



Meena Chatty

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# **Dedication**

To Amma,

My backbone, my role model.

You inspire me to do better by just being you.

Thank you for everything.

# Acknowledgements

My thanks go out to many people for this book.

My parents, for giving me a memorable childhood from where all these stories have emerged.

My sister for being my editor, and helping me remember the minute details of the tales told here, and preserving the small tokens of childhood in between the pages of old books.

My elder daughter for the cover page and chapter icons.

The entire team at <http://www.Blogchatter.com> for facilitating the publication.

# Preface

In this book, I plan to share a few memories from my childhood. These are my very personal stories that I have experienced during my childhood back in late 70s to early 90s.

I hope I can take you on this journey with me as I relive all my most cherished memories.

The main reason I have picked up this idea is to showcase how the world has shifted. My childhood and its small pleasures are totally different from the childhood that my kids have experienced a decade ago. Now my kids are young adults. Their childhood is totally different from the childhood of kids these days. Only a few decades in between have created a chasm so deep that some things that were common those days are not relatable to kids these days.

Don't be alarmed, I am not going into a rant of "things were better in our days" and bore you all to death. I am not here to say that kids don't have fun growing up in today's day and age. I am not even saying that only my generation had fun growing up.

I always believe that "Change is the only constant". But not all changes are for the good. Changes do take place and they are happening at a super speed. Most of them are permanent in this new world of technology.

I only want to show how the perspective of the world has changed. It has been turned on its axis. I hope that will give me and you a chance to see the future of our human race.

Mine was a generation where Apple was still a fruit. Windows were something you had to open to allow fresh air in. Games were played with friends you knew well and had to meet to actually play. Newspaper was the only means to know what was happening in the world outside. You had to ask strangers on the road for directions. Railway tickets came in small cardboard chits with illegible letters printed on it.

Yet..... we survived. We must celebrate that. It will help us find a centring in this bewildering world.

I grew up in a middle-class family, neither upper nor lower. So, we are kind of "middle" middle class. We lived in a colony for the employees of the PSU (Public Sector Unit) that my Dad worked for, in the garden city of Bangalore. Our colony was a microcosm within the macrocosm of the city. It had a hospital, gardens, movie theatre, minor shopping centre, huge walkways with tree lined roads, a library, playgrounds, and of course houses for the employees. My school was inside the colony campus too. A self-sufficient, thriving community living.

My family consisted of my parents, my grandma and my sister, and of course – me.

The house we lived in, was a 2 bedroom one with a large garden. My mother was an enthusiastic gardener and we had a variety of flowering plants. Though my Dad was eligible to be allotted bigger houses within the colony after a few years of service, he was always denied that facility. I am not sure why that happened. The result was that, my entire stay in the colony has been in this one house. As long as we stayed in the colony, and that was till I reached 18 years, this was our home, and I loved it. In fact, I still remember the day we shifted out of the colony. After all the furniture was moved into the

waiting trucks, I went into each empty room and kissed all the walls and said my goodbyes to my childhood home! Cheesy right? Yeah! You bet!

Our routine was very ordinary, very mundane and yet full of excitement. Morning to late afternoon was school time. Evening was games with friends till it would become too dark to see anything. Then after washing hands and feet, it was homework time. Dinner and that's it. It is an unimaginable scenario now, isn't it?

But in between all these seemingly boring days, we, my sister and I had a wholesome childhood. I do recall those days with immense fondness. I would like to share them with you all.

I'll take you through a few choicest memories of my old home and my activities as I grew up in a world that has ceased to exist today. I do not regret that the world I knew is no longer there, because I do love the world I live in now. I cannot diminish the role of technology and social media. Without social media my stories could not be told. That my stories are read by so many of you is a matter of awe to me. I could not have envisaged this scenario at all when I was in that time and space. It is nothing short of a miracle to the 10-year-old me.

Having said that, I do miss the old-world charm of simple pleasures. It was the times before the awareness of socially responsible living had set in. All the food we ate was organic, and locally sourced. We carried our own cloth bags to shops and were given groceries packed in paper *potlis*. We knew no plastic bags or use-and-throw items. We had no bottled water. We walked more than we rode. Our carbon footprint was negligible.

Wherever possible, I will have a "Comparison Corner" just to highlight the subtle but significant change that I have observed in the passage of these few decades.

Come, let me tell you more. Take this walk with me down my memory lane. Or as the Harry Potter part of my mind says: take this dive into my pensieve to relive them with me.

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## **Growing up together**

## Big Sister

I have a sister younger to me by 2 years. We were very close then and still are now. Even now she calls me "Akka" or elder sister in Telugu. We have been each other's sister, friend, guide, argument-partner, sound board, debate-partner, moral support, entertainer, teacher and everything else in between, all these years.

By virtue of being born before her, I was kind of her protector too in my childhood, not that she needed any protection as such, but I felt it that way. I was kind of a hoverer for some years.

I will give you an example that I remember vividly. We used to have a milkman who would bring us milk in 1/2 litre glass bottles. He would leave the fresh bottles and pick up the bottles from the day before. When I was about three years old, my sister was one. She was a big cutie pie. Heck! She still is! All cuddly and full of smiles. As he would wait for my Mom to bring the bottles from the day before, he would call my sister, and she would waddle off to greet him. Then he would look at me and say "I'll take your sister with me!". Looking back, he would have said that with a smile, I suppose. I know now that he was a kind fellow, but for me, at that time, it was a threat. I would pull on my sister's arm preventing her from going further and hold on to her for dear life.

I was also two standards ahead of her in academics. So, I was a kind of a teacher to her for subjects she found difficulty in, which were admittedly few. She is quite clever you see! Though mathematics was her nemesis.

Our school was within the colony we lived in. It used to take a walk of about 10-12 minutes to reach the school from our home. Our school offered classes from pre-school to 10th standard. Admissions were open to all kids of the employees of the factory my Dad worked in.

The pre-school was called KG-1 and KG-2, KG being kindergarten. The timings of kindergarten were different from the other standards. It was housed in a different building itself. KG-1 would be in the morning session up to lunch. KG-2 kids would come in the post lunch session.

When she started in KG-1, I was in 1<sup>st</sup> standard. My classes would be in a different building and I had both morning and afternoon sessions.

In her KG-1, we both would walk to the school, hand in hand in the morning. I would drop her off at her class and then I would go over to my class. At lunch time, I would go to her class, and both of us would walk back home for lunch. I would finish my lunch and walk back to school.

When she came to KG-2, she would have afternoon school. Then, I would take her to school with me in the afternoon after lunch, drop her off, go to my class 2, finish my session, then go back to her building and both of us would walk back home, hand in hand.

I remember one time in my 2<sup>nd</sup> standard, my class took a bit longer and I was late to pick her up. She sat there waiting for me patiently without any fuss. Her KG-2 class teacher praised both of us saying we were good sisters. That was a happy day for me.

Validation! Yay!

Most of our school days, we would walk to and from home to school together, unless we had some other commitments.

**Comparison Corner:**

I cannot imagine a 3-year-old and a 5-year-old in today's world walking by themselves to their school. Can you? I myself have been a chauffeur to my daughters up to their 10th standard. I have sometimes, run to their school in the middle of the day with some book or the other that they might have left behind. I CANNOT remember even one instance of my parents coming over with forgotten books and stuff. If we forgot, and we got punished, then most likely we deserved it! But, yes, during rainy seasons, my mother would walk up to our school with umbrellas if we forgot our raincoats so we wouldn't get drenched.

I have to tell you a titbit that sounds too ridiculous to be true. But I swear this is a fact.

Our school fees had to be paid monthly to the class teacher before 20<sup>th</sup> of every month. Our fee was just.....

Rs 10/- per month!

Unbelievable, right?

The fees would be collected on 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. The first period on those days would be dedicated to fees collection. My mother would give me Rs 20/- on 5<sup>th</sup>. I would feel so important taking this money in my pencil box! I would pay my fees to my class teacher and walk over to my sister's classroom and pay her fees to her class teacher. Then maybe when she reached 4<sup>th</sup> standard, she would pay her own fees.

We have had our share of fights too. But as far as I remember, all our fights have been verbal. I don't remember hitting each other. If we did, then I have successfully blocked out that memory.

We share our love for books till today. We would pool in our money given by aunts and uncles and at the end of an academic year, would run off to Gangarams, a popular book shop in Bangalore and buy books. We still have all those books we bought and we call our shelf of books our library!

For what it is worth, I must say that my sister is a great person. She would do everything I told her. I have made her fetch and carry for me! I don't think I bullied her though. I hope not (fingers crossed).

## Dolls' birthday

Here is a vital piece of my childhood which holds a special place in my heart.

In the year 1980, we went on a ten-day trip to Tamil Nadu. We went to most temples in Tamil Nadu including Rameshwaram, Madurai, Palani and Kanyakumari to name a few. We went in a bus with a tour operator. The tour operator provided the transport, accommodation and food. Apart from the five of us: parents, grandma, my sister and me, there were a bus full of other strangers. Along with the tourists, our bus also carried the cook and his helper. Wherever we stopped, the cook would light up his stove and by the time our sightseeing was done, he would have hot food ready. We would stop at nights at different places and then travel by day to see these historic temples. It was in April that we went. So, you can imagine the heat of the Tamil Nadu summer beating down on us. The bus was not AC. The heat was oppressive. My Dad would hog the window seat EVERY SINGLE TIME saying he needed to sit there because he was sweating more. Hey! We were hot too!!!! But there was no reasoning with him. After all, a 10-year-old me had no clout! My Mom would never get into this argument at all. She would curl up in the aisle seat and sleep till the next destination. My sister and I would play or sleep during the bus journey, squished up between the adults!

Though I do not have a full recollection of the whole trip, I do remember a few highlights.

- I had a fever for some time during the journey. Must have been the heat. But it disappeared in Rameshwaram after taking bath in the water from the different wells in the temple premises.
- My grandma fell down and hurt her leg in Madurai and my parents went around looking for a doctor for her on the roads of Madurai. She was okay after some medication.
- In Palani, we had to climb a lot of steps up the hill. Now there is a beautiful ropeway all the way up the hill. At that time, we had to climb up to reach the temple. All along the way there were a lot of beggars. On the way back, my Mom gave me some coins to give them. I remember giving them to as many of the beggars as possible. I felt as if I did a great thing. Silly me!
- Our night stop would be in a large empty room where all of us tourists had to grab a corner on the floor, spread out our sheets and sleep. We had no idea about this in the beginning. On the first day, all the other passengers grabbed the best positions under the few fans operating or near the windows. By the time we got down from the bus with our luggage, we had to sleep in a corner where no air reached in the heat of the night. I quickly took it upon myself to grab the best places from then on. As soon as the bus would stop at our destination, I would run into the dormitory, slipping in between all the others, check out the best running fan and mark out space enough for five of us to sleep and guard it with my sister. After my grandma would come over, I would make her take my place, then I would help my Dad with the luggage. I did enjoy beating the best "grabbers" every night!
- Once we had a night halt at Chennai, still called Madras at that time. The tour operator provided a dormitory that had a few chickens running around. My mother took one look at the place and put her foot down. Dad went around looking for a hotel nearby. That night we slept well.
- Each and every time our bus stopped anywhere, my Dad would buy us tender coconut to drink. After a long drive in the hot, sweltering bus, the cool drink would hydrate and refresh us at the same time. By the end of the ten-day trip, we must have drunk a gallon of the tender coconut water.

- My Mom was the most overworked person on this vacation, poor thing. I am sure she did not enjoy this trip at all. Imagine having to travel every day in searing heat, look after 2 kids under 10 and a senior citizen, wash clothes in the night, pack and unpack daily! Uff!

The most memorable part of the trip for me was when my parents bought us a doll each on the Marina Beach of Chennai. They were about 6-inch dolls that would close their eyes when in supine position and open their bright blue eyes when standing. They came with a pair of shoes, a comb, a bottle and had golden hair. Oh! They were beautiful. I named my doll Sumitra, after the mother of Lakshmana, brother of Rama. I had always liked the character of Sumitra in the Ramayana. My sister named hers Swapna.

It was on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1980 that we first met Swapna and Sumitra. So, we both decided that 24<sup>th</sup> April was their birthday!

Every year for many years after our trip, we celebrated the dolls' birthday with great pomp and show. We would give them a traditional bath, making sure to shield their eyes from water, just like how our mother did for us. Make them wear new outfits. The new outfits for both Swapna and Sumitra were made by my talented mother. She would sew beautiful dresses for both of them using small bits of fabric complete with laces and buttons and what not. Each year it would be a new one, completely different from all the previous ones. Between Swapna and Sumitra, they had nothing less than 15 outfits to alternate. They ranged from off-shoulder dresses, long gowns, churidar, frocks, and pants. Amma also made sweets for us to eat for their birthday! It was a legit celebration at our home!

During the other days, we would change their outfits from time to time during our play. Over years, they lost their hair, due to our excessive washing, combing and styling. My mother sewed on some hair too on their bald heads using fine black thread! Swapna, poor thing, lost one of her eyes when a boy poked his finger into her eye. He was the brother of my friend. He was too little to understand what he did. But we never forgave him!

We kept up this ritual of dolls' birthday for many years. Then slowly it got lost when we grew out of playing with dolls. But we never stopped caring for them. They used to live in a box. We would periodically change their outfit and comb out their hair.

### **Comparison Corner:**

*Can you imagine taking a tour with three generations in this day and age in a non-AC bus across a span of 10 days with relentless travelling in the heat of summer? Even if that can be envisaged, can you imagine staying overnight in a dormitory on the floor with a whole bunch of strangers, sharing common bathrooms? Looking back now, I don't think I will ever be able to take such a trip at all. I would require a bed with clean linen, a separate bathroom and of course AC transport.*

*I think my parents were more adventurous than me. They did this with minimum fuss and full enthusiasm. I have photos to prove this!*

## Study time and Posts

My parents never had to pester me or my sister about doing our homework or tell us to study. We were both very interested in studying. After our evening play, we would sit together and finish off our homework by ourselves. We would maintain our classwork and workbooks too in good order. In fact, my sister would get my hand-me-down text books most of the time. Only when she picked up Sanskrit as her first language, she would get brand new textbooks for that subject. I had opted for Hindi instead. We kept our books in good order. After all, we both loved books. So, defacing or tearing them was never an option.

When we were in school, both of us had exams at the same time. Holidays too used to match. During college, this routine was broken since both of us were pursuing different subjects. Though our timetables wouldn't match, there used to be some days when we would get to study together like old times. This mostly would fall during the study holidays, when the college would give a few days of holidays before the start of the university exams.

We both would draw up study timetables and would mostly stick to them. We would sit in different rooms so that we wouldn't disturb each other during our studies.

Sometimes, I would get bored and I would write a short note for her, make a small envelope and put the note in it. Then I would carry it to her room and shout "POST" and throw the envelope into her lap or on to her book and go away. She would write out a reply and put it into another envelope. She would too shout "POST" and throw it at me. We would continue this for a few minutes and then go back to studies. Almost every day we had this postal service going!

We both would write out the formulae and theorems and practice. For this we used up a lot of paper. Most of this written work would be done on waste sheets that was printed on one side. Old dot matrix printer paper with reports printed on one side and such. Dad would bring reports that he would not require from his office for this purpose. We would pass on our "posts" on these papers.

In the middle of studying, I would simply doodle and draw stick figure impressions of my sister and send those as my "posts". I was not a good doodler too. I simply created these for my fun. But my sister has preserved some of these doodles till now. I will share a few of them here.



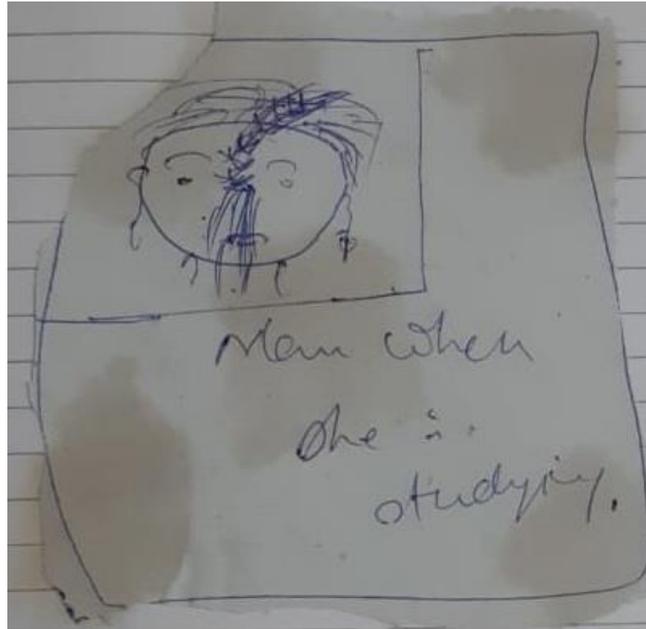
Whenever we studied sitting on the ground, I would end up lying on my stomach. But my sister would study for long hours sitting with her back straight as a ramrod.

I did these two doodles to show that. The second one is a diagrammatic representation of the first one.

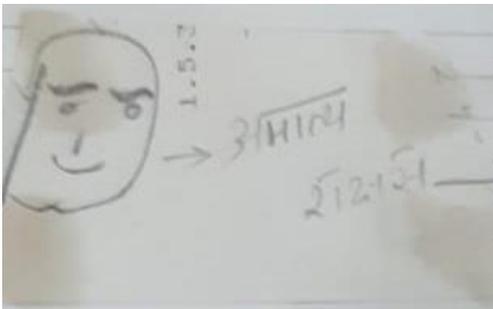
:D

- COMPARISON OF AIR FREIGHTS OF DIFFERENT AIRLINES		Station : EOHBRAY		Currency : /	
BL	65.00	GM	1307.00	LH	190.00
LN	150.00	SM	1303.00	CC	220.00
CC	16.95	BL	17.00	LH	20.80
CC	16.95	LH	20.80	GM	23.50
CC	19.95	BL	16.00	LH	20.80
CC	19.95	LH	20.80	GM	21.50
CC	18.95	BL	17.00	GM	20.00
CC	14.95	SM	20.00	LH	20.80
CC	16.85	SM	17.00	GM	19.50
CC	16.85	GM	19.50	LH	20.80
BL	16.50	CC	16.95	GM	19.00

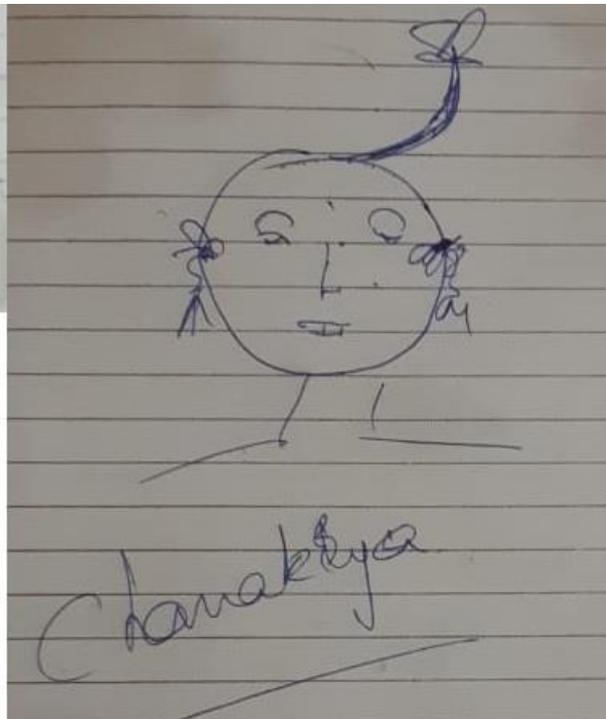
*diagrammatic representation of sitting posture*

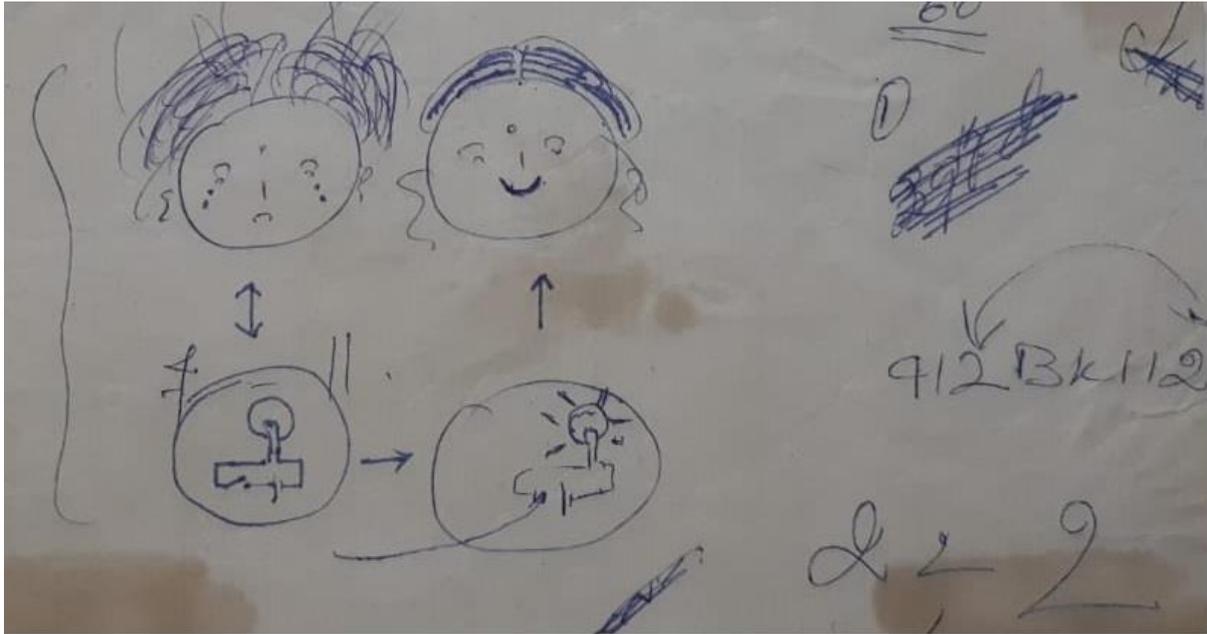


Whenever my sister had to concentrate hard, her braid would be pulled on to her face!



My sister had a Sanskrit lesson on Chanakya and his rival Rakshasa. These are my impressions of those two characters!





My sister came home after an exam one day all agitated because she could not remember if she wrote her roll number correctly. Then she remembered exactly how she wrote the digit "2" that came twice in her number. I drew this to show how she was pulling her hair, and inside her brain the electrical connection was made and the bulb lit up and she became ok again! :D



My sister's Sanskrit sir had a hair style that looked like the state of J&K. This is him! He would wear suits everyday even in summer!



Self portrait! and self explanatory too!

A lot of times, especially in the summer, and just before exams, there would be prolonged power cuts in the evenings. Invariably, we both would end up having to study in candle light. We had a huge candle

just for this purpose. It was a thick one and its wick too was long. It would cast a bigger light than the normal ones. We both would sit on either side of it and spread out our books for studying.

Of course, this kind of diligence for learning even during power cuts was only if exams were nearing. Other times power cuts meant extra time to play!

Power cut time meant *Antakshari* time. *Antakshari* is a fun game where one person sings a snatch of a song and the next person must sing another, but the song must start with the ending syllable of the previous song. If the power cut would last an hour, our game too would last an hour. One small emergency light or candle in the middle of the room and the mood would be set for the game. All of us would congregate in one room and songs would flow one after another. We have had so many fun impromptu *antakshari* nights; courtesy the Karnataka Electricity Board!

Power cuts and candle lights meant shadow plays on the walls. Fingers would make grotesque images depending on the angle used. Or there would be deer, fish and birds on the walls. We would laugh at those shadows and make up stories too.

**Comparison Corner:**

*With the use of inverter now at home, these unscheduled fun song sessions are lost in my home now. We do play anthakshari, but not in candle light.*

## Wooden dolls

Among all the indoor games that we (my sister and I) played, our favourite were the games we invented and played with a set of wooden dolls.

These were about 2 inches in height and had no arms. Just a head and a body. These dolls were 10 in number and were actually 5 pairs. 5 girls matched with 5 boys. They were colourfully painted. They were pairs representing different cultures of India. There was a pandit and his wife, a Muslim chap and his begum, a Goan and his wife, and two other couples.

For some years, my mother did not give them to us for playing. All 10 of them would stand proudly on a showpiece on the wall. Then one day she gave them to us to play with. We invented many games with them.

Every time we played with them; we would give them different names. One day, we asked our Dad to name the boys. Dad looked at them and said the pandit was Amar, the Muslim fellow was Akbar and the Christian doll was Anthony. You know, after the blockbuster movie, *Amar, Akbar, Anthony*. We liked those names. Now, we had two more boys to be named. We asked our mother to name them. I guess she was in a funky mood that day and so she just sang the song "*mera naam abdul rahman, pistawala main hoon pathan*". This is an old Hindi film song. So naturally, one of the boys became Abdul. The last fellow was named Madakarinyaka or Mada in short after a king from my Kannada textbook.

You would think, since the boys had such good names and we took so much pain to give them those fine names, that the girls too would have beautiful names. But no!

We took absolutely no effort to do that.

Anthony's wife wore an orange dress, so we named her "Orangy".

Amar's wife wore red, so she was "Reddi".

Mada's wife and Abdul's wife both wore green, giving us a problem. We measured out their heights and named them "Pedda Greeni" and "Chinna Greeni" respectively. "*Pedda*" means big and "*Chinna*" means small in Telugu.

Now, Akbar's wife wore blue. But she was not "Bluey". There was a good reason for that. Due to some mischance, the foot of that girl was broken and she could not stand on her own. We made her a small shoe out of the top of an ink filler. We pushed in the rubber and made it just right for her to stand in. She was the only one among all the 10 to have a special footwear. Anyway, since she was a wobbly one, we named her "mamma" or grandmother.

Ha ha ha ha! I am rolling on the floor laughing as I am writing this! Let me recall the pairs for you.

Anthony-Orangy; Amar-Reddi; Abdul-Chinna Greeni; Mada-Pedda Greeni; and Akbar-Mamma!

They have been our companions for many an afternoon. We made up stories to enact with them. All of them had a tiny hole on the top of their heads. If our story required that the characters be rich and famous, then we would stick a feather into that hole and voila! they were the upper class!

We played house with them. We would make them hop around and say their dialogues and make up stories on the go! Such imagination we had! But in all the stories we made, the names remained the same, always!

After a bout of rain, we would sometimes take them for a swim in the puddles formed in the garden.

Paired with these dolls, we would use building blocks made of plastic that we called “building”. These came in different shapes like a square and a triangle. These pieces had slots into which long or short connectors could be inserted and we could create anything.

We would share the “building” pieces equally and create so many things like beds, sofas, trains, boxes etc.

One favourite play was that both of us would create a new thing with the building and after the appointed time, we would examine the other’s creation and identify what was being depicted. For further enhancing the effect of the scene created, we would use the wooden dolls too.

Every time we played this game, we tried to create something entirely new. It was very enjoyable making these. Unlimited fun! The building set came in three colours, making the sharing equally a little challenging. But we managed it. We would turn our backs to each other when creating so as to not copy from the other. Sometimes if one of the pieces was less, we would request from each other. I don’t remember ever fighting over the pieces.

The dolls and building had kept us entertained for hours on end. Good times!

### **Comparison Corner:**

*We played with the same toys for years, keeping all the pieces safe, and never getting bored. We invented new and fun stories with the same dolls. Now we give our kids too many different toys. I have seen my own kids getting bored with a game too soon and looking for a new thing. We were happy creating new things with old toys. I do not see that in kids these days.*

After many years of playing with them, they became faded and their faces too lost some of their painted features. The day my mother disposed them was a sad day for both of us. I still remember the shock I experienced when my mother said that she had thrown them away since we were no longer playing with them and that they had faded beyond recognition.

Oh! By the way, since these dolls were tiny, we called them.....

*Chinna bommalu* or little dolls!

## Happy hours

As a kid growing up in a house with a personal playground, I have had my share of outdoor games. Those times form a big part of my childhood memories.

Our school would be over by 3.45 PM. After walking home, we would wash up, change, eat something that our mother made for us, and then run off outside to play till it would become too dark to see anything. Come back inside, wash up again and sit for homework. This was our routine all year round for as long as we lived in the colony, which is all of my childhood. Lucky me, right?!! Don't I know it!!

A lot of times we would have a couple of friends over to play with us. If not, my sister and I were content to play with each other. Occasionally my mother and my father too would join us for a game of badminton. My mother was sportier than my Dad. She would join us for all kinds of games. Indoor or outdoor. She willingly and happily joined us in our share of fun more often than not.

My mother had a green thumb and she had a whole variety of plants in our garden. Even though my mother had utilized the grounds around the house optimally for her plants and trees, she deliberately left a large chunk of yard spare for us to use exclusively for games. Most of our games would be in this space. Of course, when playing hide and seek, all of the grounds were fair game.

One of the games we played frequently was hopscotch. You know, the one where players hop on one foot. We had many varieties of this game. In one, a designated person who was "out" had to catch the others within a boundary, hopping on one foot all the while. If successful, the person caught would be the one hopping next.

Playing hopscotch with a flat piece of stone was our favourite. This too had many versions. All of them required a pattern to be drawn on the ground. One shape was like an aeroplane. One was a square cut into 4 equal parts. One was a 2x6 or 2x8 column. All of these we would draw by dragging our feet on the dry soil, with no care for mud on our bare feet! Each of these games were played differently. I do wish I had a video to show you how different they all were. Except the aeroplane, all of them required hopping on one foot, balancing the body and pushing the flat stone from one square to the next without stepping on the boundary lines and of course without putting the other foot on the ground.

The game with 4 squares was quite tough because we had about 8 different ways to hop. I will try and recall some of them. Regular one with a foot off the ground, holding the raised foot with a hand, folding the raised foot in front of the body and holding with hand, hopping with the feet crossed at the ankles were some of them. Each pose had a different name. Playing this game gave us great balance and also core strength.

We used to play a different version of dodgeball. Here we would draw a fairly large circle on the ground. All of the players would be inside the circle. The person who was "out" had to be outside this circle. He/she would hit the ones inside with a ball, but had to catch them only below the knee. The first who was hit would be the next one "out".

Then there was "Gold Spot". This game is named after a popular soda during 80's before Pepsi and Coke took over. I do not know how many still remember this drink. It was an orange flavoured, fizzy soda. Quite a popular drink those days. Anyway, I am digressing.

"Gold Spot" was a game that had nothing to do with that drink. Everyone playing holds hands and shouts "GoooooIIldddd spot" and jumps backwards. One by one each person tries to jump on to the foot

of the neighbour with a single hop, shouting “gold spot”. The neighbour must dodge the foot stamper by jumping away in time. If trodden, he/she is out of the game. Otherwise, he/she now tries to jump on the foot of the next neighbour. Ultimately it becomes a match between 2 people who try to hop on to the opponent’s foot. Good game. Try it with your kids and friends.

Another popular game was “Lagori”. This game has many names and is popular all over the country. Here 2 teams compete against each other. There are 7 uneven but fairly flat stones that are placed one on top of the other. One team hits the stones with a ball and the ball passes to the next team. Now the task for the first team is to put the stones back in a stack before anyone of their team members are hit by the ball. The opposing team coordinates by trying to prevent the restacking by passing the ball between themselves to hit any member in first team with the ball. Even if one member of the stacking team is hit by the ball, before the 7 stone stack is up, the stackers lose. It is an energetic game with a great deal of shouting and running. It does require at least 4 people.

One other game I remember vividly is “Land, River, Garden, Forest, Sea”. We would play this on the steps to our front door. We would designate an area on the 3 steps we had each to “Land”, “River”, “Garden”, “Forest” and “Sea” using a chalk to demarcate the areas. The person who was “out” would call out any of these names in any random order and as fast or as slow as he/she wanted. The others would have to hop and stand on the areas called out. If they stepped into a wrong area then they became the next “out” person. It is a good game to play with young children. Try it sometime.

Another fun game to play with a bunch of young kids is the “Crocodile” game. It is another game that requires no props. On the ground draw 2 parallel lines that are about 3-4 feet apart. The “out” person or the “crocodile” is required to stand in between these lines. The area in between the 2 parallel lines is the “river”. The “crocodile” can move anywhere within the lines but cannot come out of them. All other players stand to one side of a line. Their objective is to cross the “river” without the “crocodile” catching them.

Here there are a set of dialogues spoken between the “crocodile” and the river crossers.

Everyone: “Crocodile, Crocodile, can we cross the river?”

Crocodile: “Only if you have a certain colour.”

Everyone: “Colour colour, what colour do you choose?”

The crocodile then chooses a colour. If any of the players have that colour in their dress or anywhere on their person, then they are allowed to walk across the river and the crocodile cannot catch them. The others will have to run across the river and the crocodile will try and catch that person. If caught, that person is the next crocodile. This is such a fun game. To ensure that no player got to walk freely when I was to be a crocodile, I would choose some vague colours like a “dirty yellow” or a “neon blue”, which were sure to not be on any of my opponents. That way no one would be able to get away from me for free!

Play this game with a bunch of kids and I guarantee you will have a whale of a time!

There were other games we played as well. Badminton, hide and seek, running and catching etc. The cork of the badminton would invariably end up on the window *chajja*. Then we would have to do all kinds of circus to get it down.

In the kite season, my Dad would buy us a colourful kite each and try to teach us to fly them. I have forgotten whether my sister could fly it or not, but for all the world, I could never fly it AT ALL. In the

end, I would simply hold the string at one end and run watching the kite trail behind me. That is about the only height my kite could go to.

Contrary to all the kids of India, whether then and now, we never played cricket! Scandalous, you say?! Neither my sister nor I really enjoyed that game, though our parents did buy us a plastic bat and a ball to go with it.

### **Comparison Corner:**

*Kids of today are lucky to have sports academies and clubs to go to. In today's world of gated communities, kids have more opportunities to pursue a sport of their choice. We had no such thing. We just had fun doing whatever we wanted. Since the public playgrounds have reduced nowadays, and personal gardens are scarce, for people not living in gated communities, playing outdoor games has become a challenge. Kids are missing out a lot of fun.*

Here is one of my all-time favourite indoor game. It is fun to play. There is no limit to the number of players for this game. Minimum number of players is two. All that is required is paper and pen for each player.

The game is: Name Place Animal Thing.

Every player is required to make five columns on their paper, one each for name, place, animal, thing and total.

One player tells another to "start". That designated person starts to recite the alphabet in his/her mind. Then the first player says "stop" at any point. The player saying the alphabet tells the alphabet at which he/she was stopped. That letter becomes the chosen one for that round. Now, every player must write down a name, a place, an animal and a thing that starts from that letter. Once every one completes, then each one reads out what they have written, column wise. If no other player has written the same word they have written, then they mark 10 points for themselves. If the same word is written by another player, then they both have only 5 points. After all the columns are read out, each player counts the points he/she has scored and writes that down in the "total" column. Now proceed to find the next letter using the "start-stop" technique.

There are some basic rules to this game.

1. "Place" has to be a name of a city or town, not continents or countries or areas inside a city.
2. "Animal" can include birds, insects and aquatic animals.
3. "Thing" has to be something that can be touched.
4. You can have a time limit for each round.

This game is very good for people of all ages. It is very educative for kids and improves GK.

We used to play this game a lot. We modified this game to include a total of 26 columns. The "Name" would start with the letter selected, then the "Place" would be the next alphabet, "Animal" would be the one after that and so on. So, all the letters in the English alphabet would be used in one round. It was my A2Z from my childhood, much like the A2Z that I like to participate in now!

We used to have columns like, movie, actor, actress, book, a male character from any book, a female character from any book, author, sport, sport personality, rivers, monuments, TV shows, fruits,

vegetables, brands, famous persons, song and so on. We would make up 26 columns by having so many categories.

Next time you want to play a game, try this one. It is a really entertaining and educative.

## Grandmother and story time

So far, in this series of recollections from my childhood memories, I have not spoken about my grandmother, my Dad's mother.

There were many facets to her personality. Some good, some not so good and some weird.

She was fond of dressing up and also jewellery. Every evening, by 4.30 PM, she would change into a fresh saree with a large zari border. She would wear her saree in the dhoti style. She would make sure the border of her saree would show well. Then she would sit outside on the steps and watch us play. She would always wear all her jewellery.

She was the one who introduced us to stories of all kinds. She was a good story teller. She could make a tale come alive. She would capture our imagination with all the dialogues and twists and keep the suspense alive.

My sister and I learnt our Ramayana, Mahabharata, tales of Lord Krishna, tales of Shiva, and everything else from the Indian Mythology from her.

In the summer months, we would sit outside on a woven wooden cot in the garden. The gentle breeze with fragrance of the flowers mixed in, used to be the perfect setting for another instalment of the story she had in mind.

She would tell us the stories in a style similar to the daily soaps of today. A half hour of story, stopping at a cliff hanger and that would be continued the next day. We would eagerly wait for the rest of the story.

Not just the Ramayana and Mahabharata, she would also tell us folk tales. I particularly remember a story of a magician who hid his soul in the heart of a parrot and hid the parrot in a niche of a big tree in the middle of the forest. The hero and heroine's struggle to get better of the magician was the crux of the story. It was fascinating to say the least. I used to be on the edge of my seat to know more.

She has repeated the Ramayana and Mahabharata many times over for us. Now, we know these stories so well. All credit goes to her. She would get all the names, plot points and twists bang on. There are not many of my generation, let alone the present generation who can tell stories from these classics so well. I think I know my mythology well enough. All thanks to my grandmother.

### **Comparison Corner:**

*My sister and I were lucky to have a granny who told us so many stories. I do hope every child has a grandparent who will shower him/her with love. In this world of nuclear families, the warmth of a granny or grandpa is missing.*

Sometimes when I used to ask her for a new story, she would say "Today the story train did not arrive". I used to think that there actually was a train carrying stories! There used to be a railway line that would run at a little distance from my back yard. I used to think that this "story train" would stop behind my backyard and give my grandmother some stories. In my imagination, the "story train" would come in the dead of night, because never did I see any train stopping during the day time. Ha ha!

My grandmother promised that she would buy me a wristwatch if I secured good marks in my 10<sup>th</sup> board exams. After I did get decent marks, she gave me the money to buy a watch of my choice. I still have it with me.

My sister used to use an old watch of my Dad during her 10<sup>th</sup> standard. My grandmother refused to buy her a new watch after her 10<sup>th</sup> results, saying she already had one. I protested a lot with her, arguing that a new one from a grandmother to commemorate a great result was different from any old, battered watch. Ultimately, I won this contest of wills and my sister was the owner of a brand-new Titan watch. Tata had launched Titan around that time. She still has that watch.

## Couple of nuts

Let me take you back to a time in my childhood when we had to turn to radio or music tapes for our music hunger. It was not the time of CDs or Internet radio or MP3.

There was another thing that is now lost in the annals of time, just like the tapes and tape recorders.

Those were the small booklets of the lyrics of film songs. Oh! Yes. There were tiny books that were sold on the roadside for Rs 2/- or less. The printed lyrics of songs of popular movies sold like hot cakes.

There was one Telugu movie *Shankarabharanam* which became hugely successful. It was a movie that put Carnatic classical music in the centre stage and its songs too became popular.

My parents took us to this movie when it was released and Amma also bought the booklet with its lyrics after that. Now comes the fun part of this story.

My sister and I took the booklet and we divided up the songs between ourselves! The pact was that I couldn't sing "her" song and she couldn't sing "mine". Even humming the other's song was barred and so was bathroom singing.

For example, "*Ragam taanam pallavi*" was hers and "*Omkaara naadanu sandhanamau*" was mine! We kept up our bargain for a really long time.

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There was one movie theatre in our colony. This one was the only nearest theatre. If we had to go to another one, we had to "go to the city". And that was a big deal! We had to take an hour-long bus ride, wait in the queue there. After the movie, invariably there would be lunch/dinner outside. And then of course, we had to come back by the bus. If we were lucky, we would get seats in the buses, otherwise, we would have to stand!

Our theatre never (never ever) showed the latest releases. Any movie had to be at least 2 years old to be shown here. We had to go to the city, to see the film *Saudagar* when it was released as we wanted to see it at the earliest. The hype was too much to ignore!

Since we had to take a bus to get to the theatre, we had to start very early to be able to get tickets to the movie as the queues would be very long. Those were not the times of online booking and phone booking. To beat the queues, it was decided that my sister and I would go early, stand in the queue and pick up tickets and my parents would take a much later bus to be able to get to the show in time. This way at least two of us would not have to hurry.

Accordingly, we both reached the theatre much ahead of time. The counter was closed, yet the queue was long. Thinking of it now, I feel, how patient and forgiving we all were then.

### Comparison Corner:

*Can you imagine, standing in the hot sun for a couple of movie tickets for a few hours? No way! Now I can't even think of doing it. Now, we will just ditch the movie plan and do something else if we had to wait. But back then, we had a lot of time on hands! We both did not mind it at all. We stood there along with other souls like us and whiled away the time.*

When the counter opened, the guy inside told everyone that a maximum of two tickets only could be purchased by a single person. This was to avoid bulk buying of tickets for black market purposes. We were not perturbed. We wanted 4 tickets and between the 2 of us, this would not be an issue.

Before our turn came, we both talked it over that since only 2 tickets per person were being given, we should purchase 2 each separately. It never occurred to us to say we were 2 people wanting 4 tickets.

Anyway.....

I went first to the counter and got 2 tickets. Then my sister went up to the counter and got 2 more. Sometime later our parents came. We went into the theatre. And Lo! we had 2 tickets in one end of a row and the other 2 tickets on the other end of another row behind. We were not together!

If you needed further proof, here it is: We were couple of chuckleheads!

The people next to us refused to exchange seats with us, so my sister and I sat in one row and my parents in another row and we saw the movie like that.

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Sometimes we would all go to movies in the only theatre in our colony. My mother, in her infinite wisdom, would sometimes take only one us. So, if I got to go to a movie, my sister would go to the next one. Mind you, not all movies were subject to this method. For some of them, the whole family would go. The criteria based on which my mother made these decisions is still a mystery!

### **Comparison Corner:**

*The fact remains that we both never once protested this random thing of taking only one of us to the movies. If my mother did not take one of us, the other would simply not go. Not once do I remember either of us making a fuss or crying or anything. It is not that our mother was a strict disciplinarian or that we were being punished for something. Maybe she had some reasons that she did not share with us. We just never questioned her. I cannot imagine any such behaviour from the kids of this generation, mine included. Maybe we both were simpletons or dunderheads!*

Anyway, once my sister got to go to the movie *Qurbani*. She came back and the next day, enacted the whole movie to me! The story, with dialogues, songs and fights were all excellently recreated for my benefit. Honestly speaking, I do not remember the story much. I only remember my sister's re-enactment. It was almost like I was in the theatre myself. I remember really enjoying her retelling the movie for me. It was like an exclusive show just for me!



**Goofy Me**

I have always been a bit of a goofy girl! I take hit numbers and sing made up lyrics for them, irritating my daughters. I talk gibberish sometimes. I entertain myself with small dances. I laugh out loud, without caring for my surroundings! Oooh! I am like that!

In my young days too, I did not really care much for “what will people say”. I will try and recall a few quirky episodes that I was directly involved in!

## In the sun

My grandmother used to put her mattress out in the sun sometimes. She used to put it in the backyard in the hot sun for more than half an hour and then take it in again. I remember I once sat on this mattress, in the hot sun for a really long time. I must have been about 9 or 10 years old. I sat there without moving a muscle, legs spread out in front of me. Then a fly came by and sat on my bare leg, I looked at it and started noting its features. The way its wings fluttered, the way it would rub its antennae together, as if plotting something like an 80s villain! Then, slowly other flies came. In a short period of time, there were at least 50 houseflies sitting on me, basking in the sun. I suppose some were friends because they sat together and caught up on the day's news! Or maybe it was their daily stand-up meeting to fix their deadlines for the day!

I did not think it was dirty or unhygienic or gross. I just sat there seeing all these flies on me. The sun beating down was making me hot, but I sat still, unmoving.

This is how my mother found me after some time. I got an earful from her. I got up hurriedly and all my fly friends flew away!

## Prank calling

We had a telephone system in the colony where we could call anyone within the colony. That would include the factory, residences, bank, school, library, shops, etc. We could not call anyone outside the colony. This was just a telephone network exclusive to the colony. All numbers would be of 4 digits. Sometimes we would get wrong numbers.

Once I had a great idea to make wrong number call. Just for cheap thrills. I roped in my sister, my (hapless) partner-in-crime. I told her, I would call a random four-digit number and ask the recipient "Hello, is this some-other-four-digit-number?" and when they would say "wrong number", our mission would be successful!

Accordingly, I picked up the phone and dialled some number. It went off to the Dad's factory. Some random gruff voice said "Hallo?". That was my cue to ask for a four-digit number other than what I had dialled. But I lost my nerve completely! I panicked and shouted "Hallo, 1234!" and banged the receiver down. I have no idea who that person was, heck, it could be the managing director himself or some shop floor workman. But he must have been one surprised individual that day to have had a surreal conversation with a chit of a child!

Needless to say, I never did that again. I could not gather my courage!

## Stories from the Officer's Club

The factory that my Dad worked for had an officers' club. Every Christmas, they used to organize a Christmas themed get together. I remember one year so vividly. There was a cultural program. The main attraction that year was that there would be a Santa who would distribute candies and sweets to kids. We all sat in the audience. My parents sat with their respective friends. I sat with my sister. We purposely chose an aisle seat to be more accessible to the Santa. That year Santa was being played by my Dad's friend, Mr. Theodore. He came on to the stage, wearing the Santa outfit, complete with red coat, red cap, white beard and a red bag. He said a few things and then came among the audience to distribute sweets to the children from his red bag slung on his shoulder. All of us kids were super excited to get sweets from Santa.

But to our horror, Santa came and gave sweets only to the children of Theodore uncle's bosses who studied in convent schools. I waited patiently for my turn, but that turn never came. Santa turned away. That really angered me. I HAD to take things into my own hands. The injustice! I channelled my inner super hero. I told my sister to be ready. I told her to sit with her frock spread out to collect the sweets that I was about to bring in! And then, I fell on Santa and grabbed a handful of toffees from his bag and dropped them onto my sister's lap and ran back for more. Seeing me grabbing, all other children deprived of toffees, joined me and we manhandled Santa! He tried valiantly to hold on to his bag, dress, beard and what not. But his beard came off and he could no longer hold on to his bag. We grabbed the sweets. I made several rounds between him and my sister. Ha ha!

At the end of the episode, my new blue sweater that my mother made was full of fluff from Santa's beard!!

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The officer's club used to conduct an annual competition for all kids up to 16 years. Those included painting, singing, fancy dress, sports and the like. My sister and I would participate in some of them. Singing was one that we both definitely participated in. There used to be categories based on ages of kids. One year both of us were slotted into the senior category. We sang our songs and we won. During the prize distribution we saw that the sub juniors and juniors got Amar Chitra Katha and we seniors were given silly nursery rhyme books as prizes. We could not keep quiet, could we! Both of us marched to the organizer, who happened to be my Dad's good friend and also my friend's father. That did not deter us. We straight up fought with him. He had to finally take our prizes back and replace them with Amar Chitra Katha. We still have those books!

During such dare devil acts, I never once consulted with my parents to discuss my actions before doing them. I did not care if the person I was up against was some friend of my father or any senior in the organization. I would simply go ahead, consequences be damned!

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My father used to bring old issues of magazines home from the officer's club library every week. These would include Women's Era, Eve's Weekly, Illustrated Weekly, Filmfare, Stardust, India Today and Femina. Some of these have gone out of print now. I would read these back-to-back. My mother had a strict "no story book reading during academic year" rule. So, these magazines were my reading material then. In some of the lifestyle and women's magazines, there would be a few photo spreads of kids'

wear and women's fashion wear. I remember, my sister and I would choose our favourites from these. I would forbid her to even look at mine! I would imagine those dresses to be actually mine!

**Comparison Corner:**

*I have nothing to say here! I can only say that compared to me, my sister is the same one!*

I always was and always will be goofy to the core! Being an adult is overrated!

## Me and my glasses

I have worn spectacles from the time I was 12 years old. I still do. It is my constant companion. I need it for seeing distant things. Yeah! I have myopia.

I was in 7<sup>th</sup> standard when I came to know that I had an eye problem. I had blurry vision and I was none the wiser. I carried on as if everything was okay. I had no clue and nor did my parents. I guess I never realized that I was seeing the world hazily. Yeah! I was (am) a nut!

I had a class test one day. My mathematics teacher made all students sit far apart from each other so that there would not be any cheating. The questions for the test were written down on the black board. I was made to sit on the floor at the very back of the class. The test began and I wrote out the answers to the questions on the board to the best of my ability. I was not a bad student. I would get fairly good grades especially in maths. I scored a spectacularly low score in this test. The teacher asked me to bring my mother over to the school to talk about my marks. This was the first time that my mother had been called to school over grades. I was very uncomfortable, and so was my mother. I thought that I was about to get a big scolding from the teacher.

When my mother came and Helen Miss told her that I had done badly in the test because all the questions itself were copied wrong from the board. I had actually written out my own questions and answered them, instead of the ones the teacher gave because I could not see the board clearly! The teacher advised my mother to get my eyes tested!

That's when we knew that I had a problem with my vision! I remember that evening, my father held up a newspaper for me to read from different distances and I could only read the bolder headlines, that too only up to a certain distance.

The next stop was the ophthalmologist. He did all kinds of tests including the one where the pupils are dilated and the doctor peers inside the eyeball to see the retina. In this the doctor shines a bright light right into the eye, asking the patient to look away from the light. Then he comes right into your personal space putting his face close to your eye and takes a look inside. The first time I got tested, I was very uncomfortable with this. Not with the doctor's face in my eye, but with the light. I still find that most disorienting, especially since the pupils are dilated to allow more light into the eye.

Since our colony had no optical shop, we had to go to the "city" to get my spectacles. I still remember the shop that we went to. It was a fairly small shop in the heart of the city. Selecting a frame was very exciting for me. There were not many styles available for kids those days. I had to select between black and brown colour frames. I chose black. For many years after that too, I invariably selected black frame whenever I had to change my frames.

The order was completed almost 10-12 days later. Nowadays, they are done very fast, but not during those times. When I first put on my new spectacles, the whole world came into focus! Oh! What a joy to see the world with clarity! I still remember the feeling.

Oh! Yes, I forgot to tell you something. Between the time of my teacher finding out about my vision and me actually getting the glasses, all my teachers came to know of my problem. I was made to sit in the front benches so that I could squint at the black board better. I used to sit next to the shortest boy of the class: a tiny fellow and he became a good friend after this.

Here is a stupid story! About a week or ten days before my 10<sup>th</sup> board exams, I broke my spectacles. One of the arms came clean off. To get a new pair, we had to go to the “city” again. Also, even if we did go, the order was sure not be ready before the exams. So, we had a great “*jugaad*” idea. My mother tied a dark blue wool to one end of the broken black frame and I put a hair clip in my hair to hold the wool in place and voila! new spectacles were ready!

I went and wrote all my exams in this manner. I don’t know if my friends noticed or not. I definitely didn’t care. I generally don’t give much thought to what anyone may say.

### **Comparison Corner:**

*Yeah! I did wear broken spectacles held up by mismatched wool and a hair clip and walked around nonchalantly! I seriously doubt if anyone who is a teenager would do that anymore. Now kids and adults too are so conscious of fashion and being prim and proper. I was not afraid of being laughed at. I still don’t care if I am!*

Sometime in my mid-twenties, I went to Singapore for work for a few months. During my stay there, I went along with a few of my friends to Sentosa, the huge theme park island there for a day’s outing. Here we first went to the water theme park and I promptly lost my spectacles in one of the first water rides I took. Later, walking around and exploring Sentosa was a blur! I did borrow a friend’s glasses sometimes to see something. I had to buy a new frame in Singapore. I did not have a spare one. For a few days, I had to manage without them. I don’t know what came over me, but I did buy the most hideous pair there! Maybe those came in my budget. I still look at some of the photos from that time and I cringe. God knows what I was thinking when I bought those!

My spectacles and I have a very special bond! I call them my “eternal truth”. I will tell you why. I do not require them to read. I have this bad habit of removing them whenever I need to read, or use my computer or phone. I remove them, keep them away, read and then promptly forget where I have kept them. Then I end up searching for them all over. I rope in my hapless family into this futile search. It could be anywhere, and I would have no clue! I call this my “search for eternal truth”. And I search for it constantly!

## Election time

Election time, both the state assembly and central Lok Sabha, were a period of intense activity in our sleepy colony.

Our colony was sprawling, with huge tree lined wide roads. The traffic too was minimal with bicycles and an occasional scooter being the vehicles moving. The pedestrians mostly had a free reign on the roads. We kids had a field day on the roads, walking to and from the school. A lot of times, I used to start from home kicking a stone all the way to the school. I would repeat that on the way back with another stone. The stone obviously would not follow a straight path. I would have no care for any traffic and would walk back and forth chasing the stone, kicking it from wherever it would stop. There was really no need to watch out for sudden traffic descending, no screeching horns and such. We would stop and pick up sticks, fallen leaves and flowers, run and chase on the roads to our hearts content.

I remember finding coins on the ground sometimes while walking. Finding 2 paise, 5 paise, or 10 paise was great. But if I found a 25 paise coin, man, that would be a big day for me! We would use this money to buy gooseberries that an old lady used to sell near our school. She would give a handful for 5 paise. Heaven!

The street vendors selling fruits and such shouting their wares, would be the most exciting thing. They too would be on foot.

Since we all lived in a colony, there was really no need for autorickshaws to be running inside. Almost all places were accessible on foot and most people did just that. Looking back, I think I did my most walking in my school days. Now, I have to go for a walk to actually walk. Those times, if you had to get somewhere, you had to walk. There was no other option.

In comparison to today's times, I must admit that our colony was pretty sleepy.

But all that changed whenever the elections would be upon us. Almost a month before the election date, the campaigning would start. Autorickshaws fitted with loud speakers would descend on the colony, zigzagging through the roads. The party's flag propped up on the auto, flapping in the wind. It would contain a couple of fellows, one shouting into the loudspeaker asking for votes, and the other distributing pamphlets. The fellows distributing the pamphlets would sometimes throw out a bunch of them onto the road.

The slogans of political parties rent the air. We had Congress (I). For the ignorant, Congress (I) was a faction of the present Congress party, led by Indira Gandhi. This faction was originally from the Congress party. After Indira Gandhi's phenomenal political success. the original ceased to exist and the Cong(I) became the Congress party we know today. There was Janata Party with leaders from Karnataka like Ramakrishna Hegde. There were also a whole lot of independents. I cannot seem to remember any other party. JDS etc. were not yet born then.

Just like now, even back then, the Lok Sabha elections always happened in the peak of summer in April and May. That meant it would be summer holidays for us. I used to be fascinated by the pamphlets of various parties. The candidate's name, election symbol, the party name, and sometimes the slogans too would be printed on them. The campaigners would distribute these pamphlets freely. I would collect them! I would wait for an auto to drive by and then I would run bare foot on the hot tar roads to collect these when the fellows inside who would throw them out!

As the elections would come nearer, sometimes candidates would come to every house to campaign. I used to be enamoured by these fellows who would try to woo my parents for their vote. I would watch their campaign pitch with rapt attention. They too would give out more pamphlets and I would hoard them. Later I think my mother would throw them out! Haha!

The arrival of TV in the year 1982 brought the election results to my attention. Before the advent of TV, election results would be announced in the newspapers the next day. If people were really interested about the results and could not wait for the next day to know them, then they would have to sit at the newspaper offices.

The idea of live telecasting, debates, trends, projections of winners, pre-poll, post-poll discussions and shouting matches of today's election results broadcast was not yet born then. We just had a news caster announcing the results by reading from a paper. Every hour, a dour faced reader would pop up on to the screen and read out the results that were declared in the past hour. It would be a 10-minute segment with no graphics or anything. Just a person reading out the results of a few constituencies. Sometimes it would be the results of constituencies from around the country that I had never heard of.

Not that I cared. I would wait for the broadcast that was BETWEEN these news bulletins. That time was devoted to telecasting amazing, old classic Hindi movies of black and white era. I used to tell my mother I was interested in the results but in reality, I would sit for the movies! I am sure my Mom knew this but she pretended to misunderstand and would allow me to watch TV for hours together. Ahhh! It was a great privilege to watch TV for prolonged periods!

The declaration of results for all the constituencies of the country for the Lok Sabha would take almost 2-3 days. Those were the days of counting the paper ballots. It was time consuming. But that was a bonanza time for me. There would be back-to-back movies!

Some of the classics that I watched were "Chaudvin Ka Chand", "Barsaat", "Aag", "Shree 420", "Hum Dono", "Barsaat Ki Ek Raat", "Khamoshi", "Aar Paar", "Pyaasa", "Ganga Jamuna" and many more. No ad breaks whatsoever. Pure cinematic bliss interspersed with idiotic election news!

My Dad used to come in for the news bulletins. He was very interested in politics.

I never cared who won or lost. I was in this for the pamphlets and the movies!!

### **Comparison Corner:**

I doubt if I will EVER allow any kid (mine or not) to run barefoot on roads in the hot sun for useless pamphlets. I guess my mother was WAY cooler than I am or I ever will be! Not once did she scold me for running on the roads. Of course, there was no danger of oncoming traffic. But still running on hot roads barefoot? No! I cannot allow! My sister never did this. For sure, I am the crazy one! No arguments about that!



## **My Neverland**

## Heaven

There was a place in our colony that was out of this world. The building itself was non-descript. Just a large water tank with a big winding ladder to get to the top. There was a tiny room at the base of the tank. The door to this room guarded a magical place that waited for a special person who would unlock it every day!

The room under the water tank housed the City Central Library!

This place has a large place in my heart. This was where I fell in love with books. This was where I was transported into any world just by the simple act of opening a book.

The government of Karnataka runs many City Central Libraries in the state. We were lucky to have one inside our colony. For a really nominal one-time payment, anyone could be a member. All books were available to be borrowed for a period of 2 weeks.

My mother had only one rule. We adhered to this rule our whole learning days, including university. The rule was: No story book during the academic year.

That is why both me and my sister would wait for summer holidays like a thirsty person for water! On the day the school declared holidays, we both would be found at the doors of the library!

Sometimes we used to be the first to arrive, earlier than the librarian himself and as soon as the door would open, we would step in to pick up new books to read. Though we were allowed 2 weeks to return a book, we never took that long to read them. Our membership allowed for borrowing of 2 books at a time. On the day we brought the books home, each of us would read a book and finish it by the end of the day. We would then exchange the books between ourselves, read and finish the second one the next day. And voila! both of us would be back at the library on the third day to pick up another pair of books.

I am sure the librarian must have thought we were simply returning the books without reading them!

We were voracious readers. Our appetite for books was never ending. Our library was a small one. But being a small one never made it inadequate. It catered to our needs at every age.

We first started with Amar Chitra Katha at the library. I hope all of you are familiar with these picture books of about 30 pages telling stories from the Indian Mythologies, Folk Tales, Kings and Queens of India and whole lot of other stories. These books are still popular now. We loved them. My kids too enjoy them. They too have a large collection now.

Then when we grew out of those, we found Enid Blyton and her boisterous kids. Famous Five, Secret Seven, Adventure series, Faraway tree, Malory Towers, St. Clare's and the rest. We just devoured these books.

After that we moved over to Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew. Now when I pick up these books, I laugh at my stupidity for liking these. They are so childish and improbable. But at that point in life, we were just mad about them. Every two days, we would have new ones to read!

By the time we had reached high school our tastes turned to classics in English literature. So, it was Dickens, Bronte sisters, Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Jane Austen all the way. My all-time favourites still is David Copperfield. I can never get bored with it.

We also loved regency romance novels especially the ones by Georgette Heyer. We own a lot of her books till now. The yellowed out pages can transport me back to those times in a trice.

The most surprising thing was that as we moved from one genre to the next in our reading adventure, the books of the previous age group that we were crazy about seemed to vanish from the library! More and more books of the category we liked would line up on the shelves and earlier ones would not be seen anymore. It appeared as if our library grew up with us.

Our love for books prompted us to start our own library. We would save up the money that aunts, uncles and grandmother gave us occasionally. Once in a year we both would pool in our money and buy books. The shelf that had our books was our library. That library is still going strong. I encouraged my kids too to read. Luckily, they like to read too and now we have quite a collection of books to choose from.

Another way of adding to our collection was to pester our mother to buy us books whenever we travelled by train. There used to be a Higginbotham's stall at every major railway station in India. At the beginning of every journey our mother would buy us a book of our choice off the cart.

At some point in time, we started buying books that we really loved just to add to the collection even though we had read them. That's why we both own the complete and unabridged versions of all the works of Doyle. A big chunk of all the classics by Dickens. You name it, most probably we have that! A healthy collection of P. G. Wodehouse. Other classics like The Three Musketeers, Anne of Green Gables, The Scarlet Pimpernel, Pride and Prejudice and Rebecca are also in this tiny library.

Our combined library is now divided between two homes now. We have independently added more to each of our collection. And we have a healthy exchange program too!

Now, thanks to my kids, my library has entire collection of Harry Potter and Song of Ice and Fire, books by Sudha Murthy and Devadutt Pattanaik too.

### **Comparison Corner:**

*The love for books is successfully passed on to my kids as well as my sister's kids. I am very happy for that. But both of us could not implement the rule of "no story book during academic year" of my mother on our kids. That rule has been blatantly disregarded. Maybe we were more afraid of our mother than this bunch has been of us. No idea. We tried our best to enforce that rule. We gave up in the end!*

## KRP

Anyone living in or familiar with Bangalore is sure to know “KRP” or KR Puram or Krishnarajapuram. It is a part of Bangalore that is at the junction of Old Madras Road (NH – 4) and Outer Ring road. The flyover at KRP with its landmark bridge is iconic, not only for its structure but also for the traffic!

My idea of KRP goes way back in time, much before this iconic structure came up.

My memories bring up an extremely sleepy and tiny village of KRP into my mind’s eye.

It was the village next to our colony. Just outside the boundary of our colony was this quaint village that was so removed from the concept of a bustling city. It is about 15 kms away from the Bangalore Railway station. In today’s terms that distance is quite normal for a big city. But in the 80’s, that distance amounted to being in the outskirts of the city.

Though our colony had a mini-market and a government’s fair price ration shop, my parents preferred to buy their stuff from outside the colony. For a long time, we would “go to the city” to get monthly groceries from the KR Market or Majestic areas of Bangalore.

Sometimes they would get their essentials from the small business places in the KRP village. I remember a store that we frequented. It was called “Brindavan Stores”. This place would pack a 100 different things in one tiny shop. We would stand outside and tell the shop boy our needs and he would bring it out from the depths of the shop. Soaps to lentils, rice to toothbrush. You name it, he would find it for you!

All the groceries would be packed in paper *potlis*. A big roll of jute thread would hang from a hook and once the quantity of required stuff was weighed, it would be poured into a big newspaper folded like a cone and then, the jute thread would be tied around it to secure it. The boy would expertly cut the thread off with his fingers. Not an easy task, believe me, I have tried many times. The jute thread is quite hardy and I could never cut it with just a movement of my fingers. All *potlis* would be put into our cloth bags that we would have brought with us. No plastic at all.

After going home, all the packets would be opened and contents would be put into respective containers. The *potli* newspapers would be folded out and kept for reselling. My mother would store the jute thread too for any future use. Just like nowadays where we hoard plastic bags: a big plastic bag containing all other smaller plastic bags, those days, we would hoard jute threads!

KRP village had the national highway No 4, popularly called Old Madras Road running through it. All activity centred around this road. Old Madras Road leads to .... you guessed it..... Madras! Even today, all trains that lead towards Chennai have to pass via the KRP railway station. Now the KRP railway station is quite big and modern. But back then it was a tiny, sleepy kind of a place. Trains would stop for merely 1 or 2 minutes there.

There would be shops of all kinds on both sides of the central road, a primary medical centre that was almost always closed, and a bus stop. The rest of the village with its houses were spread out on both sides.

There used to be an oil mill too in KRP. It used to be a little off the main road. It was a shop that extracted oil from oil seeds. Groundnut and Til oil were available here. My sister or I would accompany our Dad to this mill with an oil can. We would purchase a month’s worth of cooking oil from here.

Weekly village market in KRP was very famous. Villagers from all around would congregate once in a week and sell and buy everything under the sun from vegetables to pots to trinkets to groceries.

There was a temple of Lord Shiva a little interior in the village. To reach this we had to leave the main road and venture into dimly lit pathways. Going to this temple after sunset used to be a bit scary. I don't think we ever went without the escort of our parents. The temple itself was very small. We would make it a point to go to this temple on Maha Shivaratri. It would be extremely crowded on that day.

We were allowed to go to KRP to buy from the shops. My sister and I would go to the grocers or the vegetable market sometimes. Bargaining at the vegetable shop was a norm. But I always failed at it. I still can't bargain.

**Comparison Corner:**

*The experience of village life within a city is not possible in today's times. To live a life of a villager, we will have to move to the interior of India. We had this opportunity to see it because our colony was in the outskirts of the city. KRP is no longer a village it used to be. Nor is it considered to be in the outskirts of Bangalore anymore. It is very much a part of the bursting-to-the-brim-Bangalore now. The KRP I knew is lost in the annals of time. Poof! Gone!*

## Russian festival

Did the title confuse you? What is Russia doing in my childhood memories when I had never travelled abroad at all at that time?

It has a good reason to be here. Let me explain.

This was in the year 1987. Russia was called USSR at that time and it was under President Gorbachev. India, under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, used to have a very close relationship with USSR at that time. In the interest of mutual cooperation, the two countries decided to have a cultural exchange program and were invited to each other's country. USSR was given a grand welcome in November 1987 in New Delhi. This program was telecast live on Doordarshan.

USSR pulled out all the stops and their team came and conquered the Indian hearts. The dances, songs, and everything else were simply mind blowing. Their particularly high energy dances were such a big hit with the audience.

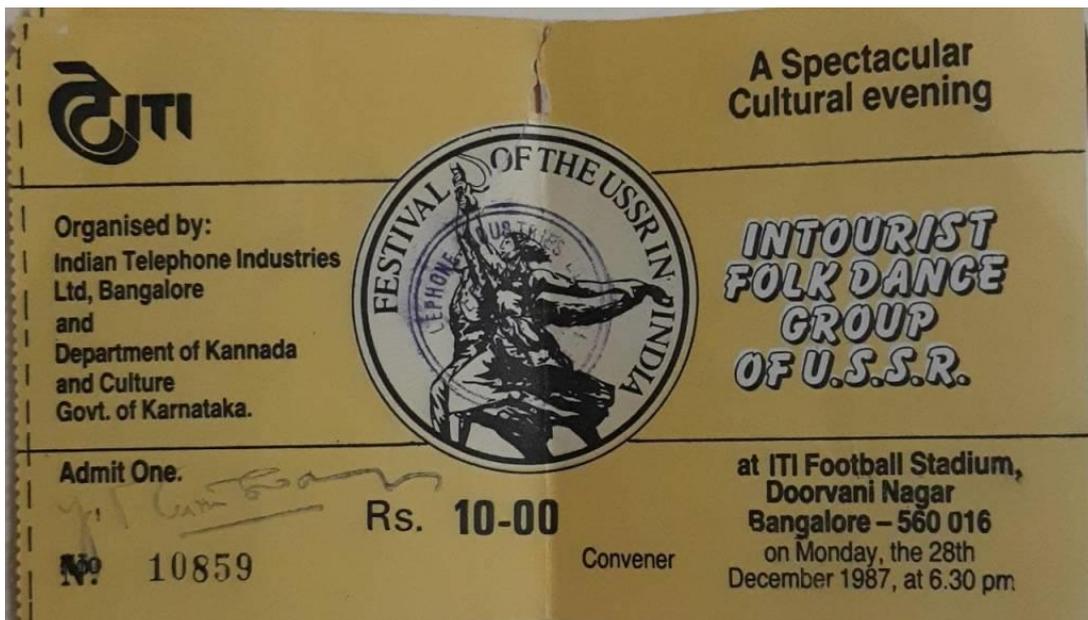
After the main event where the Prime Minister and all other VIPs got front row seats, the festival moved to all other cities of India. It was a month-long affair, if I remember correctly.

The USSR team travelled all over the country and wherever they went, their program was a hit.

Since the government of India was sponsoring this mega event, all PSUs were invited to participate in this event. I do not know of the financial aspect of this.

My Dad's institution too hosted the USSR team at the colony for a performance.

This was a great thing for us. We had never seen any live performance and that too a troupe from a different country altogether. To watch this program, we had to purchase tickets. The prices started with Rs 10/- per ticket. The costlier ticket was nearer the stage as usual. After Rs 10/-, the next one was Rs 50/-. My father bought us the Rs 10/- ticket.



*My sister has preserved her ticket till date. Here it is!*

I do not remember all the programs very clearly now. But I do remember that we enjoyed a lot that day. Even though we sat quite far away from the stage, we did have a good view.

The folk dancers who came on were so energetic and full of vitality. Their signature dance moves with high stepping feet and foot stomping are still fresh in my mind's eye. The women with their bright red skirts, the men in hats, the makes-you-want-to-get-up-and-dance music. Oh! It was a sensory overload.

I have never had any experience like that again in my life.

**Comparison Corner:**

*I remember my sister asking Dad to buy the Rs 50/- ticket so that we would be nearer to the stage. But Dad did not, saying it was too costly. We argued that it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, but no luck. I do not think kids of the new age would have kept as quiet as us. We did not throw any tantrums.*

## Sante

In the past 20 years, I have got used to shopping in the super market setup. I pick up a cart, roam around the aisles of the shop, picking up my groceries, stationery, toiletries, household articles and what not, stand in the queue and pay for my stuff. This same thing goes for purchase of vegetables and fruits. I do have a lady who comes every few days to my doorstep with a push cart of vegetables and I buy fresh produce from her. In spite of this, there are many occasions when I shop for vegetables from the super market.

In my childhood, the concept of super market was in its nascent state. There were one or two such places. They would be in the city and nowhere near our colony.

I told you about the village adjacent to our colony: Krishnarajapuram.

Every Tuesday was a special day in KRP. The whole village would wear a festive look that day. The village would be abuzz from very early in the morning.

The reason?

It was the village market day! or *Sante* in Kannada!

The village market would call people from all walks of life. Everyone from around that area would reach there either to sell or to buy from the market. The farmers from around the area would reach quite early and set up their vegetables and fruits. Small and marginal farmers would have a small stall, whereas richer farmers would have bigger ones. Some would put up a shade as protection from the sun.

The customers would stream in from early morning till sunset. Everyone from surrounding villages would come to buy their weekly supply. Our colony residents too were regular visitors to this market.

This market would sell everything from clay pots to tamarind to vegetables to bangles to chicken to condiments to clothes to hairclips to groceries and everything in between too.

The festive look of a village *sante* is to be seen to be believed. Women and girls in their finest wear, men too all decked up! Everyone looking for something would most likely find it. The enthusiasm is hard to miss. The catching up of friends, the exchange of goods, and buying weekly supplies, everything happening at the same place.

The best times to visit would be early in the day to get the fresh vegetables before they would fade in the harsh sunlight as the day progressed.

I have visited the *Sante* many times. Since it happened on Tuesday, and that was a school day, most of the time only my mother would go and lug in a week's worth of vegetables home. But sometimes if she was unable to go, I would tag along with my father in the evening after school hours to make the purchases.

Towards the end of our stay at the colony, many shops came up in KRP which would stock fresh vegetables throughout the week. Then the frequency of having to stock for the whole week became a little unnecessary. We would go to these small vendors during other days and avoid the rush.

**Comparison Corner:**

After leaving the colony setup, I have never come across any *sante* in Bangalore. I have seen this kind of a village market in the *Raithu bazaar* or farmer's market setup in the state of Andhra Pradesh. My kids have not experienced the charm of going from shop to shop, bargaining for the best produce. I am an absolute waste at bargaining. I have seen my mother bargain like a pro. It is amazing to see the interaction between the shop person and my mother. Such a thing is impossible in a super market! You have to pay what the label says, or you can kiss the product goodbye!

## Around the city

When I got a job after my education, I bought myself a bike to ride to office. Till that time, all my life I had used the public transport, aka the BTS bus.

BTS stands for Bangalore Transport Service. In my childhood that was the name of the public transport. Now it goes by the name of BMTC, Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation.

For all major purchases, we had to go to the “city” when we lived in the colony as I mentioned before. Going to the city meant half a day’s worth of time. Our colony was about 15 kms away from the business district of the city. Buses were the only means of getting there.

KRP, the village adjacent to our colony was connected by the BTS network to the city. It would take at least one hour to go from KRP to the final bus station in the city. There were essentially 3 bus stations that the buses from KRP connected to in those days: Majestic, City Market and Shivajinagar. If you are familiar with Bangalore, then you will know that these are the three main areas for good shopping.

The frequency of buses were very less those times. The time gap between the buses sometimes went up to more than 45 minutes. We would sit at the bus stop most patiently. Sometimes, we would see the bus we need pulling out of the KRP station just as we were coming in. If we were unable to stop it or if it was impossibly full, we would sit to wait for the next one to arrive. How many times we have waited in this way! But looking back, I have no idea how we did it. Not once do I remember that we ran out of patience!

Once the bus came, there would be a scramble to get in and procure a seat inside. Lot a people would drop a handkerchief or a bag from the window outside to reserve the seat. The crowd at the entrance of the bus would jostle to get in. I was the one who would push through the crowd, climb up on to the bus and hold on to seats for my mother and father! This was very useful, because most of the time, the people who got in at KRP would generally get down at the very last stop and same was true for the return journey. There would be very few people who got down in between. Getting a seat to sit was a big thing!

If unlucky, we would have to stand all the way! Holding on to the rail above, balancing whenever the bus driver applied brakes and managing bags and kids must have been a feat for my parents.

Whenever possible, I would hog a window seat and watch the world go by. I would sing songs to entertain myself. The bus would stop at regular intervals collecting more and more commuters who would cram into every corner. It would get hotter and hotter inside, but the wind from the window would keep me cool.

A lot of times, my parents would have work in Majestic. They would complete it and then walk all the way to the City Market and then get a bus from there to home. It is not a small walk. Oh no! We had to walk quite a distance. I find it very surprising that they would carry their weighted bags for long distances with such ease. Sometimes, if me or my sister would get tired walking, then my Dad would pull us onto his hip and walk with us AND the bags.

I cannot think of doing that in these times. I would prefer to take a transport between different destinations if I had multiple locations to get to!

In case we had shopping in the MG Road or Brigade Road area, while going back, we would take a bus to go back to the main bus stand of Shivajinagar and wait for the next bus home just to be able to get a seat. If we took for a bus from MG Road itself that was heading home, it was sure to be full to capacity.

A trip to the city meant that we left home by 2.30 PM and returned by 9 PM. That is why, it was an unwritten rule that we would stop at a restaurant to have something. Most of the time, my parents preferred the Kamat restaurant. It used to be a famous hotel chain in Bangalore then More often than not, I would have a puri and dosa. They were my favourite.

When leaving for the city from home we would be fully enthusiastic and eager. The return journey mostly saw me and my sister completely tired out and we would drop off on the bus to be woken up by Dad when KRP stop arrived. Then to drag ourselves home and wash up would be tiresome. After washing up and eating, looking at purchases saw us reenergized, especially when mother brought home cloth to make us new dresses or school supplies and such!

I have used the BTS to get to my college too. The peak hours would be a nightmare. Sometimes, I would get down from the bus and pull my duppatta which would be lodged between the people inside the bus!

I have run behind buses to get in. I have done this running behind buses when I was 5-6 months pregnant too! I have travelled on foot boards. I have had my purse pickpocketed in the bus. I have made men get up from the seats reserved for women. I have fought with the conductors for change. I have fought off eve teasers. I have held heavy bags of passengers standing next to me to help relieve their burdens.

### **Comparison Corner:**

*I have been a chauffeur to my kids all their life. To and from school, to their friends' place and everywhere else. They have never used public transport. Only in the recent times, my elder one has used it.*

*In fact, when my elder one was about 2-3 years old, whenever we would step out of the house to go anywhere, she would go on the road, look left and right and shout "Auto", even if there were none in sight!*

Now, after all these years, I rarely take the public transport. In fact, after my marriage, I have got used to going around on my husband's scooter.

Even though I can ride a two-wheeler, I prefer to drive my car now!

Actually, now the buses are quite spacious and some of them are air conditioned too, unlike the buses of my childhood. But still, the luxury of a personal vehicle is unbeatable.

## Television

TV came to Bangalore in 1982, when India hosted the Asian Games in New Delhi. Indira Gandhi made live telecast of the games possible all over the country by opening up all metro cities to the magic of television. Till that time only the four metro cities, Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta had TV.

I was in 7<sup>th</sup> standard when TV came home. Every day I would go to school and someone or the other of my classmate would say “We got a TV today!”. It would be so thrilling to hear that. Dad held out for a month or two after it was launched. Then he purchased a Black and White TV (colour TVs came later). It came with two shutters and a key! The antenna had to be put up on the roof of the house, angling in such a way so that it faced the transmission tower.

The TV programs were not 24/7 like nowadays. The transmission would start at 6.30 PM and end at 10.30 PM. In the initial days of our TV watching, we would switch it on about 15 minutes before the program started. About 5 minutes of static was followed by a pattern of black and white stripes. It was supposed to help the viewer adjust the contrast and brightness. I would very studiously watch the pattern for as long as it came. Most irritatingly the pattern was accompanied by a screeching sound too. But I didn't care! I would watch it till it stopped. Finally, the transmission would start with the signature music of Doordarshan, the only channel available for watching.

When TV first came to Bangalore, there was no exclusive studio where local Kannada programs could be produced. Hence the regional telecast would be Tamil programs from Chennai! This lasted for almost 6 months, maybe, till Bangalore Doordarshan started its own programs.

In the initial months of TV, the placard holding “Sorry for the interruption” was displayed more often than not. The initial technical glitches were too many. But we were patient viewers, we never complained. We bore it all.

Jokes aside, TV did a lot of good too. For me, it opened up so many vistas. I learnt about all the different cultures of India. The news of the country and the world came nearer to me. My world expanded.

I do remember a lot of programs that were broadcast during those times which were very popular. I will try and recall some of them.

- Surabhi – This cultural magazine style program hosted by Renuka Shahane and Siddarth Kak that ran from 1990 to 2001, was a beautiful one. It gave us a glimpse of the diversity and richness of India.
- Whys and the wherefores – I don't know how many remember this one. It was a 15-minute segment that answered scientific questions in an animated format. I used to enjoy that.
- Movies – The Saturday evening regional movie and the Sunday evening Hindi movie became a staple in my home. We would complete homework and other tasks to be able to sit in front of the TV. The concept of watching and appreciating the movies from other languages of the country was taught to me through the telecast of national award-winning regional movies every Sunday afternoon.
- National program of dance and music – This weekly program opened my eyes to the rich cultural heritage of India in classical dance and classical music. Since my mother was a great enthusiast of classical music, both Carnatic and Hindustani, she would make it a point to watch

it without fail. I would sit with her. It was only through these programs that I learnt to identify different instruments, different forms of dance and I heard great masters of music.

- Serials – There have been quite a few classic serials that were popular in those days like Humlog, Buniyaad, Mahabharat, Ramayan, Tamas, Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi, Vikram-Betaal and many more. It is said that when Ramayan and Mahabharat were airing, the roads would be empty. That was the level of their popularity. The popularity of Ramayan and Mahabharat were proved again when they were re-telecast during the first lockdown for Covid on DD. After watching these serials, my sister and I started calling our father as Pitashree. We kept up this practice all these years. Even after his passing, we still refer to him as Pitashree!
- Chitrahaar – Wednesday 8 PM was reserved for this half hour program of Hindi film songs. It was very popular.
- English classics – At one point in time, DD used to telecast great programs from English classic literature. These were BBC programs. I have seen the Sherlock Holmes series, Great Expectations, Nicholas Nickleby, Poirot series, Jane Eyre, Yes Minister and many more. American sitcoms like I Love Lucy was so popular too.
- The World This Week – This 15-20 minute world news roundup by Pranoy Roy was one of my favourites. This program opened my understanding to include the whole world.
- Around The World In Eighty Days – This animated series of the famous novel of the same name was a delight to watch.
- Kathasagar – This weekly program of short stories was thought provoking. The heart-warming stories about simple people was much awaited.
- Udaan – This story of an ambitious girl was so much ahead of its time.
- Bharat – Ek Khoj – This hour-long Sunday special was based on Jawaharlal Nehru’s Discovery of India. It traced the history of India from the Vedic times to present day. The dramatization of events was so spellbinding. The opening and closing credit music were spectacular.

There are many more programs that were popular and noteworthy. But my memory is failing me.

### **Comparison Corner:**

*My sister and I never operated the TV in the initial days because our parents said so. Only one of them would open up the shutters and then switch it on. Once I remember, both of them had gone to visit some friends and the program “I Love Lucy” was about to start. Since we were told not to switch it on, we did not. I called my parents on the landline to their friend’s home and my mother told us to hold on. We did and only when they came back, we got to watch the remainder of the show that week. Can you imagine any kid doing that now?*



## **Superstar Amma**

## Designer Mom

My Dad would go in the morning shift to the factory. One unique thing about the factory was that every Thursday was a half day for all employees.

Since our school was for the kids of the employees, it too would work for half day on Thursday. No afternoon sessions.

What made these half days even more special was, it used to be a “colour dress day”.

In the middle of the week, we kids would give up our white and blue uniforms and become butterflies! Everyone dressed in all different colours and styles of apparel.

We could wear anything of our choice. It would be like a fashion show, if we had known the meaning of catwalk.

Colour dress day was apart from the “birthday colour dress” day. On a “birthday colour dress” day, kids could wear new clothes on their birthday to school and could distribute candies to all the classmates and teachers. Sadly, I would miss this every year, since my birthday invariably fell during the Navratri holidays.

My mother was a seamstress. She made us all our clothes including uniforms till I turned 16. After that she stopped and we went in for ready to wear clothes. During our school age, she used to tailor all our clothes on a leg operated sewing machine that she maintained with great care. It is still in her house in pristine condition. Whenever my dresses or frocks used to be stitched, I remember very vividly how I would sit next to her watching as she made them. I would sit with her right from the cutting of the fabric till it would be ready for me to wear. I still recall that I used to collect small scraps of the fabric being stitched and keep it for safekeeping to remember the dresses she made for me. I don't know what happened to that stash I had. Maybe I threw it out because they were useless!

My mother used to make us new clothes for every festival during the year. She would plan ahead and make it in time for us to wear. She would go shopping to buy the materials, matching the colours for different parts of the dress that she had in mind. She would buy the laces, threads and stuff. Take our measurements. Cut the fabric accordingly. Then sit on her machine and magically a new dress would be ready to wear. It was fascinating to watch this process.

She used to design these dresses on her own. Each one more unique than the other. She created a new design each time. Wow!

The saddest part is, I can now make only basic stitches and I cannot design like her. I do know to use a sewing machine but I cannot create any dress. I never learnt from her. I just watched her make the dresses. It is one of the regrets of my life that I did not learn to sew, embroider, crochet, or knit beautifully like my mother. She had offered to teach me several times. but at that time, I was not interested to learn. Sigh.

Anyway.....

We would wear our designer clothes on the “colour dress” day. It used to be a delight to wear a new dress to school after a festival. My mother used to make dresses of exactly same design for me and my sister. After a few years, we used to insist that she make different styles for us since we did not want to

look the same. My designer Mom would create totally different styles for both of us. She would use the same cloth but design two different dresses for each of us.

After a major festival like Deepavali etc, all kids of the class would come to school wearing their new clothes and we would admire each other.

One day in the week to feel special and unique!

Good times.

**Comparison Corner:**

*I do not think this concept exists anymore. My kids used to have a different uniform for Wednesdays. But it was still a uniform based on the "house" they were sorted into. I don't think they ever wore a "colour dress" other than their birthdays to their school on a regular day.*

## Banking lessons

My childhood was a different time to live in. We never had the concept of “pocket money” at all for many years. If we wanted something, we would just ask our mother or father. If they deemed fit, then they would buy it for us. The only time we had money with us would be when any visiting aunt or uncle would give us some as a gift. All we did with that was to buy books for our library collection.

Then one fine day when I was about 10 or 11 years old, my mother decided to teach both me and my sister book-keeping. She said it would make us understand how banks worked. Accounting would involve making sure the cash inflow and outflow would be transparent. She said that in the future we would have to be read and understand passbooks that were given to all account holders of any bank.

So, our first lesson in banking started. The first thing that she did was to give a small book each. Using our scale and pencil we made out columns in the book as instructed by our mother. The column heads were, date, details, credit, debit and amount. There was also a column for signature.

To start off our accounting books, my mother gave us 25ps per month to maintain.

Do I see you smiling or are you shocked?

25ps quickly became 50ps after a few months and then reached a grand total of Rs 1/- for many months after that.

Does that seem too little money to you? It was! No doubt about that. But keep in mind we had absolutely no expenses too. The maximum I spent it on was sour gooseberries. The old lady who would sit near our school entrance used to give a handful of them for 5ps. She used to sell a range of stuff including salted peanuts, gooseberries, peppermints and some candy that was chewy. All these she would keep in glass bottles and sit on the ground waiting for kids to come out of the school after classes. Neither me nor my sister were interested in her stuff. An occasional purchase of gooseberries was my only indulgence. So Rs 1/- was sufficient.

Then this pocket money slowly became Rs 2/-, Rs 5/-, Rs 10/-, Rs 25/-, Rs 50/- and ultimately Rs 100/- over the years till I got a job. Apart from the regular monthly payments that my mother gave us, she would also share the money she got by selling the newspapers to the *raddiwala* to both of us.

Another thing we were given apart from the book was a tiny purse. This would contain the cash we were given. It was such a proud moment for me to be an owner of a purse with actual money in it.

Let me side track a little bit here. This episode will not show the childhood-me in a good light and is liable to make you laugh at me. But hey! I am up for a joke! Are you?

Anyway..... When I was about 9 or so years old, during summer holidays we had gone to our grandmother's house. The house was quite a big one and life with all cousins was amazing. I was unaware of the game of monopoly at that time. One afternoon when all was quiet, I was simply loitering in the house and I found a big stack of “money” in a small shelf. I was shocked to see so much cash sitting in the open, unguarded, just like that. I picked up a few notes and thought I was rich! I went to my mother and showed her the cash and told her about all that money just lying around. She had a good laugh and told me it was all fake money. How silly of me!

Coming back to my accounting experience now. For every purchase or earnings that we made, an entry had to be made in the account book and signed off by my mother. Once in a while my mother would

check our account books for accuracy and neatness. The amount in the balance had to match with the actual cash that we had in our purse.

Sometimes my mother would borrow money from us, like when she wanted some change to give vendors or such. In that case we wrote down "Money loaned to Amma" in our account books. She would repay that money in the next month along with that month's pocket money.

She would advise us to make our entries as soon as any transactions were done. Making an entry in the credit section when we got some money and an entry in the debit section whenever money was spent. But sometimes we would forget to do that and, in the inspection, there would be a mismatch.

Then would come the part where we would try and recall our transactions. Most of the time I would remember and so my tally would be correct.

My sister had a big problem in this regard. Even if she kept her books meticulously, at the end of the month, she would find herself either short of some money or richer by some. She would not be able to trace the source of this extra income at all. Nor would she be able to find a cause for losing a bit of her pocket money. Ultimately, she would make entries like "Money found" or "Money lost" into her account book and get it signed off by my mother. We would make so much fun of her! But now she has grown into this confident woman who manages her financial portfolio like a pro!

The practice of taking pocket money from Dad continued till I got myself a job. After that we stopped taking money from parents. The maximum pocket money we were ever given was 100/- per month.

I tried to teach accounting to my girls also. I opened actual bank accounts for them to teach them the concept of saving. I started with a joint account first to help them with banking. Now they have their own ATM cards and can manage well.

**Comparison Corner:**

*I do not think kids today would be satisfied with so little pocket money. We were quite happy with what we got and thought ourselves rich!*

## Best picnic ever

What is your idea of a picnic? Pack up food from home and take it someplace else. Spread out mats and eat under the trees?

In my mother's childhood, every year in the month of *Karthika*, which comes after Deepavali, the whole family would go for a picnic. This picnic would involve taking all raw materials to cook a meal and a stove too. The picnic site would be a river bank. They would take water from the river, light up a stove and prepare food to be had at the river bank. What a beautiful picnic!

They did this for many years. My mother had so many stories to tell about these picnics. Once, she said, a cousin poured a large amount of water into the flour that was to be used to make the pooris, and the whole thing was ruined. They had to change the menu in the middle of the picnic to offset this disaster. They would have games after their meal on the river side.

It was possible to do this during my grandmother's time, because theirs was a joint family with a lot of members. Going to the site would mean taking a bus. The labour too would be divided among everyone. So, the enjoyment of a picnic would be many fold.

I used to be so thrilled to listen to these amazing stories.

Taking prepared food versus preparing the food at the camp site are two whole different things.

I love a picnic. So far, I have had few picnics.

I always wanted to have one where food was prepared at the picnic spot.

But such a thing was not possible for practical purposes.

My mother wanted us to have such an experience. So, one summer we planned to have a picnic right in our garden. I do not remember how old I was. I must have been in 7<sup>th</sup> standard maybe.

I had a friend. She came over with her two sisters to my house that day. Amma gave us a kerosene stove that we put in the garden under a tree. Then she loaned us utensils and lit up the stove for us.

Then she stood aside and started giving instructions to make upma, that tasty breakfast dish made with rawa.

We put the pan on the stove, fried the rawa, kept it aside, added oil and then the tempering. We simply plucked a few curry leaves from the garden to add to it. We followed her instructions to the T.

When the upma was ready, the five of us took out a mat, spread it out in the shade of the trees. We then had piping hot upma that we had made ourselves.

Let me tell you, that was the best upma I have ever had! The joy of eating food under the shade of trees with friends is really something else. That too, food that was prepared by us under the trees made it even more special.

I can never forget that day.

No picnic has ever come closer to beating that one yet!

**Comparison Corner:**

I cannot imagine organizing such a picnic for my kids now. I have arranged for picnics on the roof for them, under the moonlight. The food though would be made in the kitchen inside and then taken to the picnic place. Preparing the food outside seems to be an alien concept now.

## Swings

Another beautiful thing that my mother recreated from her childhood for us was the setting up of a swing for us to play.

My mother and her sisters were privileged to have a huge wooden swing on which at least 4 people could sit comfortably. She tells me that they used to take turns on it and swing to their hearts content for hours together. They would sing songs as they played on it.

My sister and I used to be fascinated by these stories from my mother's childhood. To satisfy our craving for a swing, my mother made us one of our own.

She used a small wooden plank and tied strong ropes to suspend it from the roof. One person could comfortably sit on it and swing.

We both really enjoyed this swing to the fullest. We would hit the wall with our feet to swing ourselves higher. So much fun. This setup was not just for a month, it was up for many years.

My love for swings continues till date. I have a swing in my balcony now and that is by far, my favourite place in the house. Of course, this swing is a basket style one as compared to the wooden plank I had in my childhood. But a swing nonetheless.

My mother's love to make our dream into a reality is really commendable. She would go out of her way to make things for us.

She made a tent out of bedsheets in the garden and rooftop for us to play in.

She once made a balance with cardboard to teach us about weights. We used to keep all the vegetables in the house to "sell" them back to Mom and we would weigh them using the cardboard balances.

I call her an "Idea Rani" for the fact that she can make any situation turn around just with her creativity. She can really think out of the box.



## **Fragrance**

## Our Garden

Our house in the colony had a large space surrounding the building. The open area was enclosed by a barbed fence. All around the fence were Tacoma shrubs with their pretty yellow flowers and 5 pronged leaves. This Tacoma shrub fence was a common factor in all the houses of the colony. The space inside was left to the discretion of the home dwellers to make any garden of their choice.

My mother was an enthusiastic gardener. We did not have any gardener who would come and tend to the plants that my mother had. Occasionally, a fellow would be employed to cut the long grass. All other gardening would be done by her with intermittent help from me and my sister.

All the plants we had were directly sown in the soil. We did not have any potted plants. My sister and I would help her make small mud bunds around each individual plant to help hold the water near it and not flow away. That was a super fun activity. The work involved wetting the area around the plant, digging up the mud all around it, about half a foot away from the base of the tree. Then press the dug-up mud into a small fort using our hands, tightly enough to hold the water when poured near the plant. Each mud bund would take at least 15 – 20 minutes to make. Since we had many plants, this activity would sometimes take up to 2 days to complete. It was so much fun to play with mud and get all dirty! The smell of the earth when water falls on it is heavenly. The mud bund making would take place essentially in summer when the heat would be maximum. Every rainfall would wash away our bunds! We would make them again after the monsoon.

Our mother made an area in the garden where we could play. It used to be a clear area with no plants. It was our designated area to play ball, badminton, dodgeball, hopscotch and many more. Sometimes a couple of friends from school would come over to play.

We had many varieties of flowering plants and trees. Let me try and make a list as far as I can remember.

- Roses: Beautiful and fragrant. There were quite a few varieties of them. White, yellow, pink, and red. There used to be one variety of white roses which would flower in bunches. A red and a white one were next to each other and they grew big enough to self-graft and we used to get some flowers that were a combination of both. There used to be another small one that was an Edward rose variety. We used to go to school wearing a rose in our braids almost daily. My sister was actually fond of eating a few petals of the rose.
- Jasmine: Oh! The Jasmine. The beautiful, white flower was in abundance in our home. We have made many a garland with them. It would take many hours to complete the garlands.
- Jaji: I do not know the Anglican name for this delicate, fragrant white beauty. It is a creeper and in summer it would flower in abundance.
- Hibiscus: We had a few different varieties of these too. Yellow, red, single and multi-petal flowers.
- Parijata: This orange and white, fragrant tree used to stand in a corner of our playground. Each morning quite a number of these flowers would fall on the ground and we would pick them up. They are so delicate that even holding them tightly in the palm would crush them up. The fragrance of Parijata is exquisite.
- Crotons: There used to be at least 3-4 different varieties of crotons in my house. I am sure you are familiar with crotons. They are too small to be called a tree and too big to be called a plant.

They have the most amazing colourful leaves of many hues. They are not flowering plants but their leaves make up for all the colours that you need.

- Curry Leaf tree: We had a curry leaf tree. In all the time we spent in that house, we never purchased curry leaves. Whenever my mother needed it for cooking, we just went out and plucked a few leaves off.
- Coconut: We had one coconut tree. The silliest part of having that coconut tree was that as long as we lived in that house, which was for at least 20 years, it never once flowered. But the year we shifted out of the house, there was a profusion of small coconuts growing on it! The people who moved in after us would have had a bumper harvest!
- Drumstick: Yes, that tasty, long, green vegetable that can be used in sambar and rasam. It was a big tree. The drumstick branches are very delicate. They are so very fragile that they can break at the smallest pressure. So, climbing the tree to get the drumsticks was out of the question. The solution was to use long sticks to pluck them from the ground. Dad used to make makeshift poles joining 2 long sticks, tie a small knife at end of one and manoeuvre it to smack a drumstick down. It was fun to run around collecting the fallen ones. The taste was super!
- Henna: We had a cute little henna plant in our backyard. Quite regularly we would pluck leaves from the plant, clean them up and grind them to a fine paste. Then my mother would put in the mehendi designs on our palms. Both of us would insist on different designs on each of our palms and my mother would patiently make them. The use of cones is a relatively new concept. My mother would use a small matchstick and make the patterns on our palms. The tips of our fingers were always covered with the henna paste. After she would finish making the design, we would sit with our palms outstretched carefully, making sure to keep them away from others and furniture so they would not get smudged. The next day morning, it would be great fun to admire our hands.
- Soap nut: This tree would provide us with enough soap nuts to last us a few months every year. Soap nuts are very good for hair. A handful of them boiled well in water gives enough lather to wash the hair. Every week we would use soap nut to wash our hair. I have never used any shampoo for a really long time until recently.
- Banana: We had a few banana plants too. As you may know, a banana plant dies after flowering once. But before flowering, it makes a cute little new one next to it. All parts of the banana plant are useful. The bark, leaves, fruit and flower too.
- Nandivardhanam: I do not know the English name for this too. We had 2 varieties of this. Single petal and multi-petal variety. The single petal ones grew in to sturdy trees that we used to climb.
- Allamanda: This beautiful yellow flowering plant would flower all year round. I used to love its delicate velvet-soft petals.
- Lily: This white beauty would flower only in the month of May to our great delight. It used to be under the drawing room window filling its fragrance into the room every time it bloomed.
- Cotton: We had a cotton tree! I know! It would flower with tiny yellow/white flowers and then a few days later magically the flower would become a ball of fluffy cotton! My mother would use this cotton to make wicks for the lamp for the Lord's puja daily. I remember deseeding the cotton for her, separating the small black seeds embedded deep inside the cotton flower.
- Oleander: This is called "*ganneru*" in Telugu. Pink and multi petaled all season flowering plant was one of my favourites. It had a mild distinct fragrance that would be subtle. So pretty.
- Neem: We had a neem tree too. For some reason it did not grow into a large one but remained a fairly small one albeit healthy.

- Tamarind: We had a big, shady tamarind tree too. Every winter it would flower and we would have a nice harvest of tamarind.
- Custard apple: We had a cute little custard apple tree that would occasionally give us succulent, and sweet custard apples from time to time.
- Bougainvillea: This creeper was the pride of our house. My parents had planted this on either side of the main gate of the house. They made a small arch above the gate and made the creeper grow over it. The magenta flowers would drape over the gate creating a beautiful flowery welcome to anyone coming in. My Dad would get on a table and prune the plant from time to time. That would happen once in six months. After each such session, the bougainvillea would look like how Harry Potter would look when Aunt Petunia went after his hair! All shorn!

Watering all these plants was a great fun activity in itself. We would have a long pipe, connecting one end to the tap in the backyard. Then we would drag it all along to every corner of the garden and go to every plant and pour water into the bunds we made. Sometimes, in summer, we would put a finger in the flow of the water to create a shower and make the water fall on the leaves of the plants. That way, they would get a “rain” and all the leaves would become clean. We too would get drenched completely in this process.

In the summer months, after night food we would all put a mat on the ground and sit and talk into the night taking in all the fragrances of the flowers. This was pre-TV time. Once TV came, this practice slowly receded. In winters, we would put folding chairs and such and sit basking in the mild sunlight watching the deep blue skies with fluffy cotton clouds.

### **Comparison Corner:**

*Nowadays gardens are limited to a few potted plants in the balconies. I can identify many types of plants just by looking at the leaves or by sense of smell of the leaf or flower. Kids now are not exposed to so much. At least, that is true for my kids and their friends. If your kids are well versed in all things green then you are really lucky to be able to pass on this knowledge.*

With all the environmental awareness these days, it is becoming more and more important to remain connected to nature. Unless we have played around in the mud, planted a few trees and cared for the flowers, it becomes difficult to be attached to them. Kids may not be exposed to many plants at home due to space constraints but I feel schools must step in with a compulsory gardening period to connect the next generation to the roots.

We are nothing without our Mother Earth. Don't you agree?

## Jasmine, the white beauty

What do summer holidays remind you of?

Heat? Mangoes? Leisure? Friends? Books? Games? Cousins? No homework?

Summer holidays for me is a whiff of all these plus a big dose of the fragrance of jasmine.

Jasmine, that small, delicate, fragrant, cute little white flower. It blossoms only in the summer. We used to have an abundant supply in our garden. Our summers were full of the jasmine fragrance.

Jasmine comes in many varieties. The ones we had in our garden were the single whorl jasmine and 7 whorl jasmine.

The 7 whorl one was a small plant which would give about 10-15 flowers per day. The single whorl jasmine plant grew into quite a large bush and would flower in profusion.

Every evening around 4 PM, my sister and I would take a basket and pluck all the buds of the single whorl jasmine plant. We had to be careful to pluck only the buds that were to flower by that evening. It is quite easy to identify such a bud. A bud that will open out into a flower will be pure white and the younger buds will be a kind of creamy yellow. The plucking of these buds would take us almost half an hour. Can you imagine how many buds we would collect? Our basket would be full of these cute beauties.

Along with jasmine buds, we also had a big basket of jaji buds too. A large creeper, this jaji plant would give us a whole lot of fragrant buds. These buds were so delicate that holding them too tight would make them wilt. Jasmine buds are hardier than jaji buds.

Now the next big task for us would be to string these buds into a garland. We would use needle and thread and string the jasmine and jaji buds into two different garlands. Then we would divide these into 3 equal parts. My mother, sister and I would then wear these in our hair. All this would take us another half hour or so. By the time it would be 6 PM, these buds would bloom into delicate flowers and we would be enveloped in jasmine fragrance. The aroma would follow us wherever we went. Our hair too would become delightfully scented.

Every summer, at least once, my mother would make time to weave us a "*moggala jada*" or braid of jasmine buds in our long hair. Both my sister and I had long hair. She would painstakingly weave the buds, one by one, into our hair using needle and string. It would take a long time. We would sit quietly till it was complete. Oh! It used to be so beautiful!

Nowadays, I see these flower braids worn only by brides and those are mostly ready to wear. They only need to be clipped on or tied to the braid. But the one my mother used to make for us, was one of a kind and custom made only for us. Each bud had to be stitched into the hair individually. Can you imagine the amount of patience she must have had?



A painting I made long ago! Apt for this chapter

### **Comparison Corner:**

I do not see little girls wearing flowers in their hair at all these days. Only older women wear them on occasions. It is only in rural areas that we see young girls wearing them now. We used to have flowers in our hair even when going to school. A rose from the garden or jasmine string used to be a usual thing to wear every day for us.

The summer days were also the time to drink cool water from the earthen pot. The water from this pot used to be so much tastier than any cold water from the fridge. My Dad used to put in 2-3 jasmine flowers into the pot. When we would drink the water from the pot, it used to be filled with the fragrance of the flower. I can still recall the taste of this water. To this day I prefer cool water from earthen pots to fridge cooled water in summer.



## **Learning grounds**

## My school

I have very fond memories of my school where I spent 12 years of my life. My school, as I already told you, was inside the colony premises. It was open to all kids of the employees of Dad's telecom factory. The school was built on a sprawling campus with large grounds and gardens.

The front gate of the school had a Mahatma Gandhi statue surrounded by a nice garden. We seldom used this gate to go to school. Our school had multiple gates for ease of entry and exit. Children used the gate nearest to their home. Basically, our school was kind of in the middle of the colony. The residences were spread around it. Kids used the gate that would be most convenient to them.

The school had three mediums of instruction. English, Kannada and Tamil. The Tamil medium was only up to 7<sup>th</sup> standard. These kids would have to move to either English or Kannada mediums of instruction in their 8<sup>th</sup> standard. Further, the school had a demarcation of middle school and high school. Standards 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> were called high school. Each of these blocks were housed in the same building. Each block was exclusive. Even though there was thoroughfare between them, nobody would trespass into other blocks. There was an auditorium and a ground inside the school that was common to all blocks. For games and PT, there were huge grounds outside the school building too. These too would be demarcated for different mediums of the school. Each medium of the school had their own headmistress and there was one principal for the whole school.

Even though students of different mediums of instruction in the school seldom met, we would all meet for the morning assembly. The assembly would see the high school students, Tamil, Kannada, English medium kids up to 7<sup>th</sup> standard – everyone and all the teachers in one place at the exact time every day.

Every individual medium had a specific place in the assembly. Some kids from each medium would be chosen and they would lead us in prayer. We had a set of 3 prayers. I still remember all the three. Beautiful Sanskrit songs set to pleasing tunes. Once in a week, the assembly prayer included the national anthem too. Important announcements would be made by the principal, if any. Then all of us would silently go back to our respective classrooms.

Till my 7<sup>th</sup> standard, there used to be a class prayer too led by our class teacher. This would follow the assembly prayer. Classes would commence after the morning prayers.

All the gates of the school would be closed about 5 minutes before the assembly. All kids who would be late would not be allowed in till the assembly was complete and all students would reach their classes. The class teacher would already be in the classroom by the time the late comers would be allowed in. So, the teacher could reprimand them.

My sister and I were never late. It is only a very few times that I have had a scolding from the teacher for reaching late in my whole schooling career. One day, we were late just by a minute. We ran up to the gate just as the peon uncle was closing them. I begged him to open it. As expected, he did not. I begged him to allow only me and my sister and not anyone else. I guess, I made a very sad puppy face or something. He took pity and allowed only us both into the school.

Our school uniform was white shirt and navy blue pinafore for girls up to 7<sup>th</sup>. Then from 8<sup>th</sup>, it would be navy blue skirt with a white shirt. It would be blue shorts for little boys and blue pants for high school boys with white shirts. One remarkable thing about our uniforms was that no two blues would match.

Everyone had a different shade of blue! The navy blue would range from a light blue to midnight blue to dark blue. Ha ha! The management did not have a standard supplier. Everyone was allowed to source their own cloth. The material of the cloth too differed from one another. It would range from cotton, to polyester to terrycloth. The budget of the parent determined the fabric. As long as it was a white shirt with a blue skirt/pant, anything was okay.

Our school was a two-storey building with wide corridors and a pair of wide stairs leading to the landing from both sides. It was like the typical 70s movie set of the rich villain's drawing room. Large curving stairs!

Throughout our school life we went home for hot lunch. We never took any lunch box. The lunch hour was a luxurious one hour. A 10-minute walk home and a nice hot meal later, another 10-minute walk and we were back at the school before the lunch hour was up. It was only when I reached college that I had to take a packed lunch. The benefit of having the lunch at home was that our school bags would be light too. We would pack only the books needed for the morning session and replace them with books for the afternoon session when we went home for lunch. We never had a donkey's load of books to carry.

I remember very clearly a special room called a map room in the school. This room housed huge maps of all kinds. All my geography and history lessons included maps. The teacher would display the map in the class to explain the lesson. For example, if the lesson was about Akbar or the Vijayanagar Empire, the map would show their entire kingdom so we would have an idea of their vastness. Geography lessons about rice cultivation or forest cover would include maps that showed these. My daughters' schools did not employ any such maps.

**Comparison Corner:**

*Whenever we were thirsty, we would drink water directly from the taps that were provided at school. The water used to be so safe. That is quite unthinkable now. Isn't it?*

## Weird teachers

We did have our share of good, and bad teachers. Some were simply weird in their ways.

There are 3 types of teachers according to me.

- Really good teachers who know their subjects so well and they teach to inspire. They are few and far between and live in your memories for ever. Hats off to them! They made you who you are!
- Teachers who just did their jobs. You learnt from them, got some adequate marks and then promptly forgot what it was all about and now you can't really match their names to their faces in your memories. Most of the teachers fall into this category.
- The third category of teachers are those who made you laugh. You know..... the ones who spoke funnily or taught badly or in whose class you could get away with anything....

My salute goes out to all these teachers. I dedicate this chapter to the teachers of the third category.

They are aplenty in our lives and we thank the lord for them. They made education tolerable. You will never forget them too in your life. All school/college reunions will have stories of these terrible teachers for sure!

I have had my share of bad teachers too.

I had a teacher in primary school. I forget her name; I only remember her attire! You will soon know why! She used to wear sheer, chiffon, single colour sarees, you know like the ones in the movie *Chandini*, but with a twist. If the saree was light blue, the inner skirt would be bright yellow. If the saree was red, then the inner skirt would be a jarring green or blue! The blouse too would be some colour going neither with the saree or the inner skirt! God knows what she taught; I don't remember that but I do remember that I never understood a thing!

Then there used to be a teacher in high school who taught us geography. She used to be tired always. Always.... everyday..... just tooooooo tired to teach anything in the class. She would come in, flop her books and purse on the teacher's desk, sit down and simply ask one student to read out a paragraph from the text book. Like a chain reaction, one by one we would each get to read a paragraph. Some would read too slowly. Some would read too fast. Some would read just to themselves, no one else could hear. Okay! All reading over? Good! Lesson over! Now, copy out the textbook word for word into your notebook.

This had to be the most boring class I have ever attended.

One of the most hilarious teacher was my chemistry teacher, Tara Bai in my under graduate course. She taught Chemical Bonding. Every sentence she spoke had the words "I mean, you know, remember that". I kid you not, we used to count the number of "I mean"s, "You know"s and "remember that"s in every class! She would mumble her lecture to the blackboard. We girls used to have a field day in her class. Giggling, talking, throwing paper planes! I got caught by her once. She made me stand up and berated me saying "What? You think chemistry is easy? It is not easy!" She had a quirk of placing her left hand behind her back and holding her right elbow from behind and turning her right wrist in circular motion. As she scolded me, she kept turning her fist at me and I giggled even more! I was not her favourite!

This story has a sequel.....

In the year that she taught us, I made extra effort to learn chemistry on my own. I prepared my own notes, read different books and somehow managed to top the subject that year. When I came back to college the next year, Tara Bai, we used to call her Tara Bond, because she taught us Chemical Bonding, cornered me one day and said, "You got top marks in chemistry. Very good. You come to me for any help." I never did! She used to check out reference books out of the library in her name and give them to me to read. Now, when I look back, I think it was quite sweet of her. But back then, I was not so appreciative!

Anyway, good or bad or just plain okay, our teachers deserve our respect.

## Independence Day

Independence Day celebrations on the 15<sup>th</sup> August of every year was special in our colony. It was not limited to the celebrations at our school. The factory management too participated. The school was central to the participation. It used to be held at a special ground called the "Pavilion". Pavilion was a large ground with a big covered viewing gallery for spectators, and a flag post for hoisting the national flag. It used to have bushes all around the boundary.

Everyone, without exception, from the littlest KG-1 student to the 10<sup>th</sup> standard student was expected to take part in the celebration.

Our school used to have many clubs. Scouts, Guides, Bulbuls (little guides), Cubs (little scouts), Red Cross, Science Club, NCC, and a few more. Kids who belonged to any club would participate in the celebration wearing their respective club's uniform. Everyone else would wear regular school uniform.

Kids of all standards and mediums were required to participate in the march past for the Independence Day celebration.

In my 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> standard, I was a part of the Bulbul club. I participated in the parade that year wearing my bulbul uniform. Oh! I was so proud of that moment. I still remember that so well now. When our captain shouted "Salute", all of us smartly looked towards the national flag and the chief guest for the day.

Rehearsal for the event would begin a month before the actual day. Children who were selected for any dance or song event, were exempted from march past. The rest of us would not be spared. For the first few days, the practice would be in the school grounds. Every teacher was responsible for her class and she would take us all out for the march past and mass drill. Then after a few sessions, different classes would be combined for practice sessions. By the time the event would draw near, the whole school would be rehearsing together. For this, all of us who were in the general march past and the drill would troop off to the pavilion in the morning and stay on the grounds till lunch time. All morning lesson sessions would be suspended. We would practice and then sit around under the shade of the trees during breaks. For the march past, we would be grouped into batches of 50 or so students. We would be made to stand height wise and one of the best marchers would be appointed captain. Then the rest of us would be standing in 3 column formation with one arm distance.

The school band would play our march past music and we would march around the pavilion in exact form. No hand or foot could be out of place. The practice would go on till everyone could march without a flaw. After this, the practice for mass drill would be done. There would be a set of 10-12 different sets of exercises to be done. All kids would line up in the middle of the pavilion and would perform the drill till they were perfected.

On the Independence Day, we would race to the pavilion early in the day. The celebration would start by 7 AM. Kids had to be ready at the ground by 6.30 AM. All mass drill and march part kids would need to wear a white band on their wrist. My sister and I would tie a white ribbon on our wrist. Everyone was welcome to watch. My parents too would come early and sit in the pavilion.

The celebrations would be led by the factory band. They would first start with the National Anthem and flag hoisting by the chief guest. After the customary speeches, the cultural program would be presented

by kids. Then would come the march past. The best marching team would be awarded a prize too. The end of the program would be the mass drill that had all the kids of the school.

After the grand finale, all of us would run off to the school again to our respective class rooms. Here our class teacher would hand out sweets to each one.

It was one big celebration for the whole colony.

**Comparison Corner:**

*I hope this national fervour remains in all of our hearts forever for generations to come.*



## **Piety and Gaiety**

## Rangoli

The Hindu calendar has many festivals. Every year there are many festivals that are celebrated in my home. The traditional method of celebration of the major festivals still remains the same at the core even today. But there are some subtle changes in how they are celebrated now. Festivals in my childhood had an old-world charm about them.

For most of the major festivals my mother would sew us new clothes. Waiting for the dress to be ready was a thrill in itself. Magical!

Another thing I remember about festivals are the rangolis that we used to create. Rangoli is a design drawn on the floor/ground. They can be geometric or floral, freestyle or using reference dots, with or without colours. They can be made using a variety of materials. Rangoli is called “*muggu*” or “*rangavalli*” in Telugu, “*rangoli*” in Kannada, “*alpana*” in Bengali and “*kolam*” in Tamil. I am sure there are other names in different languages too. This tradition is more prevalent in the south of India. Almost every household in the south will have a lady making a new one on her doorstep every morning.

It is considered auspicious to make a rangoli in front of the main door every day. I am a great rangoli enthusiast. I have collected over 500 different designs of rangoli patterns. I started my collection in 6<sup>th</sup> standard. I used to be fascinated by the speed and ease with which some of my friends in school would make them. I started learning them and replicated them in my books. I still have them and I collect new rangolis wherever I go. I have sometimes stopped at random doorsteps to take a photo of the rangoli to be later copied into my book. Of course, Instagram and YouTube have really helped me make my collection bigger in the recent past.

Here are a few from my collection.









For every festival I make a new rangoli in front of my home. On special occasions like Navratri and Diwali, I make more elaborate and intricate ones. My kids too help me this. I am glad to pass on this torch to the next generation.

I do miss one specific thing that I cannot do these days.

On the eve of any big festival, our maid would bring fresh cow dung in a basket or bucket over to the house. Then she would mix it into a bucket full of water, stirring it to make it all uniform, removing straw and other stuff. Then she would pour it on the ground little by little and use a broom to evenly spread it across the earth. The water would be absorbed by the soil and leave behind a uniformly green surface that would be so clean and pristine. After it dried up well and completely, the area would look so pretty. Words are not enough to describe its charm. Then my mother would make the most amazing rangoli on this surface. My sister and I would insist that she make the biggest one she could.

### **Comparison Corner:**

*The practice of anointing the soil with cow dung water is an ancient one. It makes the ground clean, smooth and free of bugs and insects. This would also repel mosquitoes. This practice was used when the houses and floors were made of mud. Maybe it is still in use in the villages. But the cities have lost this art. I cannot see this being done anywhere in the cities that I visit now. Lost in the annals of time. Lost to a generation who have no idea about it who may view it as something to laugh at.*

For every festival, my father would make a *toran* of fresh mango leaves for the front and back doors of the house. A *toran* is an adornment to the doorway. It is considered auspicious to have a *toran* of mango leaves. Now we see a lot of them made from beads, flowers etc. My father would pluck fresh leaves from the tree and make one for every festival.

During Sankranthi festival, my sister and I would carry bags containing sugarcane pieces, *haldi-kumkum*, bananas, and soaked gram and go to all of my mother's friends' homes to distribute them. In turn, they too would come to our house to give us goodies like sugar-dolls and *yellu-bella* (a mixture of jaggery pieces, sesame seeds, roasted groundnuts etc).

During Ganesha Chaturthi, all through the afternoon and late into evening, groups of kids would come door to door and ask to see our Ganesha. They would pray, bow down and move on to the next house. I always wanted to do that. But I never had a gang of friends who wanted to do that with me.

**Comparison Corner:**

*I have rarely seen any such group of kids who are willing to invite themselves to strangers' homes to pray to the "Vidya Ganapathi". Also, for whatever it is worth, parents too cannot allow that to happen now because it is not safe anymore to go to other's homes.*

All other festivals have more or less retained the same fervour and flavour till now, in my opinion. It is the same enthusiasm, piety, joy and festivities. I hope it remains the same for many more years to come.

## New Year celebration

How do you usher in the New Year every time? Party? Friends? TV? Waiting till 12 AM and then calling everyone? Cake?

Mine are so tame! I sleep through the night, get up in the New Year and send wishes to everyone I know, on WhatsApp.

Ringin in the New Year in my childhood was a bit different. Before the advent of TV, there was no concept of New Year celebration in my home.

Till the TV came, we did not do anything for New Year. There was no precedent for that. New year just meant that a new calendar would now be inaugurated.

On the New Year's Eve there used to be a special live broadcast that would extend beyond 10.30 PM up to midnight. That was the first time that I understood the idea of January 1<sup>st</sup> as a reason for celebration. The hype of wishing everyone a "Happy New Year" at midnight was taught to me by Doordarshan.

Watching the new year's telecast was a big deal in my childhood. Staying up beyond 10 PM itself was a thrill!

On the 31<sup>st</sup>, the dinner would be done by 8 PM. Then as 10.30 PM would near, we would clear the drawing room of all furniture. We would push the sofa away and put in soft durries on the floor. Pillows would be propped up against the wall. And the most important thing of them all, *razais* or heavy quilts would be kept ready for use. *Razai* is a cotton stuffed quilt/blanket that is very warm in winter. After all it was December and winter was at its peak. We needed to be warm while watching!

Just like the regular days, the special New Year broadcast too would be divided into regional and national sections. The regional program would be in Kannada and only until 11 PM or so. Then it would switch to Hindi programs.

We would huddle under our *razai* and become warm as toast. Looking back, I am 100% sure the programs would have been extremely lame. But we enjoyed to the full mainly because we were staying up late! That was like once in a year experience!

The regional Kannada stuff included some folk songs, some lame skits and a maybe a poetry reading. It would not be really interesting. But we would sit through it all. I still remember a particular folk song from that time. I can sing it too now. I remember it mainly because I had laughed a lot at that song. Not because it was funny but because the singer had a bedraggled look! My father, who would never, EVER comment on anyone, was startled enough to say that this lady forgot to comb her hair! That set me off and I rolled on the floor!

The national new year's program used to have a classical music section, a *hasya kavi sammelan* (satirical poetry reading), light music, some pop songs, and a small drama. As the new year approached, there would be a countdown to 12 AM. For many years, the telecast would end with the countdown. Then some years later, the program was extended till 12.30 AM.

We would wait for the countdown and then wish each other a happy new year, lug our individual *razais* to our beds and go to sleep.

More often than not, I used to be so sleepy by the end of the program. But I would valiantly try to keep my eyes peeled to watch the countdown.

In the beginning, these telecasts were not so much influenced by films and film songs. It used to be more organic and had a lot of local flavour. The folk songs and dances, non-film music sung by artists from around the world were really nice. The Hindi poetry sessions by eminent poets of the time used to be a hit with my mother. She would laugh out loud at some of the satire. But I mostly had no clue what was so funny! I would try to get it but it used to be hit and miss with me. I would put on a smile as if I got the joke even if I didn't.

My mother would enjoy the Urdu poetry section too. She would exclaim "Wah wah" at the sections that were exceptionally good. I used to be totally clueless! But I could not let that show! From then on, I would listen with great concentration to catch each word and its nuances to understand poetry. If I can make something of Urdu and Hindi poetry now, then the thanks are due to Doordarshan, my mother and my pride!

**Comparison Corner:**

*Staying up late till 12 AM was a great thing in those times. Now sometimes we get to bed at midnight. Kids stay up more these days. The sleep cycles of both adults and children are chaotic now to say the least. Staying up till 12 AM was a thrill to us kids then.*

Now, my new year celebrations are so much more boring. I just go to sleep and January 1<sup>st</sup> comes into my life just like any other day!

## Christmas Carols

Days leading to Christmas were something to look forward to in my childhood in the colony. Before I tell you why, you need a bit of a backstory.

For as long as we lived in the colony, we had a milkman to bring us 2 bottles of fresh cow milk to our doorstep. He would bring in fresh bottles and pick up the bottles from the previous day to take back with him. The milk used to taste so good. The curd made from this milk was heavenly. I have not tasted such milk again. Now I get milk in sachets but the taste will never live up to that at all.

A lot of our neighbours would have milkmen bring their cow or buffalo directly to the house. Then they would milk the cow right there. My mother would sometimes get that also to supplement the milk that she got from our milkman. But she had a distrust on these fellows, because she suspected that they would mix water into their milk.

It was fascinating to watch a milkman sit on a stool or on his haunches and hold a bucket between his knees and milk the cow with ease and speed. It would froth and bubble and make a “plish, plish” sound as it flowed into his bucket. The cow would pet her calf with her tongue, flick her tail around and serenely chew her cud. The customers would stand around with their vessels and the milkman would measure out the milk in his measuring jar and just pour the milk into the vessels. These sights were common in my childhood.

Our milkman’s name was Laurie. He had a dairy outside the colony. The milk from his dairy was a bit costlier than these other milkmen and he wouldn’t bring his cows over to be milked in front of us. But my mother liked this milk more and so we would get our supply from Laurie.

Laurie was a tall, thin and taciturn man. He had a smile on his face most of the time. His bottles were always impeccably clean. He would come on his cycle punctually everyday.

Laurie would turn up a few days before Christmas, mostly late in the evening after sunset with a group of about 6-8 people. They would come to our doorstep with a bunch of instruments like a banjo, an accordion, a flute and cymbals. They would all wear festive clothes. They would ring our bell. When we opened it, they would all sing Christmas carols for us.

They would sing more than a few songs, including the popular ones like the “Silent night”, “Jingle bells”, “Joy to the world”. At the end of they would always sing “We wish you a merry Christmas”.

It was so much fun to listen to Laurie and his team singing the carols. The joy when they sang and the reflected joy in our eyes matched. We enjoyed listening as much as they did singing. They would come anytime in the week preceding Christmas. I would start looking for him right after 18<sup>th</sup> December.

At the end of their carolling, my mother or father would give Laurie some money that he happily collected in a bag that he had for this purpose. Laurie would not go to every house in the colony with his troupe. He would only go to his customer’s houses. That is why, ours was the only house on that road that had the privilege of listening to Christmas carols every year.

As we grew older and reached teenage years, the carolling took a sharp decline. Laurie had become old and maybe his troupe too dispersed, I have no idea. But less and less people came for carolling as the years went by. Then one year, my mother just gave him his Christmas *bakshish* without carols.

**Comparison Corner:**

*I have never seen or heard carolling again. I would love to listen to the songs of festivity. But that is not possible. Now Christmas means, malls being decorated with Christmas trees, red coloured decorations everywhere and maybe gifts. I miss Laurie and his carols.*

My sister had a friend in school by name Anu P John. He had gifted her a tiny star. It was silver one that had a string attached to it. Every Christmas, she would hang the star up in a room. That was cute. She also liked cakes. Every year to celebrate Christmas, she would buy herself a small piece of cupcake from the bakery.

This year, to beat the blues of corona and lockdown, my kids and I thought of a fun way to enliven our lives just a bit. We played Secret Santa among ourselves. Me, husband, kids and their grandmother gifted each other something. I got a great bedside lamp from my daughter. I liked this idea so much that I may make it a family tradition. Let's see.

# Treasure Chest

Looking back into my childhood is like going through an old scrapbook. A scrapbook that was once made with a lot of care. An old paper cutting, a folded note, a chipped photograph, a dried flower..... Childish but encompassing a lot of emotions. It gives a fuzzy feeling of being wrapped in a worn out but warm blanket. Writing this book has made me relive all those cherished moments that were lost in time but still are amazingly as fresh as if they had happened recently.

Childhood memories are such an integral part of a person's psyche. Writing them has been a great experience for me.

I do hope, you, my dear reader, have enjoyed going through my treasure chest as much as I did. I have recounted the most memorable gems from this treasure chest.

My childhood has been a blessing from God, especially due to my mother's and my father's love and affection. My sister's constant support is also a part of that blessing.

After some years, when I have grandchildren to tell stories to, I will dig into this book for a story or two. The best part of that plan is that I will not run out of stories to tell.

## Author

Meena Chatty is a mother of two, a yoga lover and book mad. She is also enthusiastic about painting, art and languages. She takes great delight in teaching Mathematics to her children and nephews.

One of her most loved traits is to make up stories to help them understand tough concepts or lines that need to be learnt by heart. She is an avid learner of everything.

Her blog BalconySunrise reflects the myriad emotions she has on life, everyday situations and everything in between.

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