but my prayers were never answered.

From my eighth standard days onwards, I had been craving for a bicycle. But my father, true to his nature, never bought anything if it was directly asked for. So, my wish remained unfulfilled and eventually buried. Then came the surprise. When Chinnu and I were in college, two brand-new bicycles were delivered at our doorstep! We could hardly believe our eyes. The joy was immense, though I must admit a small tinge of disappointment lingered in me. The cycles were rather plain — no dynamo, no mudguards, and not even seat cushions.

Still, despite the missing features, owning our very own bicycles felt like a dream come true. For both Chinnu and me, those simple machines were not just vehicles — they were symbols of freedom, independence, and the sweet rewards of patience.

### **FROM PALACE TO PARCEL**

*“A house gives you freedom; a flat teaches you adjustment—daily.*

I was born and brought up in our Gopalapuram house and lived there peacefully until my 55th year. That house was not merely a house—it was an independent nation. A vast bungalow sitting confidently on a two-ground square plot, surrounded by mango, jackfruit, sapota, coconut, and other trees that produced fruits without asking for committee approval.

We had a red-oxide “கிண்ணை” in the spacious verandah and two more cement “கிண்ணை” in the portico. In those days, we did not have “living rooms”; we had living spaces. You could sit, stretch, sleep, gossip, lecture others, or simply do nothing—and nobody complained. The house had a 5 to 10 feet setback all around, complete with a dignified thulasi maadam. Air and sunlight entered freely, without signing in at the gate.

Then, in a moment of misplaced intelligence—which I now proudly call the biggest blunder of our life—we sold the house and moved into a flat.

It has been more than 30 years since I started living in a flat, and I am still in the digestion stage. Some people cannot digest milk. I cannot digest flats. I constantly feel like a full-size human being living inside a matchbox. There is no scope to extend space. No “we’ll add one more room later” thinking. Later never comes in a flat.

In an individual house, if you get an idea at 6 a.m., you implement it by 6:05 a.m. In a flat, you first submit the idea to the Association, wait for a meeting, then wait for another meeting to discuss why the first meeting achieved nothing. Finally, the idea dies a natural death. Often, it is not the idea that is rejected—it is you.

And then there is politics. Not the Parliament type, but worse. Lift politics, water politics, parking politics and festival politics. I have seen more strategies here than in a chess tournament.

To be fair, flats do have certain advantages. Security is good; nobody can enter without permission—sometimes not even you. Maintenance is shared; your headache is divided into instalments. Neighbours are close by, which is comforting during emergencies and irritating during normal days. The lift is a blessing, especially to the knees, though it develops a personality disorder during power cuts.

But the biggest loss is freedom. Freedom to build, break, plant, expand, or simply sit outside and watch the world go by. In a flat, you live comfortably—but cautiously. Every action is planned, approved, and sometimes postponed till the next lifetime.

So here I am—a bungalow-bred mind trapped in a flat-approved body. Adjusted, yes. Convinced, no. I still dream of red-oxide floors, open verandas, and a mango tree that drops fruits without circulating a notice.

## **A MIXED BAG OF FORTUNE AND MISFORTUNE**

*“Tested by fate, steadied by faith.”*

### **October–December 2015**

Those three months of 2015 — October, November, and December — were nothing short of a whirlwind. They carried within them moments of great sorrow, immense struggle, and yet, flashes of joy.

After returning from the U.S., leaving behind my gravely ill Chinnu, my mind was restless. At home, Latha and I were desperately trying to sell our Ashoknagar flat. This was the last remnant of a dream — my plan to develop the Ashoknagar complex into a joint venture, demolishing the old 30 flats and replacing them with a new, modern block. Sadly, that vision collapsed due to the non-cooperation of a few owners. Time was running out. From the U.S., Raji and Arun were sending SOS messages: Chinnu's condition was worsening, and my presence was urgently required.

Just then, a lucky break — we found a buyer for our flat. Almost simultaneously, Kamala, Latha, Janani, and I stumbled upon a new flat in West K.K. Nagar. Without wasting time, we finalized the purchase in late October. It felt as though fate had set the stage for transition, though under very heavy circumstances.

By November 12th, I left for the U.S. to be with Chinnu. But it was too late. He was already in a coma in hospice care. My heart broke knowing I couldn't speak to him one last time. On November 14th, Chinnu passed away, leaving behind a void no words can fill.

Back in Chennai, Latha had the enormous responsibility of closing one chapter and opening another. She handled it with admirable grit — selling the old flat, registering the new one — all during unprecedented heavy rains and the great floods that paralyzed Chennai. While the city was sinking, she stood steady.

And then, just weeks later, life demanded another test. Eshwar's convocation in Charlotte, U.S., was scheduled for the last week of December. Kamala, Latha, and Janani were to fly on December 4th, but Chennai Airport was shut down due to flooding. After much anxiety, the waters receded just enough, and they managed to leave by December 6th. Thankfully, the convocation went off beautifully — a proud, shining moment for our family.

Even though Chinnu could not be physically present, we all felt his invisible presence that day. It was almost as though his blessings carried Eshwar to that proud milestone, and his spirit stood silently among us, smiling in approval. Looking back, those months were like a storm — loss, floods, rushed responsibilities, and at last, the joy of seeing Eshwar graduate. We survived it all by God's grace — and, I truly believe, with Chinnu's watchful blessings guiding us through.

Life taught us then that joy and sorrow never come one by one — they arrive as a package, testing both our strength and our faith.

## **MORE OF RAMBLINGS:**

### **FANTABULOUS**

*“My first ride, my loudest memory. Flawed, faithful, and fantastically mine.”*  
The Royal Enfield company is remembered for its iconic Bullet motorcycles. But tucked away in its history is one quirky experiment — a scooter called the Fantabulous. And if the records are checked, I might well have been the only person in Chennai to have bought one!

From my school days, two-wheelers fascinated me. Scooters, motorbikes — they all felt like glamorous chariots. But in those times, unlike the present generation of schoolboys who zip around on fancy vehicles, owning one was as impossible as asking for the moon. My dream finally materialised in 1964, four years into my government service.

Now, how could a young man with a monthly salary of just ₹600 afford such a luxury? The answer came from an unlikely source — a kind-hearted office clerk. Seeing my eagerness, he whispered the magic words: “Vehicle loan.” He not only gave me the idea but also arranged it. And lo and behold, soon I was the proud owner of a second-hand Fantabulous.

Why this make? Simple — it was ahead of its time. It had a self-starter (unheard of in India then!), battery, indicator lights, and dazzling head and tail lamps. Later I realised these were its only bright features. Still, thanks to these novelties, I gained instant fame among my friends, who began calling me “Fantabulous Balu.”

One unforgettable episode happened when I attended my college day function. My scooter became the star attraction. A friend insisted on a trial ride, and I, in my generosity, agreed. Within minutes, a loud crashing sound shattered the festive air. My friend, poor fellow, had pressed his foot on what he assumed was the brake pedal. Unfortunately, the Fantabulous had its gear shift pedal at the exact same spot! The result? A badly bent front mudguard — and me, standing there trying my best not to cry. Thankfully, insurance came to my rescue, sparing my purse if not my nerves.

The Fantabulous stayed with me for over five years, through thick and thin. There was just one man in the whole city who could handle its eccentricities — Shanmugham, an ex-Royal Enfield employee who knew the scooter inside out.

In his hands, my peculiar pet of a machine lived on loyally until it finally made its exit from my life.



Of course, my vehicular adventures didn't stop there. After the Fantabulous, I upgraded to a bright red Vespa — though technically the official owner was my friend Dr. Gaja. Ironically, he often had to borrow his own scooter from me! Then came the trusty Lambretta, followed by Chetak and the smooth Kinetic Honda. Eventually, I graduated to cars — first the humble Maruti 800, and now the ever-faithful Zen Estilo.

Driving wasn't just limited to my personal vehicles either. During my stint at La Chatelaine, I had the pleasure of driving a Standard Herald and even a Savoy. And just for fun — or perhaps madness — I once tried my hand at driving a lorry during my days in the Tamil Nadu Poultry Development Corporation. Don't ask me how that ended; let's just say the lorry and I both lived to tell the tale!

## THE BICYCLE

*“Every ride leaves a mark, some permanent, sorry, Chinnu—medicine wasn't my calling then.”*

### **My Two-Wheeled Tales (and a Business Blunder)**

Ah, the bicycle! This takes me back to my early school days. We only had one bicycle in the house, belonging to my elder brother. So, Chinnu and I, whenever Amandhan wasn't around, would sneak it out to learn to ride. First, it was the half-pedal method, then the full-on attempt, complete with the usual falls and bruises

One incident, though it seemed funny at the time, now makes me feel a bit of pity and apology. Chinnu got quite hurt, a rather severe abrasion on his knee, while learning to ride. In the guise of giving him first aid, I poured, not applied, a full bottle of tincture of iodine over the raw wound. Oh! The high-decibel war cry let out by Chinnu could be heard streets ahead! He carried that burnt mark

for years – a permanent reminder of my questionable medical skills. Sorry, Chinnu!

Now, for another incident involving two wheels, but with a different kind of ride. My Athimber number 1 (brother-in-law) quit his job in Bangalore soon after marrying my sister. He then plunged into business, much against my father's wishes.

The irony was, my dad himself, a few years later, decided to indulge in a business venture. He invested about Rs. 2000 (big money then) for 50 bicycles from an army sale. The catch? The bicycles were in different parts, which had to be assembled and then sold. So, Amandhan and my Athimber were entrusted with the Herculean task of assembling them, engaging a cycle mechanic, and then handling the sales. My dad, was expecting about a 50% profit. But sadly, the business was a bit of a flat tire. If I remember correctly, my dad just managed to scrape through.

### **La CHATELAINE**

*“I was there at the birth, not the applause - a story of contribution without credit.”*

Destiny Decision

Year: 1970

Stage: The open space in front of the Veterinary Hospital, Saidapet

Time: Around 6 PM daily

Purpose: A series of meetings to take an important decision

In 1970, when I was the vet in charge of the Veterinary Hospital at Saidapet, life presented me with an unexpected twist. Alongside my official duties, I had a side assignment with the Madras Race Club (MRC), where I inspected horses' shoes on race days. It was during this stint that I met Cho's brother, Ambi, and his wife, Shantha.

This couple sought me out, and soon a meeting was arranged in the hospital campus. That one meeting grew into a series of evening serious discussions, each carrying an air of purpose. Eventually, they revealed their dream — to establish a residential school, inspired by Brindavan Residential Schools.

Now, where did I, a humble government veterinarian, fit into such a lofty ambition? Their plan was simple: to raise funds, they wanted to start a dairy farm. And for that, they needed me. My professional expertise became the keystone of their vision.

I made it clear: “I can only function as a working partner.” With that, the venture began to take shape. Ambi, with his entrepreneurial flair, secured a large building on Nowroji Road, Chetpet, for ₹1,500 a month. Soon, a large poultry farm also was set up, and cows were brought in from Bangalore and elsewhere. All of this, of course, was financed by bank loans. Income generated from the dairy and poultry farms served as working capital.

The management of the dairy, poultry farm and milk supply in the morning was so hectic that I had to forego more than 75 percent of my practice which resulted in considerable reduction in my earnings. I incurred the wrath of my family members also as practically my stay in the house was only during night time, My daughter then about 5- or 6-year-old also had to stay in the school till 9 or 10 p.m. waiting to be escorted home after finishing my work.

And so were sown the humble seeds of what the world today knows as La Chatelaine Residential School. How many students did we begin with? Just three. One of them was my own six-year-old daughter, Latha. The irony of it all was not lost on me: the very school whose first roll-call featured my daughter would later grow into a prestigious institution — but my own role in its foundation would fade quietly into the background.

Years later, after her B.Ed., Latha even returned to serve as the head for juniors in the very school where she once sat as a child on its very first day. That remains one of my silent points of pride.

Ambi, to his credit, was a man of tremendous charm. A postgraduate and an officer in Indian Oil Corporation, he carried the flair of a theatre personality. He could dissolve any tense moment with wit and presence of mind. He was also, if I may say so, a master of “financial delay tactics.”

He once narrated how, after a play, when the stage organizer came to demand dues, Ambi — with no money in hand — simply filled out a bank remittance challan from his father’s desk and gave it to the unsuspecting man. Of course, he knew the fellow would return fuming within hours, but it bought him precious time. On other occasions, Ambi would issue cheques with deliberate mistakes so they would bounce, only to reissue them later when funds became available.

Shantha, on the other hand, was an unusually interesting, quirky, and utterly memorable person — one of those rare individuals with an intensified personality that defies prediction. She had her own distinct way of being, thinking, and acting, and you could never quite guess what she might say or do

next. This unique trait in her was the very reason even her close buddy — the daughter of former Kerala Governor Jothi Venkatachalam — along with her husband, who were partners in initially establishing the school, quit within just a few days of starting it. Somehow, until the dairy and poultry farms were established, I had a free hand — mainly because of Ambi — and Shantha too, surprisingly, remained non-interfering during that phase. I would say fate intervened and, for a very flimsy misunderstanding with Shantha, I eventually severed my participation. But by this time, the dairy and poultry farms were already on a firm footing and no longer dependent on a full-time veterinarian like me to look after them. Neither Ambi nor Shantha made any effort to pacify me, and my own ego, of course, did not permit me to renew the association either. I was thoroughly convinced then that I had been used merely as karuveppalai — required for the aroma at the beginning, but promptly removed once the main dish was ready.

All said and done, Ambi and Shantha were truly made for each other — a remarkable pair whose combined talents and contrasting temperaments created a unique chemistry. Whatever their storms, it was precisely this blend that ultimately gave rise to the well-established and reputable La Chatelain. But as I look back, I cannot help but reflect: while their names are remembered, my own contribution remains mostly unsung.

- I was the one who built the dairy and poultry farm that provided the seed capital;
- I was the one who staked my professional time and energy while still holding a government post; and
- I was the one who even enrolled my own daughter to give the school its start.

My role was therefore not merely that of a consultant, but of a working partner—a silent foundation stone upon which the entire edifice was raised.

At the very same time, I was maintaining a highly lucrative professional practice, with nearly 80 to 90 percent of the bovine and canine owners of South Madras among my clientele, and I was planning to purchase a car to facilitate my extensive field visits. However, as my professional avocation became progressively and almost wholly diverted to the La Chatelaine farm during its formative years, these plans collapsed. The income that once sustained me steadily diminished, my private practice virtually withered.

These were not token sacrifices, but real and personal losses willingly endured to ensure that La Chatelaine could take root, survive, and grow. Today, La

Chatelaine stands tall as a well-established and famous residential school. Ambi and Shantha are no more, but their legacy lives on. As for me, I often think of myself as one of those unsung heroes — the kind who labours, sacrifices, and fades into the shadows.

It was destiny's decision, and perhaps mine too, to remain the quiet architect of someone else's dream.

### **THE XANADU**

“A gathering place shaped by intellect, grace, and a moustache”

In the early days of La Chatelaine, when the dairy and poultry farm had just started, I would often spend my evenings at Shantha's “Xanadu” house. It was a gathering spot, and you never left without learning something new.

Sujatha's (Shantha's niece) grandfather, Venkatasubramanian, an Actuary by profession, was often there. A very pleasant and highly intellectual man, he could turn even casual conversation into a masterclass. Every minute spent with him was a minute of learning.

Sometimes Sujatha's father, Ramdoss, would suddenly appear. He was a man of truly imposing presence — tall, broad-shouldered, and carrying himself with quiet dignity. His neatly groomed, stylish moustache sat on his face like it had passed a military parade inspection every morning. Despite this formidable appearance, his manner was surprisingly gentle. He spoke softly and I have never seen him raising his voice.

And then there was Kamala, Sujatha's mother, who balanced him perfectly. She had the kind of natural grace that didn't need any effort, and a warmth that could melt even the frostiest mood. Kamala had a gift for making guests feel they were doing her a favour by visiting. She remembered every small detail about everyone, often more than they remembered about themselves.

In the later years, much later than my stint with La Chatalaine, I was fortunate and grateful in getting the acquaintance of Viswanathan (Kannan), Chartered Accountant, husband of Sujatha. He is a non-assuming, easy-going man, but with enormous abilities. He has the rare quality of praising people openly and directly for the good he sees in them. My family and I have benefitted from that encouragement many times. Thank you, Kannan.

#### **And Something More**

After the demise of both Ambi and Shantha, the responsibility of running the school passed into the very able and dedicated hands of Sujatha and her husband Viswanathan, Together, they are doing yeoman service in carrying the legacy forward.

It is now many years since I last stepped into the school. To me, the place feels strangely distant, almost alien. When I mention that I too was instrumental in the founding of this great institution, the reaction I often notice is no more than a smirk. It is only natural, then, that nowhere in the school can my name or my contribution as a founder be seen. That is a deep regret I carry—the regret of being an unsung hero. It is a truth I will take with me to my last breath.

The only consolation was the late Kamala, mother of Sujatha, who was in the know of things right from the birth of the school. Even when Ambi and Shantha were alive, she alone was always voicing, in no uncertain terms, the contribution and sacrifices I had made. I MISS HER.

Sujatha — and even my daughter Latha — are not privy to the events and happenings during the time when the school and the farms were first started. Viswanathan came into the story only after his marriage to Sujatha, so naturally what he knows is second-hand as well. Whatever they have heard over the years has mostly been hearsay, passed around in bits and pieces, coloured by memory and moods.

That is exactly why I regret the loss of Sujatha’s mother so deeply. She alone knew the full truth —the real sequence of events, the intentions, the misunderstandings, the emotions, and the struggles that shaped those early days. She was the one person who had seen everything clearly, acknowledged it honestly, and remembered it accurately. With her passing, a whole chapter of that history silently closed, rather buried.

There are moments when I feel that without her voice, the original story has lost its witness — the one person who understood the effort, the sacrifices, the dream. And perhaps that is why I feel compelled to record it now, before time edits it further.

### **“KURANGU” DOCTOR**

*“Eccentric outside, genius within.”*

Yes — the short-tempered, eccentric, yet immensely popular practitioner, Dr. P. Jayaraman., my maternal uncle. His mannerisms and quirks earned him the nickname “Kurangu” (Monkey). Picture him as a taller version of “Thuppariyum Sambu” the bumbling fictional detective from Devan’s stories -- only here, the comedy was unintentional and mixed with genius.

Now, don't be fooled by his rough exterior or unpredictable temper. Though only an L.M.P. (Licensed Medical Practitioner), his diagnostic skills were unmatched. At Thiruvankadu, where we stayed for a few months during evacuation, his clinic was always overflowing with patients. People trusted him implicitly, because he had a gift: he could see through symptoms and strike straight at the root cause.

His wife, Kunju though uneducated, was his right-hand assistant. By sheer observation, she had picked up enough medical know-how to be half a doctor herself — dispensing medicines, helping with dressings, and even calming patients who feared her husband's outbursts more than their own ailments!

I had a first-hand taste of his skill— quite literally with my teeth. Once (around 7 years then), I had a nasty fall that left almost all my teeth loose, dangling helplessly. While I was panicking about becoming a “pokka vaai” (toothless wonder) for life, my Kurangu doctor mama went about his work with calm ingenuity. He pressed the teeth back into position, packed them tightly with cotton soaked in some mysterious medicine, and — here's the masterpiece — left a small straw at one corner of my mouth so I could be fed liquid diet without disturbing the dental “construction work.” A week later, he removed the cotton and straw. Lo and behold — every tooth was back in place, firm and rooted as though nothing had happened! His crude but brilliant treatment saved my smile.

So yes, eccentric and irritable he might have been, but to me and others he'll always remain a genius in disguise — my own Kurangu Doctor, who quite literally kept my teeth in my mouth.

### **THE COLLARBONE EPISODE**

*“A ten-year-old fugitive with a broken collarbone.”*

I must have been around ten years old when this adventure happened. In those days, unlike today's children buried under mountains of homework and tuition, we had endless time to play. Every evening was ours — cricket, marbles, kites, or our favourite game of all: “police and thief.”

One evening, fate cast me as the thief. I was sprinting for my life, trying to wriggle between a lamp post and a wall, when disaster struck. The “policeman” chasing me grabbed my shirt at the exact moment I squeezed through the gap. My right collarbone ended up sandwiched between the lamp post and the wall — and let me tell you, it didn't feel like a game anymore.

At first, I brushed it off, but within minutes, an excruciating pain set in. That night I could barely sleep. By morning, I was marched off to the General Hospital. The verdict: collarbone hairline fracture.

Now, hospitals then were a different world. A nurse — clearly a beginner — wrapped me up in a tight figure-8 plaster of Paris bandage over the shoulder blades. It was so tight that my fingers swelled up like balloons. Panic! Back we went to GH. This time the doctor himself took charge, snipped off the plaster, and calmly declared, “It’s only a hairline fracture — no bandage needed. Rest will heal it.”

That “rest” came in the form of a hospital admission. In those days, government servants and their families had free hospital beds in special ward. My father wasn’t a government servant, but my uncle was — so in the admission register, his name magically transformed into my father’s. Problem solved... or so we thought.

Three days later, my guilty conscience had got the better of me. What if the hospital discovered the truth? Fearing exposure, I staged a daring escape. With the help of an attendant hired by my parents, I stealthily ran out of the ward — a 10-year-old absconder from justice!

To this day, I have no idea how my father managed to sort things out with the hospital after my vanishing act. All I know is, the collarbone healed, the “case” was closed, and I lived to play police and thief again — though I never tried squeezing between lamp posts after that.

### WHEN MADRAS HAD TRAMS

*“From tram rides with Appa to tram conductors at work.”*

This part might be of special interest — and quite a surprise — to our 3rd generation.

#### **Key Highlights:**

- **Inception:** Operations began in 1874 with horse-drawn trams.
- **First Electric Tram:** Madras was the first Indian city with electric trams, starting May 7, 1895, built by an English company.
- **Routes & Reach:** Trams connected docks with inland areas, carrying goods and passengers; at its peak around 1921, it had 97 cars on 24 km of track (later expanding to 42 km).

- **Popularity:** A practical and affordable way to travel, trams were well-loved.
- **Decline & Closure:** Financial losses mounted in the late 1940s, with the company facing bankruptcy, leading to the system's closure in 1953.
- **Legacy:** Though closed, some believe old tracks vanished under new roads, and the tram's memory lives on in rare photos and local history.

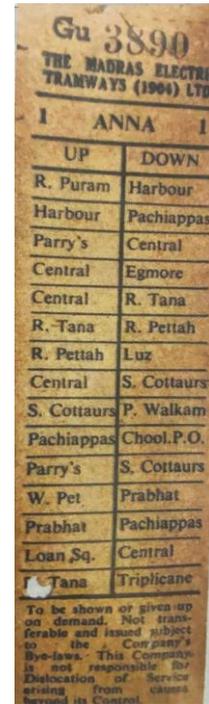
The tram services of Madras finally stopped in 1953, after running for nearly six decades. I still have a vivid memory of travelling in those trams in my early teens. My father would take us on a ride on Sundays and holidays. If I remember correctly, the fare for the whole day — unlimited trips, from anywhere to anywhere — was just one rupee. Imagine that: one rupee to roam the entire city!

As children, we looked forward to these pleasant outings. The most exciting part was going right up to the beach in Santhome. Sitting by the window, with the sea breeze on our faces, we thought life couldn't get any better.

The trams moved slowly down the middle of the road, while cars, cycles, and rickshaws zipped past on either side. At times, the tram would crawl so lazily that even pedestrians overtook it! People would jump in and out while it was still moving — something unthinkable (and risky) in today's traffic. Can you imagine such a scenario now? A tram in the middle of Anna Salai, crawling along while autos and two-wheelers honk on both sides — it would be pure comedy.

And here's an interesting connection between trams and me. My very first independent posting as a vet was at Nellikuppam near Guduvanchery. I had two attendants to help me, and guess what — one of them was a retrenched tram conductor! From punching tickets to handling cows, he had changed tracks completely! I often joked that he went from ringing the tram bell to holding the cow's tail.

From riding trams with my father to working with a tram conductor in my first job, the trams of Madras somehow stayed with me long after.



## THE TWO-ANNA COIN ADVENTURE

*“A two-anna coin almost cost me life.”*

I must have been about nine years old. On Sundays and holidays, we children would gather on the front verandah, filling the red-oxide thinnai with our chatter and mischief. One such afternoon, I was lounging lazily, gossiping with the gang, when I decided to entertain myself with a little game.

I had a shiny two-anna coin in hand and, for want of better occupation, began playfully tapping it on my front teeth. Tak-tak-tak — the sound amused me, and I thought myself quite clever.

But fate intervened. In a careless moment, my grip loosened, the coin slipped, and before I knew it, it had shot straight into my mouth and lodged itself in my throat. Suddenly, I couldn't breathe, couldn't cry out, couldn't even signal properly. I was struggling in silence, my little body writhing for air.

Standing nearby was Saraswathi, my ever-brave sister. She noticed my distress instantly. Lesser mortals might have panicked or run for help, but not Saraswathi. Without a moment's hesitation, she gripped my head firmly, tilted it back, thrust her index and middle fingers deep into my throat, and with the precision of a pair of forceps, hooked the offending coin and pulled it out. The relief was instant. I collapsed onto the thinnai, gasping, shaken, and teary-eyed — but alive. That mischievous little coin, which a moment ago had been my plaything, had nearly sent me on a permanent journey.

Thanks to Saraswathi's courage and quick thinking, the nation was spared the loss of a future veterinarian that day.

And as for me? I swore off tapping coins on my teeth forever. But Saraswathi — ah, she never let me forget it. To this day, she reminds me with a smile that I quite literally owe her my life.

### **ESHWAR**

*“Love, snacks, and unlimited channels.”*

In my “Amazing Activities” section, I had confidently declared that sports run in our family. Now, if anyone doubts it, I simply point to my grandson Eshwar — proof that the sporting gene has survived four generations without mutation.

Eshwar has dabbled in cricket, shuttle, and table tennis, and even earned his place in the school cricket team. He could have been the next Sachin, except that professional studies and a serious job decided to bowl him out of the sporting arena. Still, the passion didn't retire. Like my father once did, he keeps track of every sporting event with the precision of a scorecard.

His memory is frighteningly good. You throw any random player's name at him — say, “Taibu” — and without batting an eyelid, he'll shoot back: “Ah yes, Tatenda Taibu from Zimbabwe. Wicket-keeper batsman, captained Zimbabwean national cricket team, Played Tests, ODIs, T20s.....” A walking, talking, living sports encyclopaedia.

Eshwar, born on 6th June 1992, did his B.E. in Chennai and later an M.S. in the U.S. He is now settled in Atlanta with his wife, Viji, both securely employed. But let me get to the real treat — our unforgettable trip to the U.S. in 2025.

### **The Big American Adventure**

*“Three months abroad, a lifetime of memories.”*

Our stay in the U.S. was planned for three months — May 14th to August 13<sup>th</sup> 2025. Three months? In America? With our health and their weather? But how wrong we were! What we feared would be an exile turned out to be a holiday of a lifetime — a gift-wrapped package from Eshwar and Viji.

Eshwar, in his inimitable style, handed us the TV remote and said, “This is yours.” Suddenly, the world was at our fingertips — cricket, serials, movies, news, YouTube, you name it. Any language, any channel. Added to that the steady supply of snacks, and our boredom evaporated faster than soda fizz.

Within a week, they took us to the Niagara Falls. There we stood, drenched in spray, marvelling at nature’s power. Back in Atlanta, we were treated to a drone show and fireworks at Stone Mountain, as though America had decided to roll out a red carpet just for us.

Weekends became treasure hunts. Walmart, Indian stores, dollar stores — each visit was a new adventure. Our philosophy was simple: if the eye liked it, the cart carried it. Food? Ah, what a glorious chapter. New vegetarian dishes were introduced to us with flair, while Viji treated us on weekends with her home-made specials. And dessert— either ice cream or cake, every single night.

No Indian abroad can resist the magnetism of temples, and so, every other week, we visited the Atlanta temple. Two complexes stood proudly — one for Lord Venkataramana, and one for Lord Shiva. Majestic deities, serene surroundings, devotional peace — and yes, let’s not forget the temple canteen. Pongal, vada, dosa — holy prasadam for both soul and stomach!

When it was finally time to leave, our hearts were heavy. Saying goodbye to Eshwar and Viji felt like leaving behind not just family but a five-star hotel where the management loves you. So, hats off to our dear Eshwar and Viji — may their lives always be as sweet as our nightly desserts and as sparkling as Niagara’s spray.

### **JANANI RAJALAKSHMI**

*“Born under ancestral stars, she matched her brother, mastered her art, and now creates a home of her own.”*

Janani, Latha’s daughter, was born on 26th May 1995. Her arrival was timed with precision. While Latha was carrying her, she was also pursuing her B.Ed course, and fate mischievously set the dates of her final written exams and Janani’s grand entry dangerously close together.

But Janani, even before birth, showed what a considerate child she would be. She waited patiently in her mother's womb until the very last exam was over! Only then did she signal her readiness. The gynaecologist, in consultation with us, scheduled the C-section just two days after the final exam. We chose the date carefully, hoping for the baby to be born under Bharani star. But fate had its own little surprise—Janani arrived under Ashwini star instead. And what a happy surprise it was! Ashwini was the very birth star of her great-grandmother, Rajalakshmi (Latha's grandmother). So, the baby was named Janani Rajalakshmi—a name doubly blessed, since Kamala's mother also bore the same name.

At birth, Janani was a tiny, puny little bundle with a nose that looked a bit too prominent for her size. But within days, she blossomed into a fair, beautiful, and irresistibly cute baby – a charm she has carried into adulthood.

From her childhood, Janani was sharp in her studies, but what truly stood out was her spirited, competitive streak—especially with her elder brother, Eshwar. If both were given plantains, she would carefully pick the taller one, ensuring her “victory.” Once, when Eshwar won a prize in a school track event, Janani (watching with us as a spectator) decided she deserved one too. On the way home, we had to buy her a small gift, which she would gleefully show to visitors, declaring with great pride, “I won this prize!” Sibling rivalry at its funniest—but beneath it all, the two shared a deep affection, a bond of love that has only grown with time.

Janani was also a natural artist. Without any formal training, she taught herself to master canvas oil painting, glass painting, junk art, and more. Naturally, her passion led her to qualify in interior decoration and architecture in the U.S.—a career that perfectly combined her creativity with her professional life.

After completing her course, Janani got employed and soon excelled in her work. Her talent was such that she represented her company as a consultant for none other than Apple Inc. for their interior decoration and architecture assignments. Even after returning to India to get married, Apple insisted she continue contributing from here—a glowing testimony to her skill and dedication.

Janani is married to Sai Krishna Sekar, a visionary entrepreneur, Director of FPL Group of Companies and founder of PinSec.Ai. Together they make a truly dynamic couple. They are blessed with a son—Rihaan—who has, in no time, become the new shining star in the family's galaxy.

From a patient baby in the womb, to a competitive sister, to a creative professional, and now a loving wife and mother—Janani’s journey has been a delightful blend of surprises, achievements, and joy.

### **A NOTE TO OUR YOUNGER GENERATION ABROAD**

*“Success abroad shines brighter when culture comes along.”*

Living in a foreign land has its own charm. Better opportunities, comfort, and a new way of life—it’s all part of the adventure. But while adapting to a new country, it is equally important to keep alive the roots that connect us to where we come from.

One small but powerful way to do this is through language. Encourage your children to speak our mother tongue at home. Let them enjoy our festivals with the same enthusiasm that they might have for Christmas or Halloween. Tell them stories about our temples, our traditions, and of course, the people—grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins—who still live in India. These are not just rituals; they are the threads that hold the fabric of our identity together.

Take Arun, my nephew and few others living abroad as an example. Arun is a brilliant radiologist in the U.S., and we are immensely proud of him. But his spoken Tamil? Well, let’s just say even a two-year-old in Chennai might beat him in a language contest! This is not to point fingers—his mother, Raji, raised him with immense love and dedication. It’s just a reminder that when children grow up abroad, the local culture naturally dominates unless we make a conscious effort to pass along our own.

The balance is simple: give them the wings to fly anywhere in the world, but also the roots to know where they came from. That way, they will always belong in both places—with pride, confidence, and a sense of wholeness.

### **BEYOND THE FAMILY RADAR**

*“Family history isn’t made only by the main cast; the supporting actors make it memorable.”*

In my book, most of my stories so far have revolved around my close relatives—three generations of them—and a few dear friends who made life colourful. But there are others who, though slightly outside this “radar,” deserve a fond mention.

On my father’s side, I’ve already introduced the main cast. Now it’s time to meet the team from my mother’s side—Lakshmiamma’s lively siblings. She

had four sisters (two elder and two younger) and two brothers—one elder and one younger. They were: Thillayadi Periamma, Burma Periamma, Gnanambal Chithi, Pappa Chithi, Jayaraman Mama (fondly known as “Korangu Doctor”), and Krishnamurthi Mama.

Out of this cheerful bunch, Pappa Chithi easily took the “family favourite” ward. Her husband, a humble schoolteacher, was the family’s very own G.D. Naidu—a genius mechanic in disguise! He could fix anything that ticked, clicked, or clanged—watches, clocks, fans, sewing machines, you name it. If it had gears or screws, he’d bring it back to life.

Their elder son, Vaithu, worked in the railways and was a fine astrologer. His younger brother, Ramani, retired from the Accountant General’s Office and was known for his sharp mind and sharper wit. Unfortunately, due to his father’s modest income, he couldn’t study beyond S.S.L.C. My dad used to say “If only Ramani had continued his studies, he would’ve easily cracked the I.A.S.” Nevertheless, Ramani cleared every internal exam in the department and retired with flying colours—and jokes intact.

Then there was Balu, my Burma Periamma’s second son, lovingly called “Kodambakkam Balu and later Chromepet Balu.” Speaking of Burma Periamma, there’s an unforgettable tale about her eldest son, Natarajan. During a routine medical check-up in his sixties, the doctor discovered that his heart was placed slightly on the right side instead of the left! It had been that way since birth and hadn’t caused him any trouble. But poor Natarajan—this revelation shook him up more than any real ailment ever could! The thought of his “misplaced” heart weighed so much on his mind that, tragically, not long after, he passed away from a heart attack. Irony at its cruel best.

Burma Periamma herself carried a remarkable story. True to her nickname, she and her family had to flee from Burma during World War II, walking their way back to India. They had witnessed unimaginable horrors along the route—dead bodies strewn on the roadside, hunger, fear, and exhaustion. The traumatic journey left a deep mark, especially on their eldest son, Mani, who was never quite the same again.

Every one of these relatives, in their own way, added colour, courage, and a dash of comedy to our family tapestry.

## **CUSTOMS, RITUALS, RELIGION & ME**

*“I follow God sincerely — just not the entire instruction manual.”*

(A Confession from a Brahmin Who Didn't Read the Rule Book Properly)

Let me begin with an honest confession —I am not a model Brahmin. Not even the demo version.

I had my upanayanam at the age of twelve, I performed sandhi twice a day for two years with full sincerity. Morning, evening, and on holidays, a special bonus round in the afternoon. For those two years, I was a perfect example of Brahmachari No.1. My parents were proud, neighbours were impressed, and even the Gods must have been pleasantly surprised.

But slowly, like any great tradition touched by teenage laziness, things changed. My sandhyavandanam gradually transformed from “daily duty” to “only if I feel spiritual, free, and not hungry.” Still, because of those two disciplined years, most of the mantras remain printed in my brain.

Now, let me come to the truth: I am a believer — but not a ritual athlete. No elaborate pooja, no chanting, no lamp ceremonies that require the stamina of a marathon runner. My daily prayer is simple: “God, please take care of me and my people — and kindly ignore my shortcuts.”

But certain things I never compromise on. Annual dhevasam? Always done. Yes, it's the convenient hiranya shrardham version — but I never skip it. And malayam? Performed every single year like clockwork. So, before anyone complains, let me say proudly: I may be lazy, but I am not negligent.

I follow rituals in my own gentle and economical style — based on one rule: If you can't follow everything, at least follow something properly.

And speaking of things one must never forget —every person must remember their Kula Deivam and their native roots. I realised this late in life, but for the last 7 or 8 years, I have consistently visited our Kula Deivam — Madura Kalamman at Siruvachur — along with my family. We also visit our ancestral place, Ichangudi Ganapathi Agraharam, every year. Somehow, those visits feel like pressing the “Reset” button for the soul. Let me also place on record something important: My wife and daughter share the same relaxed-but-respectful attitude towards rituals. This ensures perfect peace at home — no arguments, no debates. Spiritual harmony + domestic harmony = bliss.

Now, about festivals. In the 1950s and 60s, Pongal, Tamil New Year, Navarathri, Saraswathi Pooja, Deepavali, and Karthigai were celebrated with grand rituals. The house would smell of fresh kolam powder, boiling jaggery,

and ghee-laden sweets. Neighbours dropped by unannounced. Every lamp, every bell, carefully arranged flowers had its precise role.

Today? Celebrations continue — but adapted to modern life. Kolams are sometimes replaced by colorful rangolis printed on mats; homemade sweets might share the table with store-bought treats.

Birthday parties have become the new festival. Even babies who don't know their own names celebrate birthdays more grandly than our entire village used to celebrate Deepavali. Earlier, the question was:

“Have we bought the agal vilakku and sandal paste?” Now, it is:

“Have we bought the birthday cake?”

But I'm not complaining. Life changes. Culture evolves. If love and togetherness remain, God won't file a complaint.

My faith is simple: Be honest, do no harm, speak kindly, help whenever possible. I deeply love and worship Maha Periyava and Shirdi Sai Baba — my two spiritual VIPs. And when my purse allows, I donate to charity. Sometimes God smiles; sometimes the purse cries — but it balances out.

I don't expect anyone to follow my style. In fact, people who strictly follow every ritual impress me so much that I sometimes feel ashamed of my shortfalls. But then I remind myself — God created all types: The highly disciplined, the moderately disciplined... and the “do-what-you-can-without-breaking-your-back” types like me.

At this age, I have understood one truth: Rituals are important. But kindness is more important. And God, in my humble opinion, is far more interested in our hearts than our rituals.

So here I am —

A believer who takes shortcuts,

A devotee who simplifies procedures,

A Brahmin who may not check every religious box,

But tries sincerely not to trouble even a single fellow human being.

If that earns me some spiritual marks in God's attendance register, I will happily accept them — even if they come under the category: “Passed — with grace marks”.

## THE CAMPUS THAT WOULDN'T LEAVE MY HEAR

*“The hospital that cured thousands now suffers from chronic neglect.”*

I had convinced myself that I had poured out every story worth telling — about my family, my career, and the many odd adventures in between. With the book practically ready, I told myself, “That’s it, Balu — time to rest your pen.”

But my mind, as always, had other plans. It refuses to sit quietly. Every now and then, a forgotten incident pops up, wagging its tail for attention. One such memory is of a place that’s forever close to my heart — the Veterinary Hospital Campus at Saidapet.

That campus was my second home for over thirteen years — from 1963 to 1976 — more than one-third of my professional life. In those days, getting a posting at Saidapet was no small achievement. Being retained there that long was almost a badge of honour!

The campus itself was a world of its own — alive, noisy, and wonderfully chaotic. It housed the Veterinary Hospital, Artificial Insemination Centre, Poultry and Piggery Farms, and offices for the Assistant Director of Animal Husbandry and the Propaganda Wing. Every inch of it buzzed with life: goats bleating, cows mooing, chickens clucking, and occasionally, a young vet (usually me) sprinting between cases, stethoscope in one hand and hope in the other.

On an average day, nearly two hundred animals — large and small — would arrive for treatment or insemination. The sounds, the smells, the confusion — it was all part of the charm. Somewhere along the way, I earned the nickname “Saidhai Balu.” It followed me everywhere, and truth be told, I wore it like a medal.

Today, when I pass by the same campus, my heart feels heavy. The once-bustling hospital stands quiet and forgotten. The barns are empty, the A.I. Centre is gone, and the buildings seem to sigh with loneliness. What was once a proud hub of service and learning now looks like an abandoned patient waiting for care.

To see a place that once brimmed with life reduced to silence is deeply saddening. Saidapet was not just a workplace — it was a living, breathing chapter of my life.

I can only hope that someday the Animal Husbandry Department will pause, look back with the same affection, and decide that this old campus deserves a

revival. It gave so much to so many — and like every good patient, it too deserves a second chance at life.

## WHATSAPP

### A Blessing, a Burden, and a Brain Exercise

WhatsApp entered our lives quietly, like a well-behaved puppy. Today, it behaves more like an over-enthusiastic Labrador—refusing to sit, bringing you sticks nobody asked for, and insisting on licking your face every five minutes.

#### **The Pros**

First, let us acknowledge its noble achievements. WhatsApp has single-handedly reunited families that had not spoken since someone borrowed money in 1993. Cousins from three continents suddenly appear in one group, sharing baby photos, festival wishes, and a mysterious “Good Morning” message featuring flowers that do not exist in nature.

It has also turned everyone into a photographer, philosopher, doctor, and political analyst—all without the inconvenience of training. Medical advice now arrives faster than the ambulance. One forward can cure diabetes, arthritis, insomnia, and sometimes even common sense.

WhatsApp is also a miracle of efficiency. With one message, you can cancel a plan, revive an old friendship, or create a misunderstanding that lasts three generations. No stamps, no envelopes, no emotional preparation required. And let us not forget the elders. WhatsApp has given senior citizens a new purpose in life: forwarding messages. It keeps their fingers agile, their eyes alert, and their opinions extremely well circulated.

#### **The Unexpected Side Effect**

Somewhere along the way, WhatsApp decided to take a personal interest in my well-being. Regular forwards arrived with helpful instructions on keeping the brain young, alert, and occupied. The message was clear enough—even without medical degrees or yoga mats.

Taking the hint, and choosing the least physically demanding option available, I began to write. Quite unintentionally, WhatsApp nudged me into putting pen to paper—and before I knew it, M Square of a V Square had arrived.

So, if you are holding this book today, remember—it is not entirely my fault. WhatsApp played its part.

#### **The Cons**

WhatsApp has destroyed the art of silence. Earlier, if someone did not reply, we assumed they were busy, asleep, or peacefully ignoring us. Today, we know they have seen the message. The blue ticks stare at us like judgmental relatives.

Family groups are particularly hazardous. One innocent “Good Morning” can trigger 47 replies, 12 animated stickers, 3 spiritual quotes, and one forwarded warning about something terrible happening if you don’t forward it further.

Opting out is considered a declaration of war.

WhatsApp also creates the illusion of productivity. You spend three hours scrolling, laughing, arguing, and watching videos—then proudly announce, “I was very busy today.”

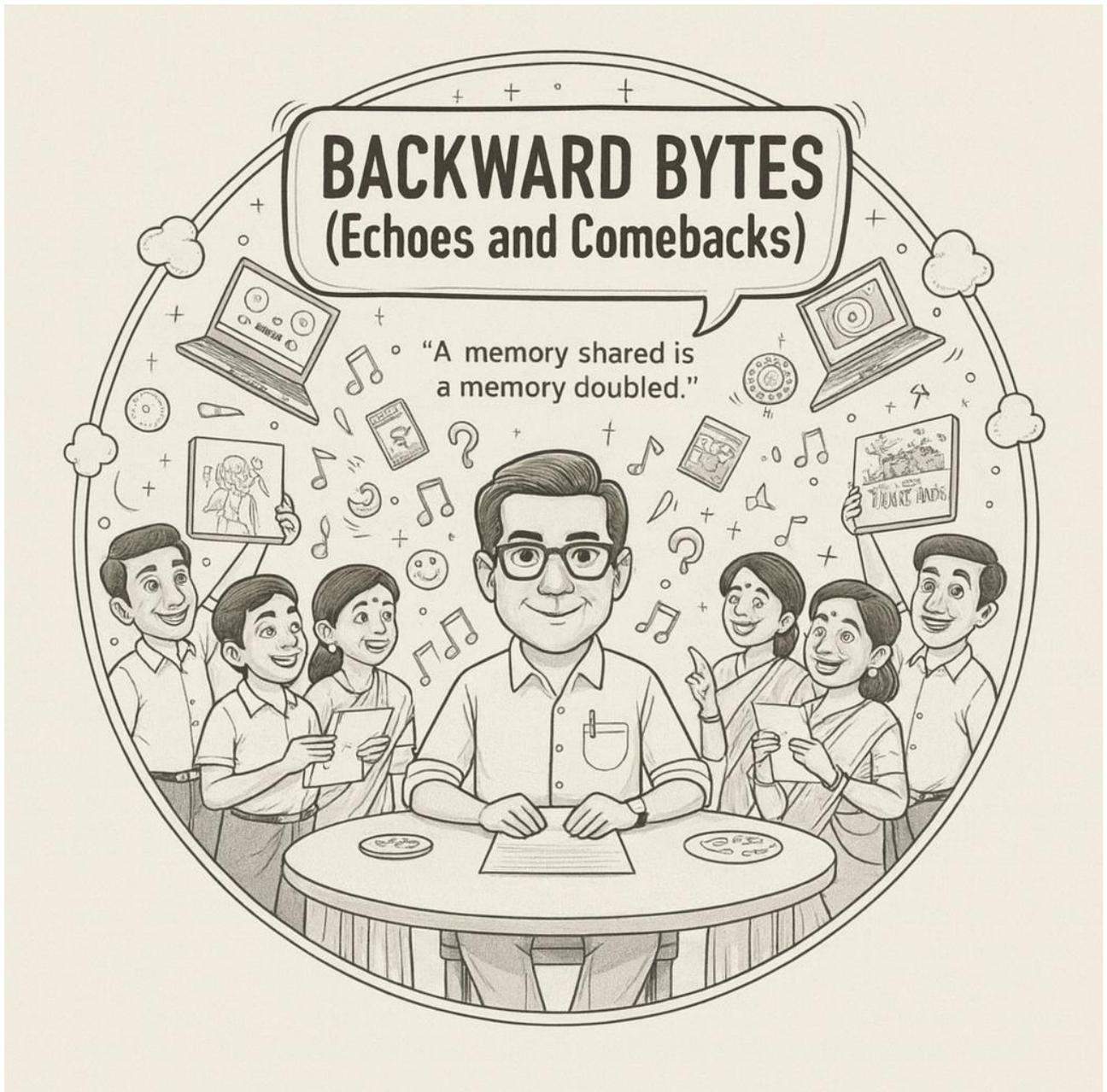
Worst of all, it has turned every phone into a pocket-sized loudspeaker for unsolicited wisdom. Just when your brain is resting, WhatsApp taps it gently and says, “One more forward won’t hurt.”

### **Final Diagnosis**

So, is WhatsApp good or bad? Like most things in life, it is both—depending on dosage. Used wisely, it connects, comforts, entertains, and occasionally inspires books. Used excessively, it confuses, distracts, and reminds you why the mute button was invented.

In conclusion, WhatsApp is not the problem. We are. The app only delivers the message. What we forward—and how often—is entirely our responsibility. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I must forward this to someone.





**“A solo act accidentally turned into a family orchestra.”**

## CHAPTER 10

### BACKWARD BYTES

*(Echoes and Comebacks)*

“A memory shared is a memory doubled”

#### INTRODUCTION

If my ramblings are pebbles tossed into a pond, then these are the ripples that bounce back — sometimes gently, sometimes like a tidal wave that soaks me head to toe! What I once thought were my harmless scribbles have now come back dressed up with new costumes.

This is the fun of family. They don't just nod politely and say, “Very nice, please continue, Uncle.” Oh no. They sharpen their pens, warm up their keyboards, and send their own versions flying back at me. My daughter, my nephews, my nieces, and even a few bold friends have all joined this mischief. And it doesn't stop with words! Alongside the replies came sketches, doodles, junk art, and other little masterpieces that prove our family's creativity has no boundaries (and no brakes either). I only ramble; they illustrate, decorate, and innovate.

Together, they've turned my one-way ramblings into a lively conversation, a chorus of memories where each voice adds its own flavour — sweet, tangy, or occasionally spicy enough to make me cough. What began as a solo performance is now more like a family orchestra, where everyone insists on playing lead violin.

So here it is: proof that nostalgia is never a solo act. Memories don't just sit quietly in a corner — they bounce around, multiply, and return with interest. And if you ask me, the interest rate is delightfully high!

## **KAMALA's WRITE UP**

I am happy to share my life's journey with the TRN family—a journey that started with good marks, sudden marriage plans, and God smiling quietly in the background.

In my school days, I studied well. I even passed my SSLC with confidence. I thought my next step would be higher studies. But my father had other plans—and a weak health condition to support them. Since he used to fall sick often, he decided it was better to complete his responsibilities early. So, my horoscope was opened wide.

The very first alliance that came—only by word of mouth—was from the TRN family. When my maternal uncle approached them, my future mother-in-law said she was already busy taking care of two pregnant daughters and needed at least one year before thinking about her son's marriage. She also stated that her son, who had entered service just then, was not keen on getting married. My father, being practical and impatient, politely said, "Okay," and started searching elsewhere.

But God, as usual, had His own timetable. Exactly four years later, the same TRN family came back. This time my future mother-in-law said that she was impressed by our family background and was ready to get her son married and that her son also gave his consent for marriage. Since it was a good alliance, my father decided to proceed with the proposal. I also personally liked and felt happy because my future husband was a professional man, a veterinarian and a government employee. Later, I heard from my husband that he wanted only an undergraduate girl with simple living and high thinking and that was the reason he chose me. Our marriage took place in May 1963.

At this juncture, I would like to share an incident.

After the horoscope matching was done, and before finalisation of our marriage, I was subjected to bridal inspection, which was in vogue at that time. My uncle's daughter gave me her silk saree to wear for this occasion. Just when I was almost getting ready in my aunt's house at Mandhaveli, I saw a whole lot of people (my future in-laws) getting inside the house. I was just baffled and astonished to see so many people coming to see me. I was a little frightened, shy and nervous too! But everything went on in a smooth manner and I was given the green signal to marry my future husband.

I entered marital life at the tender age of 19, with more excitement than experience. My husband was posted at Thirukazhikundram, and we stayed there for about six months after marriage. Soon, he got transferred to the Saidapet Veterinary Hospital in Chennai, and we moved to the famous Gopalapuram house.

Everyone in the family says Gopalapuram house is special—and I endorse it. My mamiyar was a wonderful cook. Watching her cook was better than any cooking class, and I slowly learnt many cooking secrets—without writing down measurements, of course.

The TRN family is a big one. It took me a few months to figure out who was who, who belonged to whom, and who should be called what. Once I learnt that, things became easier. My husband's brothers and sisters were very affectionate. After my daughter Latha was born, we continued living in the Gopalapuram house for nearly fifteen years.

My husband's eldest brother lived in Pune with his family. No marriage function down south escaped their attention. They used to visit the Gopalapuram house almost every year for their vacations and to attend marriages. My brother-in-law Amandhan's wife, Savithri used to play 'Dhaya kattam' almost every day during their stay. All the children and adults used to have fun. Those were busy, happy, and memorable years.

My mamiyar was a dynamic lady. She suffered a fracture in her leg once. She underwent a surgery where a plate was placed in her thigh. My eldest sister-law Rukmani and myself used to go to the hospital in turns to look after her. On yet another instance, my mamiyar went to Namakkal and fell down there. She returned home with a fractured backbone. She was bed ridden in the house for more than three months. My husband and myself used to take care of her day in and day out. Those days were very hard. My daughter was very young and my husband was doing his post-graduation (MVSc). We managed somehow and by God's grace, my mamiyar recovered fully.

My husband and his younger brother Chinnu were very close. Later in life, we got the opportunity to visit Chinnu in America for his son's marriage along with Saraswathi (my second eldest sister-in-law). Despite his busy schedule, Chinnu and Raji took us around to many places—it was a completely different world for me.

A few years later, we had the same wonderful experience again when our grandchildren invited us to the US for their graduation. Watching them grow and succeed was one of life's greatest joys.

If I start thinking deeply about the past, my thoughts overflow—and this write-up will never end. So, I will stop here. My husband and I faced many hardships in life. Nothing came easily. But by God's grace, today we live a contented and peaceful life—and that, I believe, is the greatest blessings of all.

### **My Comments**

When I received Kamala's write-up for this "*Back-ward Bytes*" section, I must admit I read it with some curiosity—and a little fear too! I was quietly hoping there would be no "*bites*" hidden in these "*bytes*."

Thankfully, God was kind and my wife was kinder. True to her nature, Kamala has written only positive things, focusing on family, faith, and togetherness. No complaints, no surprises—only warmth and gratitude.

### **LATHA'S WRITE UP**

#### **Latha's Family Files: The TRN & JV Chronicles**

(TRN stands for "T.R.Narayanaswamy–Rajalakshmi" family and JV stands for "Jatavallabar" family) I'm part of the NR crew, and the JV gang too! And I'm not even a little bit sorry about it! We're basically family-royalty.

#### **The House of Gopalapuram**

That house? It's like my personal time machine. Every corner is crammed with memories of me being a kid and a confused student. Seriously, it's so epic it still crashes my dreams sometimes, and I wake up with a tear in my eye. This place isn't just a house; it's "the house"!

#### **My Grandpa, T. R.Narayanaswamy**

He was a total math whiz. He could probably solve a Rubik's Cube with his eyes closed. I never got to meet him, but I've heard a lot of amazing stories about him.

#### **My Grandma, Rajalakshmi (Lakshmiamma)**

My grandma was my absolute favourite, and I'm pretty sure I was one of her favourites so too. She once hurt her hip and got this crazy water bed. The whole family gathered around to watch it get set up like it was a space shuttle launch. To my surprise, she just pointed at me and said, "Hop on!" I was a total mess—all my cousins were watching, and I was so shy. But she just wanted me to be the first to try it out. That's true love right there.

I also got to turn all her handwritten recipes into a book. The hilarious part? My Tamil is, let's just say, "not great." But I managed to finish the whole book without a single mistake. A miracle! And yes, I got paid for my troubles... thanks, Chinnu Chithappa!

Lakshmiamma had a special magical power that made every single one of her grandkids feel like the most important person in the world.

#### **My Uncle, Amandan Periappa**

My dad's big brother was a spiritual person. During my childhood, I remember him taking me to different temples. Thanks to him, our family has a big 'Uthsavam' at the "Big Street Pillayar Kovil" every year, and we keep that tradition going strong.

#### **My Aunt, Rukmani Athai**

My dad's eldest sister was a master impressionist. She could mimic people so perfectly, it was like having a live comedy show. She faced everything in life with patience and whenever I feel stressed, I just think of her calm energy.

I have a great story about her! Back when I was in the second standard, at the Gopalapuram house, I tripped and fell off the front 'verandah thinnai'. I wasn't injured, but I started crying fearing that I got hurt. My aunt rushed out and pointed at the ground, saying, "Look! The floor cracked from your fall!" I immediately stopped crying and started worrying about the floor instead. For years, I felt guilty, thinking I had destroyed the 'verandah' floor with my epic fall. It wasn't until later that I realized those "cracks" were just a floor design. Whoops!

#### **My Aunt, Saraswathi Athai**

Saraswathi Athai is a total firecracker—bubbly and full of energy. She and Chinna Athimber are my biggest cheerleaders; they'll never miss a chance to tell me how awesome I am. I admire her bravery, and she's a total bookworm.

#### **My Aunt, Padma Athai**

She was the only woman to have a college degree back in the day. Sadly, I never met her, but I've heard she was a dynamic lady!

#### **My Dad, Balu Appa**

My dad is the most lovable person on Earth. He's witty, kind, multi-talented, and basically good at everything.

I have a classic dad joke story about him. When I was in fifth grade, I was studying by the window at the Gopalapuram house. There was a bunch of noisy boys playing marbles outside. Suddenly, a little "stone" hit me. Then another, and another. I got scared and called my mom. I told her the boys were pelting me with stones, and she was about to go yell at them. Just then, my dad came inside with a sneaky smile on his face. When we asked him why he was smiling, he burst out laughing. It turned out, he was the one throwing things at me from the back window, and they weren't stones at all—they were

‘groundnuts! We all just started cracking up. He's just so easy-going, and he taught me how to handle life with a sense of humour. He's, my rock!

### **My Mom, Kamala Amma**

My mom is the best. She's sincere, a hard worker, talented, and very affectionate. Unlike my dad, she was a bit of a drill sergeant when it came to studies.

In sixth grade, I had to learn a Hindi poem for school, and I was really struggling. I called my grandma, Lakshmiamma, for an emergency rescue. She was getting ready to go to the dentist and needed someone to go with her. Perfect! I begged her to take me, and my mom couldn't say no. Appada! It was a perfect escape from Hindi homework! The next day, I skipped school, but my mom caught me. With her "encouragement," I finally learned the poem and aced the test. All thanks to her—I got a good name at school.

My mom is a neat freak and a total workaholic. I learned all my cooking skills from her, and she's also a financial genius. She's my other rock and has always been there for me.

### **My Uncle, Chinnu Chithappa**

This person is one of my favourite people in the world. I used to get so excited when he visited India because the whole house would buzz with energy. He would take me on walks to T. Nagar, Ranganathan Street, and we'd just wander around, talking and solving riddles. It was so much fun.

He also had a secret language. He'd say things like "tishve" or "saido" and "irpappe." I had no idea what he was talking about! Turns out, he was just saying "veshti," "dosai," and "paper" in a funny way. What a character! He inspired me a ton and was known for his generosity, his sharp mind, and his work ethic.

### **My Kids, Eshwar & Janani**

My kids are the apples of my eye. They worked hard and chose their own paths in life. Just like my parents, they've figured out how to be responsible adults and have been a huge blessing to me. Their spouses, Sai (my son-in-law) and Viji (my daughter-in-law), are also very smart and talented.

### **THE JV FAMILY**

I was born into the Jatavallabar family, which is famous for chanting the "Jatta mandiram" back in the day. The king even gave them the name "Jatavallabar." I was born in Chidambaram, my mom's hometown, which is a holy place dedicated to Lord Nataraja. So, I'm lucky to have that connection, too!

### **My Grandpa, Swaminatha Jatavallabar**

My mom's dad was an organized and strict person. He kept his house so clean

and tidy, which is probably where my mom gets it from. He loved me because I was a good kid who didn't cause any trouble. He was kind, simple, and very affectionate.

### **My Grandma, Rajalakshmi**

My mom's mom was innocent to the core! Seriously, she couldn't even read a clock. But she was a great playmate when I was a kid and was an expert in Carnatic music. She would sing beautiful songs during Navaratri. She was a timid and gentle soul.

### **My Aunt, Sivagama Sundari**

My mom's older sister was shy like my grandma. She is obsessed with glass bangles and would always bring me a new set when she visited. She also loves collecting different kinds of glass jars and bottles. She was such a soft-spoken person.

### **My Uncle, Vijayaraghavan**

My mom's older brother was just like Chinnu Chithappa—very kind and loving. He would always bring me toys or dresses when he visited. I have great memories of playing at his house during summer vacations. He was such a sweet uncle.

I have a crazy number of cousins in both the TRN and JV families. If I start writing about them, you'd be here all day. So, I'll stop punishing you with my stories now!

Before I end, I must mention the two pairs of sambandhies who have joined our family tree and upgraded its overall quality.

### **The Official Parent Review**

What a write-up! Even our relatives who've forgotten their glasses will read this from start to end. Only one correction, Latha—your parents are your rocks? Translation: we are now officially old furniture, but strong ones!

### **LATHA ON HER BOSOM FRIEND SUJATHA**

Let me tell you about my friend, Sujatha, or as I like to call her, my "partner in crime" for over five decades. We're both 61. Sujatha and I go way back, all the way to our school days. Our bond is so strong that her late parents, and even her late Auntie Shantha and Uncle Ambi, feel like family to me. Shantha and Ambi, for those in the know, were the founders of La Chatelaine Residential School, along with my own father.

Speaking of Shantha, she was a character and a half. She was a bit of an eccentric and a "friendly" dictator. When Sujatha and I were teachers at the school, Shantha would find a fault in something I did, often for a trivial reason, or sometimes for no reason at all! Shantha would stand there, ready to pounce.

Shantha's niece, Sujatha would always be tense and anxiously waiting (praying?) for me to know the outcome. She had a way of diffusing the situation and consoling me. She was my constant shield

Life has come full circle for Sujatha. After the demise of Shatha and Ambi she and her husband, Kannan, a chartered accountant, now run the school. Despite the immense responsibility, Sujatha's warmth and caring nature haven't changed a bit. She's a qualified postgraduate teacher and a truly wonderful person.

Sujatha is very fond of my mother Kamala – a name shared with Sujatha's own mother. Out of deep respect and sentiment, Sujatha always made it a point to inform my mother first about any good or auspicious event in her family. It was a small but touching ritual, reflecting the depth of their bond and Sujatha's loyalty to sentiments she held dear.

Sujatha and Kannan are incredibly fond of my family and me, and the feeling is entirely mutual. They're more than friends; they're an extension of our own family. Our journey together has been filled with laughter, shared memories, and a friendship that has stood the test of time, proving that some bonds are just meant to last just like me, Sujatha's only son is married and has settled in the US.

### **Funny Co-incidence**

Like my father having a friend in NNB, my special friend, Sujatha and myself also have some similarities:

Firstly, our names itself sound like sisters — Latha and Sujatha.

Both of us are the only children of our parents, so we grew up without brothers or sisters. Maybe that is why God decided to give us each other instead.

Then comes the biggest surprise — both our mothers are named Kamala.

The similarities continued with the next generation also. Both our sons became engineering graduates Even their birthdays are in the same month and year. My son arrived on 6th June 1992, and Sujatha's son came on 8th June 1992. Today, both are settled in the USA, making us international mothers.

Just like my father had a friend he often spoke about, I too have mine — proof that true friendships also run in the family!

### **Balu Reflects**

Some friendships age like fine filter coffee—strong, warm, and wonderfully dependable. Latha and Sujatha's bond is one such classic brew. May it continue to pour joy into both families for many more decades.

### **RAM's WRITE UP**

### **T.R. Thatha**

I see my maternal grandfather only in photos. But, have heard of his mind-boggling dexterity for mathematical calculations- which my appa Jayaraman always used to admire of. He used to tell that thatha would have easily out beat a super computer, and that talent was imbibed by Padma chithee, Chinnu mamma, Patta akka and Meena. For that matter. I am a very distant relative of my own thatha. Amma Saraswathi, to this day practices thatha's perfection- be it, the punctuality, self-drawn timetables following the schedules, counting the steps, birds, vehicles etc. I vividly remember Chinnu mamma excitement whenever crossing the Spencer's junction – appa office

### **Lakshmi Amma**

Lakshmiamma for me is a phenomenon. With her exceptional ability and culinary expertise coated with empathy & love she was a very popular lady who was looked upon with an awe. Whenever I think about her, automatically I get a lump on my throat. She was a personification of love. When I presented her with a Rangachari saree bought with my first salary, she was overwhelmed and kept telling one and all for many days thereafter about that. I remember as a kid her tipping me with 25 paise, whenever she visited Triplicane. Despite all her multiple surgeries, she always was cheerful and loved being in the kitchen making all delicacies for us to devour everything in the plate. She published a cookery book unravelling her cooking secrets and special tips for posterity. I am blessed to have had born as her grandson.

### **The Amandans**

In my childhood I always had a fear factor running whenever I saw my eldest mamma. I used to think he was very strict and unfriendly person. As a child, he used to lift me by the neck- a very painful experience of which I shudder to this day. All my apprehensions about him vanished as I grew up. He loved me very much and so was Manni. I equally loved them. Mamma used to dump me with Rasmalai- he will make me open my mouth wide and push in one after another the delicacy.

I think I have imbibed mammas character of keeping in touch with the nears and dears. I used to watch with an awe the cups and trophies he had won as a cricketer, prominently displayed in a showcase at Gopalapuram residence. He always called me 'Professor.' Those days, my close companion was Nanu- cycling inch by inch of Poona, drinking lip smacking milk of Kaiash dairy, watching movies in and around all Poona theatres- repeating the same kind of chores on his visits to Madras-such nostalgic memories. His English vocabulary used to be very impressive- we used to exchange letters even from my 13/14

age. Uma akka and Anantharaman athimber were such a lovely couple- the love they had for me, Gowri & Pavithra – no words are enough to express it.

Athimber and I used to sing MGR songs. Babu and Asha were the Master Chefs. Usha used to have her own gang of friends and not much interactions happened with her in the childhood days. Of course, my own Raju (athimber)- cannot see another “annadata” like him. Yet another sports person in the family who used to play great cricket with the likes of Ajit Wadekar, Chetan Chauhan and all. I have watched him with amazement playing carrom board in Phaltan.

### **The Balus**

Of my three mammas, my closest association is with Balu mamma. A very jovial person, randomly cracking jokes in any situation, witty to the core. These impressions had formed even when I was very young and it continues to this day. His ‘Fantabulous’ scooter with self-starter was a phenomenon by itself in the late ‘60s. With Latha he used to take me out during Christmas to see various Santa Claus-we collected X-mas gifts- hmmm...those were the days. Balu mamma is our family physician -whether he thinks we are animals, or animals as human beings-his diagnosis is always accurate. Kamala manni knows all medicines in finger tips.) Mamma used to send eggs aplenty when I was in college. I remember, the surgery he performed on a cow and retrieved balls of hair from its stomach. It was a puzzle in the medical fraternity then- it was all in the newspapers. He attributed the reason that the cow could have grazed near a saloon, and so was it!!

Mammas driving passion is something very great-be it a small maruti or the biggest Studebaker- he drives it at ease. The way he used to bring the biggest sedan of those times in the narrow alleys of Triplicane was a sight by itself. His political connections were enormous, but he never over stepped his limits- in fact, always under played. His mind and hands are always at its creative best- it has cascaded to Latha and to Janani.

I vividly remember the “pappadam thooku” Leshimma hung from the ceiling in Gopalapuram- “strictly for Balu”. Of course, she used to give me small bites now and then. Mamma used to spin the ball beautifully- it was unplayable by even Shankar and Kumar

In those days. Kamala manni is such a sweet person who cares a lot. Despite all her pains and aches, she never has shown it outside. Latha, a self-made strong woman is a living example of what a single parent can achieve. The BALUS are one family, which had never forced the turmoil undergone by them on others – they accepted things with grace and came out of it all.

### **THE CHINNUS**

Chinnu mamma, a genius of sorts, was a boon to the family. His thinking was beyond his times. His casual talks with Gowri on nano technology some 30 years ago still rings in my ears.

A down-to-earth person, who was US President's awardee, was a revered guru to his team. He was the first Asian to have held a prestigious position in the US Government run Waterways Experiment Station- a pioneer in the United States Army core of research engineers. He used to give guest lectures in most of the prestigious academic institutions across the world.

He redefined the love for amma- the meticulous way he arranged everything for her before he left every other time to America, is a lesson for all children to imbibe. His care for the family, siblings and their off shoot is one that is unparalleled. His plate during lunch will have to be filled with different kinds of curries, kootu, chips, appalam, pickles of different varieties. Amma always used to tell that I have caught up with that quality of Chinnu. Appa will tell, at least a piece of Chinnus intelligence could have come to me, but not!!

Chinnu mamma and I have crisscrossed most parts of Madras in my TVS 50. Neither we or the moped complained! It was only after Chinnu mamma gave a clean chit to the alliance; did we get Pavithra married to Sathish. Despite his ill health, manni and mamma attended the betrothal function of Pavithra at Boston. He very much wanted to be around for the marriage, but God had other plans. However, one unsuccessful mission of Chinnu mamma was to bring Gowri out of her shell-unveil Gowri's intelligence to the world- He always used to tell her that he sees the spark of brilliance in her. He will chide Gowri every time that why she was not born to him as his daughter.

### **PERIMMA**

My perimma's home was my playground. For many years, most of the Saturdays I used to spend there. I will catch 25 number bus from Triplicane. Kumar's friends were my friends too. Shankar's friends were my Anna's. We will play like mad. Perimma will make me chapathi and potato – my staple tiffin of those days.

As I was the youngest there, I had all the advantages with my sisters- Raji alone was the competition!! Kumar with his friends will tease her of her convent English- I will be enjoying it. To this day, my sisters Patta akka, Padmini akka, Savithri akka, Raji pet me and shower their unconditional love on me. A Caltex petroleum lorry's miniature, which otherwise would be in the loft above Swami cup board, will be kept for me to 'play' (till I was 14, I used to play with it).

In the later years, after the marriage of all sisters, Shankar and Kumar shifting abroad, I had also grown up, but my visits were much more frequent- used to go there many afternoons from Office, which was near Safire theatre. Leshimma also was in the first floor. Her Sadhabishegam was performed with pomp at Perimmas home. Even some 35 years back, perimma was well adept with computer games. To this day, in every trip to USA, we make it a point to visit Kumar and Usha.

### **PADMA CHITHEE**

I was barely 3 years when she left us, but surprisingly, I very well remember seeing her in the Hospital with Chithappas mother helping her out. As for my sister Sumathy, we connect so well that even after months of hiatus, we catch up from where we left. Chandramouli, a smart gentleman- my athimber and Sumathy used to frequent Leshimma at Gopalapuram. It was there I became close to him. I used to call upon him at Apollo Specialities every other day when he was admitted- spent time with my sister Sumathy. Little did we know, he would leave so soon. I was there at the hospital where he breathed his last.

As for Meena, she is my Maths guru. I am sure that she would have brooded over as to why she excelled in Mathematics- I was a bad student! Could not understand anything in Permutation and Combination- Hello..hello.....do not get an opinion that I understood all other aspects of maths except the Permutation and Combination!! She tried her best.... A replica scene of “ek gaon me ek kisan Raghu thatha”. To this day, I pity her for trying to make me a genius-another Ramanujam (I was an asaminjam !!) It is very heartening to see Meena’s intellect has cascaded to her sons.

### **THE JAYARAMANS**

As a ‘thava puthalvan’, I enjoyed and enjoying the bestest of best in all aspects from my grandparents, my parents, my sisters, brothers-in-law, nephew. my uncles, aunts, my cousin brothers and sisters and their children. As is my father, I am inclusive of all. I love to be in touch with each one of the family members.

To this day amma dotes on me and so also my sisters. Radha akka and Ramani athimber are a pride to the family. Vijaya akka and Raju athimber are the pillars of strength. From the Jayaramans has sprouted the GRASPS – generation alpha kid Saaswath is the new addition in the family.

THANKS, Balu Mamma for getting me lost in nostalgic memories -an opportunity to relive the Bygone times and enjoy the past and present glories. It is my desire to see that the next generation gets much closer in their bondage and strengthen this huge family tree. Your desire to write on this subject has

sprouted and has now become a huge tree with contributions from your children. I am fortunate to be a part of this family tree and may this be like a banyan tree as a symbol of immortality spreading its roots stronger and firmer.

### **My Ram-blings on Ram's Ramblings**

Ram, your memory power could put even Alexa to shame! Every line sparkles with affection and humour, and your descriptions make our family come alive once again — right from the pappadam thooku to my “surgical adventures.” You’ve outdone even your own “Professor” title this time! Keep that nostalgic pen flowing — you’ve reminded all of us that family bonds, like our rasam, only get richer with time.

### **SHANKER RAM'S WRITE UP**

#### **My Story**

I came into this world as something of a miracle. After four daughters, my parents—Rukmini and Narayanaswamy—finally had a son. Later, I would have a younger brother and sister. My sisters still joke about how much pomp surrounded my arrival, how proud my father was, how the whole neighborhood buzzed with joy. Though I don't remember any of it, I'll happily accept the story—it feels good to believe it.

My childhood was full of laughter and outdoor adventures. Friends like Viju and Kannan were constant companions. The street was our playground—cricket, “goli,” “gilli,” or endless rounds of “police and robber.” My father encouraged it all. He was a builder by profession and a man of means in those days, so our house was always bustling. We had cars, lorries, and even jeeps; plus, assistants and workers bustling about. He loved travelling and would load the whole family into the car for trips to Tirupati or Kutralam. Summers meant beach picnics every weekend. And we also enjoyed eating out as a family, which was unusual then, and I relished it.

Our extended family on my mother's side was nearby, and I still remember summers spent at Saraswathi Chithi's home in Triplicane, with all the cousins packed into rooms for sleepovers, going to Padma Chithi's house, and of course, to our grandma's house in Gopalapuram. Festivals like Navaratri and Diwali were magical. Diwali was unmatched—new clothes, endless firecrackers, and the pride of being the family on the street with the most sparks in the sky.

One person stands out from those early days is Lakshmanan, the assistant who took me everywhere. He was my guide, my shadow. He taught me to ride a bike, and once he took me by boat across the Adyar river to meet my uncle, Chinnu, at

Guindy Engineering College. I remember the day so clearly—the river, the campus, the feeling that start of something important had happened. In that moment, I had quietly decided: this would be my college, and engineering would be my path.

But in 1969, the rhythm of my life shifted drastically when my father fell gravely ill with blood cancer. The house that had always been buzzing grew quiet and heavy. My dad became bedridden; he needed transfusions and constant care. I didn't fully understand it then, but I watched as wealth and security slipped away. The cars disappeared. The lorries, too. Debt collectors circled. Friends and associates who once crowded our home faded into the background. My uncle Balu was a steady support during my father's illness, caring for him, taking him to the hospital, and supporting my mother. My mother and my elder sisters held the household together through sheer will.

When my father passed away in October 1971, I was only eighteen, just a second-year engineering student at Guindy. The loss overwhelmed us—not only emotionally but financially. We had not just lost my dad, but everything he had built seemed to crumble at once. We were left with debts, auction threats on our house, and a family still trying to marry off daughters. I battled in courtrooms where clerks mocked me, delayed proceedings, and demanded bribes I couldn't pay. The humiliation was deep, but I endured, determined to protect my family.

By some miracle, scholarships became my lifeline and kept me afloat. With help from government loan, leads from Jayaram Chithappa, and small grants, I managed to stay in school. I even indulged small tokens—a wristwatch, a bottle of cologne—symbols of independence in the midst of struggle. But I also longed to escape. Life at home with six women—my mother and sisters—was turbulent. We didn't understand each other and we all felt tons of pressure, which meant many misunderstandings and conflicts. I promised myself that once I graduated, I would leave Chennai and start anew.

That chance came with jobs in Hyderabad, then Bombay, then Bangalore. Good positions, but the restlessness remained. I wanted more, something beyond India. The United States beckoned, and my uncle Chinnu, already there, encouraged me on. Although I had admission offers from schools like UC Berkeley and Purdue, financial barriers blocked the way. Finally, LSU in Louisiana offered me a partial scholarship in the Engineering department, thanks largely to my uncle Chinnu.

My grandmother, Lakshmi Amma, climbed on the back of my motorcycle one day, rode with me to the bank, and stood as guarantor for my airfare loan. Without

her, I would have not have left India. I later honored her by naming one of my companies after her: The Laxmi Group.

America was a revelation. At LSU, I wandered into the Computer Science Department out of curiosity, secured an appointment with the Chair, and somehow convinced him I belonged. My background in programming from my engineering days impressed him enough to offer me a full scholarship. Suddenly, I was not just surviving, but thriving. I was the Department's first Indian student, and surprised them with my hard work and discipline that helped me ace my studies. I was fortunate to complete my Master's with multiple job offers already lined up.

I took a job at Schlumberger and Houston became my new home. My grandmother even visited me there—she stayed a few days, ate dosa and vadai I clumsily prepared from ready mixes, and laughed when I bought her nightgowns to replace her saris. Those days with her are forever etched in my memory.

After a few short months, I broke free to start my own ventures. Entrepreneurship felt like my father's spirit continuing through me, but this time I planned, saved, and grew steadily. Over time, I moved to Southern California, started and exited six companies, including The Laxmi Group. At the height of my career, I had more than 200 employees across the U.S. and India, with clients ranging from Volkswagen, Toyota, DHL, and Hasbro. It was challenging but exhilarating. I retired early, at 51—the same age my father had passed, but unlike him, by then, I left a stable foundation for those around me. I shared the proceeds of my companies' sales with my employees, a decision that continues to give me deep satisfaction.

Life gave me love too. In 1983, I married Geetha in Chennai, introduced through family. She joined me in Houston in early 1985, and together we have built a beautiful life. We raised three children—Ashwin, Nitya, and Neel—each carving their own success in medicine, law, and finance, respectively. We travelled extensively—from Patagonia, to the Amazon, to the African wilderness, even to the base of Mount Everest—experiencing each nook of the world together. We've seen places most only dream of, but more importantly, together we built a marriage that has lasted four decades, rooted in resilience and curiosity, and have raised kind, thoughtful, and compassionate children.

Today, life feels full. Geetha teaches yoga to seniors, sharing her gift as a Certified Yoga Therapist and fills her time gardening. I read, watch TV, trade in the markets, and give back by mentoring entrepreneurs through TiE Global,

where I served as a Trustee and Chair in 2023. Both of us volunteer with nonprofits—she with women’s wellness, and I, with hunger relief in the US and student education in India.

Now, in my seventies, I reflect on a life shaped by so many. From my father, I learned to live fully, travel, and to gather people. I also learned from him to be kind and to give generously. From my uncle Balu, the gift of humour and ease. From my uncle Chinnu, the value of hard work, grit, and lifelong learning. From my sisters and mother, the importance of respect for and support for women. From my brother, I have gained a lifelong companion and confidant. And from my grandmother Lakshmi Amma, the courage to take the leap when it mattered most. I am grateful for their presence in my life.

I’ve made peace with life’s ups and downs. No regrets, no complaints. I’ve come to believe in George Bernard Shaw’s words: “The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can’t find them, they make them.”

That is what I did. I made my own circumstances. It has been a wonderful life.

### **My Take**

Shanker’s life reads like a movie scripted by destiny—complete with drama, courage, humour, and a happy ending! From the bustling streets of Lake Area, Nungambakkam to the boardrooms of California, his story stands as proof that perseverance and purpose can outshine any hardship.

I’m particularly touched by the fond recollection of Lakshmi Amma—who continues to bless us through generations. Shanker has indeed lived up to his father’s legacy and perhaps borrowed a bit of Chinnu’s genius and my humour along the way! A journey truly worthy of applause and inspiration.

### **SUMATHY and MEENA’s WRITE UP**

We, Meena Sankar and Sumathi Chandramouli are daughters of Sri. K.S. Guruswami (fondly remembered as KSG) and Padma Guruswami. Though we are blessed to have had them as parents, as the fate would have had it, we are not fortunate to enjoy the love and affection of our mother for long as she passed away even when we were only toddlers. All our memories of her were not the one we experienced ourselves but what others told us. The more we hear about her from others the more we feel how unfortunate we were to have missed such a wonderful lady as our mother.

The times of testing started soon after her departure as she was the one who managed everything in household. My father too was a yet another child to her and hardly does he know anything that was related to house. As a result, it was a great shock to him and thunder struck. Still below 40, with two small female kids to take care and not much of help forthcoming from expected quarters, our paternal grandmother seeing the pathetic plight of her son decided to get him remarried and in came Sow. Meenakshi our foster mother to the outside world and goddess to we children. It will be long story if we keep writing about all that she has done to us. Few things to mention will give an idea about how she has adopted herself to a readymade family.

We lost a year of education when our mother expired. our new mother took us to a new school and claiming that we are private students got as admitted to a higher class. All through our education though we were bright students and scored high marks in all the subjects sans Tamil. she took lot of pains to teach us Tamil herself starting from Alphabet and the result was that we mastered the language and participated in oratory and other competitions and stood first.

She was blessed with her own children and never in the family was there any discrimination among us and infect it was for a very longtime that they didn't know that we had different mother. She got us married to respectable families. Took care of the delivery of her grandchildren. In fact, it was after her arrival in our family only, we really realised how motherly affection could feel.

About our father largely misunderstood by many was a Gem inside. His friendship with Sri Muthiah Chettiar of Chettinad House was a blessing. He was considered a son in their family and till his death. The Chettinad family invited him and Mother for all their family functions with respect and gratitude which only their close relatives could be expected to derive. His closeness to the Rajah of Chettinad caused jealousy among those who tried to befriend him and failed. This caused innumerable problems in the office front and the domestic front already in turmoil, the struggle faced by him is etched in our memories. What good are relatives when blind eyes are turned when your kith and kin are suffering.

As we both grew older, we saw to it that both our father and mother do not suffer for want of anything. Thank God we were into the family who only encouraged such gestures. The lesson we have learnt the hard way has made us sensitive to the sufferings of the people around us. we are glad our children too are in the same way- strive to mitigate the hardships of the society around us to the extent possible.

Though we were deprived of our mother in our tender age, God has more than compensated us by giving yet another mother. Over and above, we were married into the family where our husbands took care of us exceptionally well. The Love and affection we got from Sri. Chandramouli and Sri. Sankar is nothing more than one could ask for.

With the blessings of elders and ancestors our children too are settled well. They too are taking care of us well and with the grandchildren in our lap, what more we need. Thanks once again to God and elders for a very satisfying life.

### **My Take**

Sumathy and Meena, your story is a living tribute to the saying — “When God closes one door, He opens another, but often through a mother’s heart.” The way you’ve expressed love for both your mothers — one remembered through stories, the other through selfless deeds — moves me deeply. Life may have tested you early, but you’ve both passed with flying colours, not just in exams but in humanity! I’m proud that the grace and empathy you carry today have become the hallmark of our family’s next generation.

### **WRITE UP FROM GOWRI**

When I got married into this family, whenever I hear Gopalapuram, I used to wonder what is this Gopalapuram? Is it like Srivatsa Bharadwaja Kaushika Gotram? What is this, Gopal pura Gotram

Slowly, I met one by one of this family and understood the special characteristics of this clan. All the women in this clan are bestowed with brains and beauty starting from Lakshmi Amma, Saraswathi, Rukmini, Radha Akka, Vijaya Akka, Uma Akka, Savithri Akka, Chandra Akka, Patta Akka, Padmini Akka, Raji Akka, Sumathi and Meena Akka and last, but not the least Latha!!! Everyone shines in their own way, but everyone has beauty and character, and very strong willpower.

My mother-in-law, whom I call Sarasu is a chip of the Gopalapuram Block. She is a voracious reader, have great interest in cooking, strong will, easy going, and a very jolly type. I learnt cooking from her in Gopalapuram style.

The three giants Anandan mamma, Balu Mama and Chinnu Mama have many qualities in common. All of them are brainy and extremely witty. All of them are very warm persons.

Raju Athimber, Nanu, Kumar and Shankar ought to be mentioned for their intelligence and their care for others.

I indeed, feel lucky and blessed to be a part of this family.

Gowri.

### **My Take**

Gowri has decoded the “Gopalpura Gotram” with the precision of a geneticist and the flair of a poet! Her description of the women in the clan could well serve as a family thesis on strength, grace, and culinary excellence. I’m glad she has mastered not only the Gopalpuram style of cooking but also its spirit — cheerfulness with a touch of spice. With her sharp wit and warm heart, Gowri has proved beyond doubt that she’s now an original member of this illustrious lineage!

### **NUNGAMBAKKAM RAJI’s WRITE UP**

NR (Narayanaswamy-Rukmani) Family. I would like to share a few thoughts about my parents.

Our father, T. S. Narayanaswamy, was a charismatic person who lived with unshakable integrity & principles. He imbibed in us various good qualities like discipline, punctuality, love & affection for all around & taught us how to cherish & value life. He was very particular about the time we woke up, took bath, attended puja, came back home after play & went to bed. During summer vacation the youngsters were in the charge of an elder & had to write 1 page each of Tamil & English handwriting & Tables. We were then free for the whole day. All had to share little jobs at home (kitchen duties, laying beds, plucking flowers etc) but we enjoyed doing it. But that did not mean he was a task master. He was such a fun-loving person & would take us frequently to movies, restaurants, temples, road trips etc & to the beach every evening during summer. We would all play cards or other games in groups & Appa & Amma would play in the elders’ group. All functions & Pujas were celebrated in a grand manner especially Navaratri & Appa played a major part in its arrangements. His friendliness & magnanimity made him popular in our family circle & he was a favourite with the children in our neighbourhood.

Our mother, Rukmani, was a princess to her father & a queen to her husband. They both loved & pampered her. She was a very talented person & very calm & collected at all points of time. She was a Jack of All Trades Master of All person. She was such a good cook & finished her job with such ease & grace & would be out of the kitchen in no time looking so calm & cool. Here I would like to mention that my mother -in -law always complimented her on how she got a sweet, karam, coffee etc ready in no time & that too very tasty at that. She would say ‘she was here all the time & I don't know when she went in &

prepared all this. Because of your mother you are a good cook but you cannot match her 'Vashistar vaayal Bramha Rishi madhiri getting a compliment from my mil is unimaginable.

Her sweets, savouries including murukku, soft phulkas, were all outstanding. Amma plaiting our hair (normal, with flowers.5 plaits. French plait etc), stringing flowers, kolam everything was superb. She was very good at mental maths. She was a very jolly, fun-loving person, game for anything & did very good mimicry. She was not very vocal about her feelings nor one to exhibit her love & affection. She never made a fuss or threw up tantrums over anything, rarely got angry, no fighting, no back biting, no raising voices or using harsh words. She accepted things as it came & never complained about anything or anyone. She trusted all around her & allowed others to make her decisions & went by it with no qualms raised which is a very difficult trait.

Appa & Amma complimented each other & were a testament to enduring love, mutual understanding & joyful companionship. We have never seen both argue among themselves or raise their voices at any of us. Appa doesn't talk much when he is angry & I have never seen Amma angry.

Our Nungambakkam house was a Paradise to all of us. We had relatives from both families coming home frequently & everyone was greeted with equal love & joy. We grew up as a fun-loving family & cherished the joy of having all our relatives & friends around.

I am proud to belong to a family where love, respect & dignity are more important than material wealth. We, sisters & brothers, have stood strong at all phases of life & we are bound by true love, affection & concern for each other.

### **My Take**

Raji's recollection of her parents brings alive an era when values were lived, not lectured. Her words paint a home that ran on affection and order — where punctuality, prayer, and play all found their rightful place! The way she describes Rukmani's calm mastery in the kitchen could make even today's celebrity chefs blush. The Narayanaswamy household clearly set the gold standard for warmth and togetherness.

### **PATTA's WRITE UP**

My intention here is not to speak about one person alone, but to share the overall experience of living with my grandparents and parents, learning from them, and understanding how these influences shaped my life.

My grandfather, Narayanaswamy, was the one who brought much name and respect to our family. He rose to the position of Chief Accountant in Spencer's, the largest European company in Madras at that time — a remarkable achievement in those days. Gifted with extraordinary mathematical ability, he topped the Madras Presidency (then comprising both Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) in his degree examinations. In those pre-calculator years, his speed and accuracy in mental arithmetic were legendary. During the racing season, he was frequently called upon to calculate returns for investors at the racecourse — a responsibility he discharged with precision and speed.

On one such rainy Saturday, 23rd November, while he was on duty at the races, I was born. My grandfather affectionately named me Patta, remarking that I was soft and delicate. Later, he also gave me the name Lalitha

As the eldest granddaughter, I spent much of my childhood with my grandparents — Thatha (grandfather) and Lakshmiamma (grandmother). Thatha was my first true inspiration. He encouraged me to recite shlokas, to take an interest in sports, and to observe the world around me. Almost every evening, on his way back from office, he would make it a point to visit my mother, his eldest daughter. His deep affection for her was evident in these daily visits.

Some evenings remain vivid in my memory. At Gopalapuram, Thatha would sit under the soft glow of the lamp with a small tumbler of coffee and a bowl of peanuts. Around him gathered his children and grandchildren. He would ask each of us questions appropriate to our age, explain concepts patiently, and often add humour to his lessons. It was through these informal gatherings that I first discovered that learning could be a joyful exercise, not a burden.

He also devised little “learning challenges.” On Sundays, or sometimes once a month, each child was assigned a passage or shloka to memorize within a set period. On the appointed day, we would all sit together, and those who succeeded in reciting correctly were rewarded. I still remember the pride I felt when Thatha gave me one rupee for completing my task. That small moment of recognition instilled in me a lifelong love for learning.

This interest was reinforced by my father too. He never believed in studying merely for marks. His constant advice was: “Do not study just to pass an examination. Study so that the knowledge remains with you for life. Even if you are woken from sleep, you should be able to answer with confidence.”

He reminded us that education was not for temporary success but for lifelong enrichment. This principle shaped my attitude towards learning, and I carried forward it into my own family.

Even after marriage, this love for learning continued. I became actively involved in group chanting sessions — Vishnu Sahasranamam, Sundarakandam, and Narayaneeyam among others. Most participants were from Malayali and Telugu families in the Quarters. I would buy the texts, carefully learn the pronunciation, and immerse myself in recitation. What began with Thatha's encouragement had blossomed into a lasting spiritual practice. My uncle, Radha's father, also guided me towards thoughtful reading, marking articles in *The Hindu* with a red pencil and asking me to go through them. These small gestures fostered my curiosity and inclination towards spiritual learning.

From my grandmother Lakshmiamma, I absorbed strength of character. Though she had never attended school for even a single day, she embodied hard work, discipline, persistence, and dignity. She was a strong personality, and I believe every member of our family has inherited a part of her determination.

From my mother I learnt patience and perseverance. Despite many struggles she relentlessly carried on with hope and courage and finally reached a well-deserved position in life. That is what has been the driving force in my married life also.

Among my extended family, one person I particularly admire is Radha. Her life of selfless service, generosity, and strength has been a constant source of inspiration. I often say that if I am born again, I wish to be like her — living a life dedicated to helping others without discrimination or expectation.

Even today, after more than seventy years, those simple joys of childhood remain fresh in my memory. Sitting under the lamp with Thatha, learning shlokas, listening to my father's wise words, watching Lakshmiamma's discipline, admiring my mother's courage, and being inspired by Radha's spirit — these experiences were not mere memories. They were the foundations of my life.

### **My Take**

Only Patta can take shlokas, peanuts, racecourse arithmetic, spiritual discipline, and childhood mischief—and blend them into a smooth, elegant narrative. Reading her piece made me realise one thing: if character was a subject in school, she'd have been the class topper without studying. Her words beautifully link the past to the present, showing how affection and discipline, intellect and devotion, all came together to shape a life of grace. Her admiration

for Radha adds a moving touch — proof that inspiration in our family never runs short, only deeper with each generation.

### **SARASWATHI**

*This account is based on the recollections of my ninety-five-year-old sister, shared verbally with her daughter, Vijaya and recorded here for posterity.*

The very thought of Gopalapuram fills me with happiness. We brothers and sisters grew up as a close-knit family—cooperative, affectionate, and full of joy. We truly enjoyed every moment of our younger days.

I was the one who always looked after my father's needs. His turban and office clothes would be neatly organized and kept ready for him every day. My father was a jovial man and deeply devoted to his family. In the evenings and at night, as he relaxed in his easy chair, he liked all his children to sit around him. Those moments gave him great happiness.

Every other week, he would treat us to ice creams and cakes. Each one of us would be given a handful of peanuts or *mochai kai* to peel. After peeling just two of each, he would proudly announce that he had finished his share! These small but precious incidents remain vivid in my mind even today.

Every Saturday, my father would come to Triplicane to purchase snuff, and he never failed to visit my house afterwards. My mother, Lakshmiamma, would prepare a variety of dishes, including delicious sweets and savouries. I was not particularly interested in cooking, but I took great care of the *pooja* room, which I considered my responsibility. My sister Padma was entrusted with preparing the batter using the *kalloral*.

I was keenly interested in outdoor sports. I participated in running races held at the Gopalapuram playgrounds and won many prizes. My elder brother Amandhan, himself a great sportsman, was my mentor and a constant source of encouragement. In those days, I would jump 3 to 4 steps at a time by running up and down the stairs repeatedly, building my strength and stamina with great enthusiasm. Now, at ninety-five, I am confined to a wheelchair, but my memories remain strong and clear.

During navarathri we used to set up the *golu* in our house on a grand scale, carefully bringing the dolls down from the upstairs *golu* bureau. We will visit all the neighbouring houses almost all the seven days and bring home heavy bags of collected sundal. Those festive days are still very dear to my heart. அது ஒரு வசந்த காலம்.

I was married when I was 17 years old. After my marriage, I moved to my in-laws' house on Sami Pillai Street in Triplicane. There was no electricity in that house. Before my marriage, I lived in our house at Gopalapuram, where I enjoyed listening to the radio. In those days, we received a magazine called *Vaanoli*, which listed all the radio programmes. I used to note down my favourite programmes and listen to them regularly. After marriage, all this stopped. Even though I was only 17, I had to take care of all the household work, including cooking, in my Triplicane house.

I pray to God that everyone in our family lives happily and is blessed with robust health. It is heartening to know that Balu has taken up the task of writing this book. I offer my blessings to all.

Thank you  
— Saraswathi

### **My Take**

These memories were dictated to Vijaya by my second elder sister, Saraswathi, who is in her ninety-fifth year, with remarkable clarity and grace. Her recollections are simple, honest, and deeply rooted in family, tradition, and affection. I have only shaped her spoken words into written form, taking care not to alter her voice or sentiment. This note stands as a blessing from an elder and a precious fragment of our family's living memory.

### **VIJAYA'S WRITE UP**

The topic given by Balu mamma is very vast. As I have married my maternal uncle's son, I have had the opportunity to be closely associated to both my maternal and paternal relations. In these 73 years, I have learnt many good things from them.

The thought of T.R.Thatha brings back memory of his neatly tied turban and his majestic appearance. Amma always used to talk about his "punctuality"- even when he goes for a walk, it seems he used to tell at what time he will reach a particular place and at what time he would return home- everything was clocklike precision. I should not be self-boasting-but I have imbibed that quality from thatha. I will start at 9;18am for school, and invariably, I will reach on time and never was late to School. Till date, I adhere to being on time for anything I do. My appa always used to tell me that I am like TR Thatha- a very proud compliment.

My beloved patti Lak, Vijayashmiamma, became my mammiyar patti also after my marriage to my uncle's son Raju. Before marriage, I never knew anything about cooking. It was under her guidance I learnt my cooking and she relished whatever I cooked. "வசிஷ்டர் வாயால் பிரம்மரிஷி" (Vaśiṣṭar vāyāl

Brammarishi). With all modesty, to this day, I have lived up to her expectation. Amanda mamma, Chinnu mamma, Raju, Ram are the ones in our family very particular about the varieties and taste of the food- never failed their expectations till day.

Lakshmiamma stayed with us in Sangli, where she used to bathe in Krishna River and in the remote Maharashtrian village Phaltan- she loved that place. Lakshmi amma is synonymous to neatness. She used to have a hand towel with her and clean even as she is cooking- everything she used and everywhere she goes, it all will be spick and span. I used to admire her kitchen-even after marathon cooking, the place would be sparkling tidy.

She was always proud of her sons- would tell,” my three sons are the most intelligent people” ...she never used to complain against anyone. A remarkable character of Lakshmi amma was, irrespective of the age, she treated all equally-used to make dishes and served them lavishly. She knew who liked what and prepare food of their liking, Dipak, as a child, was very finnick in his food habits (in fact, he still is!!)- at that period he was liking kesari and oma podi. There it was when we visited her. She used to call Appa as Chinna Athimber- will make rasam exclusively for him and send it to Triplicane through Munuswami-the helper. Amma, me, Radha have imbibed this character of hers.

Whenever amma went to Gopalapuram, when I was a little kid, I will ask if Balu was there. Only if he was available would I go at all. Till date, he is the jolliest person to be with. If Chinnu was there, I will be reluctant to go because he will ask me to recite all difficult tables like 13,14,16! Hmmm...those were the days. Never have had addressed them as mammas. Always called them Balu & Chinnu only- that is the privilege I had with them. For me, mamma means only Amanda Mamma!! Chinnu's friend Umarji will ask me tell “chee po”. Seems, as I child, I used to tell it very sweetly!

Balu's spontaneous witty talk is a treat for the ears. He will keep us happy with his jokes and mannerisms. When I was married, my maternal grandmothers place became my பக்காடம். Kamala manni used to take care of me like anything. She will make me drink milk saying that till I am in Gopalapuram, I am her responsibility! Such a loving person she is. I cannot forget those days when Balu, Manni and Latha stayed with us in Poona.

Chinnu was a best friend to me more than a mamma. His India visit was never completed without visiting Poona and he used to stay with us every time he came from USA, not minding any kind of inconvenience. To tell about Chinnu,

a separate book must be published. His sudden demise was a thundering blow to us. Raji manni is covering the void created-she regularly visits us. I cannot forget the days we shopped in Poona and Bangalore.

Amanda mama, as a child I knew, was a disciplinarian-spoke very little with children. We used to become silent as he stepped in the house, fearing that he would become upset. Though at no point in time we had seen him lose his temper, somehow an inbuilt fear was there. Just imagine what if the same person became the father-in-law! I was jittery when the proposal of getting married to Raju came up and that continued even after I was married. That fear did not even last for a day- the mamma I saw was directly opposite to what I had I imagined of him. He and manni made sure that I was treated like a princess and till they breathed their last, they loved me deeply. For them, Vijaya's word was final and to this day, "Vijaya manni" is what I am for not only Raju's siblings, but to the entire Nanapet clan. Mamma's character of visiting temples is imbibed by Dipak.

Going to Nungambakkam to Rukmani periamma's house was a joyful thing. I used to play with all my cousins and we still share a good bondage with each other. Patta was a role model for me, I will watch with awe when she corrects the answer sheets- she was a teacher then, she would give great advises, which was very useful to me during my studies. I used to admire her intelligence. The 'Nungambakkam days' is a part of my life and cannot be forgotten.

The initiative taken by Balu mamma to rope in the family to share their memoirs is like opening the dam of a brimming reservoir – the flow is rampant. Thoughts are flooding more than I can write. I have restricted myself to write only a brief note of the family members. It will be like Ithihasa Puranams if I go in depth. I only wish that the coming generations also stick up to the family bond of this great tree of Gopalapuram and make it stronger.

### **From my Corner**

Reading Vijaya's reminiscences is like walking through the lanes of Gopalapuram again — every turn filled with laughter, discipline, and the aroma of Lakshmiamma's kitchen! Her sharp recall and affectionate detailing make the past come alive. I'm particularly touched by her generous words about me — though I can neither confirm nor deny the charge of being "the jolliest person," I shall happily accept it on record! Her tribute to every member of the family — from the majestic TR Thatha to the ever-smiling Rukmani Periamma, from Chinnu's friendship to Ammanda mama's quiet dignity — captures the essence of our shared heritage. True to her punctual spirit, even her memories arrive on time, in full measure and in perfect order.

## **RADHA's WRITE UP**

The thought of Gopalapuram centres around the most unsung heroine -my maternal grandmother- Lakshmiamma. Her dynamism, her generosity, her patience, her empathy, her care, her concern, her love-the list is endless. I am still amazed the way she handled the situations at ease. My pleasant days as a child and a young girl were centred around my grandmother. I would wait for an excuse to go to Gopalapuram from Triplicane, where with all my cousin sisters we would play all kinds of wild games- jumping down from tall compound walls, run helter-skelter, climb the trees. Lakshmi amma week after week will utter the same lines- Radha means naughty, playful, mischievous!

Those pleasant memories of the yester years are very nostalgic. Her culinary skills and cooking and serving to dozens of us is no mean task- the world's best chefs can never equate her skill, leave alone surpassing her! She is the inspiration for me not only to cook delicacies, but to serve it with all affection. When someone talks about Radha's hospitality, I dedicate that praise to my maternal grandmother Lakshmi amma. I owe it to her. When I was in Tanjore Medical college hostel. she used to send various pickles, savouries- I cannot forget that unconditional love of hers. For me, Patti is synonymous to Lakshmi amma.

T.R.Thatha used to call me 'pinjula pazham'. He looked majestic with his neatly made turban and going to Office by rickshaw. I remember people calling him Spencer Iyer. I vividly remember his proficiency with numbers- he used to give us quick mathematical problems to be solved. He used to reward the winners! We considered it very precious. Those were really fun moments. He knew when to be strict! At that time, we all would vanish from the scene. Here again, I recollect Lakshmi amma for managing the big family, floating crowd of relatives and always half a dozen young children at home, topping with TR Thathas moods!

Not very great interactions have I had with my eldest uncle Amanda mama in the earlier days- he was a friendly person who excelled in sports. He used to encourage everyone to participate in sports activities. Amma used to recollect her fond memories of winning all races when she was in School with Amanda mamma standing at the finish line and cheer her up. He was always neatly dressed and an authoritative disciplinarian. It was in the later years I experienced more of his soft side and love. The Nanapet family, as I used to call them, were very affectionate people. It was Raju who taught me cycling. We

cycled all the way from Triplicane to Gopalapuram without telling anyone at home- got severe scoldings after that is another story.

Balu mama, the first doctor in the family, used to have a skeleton in his room. During night, he will terrify all of us with his pranks. We knew he was up to something, but every time he will surprise us with his novelty! Reading all suspense novels like Kalki's alai osai and the slightest movement in the open garden space at the gopalapuram house multiplied our fear during the nights.

Balu, as we affectionately call him, was the one who used to take me to all fancy dress competitions conducted across the city with my mother Saraswathi, and be the proud uncle to bring the prizes I won ( invariably I did!), Also, he would take me to the street corner doctor after I used to get hurt week after week after reckless playing – not a week went without me shedding blood and a scold from mamma.

Chinnu, our youngest mamma, was the one who got me the medical college application forms and he with my amma were the people who saw to that I realize my dream of getting into the medical profession. His love is unfathomable. The love and care he used to shower on us whenever we went to USA cannot be described in words. He used to cook for us when he was in Baltimore. When he visits India, definitely he would stay with us in Coimbatore at least for 3 or 4 days. Raji manni has also become very close to us and she is now a very close friend of mine. She does not fail to visit us even if it is a very short trip to India.

At any point of time when someone kindles my memory of the past, it invariably is that of my Gopalapuram days. I moved out of Madras when I was 16 years of age to pursue my studies in medicine-went too far away Tanjore and immediately on completion of my studies, I got married and moved to Coimbatore. In that way, I feel I have drifted away from both my maternal and paternal sides.

Most of my young days were spent at my Rukmani periamma and TSN athiber's place. Vijaya preferred to be at home with amma, and I will be with my cousins Patta (the leader of our gang), Chandra (my closest friend) and Padmini (bit younger to us). I vividly remember the walks we used to go in pairs, the petty fights we would pick for reading Ananda Vikatan first, the various trips to Mahabalipuram, Tiruporur in the packed car- few of us will sit even in the car's floor, periamma plaiting my hair, eating whatever was cooked by samayal mammi- the list is endless. I loved all my cousins-Savithri, Raji, Shankar,

Kumar are always close to my heart. Any time, being along and growing with siblings and cousins is a great blessing for anyone, and I am lucky to be one. Even to this day if Patta and me start conversing, it will go for hours together.... such pleasant memories of the yester years.

The loss of Padma chithi gave me a determination to study medicine. Her succumbing to cancer was the root cause for me to choose medicine as a vocation rather than a profession. I took a vow in Triplicane terrace when I was with my bosom friend Maduramitran Vijaya that I would become a doctor and dedicate my life to serve the needy.

With all that said about the “Gopalapuram” family, the last, but not the least are the Jayaramans. Appa, with all his meagre income saved penny after penny and gave us a wonderful life with the able support of my amma. At any point of time that special relationship with my parents is a much-cherished memory in my life!

Thanks, Balu mama for giving me the opportunity to chew the cud of the pleasant happenings of my younger days!

#### **MY TAKE**

Reading Radha’s account, I realised two important truths about her: First, she possesses a memory so sharp that even the pranks I tried to quietly bury have resurfaced with full documentary evidence. Second, her childhood seems to have been conducted at such high adventure levels that a few bravery medals should have been kept ready in the Gopalapuram cupboard.

Her narrative brings Gopalapuram back to life—the aromas from the kitchen, the bustle of the courtyard, the affectionate scoldings, the laughter echoing down the corridors.

What stands out most is Radha’s clarity of purpose even as a young girl. She chose the medical profession not for prestige, but with a sincere desire to ease the suffering of others. Today, that childhood resolve has not only been fulfilled—it has grown into a monumental legacy. Together with her husband, Padmashri Dr. Ramani, she helped establish the Shankara Eye Foundation at Coimbatore, an institution that has restored sight and hope to lakhs of people across the country.

The scale, the compassion, and the commitment behind this service would have made our ancestors profoundly proud. In many ways, Radha’s journey reflects the finest values of the Gopalapuram lineage—duty, kindness, perseverance, and a quiet determination to uplift others.

I read her write-up not just with affection, but with admiration—and with the satisfied feeling that one more bright star has risen from our family tree, lighting many lives along the way.

### **PADMINI's WRITE UP**

I like to have only the pleasant memories of the past. I remember my father as a loving and caring man and my childhood was very very happy one. Every Sunday evening was a holiday for Amma and will eat outside mostly in Ashoka hotel and go for some movies for every vacation we enjoyed visiting places and majority of the time Appa will drive the car himself.

The death of my father was a real blow to us. Somehow, we came up but still the memories are lingering. My mother was a silent supporter and only because of her we all stood together and settled in our life. All seven of us have love and affection towards each other.

My Grandmother played a great role in my life and she was a second mother to all of us. I remember her as a hard-working loving and caring woman. We are also very close to our Mamas and chithis. Many a time they filled my father's and mother's role. To quote one or two incidents I was really surprised and happy to see Balu mama at AG's office on the day of my interview. He also helped me in completing the formalities to be done before joining.

For my first delivery due to some problems, I was admitted in the hospital one day before. That night only Saraswathi chithi stayed with me the whole night and took care of me.

I fondly remember the support and love of my brother Shankar when needed. Because of our family circumstances Kumar was forced to pursue only B.Com degree and he took the financial burden of the family at a very early age. Shankar took responsibility of the family with his hard work and bold decisions most of our problems were solved.

After my marriage I was had to shift to Nasik. Even though I was forced to resign my job and without any close relatives living nearby I was able to lead a happy life because of my husband and children. Specially my children are my great source of love and happiness.

### **My Take**

Padmini has expressed her memories with great warmth. Her description of a joyful childhood, affectionate parents, and close-knit siblings reflects the strong foundation on which the family was built. Her remembrance of her father's love, the Sunday outings, and the many trips they took together is touching. His

loss was indeed a heavy blow, but she rightly acknowledges how her mother's quiet strength held the family together.

Her words about her grandmother show how deeply she influenced all of us with her hard work, affection, and guidance. Padmini's gratitude for the support she received from her uncles, aunts, and brothers — including the small part I

played during her interview — reflects the bond that has always united their family. Though life took her to Nasik and required many adjustments, she has built a happy life through the support of her husband and the love of her children. Her writing is a sincere and beautiful tribute to the values of love, support, and togetherness that continue to define our family.

### **SAVITHRI'S WRITE UP**

In such a beautiful family one that has set high standards in personal values, so many people who have achieved high honours it is difficult to pick just one person as inspiration. I have taken life lessons from almost all of them. Amma, my biggest influencer widowed at 43 with 7 children to settle down - she was a soldier. When I am overcome with the problems surrounding me, she is the one I think of and pull myself up.

Appa-a perfect blend of adoration and discipline taught us good values in life, structured routine and a sense of responsibility. I believe I have inherited unwavering faith in God from Appa and Lakshmi Amma Patti. Patti's standards were so high. Her motto was always it is not a big deal to be praised by your own people. You should make your name in your in-law's family also.

I have always admired the father-daughter bond between Amna & Thatha, sibling bonding between Mamas, Chitti and Amma in this family. This sibling bonding has continued in our generation also. My brothers Shankar, Kumar and Ram are my pillars of strength. And where would I be without my PRECIOUS SISTERS. I'll always be proud and grateful to be a member of the TRN family. The valuable treasures of my heart are the cherished memories of that family.

### **From My Quiet Corner**

Savithri writes with the steadiness she has inherited—every line reflects the discipline of her Appa, the courage of her Amma, and the high standards of Lakshmiamma. If devotion and determination needed a spokesperson, Savithri would surely be nominated by the entire TRN clan.

### **ARUN'S WRITE UP**

When your favourite uncle comes to you asking you for words of wisdom in your life you know you're in trouble....

Like all our journeys in life mine is both unique with some sprinkled commonalities. I was blessed to be born to the most wonderful parents and extended family in the world (not a paid endorsement). I also feel fortunate to be born in the US...albeit in one of the states with the lowest Indian American populations in the country. I was that little speck of cinnamon in a sea of white sugar.

Although at times I felt like a fish out of water (or more aptly an idly without sambar), I was the only person I knew who grew up eating dosas and curries and then went out on the weekends to have beers and socialize with close Wasp American friends on the weekends (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants in case you didn't know). This life was oddly very easy and normal to me. And of course, with my little free time outside of studying like a good Indian American boy and socializing was left to playing the usual ABCD pastime of obligatory tennis which I loved and was fortunate to be decent.

My upbringing has shaped my outlook in life with strong belief in God, strong family bonds, belief in a strong belief in education (where a 98 on an exam would get me a "what single question did you miss? "by my dad), and strong beliefs in meritocracy, hard work and capitalism which are part of the foundations of America's success.

Growing up my summers were often partially filled with trips to India to spend time soaking up Indian culture and spend time with relatives. It was a mini crash course on Indian culture. It's these times with my uncle that are most memorable to me. My love of animals (especially large dogs) accompanied by my uncle being a part time comedian and full-time veterinarian that were a perfect match and among my fondest and most enjoyable times with extended family. Spending quality time with family, laughter, going on house calls to see canine family companions and spending time in the excruciating furnace of Indian summers often without AC are things I miss the most...Actually...forget the Indian heat which is a memory I'd like to forget.

My time in medical school and as a physician has taught me much. For example, how to analyse problems in a systematic approach, dedication to the service, how to function at a high level on little sleep, and how much I appreciate non-MD normal life in contrast. My piece of advice is: eat healthy

Whole Foods, exercise your body and brain everyday (I'm a gym rat who likes running and weights) and have several brain challenging habits and hobbies), maintain strong family and social connections, moderate drinking, eating, don't smoke, and have a good sense of humour. There you have it - universal health advice that results in healthy living, less disease, longevity, and happiness. It's simple yet elusive for some. I'll be waiting for my Nobel Prize...

I'd like to give a big warm thanks to my favourite uncle for allowing me a brief opportunity to share.

### **My Take on Arun's Write-up**

When my nephew Arun — now a respected radiologist — sends me such a well-written piece, I must admit my first reaction was: “So, this is what happens when a boy drinks American beer, eats Indian dosas, and studies like a frightened IIT aspirant!”

He begins by saying that if a favourite uncle asks for “words of wisdom,” one should be worried. Correct, Arun. You should be. I usually charge consultation fees — but for you, family discount: free advice, no warranty.

He says he was born as “a speck of cinnamon in a sea of white sugar.” I fully agree. I saw him as a baby — he looked exactly like that: a tiny brown dot.

I was deeply touched when he mentioned our times together — the dogs, the laughter, the furnace-like summers. Arun, I am proud of your nostalgia, but please keep one thing in mind: that Indian heat is still functioning. We didn't turn it off. It is waiting for you.

I do appreciate his dedication — running, weights, brain hobbies, family bonding. He has written world-class advice, and I fully support it. (Except running. I prefer running only behind dogs or away from trouble.)

Finally, Arun thanks me warmly and says I'm his favourite uncle. Dear Arun, thank you. I always knew it. But nice to have written proof.

If he does win the Nobel Prize for this health philosophy of his, I will proudly claim full credit. After all, someone had to take him into the Indian heat and teach him survival skill.

### **FAMILY FRIEND VIJU'S WRITE UP**

Shankar and Kumar are dearer for I was always with them. Every summer they

used to go to beach and I was also part of them. When they go movies, I was part of them.

I and Shankar used to take hire cycle and drive. One such time shankar ran over a stone and feel down and broke his tooth. For 2 months we were going to dentist regularly in the evening. We enjoyed walking to Dr's place and get his tooth back in place. Diwali festival is unforgettable because of so much crackers being burst. The best part is entire family used to burst crackers and the fun was unlimited. They had a cook who used to make so many sweets and karams. Kumar's favourite is Laddu.

Navarathri is again celebrated in grand manner and we used to visit all our neighbours and collect Sundal. When summer comes, we play nonstop cricket and 28 card game. Shankar's family all are expert in cards. Though kumar is very close I used to be with shankar. Once kumar invited me to his hostel for dinner which was memorable. They had a Cow called Lakshmi which is very sweet. We are blessed to see her new born calf and hats off to Shankar's mom and Dr Balu for taking of lakshmi.

#### **MY COMMENTS**

Viju's write-up beautifully captures the spirit of those carefree days—filled with friendship, mischief, festivals, and the strong bond he shared with Shankar and Kumar. His memories add a delightful personal touch to our family tapestry.

#### **SUJATHA & VISWANATHAN's WRITE UP**

We and Dr Balu's family

We know each other for 3 generations spanning more than five decades.

Mami is the backbone of the house and runs the family without cribbing. She is thrifty and manages the household with whatever is given to her by Dr Balu. To us, she has always been loving and caring.

Doctor became a vet not by choice but by chance. That didn't matter, he developed passion for the profession and always gave his best. At one point of time, he was the most sought-after vet in the city by all VIPs. His selfless service to La Chatelaine school taking care of their dairy and poultry farm without expectation of remuneration will always be remembered.

Sujatha fondly recalls accompanying the Doctor during home visits since she was a dog lover. They always had one or two dogs at home thanks to her frequent interaction with the Doctor.

Even when he had a surgery he never complained about God or questioned why he should suffer. He was always positive. There is no dip in his enthusiasm as

he planned a visit to the US to spend time with his grandson even at the age of ninety.

Nothing is a waste in his house. He is so creative that empty bottles, ice cream sticks, colour paper etc would all be turned into creative art with his nimble fingers. Release of a book narrating interesting episodes in his life showcases his literary skills.

In short, Dr Balu is a multifaceted person with a good heart always working for a noble cause.

Latha, her daughter, grew together with Sujatha. They worked together in school, took up audit assignments and did IT Returns filing for corporates like TCS, handled translation jobs for cartoon networks, etc. she is a bold person with strong convictions and a will to succeed.

Coming to his grandchildren, they are gems. Very loving, caring and responsible. By God's grace they are well settled now and what more do we need.

It's a real pleasure for Sujatha and myself to share our random ramblings about your family which we will always cherish in our hearts now and in the years to come.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sujatha and Viswanathan

24/9/2025.

### **MY TAKE**

Sujatha and Viswanathan have written so beautifully about me that I started wondering if they were talking about someone else! Still, I will happily accept all the compliments before they change their mind. Thank you both for remembering even my “ice-cream stick engineering” talents They have also remembered Latha—my bold, busy daughter who has done every job except driving an auto.

People who stay that long in your life are either true family...or they have simply forgotten how to escape! But jokes apart, their affection is genuine, their memories are precious, and their words—truly heart-warming.

Thank you both for this lovely write-up. I will treasure it... and show it to anyone who doubts that I am a “multi-faceted personality”!

### **OUR FAMILY FRIEND VARADHAN'S WRITE UP**

Balu has been my steadfast friend from our Veterinary College days. In our lives we may have very many persons as friends. But we develop an instant and effortless feeling of connection, natural attraction and understanding only with a few. Such a feeling builds up in you a sense of emotional bonding and shared interests. In this respect Balu is at the very top of all my list of friends. In addition to his exceptional talent as a Veterinarian, Balu's endearing qualities earned him the admiration of his clients. Thus, he was close to many celebrities in Madras. To name a few, starting from the Gopalapuram first family, he was known among many elite citizens in industry, entertainment and politics cutting across many parties. But he never took advantage of these contacts for his personal gain.

He has a very good sense of humour and he is famous for his skill for repartees and instant counter punches in any conversation. He is soft spoken and never raises his voice. At the same time, he never hesitates to confront any officialdom in a gentle and polite way and he used to win over them many a time, the qualities I lacked.

He also, like me, had to navigate through tough challenges in life especially in the marital life of his only beloved child Latha. He handled the situation admirably and brought up and guided his wonderful grandchildren Eshwar and Janani to succeed in their scholastic journey and I am very happy they both are doing very well.

Latha also as a single mother worked hard to bring up her children. She also had to go through a lot of emotional upheaval and she overcame the hardship through her job and support of parents and her children. I remember the travails the family went through in the rehabilitation of her life especially after her two-wheeler accident. Balu helped her to take up the challenges with perseverance and I am very happy that Balu's family has overcome all adversities and I am glad Balu now has a peaceful journey in his life's home stretch. God Bless the Balus.

### **THE VARADHAN VERDICT – MY TAKE**

Varadhan has always had a dangerous habit — he sees only the good in me! That's what fifty years of friendship can do to a man. If he says I have “instant counter-punches,” it is only because he provided the perfect punching bag with his own sharp wit. And yes, he is right — I never raised my voice... mainly because he always spoke louder!

His affection for Latha and my grandchildren has always touched me deeply. A friend who stands by you in difficult times is a blessing — and Varadhan has been exactly that, from our youth till this peaceful stretch of my life.

Thank you, my dear friend, for writing with so much warmth. Your friendship has been one of the finest gifts of my journey.

### **NANU’S WRITE UP**

Nature's permutation and combination at its best!!!

Creating a unique realization of feelings through blood relations and habitat...

Some memories.

We are a part of the family tree, consisting of 3 Brothers and 2 sisters.. namely, Rajagopalan (Raju), Padmanabhan (Babu), Uma (sister), Narayanswamy (myself) and Usha (sister).

It gives a sense of nostalgia, to mention one of the epitomes of affection and relationship with Uma...A resemblance to a Coconut (hard from outside and soft from inside), is Uma.

A beginner of a chaotic situation in the family, she was always viewed as a fierce personality, but her tenderness and softness to put off the blaze was amazing...

Usha, being the last member of our tree, was privileged to enjoy the major chunk of love and affection from our parents...Once, I had to drop her to school, on the scooter, and we had a fall, as she lost her grip... I was blamed for the fall. no questions asked!!!

Most witty of the 5-sibling army was Babu... who enjoyed playing pranky tricks, especially on Uma, who was short tempered and reactive... intentions were never serious, but the adrenaline flowed, towards laughter and joy.

### **FROM MY CORNER**

Nanu’s write-up is like opening an old family trunk—full of stories, laughter, and a few “mild explosions,” mostly courtesy of Uma! His coconut comparison is perfect... many of us have felt that hard shell and soft heart at close range.

His description of the five siblings paints a lively picture: Usha, the pampered youngest who never gets blamed; Babu, the official prank minister; and Nanu himself, forever the innocent victim of scooter accidents and sibling politics!

Reading his memories, one thing is clear—this was a house filled with noise, warmth, drama, and plenty of love. Nanu has captured it all with charm and gentle humour, making us smile as we revisit those good old days.

### **RAJU's WRITE UP**

Reminiscences of Rajgoalan[Raju]: eldest grandson of TR Naranaswamy of the Gopalpuram Family Tree. I am pleased to pen a few anecdotes, interactions and emotional outpourings with the members of the Gopalpuram family.

**THE FAMILY HEAD:** My grandfather and grandmother: T R Narayanaswamy [TR Thatha] and Rajalakshmi Ammal. [ Fondly known as Lakshmi Amma]

TR Thatha: A majestic personality. An Executive with Spencers, he used to travel to office in a cycle rickshaw: you must visualize his commanding personality well adorned in a neat dress.

Thatha was reputed to be a very good administrator and a mathematical genius used to work at the Madras race course on race days and had reputation of posting the fastest results of the winnings figures, after each race.

As the eldest grandson, I was his favourite, along with Patta and Radha [eldest granddaughters]

One day, we were sitting out on the sand bed in the front portion of the house. I was busy drawing on the sand. Thatha noticed it and queried as to what I had drawn. I answered: mysore pak. And lo behold; next day lakshmi amma had prepared Mysore Pak for her pet grandson; as per Thatha's request.

On numerous occasions, Thatha used to take me in the rickshaw to spencers, and I used to delve into the array of icecreams, sitting on the High Stools of the icecream Bar Room. The icecreams were fantastic, both variety and quality wise. I returned home in Thatha's rickshaw.

The best example of thatha's fondness for his grandson Raju is portrayed by this action of Thatha. We [my father and myself] were going to Secunderabad from Chennai by train and Thatha had come to send us off. Just before the train whistled out, Thatha pulled me off the train, through the window and told my father; that he will send me by plane and asked my father to pick me up at the airport on coming Sunday. Thus, a young 7/8-year-old, made a flying trip to Secunderabad. I had a lovely trip and fondly taken care of, by the airhostess and landed with TWO pocketsful of chocolates: courtesy:AirHostess . I had the privilege of the youngest and FIRST flyer from the Gopalapuram Clan!!

The saddest part of the narrative was that Thatha was a severe Diabetic and passed away at an early age.

LAKSHMI AMMA: She is a woman of grit, perseverance and a kind and benevolent disposition. After her husband's passing away, she managed to bring up her children; against all odds. Earlier in her life, she used to single handedly take care of all the guest /relatives who came from the interiors of tamilnadu and stayed at Gopalapuram, as TR Thatha; was the Godfather to all his relatives.

Lakshmiamma was fond of me, as I was the eldest grandson and I also am proud to have such a lovely grandma. She is known for her perfection, intelligence and cleanliness. She always has a handtowel tucked in her saree; at the waist. Always keeps her stove spic and span. A very sharp women and I was stunned to see her mark the date on the gas cylinder; on its arrival= mark the intelligence on an uneducated woman, [that to 60yrs ago] HATS OFF to the Grand Lady.

There is a bed in the room with a large window, under a huge mango tree and that keeps the bedroom cool and breezy. I go and relax on the bed. The beauty of this is that Laksihamm so partial towards me, that she shoos away anybody else trying to us her bed. Similarly, she fries papadam exclusively for her second son Balu, she doesn't serve it to anybody else, except to her pet Grandson Raju.

A cook par excellence: In a normal world Lakshmi amma's hand should have been bedecked with Gold Bangles: for the lovely cuisine she dishes out. A very innovative Chef. She had prepared ready to eat Morkhuzhambu for her son Chinnu, who was in the USA: that is also 60 yrs ago. Donot say that you have tasted the best pickles, if you have not tasted lakshmi amma's avvakai and kasu manga pickles. The avvakai with those kothu kadali and the tangy kasu manga have a long shelf and the taste is devastating and mind glowing. Thinking of the pickles has my saliva dripping. I used to take the kasu manga to the terrace and laying it on the straw mat to dry it in the sun Her other supe speciality dishes were: a) Parupu Urandai Morkhuzhambu b) Murukanga Vizhudu Kootu = steamed drumstick innerflesh is scraped and cooked and garnished with sambar vadam and fried roasted / cashewnuts [tongue tickling??!!]

Lakshmi amma has been very close to us. She has come and stayed with us, for prolonged periods, wherever I was posted: @ pune sangli, phaltan. I remember t Sangli; the police DSP was Mr Venkatachalam [kuppan]a family friend from g

Gopalapuram. Was amazed to see the DSP's respect and love for Lakshmi amma. While we were walking on the road, we were interjected by a Jeep and the DSP jumped out and vented his joy at meeting Lakshmi amma. Lakshmi amma also had dip in the Krishna River in Sangli. [ until then I never knew that the Krsihna River was flowing just behind my SBI Branch. I fondly recollect my sojourn at powai for 15 days with Lakshmi amma, alongwith patta [Lakshmi amma's eldest granddaughter] and chinnu who was then at IIT Powai. I miss my grandma.

Ramachandran [ Amandan - Thatha's eldest son] & Ms.Savithri :

My father Amandan: A lovable father and had a lot of faith and belief on his son. He has fulfilled all our wishes and demands. I drove a lambretta at 17. Dad was finicky about cleanliness. I used to dust the house and keep it spic and span. He used to come back from office at 3pm on many occasions we used to rush and dust the house, just before he comes. On coming home, he will check the window sills and feel for any dust by running his fingers on the sills and if any dust is found, he will just rub it on our chin.

Dad had one principle: none of the children in the house will stay at home from 4 to 6pm. We had to go out and compulsorily play some game or the other. I used to excel in Table Tennis and Cricket. Dad bought me a cricket kit. Dad was proud that I played well in the local cricket tournaments and I played for the SBI team.

Dad had presented me with a gift for every birthday. Dad is a great sportsman. A fighter. He has played cricket for Hyderabad and Tamilnadu. At school he had won accolades in athletics. Excelled in table tennis/badminton/hockey and cricket. I remember, at a match where dad scored a blistering 100, hitting like Mushtaq Ali - going down half the pitch. A spectator rushed and bought a bat and presented it to Dad.

Savithri: my mom. A very sweet mom. And a very beautiful Lady also. A very affectionate person. Has won prizes in badminton. An excellent cook [imbibed from Lakshmi amma] moms' favourites= badam halwa, mysore pak, kadalai urundai carrot halwa and all diwali sweets. WE miss DAD and MOM who are no more.

VIJAYA: MY WIFE of 50 years. A very sweet girl. Very knowledgeable and intelligent girl. Interested in all aspects of life. Keeps update on all matters. Known as a mobile ENCYCLOPEDIA [ Like her father] A veena exponent. Has been very supportive always, in thick and thin. A pillar of strength to the

family. Comes from a very closeknit family. A very unassuming person and a person of simplicity and no wants.

DIPAK: My Son; A very nice person. Standout friendship between mother and son. Friendly with everybody.

BALASUBRAMANIAN [Balu] -: 2<sup>nd</sup> son of Thatha & Ms Kamala  
Balu, my uncle is a very friendly, affectionate and cheerful person. A sportman and plays cricket. I still recollect a match; wherein my dad was bowling and batsman snicked the ball and flew to slips, where Balu took a beautiful catch, with outstretched hands.

I used to attend most of the matches and remember the lunch time, when we went to Guptas for that lovely coffee. As a veterinary doctor, he was friendly with all the animals. Like at one of the matches he was friendly with a dog and when we were packing up to go home, the dog jumped into the auto and came home with us. It was with us for a week, before the owner took back the canine. Balu has an artful and creative hand. He goes on building/designing new articles. Like he overturns stool and makes an autorickshaw. I remember a time when Balu came to Secunderabad and asked me as to what I liked most. I said Buses. Later I found Balu sticking the whole house with paper cuttings of so many buses

At Gopalapuram we used to play cricket with Balu, Sudhir and friends. Although I was a young boy, Balu used to play and I had the pleasures of scoring centuries on many occasions. I think those cricketing days made me a good cricketer. Kamala Manni is a silent and unassuming lady. Very supportive to the family. Her inner strength and Lata's fighting spirit, has helped them overcome all difficulties and taste success and happiness in life. Wish them all Happiness.

RADHAKRISHNAN; [chinnu] 3<sup>rd</sup> son of Thatha: Chinnu is an engineer from Guindy Engineering College and an M. Tech from IIT Powai. A very studious person and a very likeable person. When Chinnu comes to Chennai with a big suitcase, we find one or two clothes on the top layer and below we find stacks of books. That is Chinnu. When we see Chinnu; we get nervous: why: because he will ask to explain the pythagorous theorem.

Chinnu has been very close to our heart. A cherished uncle of ours for me and wife Viji. Chinnu was also very affectionate towards us. He never missed an opportunity to come and stay with us, when he visits India. Chinnu loves eating

good food. He takes less of main food, but the spread must be varied. In Pune walking on Laxmi Road, he will buy small nelika, green tamarind, groundnuts and cashewnuts.

Chinnu has been with us at Pune and Bangalore. He was very close to Viji. He has won table Tennis prizes in US universities. He is the recipient of THE US PRESIDENTSMEDAL ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS.

RUKMANI: T.S. Narayanasway, eldest daughter of THATHA: TSN was in the real estate business. Had a thriving business. Came into bad times due to mischief of his partners. TSN and Rukmani had 7 children. TSN was very fond of his family. They were provided the best things in life. I had the pleasure of spending y holidays at their place every summer. Almost a 20 day stint every year. TSN was very affectionate. He used to take me out onto his sites and loaded his car with crates of soft drinks—frutnik drinks. All the latest pictures were viewed at the best theatres. Meanwhile, I used to get hold of the non-detail books from Patta and Chandra and finish reading them. Madras university has a high standard in English.

A sudden manifestation of cancer, robbed TSN from the family. With partners trying to cheat the family, there was turmoil all around. Rukmani and the children put up stoic face and battled against all odds. The children went for jobs and have now successfully won the race. All the children are very sweet and affectionate. Patta is a very mature lady and very close to me. A very good teacher. Chandra was a banker, but cancer took her away. Padmini: I heard VATHAPI GANAPATIM on her Veena. All the family is well settled now.

SARASWATHI (2<sup>nd</sup> daughter of Thatha) - JAYARAMAN: Saraswathi[saras] is Viji's mother and my mother-in-law. Jayaraman, a ret'd Income tax officer, was a very passionate family man. His main aim is to see that his children are all comfortably placed. They are his priority. In the bargain he will forego all his comforts. A voracious reader and a knowledge bank. He loves to be with us and has stayed with us in Pune and Bangalore. He loves the potato patties and potato wada at Pune.

Saras: is a very loving mother. So concerned about her children. A very sprightly and cheerful lady. So vivacious and alert. She does her reading of all the magazines; watches all programs on TV. A great and innovative cook. Any dish shown on TV in the afternoon, is tried out by Saras in the evening. Such is her enthusiasm. Saras has stayed with us at all the places we have been posted.

RAM (son of Saras and brother of Vij) -GOWRI: . Ram is the darling in the family. I have been associated with Ram for 50 yrs. He has grown in front of me. And grown are the love and affection We always love to see that Ram is happy. We have enjoyed at all the places; Sangli = took Ram to Miraj and had Masala Dosai. Ram reacted when the chutney was placed. His dislike for curd was noticed. Phaltan: pandubas sugarcane juice and Papadi. Bombay: Ram's burnt palm was treated. Batata wada at Dadar and Sandwich at Goregaon- cannot list everything = madhuban, chitale, asha dining, Gowri: a sweet addition to the family. A very intelligent girl. Drowns herself in Bhagwat Gita and other religious lectures. Parthasarathy's successor!! Loves all in the family. Love the double Tea at Laxmi Road

Radha & Ramani: Radha is the eldest daughter of Saras. Dr Padmashri Ramani is the Managing Trustee of the Sankara Eye Hospitals, which runs top-class eye hospitals in India, extending free surgeries to the poor and downtrodden. Dr Ramani is a meticulous administrator and a very quality conscious person. Sankara Coimbatore has been conferred as the No:1 hospital in India. Radha: A strong-willed lady. A beautiful dancer. A lovely host. Heads the training activities of staff at Sankara. Takes care of the family.

**PADMA:** last and 3<sup>rd</sup> daughter of Thatha: Padma was a very loving person. A graduate and teacher. She passed away at a young age, due to cancer. Her daughters Sumathi and Meena are well settled now.

### **From Balu's Corner – On Raju's Epic Memory Marathon**

Raju's write-up should come with a warning label: "Sit comfortably before reading — this is a full family documentary!"

He has poured out memories with such affection that every person he mentions comes alive again.

His stories of Thatha, Lakshmi Amma, and the whole clan are narrated with the excitement of a child and the detail of an historian. Only Raju can turn Mysore Pak, a rickshaw ride, a gas-cylinder date, and a dog jumping into an auto into such charming episodes!

He has lovingly captured every corner of the family — the elders, the cousins, the cricket matches, the pranks, the food, the travels, the joys and even the struggles. Reading it feels like walking through Gopalapuram again, hearing the laughter, smelling the pickles, and dodging the inevitable family drama!

Raju's write-up is long, heartfelt, and overflowing with nostalgia — exactly the way family memories should be. I, rather we, never knew that manni (Savithri) was a badminton player and that too a prize winner.

## **DIPAK RAJAGOPAL'S WRITE UP**

I am very fortunate to be born in this Family. My Grandpa Amandan Thatha is a Great Sportsman. When you visit his house in Nana Peth, Pune there is a showcase full of trophies. Just like Thatha, Grandma is also a wonderful badminton player. I have lost matches with my grandma when I was young and I am proud to lose. My Grandfather was an All Rounder. My Dad used to say that one year my grandpa got Award for the Best Batsman and in the next Year He got Award for the Best Bowler. In one match my grandpa hit a sixer and the ball went missing. The ball went in the gutter outside the stadium. My Grandpa hammered a Double Century and one of his Big Fan who Hero worshipped him gifted him a brand-new cricket bat.

Balu Mama (Actually he is my younger Grandfather), but everyone calls him Balu as he is very close to all. Due to huge age difference instead of calling Balu, I started calling him Balu Mama.

Balu Mama has got a great sense of humour. He is known as Nagesh in our Family. He keeps you always happy and smiling. His timing of jokes is perfect. Balu Mama is a very strong pillar of support to all of us. Everyone in his family Kamala Mani, Lata, Eshwar are so good and loving. Jans (Janani) is a good friend despite the huge age difference.

Lakshmima is so loving and caring. She takes special care and takes efforts to prepare kesari and bonda for me. She and my grandma take so much interest in me. They know even the minute details about me.

I have good relationship with all. Savitri Mani and Suri Mama.Padmini and Shivakumar also talk with me nicely. Their sons Chandar and Shankar are also good friends.Both of them are intelligent and well-mannered and take good care of their parents. Raji Mani and Kannan Mama are also good friends. I have not interacted much with Arun. He is a good guy.

Shankar and Kumar are awesome. They always enquire about me. I am a Fan of Kumar. Kumar is a very jolly person and takes life as it comes.I like his outlook towards life.He is a gem of a person.Have learnt a lot of things from him.

Just like my grandpa, I am also a Sportsman. I have played all Sports. In School I played Football. People fondly called me Pele. I was the shortest Basketball Player with Maximum Baskets scored. I was the fastest 100 meters runner in School.

My main Sport was Tennis.

I Captained the Inter School, Inter College and University Teams and Won Championships. I was also the Winner of the Inter League Tennis Tournaments.

Once I beat the 7th Seeded Player in India. I was down 3 Match points and I fought back from the brink of defeat to win the match. I also reached the Semi Finals of the Poona Open Pool Tournament

Just like Amandan Thatha, I am fond of Walking and I walk for 2 hours every day. Just like him, I go to all Temples. I was the highest in the Temple Run Game. Have scored more than 16.67 Crore.

Amandan Thatha is a good host. He will make sure to treat you royally and will provide you the best

### **From Balu's Desk – On Dipak the “Walking Trophy Cabinet”**

Dipak's write-up reads like a sports commentary mixed with family pride — and what a delightful mix it is! He has inherited not just his Amandan Thatha's talent, but also his ability to narrate every achievement with the excitement of an ESPN anchor.

His memories of Thatha's sixer landing in the gutter, Grandma defeating him in badminton, and the entire family cheering him on are pure gold. And then comes Dipak himself — football Pele, shortest basketball star, fastest runner, tennis captain, pool semi-finalist, and champion temple-walker!

His affection for everyone — from Lakshmiamma's kesari, to Kumar's cheerful philosophy, to Janani being his “friend across generations” — shows his big heart behind all the big achievements.

Dipak's write-up is full of energy, warmth and sportsmanship. If our family had a medal for enthusiasm, he would win that too — undoubtedly Gold.





# GIFTED GIANTS AND TALENT TREASURY

“In our family tree, even the leaves have certificates—and the flowers sometimes paint.”



“Not just roots and branches — this family tree stores gifted giants and priceless talents.”

## CHAPTER 11

### GIFTED GIANTS AND TALENT TREASURY

*“In our family tree, even the leaves have certificates — and the flowers sometimes paint.”*

#### INTRODUCTION

Our family tree doesn't just branch out — it multitasks. It produces degrees, doodles, inventions, and the occasional masterpiece made from things that honestly should've been thrown away. We grow talent the way others grow weeds: effortlessly and everywhere.

This is the corner where our family's IQ shakes hands with our DIY. Some of us collected medals, titles, and qualifications like they were on discount. Others grabbed a paintbrush, a pen, or whatever junk was lying around — and magically turned it into art. Nobody here knows how to stay idle.

In the **Gifted Giants** part, you'll find the achievements of our high-fliers (living and proudly remembered). I've even sneaked in a few of my own — very politely, very modestly, please note. And just to keep things lively, I've added imaginary bio-data versions of my dad and mom too.

In the **Talent Treasury** part, you'll find the creative chaos — drawings, paintings, craft, and other proof that talent sometimes arrives covered in glue and glitter.

So, relax and stroll through this cheerful mix of logic, laughter, brilliance, and brushstrokes. In this family, intelligence and creativity are twins who refuse to sit still.

#### GIFTED GIANTS

##### BIO-DATA OF DR. N. RADHAKRISHNAN (RADHA), PhD, PE (Chinnu)

“He aimed for excellence quietly — and ended up inspiring an entire generation loudly.”

I am a highly motivated, visionary executive with deep experience at the intersection of interdisciplinary engineering, computer science, and information technology. Throughout my career, I have had the privilege of serving in leadership positions across academia, research laboratories, and government agencies in the United States. My work has revolved arograms, creating world-

class computational infrastructures, mentoring scientists and engineers, and defining research directions for the future.

## **Education**

My academic journey began in India and continued in the United States:

- **PhD, Civil Engineering (1969)** – University of Texas at Austin
- **MTech, Civil Engineering (1962)** – Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay
- **BE, Civil Engineering (1960)** – University of Madras

## **My Professional Journey**

### **Summary**

From 2010 onward, I have been serving as a **Consultant** to universities and government organizations in research management, academics, IT, and institutional development.

From **2003 to 2010**, I served as the **Vice Chancellor for Research & Economic Development** at **North Carolina A&T State University**, where I managed a **\$58M research portfolio** and helped double the University's sponsored research funding within six years.

Since **2005**, I have also been a **Tenured Professor** in the College of Engineering at NC A&T.

From **1999 to 2003**, I served as a **Senior Executive Service (SES) Director** of the **Computational and Information Sciences Directorate** at the **U.S. Army Research Laboratory (ARL)** and the **Chief Information Officer (CIO)** for the Army's corporate R&D laboratory, overseeing a **\$180M program**.

From **1986 to 1999**, I was the **Founding Director** of the **Information Technology Laboratory (ITL)** at the **U.S. Army Engineer Waterways Experiment Station (WES)** and CIO of the largest civil/environmental engineering R&D organization in the U.S.

Between **1969 and 1999**, I served as researcher, project manager, adjunct professor, advisor, and mentor across various institutions, while simultaneously developing major interdisciplinary engineering programs and computational research initiatives.

### **Consultancy (2010–Present)**

As a consultant, I have completed major institutional studies for several universities and research laboratories, including:

- Central State University (Ohio)
- Appalachian State University
- Western Carolina University
- Becker College (Games Software Marketing)
- Clark-Atlanta University
- University of Alabama at Birmingham
- Jackson State University
- NC A&T & UNC Greensboro (High Performance Computing Study)

**Vice Chancellor for Research & Economic Development (2003–2010)**  
**North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, NC**

As Vice Chancellor, I was responsible for all research and sponsored programs at the university. I developed policies, handled pre- and post-award functions, managed intellectual property and technology transfer, and helped establish mechanisms that advanced the economic development of the region.

A few milestones:

- **Doubled sponsored research funding** in six years
- Organized research into **8 interdisciplinary clusters**, a model later adopted by other universities
- Helped the university secure its first **NSF Engineering Research Center**, a historic achievement for an HBCU
- Strengthened industry partnerships and increased industry-funded projects from \$20,000 to over \$2M

**Director, Computational & Information Sciences Directorate (1999–2003)**

U.S. Army Research Laboratory (ARL), Aberdeen, MD

I managed a **\$180M program** with more than **750 personnel**, focusing on:

- Battlefield communications
- Data fusion and knowledge management
- High performance computing
- Computational science & engineering
- Atmospheric and battlespace modeling

I also:

- Served as **CIO** for ARL with a **\$36M annual IT budget**
- Established the **DOD High Performance Computing Information Assurance Intrusion Detection Center**
- Led major multi-university and industry-government R&D consortia
- Oversaw cutting-edge research centers in CFD, CSM, and materials modeling

### **Founding Director, Information Technology Laboratory (1986–1999)**

U.S. Army Engineer WES, Vicksburg, MS

At WES, I built the **premier engineering IT laboratory** in the U.S. Department of Defense, growing its budget from **\$15M to \$110M** and establishing:

- The first DoD **High Performance Computing Major Shared Resource Center**
- The **Tri-Service CADD/GIS Technology Center**
- The largest Corps of Engineers Regional Processing Center
- State-of-the-art scientific visualization and virtual reality centers
- A 21-mile fiber-optic backbone
- Major innovations in high-speed communication, data management, and engineering modeling

### **Early Career (1969–1986)**

I held multiple roles including:

- Research Civil Engineer
- Chief of the Automation Technology Center
- Adjunct Professor at Mississippi State University
- Developer and instructor of over **50 short courses** in computer-aided engineering
- Member of numerous MS and PhD committees

I also began my teaching career earlier, serving as Lecturer at **IIT Bombay** and **College of Engineering, Guindy** between 1959–1962.

### **Chief Information Officer (CIO) Roles — Unique Responsibilities**

In both ARL and WES, I held a unique dual role — responsible for:

- Scientific and research computing
- Enterprise IT systems
- Cost-reimbursable IT operations
- Global-scale communications infrastructure
- Upgrading thousands of computers and VTC systems
- Building world-class IT environments in record time

This rare combination made my position one of the few of its kind in the federal government.

## **Major Attributes & Achievements**

### **Research Leadership**

- Helped A&T become one of only **four HBCUs** designated “High Research Activity”
- Increased patents, licensing revenue, and start-up companies at the university
- Established new academic programs in **Computational Science & Engineering** and **Biotechnology**

### **Vision & Innovation**

- Conceived and built entire research centers in HPC, IA (Information Assurance), Language Translation, GIS/CADD, Visualization, and more
- Played a major leadership role in DoD–university partnerships

### **Funding Accomplishment**

Secured funds for numerous high-impact programs, often pioneering them for the first time within the Army:

- CASE & GCASE programs (20+ years)
- The Edge Warrior Project
- Information Assurance Center
- Computational Signature Modeling
- NSF, NOAA, Army, and Intelligence Agency centers at NC A&T

I have worked closely with many universities including:

- University of Texas at Austin
- Ohio State University
- University of Illinois (NCSA)

- Rice University (CRPC)
- Mississippi State University
- University of Tennessee
- University of Southern California
- Jackson State University
- Howard University
- Florida A&M
- Many HBCUs and minority-serving institutions

I have served on dozens of advisory boards across academia, government, and industry.

### **Major Recognitions**

Some of the honors I have received include:

- **Senior Executives Presidential Meritorious Performance Award** (2003)
- **Army Superior Service Award**
- **Decoration for Exceptional Civilian Service** (1999 & 1993)
- **Computing in Civil Engineering Award, ASCE**
- **Federal 100 Award** (1993 & 1996)
- **Distinguished Alumnus Award, IIT Bombay**
- Numerous Army performance and service awards over three decades.

### **Closing Note**

My career — spanning India and the United States — has been marked by a commitment to excellence, innovation, and service. Whether as a researcher, director, teacher, CIO, or consultant, I have always believed in building systems and institutions that outlast individuals. If there is any legacy I claim, it is the many young engineers, scientists, and leaders who continue to take these missions forward.

#### **BIO-DATA OF PADMA SHRI Dr. R. V. RAMANI**

“Dedicated to bringing world-class eye care to every doorstep, guided by compassion, service, and vision.”

I am Dr. R. V. Ramani, Padma Shri Awardee (2019), and I have had the privilege of serving as a **Board of Governor in supersession of the Medical Council of India**. I am also the **Founder and Managing Trustee of Sankara**

**Eye Foundation – India**, built on the belief of providing “**world-class eye care with a social impact.**”

I was born to **Late Dr. A. Ramanathan**. My early education took place at **R.S. Puram Municipal Boys High School, Coimbatore**, after which I pursued my medical studies at **Kasturba Medical College, Manipal and Mangalore**, where I was honoured as the **Best Outgoing Student**.

In 1972, my wife **Dr. Radha Ramani** and I established a memorial clinic in Coimbatore in honour of my late father. Together, we built our professional lives on the philosophy:

**“Life is a sojourn on this planet; service is the rent we pay.”**

Recognising the profound need for voluntary initiatives in healthcare, and blessed, guided, and inspired by the **Sankaracharyas of Kanchi**, my wife and I founded what later grew into the **Sankara Movement** in 1977—47 years ago.

Over the decades, I have dedicated myself to **Community Eye Care**, and I define it as “*high-quality, cost-effective, readily available eye care at the doorsteps of rural India.*” India accounts for nearly **one-fourth of the world’s blind population**, and the major challenges faced by villagers—non-availability, non-affordability, and inaccessibility of quality care—became the driving force behind our mission. Through Sankara Eye Foundation, we have been addressing this huge need with remarkable success for more than **four decades**.

In 1990, we launched the “**Gift of Vision**” rural outreach programme as a Health, Hunger and Humanity initiative of **Rotary International** and **Rotary Coimbatore Central**. This programme continues successfully even today, serving people across **164 districts in 10 Indian states**.

To date, Sankara has

- touched **over 10 million lives**,
- screened **more than 6 million rural patients**, and
- performed **over 2.6 million free eye surgeries** for the needy poor.

Across all our hospitals in India, we perform approximately **1,000 free eye surgeries every single day**, benefitting rural communities on a massive scale.

In 1995, in partnership with Rotary Coimbatore Central, we initiated “**Rainbow**”, a preventive eye care programme for children. Over the years, this

initiative has screened **over 6 million school children** for undetected visual defects, providing spectacles and timely medical or surgical treatment whenever required.

Our hospitals operate on a **unique 80:20 model**—where 80% of our patients, the rural poor, receive completely free eye care, and the remaining 20% are affordable patients whose contributions enable us to cross-subsidise and sustain high-quality services. This model has allowed us to grow without compromising our mission.

To support our expanding work, we have developed strong **processes and systems** across Operations, IT, Medical Administration, Quality and Training, Human Resources, and Financial Management, ensuring efficient replication and high standards across all centres.

We also established the **Sankara Academy of Vision**, the capacity-building arm of our movement. The academy offers postgraduate and undergraduate courses for doctors, administrators, optometrists, and paramedics, strengthening the next generation of eye-care professionals.

Today, Sankara stands as a truly **Pan-India institution**, with **13 fully operational Sankara Eye Hospitals** across the country and another under construction in **Varanasi**. I am proud that **12 of our hospitals are NABH certified**, reflecting our commitment to excellence and ethical practice.

Beyond Sankara, I have been actively involved in Rotary. I am a **Major Donor** and a **Past President of Rotary Coimbatore Central**, the world's first **100% Paul Harris Fellow Club**. In 1980, I was chosen to be part of the **Group Study Exchange Team to the USA** on behalf of Rotary International.

### **Awards and Recognitions**

Over the years, I have been humbled to receive several prestigious national and international awards, including:

- Lifetime Achievement Award – Kasturba Medical College Alumni (1996)
- Role Model of India Award – New Delhi (15 December 2000)
- *Heroes of Humanity* Award – Art of Living Foundation (2010)
- *For the Sake of Honour* Award – Rotary Club of Udumalpet (2013)
- IMC Ramakrishna Bajaj National Quality Excellence Award – Mumbai (2014)

- **Vaidyarathna Award** – Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Kanchipuram
- **IAPB Regional Achievement Award for South East Asia (2016)** for my contributions to eye care
- Quality Champion Platinum Award – Quality Council of India (2022)
- Healthcare Icon of the Year – The Economic Times (2022)
- Best CEO of the Year (Southern Region) – Indian Chamber of Commerce (2022)
- **iFocus Lifetime Achievement Award** – Centre for Sight (2023)
- Appointment as **Board of Governor (Supersession), Medical Council of India**
- **Padma Shri Award (2019)** – one of India’s most prestigious civilian honours

### **BIO-DATA OF DR. RADHA RAMANI**

I am a doctor by profession, a teacher at heart, and a lifelong advocate for women’s welfare. Throughout my journey, I have been blessed to serve as a role model to many—not by design, but simply by following the call of compassion.

In the early 1970s, while I was enjoying a fulfilling medical practice in Coimbatore alongside my husband, **Dr. R. V. Ramani**, I felt a strong inner urge to reach out to those who were less privileged and often forgotten. Inspired and blessed by the **Sankaracharyas of Kanchi**, we took a decisive step in 1977 and founded what would later grow into the **Sankara Movement**.

What began as a simple **Primary Health Care Centre** for the underprivileged in Coimbatore has today touched the lives of over **10 million people**. Through this Pan-India Movement, we have been able to perform more than **2.6 million totally free eye surgeries**, bringing light and dignity back into the lives of villagers across our motherland.

Empowering women has always been very close to my heart. I conceptualized and established the **Vision Care Technicians Training Program**, Sankara Eye Foundation’s in-house Human Resource Development initiative. Over the years, I have had the privilege of training more than **1,000 rural girls**, all of whom have been absorbed as staff across Sankara Eye Hospitals in India. Creating a job-oriented, job-guaranteed vocational program for rural girls remains one of my most fulfilling contributions.

In 1995, I was given another wonderful opportunity—to establish the **Tulsi Rural Development Program**, in collaboration with the Tulsi Chanrai Trust. My goal was to create awareness and initiate social development for a rural population of 60,000 people across 14 villages near Coimbatore. We focused on need-based services such as healthcare, education, water supply, sanitation, and women’s upliftment.

What emerged over time was nothing short of a **metamorphosis of the villages**—a true transformation of rural India and a model that can be replicated anywhere.

For me, this journey has always been about **care, compassion, and conviction**. They say that even a thousand-mile journey begins with a single step. I took that first firm step **more than forty years ago**, and I continue to walk forward with gratitude and purpose.

**Vande Mataram.**

### **BIO-DATA OF R. ESHWARA PRASATH**

I am Eshwara Prasath Ramesh, a Lead Firmware Engineer at Eaton and a doctoral researcher based in the United States, specializing in advanced energy systems, embedded technologies, and sustainable innovation. With over a decade of experience spanning EV charging infrastructure, power electronics, and smart energy systems, my career has focused on transforming emerging technologies into real-world, scalable solutions.

Before engineering became my path, I spent most of my childhood dreaming of becoming a cricketer. I played cricket every chance I got along with other sports like badminton and table tennis. Those years in sports taught me teamwork, resilience, discipline, and a “never-give-up” mindset, qualities that continue to shape how I approach engineering challenges and leadership today.

At Eaton, I lead Vehicle-to-Everything (V2X) initiatives, designing and implementing proof-of-concept systems for Vehicle-to-Home (V2H) and Vehicle-to-Grid (V2G) integration. My work brings together EV circuit protection, embedded controllers, communication protocols, and Home Energy Management Systems to enable seamless bidirectional power flow. Prior to this, I spent several years at Atom Power Inc., where I played a key architectural role in developing the world’s first programmable solid-state circuit breaker, an innovation that earned me the company’s Innovation Award and contributed to the modernization of power distribution.

My experience spans embedded firmware development, cloud-connected systems, communication interfaces, UL safety compliance, and leading cross-functional engineering teams. I work across the full technology stack, from microcontroller firmware and bootloaders to system architecture and large-scale software components.

Outside my core engineering career, I also design and develop websites and applications for businesses and organizations as a side gig allowing me to combine creativity with technical problem-solving. In parallel with industry work, I have contributed to global technical knowledge through research publications and patents, reflecting my commitment to advancing resilient, future-ready energy technologies. My professional achievements have been recognized through an honorary Doctorate in Electrical Engineering, IEEE Senior Membership, the Fortunna Global 100 distinction, and the Energy Solutions Leader of the Year Award.

Beyond engineering, I support several global organizations as a technical advisor and systems architect, helping drive advancements in sustainable energy and digital transformation. Guided by clarity, authenticity, and a passion for empowering others, I strive to inspire the next generation of engineers to build with purpose, imagination, and impact. My journey reflects not only technical depth but also a commitment to meaningful global contribution, rooted in the same determination and team spirit I learned from the sports I loved growing up.

### **RESUME:** Summary

A hands-on leader with over ten years of experience in the design, implementation, and management of connected systems. Practical experience with software development life cycle, design, cloud solutions and distributed systems. Architected and implemented several large commercial and industrial IoT and software systems. Built and managed high-performance cross-functional teams. Passionate about technology and the continuous education required to master new architectures, frameworks, and patterns.

## **EXPERIENCE**

### **Eaton Peachtree City, GA: Lead Firmware Engineer - V2X •**

- Implemented proof of concept system to export power from vehicle to home and vehicle to grid.
- Worked on integrating smart breaker 2.0 with an ARM Cortex A8 processor using smart breaker local communication protocol (SBLCP) over UDP.

- Worked on integrating Electric Vehicle Circuit breaker (EVEMCB) with an ARM Cortex A8 processor using REST API (Imp Central Cloud) and implemented Open Charge Point Protocol OCPP v2.0 communication for V2X system.

- Designed and implemented proof of concept system for V2H (Vehicle to Home) and V2G (Vehicle to Grid) implementation integrating with Home Energy Management System (HEMS)

### **Atom Power Inc• Charlotte, NC:**

Embedded Systems Architect.

Experience working on Level 2 AC electric vehicle chargers and DC Fast Chargers for residential and commercial applications

- Integrated chargers with management systems using Open Charge Point Protocol (OCPP v1.6).
- Experience building and managing cross-functional teams in the software and embedded space.
- Experience working on bootloaders, Embedded Linux, TCP/UDP protocols, CAN bus, modbus, UART, bluetooth and SPI protocols for Atom Power circuit breakers.
- Experience writing firmware for Texas Instruments 32 bit Piccolo Microcontrollers, ARM cortex A8 processors, E-ink displays and debugging using JTAG
- Experience managing and writing firmware and software to comply Underwriters Laboratory (UL) standards UL 489 SE, UL 489, UL 67, UL 259.

Architected programmable solid state circuit breaker project, demand management for residential and commercial buildings, automatic transfer switching and EV Charging.

### **Atom Power Inc• Charlotte, NC 02/2016 - 03/2019**

Embedded Software Developer

- Responsible for designing an end-to-end IoT system from embedded devices through cloud-based services, APIs, portals, and large-scale data collection systems
- Responsible for working with RESTFUL Web Services and implementing RESTFUL APIs.
- Experience taking projects through FEDRAMP certification (cybersecurity - embedded and software).
- Extensive knowledge in developing Single page Applications (SPAs) for Atom Power products such as EV Charging Infrastructure, Solid state circuit breakers and many other products.

Experienced in working on Devops operation process and tools area - Unit test automation, Code review, Build and release Automation Environment, Incident and Change management.

**Atom Power Inc., Charlotte, NC 05/2015 - 12/2015**

Microprocessor and Firmware Developer Intern Experience writing C code in a real-time embedded environment for Atom Circuit breakers.

- Driver level programming experience for gateway applications.
- Experience writing firmware for TMS320C2000 series microcontrollers (Texas Instruments board).
- Experience with CAN bus systems and associated tools
- Experience with X-Code - Integrating firmware with Application (iPad and OSX apps)

**Charlotte Research Institute Web Developer, 08/2014 - 04/2015**

Responsible for designing UI using Angular2, HTML, CSS and NodeJS.

- Assisted in building applications using Python / Tkinter.
- Used JIRA for bug tracking, GIT for Version control and Jenkins for continuous integration of builds.

**iNautix Technologies India Pvt Ltd Application Developer Intern • Chennai, TN 12/2013 - 02/2014**

Completed eight weeks of training on Java, JSP Servlets and Basics of Unix · Underwent two months training on the basics of VLSI and software simulation of “Numerically Controlled Oscillator using FPGA “, IEEE'12 at MIT Campus (Anna University) · Analyzed problems and worked with teams to develop solution

**Bharat Electronics Junior Engineer • Chennai, TN 12/2011 - 08/2012**

Worked for Government of India Ministry and Defense · Trained under department of Assembly, Inspection, Testing and Quality Management · Collaborated with engineering team to determine project specifications.

**Consulting**

2024 - Present – London Center for Innovation - Technical Adviso

2022 - Present - Eastport Systems Netherlands Systems Architect

2021 - 2022 - Learning Curve Technologies Subject Matter Expert - Engineering

2020 - 2021 - Precious 3D Business Executive & Engineering Consultant

2021 - 2022 - Karthigeya Plastics Engineering Consultant

Certificates • Microsoft Certified: Azure Administrator Associate,

• PMI - Agile Certified Practitioner, • Project Management Essentials - Certified,

• Scrum Fundamentals Certified,

• Six Sigma Yellow Belt,

• Harvard Business School - Credential of Readiness Publications, Projects and Patent Publications

### **Publications, Projects and Patent**

Publications Constantly Functioning Aduino Based Solar Tracker Fed Solar Panels (Electronic ISBN: 978-1-4673-6126-2)

IEEE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GREEN COMPUTING COMMUNICATION AND CONSERVATION OF ENERGY · Dec 13, 2013

Hydrogen Fuel Powered Car Launched by Resonant Inductive Coupling IRD INDIA, BANGALORE in the journal international journal of advanced electrical and electronics engineering (ijaeer) issn (print): 2278-8948 · Dec 27, 2012

### **Projects**

Implementation of Fuel Less Vehicle using Hydrogen Fuel Cell and Resonant Inductive

Coupling Implementation of Wireless Power Technology Programming bare-metal ARM with QEMU RAID Based Memory Controllers (Memory Expansion Technique)

Real Time Priority Based Web Server (TINY OS)

### **Patent**

Energy Harvesting Outage Signaling Module for Distributed Energy Resource Control - 63/892,995

Patent Energy Harvesting Outage Signaling Module for Distributed Energy Resource Control - 63/892,995

### **Awards**

Energy Solutions Leader of the Year 2025 - Recipient of the “Energy Solutions Leader of the Year” award by Forttuna Global, selected by a distinguished expert panel from among participants representing 83 countries

Honorary Doctorate in Electrical Engineering - Awarded by Washington Digital University for exceptional work in the field of Electrical Engineering - April 2025.

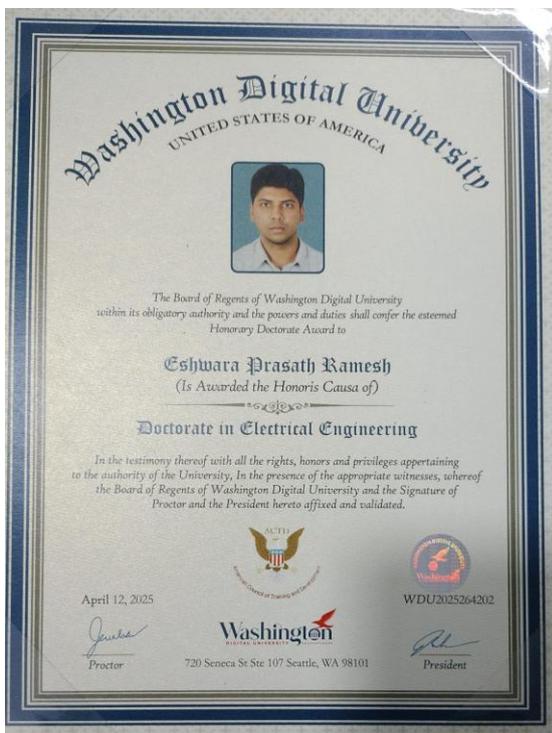
**Innovation Award – Atom Power, Inc.** - Recognized for engineering leadership in developing the world’s first solid-state circuit breaker, a groundbreaking advancement in power distribution.

**Employee of the Quarter – Atom Power, Inc.** - Awarded for exceptional contributions to engineering development, innovation, and cross-functional collaboration.

**Education**

University of North Carolina at Charlotte Master of Science in Electrical Engineering -12/2015

Anna University Bachelor in Electrical and Electronics Engineering 06/2014



## **BIO-DATA OF VIJAYALAKSHMI RAVI**

(W/o Eshwar)

I am Vijayalakshmi Ravi, a tax analyst at Forvis Mazars with nearly three years of experience in public accounting. Over the course of my career, I have worked closely with high-net-worth individuals, dealerships, real estate businesses, and flowthrough entities, helping them navigate complex tax compliance and planning needs. My expertise lies in preparing federal and multi-state returns, advising on evolving tax legislation, and developing strategies that align with both personal and business objectives.

My professional journey began in India, where I pursued intermediary studies in Chartered Accountancy. This gave me a strong grounding in accounting principles and international tax frameworks. I later earned my Master's in Accounting from North Carolina State University, which equipped me with advanced technical knowledge and analytical skills that I apply daily in my work.

Alongside academics and career, I have always nurtured varied interests in music, painting, and travel. These pursuits have shaped my creativity, adaptability, and discipline, enriching the way I approach problem-solving and client relationships. My passion for numbers was inspired by my father, who dedicated his life to teaching mathematics and eventually retired as the principal of his school. His love for education and precision instilled in me both respect for detail and curiosity for uncovering patterns qualities that now define my approach to tax accounting.

At Forvis Mazars, I have managed tax compliance portfolios for high-net-worth clients, trained interns, and contributed to projects that reduced overall tax liabilities. I am proficient in leading tax software platforms such as GoSystem Tax RS, CCH Axxess, and ONESOURCE, and I leverage tools like Excel, Tableau, and Python to bring data-driven insights into client engagements. Beyond technical expertise, I value collaboration and mentorship, having participated in recruitment initiatives and guided junior team members in tax research and compliance procedures.

I am currently pursuing my CPA designation to further sharpen my expertise in accounting and tax planning. Looking ahead, my goal is to continue building a career that combines technical rigor with creativity, helping clients navigate complexity while achieving meaningful financial outcomes.

## BIO-DATA OF SAIKRISHNA SEKAR

I am an engineer, entrepreneur, investor, and technologist focused on building and scaling businesses at the intersection of investment and technology, across public markets and operating companies. From a young age, I developed a strong inclination toward mathematics and financial markets, which naturally evolved into a deep interest in quantitative finance and systematic investing. Driven by this interest and a desire to engage closely with global markets, I pursued my Master's in Entrepreneurship & Finance at the USC Marshall School of Business in Los Angeles, with a clear focus on Wall Street, capital markets, and technology-led investing.

I am currently the Founder & CEO of PinSec.Ai, a quantitative investment and robo-advisory platform, where I lead the development of systematic, data-driven trading and investing strategies. My work centers on consistent alpha generation, disciplined risk management, and long-term capital compounding, with the goal of building globally relevant, technology-led investment platforms.

My professional journey spans Wall Street investment banking, large-scale corporate portfolio management, and multi-business leadership within the FPL Group. This experience has shaped my approach—combining entrepreneurial execution with institutional rigor, first-principles thinking, deep engagement with data and markets, and hands-on leadership focused on long-term value creation.

Beyond work, I am deeply passionate about technology-driven ventures. I enjoy spending time with my family, love traveling, and have visited over 30 countries. I am also an avid reader, with interests spanning entrepreneurship, quantitative finance, technology, and personal development.

Experience (Entrepreneurship, Leadership & Markets)

Founder & CEO – PinSec.Ai (An FPL Group Company)

Aug 2024 – Present

I founded PinSec.Ai to build an AI-powered, multi-asset quantitative investment firm focused on consistent alpha generation with disciplined risk management. The firm develops systematic strategies across equities, derivatives, commodities, and global markets using advanced statistics, machine learning, and data-driven research. My long-term vision is to establish PinSec as a leading global robo-advisory and quantitative investment platform.

As Founder & CEO, I am responsible for:

Defining the quantitative research philosophy and full strategy lifecycle

Building scalable research, trading, and execution infrastructure

Hiring and leading teams of quantitative researchers, mathematicians, and engineers

Establishing robust risk frameworks, governance standards, and capital alignment

Positioning the firm for global relevance and institutional adoption

PinSec.Ai currently operates across India and the United States, with plans to expand into additional international markets.

Director & Portfolio Manager – FPL Group

2017 – Present

I serve as a Director at FPL Group, a 35+ year diversified business house with operations spanning Manufacturing, Auto Retail, Software, and Financial Services.

Board & Operating Roles

Director overseeing FPL Group's Auto Retail businesses, including dealerships for:

Hyundai Motor India

MG Motor India

Tata Motors

Director at Palat Technologies, the Group's SaaS and technology platform

In these roles, I contribute to strategy formulation, capital allocation, governance, and long-term growth planning, bringing a data-driven, execution-oriented mindset to operating businesses. I am also actively building the FinTech and Financial Services arm for the Group.

Founder – Qubercap Ventures

Personal Investment Management Arm

I run Qubercap Ventures, through which I manage my personal and proprietary capital across public markets, quantitative strategies, private investments, and venture opportunities.

Qubercap reflects my personal capital philosophy—long-term compounding, asymmetric risk-reward, and disciplined capital deployment backed by data and conviction. Through this platform, I also back early-stage startups across technology, SaaS, AI, and finance.

Quant Research Consultant – WorldQuant (BRAIN Program)

Mar 2023 – Feb 2024

As part of WorldQuant's BRAIN Program, I developed market-neutral alpha strategies across US, China, and Emerging Markets datasets. My work focused on mean reversion, momentum breakouts, feature engineering, and regime-aware modeling, achieving average Sharpe ratios above 2.5 with strong emphasis on robustness and out-of-sample performance.

Investment Banking Analyst – Bank of America Merrill Lynch

New York | 2019 – 2020

I worked on complex financial models, valuations, and strategic analyses for institutional clients, gaining deep exposure to capital markets, due diligence processes, and institutional research standards.

Investment Banking Analyst – Merit Investment Bank  
Seattle | 2018

I began my career in investment banking, supporting M&A advisory engagements, financial modeling, and capital structure optimization.

Education

University of Southern California (Marshall School of Business)

Master of Science – Entrepreneurship & Innovation

Harvard Business School

Graduate Certificates – Finance

CORE Credential of Readiness (Economics, Financial Accounting, Business Analytics)

University of Southern California

Graduate Certificate – Technology Commercialization

Anna University – College of Engineering, Guindy

Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering

Certifications

NISM Research Analyst (RA) Certification

NISM Series 8 – Equity Derivatives Certification

Finance for Non-Financial Managers

Demystifying VC Term Sheets & Cap Tables

Influence (Leadership & Persuasion)

Improving Communication Skills

These certifications reinforce my commitment to continuous learning across finance, capital markets, leadership, and entrepreneurship.

Awards & Recognition

Forbes Select 200

Recognized among a curated group of founders and leaders building high-growth, impactful businesses at the intersection of technology, finance, and entrepreneurship.

USC Student Recognition Award – The Order of Arête

Recognized as the best graduate student of the year from a cohort of over 48,000 students during the USC graduation ceremony in May 2018.

Entrepreneurial Spirit Award

For innovation, risk-taking, and translating ideas into scalable ventures.

Top Startup Venture Award

Honoring the creation and execution of a high-potential startup with strong fundamentals and growth vision.

MSEI Leadership Award

For leadership and contributions to financial markets and market-linked initiatives.

Young Entrepreneur Award – Hyundai National Dealer Conference 2023

Recognized as Young Entrepreneur of the Year at Hyundai NDC 2023.

Investor Ecosystem & Angel Investing

I am an active angel investor and ecosystem participant, backing early-stage founders across consumer tech, SaaS, deep tech, and mobility.

The Chennai Angels – Angel Investor

Mumbai Angels – Angel Investor (until merger with 360 ONE)

Beyond capital, I actively support founders on strategy, fundraising readiness, and long-term scaling discipline, reflecting my belief in sustainable, long-term value creation.

## **JANANI RAJALAKSHMI – PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY**

I am Janani Rajalakshmi, a Lead Designer at an architecture firm working closely with Apple, where I contribute to the design of Apple’s corporate office environments across key locations including Sunnyvale and San Jose. Over the years, I have worked on several high-profile and innovative projects for Apple, including the Apple Visitor Center, the Tantau buildings, and executive office spaces for Apple Pay Vice President Jennifer Bailey. I have also been deeply involved in designing clusters of Apple’s IL buildings, which presented unique challenges due to their complex dimetric architectural geometry. Beyond corporate architecture, I have worked on multiple high-end residential projects, including a notable project for Isha Ambani, as well as civic-scale developments such as the City of Sunnyvale parking garages.

My journey into architecture has been unconventional. I started out as an amateur with no formal background in architecture, driven purely by motivation and the desire to achieve something meaningful. From a young age, I loved working with paintings, drawings, and sculptures—creativity always came naturally to me, and I believe the sky is the limit when it comes to creative expression. Although I earned a Bachelor’s degree in Commerce (B.Com), I always knew I did not want a career in finance. My true passion lay in art and architecture.

Pursuing architecture in the United States was an extremely challenging path, both financially and emotionally. Architecture schools are expensive (OH BOY! One needs to sell their kidney to pay the school fee), and sustaining a living in California alongside tuition felt almost impossible. By God’s grace, I received a

scholarship that covered most of my tuition, which enabled me to enrol in architecture school. From that moment on, there was no looking back.

I still vividly remember my first day of architecture school. I was surrounded by classmates who held five-year architecture degrees, while I entered with a three-year B. Com degree. It was intimidating, and I initially felt completely out of place. However, that discomfort became my greatest motivation. I pushed myself relentlessly to learn and improve, determined to not just keep up but to excel. I barely survived on one hour sleep every day. I learned all the essential software required for my degree and spent time with practicing architects to understand real-life building dynamics. This experience taught me that learning truly has no boundaries. My hard work paid off when I graduated as the department topper in my master's program.

During my final semester, I worked full time, which allowed me to sponsor my mother and grandparents' visit to the United States, one of my proudest personal achievements. Throughout this journey, my brother, Eshwar, worked incredibly hard to support my career choice, and I remain deeply grateful for his belief in me.

After graduation, stepping into the professional world came with an entirely new set of challenges. I quickly realized that real-life practice was no joke. I continued to learn, adapt, and push myself—often working more than 12 hours a day. Starting as a junior designer, I worked my way up to a Lead Designer role within just a year of joining the company. Earning recognition in a highly competitive environment was tough, but it strengthened my resilience and determination. I know that my journey is still ongoing, and it will take many more years of effort to reach even greater heights and emerge stronger as a woman in my career.

Alongside architecture, I have also started a small creative business called Swysh, which offers luxury gift hamper solutions. This venture allows me to channel my creativity into curated gifting experiences and serves as a creative outlet alongside my professional work.

As a mother to a toddler, I strongly believe that none of this would have been possible without a strong support system. My supportive husband, Sai has made life's challenges more manageable with his unwavering emotional, physical, and financial support. My mother, grandfather and grandmother have put immense hard work in raising my brother and me in navigating life's high tides with strength and grace. My little baby boy showers me with so much love and

reminds me that nothing is greater than unconditional love. Not to forget my in laws who have a kind heart.

My journey stands as a testament to perseverance, passion, and lifelong learning, proof that with determination, creativity, and the right support, it is possible to transform an unconventional path into a fulfilling and successful career.

### **MY “ACHIEVEMENTS”**

**(If you can call them that)**

#### ***“The One-Man Veterinary Orchestra”***

Though I have taken pains to record the brainy and creative feats of our family members, a few may still nudge me and ask: “But what about your own achievements, Balu?”

Well, the word *ACHIEVEMENT* is a tricky fellow. It has no proper yardstick. For a parent, their toddler passing L.K.G. is a great achievement. For me, clearing both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Veterinary Science was a Himalayan one! That’s my yardstick — modest but mine.

So, here’s my own little list of “feats,” sprinkled with more laughter than glory:

**Finger gymnastics:** Trained my fingers (not for piano, but for rectal examinations in cows and buffaloes) to detect pregnancy as early as 35–40 days. My crown jewel? Detecting twin pregnancy in a cow owned by none other than the then Inspector General of Police. (Imagine the IG’s pride in his cow!)

**Hairball heist:** Along with two colleagues, successfully performed a rumenotomy on a cow to remove hairballs ranging from football size down to tennis ball size. The cow went home lighter; we went home prouder.

**Monster moments:** Delivered some unforgettable cases of dystocia — including a one-eyed (cyclops) dead calf and a twin-headed buffalo calf. If Ripley’s *Believe It or Not!* had been around, they’d have signed me up.

**Doggy firsts:** Attempted artificial insemination on a golden retriever bitch, and she did deliver one pup. (Just one, but hey, history remembers first attempts kindly.)

**Cattle confidence:** Achieved a high success rate in artificial insemination of cattle. The cows never complained.

### **And finally, a footnote achievement**

Animal Birth Control (ABC): A Small Beginning. Among the many “creations” and initiatives I wish to leave on record, this one stands close to my heart. The Animal Birth Control (ABC) program, which today is debated fiercely in every street corner and news column, had its small beginnings during my tenure at the Saidapet Veterinary Hospital in the early 1970s. At that time, the programme was launched on a very limited scale, with only the Veterinary College Surgery Department involved, which meant the benefits were confined to a small area in the city. Realising the larger importance of ABC, I convinced my higher ups and took it upon myself to undergo training under Dr. N. N. Balasubramanian, my class mate, then Surgery Professor in the Veterinary College in spaying female dogs. The procedure requiring surgical skill and careful post-operative care was far more complex and time-consuming than neutering males.

With the support and sanction of my departmental superiors, we set up small in-patient facilities within the Saidapet hospital campus, and for the first time, a modest ABC programme began functioning outside the college. Looking back, I take some pride in this initiative, not for any recognition it brought, but for the quiet satisfaction of doing something that I knew was right, necessary, and ahead of its time.

My only regret is that, after my transfer, the programme was not pursued with the same enthusiasm. The Saidapet hospital, once brimming with activity, has sadly slid into neglect, a shadow of what it once was.

### **IMAGINARY BIO-DATA s (THAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE!)**

They insisted from above.

Before you read further, a small confession:

Although I have boldly titled this section “Imaginary Bio-data,” the truth is... nothing here is imaginary at all. Every detail that follows is real, factual, and taken straight from the lives of my parents. The word “imaginary” remains only because it adds a playful touch — but the people described here were very much real, and so were their remarkable qualities. If there is Wi-Fi in heaven, I hope they give this book a good rating.

#### **BIO-DATA OF T.R. NARAYANASWAMY IYER**

**(Nanu / Spencer Iyer / T.R. Thatha)**

*“The Original Human Calculator — batteries not required.”*

I was born in December 1898 and lived until 13 July 1956.

People knew me by many names — Nanu, Spencer Iyer, and T.R. Thatha — but

the one thing everyone agreed on was that I had a natural gift for numbers. I was a State first gold medalist in Mathematics, and mental arithmetic was second nature to me.

Long before calculators existed, I could close my eyes for a few seconds and tell my staff the exact bonus they would get. My children often tried to stump me with huge four-digit multiplications, scribbling away on paper. I would simply calculate it in my head and give the answer — usually before they finished writing the question!

Timekeeping came just as naturally to me. Without ever wearing a watch, I could tell you the exact minute I would reach home after my morning walk — and I rarely missed my prediction.

I lived simply. While the world used soap and combs, I preferred kadalai maavu for my bath and my fingers to comb my hair. It suited me just fine. I enjoyed my family, even if my temper was sometimes short, and I took great interest in sports. Simply reading the newspaper from end to end was enough for me to know everything about every game being played anywhere.

**Contact:** Best reached through mental arithmetic — I usually know who's calling before the phone does.

**Email:** [trn.iyer@timelessmind.in](mailto:trn.iyer@timelessmind.in)

**Availability:** Early mornings preferred; I always kept perfect time without a watch.

### **BIO-DATA OF RAJALAKSHMI (LAKSHMIAMMA)**

*“MBA in Life, PhD in Cooking — all self-taught, no tuition fees.”*

I was born in 1908 and lived until 18 July 1994. I never entered a school — not even for a day. Like many girls of my time, I was married at 10 years of age. But life became my teacher, and I learned everything I needed to keep a home running with dignity, grace, and practicality.

I became a self-taught culinary expert, and many years later, Chinnu

encouraged me to write down my recipes. my granddaughter Latha's help, I even wrote and published a 28-page Tamil cookbook. My son Chinnu arranged for the whole work to be printed as a neat booklet after my manuscript was edited and re-written by Latha.

When my husband passed away prematurely, I was left with very limited resources. But with careful management — what you might today call the

financial wizardry of a CFO — I got my daughter married and ensured both my sons completed their professional education.

I never thought of it as achievement; it was simply my duty, done with love and determination. I was the steady pillar of the family, and everything my children became, they built on the foundation I quietly created.

**Contact:** Household hotline — just call “Amma,” and I will respond without fail.

**Email:** lakshmiaamma@homeandhearts.org

**Notes:** Replies are quickest when your query involves food, family, or common sense.

## TALENT TREASURY

### LATHA'S GALLERY



COLOUR PENCIL SKETCH



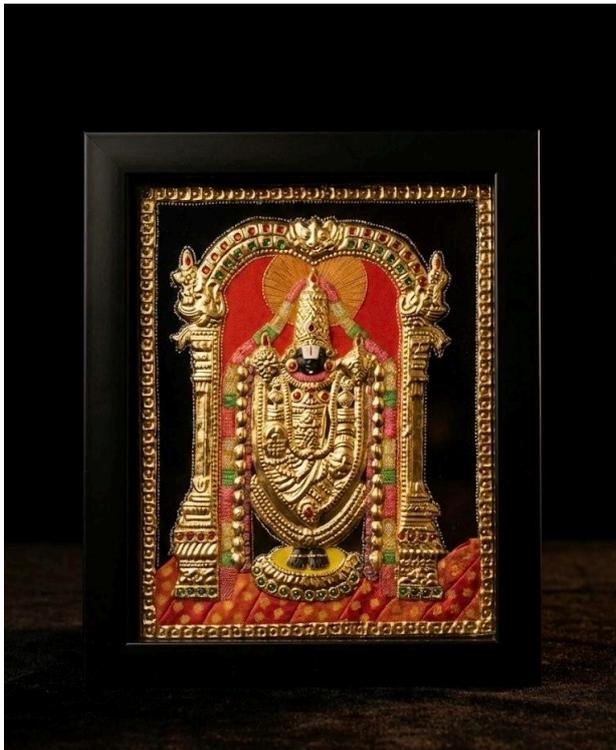
SLATE ENGRAVING



**DIAMOND ART**

## JANANI'S ARTWORK

### TANJORE PAINTING



OIL ON CANVAS



## JUNK ART



## SCULPTURES



## CHALK SCULPTURE



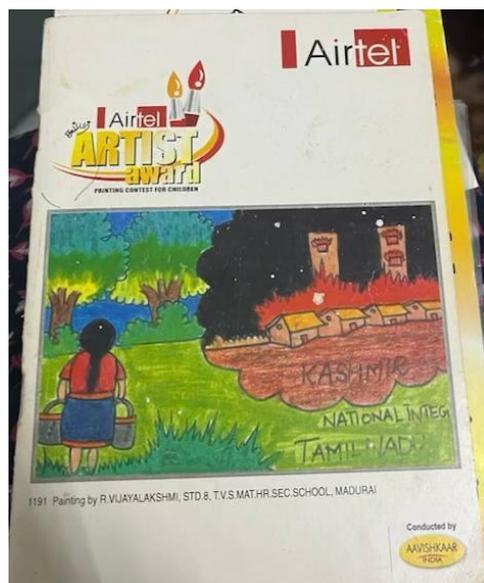
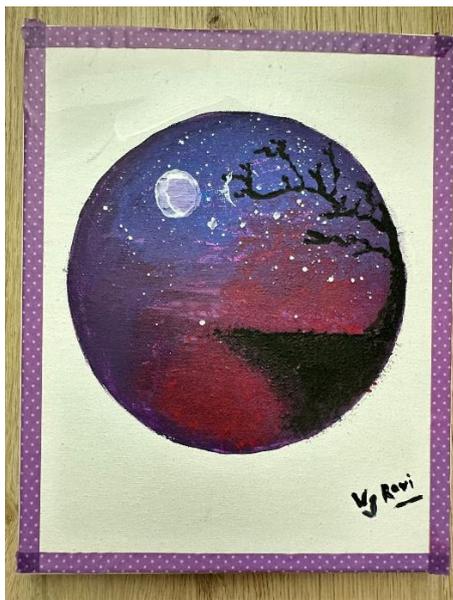
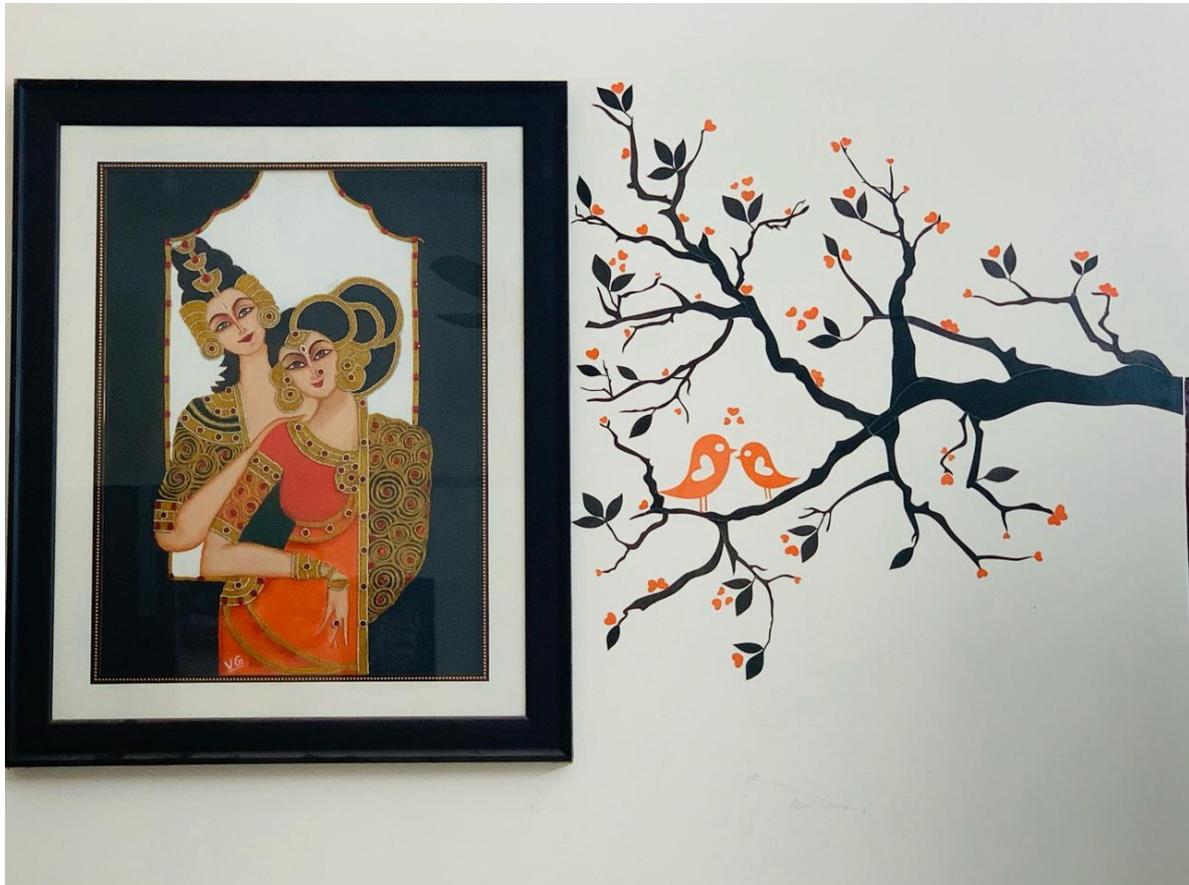
## SOAP CARVING



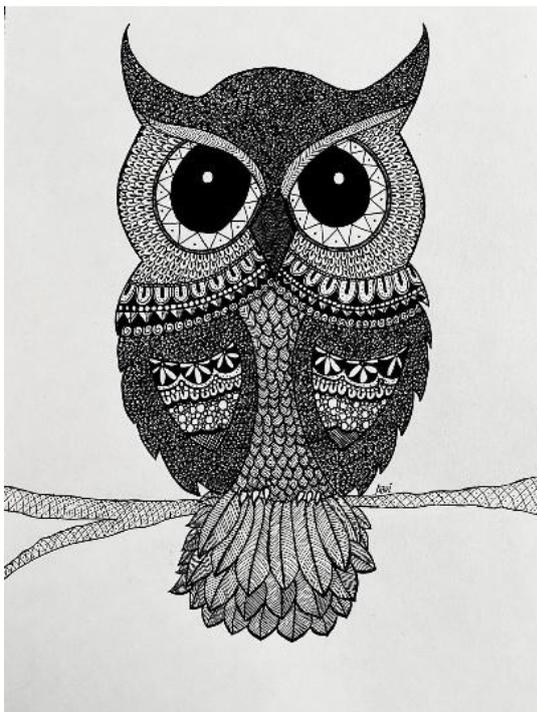
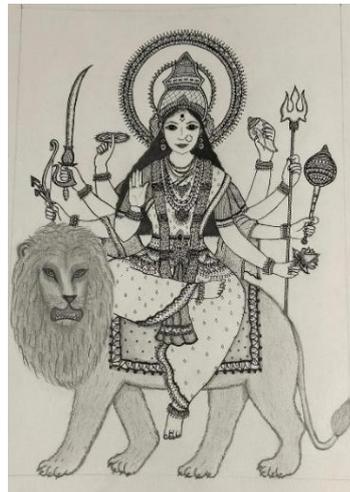
**SWYSH (GIFTING BUSINESS)**



# VIJI's ART



PAVITHRA'S GALLERY – ZEN - TANGLE ART





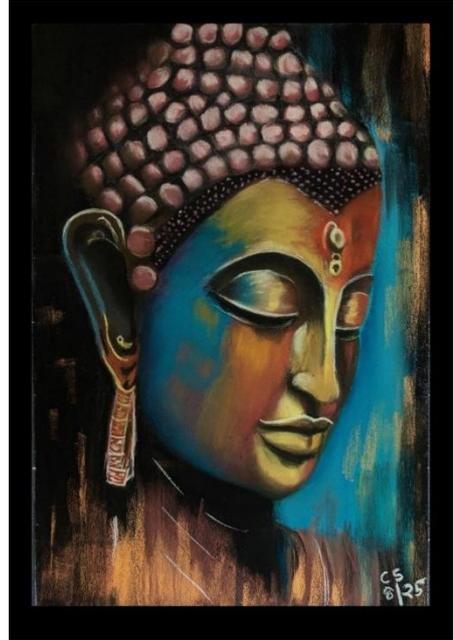
**VIDHYA (Patta's Daughter-In-Law) – PAINTINGS ON 9" MDF BOARD**



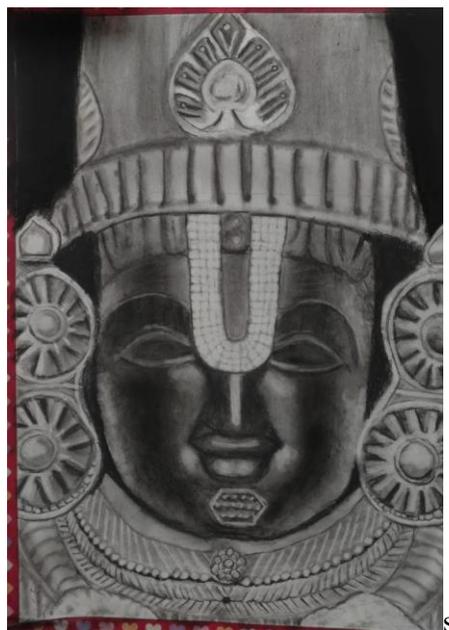
## VIDHYA'S OTHER ART WORK



## SUMATHI'S ART



## SUMATHI'S CHARCOAL DRAWING



## THE END-OF-BOOK BRIBE

For those noble souls who truly reached this page without cheating.  
Congratulations, Traveller!

As promised, here lies the final treasure chest—a lovingly preserved jewel from  
our family archives.

Q.R. code below will unlock the surprise gift in your mobile or P.C



## EPILOGUE

Well, here we are. The last word. If you've made it this far, you deserve a medal—or at least the reassurance that my self-imposed medical assignment has been a success. In the preface, I admitted this whole endeavour—this M Square of a V Square—was a thoroughly selfish prescription designed to keep my brain from retiring prematurely.

And I can confidently report: the treatment is working beautifully. The good news is that I am already fulfilling the doctor's orders to the letter. I'm into talking, talking perhaps more than ever, inflicting my stories and opinions

on anyone who will listen (and sometimes those who won't). And this second book? This glorious, random collection of squares, memories, and wisdom for the younger generation? It has kept my old grey matter in good humour.

The exercise of remembering, connecting the dots, and finding the right words has been the best mental workout I could ask for. It has been a constant, joyful challenge—a grand game of intellectual hide-and-seek.

So, I'm wrapping up this volume with the utmost confidence. Alzheimer's, Dementia, or any other slow-witted intruder has absolutely no place in this busy head. The sign has been posted, the lock is on the door, and the writing is on the wall: "Sorry, No Vacancy!"

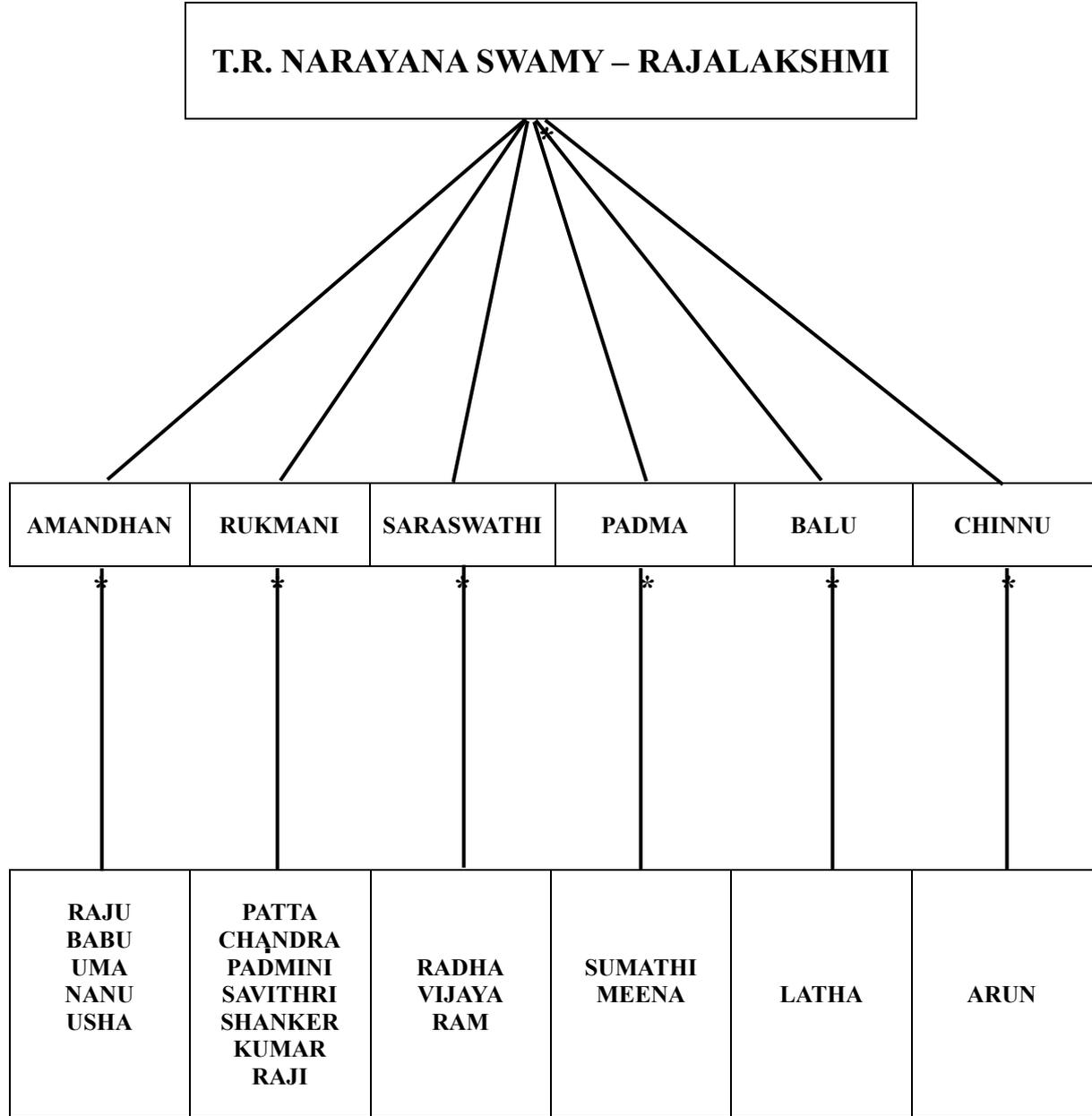
My hope is that while I was busy protecting my own mind, I managed to amuse, enlighten, or perhaps simply distract yours for a while. If you found a square of wisdom, a slice of tradition, or a moment of laughter among these pages, then the effort has been doubly worth it.

Thank you for joining me on this necessary, self-prescribed journey. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have another story to tell someone.

— **Your Veteran Veterinarian**

**ANNEXURE: A**

**FAMILY TREE**



|                    |                   |                       |                    |                  |                   |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>NAME</b>        | <b>AMANDHAN</b>   | <b>RUKMANI</b>        | <b>SARASWATHI</b>  | <b>PADMA</b>     | <b>BALU</b>       | <b>CHINNU</b>     |
| <b>SPOUSE</b>      | <b>SAVITHRI</b>   | <b>NARAYANA SWAMY</b> | <b>JAYARAMAN</b>   | <b>GURUSWAMY</b> | <b>KAMALA</b>     | <b>RAJI</b>       |
| <b>WEDDING DAY</b> | <b>01/06/1947</b> | <b>03/09/1945</b>     | <b>04/06/ 1948</b> | <b>/ /1958</b>   | <b>20/05/1963</b> | <b>18/08/1969</b> |

## ANEXURE B

### **The Great Family Recap Quiz** (Open Book Allowed... But Please Don't)

#### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

Answer honestly. No consulting.

Answers are printed upside down at the end.

#### **QUIZ**

1. The “M” that proves randomness can be organised
2. The “V” who occupies a square and a profession
3. TRN’s remembered corporate home
4. Culinary authority whose fame travelled faster than recipes
5. The six-footer who never needed a stool
6. The name that followed P. T. Usha
7. Permanently present, officially “invisible”
8. When railways invade highways
9. Remembered for complexion
10. Cricket’s walking footnote
11. The only serious rival to a banana
12. Two-anna choker made legendary
13. The very first teacher
14. A two-wheeler with theatrical flair
15. The house name anchoring generations
16. A medical legacy nobody ordered
17. Appa’s unmistakable headgear
18. Appa’s hairstyle that ignored fashion
19. Family’s most efficient population contributor
20. Dancer, doctor, speaker — triple threat
21. Padmashri worn lightly
22. Rock star without a guitar
23. Babysitting — international edition
24. Numbers surrendered to her
25. Passport always ready
26. Devotion with a permanent Sai connection
27. Salesmanship without advertisement
28. Statistically richest love-marriage family
29. Living bio-data archive
30. Tennis champion who delivered
31. Tennis champion still loading

32. Trading daylight for profit
33. Builder, entrepreneur, traveller — all rolled into one
34. Teaching flexibility without bending rules
35. Flowers caught before they noticed
36. Who understood parrots better than people
37. Turning money into magic (legally)
38. Real estate before it was fashionable
39. Entertainment guaranteed, silence not
40. Cards never stood a chance
41. A couple united by glucose levels
42. A teacher who forgot retirement
43. Silent, selective attention perfected
44. Calendar-worthy charm
45. Brainy by nature, sleepy by habit
46. The lucky last — because someone had to be
47. SSLC, street-smart, and CFO of the family
48. From C.A. dreams in India to numbers in North Carolina
49. Where finance met artificial intelligence and refused to separate
50. The feared procedure that turned into an educational sightseeing trip
51. Together, they now lead a residential school, very efficiently, founded by family elders.
52. A colleague, guide, philosopher, and family rolled into one—steadfast through every high and low of life.
53. A sensitive schoolboy who once defeated a plastic-wire-wielding tyrant by quietly bunking classes at the street corner.
54. Owner of a cricket ground where the toss never existed, coffee walked onto the pitch, and victory was pre-decided.
55. A childhood rebel who grew up to uphold the law—an IPS officer till his untimely passing.

## ANSWERS (Upside Down)

1. erutxiM sgnisuM
2. nairanireteV nareteV
3. srecnepS
4. ammainhskal
5. ramuK
6. saraS
7. nurA
8. marT
9. marinaM
- 10.rawhsE
- 11.inanaJ
- 12.ulaB
- 13.amdaP
- 14.sulubatnaF
- 15.ayalamdaP
- 16.setebaiD
- 17.nabraT
- 18.imuduK
- 19.inamkuR
- 20.ahdaR
- 21.inamaR
- 22.ahtaL
- 23.yhtamuS
- 24.aneeM
- 25.maR
- 26.irwoG
- 27.unaN
- 28.nahdnamA
- 29.unnihC
- 30.kapiD
- 31.naviV
- 32.ujaR
- 33.reknahS
- 34.ahteeG
- 35.ahsU
- 36.ayajiV
- 37.namarayaJ
- 38.rebmihtA NST
- 39.ymawsuruG

- 40.ardnahC
- 41.namarahtnanA & amU
- 42.attaP
- 43.(inimdaP) ramukaviS
- 44.irhtivaS
- 45.ramuK
- 46.(inamkuR) ijaR
- 47.alamaK
- 48.(rawhsE) ijiV
- 49.anhsirkiaS
- 50.ypocsonoloC
- 51.uøuuæK & eϕtærnS
- 52.uæpæ.ræΛ
- 53..iϕpnS
- 54.æppæbuæI
- 55.nddddny

### SCORE YOURSELF

- 45+ → *Official Family Historian*
- 35–44 → *Reliable Insider*
- 25–34 → *Read Most of It*
- 15–24 → *Glanced Lovingly*
- <15 → *Annexure Specialist*

### CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

This certifies that \_\_\_\_\_ has successfully scored ABOVE 45 in THE GREAT FAMILY RECAP QUIZ and is hereby declared OFFICIAL FAMILY HISTORIAN with full rights to correct others, quote the book freely, and say “It’s all written there.

Signed: N. BALASUBRAMANIAN

