



**Professor B. Surendra Rao** (born 1948) is a retired Professor of History, Mangalore University. He was Sectional President (Modern India) of Indian History Congress at Kolkata (2001) and was a Member of the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi. Among his more recent publications are Bunts in History and Culture (2010) and Ways and Byways of History (2015). With Prof. K. Chinnappa Gowda he has translated Ladle in a Golden Bowl, (2017) D.K. Chowta's Mittabail Yamunakka, (2018), When Moonlight is Very Hot (2018), and The Rainboy (2018) - all from Tulu. Two more translations from Tulu are in the press. He has edited, along with Prof. Chandra shekar, Karnatakada Samajika mattu Arthika Charitre: Kelavu Nelegalu in twelve volumes, published by Kuvempu Bhasha Bharathi, Bangalore (2016).

Listening to the words of elders is like sitting under a tree and taking a quiet, easy breath under its benign shade. A tree does preserve in its fold thoughts and memories of several generations. So long as we are under the shade of that tree we breathe with those generations. We live with them as long as we stay there. To be under the shade of a four hundred year old tree is to be and converse with generations four hundred years old, though for a brief period.

When I read B.A. Mohideen's 'The I within Me' I felt as if I travelled back one full generation. With it I roamed around the world sixty years old. I attended a Beary wedding. I too joined, with the bridegroom, the joyous celebrations in the bride's house. I too watched the rise and fall of people in the politics of the 1970's. I became a witness to the clash of egos and interests between Devaraja Urs and Indira Gandhi. In the name of unveiling one's life-story, this work throws open the social and political world of its times. This is not just the life-story of B.A. Mohideen, a former Minister. It is the story of a whole generation.

The true glory of this autobiography is that it is written with no vulgar penchant for theatricality, with no show of any repugnant self-love.

**B.M. Basheer**



₹ 250

An Autobiography of B.A. Mohideen

THE I WITHIN ME

Bharatha Prakashana, Mangaluru

## An Autobiography of B.A. Mohideen

# THE I WITHIN ME

Original Kannada Narration

**Mohammed Kulai, B.A. Mohammed Ali**

English Translation

**Prof. B. Surendra Rao**



**Mohammed Kulai** is a creative writer. Nine of his works have been published already. Kuchikaadina Kappu Huduga, Kadana Kutoohala and Nanna Innashu Kathegalu are some of the published anthologies of his short stories. Mittabail Yamunakka and Rangano Malemangano are among the novels he has translated. Arabian Nights and Pernal are his works in Beary language. Kadankal Mane is his debut novel. He is one of the narrators of B.A. Mohideen's autobiography, Nannolagina Naanu.

Among the honours he has received are 'Karnataka Sahitya Academy Prashasti', The Translation Award of Kuvempu Bhasha Bharati', Chaduranga Endowment Award of Karnataka Sahitya Academy, P. Lankesh Prashasti, Hemanta Sahitya Prashasti, Gubbi Solur Murugharadhya Datti Prashasti, Vasudeva Bhupalam Datti Prashasti, Muslim Sahitya Prashasti, Karnataka Tulu Sahitya Academy Prashasti, Nirata Sahitya Prashasti, Vishweshwariah Rashtriya Sahitya Prashasti and Karnataka Beary Sahitya Academy Honorary Award.

**B.A. Mohammed Ali** is a freelance writer. He was in the forefront of the Beary Movement which was launched in the 1990's. His short stories and poems in Kannada and Beary language have won wide acclaim. He is one of the narrators of B.A. Mohideen's autobiography, Nannolagina Naanu. He has retired after serving New Mangalore Port Trust for forty years, and the Karnataka Government has, since July 2017, appointed him as a member of Karnataka State Food Commission.





# THE I WITHIN ME

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**B.A. Mohideen**

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Jappu, Mangaluru - 575 001  
KARNATAKA

## **THE I WITHIN ME**

An Autobiography of B.A. Mohideen  
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## Foreword

When a book is translated from one language to the other, it is customary that the Foreword is translated almost verbatim. However in this case, after the book and the Foreword were written and 10 days before the book saw the light of the day, the protagonist of this autobiography, our beloved B.A.Mohideen passed away on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, 2018.

When I first wrote the Foreword in Kannada, I had mentioned that it would be more appropriate to call this Foreword to the autobiography of a much revered elder like B.A. Mohideen, “ನುಡಿನಮನ” (“*Nudinamana*” loosely meaning “Homage”). But the narrators of this autobiography and my friends Mohammed Kulai and B.A.Mohammed Ali had pointed out to me that the term, “ನುಡಿನಮನ” though technically right, is generally used posthumously.

So I had to rephrase the term. But whoever had thought at that point in time that the original term would turn out to be ‘appropriate’ so soon?

Having said this, I intend to repeat the original foreword as it is, since it is customary.

“Luck is nothing but the meeting point of alertness and the opportunities passing by”. This definition of luck, given way back in 1936 by the Personality Development Guru, Dale Carnegie, is pretty much accepted as gospel today by one and all. Much earlier in 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, Roman philosopher Seneca had given an almost similar definition of luck - “Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity”.

From both these definitions, what becomes clear is that luck is a matter of preparedness and alertness of mind, because opportunities pass us by every single moment. When the mind is alert and prepared, the opportunities getting grabbed by it is only natural, and out of this the so called ‘luck’ is born.

Right through B.A.Mohideen’s autobiography, this factor is amply evident. If we read his autobiography with this aspect in mind, it becomes quite clear as to how this ordinary man left behind such an extraordinary legacy. The autobiography ends with the words- “What are all these ? I think about them and I think about them often. But however much I think, their meanings elude me”. But by then the reader would have understood everything clearly and the autobiography would have offered the reader a clear perspective.

Somewhere in the middle of the autobiography, Mohideen says “My politics is an open book. I was never in politics for power. When by some chance I got my opportunities, I used them though”. But to the reader who would have already read by then about his childhood, adolescence, youth, college days, marriage etc. the alertness of his mind that was always behind his ‘chance’ encounters with the opportunities becomes obvious.

The desire to be an engineer in a boy who came from a backward and illiterate background; an uneducated father noticing the potential of an officer in his son at a time when there was not even a single officer cadre individual in the entire community; The boy who grew up in an orthodox Muslim environment having an intimate bonding with the arts and culture of the land like *yakshagāna*, *kōla*, etc; His

all-round interest in education, sports and social activities and his desire to excel in everything - all these are obviously the reflections of his dormant yet strong desires. Similarly his vivid recollection of his childhood, youth, college days, the surroundings that he grew up in, his association with his friends, etc. are a testimony to his alert mind.

Mohideen's life had too many turns and twists, which may look like accidental events. The man adrift in life getting initiated into social activities inspired by Late Govinda Gowda; The golden chance of meeting a charismatic leader like Devaraj Urs, when he accompanied a delegation under D.B.Chandre Gowda, to seek Lok Sabha ticket for a local Chikmagalur leader in 1971 and after that, as per his own words "getting a wonderful opportunity to grow under the shadow of a wonderful leader like Devaraj Urs"; When he was in the political wilderness, his chance encounter with the then Home minister Rachaiah in connection with the preparation for Pope John Paul's visit to Mangalore and that bringing him closer to Ramakrishna Hegde resulting in his political rebirth- It is important to understand that all these events are not necessarily 'chance' occurrences but the result of the opportunities getting grabbed by his prepared mind. It is important to note this, because this happens to be the essence of his autobiography and in that lies the lessons for the next generation.

All through his autobiography, one can feel the rock-solid commitment behind the extraordinary achievements of this ordinary person, who was born in a backward family, who grew up in an ordinary environment, who spent his youth like any other, who had more downs than ups in his business, but nevertheless who lived a life of no obligation to any, his uprightness, his steadfast adherence to his principles, values, ideals and beliefs – these aspects keep inspiring the reader as he gets going with this saga and compels him to go on and on with the story, without a pause.

Before Dale Carnegie wrote his highly acclaimed first ever Self-Help book called "How to Win Friends and Influence People",

people depended on the biography of mighty leaders for inspirations and lessons needed to live a meaningful life. But more often than not, people got disillusioned rather than inspired by reading these stories, because all these biographies generally were of the high and mighty and their achievements were beyond the comprehension and reach of ordinary folks. In that respect, Mohideen's autobiography is different. The heights that he achieved in his life appear within the reach of ordinary people; his feats look feasible to the ordinary folks. That is why I believe this autobiography will succeed in inspiring ordinary folks to aim higher, stand taller and reach greater goals.

My belief is further supported by the fact that the language used by the authors, Mohammed Kulai and B.A. Mohammed Ali, to narrate this saga is simple and spontaneous. The way this story is taken forward by showcasing all too familiar social, cultural and political happenings, by evaluating the changes that happened in our society, at times gradually and sometimes too suddenly, by ringing a warning bell or two about the ills of the society, keeps the reader fully hooked to the narrative. But what makes the reading even more compelling is the authors' ability to seamlessly intertwine the milestones, turns and twists, ups and downs of Mohideen's life with these contemporary happenings.

His close bonding with his family, his revered relationship with his parents, his intimate friendship with his contemporaries, his affectionate attachment to his followers, the nearness he enjoyed with stellar leaders like Indira Gandhi, Devaraj Urs, Ramakrishna Hegde, J.H.Patel, Siddaramaiah and the likes and more than anything else, his admiration and affection for his simple and steadfast life companion - the authors' ability to narrate all these without any exaggeration makes this story very endearing.

The literacy movement of the Bearys of Dakshin Kannada has always been synonymous with B. A. Mohideen. His efforts to steer this backward community towards collective progress through education and at the same time sowing the seed of social amity and

harmony through an all encompassing, secular education is indeed exemplary. In spite of all these, somewhere in the story, he says “I am not claiming that I did it all. All that I can say is that in creating this awareness and in setting up the stage for it, I did my humble bit too”. This is a reflection of his sincere and selfless attitude. While listing his achievements, as a social worker, legislator and minister, when he says “I do not remember all the works I have done during this period”, it does come across as true, because a lot of his contributions which are all too familiar to us, do not find any mention here at all. Similarly he has completely forgotten to mention about the awards and honors he got for these achievements. About the most prestigious Devaraj Urs award that he bagged during the centenary celebration of Late Devaraj Urs and the subsequent series of felicitations accorded to him, there is just a passing mention in this autobiography, which simply supports what he says somewhere in this story - “I never got involved in politics to please others or to swell the number of my followers... I never went after publicity”.

Like his life, Mohideen’s words and deeds were also upright and bold. When he talks about the leaders who he had believed to be reason for his political oblivion, there is no hint of hatred there; it is just a straightforward statement of his belief. Similarly with respect to his bitter memory about the Surathkal communal riots, when he talks about the communal attitude of certain people, he has no apprehension that it may dent the secular image that he has enjoyed as a result of his lifelong commitment to those ideals; it is simply an unbiased honest analysis. Again when he discusses about the ills of Muslim community and the hypocrisies of the so called Muslim leaders, he follows the same standard. At the end of the story when he shares a secret about a bitter incident in his life which he had never shared even with his close friends, one can see the same unabashed sincerity.

When Mohideen passed way, he was past 80. Because of the poor health that he suffered during the last few months, his physical

ability had diminished and his activities had dwindled; but his spirit had remained the same - the same pro-society thoughts, pro-people concerns and the same sense of responsibility towards his people. About a few months ago, when Mohideen was recuperating in the emergency ward of a Mangalore Hospital, when the then Chief Minister Siddaramaiah visited him, what Mohideen asked of him in his feeble voice from behind the oxygen mask was not for anything for him or his family. What he implored was for additional grant for the Beary Amity Hall in Bangalore, which was his much cherished dream!

Right in the beginning of this autobiography, Mohideen says “And yet I get a gnawing feeling that I did much less, that I should have done much more”. But in the last page he says “I have the satisfaction of having lived a beautiful life”. Though these seem like a paradox, the deeper connotation behind this apparent dichotomy of ‘contented dissatisfaction’ completely sums up Mohideen’s life and his thoughts. Though ‘contentment’ and ‘dissatisfaction’ sound like opposite words, what it really means is, ‘while there was dissatisfaction about the efforts and there was a strong urge to do more, there was always contentment about the result and there never was a grouse about it. This, in short, is the message of Mohideen’s life.

This autobiography, the writing of which was deferred for several years, finally happened during the last few months of his life. That too, I guess, is an instance of an unexpected occurrence like many others in his life. Because of his narration of this life story, in spite of his ill health, he went through his life all over again, by embarking on this extraordinary inward stroll. At the fag end of his life, through this stroll, he relived his life with the innocence of a child, sometimes in awe, sometimes in wonder and all the time in gratitude to the Almighty who gave him such a fulfilling life; And in the end, left behind all his sweet and bitter memories, his sorrows and happiness, his anger and hatred and departed this world clean and blemishless like only he could have done.

And now I guess, I can appropriately say that this piece is not a Foreword for his autobiography, but indeed a “ಸುಡಿನಮನ” (Homage).

My heartfelt gratitude to my friends Mohammed Kulai and B.A.Mohammed Ali, who captured this beautiful journey of B.A.Mohideen’s extraordinary life and narrated it in their inimitable style, and to Prof B. Surendra Rao who translated that into English with the style and substance intact, with the hope and trust that B.A. Mohideen’s persona and wisdom will inspire the generations to come.

Praying, and hoping that it will,

**Umar Teekay**  
Bengaluru

## Publisher's Note

The autobiography of our revered senior politician, B.A. Mohideen, *Nannolagina Naanu*, in Kannada was first published and released on July 20, 2018. The function to launch it was held in the Town Hall, Mangalore, and was attended by the then Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, K.R. Ramesh Kumar and many other dignitaries. The book was released by Prof. B.A. Viveka Rai, a former Vice Chancellor of Kannada University, Hampi and the Karnataka State Open University, Mysore. Within a fortnight of launching it, 2000 copies of the book reached the eager hands of readers. Thereafter it went into a second print (2000 copies), and a third one (1000 copies). Thus in forty five days 5000 copies were grabbed by readers. The book has won critical reviews and appreciation from scholars, litterateurs and ordinary readers alike.

Now we are offering to the readers the English translation of the work, as *The I within Me*. The translation is done by B. Surendra Rao, a retired Professor of History, Mangalore

University. We hope that the English translation too will be liked, lauded and welcomed by discerning readers.

We thank Professor B. Surendra Rao for translating the book for us. The person who has mooted the idea of translation and helped its publication in every way is P.A. Ibrahim Haji, the Chairman of the prestigious P.A. Engineering College, Nadupadavu, Mangalore and Sri Abdullah Ibrahim, its Executive Director. We express our wholehearted gratitude to them. We are all also thankful to the Principal of P.A. College of Engineering, Dr. Abdullah Sheriff for his unfailing support.

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**Publisher**

## **Biography of an Autobiography**

B.A. Mohideen is a very honest, secular and efficient politician that Karnataka has seen. He was born in a small village of Pejawar near Bajpe of Mangalore taluk in Dakshina Kannada. He was born in an illiterate Muslim family, and he grew by dint of his ability to leave a stamp on Karnataka politics. His service as a legislator, as a member of the Vidhana Parishat, as the Chief Whip of the Party, as Minister of Small Industries and then of Higher Education, and also as the Minister in charge of Dakshina Kannada district has been considerable and unique. Without being in politics for self-promotion, he truly followed “Rajadharma” in political life.

More than as a politician but as leader of men, the kind of decisions he used to take, the pro-people programmes he launched and the impact they made

are still green in our memory. In areas like education, social and political fields his knowledge and experience made him a veritable “walking encyclopaedia”.

In recognition of his services to our land,

society and community, B.A. Mohideen has been recognised as the “Beary of the Century”. The Karnataka Government has honoured him with the “Devaraja Urs Award”.

Loved and respected by people of all castes and religions, he is the rarest of rare persons. He loved the society around him and the community to which he belonged, and he always wished that everyone made progress, everyone became educated, and he worked to achieve that goal day in and day out. He is verily a special politician in our midst.

A tall man, of fair complexion, bald head and long arms, when B.A. Mohideen walked with his hands locked behind his back, as was his wont, anybody would perforce look up and look at him. That was his stateliness, his solemn ways and dignified mien. Anybody would salute him; that was his personality. If he attended any function, wedding and the like, there would invariably be a knot of people around him. He would more often listen to others than talk himself. If ever he met any acquaintance of his, - elders or young people, rich or poor, - he would benignly peer through his spectacles, and ask, “*Endome? Engane Ullaar?*” (“What sir? How do you do?”), and give a wide smile. When he did so, it would be hard for anybody to take their eyes off him. There was a grand innocence in his face, a face so handsome! His smile was like a splash of moonlight. Though so dignified, his smile was that of a little child!

B.A. Mohideen did all that he could to see that the Beary community should get educated, grow and make progress. If today the Beary community has progressed considerably in education and many Muslim educational institutions have come up in the state, B.A. Mohideen has a big role in it.

Though given to looking at things differently or thinking differently from others, none has been badly off by taking the road shown or marked by B.A. Mohideen. Many of those who got counsels from him have become engineers, doctors, industrialists, educational entrepreneurs, or hold high positions in this country and abroad. He had never failed those who went to him for help or

advice. His sole aim of life was to see that the Bearys came up in education, employment, industries, language, literature, art and culture.

We remember an incident. The Bearys' Welfare Association had organised a two-day Beary Conference at the Bangalore Palace Grounds on 13-14, December, 1997. The job of managing the cultural show was entrusted to a team of artists from Mangalore. We were part of that team. We had planned to have a Beary play of one hour as part of the programme. Till then no Beary play was ever enacted with Beary artists in it. But when we decided to do it, we were a bit nervous, because some conservative religious people had declared all dramas and cultural activities as "irreligious". Yet we performed the play, calling it a "skit". After the performance was over, there were scowls on many faces. We were facing a situation where we could neither meet the people with comfort nor go into hiding. Some leaders of the community had even given us a dressing down. B.A. Mohideen was observing all these things. He then came to us, took us to the stage and told the audience, in a raised voice, how impressed was he with the play and performance of all the actors. "I want to have this play enacted again in the Town Hall of Mangalore. Tell me when you are available for it. I will have it performed under my supervision!" he said, patting our backs. Next year when the first Beary Literary Meet was held in Mangalore, with B.A. Mohideen as its Honorary President, the play was again enacted at the Town Hall, and it won the applause of all. Later on, we freely performed this play in many areas of the state where there was a sizeable Beary population. This is one small example of B.A. Mohideen's love and progressive attitude towards Beary language, literature, art and culture.

If this is a little introduction to B.A. Mohideen, we would like to share with you our experience of writing down his autobiography which he kindly dictated to us.

It all began about three years back, when two of us had an hour long discussion about the personality, ideals and political life of B.A.

Mohideen. This book which you are now holding is the result of that initial discussion.

We decided that two of us should join together and write the autobiography of B.A. Mohideen, that we should record his life experience, thoughts and ideas, which should be a beacon light to posterity. When we went to Mohideen's Mangalore residence the very next day and discussed the matter, he said, "No, no way! Don't write anything about me. First of all, there should be something to write about, shouldn't there be? No, no way!" When we persisted with our request, he said, "Let us see if we can do it later. But not now!" he said firmly, disappointing us.

From then onwards, whenever he was in Mangalore we would go to him and renew our pressure. Every time he would say, "Not now, Let us see if we can do it later." A full year passed by. One day when we importuned him he said, "You know our journalist, B.M. Hanif told me he is doing it!" Hearing this we were happy. For, Hanif would do it better than us. We were not particular that we alone should do it. Whoever it is, the autobiography should be recorded; that is all that we wanted. Besides, Hanif lived in Bangalore and had a long association with B.A. Mohideen. He was familiar with the ups and downs of his political life. So we gave up the plan of recording his autobiography.

After another year, one day B.M. Hanif rang up Muhammad Kulai and said, "I am trying to record the autobiography of B.A. Mohideen for the last many months. But he is not responding well. He does not open up. He says some things for a while and then giving this or that pretext he says, 'It is enough for today. Let us do it on another day.' This has happened many times. I think I am not able to continue. I am sorely disappointed. I suggest you try it. You seem to be the right person. You should certainly record his autobiography. You come to Bangalore, stay in his house for a few days and write. Whatever help you need from side, I will give." Similarly, P. Muhammad, a Cartoonist, too called us and brought pressure on us to write the book.

Next day we called B.A. Mohideen and told what was conveyed to us by B.M. Hanif and P. Muhammad. We told him that we were planning to go to Bangalore, stay with him for a few days and take down what he says as his autobiography. Then he said, “You don’t have to come. I will be in Mangalore next week. We will meet there.”

When he came to Mangalore both of us were promptly there to meet him in his flat. Even after a long talk about this or that topic, he never raised the topic of his autobiography. When we raised it, he said, “What autobiography, I say? What have I done to deserve a book? Forget about it!” We had gone there with great enthusiasm and hope, carrying the note book, pen, tape recorder and all, and we were again hugely disappointed.

Then we told him, “We are not writing this for your sake or for our purpose. We do it for our society. Your life, ideals and your political life should be the guiding light for the posterity...” Thus we explained to him all our plans for the book, why and for whom it was meant, in as much detail as we could. We did our best to see that he accepted our proposal. He listened to all that we had to say, silently. He sat with bowed head, thinking seriously, but sat like a statue. We too sat there waiting for his words, as we would wait expectantly for the words of the judge. Ten to fifteen minutes were over. Then suddenly taking a decision, he sat up, looked at us and said, “Yes! Come tomorrow, come in the morning. Not here, though. There will be too many visitors here. We will go to our Bajpe house. There will be none to distract us.” We were very happy to hear his decision.

Next morning we travelled with him in his car to his Bajpe house. There we sat with him, in a closed room, with our pen, notebook and recorder, and we were treated to a veritable feast. Every word of his, every incident he narrated would open a new world before us. The way he spoke, the ebb and flow of his words and language, the way he explained things, the immaculate Kannada he used, his facial expressions whenever he delved deep into his memory were so special that we thought we should really have video graphed it

all. Sometimes after recounting an event he would fall silent for a while. Some issues he would discuss with us. There were occasions when he would share a joke and laugh heartily. He would go back to them again and again and savour the joke. Whenever he recounted his boyhood days he would often get emotional. We would just sit in front of him, listen to every word of his, every event he regurgitated from his memory, every song he remembered or sang and record them. Often he would forget that we were sitting in front of him and let his memory wander freely. The more we excavated his memory, the more we could get from him. We rummaged his memory as much as we could and recorded as much as we could. It is true that some events and some of ideas had been erased from the tablet of his memory. We realised that if only we could do this job a year or two earlier, we could have gathered twice as much as we did now.

Often after he spoke continuously for two or three hours, he would get tired. We too would need some respite. "Take some rest. We will go out for a while" we would say and go out. As were smoking our cigarettes and discussing what we had heard or taken down, he would come to the outer corridor and say, "Haven't you finished smoking yet? Come soon!" Our fatigue would vanish forthwith and we would go back to him with renewed enthusiasm. Thus for many days we were with him, from morning till night, recording his words and thoughts.

On all those days we were served veritable feast every day. Ghee rice, chicken curry, fried chicken, boiled rice, fish curry, fish fry, pappadam, curd, fruits, sweets were all served with utmost generosity. While we were writing, tea and other dishes to munch would there invariably. We can never forget the hospitality and cooperation of B.A. Mohideen's wife, his eldest daughter, Halima Shaheen and son-in-law, Ahmed Sheriff. Those were truly wonderful days, offering us an experience hard to forget.

When we were reducing his thoughts into writing, we would often go to him for clarification of doubts or fill up the gaps if any. If he remembered something which he had forgotten to tell us before,

he himself would call us. Thus in five months we could get his autobiography ready.

More recently old age and ill-health had prevented him from reading. So we had to read out to him what we had written about him. We had to correct any mistake that might have crept into the writing. After consulting him we decided upon a day to do it. But on that day, his health had deteriorated badly and was admitted to the hospital in Intensive Care Unit. We had to wait till he recovered and returned home. That took a full fortnight. In fact, after a few days in the ICU he was shifted to the ward. We were meeting him there often. One day he said, "Bring here what all you have written about me. Read them here." "Is it right that we read it here in the hospital?" we asked. "Nothing will happen. I will be lying down. I will not speak. You go on reading, and I will just listen to you. You cannot really wait anymore" he said. Next day, we went to the hospital, sat in front of him and read out all that we had written. He would occasionally stop us in the middle, correct the mistakes and clarify doubts. After the whole book was read out to him, we could see a rare feeling of contentment in his face. We too were happy that we had done our job and made him happy. Thereafter, we set about our task of getting the book printed.

We needed a latest photograph of his for the cover page. We went to his flat with the photographer Satish Ira, and Kalloor Nagesh, the printer and in charge of the layout of the book. He came out in his white kurta and white pyjama and black vas coat and gave the photographer many poses. When the photographer asked him to laugh, he laughed heartily as a child would; when he was asked to walk he walked as a child would take his joyous first steps. When we saw his happiness, innocence, and festive mood, we were all greatly moved, and our eyes did not remain dry. The differences in our age simply melted away, and we were all like children once again.

The autobiography of B.A. Moideen which we have narrated with so much pleasure and so much pride is now in your hands. We

want you to read it. We want you to see that your wife, children, relatives, neighbours and all, read it too. It should ensure that the B.A. Moideen's life and ideals should be the beacon light to our posterity. Then only our mission of writing this book will be truly fulfilled.

Many friends of B.A. Moideen and our own friends have helped us in bringing this book out. We will not be able to mention all their names. But we should record our gratitude and appreciation to Rahim Teekay, who corrected the manuscript, Umar Teekay who wrote the Foreword, B.M. Bashir, who wrote an Afterword, and Kalloor Nagesh of Akriti Prints and his personnel like Smt. Bharati, Smt. Gayathri, and the Photographer, Satish Ira, who worked to print the book with elegance. But more than anybody else we should acknowledge our heart-felt gratitude to B.A. Mohideen who so kindly unveiled every step and every phase of his life to us and enabled us to write this autobiography of his.

**Mohammed Kulai**  
**B. A. Mohammed Ali**

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## Childhood

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I am now eighty years old. I am nearing the sunset of my life. May be I am left with another moment or two. And I yet carry many desires. I feel I should serve my society more; I desperately feel that I need to redeem my debt to society. My mind and heart push me in that direction, but my body is not in sync with me. When I look back to the life I have spent, my memory unspools everything - my childhood, youth, college days, my family, my children, friends, politics, power and position...It is as if they all happened just yesterday, as if in a dream...But how soon they all came to an end! When I was in power and high position how many people were around me! Party workers, admirers, well-wishers, supporters, people seeking advice and those offering it, people to submit petitions, those who were there to unburden their woes, people to seek help and offer help... My house and office were humming with people... There were phone calls from ministers, the Chief Minister, the Prime Minister, or from eminent people occupying high places. There were tours around the country and abroad and there were programmes to attend... There was work round the clock and not a

moment to rest or respite. But there was a passion to serve the society, help the community, which allowed no fatigue. It would not remind me of my home, wife, children, food or such things. There was always a feeling that however much I did, I did not do enough. I always wanted to do more. I worked with no thought about fame or money, selflessly and on secular ideals. And yet I get a gnawing feeling that I did much less, and that I should have done much more. But in the din and bustle of life, I didn't realise how soon years slipped by.

Today I have none around me who were once with me. I have no power whatever. I have no public programmes to attend. Sometimes I sit alone and brood. My classmates, friends, colleagues, siblings and all, are quietly quitting this world one by one. There are some, who are yet alive but cannot move around, who call me from their residence, "Hello! Mohideen! How are you?" A moment of silence follows, and then we talk over the telephone for long. We ruminate over the days passed or spent. We recall the names and memories of our friends. We recollect some funny incidence and laugh aloud and freely like small children. We forget our loneliness. But that is only for a moment. Soon all sorts of thoughts and memories invade and besiege me. But the thoughts that keep pressing me the most are of my childhood.

I do not know the date of my birth. Nor did my illiterate father know it. My mother did not remember it either. I was born in a remote village near Bajpe, in Dakshina Kannada. Bajpe today is well-known because an international airport is located there. The name of the village where I was born is Pejawara. It is called "Pyara" in the Beary language. Here too there is a Pejawara Mutt. They say it is connected to the well-known Pejawara Mutt of Udupi. It is said that my mother's grandma's house was in Pyra and that my grandma was born there. In the same house, we were told, was my grandma married. She was married to a man from Sangabettu near Addoor.

My grandfather was a well-known rice merchant at Addoor.

He used to transport rice to Mangalore by boat. Those days, rivers offered the more efficient mode of communication between one place and the other. Many of the important households were located on the river banks.

My mother's grandfather was a farmer. His name was Hussain Beary. His daughter was my grandmother. Before my mother was born, my grandma used to stay in her grandfather's, that is, Hussain Beary's house. After his death, my mother, her sister and their two elder brothers stayed in that house.

In those days the custom was that if a woman lost her husband, she would go back to her mother's place. Hence my grandma came to Pejawara and stayed there. My mother too grew up there. Her name was Halimamma. She was very beautiful. Yet she carried a physical defect: her one hand was shorter than the other. In today's official parlance, she was 25% disabled. But she never ever showed it. In those days she was being looked after by her uncles, that is, my grandma's brothers. They were the ones who arranged for my mother's marriage.

My father was an ordinary man. He was the owner of a kiosk of a shop at 'Paladakatte'. Today's Bajpe was known in those days as "Paladakatte". It was so named because there was a huge satin tree there, and under its cool shade a lot of merchant activities used to take place. If anybody going that side were asked where they were to heading to, they would say, they were going to Paladakatte. None had heard about the name of Bajpe. At Paladakatte there was a big provision store owned by Narasimha Shanubogue. By its side was the little kiosk of a shop which belonged to my father.

Apart from the little business my father carried on, he also used to roll beedis. He seemed to be a specialist at it. People particularly used to ask for the beedis rolled by him. "Give us, if you have, the beedis rolled by Abdul Khader Beary!" they would demand. Abdul Khader Beary was my father's name, and his beedis would invariably sell well. In any temple festival, yakshagana,

bhuta kola, uroos and other occasions when people gathered, my father would go there with his brother and do business. It was a small business, though, centred on a table and a bench.

My mother used to say that I was born in the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal. That is the month of Prophet Muhammad's birth. Those days, people used to remember festivals like Ramzan, Bakrid, Milad-un-Nabhi and relate the birth of a person with them and the Hijari era. My father was not sure if I was born in the year 1937 or 1938. In the school, however, he had by birth day and date recorded as 5-6-1938.

At Pyara my grandfather had a big, tiled house. My mother was married in that house and moved to Bajpe. My father's house was a small thatched house. He had no land he could call his own. We all grew up in that humble thatched house. It seems I was very good-looking as a child. Everybody was eloquent in praising my good looks. Everybody would lift me, mollycoddle me, and would not hand me over to any other. That is what my mother used to tell me. There were not too many children at home and everybody used to love and pamper me.

Some toddy-tappers used live near our house. Early morning they would tap the toddy and keep it in a shed. My mother used to say, how one day I, while yet a child, sauntered in there and helped myself to measure of toddy from the pot. It appears when she discovered me, she found me in a high mood, laughing uncontrollably, to her surprise and panic! Those days children used to be given 'neera' as health drink.

Our mosque was located at Pyara. In it too was Haazaar Boba's dargah, which used to celebrate its uroos every year. My mother had immense faith in the dargah. People used to visit the dargah, from far and near, irrespective of their caste or creed. Among its visitors women mostly outnumbered men, because mothers would bring the new-born infants to place them on the threshold of the dargah. That, the mothers believed, would augur well to the child. Again whenever children fell ill, it was not

uncommon to bring them to the dargah and place them on its threshold. Such was the firm belief of the mothers, - my mother often used to tell me. The legend has it that the saintly Haazaar Boba had made seven Haj pilgrimages in his lifetime, all on foot. When I was born, my mother told me, I too was placed at the door of the dargah. She used to walk all the way from Bajpe to Pyara. There was no other transport available.

As years passed my father decided to move up the ghats to Chikkamagalur, in search of better fortunes. The little business he had at Bajpe was not yielding enough to look after his growing children. Going up the ghats, he yet had to struggle a lot. There he opened a hotel. None used to dare starting a hotel there because a rumour was thick in circulation that the place was haunted. It was said that a mischievous ghost was playing all sorts of pranks there, like putting dirty, unmentionable things into whatever was cooked in its kitchen. As a result the hotel owners used to suffer huge losses. In spite of this strange and discouraging rumour, my father he set up his hotel there.

It was also a time when plague was ravaging Chikkamagalur. Many children and women had succumbed to the deadly epidemic. Sometimes, my father used to see rats dying in his own hotel. But he braved on. He did not experience any trouble with any haunting ghosts. His hotel was named “Islamiya Hotel” and soon it became quite famous. It became, moreover, a centre of business in the town.

Those days many Hindi movies were being shot in and around Chikkamagalur. The whole district was full of natural beauty. Those who came there for film-shooting would go to my father’s hotel for food and refreshments. Many famous film personalities like Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Nargis and others had come to my father’s restaurant and tasted its biriyani. In fact, the biriyani of our hotel was quite popular, and people used to come to taste it from far and near. When film actors were around as its customers, people used to throng there to see them.

My father used to come down to our native village twice or thrice a year. Those days people coming from up the ghats were looked upon much in the same way people are seen today returning from the Gulf countries. He would come in a good dress, wearing a coat and a cap, his pocket bulging with cash. The cap he used to wear was known as “Fez cap”.

At Bajpe there was a person by name Guttu Jakri Beary. He was a big landlord, and quite popular. Moideen Beary of Konchar was Jakri Beary’s cousin. Moideen Beary was a big contractor. Once there was some misunderstanding between Jakri Beary and Moideen Beary. There was a mosque near Konchar-Bajpe, and Muslims from Paladakatte used to go there for prayers. One day Jakri Beary declared that the Konchar mosque was his and that none had any right over it. Hearing this one person donated fifty cents of land where the present Bajpe mosque is. He was popularly known as “Garnal Sahib”. He was a manufacturer of items of fireworks. A Hanafi Muslim, his actual name was Fakir Saheb. Much of the lands in Bajpe were his. On the land so donated, Moideen Beary, his son-in-law, my mother’s uncle and others built a mosque and was duly inaugurated.

At that time I was just a little boy. In the newly built mosque a new madrasa too was set up. My teacher in the madrasa was Abdul Rehman Musliyar. In his free hours he was doing business, selling scent. He would carry bottles of perfumes of different varieties and surma in a glass-framed box resembling a parrot-cage and sell them in different houses, shops and mosques. The box holding midget bottles of scents looked very attractive. Surma is eye-black that men used. Put a sleek little wooden splinter into a bottle of surma, take it out and draw it along the eye-lashes, and the surma would stick. Eye-lashes with surma were known to be very attractive, and it was supposed to be very cool on the eyes too. But to start with, for some moments, it would irritate the eyes. Similarly, he would make a tiny ball of cotton, dip it in the scent and place it in the ear or smear some scent on the clothes. For

such an application of surma or scent, he would not take any money. He would take money only for the little bottles of his merchandise sold. However, there were some people who would have surma or scents applied to them, and yet pay the Musliyar. This Abdul Rahman Musliyar was the first Imam of the new mosque. He was the teacher who taught me *Alif-ba-ta*.

Later one Koya from Lakshadweep came to the mosque as the Imam. He used to visit homes to collect oil in a copper vessel. Those days there was no electricity. Mosques would be lit by standing or hanging oil-lamps. But there were no kerosene lamps inside the mosque. Sometimes when Koya came to collect oil, some people would give him a quarter of an anna. Some would vow oil to the mosque when they faced some problems. Sometimes, Koya who would come to the house would also teach the people of the house the ways of the prayer (*tauba*). I have seen some women crying when they were so taught.

Onset of the rainy season would also herald a sense of apprehension. The reason was that most of the houses were thatched houses. And the rains were not the kind of rains that you see these days. There were occasions when we could not see the face of the sun for a whole month, as it were. There were bubbling founts of water even on roads. It was just one long, relentless, pelting rain. Heavy rains and winds ensured that the dry grass layer on the roof was practically destroyed in one season. And every house had to have a fresh layer of dry grass on the roof when the monsoon set in.

The job of putting a new layer of dry grass on the roof was carried out by my father with the help of my uncles. They did it not only for our house but also for the houses of our neighbours and relatives. They would go there, help them remove the old, decayed grass and put a new layer of dry grass. Some people were too poor to buy new thatch- grass. Sometimes they had to borrow money to buy it and have the roof layered with new dry grass. None saw it as a business opportunity. In such matters there

was no thought of ‘we’ and ‘they’. Irrespective of caste, people used to help each other. They would see that none was driven to get drenched inside one’s house.

After re-thatching the roofs we were particularly happy at home. That would at least promise a safe, warm refuge for us during the monsoon. I still remember spells of heavy rains when water was sliding down the thatched roof and its sound gave me great excitement. At night it sounded like mellifluous music. Mostly we would get, during the rainy season, hot rice-gruel, chutney, and dry fish baked on cinders. That is the way I spent my childhood.

Those days I was not going to school but I was attending the madrasa. When they found the space short at the madrasa, they added an additional room, thatched with coconut leaves. There was no cement flooring in the madrasa. Instead, they would put a layer of well-kneaded mud on the floor and firm it up with measured and continuous beating. In the rainy season the floor was very cold. The teacher at the madrasa was a fine scholar, and he taught us well and with great discipline. I had a few years of my religious education at this madrasa.

In those days I was hugely attracted to yakshagana. There were yakshagana performances in our place and in places nearby. Most of them were to redeem a religious vow. There was no electricity in those days. There would be a stage for the yakshagana performance, around which were hung gas lights. There would be a person in charge of those lights. He was supposed to fill the lamps with kerosene, pump them to see that the lights were kept burning bright. The yakshagana performances were held in open fields, and people had watch them squatting on the ground. Only the more important people of the village were provided with chairs or easy chairs. Women used to go to watch the performances in large numbers. Some Muslim men would be there too, but not Muslim women. But some of the Muslim women would sit on the sit-out of the houses nearby and enjoy the performances.

I would get a special thrill hearing the beat of the *chende* drum in yakshagana. I would feel as if I was transported to a different plane. If there was a yakshagana performance in the village, there would be a round of *chende* beating right when sun was going down. It was intimation to the people that a yakshagana performance was on and that they were being invited. Every time I heard the resounding sound of the drum I would be making secret plans to go there. My plan had to be secret because we the children were not permitted to see yakshagana. It was considered *haram* (forbidden) for the Muslims. And yet I would manage to sneak out and watch it all through the night, and invariably end up getting scolded by my grandmother.

One day there was a yakshagana performance near our house. As the sun set and the sound of the *chende* drum kept ringing in my ears, I visibly grew restless. This came to the notice of my grandmother. As I was about to go, she grabbed me. She called out my teacher at the madrasa nearby and told him, “Ustad! Look at this fellow! He insists on going to yakshagana, to that haram performance. He would not listen to me when I told him that going there is haram. Will you please advise him and mend his ways?” But I stuck to my plans to go to there. I started crying. At that point my teacher at the madrasa came out and called me, “Mohideen!” My heart started pounding harder.

My grandma repeated her complaint and request: “This fellow insists that he should go that yakshagana. When I said no, he started crying. Please take him to the madrasa and make him sleep there. If he stays here, he is sure to sneak out!” My teacher came to me. He placed his hands on my shoulders and said, “Why, Mohideen? Why are you crying? Good children don’t cry like this. Don’t cry! Come! Let us go to the madrasa!” He embraced me and took me to the madrasa. I gave up all my hope of going to the yakshagana. I was sure that I would be made to sleep at the madrasa and that he would be keeping a watch over me all through the night. But what happened there was altogether different. I am

still astonished at what happened when I recollect it even today.

My teacher took me to the madrasa and stopped at its front yard. He asked me, “Mohideen! Should you go to the yakshagana?” Surprised, I looked up and saw his face. From up above in the sky milky moonlight was raining down. I found no difference between the lustrous full moon and the face of my teacher! “Mohideen! Why are you silent? Should you go to the yakshagana?” he asked me again. My petrified body recovered, and I stood there with my head bent. Then the teacher took out a coin from his pocket and placed it in my hand. I do not remember now if it was a one-anna coin or quarter of an anna. Giving the coin, he said, “Go! Go to the yakshagana! Use this money to buy whatever you want to buy in the stalls there and eat. But come back soon. Do not stay there till the sunrise. If you lose sleep, you lose your health” and patted my head. I was overwhelmed and felt like crying.

Thus I did go to the yakshagana that day. With the money my teacher gave me I had bought and eaten peanuts. It is an event which has stamped itself in my memory. I can see it even now in my mind’s eye. Here I must tell you something. If today I am able to speak Kannada well, it is because I was watching yakshagana performances in my childhood. Today I realise that my teacher at the madrasa was not just a religious teacher, but a psychologist too. Today psychology recognises that one should not come in the way of a child pursuing its curiosity. Looking back, I realise how advanced was the attitude of my teacher. As I grew up I was able to understand why indeed he sent me to watch the yakshagana performance. My teacher’s name was Moideen Musliyar. He hailed from Kasargod. Later he married a girl from our place and settled down here. Those days mostly boys used to study in the madrasa. There were not many girls. Among the few who studied at the madrasa was Fatima. She was very innocent, and very beautiful. She is still alive today. Another girl was Saramma. She had a particular liking for me. Sometimes I would teach her some

lessons she could not understand. Later she married someone in Moodabidre. She remained childless, and died recently. Only these two girls have stayed in my memory.

When I was a little boy there used to be many cockfights held at Bajpe. Mostly the Bunts used to participate in or place bets on them. I had seen them taking away the injured birds, getting them killed in the 'halal' way before sending them to their Muslim friends. The cockfights would sometimes go on for three days and nights. The place was lit up with gas-lights at night. People would go there from far and near. One could see the big, knightly fighting cocks tethered to the pegs in different parts of the ground. My friend B.P. Ismail fancied cockfight very much, and I used to accompany him to watch it. But Bearys never used to participate in it.

But Bearys did participate in Kambala or buffalo race. They as well as Christians used to rear and maintain race buffaloes. I remember Unhaaka of Bolara rearing race-buffaloes and the big quarrel that ensued between him and the children of Tyampanna Shetty of our village over the squirting of water to the high flag in the buffalo race.

When I joined the school I was ten years old. There was nothing like birth certificate in those days. Our birth day was what we had declared. The name of the school I joined at Bajpe was the 'Parochial Elementary School'. It was a Christian school. Those days by the side of every church there was a school. The person who took me to school for my admission was Jakri Beary. He was the eldest son of Moideen Beary. He was a big merchant and he owned a big provision store. My father used to address him as "Kaka".

I had a teacher in the school by name Carmen teacher. She had a younger brother by name Rego and he too was a teacher in the school. There was another teacher in the school whom was called 'Gibba teacher'. He was quick to get angry and quick to wield the cane. Carmen teacher was very beautiful to look at. She

was dressed in frock while she taught us in the class. She was not married. Among the Christians many girls would remain unmarried to become “Sisters” or nuns later. Carmen teacher used show great affection for me. I too used to like her very much. She had a mother’s heart in her. She used to treat her students as her own children. No harsh words for them, and no beatings. Her words were soft and kind.

Carmen teacher would ask me to fetch tea from the nearby hotel. Pastries such as *Neerulli Baje* or *Goli Baje* would also be brought to her along with tea, and I would invariably get a share in them. That would make me immensely happy. I did not have money to buy and eat them myself. My poverty had denied such small pleasures to me. Eating in a hotel was only a stuff my dreams. In fact, Carmel teacher was a big inspiration to me. There were many students who would attend the school regularly just because they were drawn by the love of that teacher. Initially, looking at my fair complexion and good looks she thought I was a Christian. She also used to speak to me in Konkani. But one day I told her that I was a Muslim. Thereafter she seemed to love me more and not any less.

Don’t we say now that our schools should provide religious education? In the church schools such education was offered along with secular education. But the classes and lessons were held separately. When the Christian students had their religious classes, the others had training in gardening or moral science classes. The school had its own garden for that purpose. Even now we can see such secular arrangements in Christian schools. You can yet see that system in the school at Bajpe where I studied. When the Christian students were doing the prayer, they would feel envious of others like us, who enjoyed exemption from it.

Christians run their schools without discrimination. A Christian school is not declared to be for the Christian children only, but for all. That is their policy. Those days there were only Christian schools. There were no government schools. There were some

government Urdu schools, though. But only the Urdu-speaking (Hanafi) Muslims used to attend them. That rendered their education limited and lopsided. Beary children rarely went to such schools. Poverty too could be counted as one of its reasons. In matters of education the Christian outlook has been very broad. They used to set up educational institutions with the noble ideal that everyone should learn and that everybody should get education. Even now that ideal drives them to their exertion. If in India today there is a veritable revolution in education, there is a big role of Christians behind it in terms of their service, sacrifice and labour.

In our school many cultural programmes and competitions used to be held. I was participating in them. I used to take part in dramas. The girls of our schools were particularly good at dance. Those dances were not like the ones you see these days where they dance to the tune of film songs played through cassettes. Those days, some students used to sing the song themselves and others would dance. There was considerable emphasis on music and dance. However, Muslims would never participate in such programmes. Though their children were studying in the school, the parents or guardians never used to attend even functions like the school-day celebrations. They did not quite seem to be concerned about the school or about the education imparted there.

Though the church building was located close to the school, none of the teachers or those connected with the institution ever persuaded or compelled the students of other communities to go the church for prayers or for other such occasions. That is why I hold the Christian education institutions and the education they have given in high esteem. If I have grown to this stature in life, I owe it to the Convent education I received. I always remind myself of this with gratitude. I have said this often in my speeches, in public functions. There is considerable role of Christian education and my Christian teachers in imbuing in me sense of discipline, honesty, punctuality and concern for the society around. The influence of Christian educational institutions on our coastal district has been

immense. If today we see in our district schools and colleges in every place and at every step, as it were, its seeds were sown by, and the inspiration was provided by these Christian educational institutions. Because of them Muslims, backward class people and dalits could go to school and gain literacy and education.

When I was going to school at Bajpe my closest friend was Laurphy Pinto. I do not know where he is these days. His memory haunts me even now. We were so intimate. Neither in studies nor in play could we be separated. Whenever we were free, the two of us would sit in some place and chat. I still get a sense of thrill at the pleasure that such chats gave us. The subjects of such chats could be anything under the sun, like our teacher, our school, our lessons in the class, girls in the class, yakshagana, the situation at home and so on. That would often churn up many issues and problems which made us think seriously about. His father was a big officer at Basra. One day he came and took away his son to Basra. Both of us cried inconsolably when he left. Later, I would often sit alone and remember the days I had spent with my friend together. His house is still where it used to be, but I do not know where he is. I still remember him. He was a very close friend.

Those days, if somebody addressed us as “Beary” we would be livid with anger. We all thought that the word “Beary” was pejorative, that it was meant to make fun of us. In the school whenever there was any quarrel among students, that word was associated with scolding us. But such use was more common among students and not among the grown-ups. Many elders used to have a suffix of ‘Beary’ to their names. It apparently referred to the honour and prestige with which the merchant class was looked upon in the past.

We had benches in our class to sit on. In some classes there were no benches. Students were made to sit on the ground and were taught. There were occasions when we were taught under the shade of a tree. In those days there was no such thing as the huge burden of books for the students to carry. There was slate,

slate-pencil, one book of prescribed lessons and a small book of arithmetical multipliers. Even when I reached the fifth class I remember having only four or five books as part of prescribed school learning. They would not give us the kind of home-work as they are doing now. Even if they did, it would only be like asking the students to commit something to memory or do some copy-writing.

Every year there would be the Christian festival of Saint Mary celebrated in the church near our school. On that occasion there would be shops and stalls and giant wheels put up on the school grounds. In the shops there would be sweetmeat, dolls and other trinkets for sale. We would carry such money as we had saved or what we could coax out of our parents and spend it on these things in the fair.

Although I used to go to yakshagana, dramas and village fairs, I used to dread going to bhuta kola. There was a strong reason behind it. Some interesting thing happened. One night a bhuta kola or nema was being held at a place called Padpu near Pejawara Mutt. I too had gone there to watch it. It was not my first experience; I had seen such performance before. But on that day I had a strange experience. As I was returning home late at night I heard a loud scream behind me. When I turned back to find out what it was I saw the bhuta impersonator holding his ritual sword in one hand and a flaming torch in the other, screaming loudly and running after me! When I saw his fearsome make-up, theatrical trembling and blood-curdling shout, I started to tremble in fear. In great panic I ran and stumbled back home. The spirit-impersonator who came running and shouting behind me fell into a pond near our house. I was nearly paralysed with fear. Fear told on my health. When my mother saw my condition, she too was greatly upset. She said, “You are struck with fear. It is important to exorcise it!” Even now when I recall that event I feel a sense of unease. It was as if fear had gone into the marrow of my bones. The spirit-impersonator, who had screamed his way into the pond, was

extricated from it by his devotees who were frantically following him. He had swooned and he was carried back amidst great noise of panic-struck people. But I was yet in the grip of fear, and for the next few days I suffered a severe bout of fever. My mother did much to chase away the fear and cure the fever, using whatever modes her advisers prescribed. I was treated with some folk medicine. But I stayed inside the house for a whole month. I was afraid to come out. At night I would shadow my mother. I would hold her in tight embrace while sleeping. But sleep would not come near me. Sometimes my relatives would come home to see me. They would whisper among themselves that I was struck by fear, and would console me and say words of assurance. I still remember those days and words. Thereafter, however, I stopped going to bhuta kola. I remember how on such occasions of spirit-propitiation, the bhuta impersonator would loudly call out this sheik or that sheik or the palli sheik. Sheik is the leader of the Muslims and palli sheik was the head of the mosque. During the spirit possession, the bhuta impersonator would call out these Muslim leaders of the locality. For, it was quite a normal thing for the Bearys to attend the kolas. There they were given due respect. Close to the place where the event was held, there was a big platform around a peepul tree, where the Muslim leaders were respectfully entertained. The Bearys would contribute to the kola in the form of oil or money. The shops and stalls around the kola often belonged to the Bearys.

Another occasion when I was struck by fear was when Maari or 'Blight' was being chased away from our village. Once when I was in Bajpe, it was announced that they were planning to chase away Maari. The plan was conveyed to all the houses of the place. The occasion was when small pox made its appearance in our village. Those days there was no medicine to treat small pox. It was believed that the Blight was represented by Maari, a vengeful deity, who had to be chased away to the outer boundary of the village, where it would be propitiated with blood sacrifices of fowls,

and thereafter be chased away to the forest outside, where it was supposed meet its end. In this programme, there would be first an elaborate worship and ritual in the temple, and following it people would gather and chase away the blight at midnight. They would carry the flaming torches made of coconut leaves and run along shouting fiercely. Once they had chased away the Blight right through the road near our house. Hearing the screams, shouts and noise, I woke up with a start and went trembling to my mother to hold her tight. I remember my mother consoling me, and assuring me, "It is gone, my son. Fear not. It has gone away!" In fact, as the Blight was being chased away people used to close the doors and windows of their houses. They would put out the lamps. None would come out of the house, nor would they even peep out. When they chased away the Blight, it was stipulated that they should not stop in the middle nor should they look back; they were required always to look ahead and none was permitted to come out of their house. It was believed that if ever anybody chanced to come face to face with Maari, she would knock them down, that they would die, coughing up blood. They would tell lurid tales of those who died such macabre deaths. If you went to the boundary of the village the next morning you could see feathers of fowls, traces of blood, vermilion and such things. Even en route feathers of fowls could be seen strewn around or flying in the wind. In those days the belief in chasing away Maari was found even among Bearys.

There was, in our place, a person by name Mayyaddi Beary. He told me about an experience of his: "One night I was going to your house. On the way I met a stranger. He stopped me and asked, 'Do you have a beedi with you? If you have, will you spare one for me?'" Then I realised that he was not a human but a goblin in human form. Then I shouted at him, 'Won't you go away from here?' I thought I was able to free myself from him before I could reach your place." Those days such stories and beliefs were very common. The uneducated, innocent men used to believe that such stories were true. Now we hear no such things. Now man

himself seems to have taken the place of all goblins and devils. Now man fears man, and not any ghost or goblin. My mother used to tell many graphic tales of ghosts, goblins, succubi and so on. I had an aunt. She was not married. One day she went to the pond to wash clothes, and there she coughed, spat blood and fell dead. People used to say that she had a fatal smack from a ghost. They used to say that during mid-noon that a predatory ghost was frequenting the place around the pond and people were advised against going there at that time. I remember such stories even today. But as I grew up and got educated I realised that getting knocked down by a ghost was actually dying of a heart attack. But our aunts and grandmothers would tell us such stories and those of the miracle-making saints and prophets, and tell them with lurid details. And those stories were invariably told when it was dark. They were mostly free by then; we would have got back home by that time, and we would pester our aunts and grandmothers to tell us stories. They were to us then what television is today. My mother used to sing Beary songs melodiously. Children would gather around her and listen to the songs and stories avidly, often defying the intruding sleep.

In matters of singing people our village always seemed to excel those from our neighbouring village, Bykampady. Those days every village used to have trained groups of singers. It was not individual singing but group singing. When there was any wedding in any rich homes, they would organise competitions between two groups of singers. Sometimes they would go on all through the night. The bride would be placed on a swing by women, the bridegroom by men, and swinging and singing would go on for a long time. My mother would often recount the event that took place during her own wedding. The occasion was when her bridegroom, that is my father, had come to her house. That day he was made to sit on the swing and groups launched into singing. They sang for long and many in the village had come there to listen to the singing. There was fun, laughter and people seemed to regale themselves heartily.

My mother used to say that she was enjoying the scene from inside the house and also feeling shy about it, while other women were teasing her and laughing.

My uncles were very talented people. They would be specially invited to any public functions or programmes. They would go there and help conducting them as if it was their service. This apart, they were also good at certain adventurous and mischievous projects like fishing, stealing tender coconuts, mangoes and so on. Once you know what they did? They had gone to a house where wedding was being held, and there they mixed opium in tea and offered it to the group of singers. Drinking that spiked tea, the singers kept singing, tirelessly, oblivious of time. They realised that it was five o'clock, early morning only when the effect of opium left them. When they came to know about it, the singers flew into high rage and threw away tables and chairs into the river nearby. The elders then came together and apologised and pacified them, saying that it was the handiwork of some mischievous people. My mother used to recount such stories.

The bridegroom in my aunt's wedding seemed to have arrived on a horseback. He is said to have come, wearing a pompous turban, in a big procession, to the accompaniment of bands, drums, mock swords-play, and pyrotechnics and so on. It seems it was a very pompous, ostentatious wedding, which went on for fifteen days. My mother used to tell me that such pompous wedding was never ever held again in the village.

While yet a boy I was hugely fascinated by the game of *chinni-daandu* or *kutti-donne*, - a folk game played with a round, stump-like wooden stick which was used to hit to another smaller stick tapered on either end. I had a friend by name Unhi, and he was my playmate. Another playmate was Hathim. He died recently. Often older boys used to play with us. There was no stipulated time for us to play the game. Sometimes we would play even in the morning. Sometimes we would join some groups if we found them playing. We would lose the sense of time while playing that

game; we would be oblivious of our hunger and thirst. Sometimes we would be playing from morning to evening and return home to receive severe reprimand from the elders.

Jakri Beary, who admitted me to the school, was very much opposed to my playing, and whenever he found me playing he would roundly beat me up. “What dirty game is yours! Go and read seriously instead!” he would scold and admonish me. One day he had beaten me black and blue when he saw me playing. That he did so in front of two girls from my friend Unhi’s house made me particularly sore. The pain and insult of it stayed with me for many days. Since my father was away Jakri Beary was keeping a severe eye of surveillance on me. He was very affectionate and had a lot of concern for me. Sometimes those who did not like us would go to him with a complaint that we were found playing. One day my friend Unhi made a false claim that he had caught the chinni in the game we were playing. When the others denied it, he kept insisting that he had indeed caught it. The others angrily pounced on him and thrashed him. His face started bleeding. I had to console him and take him back to his house, where I had to invent a lie to say that Unhi had tripped and fallen down and got injured.

Those days boys used to play games like *chinni-daandu*, *gidi*, *kabaddi*, *palle*, *baccha*, *goli*, *lagori*, *billis* (played with cashew nuts), or *kukkata*. Girls used to play games like *kolata*, skipping, *kallata*, blindman’s bluff, one-legged race, *chennemane*, *paapacchi* and so on. Girls never used to participate in the games which the boys played; but the boys would join the games that the girls played. When the girls played in a group, some of us would stand and watch. There was a game called “*Arpem-thirpem*”. I still remember it. That game was very dear to me. Three or four girls and boys together would play it on the sit- out of the house. Every one of them would keep both their palms pressed down against the ground, and one of them would say, pointing out his or her finger, “*arpem -thirpem- korag manjila - balipam -pallil -*

*baang -kodukombo -endu poo*” and then everyone else would say “*murki poo*”. Then saying, “*murki -charki -yenne -kudichi -kaala -kaiyaa -onna - jandaa -kotti -kotti - madakatte*” he or she would touch the palms with his or her fingers at every word and stop at the word “*madakatte*”. At that point the one whose palm was touched would go out. Then the game would repeat. The one whose palm was untouched till the last round was declared the winner, as the king. The game could resume for another round. It is a game which resembles the game of Musical Chair. One wonders if the game of Musical Chair was adopted from this folk game. Whatever it is, it is an interesting game. When played, many would stand and watch it. Those days there was not much of segregation between boys and girls. They would eat together, play together. At home they would sleep in the same room and the space was often shared by grandfather or grandmother or other elders.

In my childhood poverty could be seen everywhere. Government did provide wheat, which we made into dosa and eat. We also made dosa out of big millet. The poor would cook such things as jack fruit seeds, sweet potato, and horse-gram for their food. It is only on some festive occasions that a good, sumptuous meal could be had; or possibly at wedding or *Maulood* (religious ceremonies) in any rich household of the village.

My mother used to tell me about the acute shortage of food in 1944, during the Second World War. People had next to nothing to eat. They were desperate. At that time the government had sent a committee to survey and assess the poverty in our villages. There were some Europeans too in this team. During those days women used to have a morbid fear of the military. Since this survey team landed in the village in what resembled like military vehicles, many women thought that it consisted of only military people. The fear was that these military people would abduct women and violate them. Such rumours were heard in the villages. So whenever military vehicles passed through the villages, women

would not step out of their houses. Even when this survey team came to our village, our womenfolk went into hiding. They wouldn't even allow their children to go out. The air was suffused with fear, as it were. Wherever there groups of women there were murmurs about the military presence. Even after the survey committee held a meeting of the village elders to ascertain the extent of poverty, the women did not quite dare to come out of their houses. They did so only after the fact-finding team left the village.

I will narrate another interesting incident. There was a person, living near our house, by name Bantkal Bavu Beary. He was a big merchant. The uncle of my mother was getting married to some relative of Bavu Beary. Those days the practice was that when the bridegroom was going to the house of the bride for the first time, he would be accompanied by a number of friends. Two children would also go with him to stay there. That night there was a feast for all those who had gone there. There was chicken curry, ghee-rice, sweets and all on offer. We ate our fill. After the others left the place, the bridegroom and I stayed back.

Next morning we were again served a good fare: ghee-smearred pattar or thin roti, chicken curry and rice-gruel with ghee. After partaking of the repast, and as we were drinking tea, we saw a calendar hanging on the wall. It had two photos- one of Abul Kalam Azad, and the other, of Jinnah. As we were watching the calendar, one of the elderly gentlemen there asked us, "Do you know who those two are?" We did not reply. Then he himself said, "The photo on the left is of Abul Kalam Azad. He is a harami, - a bastard! He is the one who has destroyed the whole country." While saying this, we could see a feeling of burning hatred in his face. Then he said, pointing his finger at the other photo: "You know the one on the right? He is Jinnah. He is our leader. He is our saviour. He is a very good man!"

Even at that young age I was embarrassed and upset when I heard such words of intolerance and hatred against such a great man as Abul Kalam Azad and words of pride and appreciation

for Jinnah which that elderly man was using. That man was apparently not reading any newspaper. Our place never used to get any newspaper. In fact, it was hard to see a newspaper in a village. Reading habit among people was also very rare. Only the teachers, the educated and the townspeople read any newspaper. Rarely did people have radio at home. And yet you see how wrong messages are supplied; see how Jinnah's communal ideology had reached even the remote villages. In fact, there were systematic ways in which such communal ideology was reached to every household. The illiterate, gullible people easily believed in it.

In my childhood my family was very poor. We would buy only a day's provision of rice and provision from the shop and cook them. But things improved after my father went up the ghats, and we grew into an important household in the area. Then it became not uncommon for the poor to come home, asking for rice or a meal. My mother would not refuse them to anybody. She was particularly happy feeding the hungry. She herself knew the pain when the fire of hunger was burning inside her. She used to find heavenly pleasure in dousing that fire in others. She used to find in it a sense of contentment. Our food at home was rice-gruel in the morning and a meal each in the afternoon and at night. For ghee-rice and other eatables, we had to wait for some festivals.

In our place there was an eminent Bunt guttu household. The head of that house was Paddanna Shetty. There were a few grown-up girls in that house. I still remember how they would all gather to sing "*Door hato ye duniyawaalo, Hindustan hamara he.*" When India got Independence, I remember those girls standing in a row and singing, the hoisting of the tricolour flag, distribution of the celebratory laddu, and I eating it. I remember them as if they happened just the other day. When the news of Gandhiji's assassination reached us the whole village was drowned in sorrow. It was as if every house mourning the death in its own family. Everyone would tell everyone, "It seems they killed Gandhiji...They say Gandhiji is killed..." and say in voice choked in inexpressible

sorrow. It was a condition when one would not see another's face and say anything more. Women were shedding tears.

We used to rear cows in our shed. My mother loved cows. Any excess of milk there was at home she would sell it. The money so earned was spent on buying oil-cake and hay for the cows. Although she had a disability in one hand, she would do all work in the cowshed. Rearing the cows gave her a lot of pleasure and an immense satisfaction. Patting and rubbing their back, giving them rice-gruel water or rice-washed water and feeding them with oil-cakes, she would look after them as she would her own children. Besides, she would also do all the daily chores at home like drawing water from the well, washing clothes, grinding, sweeping, and cooking and so on. Her physical disability did not come in the way of her activities. In matters of readiness and devotion to work, cleanliness and good and tasty cooking she was an object lesson to others.

My aunt, that is my father's younger sister, too used to rear cows. She would, like mother, would love cows and sell milk. During Deepavali festival we would make garlands of wild flowers and adorn the necks of our cows. My mother would love it, and she would spend time talking to the cows. During festival days she would feed them with jaggery or whatever sweets cooked at home. She would then pat or rub their back, neck or head, saying, "What, my daughter? Are you happy? Don't feel sad!" The cows seemed to understand my mother's words. They would shake their heads, blink at my mother and make a hissing sound through their nostrils. My mother would wrap them around their necks and rain her affection on them. If ever we had to sell any cow, we would all mourn the occasion and feel the pain. We were all so intimately bound to our cows.

We would have new clothes stitched only for special festivals like Ramzan and Bakrid. Or whenever there were any celebrations at home. There were no readymade clothes, nor anything like trousers. While we were boys we used to wear half-pants and

shirts. While going to the mosque or madrasa we would wear mundu or lungi, - white or coloured oblong cloth covering the lower part of our body from the waist down to the ankle. Our shirts and half-pants would be stitched by the tailor from out of the cloth we bought for the purpose. On festival days virtually there would be a queue in front of the tailor's shop to collect our newly stitched dresses. Women used to wear cotton saree and long, loose blouses, and would cover their heads with colourful scarves. My mother would not wear short blouse but wore long, loose blouse. All Beary women wore long, loose blouses. Those who did not, were not considered Bearys at all.

Those days Bearys would go to temple festivals, or to any kola or nema. Hindus of all castes had faith in uroos of Bayalu and Ullala. I remember going to the Tokur uroos together in a group. On many occasions the Bayalu uroos was organised by Hindu Bunts. When Bearys were hard up and found it difficult to organise the uroos, the Bunts would say, "We will supply ghee and rice. Don't stop the uroos." Those days there was no conflictual distinction between Hindu and Muslim, or between temple, mosque or dargah. People would vow to donate the token of their first crop or yield, - whether it is a bunch of plantains, bundle of vegetables, sugarcane, coconut, tender-coconut or whatever, - to the mosque or the dargah. Among them were Hindus more than Muslims. Later whatever the things received was auctioned off and the money realised was used for the maintenance of the mosque or dargah.

The saint in whose name the dargah at Bayalu was built was Jamaluddin Auliya. He was serious student of all religions and a great advocate of religious tolerance. He was adept in treating those bitten by poisonous creatures. He would hurry to any place where people were bitten by poisonous serpents and treat them irrespective of their caste or creed. That made him a household name. People of all castes and religions used to hold him in great veneration. On the occasion of the uroos of his dargah, people of

all religions used to work as volunteers. Even today Hindus go to that uroos.

I often used to go to the Pejawara river to catch fish. There I also learnt some swimming. Sometimes my friends used to call me to river, saying, “The fisher men have come to ‘put the nut’; let’s go and catch fish!” ‘Put the nut’ means putting poisonous nuts to the river to catch fish. They would go to the river early in the morning, ‘put the nut’ and grab whatever fish they could and run away. They did so because there was a law prohibiting ‘putting the nut’, because the nut was poisonous. The police could arrest anybody doing it. After the fisher men left, there could still be some dead fish floating in the river. We would swim in the river, catch them and bring them home. On such occasions girls too would go to the river. They would plunge into the river to catch fish. The girls of our village were expert swimmers.

In the first spell of rains when rivers, ponds and fields were overflowing with water, there was plenty of fish to catch. We would then form a group of four, carrying gas light, long knives like swords and go in a boat for fishing. Fishes would peer out at the glare of gas light and move close to the boat. We would then slash at them, catch them and put them inside the boat. On such occasions we could hunt big fishes and crabs. Those without boats would stand in the river water waist-high, and catch fish in wicker basket. River fishes are particularly tasty. We could get them only during the first spell of rains, and on such occasions there would be a veritable crowd on the river banks to catch fish. We would share such fish as we had caught with relatives and neighbours, irrespective of their castes.

*Puddar* or the feast of the newly harvested rice was a special festival of the peasants of Tulu Nadu. It was traditionally celebrated with great *éclat* in the Tuluva households. All the members of the household would gather in their ancestral house. They would cook the newly harvested rice, different vegetable curries to go with it and payasam or sweet rice or lentil porridge and sit down for a

great feast. The Bearys too would be invited to such feast. They would go there too and partake of the feast with others. Beary women also would attend such feasts. In particular, this festival was held grandly in the landlords' households. On such occasions their entire family, their tenants, and those who used to work for them as farm labourers were fed and were given presents in the form of money and clothes. In our house my mother used to celebrate the occasion in simple manner. We too used to have a vegetarian meal that day.

Among the Hindus there was an interesting belief and practice. If a child soon after its birth or when it was yet small suffered from any serious ailment and if its life was despaired of, that child would be given to the Koragas to look after. They believed that it would ensure the cure and survival of the child. That did not, however, mean that the child was taken away. Arrangements were made to rear the child in the shed of the house, under their supervision. The Koraga to whom the child was ritually given away was given food and wages for the favour.

As young boys we, with our friends, used to go on little expeditions to steal mangoes, sugarcane tender coconuts. We would then share the booty among us. Once we happened to steal sugarcane. The owner of the field saw us, chased us and gave us a severe drubbing. My father came to know about it. We feared a severe reprimand from him and mostly remained in hiding. But my father did nothing. Nor did he raise the matter with us. Instead, he went to the owner of the sugarcane fields and asked him, "Why did you beat those children? Would I not have given you the cost of your loss if only you had asked me for it? You should not beat the children as you did. Children do such thing which is natural to their age. We too had done it. You don't beat them. You should advise them, instead." My father had advised the owner of the sugarcane field thus. My mother's grandfather would always bring two or three sugarcanes whenever he came home. We would share them. He had a particular liking for my younger brother, because

he was named after him, - Hussain.

Whenever I had a few days' holiday I used to go to Chikkamagalur. There in the hotel they would serve soup mixed with crushed tomatoes. I never liked it. I used to eat it with great reluctance. For, we never used tomatoes in making soup. Instead, we used fruits of gambage tree, tamarind, kokum and such local fruits after drying them in the sun. The soup made of them used to be very tasty. Those days I did not eat biriyani. Somehow I did not like it.

My mother had, on a few occasions, gone to Chikkamagalur too. But she never stayed there for long. Those days the people who went up the ghats for doing business were not respected. Very few took their women there. Earlier I had mentioned the name of Moideen Beary. He had a daughter by name Beepamma. Her husband took her, almost by force, to a place up the ghats where he was doing business. At this her mother felt insulted and crushed. I still remember her words: "On my part, I consider Beepamma as dead!" She said so in unbearable agony. In those days only the most desperately poor used to go up the ghats for work or business. And taking wives with them was considered beneath their honour and dignity. That was the perception of people.

I first saw a bus only when a bus from Kateel started coming to our place. It was an open bus, as it were. It had no roof. Travelling in it, one could see the nature and surroundings. It was a steam bus, and not of diesel. They had to put a rod in front of the bus, and it had to be turned vigorously to start the bus.

I also remember eating in the Bombay Hotel in the Bunder area of Mangalore. My uncle, that is my mother's younger brother, was a 'writer' there. That hotel is still around.

## College Days

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In those days our village Bajpe had only a school up to the seventh class. When I finished my fifth class I was already fifteen years of age. Thereafter my father took me to Chikkamagalur, where I was admitted to the eighth class in a convent high school. There our teachers used to be very affectionate towards students. Our class teacher was one Philomena Sister. She was young, and she was particularly nice to me. She located my talent and encouraged me. Because of her I could take a move from the eighth standard directly to take the public examination.

This convent was a semi government school. It had English medium teaching in the 8th, 9th and 10th classes. The reason why English medium was available in the government school was that those students coming from the Urdu schools were not good either in English or in Kannada. So to enable such students to learn English and Kannada, the school had been converted into an English medium school. I learnt my English well only in that school.

I passed my eighth class in first class. I then joined the Intermediate class directly. Intermediate class was what Pre-University Class is at present. There were mostly Gowda,

Vaishya and other Hindu caste students. Hence my friends mostly turned out to be from other communities. Though there were some Muslim students in the school, my friends were mostly Hindus. The reason was, the Muslim students were all from the Urdu medium. They did not speak Kannada well. I had studied in Kannada medium. Therefore, my association with the Kannada-speaking friends became more intimate. There was, in fact, no thought of difference between castes or religions. I had a classmate my name Noorullah Khan. His mother tongue was Urdu. He couldn't speak Kannada well. He would say "namdooke... nimdooke..." mixing his Urdu with Kannada. I and my friends would always tease him for his odd ways of mixing Urdu and Kannada. He lived close to our hotel and therefore he became a close friend of mine. In fact, I became his family friend. I was participating in all the functions and celebrations in his house. He is still around. But he is not able to walk and move around. He had an elder sister. Her name was Moheeza. She was very beautiful, and she used to like me a lot. Those days the roads in the town were not crowded either with people or with moving vehicles. My friends and I used to go to the school playing *chinni-daandu* on the road.

There were two rooms attached to our hotel. I used to sleep in one of them. My father had allotted it to me to sleep and study. In the other rooms were two teachers. Some of my classmates used to come to my room to read. Once, as the examinations were approaching, we - my friends and I and the teachers - played cards through the night. By morning we felt very hungry, and without even washing our face we went to the hotel. My father served hot dosas to all, with butter to go with them. He served us more than we had asked for, saying, "I see your eyes all read with too much reading, sons! Now you get back and rest for a while before resuming reading!" How could he know that our eyes had gone red by defying sleep to play cards? We went back, recounting his words and laughing heartily and resumed our play! But today as I

remember the love and kindness my father had shown, my eyes go wet!

In the Intermediate examinations, I, who used to pass in all subjects, failed in one. The reason was that I was taking part in games with my friends. I was particularly fond of basketball. Playing it always and seriously, I became the captain of our team. I took the team to Mysore for the Dasara M.G.S. tournament and also to Shivamogga. I won in both the places. But this affected my studies. Later I passed in the one subject in which I had failed. In the school I had also played a part in the drama. The name of the drama was ‘Sundopa Sundara’. I had played the role of Sundopa Sundara. They had given me that role because I was my good looks. It was a comedy. After I took part in it I gained a reputation in the school as good drama actor.

While I was a student there was a girl studying in our class. Her name was Nagarathna. She was very beautiful. Though there were many girls in the class, her image has stayed in my memory even today. There was another girl by name Mumtaz Begum. She was very beautiful too. And she was a very reserved character. Long after my college days I had accidentally met her, and we were both very happy. That day she talked to me a lot and with lot freedom. Thereafter, I received a letter from her. It said, “Moideen, while in the college, I used to like you very much. So much so I wanted to marry you only. But I did not have courage enough to tell you that. May be I am unlucky. But I want you to be happy.” Hers was a silent love which she couldn’t share with anybody. By the time she said it, I was already a married man with a child.

Mumtaz Begum’s father was Registrar in Chikkamagalur. Later he was transferred to Mysore. In due course Mumtaz did her M.A. and became a teacher. Now she has retired. Even now she keeps calling. What is interesting is when she was studying in college she never used to speak to me. Nor was she mingling with others. She was something of a loner. But she was

keeping a deep sense of love suppressed within her.

Similarly, I had a strong feeling of love for another girl in the school. She was exceedingly beautiful and talented. But like Mumtaz's, it was a mute love. I wanted desperately to express it, but somehow couldn't. Later she got married to someone. In those days there were sentiments of love, romance among students. But there was nothing like going round together, enjoying each other's company, elopement and such other things as you see these days. We were even nervous about even conversing with each other.

Once I lost a pair of my shoes. I used to wear them only while going to college or on some special occasions like wedding. My father had bought those shoes for me. Therefore the loss hurt me all the more. At Pyra I attended the 'Kabi' in connection with a wedding. I had removed my shoes and went into the house, and by the time I was back my shoes had vanished. I searched for them everywhere but with no avail. "You may get them back tomorrow, if not today. Don't lose heart!" people consoled me. I returned home bare foot. After a few days I learnt that a man from a house near Konchar was gadding about wearing a pair of shoes. I went there to see for myself. Yes, they were my own shoes. I knew him very well. His was a rich family, an honourable family. I had therefore some trepidation about asking him about it. I had my aunt's house nearby. She was married to someone from the same place. I went to her and told her about everything. She told me not to pursue the matter further. She was apprehensive that if I went there to complain about it, the people of his household would feel insulted, and they could even contest and quarrel. I got further dispirited at this response and returned home disappointed.

From Chikkamagalur I went to Bangalore to study for my Degree. There I got a seat for B.Sc. in the Vijaya College. My classmates, Noorullah Khan and Chenne Gowda went to Mysore to study for B.A. Sometimes I used to feel that I should have done my B.A. That would have led to study for Law and become a lawyer. I also had an ambition to become an engineer. But my

marks were not good enough, and I did not get a seat in engineering college. I, therefore, had to settle for studying for B.Sc.

We had a Principal at our Chikkamagalur College. His name was Shama Rao. Here I must say a few words about him. He was a very good, clean-hearted man. He was very affectionate towards his students. He used to teach very well too. He would intersperse his lessons with many anecdotes, personal experiences and sparks of humour. Everybody used to love his classes. While he was teaching, his saliva would occasionally squirt out. Once as he was speaking a girl by name Padma held her palm against her face to guard it against the sprinkle of his saliva. Then the Principal said, “Why are you holding your palm against your face, dear girl? Do not worry. I have no plans to kiss you!” The whole class burst out in laughter at his sparkling humour.

The Principal recounted another story. When he was first appointed as a lecturer he wanted to get a suit stitched for him. He went to a famous tailoring shop in Mysore, where ready-made suits were available too. The name of the tailoring shop was “Pattu Brothers”. It was quite a famous shop, and you can see it in Mysore even today. When our Principal went there he was wearing his traditional panche and a shirt and was looking at the ready-made suits kept in the show-case. Then the proprietor of the shop came there and told him in an imperious tone, “What are you looking at? These are all not meant for you! Only gentlemen wear them!” He wanted to ask him, “Is only a suit-wearing person a gentleman? Not we?” But somehow he couldn’t, and quietly beat a retreat. The Principal would felicitously mix such stories and anecdotes with his flow of lessons to make them lively and interesting. He would mix freely with his students and was always humorous in his conversations. He would always say a lot of things about Shakespeare and his works. Sometimes he would address some of us as “Aye, Shakespeare!” “Aye, Gentleman!” It is hard to forget so interesting a person.

Shama Rao had a daughter. She studied in America. Later

she got married there. After she lost her husband she came back to Bangalore to live there. I was keen to meet and talk to her once. But somehow I couldn't do it.

During holidays I used to come down to the village and the old friends would meet once again. My friend Dr. T.K. Muhammad and I once planned to catch fish in a river, using an explosive. We had fixed a boat for the purpose. The boatman knew where the shoal of fish would be or how to use the explosive. But the explosive was not available easily to everybody. The explosive would be made clandestinely and sold only to known people. We got it through the boatman and set out with him on our expedition. We had six 'cartridges' of explosives with us. Starting from our village and going up to the "Ruyi Kadavu" at Kuloor, we had exploded five of them; but we had no recompense of even one fish! This "Ruyi Kadavu" was the ferry where people going by boat used to pay a toll of one "Ruyi" or a coin of one paisa. Hence the name.

Disappointed at not getting any fish, we were left with only one 'cartridge' of explosives. There seemed no prospect of getting any fish either. Then my friend, 'T.K.' told the boatman, "Why are you keeping that last 'cartridge' with you, man? Throw that too into the river!" The boatman threw it into the river and exploded it. Within minutes heaps of dead fish started floating towards our boat! The boatman promptly jumped into the river, grabbed the fish and transferred them to the boat. We had carried with us gunny bags and we filled four or five of them with fish. There were still more fish to be had; but we left them there. They were then taken away by the people living nearby.

This 'cartridge' is an explosive, filled into a metal pipe closed on one side and a wick on the other. When the wick is pulled the device would explode. It would be dropped in where there was a shoal of fish, and as it does down the fishes would mistake it for some food on offer, bite at and pull the wick, resulting in its explosion. The fish would then float on the surface of the water,

which will then be shifted to the boat. Many a time I had joined my friends to catch fish this way. When we got more than the expected loot of fish, we would distribute them to our friends and relatives.

I will narrate another interesting anecdote: Those of us who lived away from our village would bring some small presents to our friends whenever we visited our village: token presents like pens, shirt pieces and so on. Dr. T.K. Muhammad's father-in-law, who had gone on a pilgrimage of Haj in 1967, had returned with a tape-recorder as a present to his son-in-law. It was the first tape-recorder to reach our village. It was of a spool system. After seeing it I got an idea. Why not record a play? When told about it, all our friends agreed.

B.M. Zakariah, K.P. Abdul Rahman, Mahmood, B.P. Ismail, Dr. T.K. Muhammad, and I met in one place. The play that we conceived was without a script, without any rehearsal. There were some elders in our village. They were important people and influential. Each of them had distinct personality and idiosyncrasies. We would merely imitate them, their voice, the way they spoke, their mannerism and so on. It was to be a kind of mimicry. We chose some such people as Siruguru Sekabaka, Kappe Hamadaka, Hotel Shanti Bhatta, 'T.K.'s father, Bava Haji, Zakariah's father Moidiyaka, and one Velayudhan. He was a Malayali, and he was a telephone operator in our place. His way of speaking, in which he feely mixed Tulu, Kannada and Malayalam, sounded very funny. We decided who among us should play which role. It was to be a play of one hour. It contained an assortment of events like a kabbadi match, noisy quarrel in a hotel, Kappe Hamadaka raining abuses on others, a wrestling match between Kappe Hamadaka and Moidiyaka, and a commentary on it, in which the rules of match were spelt out, like "When you compete in the match you should compulsorily wear an underwear, and you are not allowed to pull each other's lungi" and so on, announcing the names and details of winners and a whole lot of funny details. It was full of

comedy. It became so popular that Muhammad Kamal, a prominent Muslim political leader and a leader of the community, learnt about it and came to Dr. T.K. and borrowed the tape recorder. It appears he listened to it many times over, made many of his friends listen to it and even played it in the offices which he visited. It was so funny and it gave an uproarious entertainment to whoever listened to it. It appears that the spool of that play was with Dr. T.K. till recently, and he told me he did not quite know how and where he lost it.

The man who brought that tape recorder was Dr. T.K.'s father-in-law, B.A. Muhammad Haji. Many used to call him Byaman's Haji. In Mangalore he owned famous company called 'Byaman and Co', which rented out cars. It had cars of reputed brands like Ford, Mercedes, and Peugeot and so on. When important people, politicians, the Chief Minister, the President, the Governor and others came to Mangalore, they would invariably use these cars. When Mrs Indira Gandhi came to Mangalore she too used these cars. When officers and guests connected with the New Mangalore Port and other important companies came here from other places in India or abroad, they would reserve these cars for their use. Dr. T.K. had a Renault Dolphin for his own personal use. Even that was the gift of his father-in-law. It was a beautiful car. Whenever it passed by or was seen parked, people would watch it in wonderment. In those days none else owned such a car.

When I was studying in Bangalore my father would send, every month, Rs. 150 by Money Order. Those days it was a hefty sum. My friends, Pattabhi Rame Gowda, Chenne Gowda, Raju and I had rented a room near the Minerva Circle for a monthly rent of Rs. 45. Nearby there was a hotel named "High Class Brahmin Restaurant". As soon as we received our money from our parents we would buy the coupons for our meals for the whole month. For, if we had all the money with us, we would be tempted to spend it all, and there would not be money enough for our food.

The hotel offered full meal. It would be served on a banana

leaf. It had rice, sambar, soup, vegetables and curd. The meal was tasty and wholesome. Like us many students and employees would eat at the restaurant, buying monthly coupons. We would never miss our meals there on Sundays, because that day the hotel invariably offered something special. There were some customers who would eat like gluttons just because the hotel offered a full meal. I still remember the owner of the hotel saying, “If we get such customers, I do not know where from I should seek my salvation! It is because we have customers like you that we are yet running this hotel. Otherwise we should have closed it down long back!” We ate moderately, and that explains his words of appreciation for us.

After some time we shifted our stay to the house of a milk vendor. There we rented a room. We would play cards there during night or during holidays. The game was ‘parole.’ Film actors like Narasimha Raju, Balakrishna and Adavani Laxmidevi would also sometimes join for the game. There was plenty of jokes and repartee there too. Often Dr. Rajakumar too would come to our room. He would silently watch us play. But he never played even once.

Our friend Pattabhi was an impossible guy. He seemed to know all sorts of things. He would bring a few tender coconuts from the garden, slice their caps open, put two aspirin tablets in each of them and replace the caps. He would then keep the tender coconuts in the sun till evening. He used to say that with such manipulation the coconut water would give considerable ‘kick’. He would offer it to his friends too.

When I was a minister this guy Pattabhi had come to my house in Bangalore. He came because I had invited him; he was not the person to come otherwise. He had so much of self-respect. The first thing he said when he met me was, “I am not here to meet the minister saheb. I have nothing to do with the minister. I am here to meet my old friend Mohideen!” After our food we were sitting and conversing with each other. By the side of my house there was a house of another minister. Seeing it, Pattabhi suddenly asked,

“Look man! I am here for more than two or three hours. During this period none has come to meet you. But see there! There is a big queue in front of the house of that minister. Why is that?”

What he said was true. I told him, “See, man! There is money there. There is lot of business going on, a lot of quid pro quo. But what is here? There is nothing. If there is money and business dealing, people come rushing in or are willing to queue up. I have no such things here. Why then should people come here, tell me?” He fell silent.

This friend Patabhi, Noorullah Khan and a few friends of college days in Chikkamagalur had come to Bajpe to attend my wedding. I had arranged for their stay in a bungalow there. That night, on the ground opposite that bungalow there was a yakshgana performance. The theme was “Bhasmasura- Mohini”. And my friends had gone there to watch it. Seeing the one who had played the female role there, my friend Noorullah Khan mistook him for a woman, and felt nearly seduced by ‘her’ beauty, dialogue and dancing abilities. After a while he wanted to see ‘her’ behind the screen and went into the tent and peered in. He saw ‘her’ sitting on a bench, smoking a beedi! He was shocked at the sight and expressed it to his friends, who had a hearty laugh at his expense!

While we were studying at Chikkamagalur I had joined some seven to eight of my friends on an excursion to Halebid on bicycles. This guy, Noorullah Khan, too was in that group. At one point as we turned round we saw him missing. We waited for him for some time. Then we saw him at distance, hurrying towards us, panting for breath. We panicked for a while. We did not notice him lagging behind. It seems a bear had stopped him on the way and threatened him, and he escaped with considerable difficulty. When he reached us, he at once picked up a quarrel with us. “What would you have done if that bear had done me to death?” he posed the question angrily. It took some efforts on our part to console him and bring him with us.

Once when I came home on holidays, some of my friends

and I went by a car from Bajpe to Ujire to watch a yakshagana performance. The logistics was arranged by Zakariah. As we went it was late. We had not eaten anything and we were all feeling hungry. On the way was Zakariah's sister-in-law's mother's place. We all decided to go there. When we barged into the house so late at night, the people of the house were taken by surprise. Zakariah's sister-in-law's father asked us "Where are you heading to, so late at night?" Then Zakariah said, "We are going to Puttur to settle some matter pertaining to business. We thought we would drop in and see all of you." If he had divulged that we were actually going to yakshagana, he thought the people of the house would disapprove it, and hence he invented a lie. They hurriedly cooked ghee-rice and chicken curry and fed us well, even though it was late at night. On our return from the yakshagana, the topic became subject of considerable mirth. Those days, whenever we went to yakshagana we were seated in the easy-chairs on the front row. They all used to treat us with affection and respect. Yakshagana never carried the burden of religion as it seems to be doing now. It was looked upon as art and as part of the rich native culture. So were temple festivals. It was the festival for the whole village. People of every faith used to participate in them.

This guy Zakariah is in Kodlipete now. He owns coffee plantations there. Once he bought some land at Kadike near Haleyangadi. It was an agricultural land. They used to grow paddy there. Somebody had told him, "Shortly a sugar factory will come up nearby. The factory will need a lot of sugarcane. If you grow sugarcane, you are sure to make a huge profit." So he plunged into the venture. He brought in new species of sugarcane and cultivated them. The yield was very good. The sugarcane on the fields presented a spectacular sight. But somehow the hoped-for sugar factory did not come up. What should he do with all the sugar cane he had grown? He was worried. He came to me for advice. I suggested that he could make jaggery, which promised profit. But then, he said, he needed the necessary machinery to

produce jaggery. He learnt that a friend of his, a Gowda in Chikkamagalur, was manufacturing jaggery. So he went to him. The machinery was there, no doubt, but he would not sell it. There, it seems, an interesting thing happened. It appears, when Zakariah went there, Gowda was away. As he was waiting for him to return, he saw groups of dogs engaged in furious quarrel for a long time, outside a room of the house. When Gowda returned, Zakariah asked him, “Why are these dogs engaged in fight for such a long time?” Then Gowda took him to the room where he had stocked jaggery. There he saw jaggery melting and flowing out through a hole. The dogs were having a fight over a share in the liquid (or liquidated!) jaggery! Gowda also told him that the melted jaggery did not have any demand in the market, and that he was forced into distress sale to those manufacturing liquor. Listening to all this, Zakariah returned disappointed. Without quite knowing what he should with all the sugarcane he had, he got from somewhere a grinding machine, produced jaggery, and stocked it in a warehouse, where he ensured that it did not melt by providing it with the right heat through electricity, and sold the jaggery for a price which at least covered his expenses in producing it. He only should tell his story. He tells it with lively details, with great sense of humour, and always with a smile on his lips. He would make anybody laugh.

I finished my B.Sc. in 1961. Thereafter I joined a law college. By that time there were serious plans at home regarding my marriage, all without my knowledge. The girl’s father was a big merchant at Jokatte. He had a big warehouse too near Kambatti near Jokatte. His was a big, respectable family, and he was a social worker. For many years he was the president of the new mosque at Jokatte. He was a respectable person. He was our distant relative too. His name was Fakira Beary. They were negotiating for his daughter Khateeja for me.

## Wedding in those Days

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Wedding in those days was not something which would take place in a hall in two or three hours, as it does today. It would always be held at home. It would never be held during daytime. It would be held invariably during night time. The programmes and celebrations connected with it would be for a minimum of fifteen days. The house would be full of relatives during all these fifteen days. Band, sleek drums, mock sword-play, songs, *dappu* dance, salaat, procession, maulood, grand feast and so on ... would be there every day. Every day was a wedding day. Every day was a celebration. Thus were held the Beary weddings those days. Our present generation should know about the Beary culture of those days. It is the purpose of this author to tell about it to the generation next. My mother used to tell me, whenever she was free, what a Beary wedding was like when she was yet a small girl. I am narrating it here.

When a girl came of age in any household, her father, grandfather and uncles would get busy with finding a husband for her. Those days a girl would get married by the time she is 12-15 years. If they come to know that there is a prospective bridegroom somewhere, they would

go there and see him, without his knowledge. Then they would find out details about him, his conduct and so on, from those who knew him, and again without his knowledge. If the boy was found suitable, and alliance with his family was approved, some elders would go there to discuss matters. Before setting out they would invite the religious leader of the mosque and have dua performed at home.

As soon as the party reached the house of the boy, they would be offered a drink to quench their thirst. Thereafter both the parties would be seated on a mat, facing each other. On the front row would be seated the head of the house, uncle and son-in-law. There would be mutual introduction of people. They would then decide if an alliance between the two households was agreed upon. That done, they would discuss matters pertaining to dowry to be paid and about gold and silver ornaments that should adorn the bride. Here the discussion would be invariably long. At that time there should be, by their side, a large plate containing betel leaves and nuts and also a spittoon. If the discussion is long, the chewing of betel leaves and nuts would be long too, and the whole spittoon would be filled to the brim! Sometimes the matters regarding dowry, gold and silver would never be settled even after a day-long discussion, and the girl's party would return home without any settlement. Those days the one who received high dowry was looked upon with great respect, as was the one who could offer high dowry.

These days Muslim young men are studying Islam somewhat seriously. They are trying to understand the tenets of Islam. Accordingly, now things have changed so much that there is hardly any practice of giving or receiving dowry in our society. On the other hand, the practice of bride-price is on the increase. In the past, those taking dowry was held in high esteem. Now he is looked down upon. He who pays higher bride-price enjoys higher honour in society. This is a very good development. But we must ensure that good tenets of Islam are not abused. In the Arab countries

many young men cannot marry because they cannot pay a high bride-price. The girls there refuse to marry the boys who pay modest bride-price. For that reason, their governments have launched a scheme of interest-free loans so that young men could pay the bride-price.

You must have heard of what is happening in the Arab countries. If one has money, and if he is willing to pay high bride-price, even a seventy year old man can find a young, beautiful bride, even though he may have one or two wives already at home. It has created a situation where poor young men have to go without girls, however handsome he is. The girls too seem to be more inclined to marry a rich old man who pays a good bride-price than a poor young man. This means the custom of bride-price is grossly misused. It is tantamount to girls selling themselves for money. This may spawn other immoral practices as well. This is a clear example of how a high ideal can be abused by the rich and the powerful.

Now among us the practice is to pay a bride-price equal to ten sovereigns of gold. Recently, a rich man's son had paid a hundred sovereigns of gold as bride-price and married a girl, and it had won considerable plaudits in the community. Thus the bride-price is on the increase. Though this is a good development, we must ensure that it is not allowed to go out of hand. In future, if educated girls begin to look for rich men who can pay high bride-price, we may end up in a situation where poor young man will have to go without a wife. This may create a serious imbalance in Muslim society, and in turn undermine a good ideal and counsel for our society. We must do well to guard against such an unsavoury prospect.

In the past there was considerable importance attached to morality, good conduct and the honour and reputation of the household. Later, money seemed to take over and become more important. When money became all important, many distinctions like the high and low, the landlord and servant and so on, began

to evaporate. Increasingly the moneyed man, whoever he is, became the all-important man. He became the leader; he received all the honour, all the high places in society. Today it is only the rich who can become the president of a mosque, whatever else he is; he is chosen unanimously. "Money answereth all things." This is seen in political, religious and every field. This is happening in all religions, in all communities. There is a progressive devaluation of such things as goodness, honesty, justice, truthfulness, humanity and so on. This is a tragedy.

In those days when all the talks were held in the boy's house regarding his marriage, he would not be consulted at all. Neither his parents nor anybody else would say a thing to him, even if he was at home. There was no such custom prevalent then. The boy would at best know that somebody had come from such and such place to discuss the matter pertaining to his marriage with the daughter of so and so. There was no such thing as the boy seeing the girl, the boy being asked if he liked the girl, or the boy rejecting the girl, or if he agreed to marry her, presenting her with a ring or some piece of jewellery, and so on. If the boy's party ever asked, how far the girl had studied, the girl's side would say, 30 *joodu* (Koran). That was all. None asked for more, and everybody was satisfied. There was never an inquiry about the school the girl attended. After all the talks and discussion, they would fix the day for the engagement. The boy's party would formally invite the girl's party to the engagement and also get the information regarding how many would be attending the function.

However, in some of the urban areas, and particularly among some households which considered themselves 'forward', there was practice of going to the girl's house to see her. But that would be a women-only team of four or five. The boy would never accompany the women. There would be one or two senior men, who were relatives, accompanying these women, but these men would not go inside the house of the girl. They would not see the girl. They would sit on the sit-out. They would be provided with

betel leaves and nuts and spittoon there, and even beedi or cigarettes if they were smokers.

Women did not wear burkha those days. But they wore *vollis*. *Volli* is a large sheet of dark yellow cloth with square designs. It could be either made of cotton or silk. Women used to cover themselves fully with it, except their eyes. *Vollis* could be of two kinds: *otthe volli* and *jōdu volli*. The former was to cover a single person and the latter, two. Those who used *jōdu volli* were considered very respectable. When a queen or a princess would be accompanied by a maid, they would go wrapped in *jōdu volli*. That greatly added to their dignity. It was the sign of opulence too.

Those who came to see the prospective bride would be first served a preparation of beaten rice, plantains, sweets like *laḍḍu*, *jalēbi*, *mālpuri*, *halwa* and tea to drink. Thereafter at lunch time, they would have a sumptuous serving of ghee-rice, mutton-curry and so on. They will then partake of betel leaves and nuts as part of hospitality. The people who came to see the girls rarely would go back without confirming their selection. In the cities, however, if they did not like the girl they saw, they would return giving some excuses. But in such cases, they would not even drink a cup of water. If they chose the girl, they also had the practice, in some places, of formally adorning her with jasmine flowers.

While fixing the day for any auspicious functions, many used to consider such astrological factors as the new moon day, full moon day, *bharaṇi*, *krithika*, *rāhu-kāla*, *guḷiga-kāla*. The day and the timing would be generally fixed by the mentor at the mosque.

There would be fifty to hundred people going to the ritual of engagement. The group would consist of close relatives and neighbours, who would be invited. While going to the engagement ceremony, they would take half the amount of the dowry money which had been agreed upon. There at the ceremony there would be discussion regarding the date of the wedding. Those days mostly the weddings would take place on the Sundays or Thursdays, and

never on the Fridays, Saturdays and Tuesdays. At the engagement ceremony, once the wedding day was decided on, the girl's party would pay half the amount of the stipulated dowry as advance. The boy's side would spread a piece of silk cloth on a plate and place it before the girl's party to receive the money. The cash is then counted, shown to all those gathered there and placed on the plate. It would be taken inside by the boy's party after everybody's consent was taken. That would conclude the engagement ceremony. That would be followed by a feast, which would include ghee-  
rice, boiled rice, and chicken curry. Before that, however, as soon as the guests arrived they would be served sarsaparilla sherbet to quench their thirst. During the ceremony it was mandatory to keep a plate with betel leaves and nuts, and beedi and cigarette, in front of the guests. There should also be a spittoon available for their use.

Those days there were no jewellery shops, as you find them now. It was the practice of people to get the goldsmiths to the house as the day of the wedding was approaching. They would come with their scale, weighing stones, their work-instruments and all in a box and stay in the sit-out of the house for months together. There only all the ornaments would be made, of whatever designs are chosen. *Alikaat, koppu, koppuro, sarapōli, vaale, bendōle, jumki, lolaak, tale-singaara, misisri-maale, mallige-maale, avulu-maale, kottambari-maale, necklace, vatte-urku, jōdi-urku, moonurku, anji-urku, rakoti, kēdage, gonḍe, mōndara, soragi-bale, murgi-bale, tirpuro-poo, kutta-kēdage, adda-kēdage, rakoti-chauri, illi-alikaat, bandi-badakara* - these are some of the names of the gold ornaments which my mother used to mention. *Aranhana* or waist-belt, *noolu, kaalu-gejje, kaalu-bale, kunipu, paaḍaga*, and so on were silver ornaments. We would tell the goldsmith the names of ornaments or show the designs of any borrowed from the neighbours, they would be made by him right on the corner of the sit-out of the house. In those days were shops of Shets in Mangalore which sold gold and silver

in small solid blocks. There were no ornaments for sale. Solid blocks of precious metal would be bought and out of them were made whatever ornaments we wanted.

Those days if we wanted to buy things for any major ceremonies at home, we had to go to Mangalore city. What was then Melamaccheri in Mangalore was what Car Street is today. It was the business centre of the city. There was no place called Hampankatta. The other centres of business in the city were Bunder, Golikatta Bazar, and Bhatkal Bazar.

Going to the city to buy clothes in connection with wedding was then part of the celebration itself. The programme had to be intimated to the close relatives, and some of them should also accompany the purchasing team. If you leave them out they might take umbrage at the insult and might not attend the wedding at all!

There was no practice of women going to the city to make the necessary purchases for the bride. It was all a male affair. In those days women did not wear bra, panties or 'nighties'. All they wore was '*body*', (an Indian corruption and version of 'bodice' in English; an inner wear which is designed to abolish the contours of the upper body), loose blouse, long skirt and saree. Boys would wear shorts and shirts and men wore shorts, mundu or cloth to cover the lower body from waist to ankle. For everything the necessary cloths would be bought and the dresses were stitched by the tailor. In fact, the tailor would go to the house to take the necessary measurement. Purchase for wedding included bath soap, face 'snow', box of collyrium, perfume oil, talcum powder, perfume, comb, ribbon, hair-clips, surma (eye-black for men), chappals, *urmal* (scarf). They were all bought along with clothes for the bride.

For the bride they would buy silk saree, *kinkapu*, voile saree, organdie blouse-piece. Women will get to see them only after those things were brought home. But then none would say, 'that is good', 'those are not good'; 'give it back' or 'get it exchanged'. The way women wore saree was not by allowing folds, as they do

now; they simply rolled it round the body. However rich the parents were, they would only buy about four or five sarees, loose blouses and two scarves for the bride. Women did not wear close-fitting blouses those days. The names of the sarees were *kallire*, *podikal*, *baingas patte*, *kinkapu*, *gatti kinkapu* and so on. They were all of the length of eight mola (a mola is the length of one's forearm from the tip of the middle finger to the elbow). They were worn by wrapping them around one's body.

The bridegroom's dress included *maulana lungi* (The Madras lungi) of four *mola*, white voile shirt, tasselled fez cap, a silk shawl, leather chappals and an umbrella. The bridegroom was expected to have an umbrella over his head even at night! Holding it over his head was the prerogative of his brother-in-law. Once clothes were bought and brought to the house, the neighbours and close relatives would be troop in to see them. Women too would come. They would come to see the ornaments readied for the wedding. If they didn't, people would feel sad, and they would express it too. It all meant that the house would hum with bustling relatives days before the wedding.

Those days there were no buses, cars, auto-rickshaws or motor bikes, as you have them now. People had to walk, even to cover long distances. If they had to cross a river, they would cross it in a boat. There was no bridge at Kuloor. I still remember, the boatman would charge two annas to cross the ferry to Mangalore. Some rich people would travel by horse carriages. Before the Kuloor Bridge was completed patients had to cross the river in a boat to go to the District Hospital at Mangalore. Women in labour pain too had to be taken in a boat. There were instances of women delivering en route, neither the mother nor the child surviving the ordeal.

The house where the wedding would take place would have a big pandal on its front yard. They would first fix poles of areca tree or bamboo, have a sturdy frame of vertically sliced bamboo poles, tied together in coir ropes and covered with plaited coconut

leaves. If it was rainy season, they would cover it with matted dry grass. Sometimes the pandal could be two-roofed. The pandal would be readied even a month before the wedding. It will have arches made of sliced bamboo, windows and doors, and was decorated with colour papers. The floor was sprinkled with water and firmed up to ensure that it did not turn dusty. In the pandals of both the bride and the bridegroom they would put up swings. A pandal without swing was rare.

Those days shamiyana and chairs were not available for rent. Women were given flat wooden planks or mats of wild-palm to sit on. They would also borrow chairs, tables, benches and seating planks. Both men and women would be seated on the ground and fed. Ghee-rice, lentil soup and mutton curry were part of the wedding feast. Biryani, chicken fry and such other things that we know today were unknown then. There was no electricity. Little or bigger kerosene lamps, bed lamps and lantern were the lamps available to people. During weddings they used gas lights. When people went out they used flambeau of closely tied coconut leaves or battery torches. Torch lights were of various sizes, of two, three or five cells.

The bridegroom had to go personally to invite people to wedding. Customarily he would be accompanied by his brother-in-law. There were no printed wedding invitations. If it were from the bride's side, her father or brother inviting people to wedding was considered an honour. If any substitute were sent, people would mistake it and they would not even attend the wedding.

The marriage ceremony would last a minimum of fifteen days. Every day there would be some programme. Nine or seven days before the wedding would take place a ceremony of applying "*tirumbu*". On another day would be "*Mōtubale*". There would be "*Kaayintho kuli*" or the ritual bath for the bride on another day. "*Moilaanji*" would take place another day, and "*Maulood*" or the praising of the Prophet and saints on yet another day. Thus there will be one programme or the other till the conclusion of the

wedding and even after. Therefore, close relatives would come the wedding at least ten days ahead. They would be invited separately to each of the programmes. Even after the wedding, there would be *taala* or feasts, in the bride's house, in the bridegroom's house, feasts with the parents of the newly wedded couple, or their sisters and brothers-in-law, the fifteenth-day wedding feast, and so on.

Applying *tirumbu* means ritually applying turmeric paste, ground in milk, on the bride's face and body. Every day, seven or nine days before the wedding, the bride would be smeared with turmeric and made to sit in a dark room. Mostly it was the privilege of her sisters-in-law. After a few hours the bride would be given a hot-water bath, cleansed with soap-nut powder and Bengal-gram powder. This would go on till on the eve of the wedding. There was a rule as to who should pour the first mug of water on the bride. There were occasions when some women had walked off in a huff when this privilege was denied to them.

*Mōtubale* means facial depilation. This programme would take place in the houses of the bride as well as the bridegroom in considerable celebration. It was like people going to the beauty parlour these days. It was a way of adorning and brightening the face. On the night before the wedding the bridegroom was made sit on a chair, covered with white cloth, in the middle of the wedding pandal. Two children holding lighted candles or lamps would stand on either side of the bridegroom. The barber would already have been summoned there. He would perform haircut and facial shave under this light. At that time there could be a separate programme of singing in another corner of the pandal. There could also be competitive singing of two groups. This was called singing "*Kabi*". *Kabi* means song or lyric. This was like recitation of songs or poetry. Along this they would also sing *Sabina* songs. They were composed in Arabi Malayalam. *Sabina* songs were in praise of the great men of Islam. They also sometimes contained tragic stories and narration of tragic incidents. But this was a kind of

entertainment, and many would gather for the occasion. After the programme the barber was generously recompensed with money, the white cloth which was spread on the chair, a good meal and so on. Those who had gathered were served sherbet.

Similarly the ceremony would be held at the bride's place. The bride would be made to sit on a chair and two girls would stand on either side of her. The bride's uncle, that is, the brother of the bride's mother, would remove two strands of hair from the bride's head and inaugurate the programme. That was, in fact, the uncle's privilege. Thereafter any woman, who had the expertise in that craft, would depilate the bride's face and adorn it. Then some women would then sing different songs, and also clap and dance. The other women would also join the chorus. The whole house was full of celebratory noise.

“*Moilaanji*”, a ceremony involving the bride's adornment with henna, would also be held in both the bride's and the bridegroom's houses. There was no ready-made henna on sale. The henna leaves would be brought and ground on the previous day itself. The next day the bride was made to wear a new saree, loose blouse, and scarf and adorn herself with jewellery and was seated on a chair. Then she would be adorned with henna, while women would gather around, dance and sing, clapping their hands. If there was a swing at home, the bride would be seated on it and swayed. Women would spend the whole night singing songs, dancing, cracking jokes and such celebrations of joy.

I still remember some the stanzas of some of the more popular songs sung by women at that time and crooned by my mother:

*Aadi amaite aanum pennil*

*akhalarivaaye - islam*

*aayavar alaval aavishyamarivad*

*vaajibadaaye*

*aadaravaye muttu muhammad*

*annabhiyaare irupad*

*vaapaanmaarude naamamidaa  
parayunnariveere*

*aadiyar abduhlahi, vaabdul  
muttalibaanor haashim,  
abdul manaaf, khushayy, kilaab  
yendaar idilaaye*

Women used to sing all these songs for all such celebrations. This song is to introduce and celebrate the names of the Prophet Muhammad's father, grandfather and great grandfather.

Another popular song in those days was,

*tshriphum mubaarakaadara vaayanebhiyumattimark  
taanimaanida maanamaay melaaya nebhiyumattimark  
tashriph bandaabhinaabhi petta paidal maadiyaark  
tangamaanana meniyaata maipudakkan vannadalho*

*tashraphalam abaana noor muzzammilum maulood naalil  
anda rakshattale vanna paidale pudaita menma  
mashriPhod magribolam bhoomi aakashattinellam  
mubaakum mubaarkadaravaaki alla nebhiyullak*

.....

This song was my favourite. Then there was another song sung loudly:

*swalaavaati aalannabhi vassalaami  
vahuva khairul aanaamimbadroottamaami*

.....

This was called *swalaat*.

There was another popular song which I remember my mother reciting. This war song was about celebrating the Prophet

Muhammad's uncle, Hamza's heroism. This was called *Sabina Pat*. Mostly this used to be sung on the wedding day, on the day of *Mōtubale*, or in *Kabi* competitions. I still remember its three stanzas:

*vamabutta hamza raliyalla chadi*  
*ttambi aswadil maaradaa*  
*vallal nebhi mahamoodar haulinn*  
*vellam kudikkunnonaaradaa*

*vamabar shafivullala kaaval vecchulla*  
*sambaarmilvannu cheradaa*  
*khairulvaraa nebhiyaar kulatthin*  
*dairiyamundengil koreadaa*

*vamban maarundengil unhaanonnu kaanatte*  
*van vilatthode vellam kudicchaate*  
*kumbikkal maamaangam potti ulamattil*  
*koriya vaakine kett velipatte*  
*sam saarigaa saarigaa*  
*pamariga-dangaari maagarigaa*  
 .....

All these songs were composed in Arabi Malayalam. I often used to coax my mother to sing such songs and *Sabina Pat*; she used to sing them melodiously.

'*Maulood*' is a religious ceremony. It is a celebratory singing of the name of the Prophet and other great figures of Islam. It used to be held one night. Relatives and friends used to participate in it, and mostly men. A mat would be spread in the hall and men would sit on it. At the front row would be seated the religious leader and along with him the men of the household and other local eminences. In front of the religious leader would be kept earthenware filled with cinders and another vessel containing frankincense. There will also be a tumbler half-filled with rice to

which would be planted burning incense sticks. They would then wrap a pillow in white cloth and place it in front of the religious leader, and on it would be placed the book of *Maulood*. One of the elders of the house would formally put a few pieces of frankincense on the cinders to begin the Maulood. Then the earthen vessel with cinders would be taken to everyone present in the gathering and everyone would drop a few pieces of frankincense on the cinders. The whole house would then be suffused with fragrant smoke. Thereafter there would be recitation of *Muhiuddin Maale*, *Nafisat Maale*, (Remembering the great men of Islam) and *Yaaseen*.

The tradition was that the wedding procession of the bride's party would head to the house of the bridegroom. It would do so to the accompaniment of band, small drums and horns, and often crackers and fireworks. The procession will also be accompanied with several gas- lights.

The guests would be first served with a preparation of beaten rice and plantains. This was called presenting "*ulupe*". After this a cot would be placed in the pandal for the nikha ritual, and over it would be spread a white *mundu* cloth. The privilege of spreading the cloth belonged to the elder or the younger uncle of the bride (Her father's elder or younger brother). The girl's side was required to bring that *mundu*. Before it was spread the consent of the gathering had to be formally taken. "With the consent of the thousand *jamaaat* I am spreading the *nikha* cloth. Do I have your approval?" he would ask loudly. "What did you say? We couldn't hear you!" the people would say, in reply, and by way of teasing him. They would make him say twice or thrice, before giving their consent. Generally, the cloth would be handed over to the Maulvi after the *nikha* ceremony was over.

Before the *nikha*, the matter regarding *meher* or bride price had to be settled. Over it there could be a long discussion between the bride's and the bridegroom's party. If the house of the bride was of a well-known and prestigious illa, they would insist on a

higher *meher* amount. The custom was that depending upon the status of the illa, the *meher* amount would be decided on and recorded in the nikha book. There were occasions when the talks regarding *meher* turned so acrimonious that the bride's party returned in a huff, without concluding the nikha. My mother used to tell me that the matter was linked so much to the honour of the household, people would much rather break the nikha than lose what they perceived as the prestige of their household.

If the households of the bride's and the bridegroom's *illas* were the same, marriage could not take place between the two. This custom is prevalent among the Tuluvas even today. Now in our community people do not know what *illa* is. In Tulu it is called *bari*. The Tuluvas do not permit marriage between the members of the same *bari*. The people who play the bands and sleek drums do not have any *illa*. They were looked upon as untouchables. They would not be fed along with the guests. They were made to sit separately and fed.

Some of the prestigious *illas* were Chamukku Belinha, Sultan Belinha, Akka Belinha. Some of the other names of the illa were Chareppalmar, Koodankaar, Padavukaar, palayo Padvaukaar, Pudiyo Paduvukaar, Kaisere Kootakkar, Paatlekkkaar, Shalido Dongar, Mapulatanha. The name of my *illa* is Paatlekkkaar. The name *illa*, according to some, must have been derived from Tulu *illu* (House).

The bride price decided on was recorded in the nikha book as either aamaade or biriyaan. Aamaade was gold coin and biriyaan was silver coin (*varaha*). When the value of the coins increased, aamaade was deemed to be five rupees and biriyaan four rupees, and were recorded in the book as such. There was no practice of handing over the Meher to the bride as it is done now. It was merely recorded in the nikha book.

Before the nikha the bridegroom would be given a ceremonial bath. It is called *kayinthokuli*. The practice survives in some places even today. Only the bridegroom's brother-in-law or anybody who

was declared eligible had the honour of giving the bath to the bridegroom. He only had to pour the first mug of water, or water mixed with milk, on the bridegroom. He would not give up that privilege to anybody else. After the bath the bridegroom would wear white *mundu*, white shirt and fez cap, smear perfume on his person, and after getting the blessings of his parents, would sit for the *nikha* ceremony. His brothers-in-law would conduct him to the *nikha* platform.

After the *nikha* the bridegroom would be seated, at a prominent place in the pandal, in a chair on which white cloth was spread. In front of him was placed a table, on which a large plate was kept. That was meant to receive presents in money. Those days there would be no wedding without presents in the form of money were not involved. The honour of making the present was of a local leader. Thereafter, it was of the son-in-law of the household. That was his privilege. Anyone transgressing it would lead to a furore of objections. Such a practice was prevalent among the Tuluvas too. There the head of the guttu had the precedence. Anyone violating this precedence was taken as insult to his honour and status. This presentation was held at both the bride's and the bridegroom's houses. The amount presented was duly recorded in a book. In future if there was any wedding or such celebration in the house of those who made the presentation, would invariably receive it back as presentation, along with some token addition made to it. If it was not done, there would be a complaining inquiry made about it too.

After the *nikha* bride's party returned home and the bridegroom would go to the bride's residence to put bandi (garland) on her. It would happen the same day if the house was near enough; or else, the next day. For this function all the men, relatives and friends had to be invited separately: "Tonight the bridegroom is going there to put bandi. You are all cordially invited." If such an invitation was not extended, none would accompany the bridegroom. If the bridegroom is poor he and his men would

walk all the way. If he is rich, he would go on a horseback, and his men would follow, walking. There would be band, slim drum, trumpets and pipes as accompaniments, as do paliyathattu, dappu dance, mock swordplay, crackers and fireworks. People of the village would be watching the scene from either side of the road. People from houses would bring a glass of milk and offer it to the bridegroom. He would take a sip or two, and give the rest to his friends. It was as if the whole village was participating in a festivity.

Women and children would not sleep until the procession reached home. They would wait, however late it was. The village was having a festive mood, with the procession moving ahead in the light of flambeaux. There would be people to replenish the oil for these oil torches and one worker would be carrying a box of oil along the procession. Later such oil torches were replaced by gas lights. Varieties of gas lights came to be available in Mangalore on rent. Three or five gas lights would be fixed into a wooden stand and carried by workers. Also available on rent were horses, band set, groups to do mock swordplay, people to pump air or fill oil to the gas lights.

Before the bridegroom reached the bride's house to put bandi, some women of his party would already proceed there. But they would not straightaway enter the bride's house. They would stand at a little distance, but enough to ensure their visibility. They had to be formally received by a few women from the bride's side. There was a method in receiving them too. They would first take four steps; the guests would respond by taking four steps themselves. The hosts would then take four more steps, and the guests took four steps in their turn, till the two sides came together and went into the bride's house! None from the party of the bridegroom would take a step ahead without the bride's party proceeding to receive them. Sometimes it led to considerable delay. Women would go there in 11 *vollu*, 7 *vollu* or 5 *vollu*.

When the bridegroom reached the pandal of the bride's house, he would be formally received by the bride's brother before he

was conducted inside and seated by the side of the bride. Then the bride's brother would place the bridegroom's feet on *thast* (a basin-like copper vessel) and pour milk on them. The bridegroom would then drop a gold finger-ring into the *thast*. That was meant for the bride's brother. Receiving it was his right. After the ritual was held, feast was served and the bridegroom returned, the women of his party would decorate the bride and take her along with him. The poor would return on a bullock cart and the rich on a horse carriage.

Women of the bridegroom's party would reach ahead to receive them at his house. The bride would be first made to stand at the doorstep and a pot of turmeric water would be waved round her head. And after partaking of the feast, the bride would return to her house.

Next day the bridegroom should be formally taken to the bride's house and there should be two representatives to take him there. Otherwise he would not go there. The two representatives who were there to take him should be sumptuously fed too. The bridegroom going to the bride's house should carry jasmine flowers, betel leaves and nuts and tobacco. He should do so till the fifteenth *thaala* (fifteen days).

The next day the bridegroom should touch the feet of his mother-in-law, and she, on her part and honour, had to present him with a gold finger ring. Then there would be successive ceremonies like putting bangles into the bride's hands, oil bath for the bridegroom, *apkari thaala*, *neyyi kanji*, *maamiro appa*, and so on till the fifteenth *thaala*. In between there would be feasts in honour of the newly wedded couple in the houses of the relatives of either the bride or the bridegroom.

On the fifteenth *thaala* the bridegroom's friends would all join together for a procession of the bridegroom to the bride's house on the fifteenth night of the wedding. That would conclude the wedding celebrations. While going there the people in the procession would carry jasmine flower, sweets like *jalēbi*, *mālpuri*,

*laḍḍu*, *halwa*, things like betel leaves, tobacco, and perfumed oil. They would carry them in large plates covered with silk cloth. Those who go in the procession would then get a feast before they returned. Only the bridegroom stayed back.

Bands were played, in those days, during auspicious ceremonies in Beary houses like wedding and *munji*. There were two band-playing groups. One was the “Rustum Band Group” and the other the “Bojan Band Group” of Tibar. The Rustum Band Group sported a uniform, and was the favourite of the rich people. The Bojan Group was relatively poor.

Once, the Bojan Group was invited to the wedding of B.P. Ismail’s elder sister in our village. The bridegroom’s party had the Rustum Group. When the bridegroom’s party came to the bride’s house in procession, they organised competition between the two groups. The Bojan Group won the competition. It brought great joy to Ismail and his party, and the news spread everywhere in the village. Apart from these two Band Groups, there was another Christian Band group too. But it was not as famous.

In our village there was a person by name Kumbdiyaaka. He was a fruit-vendor. His son was getting married. I too had gone there at around 11 o’clock at night. When I reached there a large number of people had gathered there. The bride’s side too had reached there for the *nikha*. But the bridegroom was nowhere to be seen! Everyone was asking where the bridegroom was and was demanding to get him soon as it was getting late. Then somebody said, “He is not home. He has gone to Mangalore to get the mike. He insists that he should have the mike for the occasion!” Everyone was taken aback. After waiting for a long time, we could see a gaslight approaching from a distance. As it came near, we could see the bridegroom carrying a mike-set! It was then tied to the tree nearby and readied. Then only the bridegroom went in and got ready for the *nikha*. By that time it was nearly sunrise. The *nikha* was concluded. I was ravenously hungry, and I remember eating the ghee rice gluttonously.

Like the wedding, the *seemantha* (prenatal ritual) too was celebrated grandly. When the pregnant woman completed seven months, the husband's household would decide on the day of *seemantha* (*appachuduro*) and she would be sent to her mother's place. That day the people of the mother's house, both men and women, would go to her husband's house in a procession, to the accompaniment of band, sleek drum, pipes and all. If the distance between the two houses was considerable, they would reach there on the previous day itself. While going there they would carry flowers, sweets and some jewellery. They would then stay there, for a celebratory night, singing and dancing.

Next day the pregnant woman would be duly decorated. All the items of jewellery which she received from her mother's side and given to her by the husband would be shown to all those who gathered there and she would be adorned with them. The women would gather around her while she was being decorated, clap and sing to a rhythm. There would then be a feast with meat dishes. The pregnant woman would then be taken to her mother's house in a procession, to the accompanying sound and music of band and pipes. People of all communities, men, women and children, would gather on either side of the road to watch the procession.

In her mother's house, the pregnant woman would be fed with a variety of sweets and pastries. Mostly, *irmundeppa* (vermicelli), *ennedappa* (fried dish), *sankroli*, and *guliyyappa* were the favourite items, along with sweets like *laḍḍu*, *halwa*, *jalēbi*, *nevari* and so on, which were heaped on a big plate, placed in front of the pregnant lady and was fed by the women who sat around her.

These days this celebration of *seemantha* is becoming rare. In the cities it is nearly non-existent. I should make an observation here. The women in their pregnancy have certain desires. You can see them in their faces. They seem to want the *seemantha*. If you do not perform it, they silently feel bad about it. The reason why they like it is that this celebration is exclusively centred on them.

That gives them a special happiness. Recently a friend of mine celebrated the marriage of his son. His daughter-in-law became pregnant. His was an educated family. He was not the person to celebrate any ritual such as *seemantha*. But the daughter-in-law insisted on it, it seems. She too was educated, and was a techie.

I asked my friend, “Being an educated man, and a Christian, do you celebrate such things?” He said, “No. We do not have such custom. But she insists that it should be done. The pregnant women have many desires, and if you fulfil them they would be happy. If not, they feel sad and let-down. That is why I do it.” That is also my view. A woman, who is carrying another living being in her person, has many fears and physical and mental tensions. A *seemantha* will bring down these tensions and assuage her. A tension-free mind is important for her easy delivery too. *Seemantha* will help her in this regard. I too have celebrated the *seemantha* for my daughter-in-law, though not in a big way. I had sent her for her delivery with affection, giving her all the confidence.

When the delivery time was nearing the parents of the girl would have all the tensions. They would fix the woman to give her the post-natal care well in advance, because a person would not be easily available at short notice. She would be called, paid the advance money, along with betel leaves and nuts. All the medicines the girl needed for postnatal care would be prepared at home. There was nothing like going to a hospital for delivery or for pre-delivery examination of the girl. Everything was done at home. Everything was done by the midwife. As soon as the delivery pain was felt by the girl the midwife was summoned. If the delivery was delayed, the women of the house would read aloud *nafeesat maale*, or *muhiyuddin maale* (the saga of the great men of Islam). They would vow that they would donate a *chaadar* or *maalde* (fried sweet balls of pastry) to the mosque, or that they would light lamp at the Idgah or that they would offer a fowl to *raateebh*, or that they would have *maulood* read...Such vows were common.

The travails of a woman in bringing another life into this world

were terrible those days. The loud, helpless cry she would give out at the time of delivery makes me shudder even today. Many were unable to bear to hear her cry, and would go a distance and grieve. When proper care or treatment was not available, there were instances of both the child and the mother dying during childbirth. Not just in childbirth, but in many other things too the problems and pains, physical and mental tensions, harassment and exploitation that a woman had to undergo are hard to imagine in these changed times.

People during those days used to celebrate weddings and *munji* (*sunnat*) with great pomp and *éclat*, even if they were poor. It was matter of prestige. The more grandly one celebrated these events the greater was his prestige in society.

Those days, *munji* was not performed on small children. It was done only after the boy turned ten; sometimes at fifteen years of age. People were afraid of having it done to small children, because there were instances when children had died due to excessive bleeding. There were no facilities for it as you have it now. It was done by *vasta* (the person appointed for performing *sunnat*). There was nothing like bandage or ointment either. They would place cotton and tie white cotton around the wound. They would use cock's feather to wash the wound. The same was used to apply oil on the wound. Sometimes the wound would take three or six months to heal.

The children after the *sunnat* would be looked after as they would a woman after her delivery. They would not be given cold water to drink. They would be fed with *pattir* smeared with ghee, a curry made of yam and chickpeas, chicken curry and so on till their wounds were healed. To ensure that they did not turn prone in sleep and aggravate the wound, people would keep awake all night and keep a watch over them. They would sing *sabina* songs or play *chennemane* or cards. To make sure that the children did not sleep, the women would give them tea from time to time.

The ritual of *munji* will also be accompanied by playing of

band, sleek drum and pipes. There could also be crackers and fireworks. Performing *munji* when the boy was seated on the round mura of rice was considered a great honour. And after the ritual was over, every guest was fed with ghee rice and mutton curry. And, as in a wedding so in a *munji*, there would be cash presentations made. Thereafter, the relatives and neighbours would send packs of sweets for the children who had undergone sunnat. Some would send rice *pattir* and chicken. The rich would even place the boy undergoing *munji* on horseback and taken around the village in a procession, to the accompaniment of band, sleek drum, pipes, crackers and fireworks.

After the wound was healed, the boy would go to the mosque on a Friday. For this occasion the close relatives were personally invited. Before going to the mosque everyone was given a drink made of green gram boiled and ground and mixed with jaggery, milk, cardamom and grated coconut. After the return from the mosque, everyone was given a good non-vegetarian feast.

When I underwent *munji*, I was twelve years old. I had it along with my brothers. My father had invited a large number of people for the occasion. But he did not conduct it with any great fanfare.

## My Marriage

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To tell you the truth, I didn't want to get married then. I was not in a position to marry either. I wanted to study a lot more. I wanted to stand on my own legs before thinking of my marriage. My thinking was largely conditioned by the West. I was dream of marrying an educated, modern girl. This Khateeja had studied only up to the fifth standard. That is why I was sure I did not want to get married at all.

But some influential people had badgered my father into accepting this marriage. He had given them his word too. I was not in the know of these things. When I learnt about it, I was livid with rage. That anger even made me stop going to the college. If I should get married, I would stop going to the college, I insisted. I wouldn't marry, come what may, I said, and went to Chikkamagalur in a huff.

Then my father, uncles went to my friends and relatives and made them coax me into accepting the alliance. But I didn't budge an inch. My father was hugely disappointed and felt sorely dispirited. He told his son-in-law, (that is my brother-in-law), "I thought he would marry the girl I select for him. I believed that he would listen to my words. I have given them

my word. I thought my son would help me keep my words and protect my honour. But he has not done it. He has rigidly clung to his position, and all my name and honour have mingled in dust. Damn it!” He seemed to have spoken these words with great pain and disappointment. My brother-in-law reported these things to me.

That night I didn’t sleep well at all. “My father is a respectable person in our society. He mingles with all people and everyone respects his words. Everyone regards him as a man true to his words, honest, trustworthy. If I cannot obey his words and fulfil his small wish, I cannot be a son worthy of him. If I have grown well and so far, it is all because of my father. If I cannot fulfil his little wish I will be damned as an ungrateful son. Whatever my private feelings and ambitions are, I should set them aside and honour the words of my father. I should marry the girl he had selected for me and ensure that nothing was done to bring down his honour and prestige in society.” And I conveyed my decision.

Everyone was happy that I finally agreed to marry. My parents, in particular, were overjoyed, and they began to lavish their affection for me. Their love and confidence in me grew two folds. If our children obey our words, who will not feel happy, tell me. Although I was carrying within me a live cinder of resentment, I could douse it by looking at the happiness of my parents and all at home. That helped me to suppress all my dreams within me.

There was no custom during those days of “seeing the girl”. My mother was clearly opposed to it. In fact, her generous heart was the reason behind this opposition. If, for example, we see the girl and return without approving her, how painful and insulting the experience would be to the girl and to her parents and her family! That was her generous attitude. That is why neither my mother nor any women from our family went to see the girl for me. Those days there was no custom of the boy seeing the girl before they are married. They would see each other only during the nuptial

night. That is why there was never a question of me seeing the girl before my marriage.

In the midst of these things, my parents and brother-in-law knew full well that I had agreed to the marriage under duress. They were a little unhappy too. But since I had honoured their words, they were so happy with me. During those days, some of my relatives and uncles would come home and tell my mother, “You know how beautiful your would-be daughter-in-law is? She is radiant like the full moon! When she comes to this house the rest the women of the household should go into hiding! She is so fair, and so attractive.” They would say these things loud enough to reach my ears. But I was expecting a modern, educated girl, more than just a beautiful one.

My wedding was fixed for May 24, 1962. There were some talks that it was not a good, auspicious year. People were predicting the end of the world, draught, and bad events all through the year. Since it was an inauspicious year, the suggestion was that no auspicious function should be held that year. But my father did not believe in such things. And he went ahead to fix the day of the wedding.

By the time of my marriage there were many changes taking place in society, however small. People were not what they were when I was yet small. They had progressed in some ways, somewhat. One example of it was that my father had printed the wedding invitation. That should be deemed as a major change.

I had gone to Chikkamagalur to invite my friends, carrying some copies of the wedding invitation. When I announced to my friends that my marriage was fixed, none of them believed me. There was a strong reason for them not to believe what I said.

When I was in the college we wanted a practical joke on our classmates on April Fool Day. Some of us went round saying that our friend Chinne Gowda would be getting married. I was in the forefront of playing this prank. We had even printed a few wedding cards in the name of Chinne Gowda’s father. We had invited some

of our classmates and friends to the wedding, and Chinne Gowda himself had given invitations to some of them. They were all surprised and happy. They demanded a beer party on the day of the wedding. We said, it was not just a beer party but there was even an arrangement of '*Badige Henda*', and we entreated everybody to attend it. *Badige Henda* was an arrangement where there was a whole pot of toddy placed before the guests and they were free to help themselves with it. People always used to be excited at the prospect of being entertained with *Badige Henda*. We told our friends that a bus was being arranged from the precincts of Acharya Patashala early in the morning and that all would go by it together. We had made sure that they did not get any clue to the prank we were playing.

Early in the morning, all the invitees, both boys and girls, had collected inside the compound of Acharya Patashala. They were all in good mood; cracking jokes, shouting and making fun of each other, they were waiting for the bus. We were watching the group from a distance, without their knowledge. They waited from morning to noon. Their good mood had turned sour. There was sullen silence. It was as if air had gone out of the balloon. They were cursing each other. Then I sent in a note: "Today is April 1. April Fool! You may all go back to your respective houses!" There was an explosion of anger. They shouted all kinds of abuses at me. They were shamed; they were angry; they were hungry. You should have seen their plight and impotent rage. If only they had got me there, they would have torn me to pieces!

Now when I gave them the invitation to my wedding, they were all naturally suspicious, and asked me if it was not an invitation of the kind that they had received to Chinne Gowda's marriage. I cleared their doubt by saying that the month was not April but May. They were now sure that this was no practical joke. Some were surprised, while some others started teasing me. But they were all very happy. Many of my friends had attended my wedding, which was held at Bajpe.

The marriage took place with considerable pomp. There were a good number of people from the bride's side for the nikha. Among them were some of the local eminences from Jokatte. They all had come walking. It was no big deal in those days. People used to walk whatever the distance. We had entertained them in the pandal we had erected in front of the house. Everybody was offered refreshment. After the nikha everybody had a meal of ghee rice before they left.

That night I was to go to the bride's house. I had invited my friends for the occasion. My father too had invited some of his friends. Hasan Haji, Bava Haji (T.K.'s father) had come to join us. By that time the practice of the procession with band, sleek drum, and fireworks was slowly going out of fashion. I had none of those things in my wedding. However, as we were about to leave for the bride's house, it started raining, as if from nowhere. It was a veritable downpour. People could no longer stand in the pandal. They rushed to the sit-out of the house or people frantically started taking shelter wherever they could. Luckily we had arranged for a bus to go to my bride's place. We all got into the bus. But the road was hardly visible, with all those sheets of water in that pelting rain. As the bus reached Kalavar, we saw a small bridge giving way to the gushing water. Luckily our bus was a few meters away from the bridge. As the bus could not move further, we all sat inside the bus till the rains relented. Thereafter we got down and walked the remaining distance.

There was no electricity those days. There no lamps along the road. None would leave the house without a battery torch. Now some of us had battery torches, and with that light we took a byway to reach the bride's place. The bride's house had a sprawling pandal covered with areca leaves. It was a grand pandal. My father-in-law had spared no expenses to make all the arrangements for the wedding. But then what could he do? Ferocious rains had destroyed everything. He had arranged for a generator on the lower field; but gushing water had frustrated it and put out the lamps.

The pandal was in disarray. Somehow, from somewhere, they had found some gas lights. In that light I put *bandi* on the bride. Thereafter everybody ate.

As we were returning, something happened. We took a different route. It was a new road under construction. They had heaped a lot of mud on the road, and it had turned into one big slushy field because of heavy rains and the road was all but closed. We could not move forward, nor were we inclined to beat a retreat. But then we decided, come what may, we would move ahead. And we did. As we were going along, one of us had his leg sinking into the slushy mud. When he made an attempt to lift it, the other leg would sink! As he extricated that leg, the other one would go down. Thus he kept grumbling and was making heroic effort to break loose from the slushy mud, but to no avail. He was a heavy man too. Looking at his predicament, we started laughing. And we laughed aloud and boisterously. As we were laughing, he started screaming in utter discomfiture and helpless rage. Finally, we all joined and pulled him out of the slush.

Another man sat down near the running rivulet to pee. He was something of a chicken-hearted person. He never ever came out of his house without arming himself with a battery torch. Now, when he sat down to pee, he had no torch with him. And from somewhere a young one of a rat snake came and explored his thighs! He was frightened out of his wits and came running, shouting, “Snake! Snake..!” Looking at his predicament, everybody else started laughing uproariously! Even now my friends remember the incident and laugh. Although we all seized our opportunities to enjoy the rains, my father-in-law was sad that all the fine arrangements he had made for the wedding had been ruined by the rains. All the money he had spent he had spent had gone waste, he used to say with sadness.

Then the bride came to our house. By the time the rains had relented. When I went for *Taala*, I used to go wearing gumboot. For the road was all slushy. This rain had reminded me of the

rains in Chikkamagalur. There I used to wear gumboot. There the rains were such that once they began in May, they would not stop till August. In those days the rains were so heavy and continuous that it was difficult to see the sun clearly. Such pelting rains we used to have. Even while going for the flag hoisting ceremony on the Independence Day, we used to go with our gumboots on. Here in our village none had even seen gumboots. When I put them on and went to my wife place some people had even mocked and laughed at me!

*Taala* was over. I stayed back in my wife's place. Those who had come with me returned to their places. That was my First Night. That night my wife did not speak a word to me. I too did not try to make her speak. There was absolutely no words exchanged between the two. Although we the newly married ones were inside the room, there was no sound, save the raging noise of the downpour outside. And yet I did not lose my patience. I did not do anything hasty. I thought girls were so made; they were shy. They would take at least a week to adjust to new environment. They need to be won over. They carry with them many unknown fears. Such things I had read in books.

I waited for a week. I tried my best to win her over. But there was no cooperation from her side; there wasn't even a word from her! Well after I went to bed, she would silently slide into the room with a glass of milk in hand and after keeping it in one place, quietly lie down in the corner of the cot, in a nervous foetal position, as it were!

My mother-in-law would, every day, prepare for me the native chicken curry, rice roti smeared with ghee, rice gruel mixed with ghee, ghee-rice and many pastries to make sure that I was kept happy. Some of the fiends of my father-in-law would go to river and catch for the bridegroom big fish of many kinds, either catching them with fishing rod or with fishing net. The river also used yield big shrimps. That river does not exist now. In the name of development, they have filled it with soil and big concrete buildings

and industries have come up over it. So much so, a few years back I could not even find a little clue that there once existed a river. But when it did exist, it enabled my mother-in-law to cook toothsome items for her son-in-law.

Even after weeks, my wife remained how she was. There was no change in her. She would not talk to me standing face to face. Even if she did, she would not look at my face. At night, after putting off the light, there could be some words from her. But that too were in reply to what I asked. Her words were soft and mellifluous, - so sweet that I wanted to hear more of them. But soon I realised that she was a woman of few words. Even today she talks little, not only with me but also with others. She does not mix freely with others. She minds her own business. She does not unnecessarily bother about others' affairs. She is innocent, honest, and very religious. My mother had played a big role in bringing two of us closer. I told you I was not too keen on my marriage. She remembered it till the end. She was doing her best to see that I got the occasions to speak or mix with my wife.

In the early days of my marriage, I would invite my friends to my house. I used to get special things cooked for them if they were at the meal time. But my wife would not appear before my friends. She would not show her face to them or talk to them. I myself had to serve them whatever was cooked. I knew she was not the one to do that, and so I never ever persuaded or pressurised her. I used to do everything. Sometimes our friends used to ask and me, "Why? Where is your wife? Is she not at home? Call her, I say! We can sit together and eat!" Then I used to wriggle out of the situation by telling some lies. I could not tell them that my wife was of that kind of person. Such occasions would be very embarrassing to me. Soon I stopped inviting my friends to my house. I used to take them to the hotel and entertain them.

One day, my father-in-law called me aside and told me, "You continue your studies. Do your L.L.B. or do whatever you choose to." But I was not inclined to study further. I said, I would not

study any more, but start some business. My father too persuaded me to study further. But I said, “Now I am not alone. I am married. I have to look after my wife. That is why I had told you that I would marry only after I was able live an independent life. Now I do not want to pursue my studies anymore. I should start working.” My father wanted me to study more, make me a lawyer or engineer or that I should take up some government job. But none of his desires and hopes came off.

## **In Search of a New Life...**

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After my marriage I went again to Chikkamagalur. I did not get back to our hotel there, though. My younger brothers were looking after the hotel. At Chikkamagalur I joined the JCS and I was instrumental in getting a group ready. None of them were Muslims, and there were many ladies in the group. Most of them were married. One of the qualifications of the members of that group was that they should know English, converse in English and should be able to make speeches in English effectively. Those were the criteria of leadership there. I had all the qualifications, and I ended up as its President.

Once at Willingdon Island at Cochin the JCS had organised a big dinner. It was a very prestigious hotel. All the members were entitled to a free dinner. I was then its Vice President, and we all had gone there from Chikkamagalur. That day the President had not turned up and I had to conduct the meeting. My English, organizational ability and personal charisma earned me the friendship of many important people.

One interesting thing happened in the dinner, and that has made me remember the dinner even

now. One lady had attended the dinner. If my memory serves me right, her name was Pramila. She was from Chikkamagalur. She was very talented. She was known for her singing and dancing, and was very broad-minded. She could speak eloquently in English. Her husband too was a member of the JCS. He was an uncompromising vegetarian, and would run away from the sight of fish or meat. Our dinner had both vegetarian and non-vegetarian fare. Now this lady Pramila came to me, took me aside and said, "I should eat fish. When I see you eating fish, I feel very tempted. Can you arrange fish for me without my husband knowing it?" At the dinner good fried fish was being served. I made sure that she got to eat fish without anybody knowing it. She was very happy. She told me, "I like fish. But we do not cook fish at home. My elder brothers eat fish in hotels and they also make me eat it. But my husband does not like it. We all do it in stealth. Today fish was very good. I should really thank you!" Looking at her courage I was indeed surprised.

The name of our hotel by the side of the main road of Chikkamagalur was, I remember to have told you, "Islamiya Hotel". Once "Kamala Circus" visited Chikkamagalur. Nearby the place where it had set up its show, there was a hotel belonging to Usman Beary. He began to get good business now. My father then took a place on lease near the bus stand and set up another hotel. It was named "Deluxe Hotel". Soon it became famous. Many important Gowdas of the town used to come there to meet me and talk to me.

Once I got a letter inviting me to an interview for the post of a Sub Inspector. I mentioned it to my father. He asked me what salary I would be getting there. I said, about two hundred rupees. He said I was spending that much on me; how do I hope to look after my family with that kind of salary? He did not know about the illegitimate income that position would bring! On another occasion I got a call for the post of the Range Forest Officer. My father said no to that offer too. Later I happened to meet B.R.

Shetty - the one who is now a big industrialist Dubai. He used to come to our hotel for his meals. He was then a medical representative. He became my friend, and he was a good man. Through him I was able to get a position of medical representative. But my father vetoed that offer too.

One day father called me to say that he would give me ten thousand rupees and asked me to start some business. Those days ten thousand rupees was a huge sum. I accepted the money my father had offered. There was an experienced timber merchant whom I was acquainted with. I asked him if we could join together and start timber business, and he agreed. That was in 1964. The first timber log we bought brought us a loss of three thousand rupees! That was a big blow. I was really worried. Next week we bought timber logs from another place. They were big logs, and good quality of timber of wild jack. We realised that they were of such high quality only after we bought them. They brought us a profit of one and a half lakh rupees! That was a fortune in those days.

On every Wednesday our hotel used to get very good business. The reason was that it was a day of weekly fair in the town. It was a big fair. People used come there from Kalasa, Belur and other places. They used to bring oranges, mangoes, plantains and other fruits, besides vegetables in trucks. The buyers too would converge on the place from different towns and villages. Many of those who came to the fair would come to our hotel for their meals. That day we would make biriyani in two large vessels. And everything was looked after by my father. The “Islamiya Hotel” was run by my uncle and my brother. However, as the business in the “Deluxe Hotel” increased, that of the “Islamiya Hotel” began to fall and soon had to be closed down. Not long after the landlords of the site of the “Deluxe Hotel” filed a case against us demanding the surrender of the land held on lease. While the court case was still on, my father died in 1965. In 1975 we had to give up the hotel. Being honest and truthful seemed to work against us in the end.

When my father died, many friends from Chikkamagalur and Bangalore had come to see my father's dead body in Bajpe near Bangalore. I still recollect the dialogue between my friend Pattabhi Rame Gowda and I on the occasion. The dead body of my father had been kept in the hall of our house for public viewing. There was a huge gathering of mourners in front of the house. Some were shedding tears silently, and some were crying loudly. I was standing at some distance watching the scene. Then my friend Pattabhi came to me and said, "What Mohideen! The man who has died is your father, man! People are shedding tears, and crying aloud. And you are standing here at a distance, as if you are here for the funeral of some stranger and in his house! I don't even see a drop of tear in your eyes! Why are you like this?" This was the way my friend Pattabhi always spoke! It was hard to tell if he was saying it in pain or in sarcasm. I looked intently at his face and said, "Look! I struggled a lot to see that my father should get cured. I spent a lot of money. I saw to it that he was given every treatment that could be given. I was always with him in his last days. I didn't stir out for a moment. I could not have done anything more. I tried my best, day in and day out, to ensure that he lived, that he recovered his health. But I failed. And look at those people who are crying and shedding tears! They have not spent a penny on my father! They were not with my father even for a day when he was ill. That is why they are shedding tears! If I had not spent anything on my father, if I had not made any effort secure his recovery, I would have joined them now to cry and shed tears!" Pattabhi did not say a word by way of reply. He nodded his head and stood at a distance.

Somehow I did not feel disposed to continue my timber business. I thought I should do something different. At that time I had many friends among timber merchants. They were always kind and well-disposed towards me. They were persuading me to continue that business. But my mind was not in it. I had about one and a half lakh rupees with me. With that I bought, in 1977, a

farm of twenty-five acres at Kallattipura. The name of the farm was “Gemini Farm”. Kallattipura was on the way to Kemmannagundi at the turn of the upper gradient of the road. Here there was a person by name Malaria Khadri Beary. He was a teakwood merchant. He was a big shot, someone who was a leader of the place, and a popular man. There was another person too, who was Adyar Ahmed Haji’s sister’s son. Yet another person was Seedi Haji of Jokatte. He was my father-in-law’s brother-in-law. They helped me to buy the farm.

After I bought the farm I got acquainted with a revenue inspector, and acquaintance turned into friendship. And near our farm there was a place called Lingada Halli. There lived a lady by name Kentibai, a Christian, who was closely connected with the revenue inspector. It seems her mother originally belonged to Mangalore and went to Lingada Halli after her marriage. Kentibai had a small farm and was unmarried. She was about 40-45 years of age, and she was living on the income from her small farm. She had a small house too, where the revenue inspector and I used to meet with some of our friends. Since her farm was close to mine, she used to look after my farm too when I was away. Her brother’s children and grandchildren visit me at my Bajpe home even now. I still have some acquaintance around my old farm I had helped Kentibai in sorting out some problems of her family.

Thus I became a farmer. And I was devoted to my farming. I experimented with modern ways of farming, bringing new species of plants. There people were mostly growing finger millet, great millet and so on. For the first time I started the cultivation of sun flower. None had tried it earlier. I also developed a small areca nut farm. I bought, for three thousand rupees, a new red Rajdoot motorbike, and started moving around the farm. Then I happened to make friends with a Circle Inspector by name Surendra. I often used to go to his house when I was free. He used to prepare tasty rice rotis and mutton curry. I used to go to him to savour their taste.

While I was in the JCS in Chikkamagalur I used to take part in arbitration of many disputes on land or in families. Either I would go to them or they would come to me. In the arbitration both parties would mostly respect my words and decisions. They were sure that I would be fair and just. I would listen to the points of view of both the contending parties, and announce my decision without allowing any unnecessary arguments. Both sides would then accept the settlement I would suggest. What is interesting is though there were many wise and learned men in Chikkamagalur, people would mostly come in search of me to do the arbitration. If they by some chance went to them, they would say, “Go to Mohideen. He is the right man. He would settle the dispute in half an hour!”

In our place, Bajpe too, when there were any odd quarrels, disputes over land and any controversy arising in the mosque, people would come to me for arbitration. If I was not around, they would say, “Let Mohideenaka come! Then we will settle everything” and postpone the settlement. People in my village would respect my words, and that used to give me great happiness.

There was a major incident in my village Bajpe. We had an organization called “Sowharda Samiti” This was an organization set up by the wise and those with social commitment in our village to ensure social and communal harmony. In it were Hindus, Muslims, the local eminences, as well as religious and political leaders. Popular Jagadeesha Shetty was its president. He was of Bunt community, belonging to a Guttu house. In the village he had estates and farms. He had business interests in Bombay too. He was a very secular man. He would settle things without any considerations for the caste or religion of the contending parties. He had helped the minority communities when communal riot broke out. He made sure that no serious communal riots broke out or quarrels leading to them cropped up in the village. Any sign of them he would extinguish through amicable arbitration.

You may remember the “Ratha Yatra” which the senior BJP

leader L.K. Advani took around the country. The “Rama Ratha” was to visit our village too. In the “Sowharda Samiti” it was decided that it’s President, Jagadeesha Shetty would offer the Ratha a garland on behalf of the ‘Samiti’. In the ‘Samiti’ there was a member by name Abul Hasan Maulvi. He was earlier the religious leader of the Bajpe mosque. He said he too would offer a garland to the Ratha. Then Jagadeesha Shetty told him that if it was against what his religion had sanctioned or if it would lead to any controversy, he could avoid it. But the Maulvi said that there would be no such things, and he was permitted to garland the Ratha. The Ratha duly arrived. Jagadeesha Shetty garlanded the Ratha, and the Maulvi thereafter.

Next day the newspapers reported the news prominently: “The Religious Leader of the Bajpe Mosque Garlands Rama Ratha!” And right from early morning itself, there were many phone calls to the members of the managing committee of the mosque. The question they raised was, “Was it right for a leader of the mosque to have garlanded the Rama Ratha?” There were many debates over it, here and there. As a matter of fact, this Maulvi was then not a leader of any mosque. The Bajpe mosque was now under another leader.

The young men of the village soon began to gather in groups. Some of them decided to go to the Maulvi and question his action. Some wanted the Maulvi to pay for his action. Jagadeesha Shetty was not in the Bajpe. He had left for Bombay on the very night of the visit of Rama Ratha. But he learnt about what was happening at Bajpe. Immediately he telephoned B.M. Zakariah and told him, “I learn that some young men are planning to go to the house of the Maulvi and beat him up. You all should make sure that such things do not happen. I will come back soon. Till then do not allow any scope for any trouble. See that when the Maulvi comes to the mosque (that was a Friday, incidentally), no harm befalls him.” This Zakariah was a member of the “Sowharda Samiti”. He was a member of the Mosque Committee as well. Jagadeesha

Shetty had a lot of confidence in Zakariah. Accordingly, Zakariah spoke to the restive young men about the telephone call of Jagadeesha Shetty, and entreated them not to create any problem. In fact, the Maulvi came to the Jumma prayer late and had slipped out soon without anybody else noticing his presence. But the young men had promised not to create any trouble till the arrival of Jagadeesha Shetty.

When Jagadeesha Shetty arrived at the airport the next day, he stopped his car at a shop selling cement, where he met a man name Khader. It seems he asked Khader, in a tone suggesting anger and rebuke, “Who are the ones that planned to beat up the Maulvi? Who?” This news spread from person to person and snowballed to “Jagadeesha Shetty seems to have taken Bearys to task!” With such rumours circulating, the atmosphere at Bajpe began to heat up!

A meeting of the eminent citizens of Bajpe was called immediately by Sundara Shetty, who was then the Chairman of the Panchayat. The meeting was attended by many members of the Lions Club, the elders among the Hindu and Muslim communities, the leaders of the religious, social groups and political parties. Then Jagadeesha Shetty came to my house in his jeep. “We need you, Mohideen! Nothing good will happen unless you are present. If you say a word, these young men will keep their mouths shut. What we want in our place is harmony and goodwill among people!” He then took me and Zakariah along and reached the place where the meeting was convoked. There everybody seemed to be waiting only for our arrival, The Maulvi too was there.

Jagadeesha Shetty began his speech first. That day the newspaper had carried a clarification that the Maulvi who had garlanded the Rama Ratha was not a religious leader of the mosque. There was a long debate and discussion on the event, and the whole thing saw a happy end. In the meeting the speeches made by Jagadeesha Shetty and me seemed to have been particularly

effective. We both emphasised the need to live as children of the same parents and maintain communal and social harmony. We also made a point not to listen to vicious rumours. Everybody suggested that if there were any misunderstandings, the matters should be brought to the notice of either Jagadeesha Shetty or B.A. Mohideen.

There was another happy result which emanated from this meeting. At Bajpe there was no love lost between some of the influential Bunts and even between Bearys. Some of them would not even acknowledge each other's presence when they met! It was all because of personal ego and professional rivalries. In that meeting all were made to patch their differences and shake hands. They all became friends. That meeting was indeed a landmark in achieving social and communal amity in Bajpe. This 'Popular' Jagadeesha Shetty died recently.

I had told you that I had bought a farm and took to agriculture. I will return to that story now. During those days I seem to have got sucked into politics. Initially I didn't quite realise how it happened. I never racked my brain over it. There was a place called Tanikebail, not far away from my farm. There lived a person by name Govinde Gowda. He was a Socialist. One day he came to me and introduced himself. He then asked me if I was aware of a new law. I said, no. He said that the government had passed a law that vacant lands should be distributed among the landless. "We have about 400 acres of government land. I have also brought applications from a few landless poor. I want you to give them to your friend, the revenue inspector. I will recommend them. Make sure that the revenue inspector goes to the Tahshildar and get the orders passed. I want you to take some keen interest in the matter." Somehow I was impressed with him. His concern for the poor and the oppressed, his honesty and commitment made me think about the problem. After he left me, he got all the vacant government in the vicinity surveyed; but soon he found that many vested interests were trying to put hurdles in his path. They also

started a slandering campaign against him. There was a Legislator from the place by name Margada Mallappa. He was also a Health Minister in the then Congress Government. These slandering vested interests went to him and carried tales against Govinde Gowda: “He is collecting money from the poor, landless workers with a promise that he would be distributing government land to them. He is bringing the Government to disrepute. You should not allow it” and so on.

After a while there was a meeting at Kallatipura in this regard. I too attended the meeting. There someone put forth the allegation that Govinde Gowda was collecting money from the poor, and that the gullible workers were being cheated.

Then in his reply Govinde Gowda said, “Look dear M.L.A. Mallappa! Your government has passed a law that lands should be distributed to the landless. On my part I have identified the vacant government lands, and I have gathered together the poor and the landless workers and explained to them about the prevailing law. In order to get the job done for them, I have collected Rs 15 from each of them. May be I may need about Rs 10 per head. I have taken money from them because I do not have money of my own. I have not eaten away the money I have collected from them. With the money I have collected, I got the survey of land done, the inspection of the revenue inspector done and many other things. They all involve expenses. I need money for it. I have taken money from these people to meet these expenses. If had money of my own, I would not have collected money from them. I would have spent it myself!” After saying this, he sat down.

Hearing all the charges made against him and listening to the reply he had given, I felt a deep sense of pain. I realised how when good people want to do good to others, there would be many to spite them. I liked Govinde Gowda as a person and his concern for the poor, peasants and the landless workers. I then stood up and said, “Govinde Gowda! You are doing a noble job. You are doing a work for the sake of people. That you are a

good, honest man even your accusers know. And why they are making the accusations you, I know, the M.L.A. knows and all those who are gathered here know! Whatever the kind of accusations they make, you continue with your work. I am with you!”

That meeting, Govinde Gowda and his social service gave a new turn to my life. Since then began my life’s work moved in the direction of serving society. Instead of thinking only about me, I started thinking about the poor, oppressed, backward and about those who had been deprived of education. Then what struck me was that if I joined politics I could help people get social justice, and that I could serve them in many ways. That is why I joined hands with Govinde Gowda. I did all that I could to get his work done. From there I took a definite step towards a life in politics.

But soon I found that I could no longer look after my farm at Kallatipura. Hence I sold it and landed in Bangalore. There I opened a restaurant on the Subedar Chatram Road opposite Kapali Talkies. Its name was “Sudha Restaurant”. I opened it in partnership with my friend, Gopal Singh of Chikkamagalur. It’s another partner was the owner of the hotel building. We chose him because we thought if he were to be a partner he would not ask us to vacate the place and put us to difficulty and loss. The hotel was running very well, but to our ill-luck the owner of the hotel building and our partner died of heart attack. His widow did not allow us to run the hotel any more. She was convinced that the hotel was launched on an inauspicious moment and that it had led to the death of her husband! We tried to argue her out of her untested faith, but we failed. Finally, we had to close down the hotel.

## In Politics

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My politics is an open book. Whatever decisions I took or whatever work I did were quite transparent. I was never in politics for power. When by some chance I got my opportunities, I used them though. But all my political decisions were informed by farsightedness. I never got involved in politics to please others or to swell the number of my followers. I never went after publicity. When I became a legislator and a minister, I took all my decisions without reference to any particular party and solely on secular principles. Collective progress of the society was at the core of my thinking. At no time and under no pressure did I ever compromise on my principles. That is why in the five decades of my political life I was forced to change my allegiance to political parties. And, of course, I began my political life in the Indian National Congress.

In 1980 when Devaraja Urs disassociated himself with Indira Gandhi, I stayed with Urs. When Urs resigned and became the Leader of the Opposition, I kept company with him. After the death of Devaraja Urs I returned to the Indira Congress, along with many others. In the 1983 elections even when I was refused ticket,

I stayed with the Congress. When the Congress under the vice-like grip of Janardhana Poojary neglected me entirely, the Janata Party gave me due honour and recognition, invited me and offered the position of the Secretary of the Party, the Membership of the Legislative Council, the position of the Chief Whip of the Party, the position of a Minister and that of the Minister in charge of the District.

When the Janata Party broke up, some of my friends and I stood neutral. In 2002 when my membership of the Legislative Council ended, some of the political developments pulled me towards the Congress which I joined.

Even while I changed political parties I did not ever compromise on my political principles and ethics. I have not given up my secular credentials. I have always opposed communal politics of every kind.

Now let me unpack my memories before you. The events that I am describing here may not always conform to strict chronological order, though; and possibly, I have forgotten some of the names and incidents I ought to mention here.

Whatever I say now about anyone or about any incident is what I felt then, when the incidents took place. No one should be under the impression that I hold on to those views of mine even now. When the Karnataka Government honoured me with “Devaraja Urs Award” on the occasion of the centenary celebration of Devaraja Urs, there was a very cordial civic honour for me at the Town Hall in Mangalore on 15-9-2016. That day I forgot whatever the old bitterness that had clung to me. I have since accepted everyone as my friend. Whatever I now recount is from the memory of the past. As an aid to my memory I have divided the span of my political life into three phases.

### **The First Phase: 1969-1978**

This phase is known in history as the ‘Era of Devaraja Urs’. During this period the Congress was divided at the all India level.

In 1971 Lok Sabha elections D.B. Chandre Gowda contested and I worked with him closely and entered active politics. The responsibility of managing the Congress affairs in the state squarely fell on the shoulders of Devaraja Urs. In 1972 Vidhana Sabha elections the Congress won a resounding majority. Though he did not contest the elections, Devaraja Urs became the Chief Minister. I became the Organising Secretary of the Youth Congress and later the Secretary of the K.P.C.C. Under the leadership of Devaraja Urs, the state became a witness to some historic and far-reaching progress and political changes. In 1975 Emergency was declared in the country and in 1977 the Indira Congress was routed resoundingly in the elections and the Janata Party came to power at the Centre.

In the elections Smt. Indira Gandhi too lost. In the District a new face made its appearance. The District witnessed murders Kalladka Ismail and Semitha. In 1978 elections were declared for the State Assembly. I contested in the Buntwal constituency and won.

### **The Second Phase: 1978-1986**

This phase saw my innings as a legislator. In the state the Janata Party lost unexpectedly and the Congress won, and Devaraja Urs again became the Chief Minister. In 1978 in the historic by-election Smt. Indira Gandhi won and entered the Lok Sabha to become the Leader of the Opposition. Owing to vendetta politics Smt. Indira Gandhi was arrested. In the subsequent political development a rift arose between Smt. Indira Gandhi and Devaraja Urs and the State Congress was torn asunder. I stayed with Urs. In the Lok Sabha elections of 1980 I contested in the Mangalore constituency on behalf of Devaraja Urs's party. All the candidates of his party lost the election. Devaraja Urs resigned his Chief Minister's position and gave freedom to the Legislators who were with him to take their own independent decisions. Gundu Rao became the Chief Minister and Urs became the Leader of the

Opposition. I stayed with Urs. After the death of Urs we all joined the Indira Congress. In 1983 the elections were declared for the Vidhana Sabha. I was denied an opportunity to contest again from Buntwal. In the elections the Congress lost and a coalition government was formed by Janata Party and the BJP with Ramakrishna Hegde as the Chief Minister. In 1985 mid-term elections were held for the State Assembly. Even this time Janardhana Poojary and Oscar Fernandes denied election ticket for me to crush my political life prematurely. In the elections the Congress lost again and Janata Party gained majority and came to power, with Ramakrishna Hegde becoming the Chief Minister once again. In the meantime, in 1984 Smt. Indira Gandhi was assassinated and Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister.

### **The Third Phase: 1986-2002**

In this phase, V.P. Singh, who was the Defence Minister in the Cabinet of Rajiv Gandhi resigned and launched a new party called Jana Morcha. In 1989 a merger of Jana Morcha, Lok Dal and a few other parties resulted in the creation of Janatha Dal. I who had joined Jan Morcha thus got inducted into Janata Dal. Ramakrishna Hegde, in recognition of my services, appointed me as the Secretary of Janata Dal. He also placed the whole responsibility of managing the affairs of the Janta Dal Office on my shoulders. In 1990 I was elected to the Legislative Council. In 1994-95 I became its Chief Whip. During 1995-1999 I was the Minister of Small Industries, Minister of Higher Education and also the Minister in charge of the Dakshina Kannada District. In 1999 when the Janata Dal was divided, I and some of my friends remained neutral. In 2002 my term as the Member of the Legislative Assembly got over. In the later political developments, I joined the Congress Party.

### **The Dawn of the Devaraja Urs Era**

“It is not right that you become the Chief Minister and form

the government merely because you are elected the Leader of the Congress Party in the Legislature Assembly, because you are a defeated candidate in the elections. This will not add strength to your position. If you cling to your position of power, it will give you no moral strength either. That is why you should not become the Chief Minister. Now you select any legislator for the position of the Chief Minister. You can then get a position vacated, contest for the election and come back a winner!” These are the words expressed by Devaraja Urs in 1962 to Nijalingappa, the then undisputed leader of the Congress party.

The 1962 the Mysore State Vidhana Sabha elections had thrown up a strange result. The Congress had won a resounding victory all over the state. Nijalingappa’s supporters too had won. But the Chief Minister Nijalingappa had surprisingly lost his elections in the Hosadurga constituency. The reason was the bitter rivalry between his group and that of B.D. Jatti’s faction. However, after the elections, the supporters of Nijalingappa wanted him to be elected as the Leader of the Congress in the Legislature and make him the Chief Minister in the first instance and thereafter make him contest and win a by-election. Although many senior leaders of the Congress like Sowkar Chennaiah, Kengal Hanumanthaiah and Shrinivasa Mallya, disagreed with the decision, they did not have the courage to express their views openly. In such a critical situation, the man who boldly expressed his view was Devaraja Urs. When he did, even Nijalingappa had to accept it. Accordingly S.R. Kanthi was chosen as the Chief Minister. This one incident drew the attention of the entire state to the name of Devaraja Urs. He gained considerable popularity.

With his bold views, progressive thinking and deep concern for the backward and minorities, Devaraja Urs began to gain ascendancy, step by step, in politics. In 1967 the Lok Sabha elections were held. The Indian National Congress won 286 seats in the elections and came to power. Smt. Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister and Morarji Desai the Deputy Prime Minister.

This was the beginning of differences of opinions between the two factions. Morarji Desai did not like the decision of Smt. Indira Gandhi to nationalise banks. At that time S. Nijalingappa was the President of the Indian National Congress. The differences between the two factions grew apace and wider. Every month a meeting of the Congress Committee, consisting of 21 members, was held. But Smt. Gandhi would not take part in the monthly meetings. Instead, she and her supporters would meet separately. This would embarrass the old Congressmen. Then as a chastisement to indiscipline, the Congress Party under Nijalingappa decided on removing Smt. Gandhi as the Leader of the Congress Party in the Parliament and passed a resolution to that effect. Thus the Congress Party was formally torn asunder. Those in the Congress who supported Smt. Gandhi came to be called “Indicate”, while those who stood by Nijalingappa and his group were known as the “Syndicate”.

At this time the elections to the office of the President of India took place. The “Syndicate” faction of the Congress under Nijalingappa chose Neelam Sanjiva Reddy as the Presidential candidate. Smt. Indira Gandhi did not endorse it. She wanted to select Jagajivan Ram, but agreed to the candidature of V.V. Giri to effect a new turn of history. Taking advantage of the factional conflicts behind the scene and with the support of the group led by Smt. Indira Gandhi, the independent candidate V.V. Giri won the election to the office of the President of India.

The historic A.I.C.C. meeting was held at the Lal Baug Glass House, in Bangalore on 15 July 1969. That was the occasion when Smt. Indira Gandhi emerged as a true political force in the country. The meeting adopted some significant progressive resolutions like nationalisation of banks, abolition of privy purses, and so on. This further brought down the image of the Nijalingappa faction of the Congress. Besides, the Election Commission accorded recognition to the Indira Congress. In this Bangalore A.I.C.C. Session Devaraja Urs and B. Basavalingappa took an active part on the side of the

Indira faction. When the Congress broke into two Virendra Patil was the Chief Minister of the Mysore State, and his government gave its support to the old faction of the Party led by Nijalingappa.

After the schism, the Indira Congress was formed in Karnataka. The responsibility of promoting it and managing it was vested in Devaraja Urs, and he was appointed the state head of the Indira Congress. This is significant. With it began the Era of Devaraja Urs in Karnataka. A party which was till then under the control of the upper castes now came to recognise the role and honour the backward castes and the minorities. However, the press and the media kept writing loosely and flippantly about Devaraja Urs, who was in charge of the Indira Congress in the state. For, Virendra Patil and Ramakrishna Hegde were like Lava-Kusha, - the inseparable twins- in Karnataka politics. The Old Congress under Nijalingappa had a good support from rich and the industrialist groups too. In the face of such a challenge many people were wondering how Devaraja Urs would manage the affairs of the Indira Congress.

At this time, in 1970, the state government under Virendra Patil decided to send a delegation to Tokyo in Japan where Expo-70 was being held. When the names in the delegation were announced, it triggered a furore over favouritism and nepotism involved in it. Devaraja Urs took up the matter seriously and along with K.H. Patil, Aziz Sait, Siddaveerappa and others, launched a successful movement against the Old Congress government. This helped Urs to gain the support of castes like Lingayaths, Reddis, Ganigas and the like. R. Gundu Rao too organised a protest of a group of students against Expo-70 delegation. In fact, this protest helped Devaraja Urs to undermine the power of the Old Congress in Karnataka, which had ruled the roost hitherto. Many smaller communities had lent their support to his leadership. What struck his mind at that time was, that all these years the more powerful caste groups had been exploiting the lower castes, that it was important to halt this trend and empower the lower castes in

politics, who should be made aware of their rights in matters of development, and the need to organise themselves for their larger good. Thus Devaraja Urs launched a veritable movement of social and political transformation in Karnataka.

At this time, in 1971 mid-term elections were held for the Lok Sabha. When the election results were declared, all the 27 seats were won by the Indira Congress, which made Smt. Indira Gandhi happy, while it disappointed and left Nijalingappa and Virendra Patil depressed. Devaraja Urs began to make his name at the national level. Till then the Old Congress was in power in the State; and Virendra Patil was its Chief Minister. But the results of the Parliamentary election were like intimations of things to come. Soon many began to desert the Cabinet of Virendra Patil and move to the Indira Congress, and they were all heartily welcomed by Devaraja Urs. Prominent among them were K.H. Patil of Gadag, B.M. Patil of Bijapur, H. Siddaveerappa of Shivamogga, B.L. Gowda of Chitradurga, D.B. Powar of Belgaum, K. Puttaswami of Mysore, Nilakanta Rao Patil, who was known to be the right-hand man of Virendra Patil, M. Muhammada Ali and many others.

A major change that took place in politics at that time was that the Congress party which was under the control of the rich and the upper castes was now finding place for the backward classes and the minorities. At one stage more than forty ministers and legislators under Virendra Patil had resigned and joined the Indira Congress. Virendra Patil was helpless to prevent it. He resigned and his government duly fell.

Most of the legislators were now with the Indira Congress. It gave a clear evidence to the political acumen and farsightedness of Devaraja Urs. The situation was such that when the government of Virendra Patil fell, the legislators and ministers who had resigned were all ready to form an alternate government. But Devaraja Urs did not say a word. When the press people went to him and asked him as to who was the next Chief Minister, Devaraja Urs said nothing. "I do not know! You should tell me! If you say anything,

I am willing to listen to you!” he said. For, he knew that if he hastened to form an alternate government, the power would go to the same group of the rich, the upper castes and the capitalists. He knew that those who had won the election as legislators and those who had left the Old Congress and migrated to the Indira Congress had all belonged to those categories of people.

Devaraja Urs was aware that it was his best opportunity to salvage the Congress from the octopus grip of the upper classes and make it a party of the poor, backward classes and of the minorities. When he told Smt. Indira Gandhi about his hopes and plans she too agreed with him. She stood by him. Instead of forming the government Urs got ready for fresh elections. This obviously frustrated many who had joined the party with the hope of grabbing the Chief Minister’s hat. And yet there was an attempt to form the government under the leadership of Shantaveri Gopala Gowda. Although he was personally reluctant, he agreed to others’ pressure. He even met the Governor. But he could not prove the majority in the legislature. Since Shantaveri Gopala Gowda was a socialist and a person who Devaraja Urs looked up to, Urs remained neutral. He could not oppose him. However, when the attempt failed, the President’s rule was promulgated. The then Governor, Dharma Vir was in charge of the President’s rule for the next ten months.

After the President’s Rule ended elections were announced. The elections took place in February 1972. Since Devaraja Urs was the convener of the Indira Congress in Karnataka, it was under his leadership that the Party faced the elections. In the elections the Indira Congress won 166 seats out of 223. When the Party won such a resounding victory, the question arose as to who should be the Chief Minister of the state. The problem was that Devaraja Urs who was marshalling the forces of the Indira Congress in the elections had not contested the elections!

In the elections Devaraja Urs had wrought a major transformation. Till then the Congress Party used to offer 145 out

of 223 tickets to the upper castes and upper classes, and only 73 to the backward castes and the minorities. In this election the picture was radically altered by giving 133 tickets to the backward castes and 90 to the upper caste candidates. Of the 166 candidates who won 92 belonged to the backward castes and religious minorities. This was a revolutionary change wrought by Devaraja Urs in the 1972 election. Breaking the monopoly which the upper castes had been enjoying hitherto in politics, he showed that the backward castes and minorities too could wield power in Karnataka. With this a new chapter was opened in the political history of Karnataka.

The 1972 election was over. The Indira Congress had won the majority in the Vidhana Sabha. But Devaraja Urs had not contested the election, though he was greatly responsible for the victory of the Party. When the process of electing the Chief Minister of the state was on, the competition was between the legislator from Harihara, H. Siddaveerappa and Devaraja Urs. The Party High Command examined the political climate of the state and found out as to who commanded the support of the most of the legislators. After confirming that Devaraja Urs had the support of the majority of the Congress legislators, he was elected the Leader of the Congress in the Legislature. On March 18, 1972 as per the suggestion of Smt. Indira Gandhi, Devaraja Urs was elected as the Chief Minister, though he was not a member of the Vidhana Sabha. When the message of Smt. Gandhi was conveyed, the Congress legislators rejoiced and applauded the choice. For the first time in the state the upper caste monopoly was broken, and Devaraja Urs became the eighth Chief Minister of Mysore on March 20, 1972.

Urs had a long stint of rule during which he exerted to bring up the socially backward classes, dalits, the minorities and the poor by kindling awareness in them. And when the Congress was at this cusp of change I was appointed as the Secretary of K.P.C.C. It also launched me into my political career. I got a wonderful

opportunity to grow under the shadow of a wonderful and generous leader like Devaraja Urs.

### **Devaraja Urs and the first five years of his Administration**

From 1972 when Devaraja Urs became the Chief Minister, till 1978 when I contested the elections from the Buntwal constituency I was a close associate of Devaraja Urs. I was a witness, from close quarters, to the administration he had set up and marshalled. The person who was my close associate at that time was my friend Ramesh Kumar, the present Speaker of the Vidhana Sabha. On many occasions Devaraja Urs would sit down with us to share his intimate thoughts and unburden his worries. We can never forget in our lives the love and trust he had reposed in us.

Here I should recount an old incident. In 1971 the mid-term elections were being held for the Lok Sabha. That was the time when the Congress was getting divided vertically into two parties. On the one side was the Old Congress and on the other, the Indira Congress. Those were yet my early days in politics. I was full of enthusiasm. When the Lok Sabha elections were announced there was a debate over the candidate for the Chikkamagalur constituency. One H.A. Narayana Gowda was trying for a ticket. He was an influential person, and the President of the D.C.C. Bank. He later served the state as a legislator and a minister.

But I was part of a group of young men that included D.B. Chandre Gowda, which believed that the then Member of the Lok Sabha, Makonahalli Hucche Gowda should be the candidate. But Hucche Gowda did not consent to contest the election. He was not confident that the Congress would win the elections. Devaraja Urs was the convener of the Indira Congress in Karnataka. He was given the power and responsibility to select the Lok Sabha candidates and give them tickets on behalf of the Congress. A group of young men from Chikkamagalur met Urs, apprised him of the situation in our area and asked him to give the ticket to

Hucche Gowda and it promised full support to him and victory in the election. The group that met Urs included D.B. Chandre Gowda, I and a few of our friends. Devaraja Urs himself called Hucche Gowda, but the latter refused to contest the election. Then Devaraja Urs casually asked D.B. Chandre Gowda, “What are you doing these days?” Chandre Gowda replied, “I have completed my degree in law. I am at present practising law.” Then Urs told him, “Go! File your nomination! You are my candidate! You go and file the nomination!”

We all felt happy but were a little confused too. I don’t now have words to explain what exactly we felt then. But we did not back out. With the blessings of Devaraja Urs D.B. Chandre Gowda contested the election from the Chikkamagalur Lok Sabha constituency. Everything was new to us. But we did not lack in enthusiasm. D.B. Chandre Gowda won with a big margin and was elected to the Lok Sabha. I still remember the words of Anne Gowda, the father of Narayana Gowda, who was known to be our king-maker, ringing in my ears: “Chandre Gowda tied his pubic hair to the hillock and pulled it, saying that if he won he would get the hillock, and if he failed he would only lose his pubic hair! Look at his luck! He got the hillock!”

During the election I worked closely with D.B. Chandre Gowda. Watching my activities, my speeches, and my viewpoints, Chandre Gowda told me, “You are not meant for here. You should be in Bangalore!” And he took me to Bangalore. He made me the Secretary of the State Youth Congress. Because of D.B. Chandre Gowda’s affection for me and confidence in me, I ended up on the political lap of Devaraja Urs.

While forming his cabinet as the Chief Minister of Mysore, Devaraja Urs gave new look to the political set up of the state. He made sure that the power which was hitherto in the iron grip of the upper castes and upper classes was shifted to the hands of the backward classes and the minorities. In his cabinet he included many competent, honest, service-minded people among the

Socialists, backward classes, minorities, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to form an impressive government. Taking such competent people in his Ministry as K.H. Ranganath, B. Basavalingappa, L.G. Havanur, M.Y. Ghorpade, K.H. Patil, H.S. Chennabasanna, Veerappa Moily, Devendra Ghaleppa, Shivanna B, Subbaiah Shetty, Manorama Madhwaraj, Mallikarjauna Kharge, S.M. Yahya, Aziz Sait, S.M. Krishna, H.N. Nanje Gowda, H. Hucchamasti Gowda, H. Siddaveerappa, D.K. Naickar, R.D. Kittur and the like, he became the harbinger of the social and political transformation of the state.

The people of the state cannot forget the lasting contribution of Devaraja Urs who strove to uphold and implement the noble idea of “A fair share to each in a fair life.” His heart would always be responsive to the cause of the helpless and the unorganised groups in society. He was always keen to help the cause of the peasants, workers, the poor and women and wanted to formulate permanent plans for their amelioration.

When we look at the various schemes Urs planned as the Chief Minister for the common man, we realise how concerned he was for the poor and how determined he was to work for them.

Devaraja Urs was a true lover of Kannada. He passionately loved Kannada literature. He was an avid reader of the famous writers of the period like ‘Masti’, ‘Kuvempu’, Bendre, Karanth, ‘DVG’, ‘Chaduranga’ and so on. He had studied Ramayana and Mahabharata. He used to read English books too. He was greatly influenced by the thoughts of Basavanna, Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave and others. On November 1 1973 he renamed the Mysore State as ‘Karnataka’, and with it he earned the renown as the first Chief Minister of Karnataka. Starting a new Directorate for the Language and development of Kannada, he gave a great fillip to the cause of Kannada. This Directorate has now grown to become the Department of Kannada and Culture. Having its branches in every district, it has helped in promoting the cause of Kannada and culture, and that should redound to the lasting credit of Devaraja Urs.

## **Land Reforms**

Proclaiming the revolutionary idea that “The tiller alone is the owner of the land” and implementing it, Devaraja Urs was one of the first to defy the exploitative system of rack-rent in agriculture. It is against this system alone the socialist movement had been launched. Although there was a law to restrain rack-rent, it was weak and toothless. The comprehensive Land Reforms which Urs introduced on March 1, 1974 was a bold measure to end the power of the landlords and hand over the ownership of the land to those who cultivated it. That was indeed a war which Urs declared against the landlords and capitalists. He not only passed legislation regarding it, but made sure that the administration was sufficiently geared up to see that the poorest of the poor rent-paying tenant benefitted from the legislation formulated for his benefit. Urs is entitled to the credit of having achieved it.

But Devaraja Urs knew that Land Reforms Legislation was not easy to implement. There was every possibility of the angry landlords and capitalists brow-beating the tenants to submission or chase them away. To ensure that that judiciary did not interfere in the matter, Land Reforms had been kept out of the purview of judiciary. To see to it that that the illiterate and unorganised tenants were not exploited at any stage, Land Tribunals were established in every village. At every stage the tenants had been given every protection. These notwithstanding, some unsavoury events had occurred here and there. Two such events had occurred in Dakshina Kannada: one, The Kalladka Ismail murder case and the other, Semitha murder case. I shall come back to these events later on. But, to sum up, it is no exaggeration to say that the Land Reforms was one of the first revolutionary changes effected in the country unaccompanied by any major acts of violence or bloodshed.

## **Havanur Report**

Dr. Lohia’s ideas and ideals had a profound impact on Devaraja Urs. Lohia’s view that to render the freedom that India had won

truly meaningful the backward classes and the weaker sections of the society should have greater slice of power in politics and share in administration was what Devaraja Urs too had endorsed fully. He therefore appointed a commission under Havanur to study the issue and prepare a comprehensive report on it. This was Karnataka's first Backward Class Commission. A lawyer, a politician and the one belonging to the backward class himself, Havanur made an extensive survey of the issue by a comprehensive study of the earlier reports on reservation policy as well as making a fresh economic and social survey of the state before giving the report. In the report he made three classifications of the backward population of the state: 1. Backward Classes, 2. Backward Castes, 3. Backward Tribes. According to the Havanur Report, 14% of the state population belonged to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and 44.52% belonged to the Backward Groups.

Today if in the state the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and all the Backward Classes and Tribes are getting the benefit of reservation in education, government employment and in political participation, it is all done on the basis of the Havanur Report. It empowered the Backward Classes and became the fountain-spring of a popular movement.

### **Debt Relief Act**

An indirectly crushing system of exploitation had entrenched itself in the state. Many backward castes belonging to agriculture, working classes, potters, garland-makers, cobblers, blacksmiths, washer men, carpenters and the like had fallen under the trap of debt laid by the rich and the capitalists. Many who had borrowed money from the rich at usurious rates of interest could not pay the debt because it kept swelling owing to compound interest, resulting in the loss of land, fields and houses which they had hypothecated. This meant that many poor people were rendered homeless and destitute. Devaraja Urs was aware of what was going on. Hence he passed a Debt Relief Act in 1976 which was meant to write off

both the loan and its interest which the poor owed to the rich. He also took keen interest in the proper implementation of the Act too. The District Collectors were required to recover the documents pertaining to hypothecation or jewellery pawned from the rich and from the money lenders and return them to the poor. This bold step helped millions of poor people who had been hopelessly caught in debt-trap.

### **Abolition of Bonded Labour**

Our state had long been nursing an evil practice. Many rich people or merchants used to lend some money to the poor in desperate need and used to keep some member of their family to serve them until the debt was cleared. This was a form of servitude. Such incidents would invariably increase at the time of drought, when the rich would advance money to the poor and make them work for them like slaves. Staying in the cattle-shed of the rich, these poor people would toil like cattle, day in and day out, in rich people's farms. Noting this evil and exploitative practice, Devaraja Urs passed a legislation to abolish the bonded labour in the state. Following it up, he appointed a machinery of efficient officers to locate such practices and release the bonded labourers. According to one estimate more than 50,000 bonded labourers won their freedom and duly rehabilitated.

### **Abolition of the practice of carrying night soil on the head**

The practice of manual cleaning of toilets and carrying the night soil on the head was prevalent in the state from time immemorial. It was a practice in which the night soil of the upper castes was carried by the lowliest of the low castes. There was a caste among the dalits which was meant to do it. None had dared to stop this inhuman, degrading practice. Devaraja Urs was moved at the sight of people who were condemned to this degradation. He therefore passed an Act in 1977 abolishing the practice of carrying night soil on the head. The Minister of Corporate

Administration, B. Basavalingappa had done much to secure this Act passed. Sadly many upper castes did not extend a whole hearted cooperation in this regard. But the stern will of Devaraja Urs implemented the Act in the state, and won the plaudit as the first state to have passed such a progressive Act in the country.

### **Drought Relief**

There were two major droughts which visited the state when Devaraja Urs was in power. If during 1972-73 the northern districts of the state like Gulbarga, Bijapur, Raichur, Belgaum, Dharwad and Chitradurga suffered from drought, in 1974-75 districts of Hassan, Mandya, Mysore and Dharwad suffered as severely. To deal with the problem of drought, Urs took up several irrigation projects. The more important among them were Supa, Harangi, Hemavathi, Krishna, Kabini, Malaprabha and Ghataprabha.

Devaraja Urs had taken up many more projects which were designed to alleviate the poverty and ensure the welfare of the poor, the dalits, peasants and workers and had won their hearts. The reason why I am recounting all such noble projects of far-reaching consequences now is that when the blue-prints and details of those projects were being drawn up and were being implemented, I was watching them from close quarters. Urs was always striving to reconstruct a bold, new Karnataka and he was persuading others to do so. He was also sharing with others the travails and pleasures of doing so. When I became the Organising Secretary of the Youth Congress, I had fallen into his political lap, and by scrupulously following him, had since developed into a responsible, mature politician. In fact, I had gained in him a matchless, humanistic model preceptor, - something hard for many others to gain in life. It was under his benign shadow that I grew up as a politician. Even today his image as a rare human being and as an embodiment of a lofty ideal stays with me, in my heart.

## **A Corrupt Urs!**

In spite of all the good he had done some newspapers and some persons used to criticise him as corrupt. One day I went to his chamber and asked him, “Sir, There some who describe you as a corrupt Chief Minister. Why don’t you react to this charge?” Then, without being disturbed in the least, he said in his typical style: “O Come on! They are out of their mind! Why do I need money? If I get everyday two lumps of boiled ragi to eat, that would do for me! I do not need anything more! But then, there are these people, these M.L.A’s! I have to rear them and look after them! I have to meet their needs, all their needs. If I have to stay in power I have to look after them well! For that I need money. I do not need any money!” Listening to him, I fell silent.

Many days after this conversation, as I was sitting in Urs’ chamber, one M.L.A. came in. I don’t get his name now. He was an M.L.A. from Kadur. As he came in, he addressed the Chief Minister as “My Lord!” and fell on his feet. Urs asked him, “What brings you here?” “Nothing, Sir! I have fixed the marriage of my daughter! And I have done so placing all my trust in you!” It was true that the M.L.A. was an honest man and was equally true that he did not have money enough to conduct his daughter’s marriage. In fact, there were many such M.L.A.s among Urs’s supporters. Urs looked at my face for a moment and then turned to that legislator and said, “Do you think I have the money? Where from should I get that money?” Then the legislator repeated his request, “I have come here with all the trust in you!” Urs then turned to me and said, “Look, Mohideen! Please tell R.N. Desai to give this man some money!” R.N. Desai was a trusted friend of Urs. He was the one who was looking after all his financial matters. He was from Bijapur and was a member of the Rajya Sabha. The Kadur legislator went to the Desai and took Rs. 40,000 from him.

Devaraja Urs had two sons-in-law. One was Nataraj. He was a doctor. And he was somewhat interested in politics and had the ambition to come up in politics too. The other son-in-law was

Mohan. After the death of Urs I met Mohan one day, and he told me, “Look, Mohideen! Your Lord (Urs) has now received a notice from the D.L.B. Bank!” He showed the notice to me. It said, “Of the loan you had taken from the bank, hypothecating your land, there is so much money unpaid. You should pay it immediately. If you do not, your land is liable to be auctioned off.” The fact of the matter was that there was a Muslim legislator in his village. He was given the ticket by Urs and was made the legislator. He had been asked to pay off the loan in the bank, and he had agreed too. But he had not paid the money. It was the land which belonged to Urs, where he was born and brought up. But he had hypothecated that land to the bank and borrowed the money. Though a Chief Minister, he could not pay off the loan. It is a cruel irony that such a person as Urs was being targeted as corrupt by his enemies.

I have seen many such persons who lived such a public life. For example, one of the most honest and efficient politicians that Dakshina Kannada had seen was K.K. Shetty. As the President of the District Congress and as a Member of the Lok Sabha, he had used his entire life for the welfare of the poor and the weaker sections of the society. But he left the scene empty-handed. He had not done anything for himself or for his relatives and friends. He has only left behind a good ideal and a good memory for us to cherish.

### **Nazeer Saab**

Another such person of rare virtues and lofty ideals was Nazeer Saab. He too had done nothing for himself or for his relatives and friends, and had lived almost like a saint. Born in a village, familiar with the difficulties of the peasants and pains of the poor, he knew all about a village, and he toiled hard to see that Gandhiji’s dream of ‘Grama Swarajya’ came true. By volunteering to take up the portfolio of Village Development and Panchayat Raj under the Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde, he achieved

remarkable things. He could have made millions of rupees if only he had chosen to. But when he died of cancer in 1988 he was all but indigent. I was very close to him. I used to call him ‘My brother!’ We were so close as to address each other in the singular.

Before I forget, I would like to recount an incident. A big delegation from Mangalore had come to me at Bangalore. The delegation had many prominent industrialists in it. There was considerable opposition to the construction of a mosque at Hampankatta, a central place in Mangalore, and very close to the Milagres Church. But if the present ‘Masjid-un-Noor’ has come up there, it was because of Nazeer Saab, who secured permission for it. This Nazeer Saab was an atheist of sorts. He did not have any great faith in God. He used to say that there was God, but he was doing no such thing as Namaaz, prayer and so on. But he was identifying himself as a Muslim. Whenever there were any religious matters under contest, he would secure justice to the parties. He was not sure why permission should not be granted to the building of the mosque in Mangalore. But since there was considerable pressure against it from the other side, he was a bit hesitant. When I went to him along with the delegation from Mangalore, he took me inside to his chamber and explained what he felt about the matter: “Look Mohideen! There is considerable opposition to the construction of the mosque from the Christians. They have taken their complaint all the way to the Prime Minister. There are pressures on us from that side too. There is also a letter to say that if permission was accorded to building the mosque there, peace could be disturbed in the city. There is a letter from a D.I.G. too in support of this perceived threat.”

Then I told him, “Look, Nazeer! I am from Mangalore. If a mosque is built there, there would be no clash of any kind! The Christians and the Muslims are alike minorities. There cannot be any clash between the two. I think there is some deeper political conspiracy behind this. Please trust my words. Get the permission for the construction of Masjid-un-Noor.” In fact, he was not the

Minister concerned with the matter. But his words carried much weight in the government. Everyone knew him as a secular person. That is why I had taken the delegation from Mangalore to Nazeer Saab. After listening to me, he said, “All right, you go!” He ensured that the permission to build the mosque was given.

## **Emergency**

During the first stint of Devaraja Urs’s administration, between 1972 and 1978 two important events occurred at the national level. One was the imposition of the Emergency between June 25, 1975 and March 21, 1977, and the other was the 1977 Lok Sabha elections in which the Congress, including Smt. Indira Gandhi, lost the elections and the Janata Party came to power at the Centre.

There were two reasons for the imposition of the Emergency. The War against Pakistan was just over. The country was facing economic crisis in the aftermath of the war, as by the drought condition, and also by the oil crisis of 1973. During this period Raj Narain, who had contested the Lok Sabha seat from Rae Bareilly against Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1971 filed a suit against her in the Allahabad High Court for having misused governmental power and machinery during the elections.

The Allahabad High Court gave its verdict and quashed the election of Smt. Indira Gandhi on the sole ground that she had misused the administrative machinery to her advantage during the elections, and disqualified her for contesting elections for the next six years. She appealed to the Supreme Court, which also upheld the verdict of the High Court. The Opposition Parties organised strikes and protest movements against Indira Gandhi, grabbing this as an excuse and to evict her for power. George Fernandez, who was the President of the All India Railway Workers’ Union, gave a call for an all-India railway strike. Morarji Desai and Raj Narain organised a massive rally in Delhi and laid siege on the Parliament. Jaya Prakash Narayan gave a call to the defence forces to rise in rebellion against Smt. Indira Gandhi. These developments had

created a condition of virtual anarchy in the country. Under these circumstances Smt. Indira Gandhi invoked the Section 352 of the Constitution recommended the promulgation of Internal Emergency to the President Fakr-ud-din Ali Ahmed. Thus on 25, June, 1975 Emergency was declared in the country.

Although many unfortunate incidents occurred in the country during the Emergency, the Chief Minister, Devaraja Urs used the occasion for the over-all development of the state. By an efficient implementation of the 20 Point Programmes announced by Smt. Indira Gandhi, he showed his political acumen. Smt. Indira Gandhi's slogan "Garibi Hatao" which was pitted against the Opposition's slogan "Indira Hatao" became very popular in Karnataka.

Urs succeeded in bring down poverty and reducing for the poor the prices of daily consumption. Measures were taken on a war footing for the uplift of the weaker sections of society. By reducing the retirement age of the government employees from 58 to 55 many unemployed degree holders were given opportunities to gain employment. Although many parts of the country experienced unsavoury events during the Emergency, in Karnataka it became an occasion for a greater uplift of the poor and the downtrodden.

On March 21, 1977 the Emergency was withdrawn, and elections were declared for the Lok Sabha. In this election the Congress and Smt. Indira Gandhi were defeated, and the coalition of Opposition Parties formed as Janata Party won 345 seats and captured power at the Centre. Morarji Desai became the first non-Congress Prime Minister of the country. In this election the credit for the Congress candidates winning in 26 of the 28 constituencies should go to Devaraja Urs. I still remember this election, because a name none had hitherto heard by name Janardhana Poojary, people came to know owing to the generosity of Devaraja Urs. He became the member of the Lok Sabha in 1977. I will tell you more things about Janardhana Poojary later.

## **My Contest in the Election**

After the Emergency I was the General Secretary to the K.P.C.C. Then the Janata Party was in power at the Centre. Indira Gandhi had lost in the elections. In 1978 the term of the Devaraja Urs Government was coming to an end. Considering the popularity of the Urs government and the efficient way he was functioning, the Central Government thought that it would be hard to defeat him when in power, and therefore dissolved the state legislature and imposed the President's Rule in the state on 31 December, 1977, while at the same time declaring fresh elections. But Urs did not lose heart. At that time Kengal Hanumanthaiah, who came out of the Congress, built his own Swarajya Paksha. An influential leader from Mysore, N. Rachiah, built Janata Congress Party. Without being shaken by these developments, Urs busied himself with the task of finding the right candidates who could win the elections. He appointed me as a member of the Election Committee of 1978, and I was assigned the great responsibility of awarding the election tickets. On that occasion a long consultative meeting was held for 38 hours under the leadership of Devaraja Urs. When the matter regarding the candidate for the Buntwal had to be decided upon, the then legislator representing the constituency, B.V. Kakkillaya said that he would prefer Vitla constituency, rather than Buntwal. The Congress was obliged to respect his demand, because C.P.I. was then a power to be reckoned within Dakshina Kannada, and the Congress had a political understanding with that party too. But Sivarama Shetty of the Congress was demanding the ticket from Vitla. Urs told him to contest from Buntwal, instead, but Shivarama Shetty refused. When the debate was going on, Urs asked me, "What is your constituency, by the by?" I said, "I belong to Bajpe. It is the Gurupura hobli; and it falls under the Buntwal constituency." Then Urs said, "You are the candidate. Go and contest. You are my General Secretary!" "No sir! I may not be able to! I am not familiar with the constituency. Nor do I know the local leaders there!" I said in reply. "Don't be afraid. Go and

file the nomination! I will come there to support you!” he said. Those days K.K. Shetty was the District Congress President of Dakshina Kannada. His efficiency and commitment had made him very popular.

And yet I was somewhat confused at the prospect of contesting election. Though I was born at Bajpe in Mangalore, the best part of my life till then had been spent in Chikkamagalur and Bangalore. When I was the General Secretary of the K.P.C.C. many people from the district used to meet me for some work or the other. It is worthy of mention that those days the Congress party had a dignity and honour. If a letter went from the office of the K.P.C.C. to the Chief Minister or any minister or department, it would be considered seriously and would invariably get an immediate reply. There was never any practice of calling on any minister or calling him for any purpose. Even a minor letter going from the Party office was taken so seriously.

If I should give you an illustration: One day Nissar, who is the founder of the now prestigious “Presidency School” came to me when I was the General Secretary of the K.P.C.C. and told me, “Sir, I have some money with me. I want to start a school, for which I want to get the permission from the government.” On behalf of the party I wrote a letter to the concerned minister. I told him, “Give this to the Minister. You will get the necessary permission.” In fact, Nissar did get the permission. Today what was established as a little ‘Presidency School’ has grown into a big ‘Presidency University’.

There were thus many in Dakshina Kannada who had gained favours from me. When Devaraja Urs directed me to contest from the Buntwal constituency, I was hesitant for a while, but came directly to Mangalore. I had a round of talk with my close friends and my close relatives. They all encouraged me to take up the challenge. “This is a good opportunity for you. Don’t let it go!” they said.

Then I presented my own views before them. For one thing, I

didn't have any money. I will not ask for money from anyone either for my election expenses. If I get any money from the Party, I will not touch it; instead I will hand it over to the Block Congress. None should come to me for money, nor should anybody collect money on my behalf. My second stand was, I would not visit any temple, church or mosque to seek votes. I will not use any religious place for political purposes. None should seek votes on the ground of religion or caste. During the time of elections, there should be no clash or violence of any kind. If such things happen I will not intervene. I will neither recommend the release of anybody nor their arrest.

As I was saying these things with some of my close friends and relatives, some young men stood up and said angrily: "These are impractical things! With all such conditions, can you win the election?" They then walked out. At that point a person by name Muhammad Malali followed those young men and brought them back to the meeting, and began to address them in his high voice: "What is your problem? That Mohideen will not go to mosque, temple or church seeking votes! Yes, he will not go! In this election we will specifically point this out! That he is a secular person, that he will not make political use of mosque, temple or church or any religious beliefs, that he will not use any religious site for political ends! We will surely use this as a weapon of election propaganda. This will surely appeal to all!" When Muhammad Malali said this in his own language and style, all those gathered in the meeting nodded their heads in approval. I too got mentally prepared to fight the election.

I went back to Bangalore and returned to Mangalore to submit my nomination. At that time the person whom I contacted first was Sadananda Poonja, who was then the chief Secretary of the Buntwal-Panemangalore Block. There were, in fact, two blocks in the Buntwal constituency - one was Gurupur Block and the other, Panemangalore Block. There were 29 villages under the Gurupur Firka and 65 villages under Panemangalore Firka. Before

submitting my nomination I had called a meeting of all the party workers. But the political climate of the district was not quite congenial to the Indira Congress. There were but a handful local leaders standing by it. The Old Congress had an influential leader Mahabala Shetty as its president. At the Centre the Janata Party was in power, and mostly the rich, the landlords and the capitalists were its backbone. In Buntwal our strength was the local leaders of the C.P.I. and its workers. B.V. Kakkillaya was allowed to choose the Vitla constituency. Kakkillaya had a big band of admirers and followers at Buntwal. This committed, hard-working group stood strongly by me. Sadananda Poonja boldly and efficiently organised everyone and prepared for the election. But the biggest task was to introduce me to the people of the constituency. And this Sadananda Poonja did with consummate ability. The two others who gave me full support were Comrade Vishwanatha Naik and P. Sanjeeva, whom we have sadly lost recently.

We went in three cars and submitted our nominations without much fanfare. We then began the task of canvassing for the election. My friends and well-wishers went to every house in the constituency to seek votes for me. But let me be frank! Many who did such work selflessly had not even come to my notice!

One incident in this election is hard to forget, though. There was a big businessman at Bunder in Mangalore. His name was P.B. Hussain Kunhi. He was a local leader too, and had considerable contact with people in Buntwal. There he had a building too. I requested him to lend me a small room in that building which I could use for coordinating our election work. But he did not give it to me. But nearby there was a hotel, belonging to a Konkani gentleman. He was a fine gentleman. But I do not remember his name now. He was not even from our party. He was a supporter of Jan Sangh. He called me and said, “Don’t suffer any tension in this regard. I have my hotel here. I will permit

you to use it for your election purpose!” I had no direct familiarity with him. I got to know him through a Konkani gentleman in our party, who was known to this gentleman. I met him only through him! The big businessman, P.B. Hussain did not consent to give me a room in his building because the Janata Party was in power at the Centre, and could as well come to power in the state. If he had rented out the room to me for my election purpose he could find himself in difficulty. Hence he did not give the room. But that, the Konkani gentleman did!

I had a car of my own. Sadananda Poonja and I launched my election campaign in it. I used to make my speeches in Kannada. Soon the Opposition parties began to circulate a slander that “B.A. Mohideen is a man from up the ghats. He does not even know Tulu!” Thereafter I started making my speeches in Tulu. In them I used to make only one point. I used to describe Indira Gandhi’s various programmes for the poor like the Land Reforms, nationalisation of banks, abolition of privy purses and others. Then I would say in a simple, uncomplicated manner: “I am Indira Gandhi’s candidate. She alone chose me to contest this election. If you help me in winning the election, it is as if you win the election for Indira Gandhi!” In none of the speeches I would criticise the Opposition parties or their candidates. Gradually we began to draw bigger crowds in our election campaign.

The Opposition parties had created such an atmosphere of fear that since B.A. Mohideen had no prospect of winning the election anybody identifying with him would possibly be blacklisted later! But this fear began to gradually melt away. More and more people began to join us in our election rallies. The mood of the election visibly began to change. While the rich, the big land-owners and industrialists continued to hesitate joining us, the poor and the oppressed castes and classes began to shout slogans in praise of Indira Gandhi. I began to gain greater confidence. The person who was contesting against me was, it should be noted, was Rukmayya Poojary of the Janata Party, a very influential person,

and the one who belonged to the Billava caste, which constituted the biggest chunk of the voters.

The election campaign was heating up as the election date was approaching. The tenants of the region had clearly stood by me and were fully involved in the election campaign. In fact, the whole election became something of a fight between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots and between landlords and the tenants.

On this occasion let me tell you some of the details of election campaign, which my friends and well-wishers did without bringing them to my notice, but shared with me later on. Those days the election campaign involved such things as writing the party slogans on compound walls or on big stones or granite outcrops, collecting soda bottle caps to stamp them on tar roads to portray the party emblems, pasting the party posters in towns and villages, and near bus-stands and hotels where people mostly gather and so on. All these the party workers would do late at night, at 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock! Even after the party processions and party rallies became fewer, the programmes of door-to-door contact of the voters continued at a feverish pitch. The party workers would work the whole day on all the days.

Another passion bordering on madness during elections was to hoist big party flags atop high poles. There could be rivalry among parties as to whose flag would fly higher. It appears in one place the Janata Party workers had hoisted their flag to a long pole of an areca nut tree. Seeing this, the Congress party workers brought a longer pole of an areca nut tree and started fixing it near that of the Janata Party flag after tying their own flag to it. But the task was not easy. Since the pole was long it was hard to straighten it and plant it firmly, maintaining its balance. It first needs a deep pit dug and after burying its base, the long pole should be straightened carefully, using long ropes to make it stand firmly and with right balance. It needs a lot of skill to do it. When the Congress party workers were struggling to do it, the Janata party workers,

who were watching the scene, it seems, came there to help the workers of the rival party and helped them to fix the pole and the flag, taller than their own! This incident was narrated to me by T.K. Abdul Rahim, who had worked tirelessly for me in the election. This is the kind of humanity and harmony that could be seen those days, even in election campaigns!

I needed a jeep for my election campaign. But I had no money to buy it. Knowing this my childhood friend B.M. Zakariah was trying to get one for me. In those days I had a neighbour by name 'Deluxe Haji'. His actual name was M.K. Muhammad. He was my brother-in-law, that is, my sister's husband. He had a shop at Moodigere, and his was a big business. He told Zakariah that a Gowda at Moodigere had a jeep and that he was planning to sell it. He also told him that its price, whatever it was, could be paid later on. It seems Zakariah and 'Deluxe Haji' went there to see the jeep. It was an old vehicle. It had not been running for a long time. When 'Deluxe Haji' asked for its price, the Gowda would not quote it. He said, give whatever you choose to! The relation between the two was very cordial. It was from Haji's shop that all the provisions were being supplied to Gowda's house. Then when pressed hard, Gowda said, "O.K. You pay five thousand rupees!" The deal was struck without another word. He also said the money could be paid any time later. But then nobody knew what condition the vehicle was in, since it had not been running for a long time. But the buyers had taken with them a mechanic. He examined the jeep, did some minor repairs, filled air into the tyres with a hand-pump, and after starting it, was brought to our constituency. It was a good jeep. It was efficiently used for election campaigns in the villages. After the election was over, the jeep was sold and money was paid to the Gowda. I came to know all these details only after the election!

I did not spend a great amount of money for my election. May be, I might have spent about Rs. one lakh. Some of my friends had given me their own contributions of one or two

thousand rupees each. One gentleman by name Sidi Haji had given me Rs. five thousand. My father-in-law, M. Fakirabba, had spent some money on my election. By the time the election was over, after spending a lakh of rupees, I was still left with five to six thousand rupees. I never had any problem with money during the election.

Another important thing about the election was that there were some small clashes during the election campaigns. But whenever they took place, neither the party workers nor the local leaders would inform me about them. They were mostly brought to the notice of B. Subbaiah Shetty, who was contesting from the Suratkal constituency, and he would settle the matter himself. B. Subbaiah Shetty was a very influential leader of the district, and he was held in high esteem everywhere.

Election was over. The counting of votes too was over. The Congress (O) candidate, Mahabala Shetty, who had made much noise during the election, had lost the election and lost the deposit too.

I had won with a difference of over 14,000 votes over Rukmayya Poojary, who was the candidate of the Janata Party which was in power at the Centre. What needs to be noted here is that in the Buntwal constituency there were a sizeable number of voters belonging to the Billava community, to which Rukmayya Poojary belonged. That was the community which had greatly benefitted from the Land Reforms. Remembering this big favour which Indira Gandhi had done, the voters of that community had a Muslim candidate like me rather than a man of their own caste. It only meant that the Billavas did not consider caste as a factor while voting, but preferred Indira Gandhi's leadership.

For the Janata Party the results of the 1978 elections were totally unexpected. They belied the prediction of pre-poll survey that the Indira Congress would lose and Janata Party would come to power. Instead, under Devaraja Urs, Indira Congress won 149 seats and established a record. Urs who had the honour of

completing a full five year term as the Chief Minister of Karnataka, again took the oath in 1978 for his second term.

In 1978 elections in the undivided Dakshina Kannada, barring two constituencies of Sullia and Puttur, in the 13 other constituencies Indira Congress had won, including the Congress supported C.P.I. candidate B.V. Kakkillaya at Vitla. In Sullia A. Ramachandra had won, as did K. Rama Bhat in Puttur, as Janata Party candidates. Gangadhara Gowda from Belthangady, P.F. Rodrigues from Mangalore, U.T. Farid from Ullal, B. Subbaiah Shetty from Suratkal, B. Bhaskara Shetty from Kaup, Manorama Madhwaraj from Udupi, Ananda Kunda Hegde from Brahmavara, Kaup Sanjeeva Shetty from Kundapura, Gopalakrishna Kodgi from Byndoor, M. Veerappa Moily from Karkala, Damodara Mulki from Moodabidre and yours truly from Buntwal had won the elections. When I recount their names I get a feeling of thrill even now. In the undivided Dakshina Kannada, they all wrote a glittering chapter of history by their honest, efficient and secular service. They had worked selflessly to ensure a happier life for the poor and the oppressed classes. The political future of many of these leaders, including mine, who had worked to build a secular Congress party in the district, was destroyed by a person by name Janardhana Poojary. The person who wrote a foreword to communal politics in Dakshina Kannada was this Janardhana Poojary.

After getting elected as a legislator I had worked tirelessly, without any thought of caste or religion, to serve the people of the constituency. I particularly bestowed attention to the proper implementation of the land reforms in my constituency.

### **My Tenure as a Legislator**

Even before I became a legislator, I had worked at implementing the Land reforms by counselling and emboldening the tenants, helping them to file their declaration forms, throughout the Gurupura *firka*. In 1973 there was a major flood in that area, and many in Adyapadi and Kolambe villages around Bajpe had

their houses damaged and people were put to great hardship. Most of them were working like bonded labourers in the houses of landlords and were very poor. The rich landlords would not help them nor would they allow others to help them.

Those days at Adyapadi, near the Bajpe airport, there was a hilly area called Mevu. I helped the poor people who had lost everything in the floods to get 5, 10, 15 cents of land sanctioned at Mevu, so that they could build their houses and re-settle there. I also had worked to get them their title-deeds.

Later, when the Bajpe airport was being extended, those who lost their land were given sites at Adarsha Nagar in the Kolambe village and good compensation amount too, and they are now living there in good concrete houses. These dispossessed were originally proposed to be shifted to a far off place called Nirude in Mucchur village. But I prevented it and people were rehabilitated in Kolambe village only. That too I got private land acquired by the government to be distributed to those dispossessed people. In fact, while I was a Minister, the same package of compensation which the dispossessed got in the Seabird Project of Karwar, I was able to give to the people for those who lost the land while the Bajpe airport was being extended.

When the Land Reforms were being implemented, certain interesting things came to light. Here the relation between the landlord and the tenants was largely based on trust. Although the tenants were working for many years for the landlords, there were no documents to support it. Although they had been paying rent regularly and performing many odd pieces of forced labour, there was neither any record relating to the landlords' relation with the tenants nor any receipt for the rent which the tenant had paid. This was the situation in the entire Gurupura *firka*. Whatever the record there were, were all with the landlords. This had led to many clashes in Edapadavu, Kuppepadavu, Kolambe, Adyapadi, and Gurupura.

In Kolambe village there was a poor tenant by name Meena Moolya on a ten acre of land. But he had no document to prove

it. He would not dare to file a declaration on the land either. I went to him, instilled courage in him, promised to stand by him and initiated litigation on his right to get that land. The litigation is yet awaiting a verdict from the High Court. Recently Meena Moolya died at the age of ninety-five! Although the litigation is not concluded as yet, his family is living on the possession of that ten acre land.

In Kolambe village there was another poor tenant by name Thimma Moolya. I helped him too to get his rightful possession of land.

In the same village there was a lady by name Yamuna, belonging to the Scheduled Caste. She had been widowed and she had to look after her young children. The landlord had forcibly evicted her from the land she was the tenant of. I instilled courage in her and secured for her the land from which she had been chased away.

At one end of the borders of the Kolambe village there was a tenant by name Bhairo Shetty. He was very old man. His landlord was a very rich and influential man, and had considerable clout in the police station. He tried to evict Bhairo Shetty forcible from the land. When the wife of Bhairo Shetty was working in the field, her landlord's men came there, tied her up and was beaten black and blue. She came to my house in that sorry state. I intervened on behalf of her and ensured police protection to her and her family, which has now become the owners of the land they used till and are living happily.

### **The Semitha Murder Case**

At Padu Perar there was no love lost between the tenant, Raghava Kotian and the landlord, Bhaskara Semitha. When Raghava Kotian took six poor landless workers from the Kolambe village and was getting his land harvested, the landlord Semitha and his men attacked them. In this clash Semitha was wounded by a severe knife-cut and died of it later. The six landless workers from the Kolambe village were implicated in the case and were

herded in police lock-up. Their families had none to fall back upon. Then some of us stood by them and gave all the financial and legal assistance they needed. A famous lawyer of Yusuf Haider had argued for these poor labourers. Incidentally, Janardhana Poojary was working as a junior to Yusuf Haider. The court ruled in favour of the tenants.

A sad part of the story was that while Yusuf Haider was yet arguing the case in the law court, he suddenly fell ill. It was a three day long argument in the court. When he felt ill, he took the permission of the judge, came out to recuperate and returned to continue his argument. When the argument was over, he was immediately shifted to Father Muller's Hospital. There he was treated for a couple weeks but he did not recover. He died on 5-9-1975. The family of the tenants and the landless he had rescued are now living happily and some of the members of their families are in good positions in life.

Another fact which came to light while the litigation was yet on was that Raghava Kotian was not even the tenant of Bhaskar Semitha. His landlord was somebody else. When there was a clash between that landlord and Raghava Kotian and his men, Semitha had intervened to stop the violence. Either by a misunderstanding or by an accident, Semitha was stabbed and was killed. As a matter of fact, Bhaskara Semitha was a progressive farmer and though a landlord, he had been good to his tenants. He had, on his own, given away land to his tenants. His death was mourned by the entire village.

### **The Murder of Kalladka Ismail**

Another gruesome murder which drew the attention of the entire state was the murder of Kalladka Ismail. He was a local Congress leader, and was a social worker. He used to help people in need and was popular with people. When the Land Reforms came, he had worked on behalf of the tenants and had fallen foul of the local landlords.

Ismail had a cutlery shop in the town of Kalladka. It was the month of Ramzan. One evening a police jeep stopped in front of his shop. A constable came out of it and told Ismail, “S.I saheb wants to talk to you. He is calling you.” Ismail peeped out and saw the S.I. and some police constables waiting in the jeep. So he closed the shop and went to the jeep. There the S.I. said, “Come, sit in the jeep. Let us go to the police station for a while.” Ismail got into the jeep.

In reality it was not a police jeep at all. All those who were inside the jeep were people disguised as policemen. As the jeep moved on, those sitting in the rear seats strangled Ismail with a nylon rope and murdered him. His body was recovered three days later on the river bank near Sarapady.

The accused in the case were Mahabala Devadiga, Purandara Bhat, Prabhakara Bhat, the owner of the jeep from Neria and few others. The police had done a thorough job of their investigation and had filed a strong charge sheet. The public prosecutor had also argued strongly against the accused. But the case fizzled out. There were strong reasons for failing to establish the charges of murder which otherwise should have been established. I do not wish to record them here.

The area in Dakshina Kannada which witnessed the maximum number of clashes between the landlords and the tenants was the Gurupura *firka*. Here the landlords were very influential, while at the same time the tenants were poor and illiterate. They had no document whatever to establish their tenancy. At that time B. Subbaiah Shetty was the Minister for Land Reforms. His courage and support went a long way in securing the victory for the tenants. The whole thing was going on as if it was a veritable movement. Noticing this, the Chief Minister Devaraja Urs himself had visited the place. He had addressed a large gathering of thousands of tenants; and he had instilled into them courage and confidence. The hoodlum ways of the landlords were such that they had planned to stone the car of the Chief Minister himself.

As I mentioned earlier, the landlords particularly seemed to revel in their rowdy ways in the Kolambe village. A tenant there, by name Thimma Moolya, was putting up resistance against them. Later, he was struck by paralysis. It seems if anybody went to him to talk with him and inquire into his health, he would merely, while yet lying down, show his finger towards my house, suggesting that they should talk to me. This is what his son-in-law used to tell me. I had such selfless workers with me. I had made Thimma Moolya, Vincent of Bajpe, Muttoor Doddayya Shetty, Abu Bakkar, and Ramanna Tantri, the Panchayat President of Badaga Edapadavu as the members of the Land Tribunal. They had worked very hard in implementing the Land Reforms successfully in the Gurupura firka.

When I was the legislator I had started the practice of celebrating the Peasants' Day every year at Bajpe. In the programmes which would last two to three days legislators like B.V. Kakkilaya, P.F. Rodrigues and others would participate. The programme would include village games and competitions and cultural activities. We would recognise the services of peasants and workers and honour them. In these things I had the help of such committed workers as Doddayya Shetty and Abu Bakkar.

### **The Chikkamagalur Election**

The Lok Sabha election held in Chikkamagalur in 1978 was a memorable event in the political history of the country. At the Centre the Janata Party was ruling with a clear majority. Smt. Indira Gandhi had lost her election in the Rae Bareilly constituency and had lost her membership in the Lok Sabha. She was being continually harassed by a number of inquiry committees and commissions. Although the Indira Congress had lost in other parts of the country, the party was running the state of Karnataka with tremendous majority under the leadership of Devaraja Urs. At this point Devaraja Urs resolved that Indira Gandhi should again be sent to the Lok Sabha.

In the 1977 election D.B. Chandre Gowda had won with impressive majority and had been elected to the Lok Sabha. He was a great admirer of Devaraja Urs. Being sure that Chikkamagalur was a safe constituency to get Smt. Indira Gandhi elected, he asked his friend Chandre Gowda to resign his seat. A by-election was duly announced. When it became sure that Indira Gandhi would contest the election, the Janata Party made every attempt to defeat her. It tried to get the famous Kannada actor Dr. Rajakumar to contest against her. But he refused to enter politics. Then finally the former Chief Minister, Veerendra Patil became the Janata Party candidate against Indira Gandhi. What followed was a kind of election which the country had not seen before or since.

In one sense this election was not just an election. It was a mighty clash of ideologies and a veritable war. On the one side were those political heavy weights who had suffered physical and mental agony on account of their arrest and ill-treatment during the Emergency, those political organisations who nursed a frozen mood of vendetta, the landlords who had lost their lands in Land Reforms and fulminating in rage, the rich who found themselves bruised on account of the Debt Relief Act and those who were left sulking at the visible welfare of the poor and the oppressed after the abolition of the bonded labour; on the other side were those who were inspired by Indira Gandhi's "*Garibi Hatao!*" slogan, who benefitted from the Land Reforms and those who gained from the '20 Point Programmes' like the poor, the oppressed, the minorities, the peasants, workers and the like.

In the Chikkamagalur by-election Devaraja Urs had appointed me as in charge. At that time some senior leaders had expressed their doubts about the wisdom of that decision. "What, sir! You have chosen a boy as in charge of the elections, leaving out the more experienced ones!" they had said. "No sir! That boy knows every nook and corner of Chikkamagalur! He will manage it. Chandre Gowda is with him too!" was the reply of Urs, in his typical style.

The Chikkamagalur Lok Sabha constituency consisted of two Vidhana Sabha constituencies of Dakshina Kannada, and six from Chikkamagalur district. From Dakshina Kannada the constituencies were Belthangady and Karkala; from Chikkamagalur they were Tarikere, Kadur, Birur, Chikkamagalur, Moodigere and Sringeri.

In these eight constituencies only Kadur had K.M. Thammaiah as a legislator representing the Janata Party; the other seven constituencies had legislators representing the Indira Congress: Gangadhara Gowda in Belthangady, Veerappa Moily in Karkala, B. Ramaiah in Sringeri, Motamma in Moodigere, C.A. Chandre Gowda in Chikkamagalur, M. Mallappa in Birur and H.M. Mallikarjunappa in Tarikere. Urs had given the responsibility to each of them to manage the election in their respective constituencies. They had all worked hard and selflessly. D.B. Chandre Gowda, who had resigned his membership of the Parliament to make the by-election possible, would move around the whole constituency as if his feet were on wheels to give direction and instil inspiration to workers. A former legislator, C.M.S Shastri was the President of Chikkamagalur District Congress. With him was the Taluk Development Board president, Ramachandra Rao, who worked actively in the election. I was given two responsibilities. One was the management of finances and the other the preparation of the schedule of daily programmes of Smt. Indira Gandhi. We used to sit in the district Congress office till noon to do this assigned work and get down to the election campaigning in the evenings. Those days there were no restrictions regarding election campaign. We were doing our election campaign till 1 or 2 at night.

Most of the important Congress leaders of the country had trooped into Chikkamagalur and bivouacked there. Leaders like Buta Singh and Arjun Singh had come to campaign for the party. Handing over his own house for these leaders to stay, my friend, Dr. Abdul Khader, a famous dentist of Chikkamagalur, was working day in and day out in the election. I gratefully remember

his services. Known as “Poomonu”, he was the younger brother of my friend, B.M. Zakariah.

Madhav Sinha Solanki of Gujarat came to me and asked me to allot him two or three villages for him to campaign in. One Prabha Devi, an important leader from Maharashtra, had come to me with Rs. ten lakhs. She said, “Mohideen! Take this money. You may need it to spend on the party workers.” I told her, “Madam! I do not deal with money. If you have to discuss about money, do it directly with Devaraja Urs.”

I had written down every detail of expenditure and had given all the accounts for the money I had received from Devaraja Urs and returned the remaining amount to the party. My friend Ramesh Kumar used to pull my legs, saying “Does anyone return the money you are given to spend on elections? This honest soul has returned it!” You know how much money I was left with after the election? Rs 13 lakhs in 1978!

The man who worked the least in this election was Janardhana Poojary, the Lok Sabha member from Mangalore. He was new to politics, and he did not even know how to make a speech. He was merely tailing Veerappa Moily and Indira Gandhi in the two constituencies of Dakshina Kannada.

Stalwarts from the Janata Party too had taken this election as a big challenge. All the important leaders of the party had come down to Chikkamagalur for election campaigning. In the forefront was the party candidate, Virendra Patil and his election agent George Fernandez. They were making fiery speeches and trying to provoke the sentiments of the people. This had resulted in student unrest at Ujire in the Belthangady constituency and the police were constrained to fire at the unruly crowd. An innocent girl, Gayathri, died as a result. The Janata Party used the occasion as an excuse to create more trouble and curfew had to be clamped on Ujire and its surrounding places. This event had given a little setback to the Congress.

Another speciality of this election was that the team of election

workers were committed to their work like selfless soldiers, without any thought of material reward. At the level of villages their leaders formed their own groups of workers to visit every household and seek votes. In the estates of Chikkamagalur this work could be done only after the evenings, because the workers would be free only after 6 o'clock. The party workers would go to the estates in the evening and by the time they returned it would be late at night, at 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock. These workers were our true strength. The Janata Party had the support of the rich, capitalist class and the estate owners. But it had no 'bare-foot workers'. Under each owner of the estates, there were hundreds of workers. There was every attempt to win over them with carrots and stick, but were all in vain. Most of these workers were Tamilians.

M.G. Ramachandran had sent hundreds of party workers from Tamilnadu to campaign in Chikkamagalur. They had come like migrants, with their clothes, utensils and victuals. They would stay and sleep in the school corridors, cook their food and eat there before setting out for the election campaign. Asking for nothing and getting nothing, they had laboured for the success of Indira Gandhi in the election. Some estate owners tried to browbeat them, but against the unity of the Tamil workers they proved powerless.

At one stage, when it was clear that the Janata Party was losing the election, its leaders in their desperation tried to foment trouble and sponsor violence. There were instances of stone-pelting on the Congress procession or their election meetings. There were instances of physical attack on the Congress workers. At that stage the only hope of the Janata Party was to get the election cancelled. Knowing this Devaraja Urs gave the only instruction to the Congress leaders and workers that they should not lose their patience, whatever the provocation; they should not react violently to any violence; they should have patience till the election is over and maintain peace.

In the last phase leading to the poll the whole Chikkamagalur constituency was like a battlefield. Indira Gandhi was making flash

visits to even remote villages. Devaraja Urs was always with her, accompanying her to every place. The poor, working classes and women were always lining up the streets in thousands to see and salute Indira Gandhi. If she was scheduled to be in a place at 6 in the evening, she would sometimes reach there at 10 or 11 at night. And yet people would wait. As she arrived they would be thrilled and they would applaud as if mesmerised. Indira Gandhi had such charisma in her.

About ten days before the poll there was a massive election rally at the Azad Park in Chikkamagalur. Devaraja Urs had reached there already and begun his speech. It was as if the massive crowd gathered there was already in a celebratory mood. At that time some hoodlums of the Janata Party began pelting stones to create pandemonium in the meeting. Urs, who had all through been counselling patience and peace, now had his dander up. He said in a raised voice, which reverberated in every corner: “You cowards! Are you here to provoke us? We have been putting up with your ways all these days. We did it because we wanted the elections to take place peacefully and because any ensuing violence should not harm innocent people. If only I tell our party workers to hit back, none of you would be here to create mischief. But I won’t give such a call. But I am telling the police now. I am the Chief Minister of the state. I have not given you any instruction till now. I had allowed you to work independently. But now I am directing you from my responsible position as the Chief Minister. It is your responsibility to maintain peace. The cane that you carry in your hand and the pistol you have on your person are not meant to be showpieces. They are the weapons given to you which are meant to be used, when necessary, to maintain peace. From today onwards till the elections are over, you will be held responsible if any untoward incident takes place. I am giving you full freedom. If you fail to perform your duties and shirk your responsibilities, the government will take the matter as very serious!” When Urs thundered thus, the whole election scenario changed. The chief

Police Officer of Chikkamagalur District, Sangliana, woke up, and the whole police force under him performed its duties with consummate efficiency and ensured that peace was maintained during the period leading up to the election. The Chikkamagalur by-election of 1978 was over. Devaraja Urs ensured that Indira Gandhi won with a thumping majority of 77,313 votes and she was made to enter the Lok Sabha again.

### **Misfortunes Begin**

After a thumping victory of Indira Gandhi in the Chikkamagalur by-election days of misfortunes seem to have begun for Devaraja Urs. In the Congress party there were many who were jealous of Devaraja Urs's popularity, and they were always intriguing against him. People like Gundu Rao, F.M. Khan, Jaffer Sheriff and others who were close to Sanjay Gandhi during the Emergency were trying to turn him against Urs. After the victory of the Chikkamagalur election, Urs had become of the focus of national attention and some newspapers had praised him sky-high.

A Swamiji near Arsikere in Hassan district, who was known to read some arcane palm-leaf document and forecast the future, seemed to have foretold, "Urs is destined to be the Prime Minister of India!" This had gained considerable publicity. That Gundu Rao, who was a member of the Urs cabinet, had confided with some of his close friends in the press that Devaraja Urs was not giving enough respect to Sanjay Gandhi had received wide publicity too. After the victory in the Chikkamagalur election, Urs was felicitated in various states. In January 1979 the Gujarat Kshatriya Samaj organised a function to honour Urs and in the Felicitations Address they not only waxed eloquent over the sterling qualities of a great Kshatriya of South India but also conferred on him the title of "Prithvi Vallabha". All these things were working at increasing Indira Gandhi's intolerance of Urs.

In January 1979 in the All India Conference of the Indira Congress Urs made a speech that the Party should divest itself of

the infamy that it is full of bondsmen attached to a dynastic rule. It was as if he was openly critical of the bumptious ways in which Sanjay Gandhi running the party. This naturally upset Sanjay Gandhi, who considered himself the true heir to the political dynasty. He now began to talk openly about destroying the political career of Urs. Some members of Urs's cabinet too conspired to do it. Thus Urs emerges as a tragic hero in Indian politics.

In May 1979 there was big news about growing imperfect sympathies between Indira Gandhi and Urs. Indira Gandhi was using such people as Gundu Rao, C.K. Jaffer Sheriff, F.M. Khan and others to pull down the image and position of Urs. At that point Urs was both the Chief Minister and the President of the Congress Party in Karnataka. Indira Gandhi suggested that Urs could give up the position of the party president. Urs was then ill and was being treated for herpes. He told her, "I am unwell now. I will meet you as soon as my treatment is over. Let us talk about it." But Indira Gandhi did not agree, and on 20 June, 1979 she relieved Urs of his position as the President of the Congress in Karnataka.

However, what shocked Urs most was the attitude of S. Bangarappa. He was with Urs until the previous night and was promising to be with him, but accepted the post of the Congress president the next morning!

Indira Gandhi had appointed S. Bangarappa as the Congress President in Karnataka. Many of the legislators belonging to the backward classes, who had been steadfastly with Urs all these days, began to desert him one by one. Veerappa Moily, Dharam Singh, Mallikarjuna Kharge, Venkataramana P., Smt. Renuka Rajendra, K. Venkatappa, B. Ramaiah, Y. Ramakrishna, now distanced themselves from Urs. In the Vidhana Sabha a separate bloc of Indira Congress was formed. Over 40 legislators left the Urs party and joined the Indira Congress. In this changed scenario Urs got the support of some 25 leaders from the Janata Party, including J.H. Patel, Jeevaraj Alva, Prameela Nesargi and others.

That prevented the fall of the Urs government. All the legislators of the undivided Dakshina Kannada stayed with Urs, except Veerappa Moily.

For some of us, it was a painful dilemma. When Indira Gandhi came to Bangalore a few days before, she had invited Ramesh Kumar and me to her guest house and had requested us to join her. We had assured her of our support. When our meeting with Indira Gandhi became news, Urs called both of us and asked, “Are you deserting me too?” We stood dumb. Urs was everything to us. We could not bear to forsake him. We stayed with him.

This rift could have been averted. If senior ministers like Subbaiah Shetty and others had made up their mind the seeds of suspicion between Indira Gandhi and Urs could have been nipped in the bud. Or Urs could have been persuaded to stay in the Congress. Those who could have done it did not do it. Urs had a foster daughter. She was an IPS officer. She had a fair share in dragging him to a wrong path.

In one sense Devaja’s overweening pride and over-confidence must have driven him down this path. Possibly some central leaders too must have instilled in him hopes of national leadership.

In this connection, I am reminded of an incident. The process of the Rajya Sabha election was on in 1978. The list of the candidates from Karnataka was prepared and I was sent to Indira Gandhi in Delhi to secure her approval. I took the list to the Willingdon Annexe where Indira Gandhi’s house was located. As I was waiting for her in the main hall, she came with a cup of coffee and offered it me and sat by my side. As we were discussing many things, she stopped and asked me, “Why is your friend Urs doing this? What have I done to him?”

I asked her, “What has he done, madam?”

She said, “Why is he seen so often with Rajni Patel?”

She said nothing more.

You know why Indira Gandhi said such things to me? Not certainly because she considered me as having a big clout. She

was only using me as messenger. She knew that I would go back and convey the matter to Urs. In fact, as soon as I went back to Bangalore, I told Urs about it. In response, he said, “My God! This lady doubts too much I say! Why should she do it? I have kept nothing for myself. I have pawned the whole state, called her here and made her win the election. Will I betray her?”

Those words which Urs spoke then keep ringing in my ears even now. The main role in creating a break between Indira Gandhi and Urs was played by Jaffer Sheriff, Gundu Rao, F.M. Khan and Bangarappa.

If Subbaiah Shetty and Ranganath and some others had made up their mind, this rift could have been averted. I and some others had argued, “We had all done things in the name of Indira Gandhi. All the developmental activities were, no doubt, yours. But people know only Indira Gandhi’s name!” But our argument cut no ice with the senior leaders. Their failure to counsel Urs rightly led to the schism in the party.

The Janata Party which had come to power found itself in crisis owing to its own internecine struggles. The party which was formed by a coalition of Congress (O), Jan Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal, and Samajawadi Party imploded by the many mistakes it had made. On July 15, 1979 Morarji Desai resigned as the Prime Minister when he found that he enjoyed no majority in the Parliament. Choudhuri Charan Singh became the Prime Minister. When he too failed to prove his majority in the Lok Sabha, he reigned on July 26. The Janata Government at the Centre fell, and it became a prelude to the political reincarnation of Indira Gandhi. Devaraja Urs thought he would get the full support of the Janata Party both at the state and national levels. But his calculations all went awry. In the midst of it, the mid-term election to the Lok Sabha was declared.

## **Urs Resigns**

When the Janata Government fell at the Centre, a mid-term

election was announced for the LoK Sabha in 1980. The Chief Minister Devaraja Urs put up his candidates in all the 27 constituencies of the state. As per his direction I became the candidate for the Mangalore constituency. Although all the legislators of the district except Veerappa Moily were with Urs, the situation was not quite favourable to us. In the Udupi constituency Oscar Fernandez was contesting against T.A. Pai of the Urs Congress and making his political debut.

The popular mood was such that when I went to file my nomination papers to the Lok Sabha elections some hoodlums had stoned us at the Light House Hill. I had received some minor injuries too.

When the election results were being announced Devaraja Urs who till then had been optimistic, seemed to have been sorely disappointed. Barring P.M. Syeed from Lakshadweep, none of the candidates of the Urs Congress won. As the Lok Sabha election results were coming out, Urs and B. Subbaiah Shetty were reportedly in a hotel. As the news of the defeat of their candidates kept coming out Urs seemed to have fallen into silence. When the defeat of Nataraj, his son-in-law, was announced, Urs is said to have sighed and said, “Has Nataraj lost too?” Winning 374 seats in the Lok Sabha, Indira Gandhi came back to power with a resounding majority and became Prime Minister once again.

Depressed at the election results, Urs’s political life suffered an eclipse. There was increasing pressure on him to resign. On January 6, 1980 he resigned as the Chief Minister. The legislators, however, were not keen on facing the mid-term elections. So most of them began identify themselves with the Bangarappa of the Indira Congress. However, the expectation that Bangarappa, who was the leader of the state unit of the Indira Congress in the triumphant election, would be the next Chief Minister was belied. That position was grabbed by R. Gundu Rao, who was very close to Sanjay Gandhi.

With 40 legislators who were still with him, Devaraja Urs sat

as the Leader of the Opposition. D.B. Chandre Gowda headed the Urs Congress.

The government of R. Gundu Rao went about in unbridled ways. In June 1980 by using the peasant revolt at Navalagund to his advantage Urs once again hoped to re-emerge as a political force against Indira Gandhi. But at that time an unexpected tragedy overtook him. His dear daughter, Nagaratna slipped and fell into a well in her farmhouse. Nagaratna was the wife of Dr. M.D. Nataraj. After the shock of this tragedy, Urs remained mute for many days.

People were frustrated with the rule of R. Gundu Rao. The differences between him and Bangarappa had moved to a crescendo. The state was witnessing unrest in the form of peasant movements and Gokak Movement. There was a feeling that the state was now ready for an alternate political platform. Realising this, Devaraja Urs established a political party called 'Kranti Ranga'. It was becoming a focus of popular appeal. National leaders like George Fernandez and Chandrashekhar announced their support to it. A new hope was raised in the political life of Urs as a favourable breeze was wafting towards him. The backward castes were now realising that they had done a big mistake by not supporting him. However, in this transitional phase, Devaraja Urs died suddenly, on June 6, 1982. He died of a heart attack when he was with a friend of his brother at Jayanagar in Bangalore.

### **My Days of Political Setback**

After the death of Devaraja Urs, I and all my fellow legislators in the district, chose not to join the 'Kranti Ranga' which Urs had established, but returned to the Indira Congress. Gundu Rao was the Chief Minister. I was a legislator till 1983. During my tenure I had worked hard for the development of my Buntwal constituency, and done considerable work for the party.

In 1983 elections were announced for the Vidhana Sabha. I asked for the party ticket in the same constituency. But, for having

defeated a strong candidate like Rukmayya Poojary in the previous election and worked so hard for the constituency, Janardhana Poojary did not allow the party to give me the ticket again. And yet, I worked hard for the party during the election. But when the election results were announced, the Congress had, for the first time, suffered humiliating defeat. Not only did the Congress lose in nine constituencies of the district like Sullia, Puttur, Vitla, Belthangady, Buntwal, Mangalore, Ullal, Suratkal and Moodabidre, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won six seats and created a record. Bakila Hukrappa from Sullia, Rama Bhat from Puttur, Rukmayya Poojary from Vitla, Vasantha Bangera from Belthangady, Shiva Rao from Buntwal and Dananjaya Kumar from Mangalore won the seats for the BJP. The others who won were Ramachandra Rao of CPM from Ullal, Lokaiah Shetty of Kranti Ranga from Suratkal and Amaranatha Shetty of Janata Party from Moodabidre.

Losing the election badly in the district, the Congress suffered humiliating loss in the state too, and with the result, the Janata Party formed the government with support from the BJP. If 18 legislators were elected from the BJP, the Janata Party had 95, the Congress 82 and the other parties 29. Ramakrishna Hegde became the first non-Congress Chief Minister in the history of Karnataka. His government lasted from 1983 to 1985.

The government, run with the support of the BJP, its Chief Minister began to experience trouble from the BJP itself. He was made to feel that his government was indebted to the BJP. In the meantime, the Lok Sabha elections were held in 1984. In that election, the Congress won 24 of the 28 seats, while the Janata Party, which was in power in Karnataka, won only 4. Taking the moral responsibility for the defeat, Ramakrishna Hegde recommended dissolution of the Assembly and holding fresh elections. Politically it was a daring decision. This resulted in the mid-term poll for the Karnataka Assembly in 1985. In this election too Janardhana Poojary prevented me from getting the election ticket on behalf of the Congress. Instead a few new faces were

introduced, like Ramanatha Rai from Buntwal, B.A. Umarabba from Vitla, Vinayakumar Sorake from Puttur, N.M. Adyanthaya from Suratkal who contested the election. When the election results were announced, the Janata Party had won a resounding victory and it came to power. If the Janata Party won 139 seats, the Congress managed only 65. Interestingly, the BJP which had won 18 seats in 1983 retained only 2 of them. CPI had won 3, CPM 3 and the Independents 13. The Congress was revived in the district. Kushala from Sullia, Vinayakumar Sorake, B.A. Umarabba from Vitla, B. Ramanatha Rai from Buntwal, Blasius D'Souza from Mangalore, B.M. Idinabba from Ullal, and N.M. Adyanthaya from Suratkal were elected from the Congress. If Amaranath Shetty of the Janata Party was elected from Moodabidre, Vasantha Bangera of Belthangady was re-elected from the BJP. With this election one phase of my political life came to an end. I withdrew from the political scene.

### **Why did these Three do this to Me?**

At this stage the people who ended my political career were three: Janardhana Poojary, Oscar Fernandez and Veerappa Moily. I am still thinking as to why they wronged me. At no stage I gave them any trouble. I had helped them wherever possible. But whenever I think of the magnitude of wrong they had done to me, I feel pained. I was in active politics from 1969 onwards. I was the state secretary of the Youth Congress, the main Secretary of the KPCC and I had actively collaborated with Devaraja Urs in implementing Indira Gandhi's 20-Point Programme.

I had fought on behalf of those who suffered injustice in the Kalladka Ismail murder case and in the Semitha murder case. I had worked relentlessly for the tenants, and I was with the Congress continually till 1977. But what was this Janardhana Poojary? He was an advocate, an advocate in Buntwal. He was a junior to the famous advocate Yusuf Haider. Yusuf Haider had argued for the tenants in the Semitha murder case. In fact, when Sadananda

Poonja was trying to get the right evidence in favour of the tenants, this Janardhana Poojary had asked him, “Why do you take all this unnecessary trouble? By fighting for these tenants and the poor, why do you invite trouble for yourself?”

This man Janardhana Poojary entered politics thanks to Veerappa Moily’s favour. Veerappa Moily had some grouse against the then member of the Lok Sabha, K.K. Shetty, and he was waiting for his opportunity. When the 1977 elections were announced, K.K. Shetty had casually said that he was not interested in contesting that election. Veerappa Moily immediately grabbed at that statement and contacted T.A. Pai, who was then a very influential Congress politician at the national level. Devaraja Urs too had great respect for T.A. Pai.

Veerappa Moily started buttonholing T.A. Pai. “Sir, in your Udupi constituency a sizeable number of voters are Billavas. You need their votes to win. If you have to win over them you need to have a Billava candidate belonging to the Backward Caste for Mangalore constituency.” T.A. Pai must have been convinced of that line of the argument. Besides, K.K. Shetty had expressed his unwillingness to contest the election. So he said, “All right! Find a good Billava candidate!” This certainly helped Moily to elbow out K.K. Shetty. So he was on a look out for a Billava candidate. His choice fell on this Poojary. At that time he was not Janardhana Poojary; he was just ‘Janardhana’. The suffix ‘Poojary’ was added later at the instance of Veerappa Moily. When Jardhana Poojary was contacted for this purpose, he was hesitant. He knew nothing of politics. But Moily blew confidence in him. He was asked to put on a Khadi dress and was taken before T.A. Pai. After introducing him with due flattery, T.A. Pai was persuaded to accept Poojary as the candidate. T.A. Pai and Veerappa Moily, in turn, went to Devaraja Urs and convinced him to accept the candidature of Poojary. Thus a person, who was not even a primary member of the Party, became the candidate of the Congress for the Mangalore Lok Sabha constituency. Thus Janardhana Poojary,

whom none knew, entered the election fray. I still remember the headlines that appeared in one of the English dailies: Who is this Janardhana Poojary?

But he won the election. But he won it not because of his name but because of the name of Indira Gandhi. How then Indira Gandhi's name had become so popular in the district? The man responsible was Devaraja Urs. But who implemented all his programmes in the district? We did. That could me, Subbaiah Shetty, or K.K. Shetty. Janardhana Poojary became the Member of the Lok Sabha at the sweat of our brow. But once he won, he forgot all of us. He held the whole politics of the district within his iron grip. He did it to such an extent that if there was an election to the Grama Panchayat, he should decide on the candidate there. Who should get the ticket in a corporation election, he should decide. Who should become the Mayor, Poojary would tell. Who should become the legislator, should be the decision of Poojary alone! Thus he created a condition, all for his own selfish ends. We all toiled, but he sat on the throne and crushed us all.

This man Janardhana Poojary was so conceited and he insulted me so much that when I was trying to get the Party ticket for the Buntwal constituency in the 1985 election, he did not even allow me to see him. I tried to contact him by phone, but he did not even show the courtesy to talk to me. Oscar Fernandez asked me to contact Poojary, but I could not because Poojary did not have the courtesy to meet me. Then after the candidature of Ramanatha Rai was decided on, I rang him up again. But this time he did speak! What he said then is still ringing in my ears. He said, as if he was slapping on my face: "Pole, Pole, fieldedu kelasa malpule! Bokka poora tooka!" ("Go! Go! Go and work in the field! The rest we shall see later!")

Oscar Fernandez was one of the young men whom I accorded recognition. South Kanara Youth Congress had a president by name Harischandra Bengre. He was chosen by B. Subbaiah Shetty. Harischandra Bengre's secretary was Oscar Fernandez. I was

planning to promote him in politics. That is why for the sake of party organisation, I decided to divide the district of Dakshina Kannada into Urban and Rural, recognised Udupi as Rural and made Oscar Fernandez as its president. Some people had objected to this arrangement; but I gave them a convincing explanation. The Dakshina Kannada district is very big, stretching from Mangalore to Byndoor, and unless it is divided, the party organisation would be difficult. I had promotion of Oscar Fernandez in mind when this reorganisation was proposed and effected. Subbaiah Shetty did not like it, though. During the 1980 Lok Sabha elections there was a proposal that the Congress should give representation to the youth, and hence it was decided to give ticket to Oscar Fernandez in the Udupi Lok Sabha constituency. He contested the election against T.A. Pai and won a resounding victory.

In 1985 Vidhana Sabha elections when I was trying for a Congress ticket from Buntwal constituency, my friend and a former legislator Shuntikoppa Ibrahim, gave me great support. Ibrahim was very close to Gundu Rao. He took me to Gundu Rao, who told me that I had done a good job as a legislator and had remained close to Devaraja Urs. In the distribution of Congress tickets, those Congressmen who had won in their respective constituencies have been given tickets. It is not fair that you are denied your ticket. But do not linger on here. Go to Delhi and try your chance there. That was the suggestion of Gundu Rao. The only person who could have helped me in Delhi was Oscar Fernandez. I thought he would at least remember the help I had done to him and would now help me in return. But my hopes were belied.

I was hard up on money. So much so I did not even have money to go to Delhi. I somehow managed to find some money and went to Delhi. I met Oscar Fernandez and asked him to help me to get the Congress ticket. But Oscar expressed his helplessness. He threw up his hands saying, "There is great pressure on me from Janardhana Poojary and Veerappa Moily. I can do nothing!" I told him, "The Buntwal Vidhana Sabha constituency

comes under the Udupi Lok Sabha constituency. You are the one to decide who should get the ticket there. You are now in good position at the Centre. You can certainly help me. If you don't, it would be like casting me to the political dustbin!" And yet, Oscar Fernandez did not help me.

"You are now no ordinary politician. You are the principal secretary to the Prime Minister. The future of many politicians in this country is in your hands. None should feel wronged at your hands. I have worked hard in your election. I have secured considerable lead for you in the Buntwal constituency. It is not fair to deny ticket to me just because I stood by Urs. In many other districts those who were Urs and returned to the fold of the Party have been given tickets." I said all these things to convince him. But Oscar Fernandez would not budge an inch.

It is yet a riddle to me as to why Veerappa Moily came in the way of my political life. I had not given him trouble at any time. I had a good relationship with him all through. Although it was bruited about that he had a hand in effecting a rift between Devaraja Urs and Indira Gandhi, I had not mentioned it anywhere. And yet, it remains a puzzle to me as to why Moily wronged me at all. I was pulled down because I was with Devaraja Urs. In none of the districts of the state it happened to people who were once with Urs but returned to the Party later on. Mallikarajuna Kharge was once an associate of Urs. But in Dakshina Kannada whoever were with Urs once were politically destroyed. Kaup Bhaskar Shetty, Damodara Mulki, B. Subbaiah Shetty, Anandakunda Hegde and A.J. Kodgi, who had done so much for the Party and the one who had voluntarily surrendered his land to the tenants in the wake of the Land Reforms, were all politically crushed. Oscar Fernandez could have done to give justice us. But he seemed to live in fear of Poojary and Moily. Ananda Kunda Hegde used to speak good Kannada. He had given a name to each of these three: one was Keechaka, (the strong but lusty brother-in-law of King Virata, who met his end at the hands of Bhima), another was *naya vanchanka*

(a sweet-tongued cheat), and the third one, *maayaavi* (a sorcerer or a trickster). He used to say that this triad would not allow us to come up in politics. That is how it turned out to be.

Now I am only recounting what all happened to me; nothing more. Right now I do not nurse any anger or hatred against any of these three. These are all things that do happen in politics. None should be blamed for them, nor is it fair to blame anybody. Janardhana Poojary has grown old now, as I have. He has his illness to contend with. After a series of political setback, with all the beatings he has received from inexorable Fate, he is shaken and pained, as he has from many trivial incidents in life. I pray God to give him good health and peace of mind. Oscar Fernandez still treats me with respect and shows all the courtesies. Recently, he has honoured me too. He still has a future in politics. I wish him well. Veerappa Moily is yet in active politics and he has gained recognition as a national-level leader. He talks to me affectionately whenever he meets me.

I remember a more recent incident. Some of us had gone to Delhi to present a memorandum regarding Haj. The group had the Suratkal legislator Mohi-ud-din Bava too. When Veerappa Moily saw us, he turned towards Mohi-ud-din Bava and said, “Whatever work you are here for, I will not do it. That is because people of Dakshina Kannada have betrayed me!” There was a reason why he said it. He had not been given a ticket to contest from Dakshina Kannada. He had contested from Chikkaballapur and won. He had spoken those words with a sense of indignation.

Then I replied in a somewhat raised voice: “Moily Sir! Chikkaballapur might have revived your political life. But you were given your political life by Dakshina Kannada. If the people of Dakshina Kannada had decided not to give you a ticket to contest, it was for your own good. It turned out to be good for you. You contested at Chikkaballapur and won. If you had contested from Dakshina Kannada you would not have won. In fact, you should be grateful to the people of Dakshina Kannada. It is not right that

you spoke in the manner you did!” I said it in an emphatic tone.

A change came upon him. He asked us to sit down He took the memorandum from us. He had kept quiet because he honoured my words. What I said was true. If he had contested the election from Dakshina Kannada, he would have certainly lost.

I wish Moily well too. What I have recounted here are some of the events and incidents of history. Nobody should read more into them. They should be seen as normal happenings in politics.

### **My Political Revival**

When in 1985 I was denied ticket to contest election from Buntwal, I was left without any position or work and I was forced live a life of a mere householder. I did not have money enough even to meet my daily expenses. Janardhana Poojary and Oscar Fernandez were solely responsible for my predicament.

On February 6, 1986 Pope John Paul II had visited Bajpe in Mangalore. This was his first visit to India. At that time there was a coalition government of Janata and BJP parties in Karnataka. Ramakrishna Hegde was the Chief Minister. When the Pope was making this historic visit, some organisation had announced its opposition against it and planned a protest too. At that time, even though I had no power or position, I had contacted the concerned people, explained to them the significance of the visit and won them over to see that no untoward incident took place during the Pope’s visit. His visit had created a history in Bajpe. More than half a million people had gone to Bajpe to welcome the Pope. On behalf of the Karnataka Government, the Home Minister Rachaiah was there too. I had known him well. He learnt all about me and instilled confidence in me.

After 1985 I had mentally distanced myself from the Congress. But I was restless. However, I had to maintain my own honour and identity. In 1987 V.P. Singh was the Defence Minister at the Centre. Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister. V. P. Singh opposed some of the corruptions of the Rajiv Gandhi government, resigned

from the government, left the Congress and started a separate party called “Jan Morcha”. I was impressed with the policies and programmes of V.P. Singh, and in 1987 I joined Jan Morcha. In 1989 there was an amalgamation of Janata Party, Jan Morcha and Lok Dal to constitute a new party called “Janata Dal”. Its election symbol was Wheel. Thus I ended up in Janata Dal.

At that time if anybody helped me to revive my political career, it was Ramakrishna Hegde. I cannot forget him, and I will ever remain grateful to him. When I was sitting at home, without power or position, I was called by Ramakrishna Hegde. At that time Jeevaraja Alva too was with him. He asked all about my affairs. Perhaps Rachaiah must have reported to him about the events connected with the Pope’s visit of Mangalore.

“Please come to active politics. We need a Muslim leader like you in our party!” he said. Not only that, he made me the secretary of the State Janata Dal. When some persons expressed displeasure at his decision, he convinced them by saying, “Look! B.A. Mohideen has come from Jan Morcha. That segment has to be given a representation.” He handed over the responsibility of managing the office of the Janata Dal to me. I worked there honestly. I was to look after all the matters pertaining to the party correspondence, supervision of party elections, local elections and distribution of party tickets. When in 1990 there was a vacancy in the Vidhana Parishat, Ramakrishna Hegde gave it to me. I thus became a member of the Vidhana Parishat.

May be Ramakrishna Hegde was aware of the financial difficulties I was in. Twice or thrice when he came to the office of Janata Dal, he had given me money. Normally politicians do not give money thus. Once I told Jeevaraja Alva about it. He then told me, “That is the way Ramakrishna Hegde is! He knows that you are in dire financial straits. That is why he is giving you money!”

In 1994 Janata Dal won the majority and came to power again, with H.D. Deve Gowda as the Chief Minister. At that time I was appointed as the Chief Whip of the Party. In 1996 when

Deve Gowda became the Prime Minister, J.H. Patel took over as the Chief Minister. He personally chose me as the Member of his Cabinet and I was given the portfolio of Small Industries. Besides, I was made the Minister in charge of the District of Dakshina Kannada. In 1997 I was made the Minister of Higher Education.

In 1996 my tenure of membership in Vidhana Parishat was coming to an end and it needed to be renewed. At that time C.M. Ibrahim made some attempt to prevent it. When Ramesh Kumar and M.C. Nanaiah learnt about it, they gave C.M. Ibrahim a good dressing down. My membership of the Vidhana Parishat was renewed for another six years, till 2002. Thus I got a second chance in politics to serve my people. During these tenures I had worked without being constrained by party or caste or religion. I have considerable satisfaction of the service I had rendered as a Member of the Vidhana Parishat in 1990, as the Party Whip in 1994-95, as Cabinet Minister and the Minister in charge of Dakshina Kannada district between 1995 and 1999, and again as the Member of the Vidhana Parishat from 1996 to 2002. I had forgotten all about the unsavoury events and wrongs done to me before and I had taken the new opportunities as an occasion for honest service to the people. I had never sought any publicity for me or my work and I had always worked less in my interest than in the interest of society and community at large. I do not remember all the work I had done during this period, but I will try to recollect some of them.

### **Extension of the Mangalore Corporation**

In the Suratkal area a meeting was arranged by Sitarama Aithala, P.M.A. Razak and others to discuss the development of the place. The Minister Deshpande, I and some others had secured of Rs one thousand crore for the development of the Karnataka coastal region under ADB Grant scheme and got it passed in the Cabinet. The Grant was actually a loan. It was passed in the Cabinet to enable the development of the coastal towns from Mangalore

to Karwar. The scheme, when it came, would help in improving the road, street-lights, drinking water supply, sewage, etc. If any area was under the Panchayat, the scheme would not apply. Hence I proposed a plan to extend the Mangalore City Corporation up to Mukka, including Krishnapura-Katipalla. But some local people who did not know a thing about the scheme raised a big hue and cry, opposing the incorporation of their areas into the City Corporation. A protest meeting was organised in which nearly ten thousand people participated. They wanted a status quo on the municipalities and panchayats. They had spread such misinformation that if these areas were brought under the Mangalore City Corporation, people had to pay a ten-fold increase in house-tax, water-tax, etc. That is why they were demanding status quo. When I explained everything, they were not in a frame of mind to understand what I said. I did not give them any major promise. I merely said, “You give me your letter of request. I will look into the matter, and take a decision as to what is good for you.”

In the days ahead I took the decision to extend the jurisdiction of Mangalore City Corporation to Suratkal, Katipalla, Krishnapura and up to Mukka. Some people, including the legislator of Suratkal, Kumble Sundara Rao, did oppose the decision for political reasons. But I ignored them. Today, because of the decision I had taken, a lot of developmental activities have taken place in Suratkal and Mukka, including Katiapall and Krishnapura. The Suratkal area is one of the most developed areas of Mangalore City Corporation. It is one of the more important pro-people activities I did when I was a Minister. The local people realised it later and lauded me.

### **Extending the ADB Scheme to Ullal**

Later I extended the ADB scheme to Ullal too. Ullal is a famous place of pilgrimage. A very famous Sayyid Madani Darga is located there, and every day thousands of pilgrims go there. Giving this reason and getting a special permission, I secured the extension of the ADB scheme to Ullal. This helped Ullal in getting

better infrastructural facilities. I did these things not for any personal publicity or for gaining more votes. These things I did what I ought to have done as a Minister and as the one in charge of the district, which I did with sincerity and commitment.

### **Distribution of Title-Deeds**

In areas like Kunjattabail, Kavoor, Panjimogaru and other places which were under Mangalore City Corporation many poor people had built their houses and settled down in government lands. There were hundreds of such houses, and none had their title-deeds, and the poor were put to severe inconveniences. The local representatives of the people were not responsive to the needs of the poor. When the officials were contacted they would simply say that since the places came under the jurisdiction of the City Corporation, people could not be given their title-deeds. They would say that the matter had to be decided by the government and get the approval in Bangalore and so on. Then I went to the officers and asked them, “Look, there is a scheme under which the Corporation could sanction, under its jurisdiction, three cents of land as house-sites. I am right?” They said, yes. Then I directed them to sanction the poor a house site each of three cents, and within a few days this was done and eight thousands such beneficiaries received their title-deeds. I distributed them by stages. All the title-deeds I gave in the name of women. For, if they had been given to men, there were chances that they would sell off the land. Since the poor got the title-deeds of their lands, they were able to get loans to build good houses for themselves.

The function to distribute the title-deeds was a memorable one in my life. The sense of happiness that the poor women showed when they received the title-deeds, the overwhelming emotion which made them touch my feet, or my forbidding it, and, in return, patting their backs, or the sense of gratitude which their eyes expressed, are something which I can never forget in my life.

The person who took an active part in getting the title-deeds

in the Kunjattabail area was one of my own close associates, Muhammad Kunjattabail. He had contested from Janata Dal for the City Corporation, and people had elected him with resounding majority. He has been winning regularly as a member of the Corporation and in 2018 has been elected the Deputy Mayor.

### **The Pattrame Bridge**

Recently I met Vasantha Bangera, the legislator from Belthangady. “You should come to Belthangady”, he said. I asked him why. He said, “When you were the Minister, you had sanctioned a bridge at a huge cost and had it constructed at Pattrame, which is under my constituency. Because of that the area has seen considerable improvement. You should come there and see it. I want to get the bridge inaugurated again at your hands!” I said, “O, I know. But that is an old story. If you are all happy about it, I am happy for you too!” In fact, I had forgotten many such things I had done.

### **The Tumbe Dam**

When I was the Minister, we had spent 40 crores of rupees under the ADB scheme on the Tumbe dam which is now supplying water to the city of Mangalore. We had raised the height of the dam. It had helped in better supply of water to the city. This is one of the things I did for the district.

### **Development of Sullia and Belthangady Taluks**

I had paid much attention to the development of Sullia Taluk. During the tenure of my office, I had helped in improving many roads there. Considering Sullia and Belthangady taluks as backward taluks, I had secured sanctions for many development activities there.

### **Paying Subsidies to Small Industries**

When I was the Minister of Small Industries, there were many

sick units of industries. I had travelled through the length and breadth of the state to revive these units. There were any problems and there was much corruption. I solved them all.

I was asked a question in the Assembly. There was an unpaid subsidy of hundreds of crores of rupees. This had placed serious handicap of small industries. How fair it is to keep the subsidies unpaid for 3-4 years, was the question posed. Replying to the question, I said that I would pay off the unpaid subsidies in three months.

H.K. Patil was the Leader of the Opposition at that time. He said, “How do you pay that big sum in three months? Do not be flippant in your reply. You will not be able to do it. You will again be the target of our criticism. Don’t be. Tell us only what you can actually do.” “Watch it. I will do it!” I told him.

The very next day I prepared a proposal. It showed that even if 50-55 crores of rupees very released annually, paying the unpaid subsidy of over 250 crores would take five years. That wouldn’t do. Let us raise bonds, I suggested. Let K.S.F.C. release bonds. That would realise for us 250 crores of rupees. We would repay the bonds annually as we get the subsidy. But this needed the approval of the government.

Although the finance department hesitated to accept my proposal, the Chief Minister, J.H. Patel supported it. I made arrangements to release the bonds. We realised 250 crores of rupees and paid all the unpaid subsidies to the small industries.

A lot of documents were needed if subsidies had to be released to the small industries. Earlier they would get it released by stages by paying bribes. But I used the computer technology for the first time to implement the principle of ‘first come, first served’, and saw to it all the subsidies were promptly paid to all those who were entitled to them. Without anybody’s help or influence, the claimants got their subsidies. The owners of small industries were very happy. Even now they express their appreciation whenever they meet me.

Transparency in administration is not a matter of announcement in speeches. It should be demonstrated in practice. I was the Minister of Small Industries for only one year. But I have the satisfaction of doing the work of ten years. I had cleared all the unpaid subsidies of the small industries in the state.

### **Establishment of GTTC's**

Another important work I did was the setting up of GTTC's (Government Tool Room Training Centre). Most people do not know what these GTTC is. If a person was trained in this centre, he could get in any country abroad a monthly salary of 2-3 lakhs. They are called dye-makers. It is a specialised job. If a new model of a car is to be made and released, they need a dye-maker. They are in great demand in industries. GTTC produced such experts. It has reservation for different castes and for the minorities. A unit of GTTC is functioning in the Baikampady Industrial Area near Managalore.

### **Skill-Training Programmes**

What the government of Narendra Modi is doing now in launching schemes to impart skills to young persons, I did them long back.

I had a scheme to train the cobblers to enhance their skill. I believed that the cobblers and blacksmiths need not necessarily belong to any particular caste. People of any caste or religion could gain the skill in these matters and I had instituted schemes to train them.

### **Encouragement to Bidri Work**

Bidri work is a very fine, skilful craft. Mostly poor Muslims are engaged in it. Its products are in great demand all over the world. But its craftsmen were sorely handicapped as they had no opportunities for training, no facilities in life and no organised market for their products. Taking note of them, I did my best to give all

the facilities possible. I opened a marketing centre for their products in Dubai.

In recognition of my services as the Minister of Small Industries, the Chief Minister J.H. Patel made me the Minister of Higher Education.

### **Higher Pay Scales for the Professors**

The main challenge which I faced as the Minister of Higher Education was how to raise the standard of higher education in the state. As I was engaged in dealing with this question, the issue of giving the new UGC scales to University teachers came up. The UGC would give its share of 180 crores of rupees while the state government would give 20 crores.

When I said “Yes, I will pay the UGC scales,” the finance department of the government opposed it. The present (now, ex-) Chief Minister Siddaramaiah was then the Finance Minister. Why should these teachers be given such a high pay, was the question posed by the finance department. “We are not giving it. The UGC gives it. Why should we rack our brains over it?” I asked. “No, we have to give the full salary in future also” was their reply.

Yes, we should give. We have to give because they work day in and day out. They do not have any bribes to take either. In fact, they alone can improve the standard of education, I argued.

The honourable Chief Minister, J.H. Patel, called a special meeting to discuss the issue. After a long debate, the Chief Minister agreed to give the UGC scales to the college teachers. We all were very happy. I gave a press release immediately announcing the decision.

The decision was very important. Tell me, what is the salary a college teacher is getting now? Ask him and find out. This has certainly raised the social and economic status of the teacher and the society is getting a better quality of higher education.

Here too I had done my work transparently. When the debate

was on as to whether the UGC scales should be given or not, the office-bearers of the College Teachers' Union had come and met me. They were talking in such a tone that they were willing to give a hefty sum of money, to the tune of two crores of rupees even, if the UGC scales were implemented. I gave no scope for such discussion.

One day when I was sitting at home a professor came to me, along with his family. He was carrying a big garland. He garlanded me with great affection and offered me a plate full of fruits. When I asked him as to why he was being so nice to me, he said, "Sir, because you had given us the UGC scales, I got the arrears of salary in one lump sum of Rs 5 lakhs. I had a daughter of marriageable age; I could not marry her off because I was hamstrung for money. Now with the salary arrears of Rs 5 lakhs, I was able to celebrate her marriage." As the professor was saying this, his eyes and those of his wife were wet.

### **Permission to Medical Colleges**

Three educational institutions from Mangalore had sought permission to start medical colleges. I had recommended all the three. When the government's decision was published, only two - Yenapoya Medical College and K.S. Hegde Medical College - had got the permission. Father Muller's Hospital had not got the permission to start the medical college. When I learnt about it, I asked Mr. Ivan D'Souza, who is at present the Party Whip in the legislature, to meet me and took him to the chamber of the Chief Minister. I argued that Father Muller's Medical College also deserves permission because it is run by minority Christians and the institution has a history of a hundred years. I also argued that when two other institutions get the permission and this one is denied, it could be construed as a case of injustice. The Chief Minister gave me a patient hearing and at the end merely said, "Let me see". The next day when a new list of the medical colleges approved was published in the newspapers, it contained the name of Father

Muller's too. Thus one district getting three medical colleges at the same time was a record of a rare kind.

### **Coming in the Way of Power Production**

I was planning a project under KPTCL. The Austrian government was offering 100% loan on it. Availing of it, I proposed to have a power production plant at Sarapady in the Buntwal constituency. It would have resulted in the production of 50 megawatts of power and would have provided irrigation to thousands of acres of agricultural lands. But when I came up with that proposal, the legislator of that constituency disapproved it. Listening to petty objections of some vested interests that it would involve inundation of a few fields and areca plantations he stopped a good project for his constituency.

There was also a rumour circulated that the implementation of the project would result in the inundation of temples, mosques and dargahs. I called a meeting and explained to the people that “before I was a legislator to represent their constituency, they did not have any power connection at all. I had secured for them the power connection. Using it, you set up pump sets, developed your areca gardens well, and you are getting good crops now. You have developed your areca gardens on government lands, and yet I promise a good compensation for you from the government. Do not come in the way of a good project like this.” Perhaps people would have come round to accepting it. But the legislator merely said, “If people do not want the project, I do not need it either,” and kept quiet! I too gave up the proposal.

You know what has happened there now? The MRPL has built a dam. But the local people are not getting their share of water. Water goes to benefit the MRPL and ONGC. People get nothing. Then I did another thing. On the one side MRPL was getting the water from the Sarapady dam and on the other, a supply from the Mangalore City Corporation too. I brought this to the notice of the authorities concerned and stopped the water supply

from the City Corporation, and got it diverted to Katipalla - Krishnapura. The people of that area now get enough water supply.

### **A Selfless Worker in People's Cause**

There was a member of the Corporation representing our party from Krishnapura-Chokkabettu. His name was Idinabba. He was a poor man. Once I called him during the month of Ramzan and gave him Rs 5000 and said, "Idinabba, take this money and celebrate Ramzan well and happily with your wife and children." He replied, humbly, "No Sir! I do not want the money. In Krishnapura we have acute shortage of water. You get us a water tank built in the 6th Block. That would be a great help." Hearing him, I became very emotional. If today the water problem in the 6th and 7th Blocks at Krishnapura is solved, it is because of the selfless service of late Idinabba.

### **Pilikula Nisargadhama in Mangalore**

I was the first to take up the "Pilikula Nisargadhama" in Mangalore. When I was a legislator I received a scheme which the U.K. government had offered. It was a project of Rs 46 crores, for the purpose of developing forest and making it a site of recreation. The site I identified was Pilikula. Without proper wall around it, some of its land was being trespassed into. I asked the then District Commissioner Bharatlal Meena to improve Pilikula. The present legislator, J.R. Lobo was its Chief Officer. I was able to get for it a government grant and also participation from private companies. We were also able to collect money from the builders. Thus it was during my time that the Pilikula Nisargadhama was set up.

### **Jumbo Cabinet**

I should say something about the government of J.H. Patel. Once, some journalists asked him to his face: "You have created a jumbo cabinet. Do you need so many ministers?"

J.H. Patel replied to this question: “Yes! Mine is a very big cabinet. But I cannot help it. I have too many pressures, and it is necessary.” Then he pointed his finger at me and said, “There is one who is sitting there. He is my own choice!” Next day this news was published in all the newspapers.

### **Sense of Satisfaction**

Power is an instrument of doing justice to people. If one has the right idea and an inner compulsion to do good to people, nothing gives you a better opportunity. Position of authority is like a weapon. Using it well, you can serve the people well. If you misuse it, nothing can bring greater calamity on them. I have always believed that power should be used for the larger good of the people. My good is not important, but the good of the people is all that matters. That has been my ideal and policy. But then, there are people who use power for promoting their own interests. But such people do not stay in the minds and hearts of people. People forget them. Now, if someone tells me, “Mohideen Sir! You have done well. You have done good to society!” I feel happy. I feel a sense of satisfaction, a sense of fulfilment.

### **Wakf: The Mistake I made**

When I was offered the portfolio of the Minister of Small Industries by the Chief Minister J.H. Patel, I had also been given an additional charge of the Wakf Department. At that time Roshan Baig wanted it and he kept importuning me, and yielding to his pressure, I handed over the charge of the Wakf Department to him. Even today I think it was a big mistake I did.

Karnataka is the state with the third richest Wakf properties in the country. Approximately, the Karnataka Wakf Department has more than 50,000 acres of land its control and its estimated value is around four lakh crores of rupees.

In Karnataka the Wakf properties are being looted systematically. Properties worth crores of rupees have been

misappropriated and it is painful to note that only some of the leaders of the Muslim community are in the forefront of this organised plunder. There have been systematic frauds committed in giving lease of properties, or in building complexes and renting them out; and properties worth crores of rupees have been swallowed by various people. Karnataka Wakf property dealings have assumed the proportion of a huge scam. If I had not handed over the charge of the Wakf department to Roshan Baig, I would have dealt with those who had looted the Wakf properties severely, and stripped them bare. Whoever such people are, however influential they are, they are the enemies of the Muslim community. They do not even deserve to be spat at!

Even now the government should boldly come forward to make a thorough inquiry into the misappropriation of Wakf properties in Karnataka. I appeal to the government that the properties that have been fraudulently taken away should be restored to the Wakf Department and the guilty should get exemplary punishment.

### **Schism in Janata Dal and My Exit**

In 1999 Janata Dal broke up. Deve Gowda set up his Janata Dal (Secular) and the group under J.H. Patel formed Janata Dal (U). The root cause of this schism was George Fernandez. I and some of my friends like Ramesh Kumar, Nanaiah and Jayaprakash Hegde were not disposed to go with Deve Gowda. Since J.H. Patel joined hands with the BJP we were not prepared to go with him either. So, four of us remained neutral. I submitted my resignation as the Minister. But I stayed as the Member of the Vidhana Parishat till 2002.

Three months after this event, elections were held for the Karnataka Assembly. The Congress came back to power and S.M. Krishna became the Chief Minister.

After my tenure in the Vidhana Parishat ended in 2002, we all went back to Congress. Since then I have been in that party. The Congress once even made me a member of AICC.

## **Siddaramaiah's Defeat and the Danger from Communalism**

I got to know the former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in 1983. In the Assembly elections of that year the Congress had suffered an unexpected loss. That year Siddaramaiah had won his election from Mysore and entered the state politics. Till then I had not known him. After he became a legislator, and later became the Chairman of the Kannada Development Authority, we got to know each other well. My ideals and ideology were similar to those of his. Hence we became close to each other.

When he was elected again in 1985, Ramakrishna Hegde made him a Minister, and gave him the responsibility of looking after the Department of Kannada and Culture. In 1994 he became the Finance Minister in the Deve Gowda Cabinet. The credit of presenting the highest number of budgets in Karnataka, in fact, goes to Siddaramaiah. As Finance Minister he has done many salutary developmental activities. He was the first Finance Minister to provide a kilo of rice for Rs 2 to the poor.

As a Chief Minister the first thing he did was to give seven kilos of rice free to the poor. Behind this was his deep political commitment. For, Siddaramaiah was born in a poor family in a village in Chamarajanagar district. There was utter indigence at home. He knew what it was to be hungry. He had experienced it himself. Against this background he had worked to assuage the hunger of the poor while he was in power.

Recently Siddaramaiah had taken up many programmes for the welfare of the poor and the middle class. "Ahinda" means the minorities, backward classes and the dalits. Siddaramaiah, in fact, started a movement to help these groups. He had worked to give several facilities to the "Ahinda" sections of the population. They, in fact, have gained many significant advantages in the field of education.

Karnataka is the state which has been traditionally dominated by dominant castes and religion. All advantages and facilities would invariably go to them. After Siddaramaiah came to power he

brought about considerable changes in the entrenched equations. Here he followed the policies and programmes of Devaraja Urs. As a result, the upper classes and upper castes which had been enjoying all the power and the advantages accruing from it, could not tolerate these changes. Devaraja Urs knew how to anticipate such a reaction. That is why he had maintained a balance between the contending groups. He was able to have the upper classes around him in managing the affairs. But Siddaramaiah knew poverty and the pains of the poor. He could not put up with the acute social and economic imbalance. Hence he launched several pro-poor programmes in the state, which the upper classes could not quite appreciate or tolerate. They were waiting for an opportunity to defeat him and put an end to his political career.

Without being aware of this, Siddaramaiah decided to contest in the Chamundeshwari constituency of Mysore. He had lost there once. But later he had won there by a small margin. This time too (2018), he contested in the Chamundeshwari constituency as a matter of challenge. This policy of taking anything as a matter of 'challenge' is a besetting weakness of Siddaramaiah. He made his son contest at Varuna, and himself contested at Chamundeshwari. He had done considerable development work there; but people did not accept them and turned against him. As a result, he lost in the Chamundeshwari constituency by a big margin. He only won with a slender margin at Badami, where he had contested too.

People will certainly recognise the good work that Siddaramaiah has done. They will remember Siddaramaiah with gratitude. He will get the respect which is his due. That was the condition of Devaraja Urs too. Taking up such programmes as Land Reforms and several pro-poor projects, Devaraja Urs had helped the cause of the poor and backward classes and dalits in the state. But he became a victim of the political cyclone and lost badly. This is the history we know of. Siddaramaiah is facing a similar situation now.

During the five year tenure of his rule Siddaramaiah has done

many salutary works. Keeping the poor and the middle class in view, he had started several unique programmes, hard to see in other states. “Anna Bhagya”, “Indira Canteen”, “Ksheera Bhagya”, loan waiver for the poor, employment creation, free laptop for the students, “Krishi Bhagya”, “Arogya Bhagya”, “Maathru Poorna”, “Jalasiri Bhagya”, “Kalyana Parva”, “Nirantara Jyothi”, “Grama Swarajya” and many such programmes had helped in bringing a bloom of happiness in the face of the poor and the middle classes. If Siddaramaiah, who did all these, could not get the support of the voters and ended up losing the election, what meaning should you read into it?

All that happened is just this. Even as bright moon in the sky is covered by a fleeting dark cloud, the good work of Siddaramaiah is now eclipsed by “Hindutva”. The RSS and the pro-Hindu outfits have spread misinformation about the work and achievements of Siddaramaiah. This is a big conspiracy. This is a show of the Fascist strength. By rousing the religious passion of people, and spreading the poisonous seeds of communalism, the capitalist class is trying to draw the attention of the people away from the real problems of society and have its own selfish plans fulfilled. This is a dangerous trend of events.

People should get the right awareness of this kind of development. An atmosphere of true harmony should be created. The Congress which is wedded to the principle of secularism should work in this direction. This should be done on a war-footing. We have come to a situation now which the Congress had once faced during the Freedom Struggle. A similar situation is prevalent today. This should be seen as the Second Freedom Struggle. The Congress should take the lead in it and defeat the communal forces throughout the country. This is the demand of the country and the demand of the times too.

## The Suratkal Riots

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The most disturbing and painful event which took place when I was holding the position of power and was the Minister in charge of Dakshina Kannada was the communal riots that broke out in Suratkal between 29-12-1998 and 5-1-1999. In these riots nine innocent citizens lost their lives. Of them two died in police firing and seven became victims of the blood-thirsty communalists. Over 130 people received serious injuries, and there was a large scale loss of civilian properties.

In one sense it was not a communal disturbance at all. It was an organised violence committed on Muslims. For, there was not much difference between the attacks taking place against the minorities in India and what happened in Suratkal. That becomes obvious when you look at the figures of the number of people who died, beaten up, injured and lost their properties. It was not a riot which broke out all of a sudden. It was apparent that it was a conspiracy planned over many months and executed meticulously. As elsewhere, the main role in the riot was of the Sangh Parivar. It had planned all the violence. Such acts of violence take place all over India. Transport of cows for

slaughter, ‘Love Jihad’ terrorism, Mandir-Masjid issue, betrayal of the country and such false accusations are regularly spread and Muslims are portrayed as bigots, Hindu-haters, betrayers of the nation, or that they are getting money from the Gulf countries, that by using that money they entice Hindu women to marriage and convert them. They distort Indian history to show that Muslims were guilty of partitioning the country, or that they yet love Pakistan. They are portrayed as bad, cruel and without culture and that they are not “ours” - a sentiment which the Sangh Parivar is trying its best in instilling among the Hindus, and it has succeeded in its efforts in no small measure.

The result of it all is that Sangh Parivar has propounded the ideology that India is a Hindu nation, and that it is not either Muslim or Christian nation. They have their own other nations, but the Hindus have India as their only nation. Therefore the Hindus have to protect it. The Sangh Parivar was disseminating such a “Hindutva” ideology in and around Suratkal for many months and was preparing for a communal clash there.

At that time, one Balakrishna Bhat was the BJP member of the Vidhana Parishat. Another one, a political novice, by name Kumble Sundara Rao was the legislator from Suratkal. Like the one who jumps and dances on the yakshagana stage, this Kumble Sundara Rao would do the hopping as the situation suited him. He would speak provocatively both in the meeting of the Muslims and in the gathering of the Hindus, and he played an important role in the communal riots which broke out in and around Suratkal.

At the same time Satyajit Suratkal, and Satish who was the son of a member of the Corporation, were members of the ‘Hindu Jagarana Vedike’ were busy not only in organising the Hindus but also in rousing their communal passion. Community organisations are necessary; but they are needed to work for people’s uplift and development. But what these people were doing was to provoke people to rioting and acts of violence. At the same time, some Muslim youth from Krishnapura and Katipalla were working against them.

One day some people from Krishanpura-Katipalla came to me and complained that the property of one of them who was working in the Panambur harbour was being trespassed into. In the group that came to me there were some Muslims too. Then the man would come to me often to seek my help to recover his land which had been trespassed into.

Later some people came to me and said that the man who had grabbed the land was organising a yakshagana performance and that he was doing so to establish his claim on that piece of land. They requested me to stop the yakshagana performance. Then I called the concerned authorities and asked them look into the matter and make sure that the peace and harmony of the area are not disturbed. But the authorities stopped the yakshagana itself. The communal organisations immediately seized the opportunity and carried on the propaganda that “The yakshagana scheduled to be held at Katipalla was stopped by the Minister B.A. Mohideen!” These matters had not even come to my notice.

In the meantime during the Annual Day celebration of Govinda Das College a Muslim boy was accused of making passes at a Hindu girl and was severely beaten up. The police arrested the attackers and a case under Section 307 was slapped on them. Then the members of Sangh Parivar under the leadership of the BJP legislator, Kumble Sundara Rao and the Member of the Vidhana Parishat, Balakrishna Bhat, went on a procession to the Suratkal police station to get the arrested released. Those who went on procession stopped all traffic on the highway for 4-5 hours and began pelting stones at the police station. Those who are charged under Section 307 do not get bail. When the police felt that the protest was turning violent, they converted the charge as under Section 324 and released the accused.

The accused were now taken in procession and Kumble Sundara Rao and Balakrishna Bhat garlanded them and made provocative speeches. Jagadish Karanth, the convener of ‘Hindu Jagarana Vedike’ gave a call to punish Muslims. Provoked by the

incendiary speeches, some people were waiting for an opportunity to beat up the Muslims. There was a tense atmosphere in the surrounding areas of Kulai, Bykampady, Hosabettu, Idya, Chokkabettu, Krishnapura, Katipalla, Kana, Kaikamba, Tadambail, Munchuru, Madhya, Chelar and Suratkal. It was like a tinder-box which could explode with even a small ignition.

The ignition came in the form of a minor incident. In a house at Chokkabettu located near the railway lines two Muslim boys who were picking scraps were accused of theft and beaten up. Those boys went to the people of their community and reported the matter, which, in turn, created a communal conflagration that shook the whole area for one full week. The whole thing was so planned and people were so viciously communalised that people who knew each other for years and had spoken to the other person just the other day with easy familiarity were prepared to barge into the house and kill each other. The media had a big role in spreading the virus of the communal riot. The 'Shakti Cable' which was being run by the convener of the 'Hindu Jagarana Vedike' was telecasting the protest, procession and the fire-spitting speeches of the leaders and was doing its best to pour fat on the fire.

I remember what a Muslim gentleman told me of his experience. For forty years he had been living at Chelar, running provision store. He was living with his wife and children in a house just behind his shop. After the riots broke out, a Hindu acquaintance of his for many years, came one morning and assured him, "Do not be afraid. We are all here to protect you." The same guy came back in the evening and snapped the telephone lines. When an attempt was made to connect the line, he said, "Don't do it. If there is trouble, you would otherwise telephone your people, and if they come here, there will be more trouble! Don't be afraid! We are here to protect you!" But the shopkeeper smelt the danger and he took his wife and children to the nearby hillock and spent the whole night, struggling to stop his children crying.

That evening at 6 o'clock a group of people gathered in front

of his shop, beating drum and exploding firecrackers. The one who had cut the telephone wires and promised protection was also part of the mob. It beat the drum and exploded firecrackers, raved and danced for half an hour, and all of a sudden broke open the shop and the house and looted them. All through the night the looting went on. A Muslim shop nearby was also looted.

At Kulai an innocent Muslim riding a scooter on the road was stopped, chased and murdered. The person who carried him to the hospital was, incidentally, a Hindu.

At Hosabettu Kadambodi there were mostly Hindu houses, but only two Muslim houses. A marauding group attacked these two houses, beat up women, children and old men there, destroyed the furniture and made off with 25 sovereigns of gold. All these things happened in ten to fifteen minutes. Later they were unburdening their woes that none of the Hindu neighbours, with whom they had lived harmoniously for many years, had lifted a finger to save them.

At a place called Kana near Suratkal, a group of fifty masked men entered the Muslim houses and murdered three Muslims. Of the people who were hacked to death, one was 85 and another 65. After the group committed the murder and loot, the mask of one of them slipped, and the people of the house could recognise him. He was one of the boys who would go there regularly to play cricket. That day, it seems he had gone to them and said, "There are riots everywhere. Don't venture out anywhere. You stay here. But fear not; we are here to protect you!"

Zohra lived at Krishnapura. Her neighbours were mostly Hindus and Christians. She had three sons and a daughter. A group of fifty to sixty people armed with swords, scythes and rods barged into their house. Only Zohra and her son Zakir Hussain, who was a post-graduate student at Mangalore University and daughter who was doing her S.S.L.C, were in the house. "We have done no harm to anyone! We have not wished anyone ill. Please spare us!" they appealed, again and again. But they were all beaten up, and

the house was looted. As the mob was returning, one of them turned to Zohra and said, “These things are normal in such situations. Don’t feel bad!”

Such mob attacks took place in many places. Such ‘guerrilla attacks’ by groups armed with rods, knives and swords, were made without compunction. The attacks were made against neighbours, acquaintances or even friends. If they were Muslims, they would be the targets. They would enter their houses and beat them up, without a thought as to whether they were women, children, old people or even patients. They beat them up indiscriminately and even killed them. In some places some Muslim boys too had attacked and burnt Hindu houses as acts of revenge.

However, even as the communalists were revelling, many Hindu families had given refuge to Muslim families to save them. Similarly, Muslims families had given protection to Hindus. If there had been no humanitarian impulse at work, the dead should have been counted in their hundreds in and around Suratkal. Such families which had given refuge were noted by the leaders of communal outfits and threatened: “So, you are trying to protect the Muslims, aren’t you? We will deal with you later on!” Some of them were even beaten up.

Now most of the political parties seem to have endorsed the division of the Indians as Hindus and non-Hindus, which the BJP has given currency to. Our newspapers and media, as well as or governmental and non-governmental organisations appear to have concurred with it. Therefore, communalism should be seen not only as a problem which the BJP has created but also as a malady which can be detected in various political parties and in various degrees. I believe that unless the true lovers of democracy and the constitution of the country deal with this malady, this country may not survive as a republic for long.

The pain of those who lost their kith and kin or their properties may not be erased as long as they live. Here both Hindus and Muslims feel the same pain. We cannot argue that the Muslim pain

is different from what the Hindu feels. But so long as we are all together and remain as one, no pain will trouble us. When our society is broken into Hindu and Muslim factions, it is sure to spawn all kinds of problems like violence, murders, riots, looting and all. The Sangh Parivar is trying its best to take control of the country by breaking the country, and through the instrumentality of violence or creating such problems. Neither the Hindus nor the Muslims should allow this to happen. If we do, let us remember, we are the ones who will be destroyed, our wives and children and our posterity.

Attacks on the minorities, violence against the dalits, outrages against women, the poor getting poorer and the rich becoming richer have created a situation where the poor are losing even the little morsel of their food, their opportunities for education and job to be reduced to beggary. These are pushing the country to a huge disaster. It is the responsibility of all of us to save the country and its democracy from this impending calamity.

After the Suratkal Riots, the Chief Minister J.H. Patel raised this issue in one of the Cabinet meetings and said, "Some people have contacted me and told me that the communal riot took place owing to the failure of the Minister in charge of District. They have asked me to replace him. But I have told him emphatically that B.A. Mohideen is a very secular person. Nowhere has he behaved in a partisan way. He has secured justice for all. There is no question of replacing him at all." The other ministers in the meeting too gave me all encouragement. "Continue with your good works" they told me. After the riots compensations were paid to those who were affected by them. I ensured that they were more than compensated for the material loss they incurred. But could we really decide on the value of the lives lost? That pain is still with me.

## Revolution in Muslim Education

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The reason why I gave emphasis on Muslim education was that my neighbours, my relatives, my elder or younger sisters were all illiterates. Those days the Mullahs who came from Kerala used to harp on the point that giving education to girls was against Islamic tradition. When I was young, our girls used to go only to the madrasas. It is enough if they could read the Koran; only religious education is true education; that was what the religious leaders would expound. The credulous people believed them too.

Later when I and some of our contemporaries got education, we began to think as to how best we could give education to our girls. One such attempt I did in my own village. And it gave me better hold of things.

For the first time I started in the Bajpe madrasa a nursery school. In fact, the school had no name at all. People used to call it a 'nursery school'. My reason for starting the nursery school was that you could send the children to school till they were five years and ten months. That was the government's rule. Till then the children would be at home. What do they do at home? Take, for example, some

guests come to your house. You place a plate of sweets or some eatables before them as a gesture of hospitality. Then your children will come there, lay their hands on the plate and eat what is being offered to the guests. The guests keep quiet about it because, after all, they are children. Such practices they get initiated to early in life. They play pranks and do mischief because they have nothing else to do. They are seen always creating mischief, troubling their mothers and so on. What do you do? You wait till the children turn five years and ten months and then admit them to the school. What happens there? The teacher writes 1, 2, 3... on the blackboard. The Christian or Hindu children read it easily as 1, 2, 3...! The teacher writes A B C D...! Those children read them too easily. They say in chorus, "We know that, teacher!" But the Muslim children know nothing. They merely stare or blink. That is because they have not gone to the nursery school. Nor were they taught at home because there was none educated enough to teach them. Even if there were some educated person to teach, none had time or patience to teach. All these things have their impact on children. When they go to school, they begin to realise, "They know everything, but we know nothing!" An acute sense of inferiority envelops in them. They slowly slink into the backbenches. They somehow struggle in the school till the fourth standard or so. And then they drop out of the school. This should not happen to our children, I felt.

When I told my people, if our children should study well, first send them to the nursery school, some of the authorities of the mosque and madrasas showed their willingness to start the nursery school. The news reached Mullahs and Maulvis. "*adella paadallallo*" ('Our religion does not endorse it'), they said. If in our madrasas a Hindu teacher comes, makes the children sing, dance and play, the sanctity of the madrasa would be ruined. That is why that is not acceptable. Madrasa is only a place for studying the Holy Koran. That was what they believed in.

But in Bajpe we had a firm hold on the madrasa. Therefore a

nursery school could be easily started there. But after the nursery school there should be provision for the first standard also and that too in English medium. Otherwise children will not prefer the school. But I had already started an English medium school at Bajpe and managed it for a while. But when a Central School was set up at Panambur, the children of the airport personnel had the opportunity to study there. The standard of that school was excellent and there were school buses to transport children. Hence many parents began to send the children to Panambur. We therefore handed over the school to a Christian management. That school is functioning even now. It is called 'Morning Star'. That is why we had to start another English medium school at Bajpe.

Later under Muslim managements many English medium schools were set up at Katipalla, Krishnapura, Soorinje, Jokatte, Bykampady and other places. I saw to it that these new schools got the permission from the government. I did it as if I was heading a movement.

I began to argue that much in the same way Christian schools are set up wherever their churches are, Muslim organisations too should start their own schools. It should be easy for the Muslims because in all Muslim Jama-ats there are madrasas. These madrasas are well-equipped to start a school. They are only used for one or two hours in the morning and again for one or two hours in the evening. We could start a school by using the facilities in the madrasa building. Whenever I went to any religious gatherings, or to Uroos or Nerche, I never made a speech on religious subjects. I invariably spoke on the need for education and its importance, the need to establish schools, how to do it and so on. The Muslims of undivided Dakshina Kannada took my views in a very positive sense. Many English medium schools were set up in many places.

However, to run these schools there were many administrative or legal hurdles. It was difficult for the schools to overcome these hurdles individually. That is why I established a federation of all

the Muslim management schools. That is what you have now as MEIF (Muslim Educational Institutions Federation).

There is a background to establishing the Federation. It does not interfere with the internal management of the school. But if there are problems to be collectively solved, it can do that. For example, there is a law that one should not start English medium schools. There is a rule that you should do the teaching only in one's mother tongue. But I found out that the Article 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution allows the Minorities to start their own schools. I argued that, accordingly the Minorities could start their own English medium schools, and that no government can come in their way. This case went up to the Supreme Court. There we argued that the schools that we were running were the schools of the Minorities. Which linguistic medium those schools should teach in is a matter which the parents of the children should decide. This right which the Constitution has conferred on them should not be denied to them, we argued in the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court of India upheld our contention and gave the verdict in our favour. Now more than 120 schools are part of this Federation.

All these things have created a strong educational awareness among the Muslims of the undivided Dakshina Kannada. They felt that not only boys but also girls should take to education seriously. Even those youths who are working abroad have started feeling that "Those of us who do not have education are only doing menial jobs here. But those of other religions who are educated are doing higher jobs and earning well." That is why the Muslims schools which were set up here started getting substantial patronage and assistance from those working abroad.

Our one little weakness is initial fear or nervousness before doing a thing. But once they do it, the Bearys don't look back. That is what has happened in this educational movement of theirs. Our community is a mimetic community. If one does something and is successful, the others do the same thing. This is a weakness

of the Beary community. I harnessed this weakness into our strength. That is why my goal was easily reached.

The result of it all is that in our district many engineering and medical colleges were started. The undivided Dakshina Kannada has gained recognition as an educational hub. I do not know if you know this. In the whole country Manipal is the one to introduce the idea of taking donation to start and run educational institutions. This system has guided others in establishing many engineering and medical colleges. Our schools supply students to these institutions of higher learning. Our Beary students too have passed PUC with good marks, and with distinction to become engineers, doctors, pharmacists, and so on. It was as if the Bearys tasted success in the field of education. It created an awareness that their girls too should study. It has grown so much that today there is a feeling among them that education of girls should be the bounden duty of all. Now the Beary girls are becoming graduates in big numbers; they are becoming doctors; they are becoming engineers. All these are the results of the movement started in 1970's and 1980's. I am not claiming that I did it all. All that I can say is that in creating this awareness and in setting up a stage for it, I did my humble bit too.

When MEIF was founded many heads of the managements of Muslim schools had played an active part in it. Some of their names I should certainly mention here: P.A. Khader Kukkadi, a senior educationist from Bykampady, Yedapadvu Muhammad Beary, Haji B.S. Umarabba from Krishnapura, Haji B.M. Mumtaz Ali, B.A. Nazir, Maiyaddi from NMPT, U.A. Kasim from Ullal, U. Moideen of Al Furkhan, P. Moosabba Beary of Jokatte, Idinabba of Mukka and others have worked hard and continuously for the success of MEIF.

When I was holding a position of power in the government I had started a scheme called "Arivu", and I had a big role in initiating it. The scheme was to ensure direct payment of college fees of a student if he or she got a seat in medical or engineering college.

This scheme is very helpful for students belong to minority or backward castes in prosecuting their higher studies.

Once, the ‘Karnataka Sangha’ of Dubai had invited me to their annual celebration. There too I had spoken on the need for promoting education. I said, “You have all come to Dubai. Some of you have good jobs and earn well. You have money. But it should be well spent. The best thing that you can do is to start educational institutions in your towns or villages in India. All the permissions and facilities you need the Karnataka government will surely provide”.

The same night at around 11 o’clock a gentleman met me in the hotel where I was staying. He said he had money and that he wanted to start an engineering college and he wanted my help. I asked him to meet him in Bangalore and whatever help he needed from the side of the government I would offer him. After a few days he met me in Bangalore. I introduced him to the Director of Higher Education and said that he wished to start an engineering college and asked him to provide all advice and help. I asked him to send the file to me for the necessary permission. The person who came and met me was the famous industrialist from Kerala, P.A. Ibrahim Haji. Today his “P.A. College of Engineering” is one of the more successful educational institutions run at Nadupadavu in Mangalore.

Schools should be secular. All schools should be run on secular lines. There is something wrong if the Hindus go only to the Hindu schools and Muslims only to Muslims schools. That is why our schools should be like Christian schools. In the Christian schools they have religious education; but that is only for Christians. But people of all religions and castes go to the Christian schools. All our schools should follow that model. If we start our schools in the precincts of our mosques or madrasas, how would people of other religions go there? They will not. Similarly, if our schools carry the names like Al Badriya, Islamiya and so on, Hindus will not go there. You start your schools outside the precincts of your

mosque or madrasa. Do not make them carry your religious labels. Look at “Ideal School” at Yedapadavu, “Chaitanya School” of Krishnapura, “Bertrand Russell School” at Bykampady. They are all run by Muslim managements. Since these schools are away from the mosque, students of all religions and castes go there. In fact, a failure to realise the importance of this is a big problem in education. I had harped on it many a time in the meetings of MEIF. Do not separate a Muslim school from others schools. Have a school where Hindu, Muslim and Christian students all study together. Let them know each other’s religion, culture and learn to live a harmonious life of mutual coexistence. This is something which had been advocating all through and in the meetings of MEIF too.

There are some accusations that in the schools within the precincts of mosques and madrasas are not allowed to have, during their school day celebrations things such as songs, dramas, dances or such other cultural programmes, that the school management or religious leaders do not permit such things. This is very bad. It is our responsibility to make our children culturally rich. That is part of education. That is the demand of the times too. It helps in bringing out the hidden talents of children and in promoting harmonious life in society.

There is one more thing that I wish to point out to. In the schools that the Muslims establish or manage, or in the schools within the precincts of mosques and madrasas, 80-90 percent teachers are Hindus or non-Muslims. It is a very happy thing. A happier thing is that now more and more Muslims girls are getting educated. Recently I had visited school. I do not remember the name of the school nor the place. But it is a school belonging to Muslim management. There, of the fourteen teachers twelve were Muslims. I called one of them and asked “What did you study?” She said, “B.Ed.” It only means that now more and more girls study, get educated and find employment. But it should not mean that Muslim teachers should teach only in Muslim schools. I wish we all should teach and study together. Only then can we live

beyond the confines of religion and caste, in truly secular spirit, harmoniously, like brothers.

In that school there was a non-Muslim student. He belonged to the Moolya caste. He was very poor. But he had passed in high first class marks. I summoned his parents to the school, and told them, “Your boy wants to study. Whatever your difficulties, make sure that he studies further.” I was so happy about the boy.

There is a general feeling that the Muslim schools are short of quality. It is important that we remove this impression from the minds of the public. The root cause of the misunderstanding that others have about us, the feeling of suspicion that others carry about us and about our religion or our community is that we tend to remain separate from others. If we mix with others such problems do not arise. We alone should create a climate of mutual co-existence. We have the duty to work together in that direction.

The communal outfits which flourish in our society are trying their best to keep us apart. They discourage a Muslim student from talking to a Hindu student, much less mingling with him freely. “If you mix with a Beary, you will be spoiled. You will not study” they say. Many lies and falsehood are injected into the minds of Hindu girls and this is merely a conspiracy to keep the two communities apart. We should be wary of such attempts to keep Muslims separate and reduce them to an island in society.

## The Beary Movement

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This phrase ‘Beary Movement’ is what we have chosen to represent the growing activities and development among the Bearys. The community awareness among the Bearys grew in stages; it took different forms before becoming something of a movement. From 1987 when “The Bearys’ Association” was founded in Bangalore to 2007 when “Karnataka Beary Sahitya Academy” was established, all the activities and developments constitute aspects of the ‘Beary Movement’.

Although “The Bearys’ Welfare Association was founded in Bangalore in 1987, I came into its contact only in 1989. As far as I know, the Bearys’ Welfare Association was founded against the background of an event. Although many Beary families were living in Bangalore taking up jobs or doing business, they did not know each other, nor did they have any contact with one another. Once, when a member of a Beary family died, none in Bangalore learnt about it till his dead body was sent to his native place. When others learnt about it after many days, they realised that they should know each other, keep in touch with each other and that one should respond to the needs of the others

in the community. With this modest purpose in mind, some of them met to discuss the matter. Then M. Beary (Muhammad Beary) was the director of the Bangalore branch of the Karnataka State Lottery. In his presence people like M.M. Qureshi, Noori Saheb, Syed Ahmed Beary, Attur Chayabba, Hussain Beary, K.M. Shekabba, A.B. Bajal, Abid Beary and others met. With M. Beary as the advisor and M.M. Qureshi as the president, they formed an association. Later they framed the necessary by-laws, and formally set up “The Bearys’ Welfare Association” and launched its activities.

In 1989 the Association had invited me, along with Veerappa Moily, as its guest. On that occasion I got to know all the members of the Association I was impressed with its activities and later got involved fully in all its programmes and activities. Even today its members discuss all the matters relating to the Association with me and take my advice and give me their unfailing respect for me.

In 1994 Umar Teekay was the President of the Association. At that time Veerappa Moily was the Chief Minister of Karnataka. When a wedding was held at the Palace Grounds some of the people had attended it like Umar Teekay, Chayabba, Ahmed Bava, Syed Muhammad Beary, and the former Mayor of Mangalore, Abdul Khader Haji met and told me, “Now Veerappa Moily is the Chief Minister. We will organise a big meeting of the Association and invite Moily, and using the opportunity, request him to recommend the award of a BDA site for the Association. I am sure we will get it.” But then we were not sure as to what occasion which should create for such a big meeting of the occasion. Then it struck us that we could hold a felicitation to P.M. Sayeed, who originally hailed from Mangalore but was representing Lakshdweep in the Lok Sabha and was a Minister in the Central Government. We were sure that if invited, the Chief Minister Veerappa Moily would certainly attend it.

One Mumunhi Haji of Bangalore was a close associate of P.M. Sayeed. Through him we contacted P.M. Sayeed and he agreed to come to the function. Thereafter we contacted Veerappa

Moily through his associates like Ramanath Rai, Abdul Majid Sooralpady, Mayor Khader Haji and others; he too consented to attend the function as the guest.

This programme helped us to bring together many Beary leaders such as B. Ahmed Haji Tumbe, Hasan Haji, Ibrahim Haji, who was the President of the Ullal Dargah and many others. Many Beary leaders from Chikkamagalur and Kodagu too attended the function, which was held on 28-8-1994 at the NGO Hall at the Cubbon Park in Bangalore. This one-day programme was organised as a goodwill meet, and it had helped in strengthening our association in a big way. We had invited to the programme representatives from Tulu Koota, and from the associations of Jains, Bunts, Billavas, Mogaveeras and others.

This was the first step we had taken to set up a “Sowharda Bhavana” We placed before Veerappa Moily our demand for a site in Bangalore. But we could not get one during the tenure of Veerappa Moily as the Chief Minister.

P.M. Sayeed who had received his felicitation was very happy. After he went back to Delhi he wrote a letter to the Association to say that he would include the name of the Beary language to whatever languages he knew and use, and thus for the first time the word ‘Beary’ got into the Parliament document.

When I was the Minister in the J.H. Patel Cabinet, the Bearys’ Welfare Association got a sanction of a good site of 28,000 square feet near H.B.R. Layout in Bangalore. Syed Muhammad Beary and Nissar Ahmed of the Presidency School had worked hard in securing the site for the Association.

In 1996 when Dr. Maqsood Ahmed was the President there was a plan to celebrate the Decennial of the Association. As a Minister I had extended all my cooperation to the Association. They had made me the Chairman of the Reception Committee. Syed Muhammad Beary, B.A. Hasanabba, and G.A. Bava were the Vice Chairmen. Umar Teekay was the Secretary General. Every member of the Association had actively cooperated with the office-

bearers. The first two-day Beary Conference was successfully held in Bangalore at the Palace Grounds on 13-14 December, 1997.

The Conference was inaugurated by the then Governor of Karnataka, Khurshid Alam Khan. The valedictory address should have been delivered by the Chief Minister, J.H. Patel. But as he could not make it to the Conference for unavoidable reasons, his place was taken up by the Speaker of the Vidhana Sabha, Ramesh Kumar.

This Conference gave a new direction to the Beary community. It is no exaggeration to say that it brought about an emotional integration of the Bearys of Karnataka. As a background and preparation to the Conference, the office-bearers of the Association had travelled to the Dakshina Kannada, Chikkamagalur and Kodagu districts of Karnataka to set up the branches of the Association there and create awareness among the members of the community.

While, on the one hand, many renowned industrialists and businessmen among the Bearys like B. Ahmed Haji Tumble, Yenopoya Abdulla Kunhi, Bhatkal Ibrahim Haji, Hasan Haji, Ibrahim Haji, the President of the Ullal Dargah, Mayor Abdul Khader Haji and others had participated in the Conference, on the other, many Beary writers, litterateurs, poets, artists and others took part in the meeting to create a rare mood of a popular movement in the Conference.

Much as a storm is followed by a lull, after the massive Conference the Bearys' Welfare Association fell into silence. Although for the next two years Syed Muhammad Beary was its president, no noticeable activity was recorded by the Association. In the meantime, the site allotted to the Association was lost to it, as it was grabbed by some influential persons.

In 2005, however, the activities of the Association were revived when B.M. Farookh became its president. That was the time B.M. Farookh was emerging as an industrialist. He was not till then closely associated with the Association, but when he attended one

of its meetings, he was made the President. Under him all the activities of the Association were regularly, impressively held. Its award functions gained a new glitter.

In this new mood of enthusiasm, a plan was revived to recover the lost site. Ahmed Bava Bajal, G.A. Bava, lawyer Usman and a few others filed a case, and after a long-drawn litigation the case was won. The High Court gave the verdict that the government should award an alternate site. At that time G.A. Bava was the president of the Association. But even then the person who took the lead in paying the money was Syed Muhammad Beary. The office-bearers of the Association would all that needed to be done to Siddique Beary, who, in turn, would inform Syed Muhammad Beary, and everything would be done without much noise or fanfare. As a result, the Association was able to get a valuable site of 10,000 square feet in 2010, not far away from the one which had been lost earlier.

On the site which is centrally located in Bangalore I had dreamt of having a beautiful, well-equipped 'Beary Bhavana'. Even after couple of years of securing the site, none had really come forward to put up the building. Although the president of the Association, B.M. Farookh had prepared the blue-print of the 'Sowharda Bhavan' building and was discussing it in many meetings, none really seemed to be enthusiastic about it. I was very disappointed with this apathy.

Once when all the important leaders of the Association had met at a wedding in Bangalore, my son, Mushtaq persuaded them to come to my house for a meeting. That resulted in a meeting in my Bangalore house in 2012. People like Syed Muhammad Beary, Umar Teekay, B. M. Farookh and others had attended it. That day I had spoken somewhat sternly. "We have now got the site. But none of you seems to be doing anything about building the 'Sowharda Bhavan'. I am sorely disappointed. If you are building the 'Sowharda Bhavan' I am with you. Or else, from tomorrow onwards, I will not be with you." I said curtly.

My words must have had their impact on them. They all decided upon building the Beary Bhavan, and right there elected Syed Muhammad Beary as the chairman of the building committee.

Once he takes up a work, Syed Muhammad Beary does it with consummate efficiency, in his own individual style. He prefaced his work with his thought as to how the 'Beary Sowharda Bhavana' should be and how it should reflect the honour and dignity of the community. It was also decided as to who and how much each should contribute to its making financially. Thus, with a renewed enthusiasm the work on the 'Sowharda Bhavana' was launched.

A 12 crore rupees project, it is now nearly half done. The government had given us, as its first instalment, three crores of rupees. Later, I met the Chief Minister, Siddaramaiah, and presented a request for another two crores of rupees. But owing to technical reasons it was not sanctioned, I came to know later. Recently, when I was being treated for my illness in one of the private hospitals, the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had come to Mangalore and met me. There I renewed my request for a government grant of Rs two crores for the 'Beary Bhavana'. I had told him that the building of the Beary Bhavana is a long-cherished dream of the community, and that it should come true during the tenure of his office. He did kindly respond to my request and sanction Rs two crores for the 'Beary Sowharda Bhavana' in the state budget for 2018-19.

The work on the building is going on at a considerable pace, and I hope that it would be completed by the end of 2018.

### **The Beary Literary Movement**

When the Beary Conference was held in Bangalore, a Beary cultural team from Mangalore had been invited to it, consisting of Beary litterateurs, poets and artists. The Beary Poets' Meet, the Beary Plays and the Beary songs they had presented had added an extra glow to the Conference. Thrilled by their success, this group on its return to Mangalore set up a "Beary Literature and

Cultural Association” and began to present its activities all over the district. In creating greater awareness of the Beary literature, the “Poets’ Meets” became a powerful medium. They were held in many villages and they became very popular.

After creating a literary awareness among the ordinary citizens, this group planned the first ‘Beary Literary Conference’ with more than 200 leaders as part of its Reception Committee. When they faced criticisms and hurdles from some conservative quarters, they met me and sought my support. Since I was convinced of the good work they were doing, I agreed to become the honorary president of the Reception Committee. I was then the Minister of Small Industries in the J.H. Patel Cabinet. I came to Mangalore and gave my full support to the Beary Literary Conference. Gathering a renewed spirit, these young men held the Conference very successfully.

The first Beary Literary Conference which was held on 22-11-1998 at the Mangalore Town Hall with B.M. Idinabba as its President created a history. From 9 in the morning till 9 in the evening, all activities and programmes such as the inaugural, felicitations, release of books and cassettes, thematic discussions, the poets’ meet, plays, exhibition, cultural programmes and so on were conducted with great discipline and sense of taste. One of the resolutions adopted in the Conference was the demand for the creation of the ‘Beary Sahitya Academy’. Next day it had hit the headlines in all the newspapers and drawn the attention of the people of the state.

The same Reception Committee which had functioned in the first Beary Literary Conference now called itself “Kendra Beary Sahitya Parishat” and got itself duly registered, to continue its literary activities. In 1999 it held the Second Beary Literary Conference successfully at Buntwal and the third one in 2000 at Udupi.

Although the state ministers and legislators were invited to these conferences, the Karnataka government was not yet ready to

concede the demand for the Beary Sahitya Academy. I had taken a delegation to the Chief Minister S.M. Krishna, but he did not respond to our request positively. When Veerappa Moily was the Chief Minister he had given Sahitya Academies to Konkani, Tulu and Kodava languages. When I met him later he told me that if only I had presented my demand then he would have given it.

In 2006 a coalition government of the BJP and JDS came to power in the state. H.D. Kumara Swamy became the Chief Minister. In 2007 the Kendra Beary Sahitya Parishat organised its fourth Beary Literary Conference at Chikkamagalur. It was a historic conference. Senior litterateur, Fakir Muhammad Katpady was the President of the Conference. It was organised so successfully that most of the Bearys of Chikkamagalur district had closed their shops and business to participate in it. Many non-Bearys too had taken part in it. One of the guests of the Conference had in his speech observed, “This is not just a Conference. It is a veritable fair of social harmony taking place in Chikkamagalur.”

In the valedictory of the Conference the then Minister of Kannada and Culture, Mahadev Prasad, had participated. In my speech I made a reference to the need for the Beary Sahitya Academy. Noting the huge gathering there and its enthusiasm and discipline, the Minister spoke to the Chief Minister, H.D. Kumara Swamy right from the dais and convinced him of the legitimacy of the demand for the Academy, got his permission and in his speech made an unofficial announcement of the creation of the Academy. In the next few days, it was formally, officially announced, and the Beary Sahitya Academy came into being on 3-10-2007. I am closely and actively associated with the Academy and giving it all my cooperation and counsel.

## My Family

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Now let me remember, and say something about my family. Ours is a big family. My father is Abdul Khader and my mother, Halimamma. My parents had eight children - six boys and two girls. I am the eldest. Second one is a brother, by name Hussain Sheriff. He is no more. He has four children, -three sons and a daughter. The third of my siblings is a sister, Khateeja. She is no more. She has thirteen children, - five daughters and eight sons. My fourth brother is Muhammad. He is no more. He has five children, - two daughters and three sons. Shamir, the founder of the internationally famous logistic organisation, “Compass”, is a son of my brother, Muhammad. This institution is doing business in 20 countries and has more than 2000 employees. Shamir is the pride of our family. The secret of his success, as I see it, is his honesty and commitment. My fifth sibling is my sister Fatima, who is no more. She has six children, - three girls and three boys. My sixth sibling is a brother, Hamid, who is no more. He has five children, - four sons and a daughter. The seventh one is Umar, who has three daughters. The last and eighth one is Ismail, who has one son and a daughter.

I have four children, - two sons and two daughters. The eldest is the daughter, Halima Shaheen. She has read up to PUC. She is married to Ahmed Sheriff of Bajpe, who is a B.Sc. graduate. My eldest daughter has three daughters - Khateeja Suhana, Shima Fatima and Ayesha Saloola. They are all married.

My second son is Abdul Khader Mushtaq. He has done his B.E. in Civil Engineering from K.R.E.C. in Suratkal. His wife, Nazmeen, is a graduate. They have two children: daughter is Misha Khateeja and son Mehul Mohideen.

My third daughter is Fatima Sabeena. She had read up to S.S.L.C. She is married to Muhammad Nawaz Gurupur, who has done a diploma in mechanical engineering. They have three children, - Muhammad Naveed, Nayeema Fatima and Muhammad Nuhaid.

My youngest son is Asif Masood. He has done his B.E. in Mechanical Engineering from K.R.E.C. His wife Nusheen is from Mangalore, and she too is an engineering graduate. They have two children - Numaan Sharikh and Mida Khateeja.

Halima Shaheen's eldest daughter, Khateeja Suhana is a graduate. She is married to one of our relatives, Ahmed Shakeer of Bajpe. He is a BBM graduate. They have four children, - Shanum Fatima, Halima Sharmin, Muhammad Sharikh and Ahmed Shahil.

The second one is Shaima Fatima. She is an engineer. She is married to Ashfi Hamid of Mangalore. He is a B.Com graduate. They have two children, - Ayisha Zoya and Halima Ziva.

The third one is Ayisha Shaloola. She is a B.Com graduate. She is married to Sayeed Anas of Mangalore. They have a daughter, Arha Anas.

I now live with a big family of wife, children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

## The I within Me

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You may now be wondering as to why have written, in this autobiography of mine, about great leaders like Indira Gandhi, Devaraja Urs, Ramakrishna Hegde, J.H. Patel and others. I have written about them because politics is a board-game of dice. Here a beggar may become a king and a king an indigent vagrant. Pulling another man down so that you succeed or gain power, to make sure that none overtakes you, none grows taller than you or scales a height greater than yours are things which have routinely taken place in politics in independent India.

In our country's politics no one is really a friend and no one an enemy. Today's friend may turn out to be an enemy tomorrow. Sworn enemies of today may be seen in public walking hand in hand, with broad smile on their faces. Here none really trusts the other. Suspicion, distrust, skulduggery, cloak-and-dagger games come easily in politics. None, not even great leaders like Indira Gandhi or Devaraja Urs were exceptions in this regard. That is why I had to write a little about them.

Nowhere else can you see the ups and downs which politicians experience in their

political lives. Here only the ones with craftiness, daring, organisational ability, a show of dignity, patience and resilience and talent for play-acting can survive. Or else, he will find himself dumped in a corner.

I too have experienced a lot of ups and downs in my political life. As a legislator, as the Chief Whip of the Party, as Minister, as the Minister in charge of the District, I did not ever give up my principles, ideals, truth and honesty. When I was ignored or bullied by others, when I was out of power and consigned to obscurity, never did I stretch my palm for alms or favour and never did I bow my head in servility. When I did not have enough money on me to meet my daily needs, I did not show it others or tell it to others.

I should now confide with you. I had never dreamt of becoming a politician. There was no politician in my family, ever. I had hoped to become an engineer. My father who educated me wanted me to be a big officer. But for the fact that great leaders like Devaraja Urs, Ramakrishna Hegde and J.H. Patel recognised my merit and gave me in politics the positions of power and influence, today none would have known who this B.A. Mohideen is. I would have been lost in the crowd of millions of ordinary people in this country. But I never pursued a life in politics. I have not gone after politicians. I never craved for power. Instead, it was politics which dragged me to the positions I held in politics. That is the truth.

My ideals in politics were the first four *Caliphs* of Islam - Abu Bhakr Siddique, Omar Khattab, Osman, and Ali Ibn Abu Talib. Their history is my inspiration. None of them was well-off to begin with. But they gave their all to the society they lived in. They were honest; they were just. They would get angry whenever they saw wrong, injustice and corruption around them. They would punish such guilty ones. Once during the Caliph Omar's rule, a buyer asked a milk-vendor "You give us pure, unadulterated milk. What prompts you to be so honest?" Then the milk-vendor said,

“O God! If I ever mix water to the milk I sell and the Caliph comes to know of it that would be the end of me! Forget about mixing water to the milk, I cannot even nurse such a thought!”

These Caliphs did not spend a penny of public money on them. There was nothing like corruption in their rule, either in their lives or in the lives of those they ruled. They all lived simple, transparent lives. They always made sure that none of their subjects suffered any injustice. When they died, they did not leave behind any wealth or property.

If I should say something about myself, I am known to be rough and rude to others and very short-tempered. That is what I have heard people say about me, though not to my face. Once, my bosom friend Dr. T.K. Muhammad too had told me this. He had a quarrel with me too for that reason.

Once this friend of mine had phoned me up when I was in Bangalore as a Minister. I had asked him to meet me. He came to my office, and sat on the corridor at such a vantage point as to be visible to me. I had noticed him, but I thought I could meet him and speak to him leisurely, after every other visitor had left. But after a while I did not see him. I realised that he could have been miffed at me. I was able to locate him and brought him to my chamber. He was in high rage. “You are now a big man, aren’t you? I was sitting in front of you, but you pretended as if you had not noticed me. You should not have insulted me like this!” he raved. I had no intention of insulting him. I might have done it under the pressure of work. I explained everything to him and he slowly cooled down. I did whatever work he wanted me to do and sent him away.

But on certain occasions I could be really rude. If someone was arrested by the police after committing theft or creating trouble for others or getting involved in communal riots, his parents would come to me and tell me. “The police have arrested my son for no reason. I want you to telephone to the police and get him released. He has done no wrong, really. An innocent boy

has been implicated!” In such situation I could be very rude to them.

If a person were arrested by the police, whoever he might be, however influential he was, and whoever recommended his case, I would not ring up the police station on his behalf. Similarly, I would not bring pressure on the police to arrest anybody. I never brought pressure on the police in doing their duty. I would not interfere with their work. By doing it, I would be a party to helping the guilty and getting the innocent arrested. Such political interferences would be ruinous to social harmony. It would lead to corruption. This had always been my stand. Therefore on such occasions I could be really rude to people. This gave rise to the impression that I was rough, unhelpful and unkind, a man who would not help others or that I had a very short fuse. Some people had gone round circulating such an image of me, but I am not worried one bit.

About my children I should say, I am very proud of them. Even when I was at the top my political power and influence, they never ever misused it. They never tried to influence me. They never stepped into the Vidhana Soudha. Sometimes when I see the kind of nepotism, favouritism and such other evils I get disgusted. I am very happy that my children did not fall into such stinking political gutter.

Of late my health had deteriorated badly. For nearly a month I was hospitalised. My whole family -my wife, children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and all were with me. When I saw the anxiety on their faces I felt a happy sense of fulfilment. They were all so worried that I would leave them forever. Even though I am now past eighty, they all seemed to want me to live, and live with them for some more years. That has rekindled my desire to live. They look after me like a child, with unflinching affection. Seeing them I feel I have been truly fortunate in life. Even in the evening of my life they love me and respect me. They feel for me, and try to understand my feelings.

What else does one need, tell me? I consider myself truly fortunate, truly blessed.

Apart my family and close relatives, many of friends, the children of my long lost friends, my well wishers, and those who thought well of me, had met me in the hospital. Their words, their words of consolation, their feeling of sadness at my predicament, their sincere hopes for my early recovery which so eloquently were reflected in their eyes, had all convinced me that I had deserved nothing more in life. Even as I was feeling that I should quit this world when everyone was sad to see me go, another feeling that I should yet live and savour the sweetness of life for some more time creeps into me.

Even as others have it, I too have an 'I' within me. That 'I' I have not introduced to anybody. I have not unveiled that part of me to anybody. Some of my close friends in Bangalore who are writers and media people had come to me with a hope of writing a book about me. They sat before me with their laptop, pens and books. They tried to retrieve that part of me who was inside me. But more than saying that they had failed in their attempts to do so, I should say I did not unveil myself before them, or rather, I could not. I sent them back, saying "Not now! Let us see later." I had disappointed them.

The writers of this work, Mohammed Kulai and B.A. Mohammed Ali, had been after me for the last two years to write a book on me. I had not conceded to their demand. "This is not meant for you, sir. The posterity certainly needs the details of your life and experiences. You should agree to our demands. We will come wherever you are and sit in front of you. We will take down whatever you say or dictate." Then I thought for a while. They have been extremely nice to me. If my life and what I did and what ideals I pursued should be of use to posterity, why can't I lay bare the 'I' inside me? With this thought, I decided to accept their demand. I invited them and revealed my inner self to them without hesitation. I have kept nothing as a secret. For many days

these writers would come home, stay with me from morning till night, and rummage all my memories and ferret out all my thoughts by throwing at me searching questions, seeking clarifications and making me share all that I could share. After I bared my all, after I shared my most inner thoughts with them, I felt a sense of fulfilment. I felt lighter, happier. I felt as if a cool breeze was wafting on me. As my inner thoughts came out, I felt a sense of happy emptiness.

But even after I shared my all with you, I should say I yet concealed a thing from you. It is a very important event in my life. I had not shared it with anybody. Till yesterday or day before, I was not sure if I should tell it to anybody. I was ashamed to say it. But if I don't say it, I would be buried with me. Now I have made a firm decision to share it with you. Whatever the society thinks of me, I am resolved to tell the truth. If I do not tell you something which has been gnawing me for a long time, it would be betrayal of my conscience. That is a pain which would be hard for me to bear.

The matter is that once I slapped my wife Khateeja. That is the biggest blunder I did in my life. That keeps drilling my conscience, and whenever I remember it, I am overwhelmed with shame.

The occasion was the wedding of my youngest daughter. All the women of the house and relatives were getting ready to go to the bridegroom's house to bring back the bride. My wife Khateeja too was with them. Everybody was waiting for them to come out, ready to go. But none would come out even after a long wait. When I went in I saw her readying two house maids. Those two girls were children of our distant relatives. Since they were very poor I had kept them in our house as house maids. My wife was dressing them up with new dress, combing their hair and decorating them with flowers.

“Why are you decorating them? Where are you taking them to?” I asked.

Preoccupied with the job of decorating them, she said, “Poor girls! Let them come with us too!”

When she said this, I got angry and slapped her on her cheek. She trembled. It was so unexpected. She looked intently at my face, and there was a cascade of tears in her eyes. It became a big issue at home. All the happiness of the occasion melted away. She did not go to bring back her daughter. She stayed in the room, crying. Those girls too consigned themselves to a corner of the house. The whole programme was ruined.

For many days my wife did not talk to me. I had no courage to look at her face either. After a few days I forgot about the event. She too seemed to recover her normal mood. But one day she asked me, “Why did you slap me that day? What mistake had I committed?”

“You had set out with those two house maids to bring the bride back. Was it right? Didn’t you know that much?” I said.

“I have never treated them as our servants. I have always treated them as my own children. Poor girls! Leaving their parents, they are here because of poverty. Tell me, do they get to go anywhere? Don’t they also have the dreams of go to the weddings and such functions as our children do? How happy they were in their expectations! You ruined it all. We should never make a distinction between our children and the children of others, between the rich and the poor. Never treat servant maids as inferior. It was not their mistake that they were born poor, but it is our mistake to treat them as poor and as inferior. I cannot treat them as anybody other than my own. I cannot think anything beyond” she said.

Those words of hers opened my eyes. They gave a new turn to my life. I was able to find a new meaning in life. Since then I never treated anyone as my inferior. I rejected the idea of high and low. The practical application of equality, secularism, and sense of brotherhood of man is what I learnt from my dear wife Khateeja. I have followed this ideal all through my life. Even now she

occasionally reminds me of the event. I find it hard to look her in her eyes. I fall silent, and I turn away my face in shame.

I had told you earlier that Khateeja is a woman of few words. She does not talk much with people who visit our house. She does not debate with people or fall into an argument. She lives in her own world, with herself. None can hear her words or voice. It is as if she is not at home at all. She is so innocent, and uneducated. But I learnt my biggest lesson of my life from her. Whenever she stands before me and when I see her innocent face and eyes, I am overwhelmed into silence. I fill into my being her beautiful face and her noble, loving heart and close my eyes with a sense of fulfilment. Getting a wife like Khateeja has been a gift of god, and I cannot be more grateful for it. Whenever I think about it, a deep sense of love and gratitude well up in my heart, and my eyes grow moist. My God do all the good to my beloved Khateeja!

All the affairs of my life are now drawing to their close. I do not know how many more days are allotted to me. The one to draw the curtain on my life is surely waiting in the corner. He may do his job silently, without notice. I am getting ready for it. But I have the satisfaction of having lived a beautiful life. I remember all the events of my life, the loss I suffered and gains I had made, the high positions I had occupied or the obscurity to which I was consigned, my friends and relatives. All these appear before me as if they happened just the other day. I feel as if I am watching a play or a cinema. Sometimes I laugh at the spectacle; sometimes I am surprised and amused. What are all these? I think about them, and I think about them often. But however much I think, their meanings elude me.

