was the favourite one. Some boys were telling that the teacher was from the barber community. I did not feel any different because of the back ground of my growing up with Periappa, who had so many persons, from non-brahmin community, as his assistants and colleagues.

Back to the life in our street and home.

RR's father Ramasubba Iya found Periappa as a great companion. He used to come to our house often. I remember his first talk almost every day ~~will be~~ words be around his stomach, the uneasiness, pain etc

Papa & I used to enjoy his oft repeated sentences: "Sankara Iyer; I had lots of stomach pain; I took a hot idli, first class (in Tamil onnaam - classaa!) dip in hot water and I ate! Now my stomach is all well." May be he suffered from ulcers because of which he had pains and could not use the traditional chutney, chilli powder & or saambaar. Not even ghee & sugar, as is done for children. But the way he praised the hot water dip of Idli, as "onnaam - classaa", is a scene still in my mind.

He was a dark person, with panchakaachcham (unlike Periappa) with a thin towel as angavastram. His body was full of hair. He would have it shaved once a month or two. I have never heard him talking about his son RR. Apparently he was not happy that his son was working day and night for helping others. May be he was right. A few months after our coming, we heard that RR had died in house. There were many gossips/rumours

rumours that it was a suicide;
no it was ~~a~~ ulcer and bleeding
in stomach etc. I recall a large
~~four~~ crowd of his admirers
coming to see the body and
funeral. RR was always dressed
in ~~pant~~ pant and ~~dress~~ shirt.
I never spoke to RR
after his getting admission for me.
He was too big in position, too busy.
While passing through their
house I had seen him
only a few times, in Veshti & Mostly
at home & only his wife, who
~~was there~~
looked ~~was~~ almost girlish and like a
used to be there all the time.
doll. She ~~not~~ used to come out
for a while and go back in.
I had never seen her coming
out even for the Sivan temple

around our homes. She used to look like a deer which was afraid, judging from her eye expressions.

A few days after the death of RR, I did not see her. She might have gone back to her birth-home. Apparently RR and she were married only a few months before that his death.

Ramasubba Iyer, despite that very sad event, continued to come to our house and continue his usual talk with Periappa. I have

never seen Periappa going to his house.

On the other side of our house was an empty house. We were told that nobody rents it because a person had committed suicide in that house by hanging. I did not venture to find more. But that status of the house had not made me afraid.

The other side of the house was that of a rich man. I was told that he owned many such houses. I used to see a Moopanaar coming to his house. He was a lean ascetic and had almost lost

~~was~~ voice, may because he was dealing with paddy and rice. ~~He~~ I ~~too~~ was told that he was the man who was taking care of the properties of the rich person — a brahmin. I had seen once or twice and been near also when he came out. Some peculiar smell and ~~some~~ face puffed, ~~hands~~ fingers deformed. We were told that he suffered from leprosy. He had sons too. There were speculations that they were also infected. They did not mingle with any body. They were also rich; house fully electrified.

I had any own playcircles. Boys on the streets. Convenient alliances. I don't remember any special friends. Papa had stopped playing in the street any more as she used to do in Kottaram. She had become a big girl, busy with lots of homework from the Convent school. (about 11 years)

Inside the house Papa & I used to compete especially in finishing Kalki and Ananda Vikatan, the respectable Tamil weeklies

which was got at home. We used to run to get it first. I remember once that Papa's ~~glob~~ gold chain got entangled in the padlock of the house door & broke. Later it was ~~repaired~~ repaired.

The Kalki & Ananda Vikatan increased my literary horizons in Tamil.

(free) Occassionally provincial copies of Kumudam used to be pushed in our house also. It was supposed to be "out-of-bounds" for "decent families".

The promotional scent which they used put on the Kumudam was also attractive. Papa & I used to read it also. The slightly more "exposed women" was its speciality and some "special jokes". & That was during (1953 - 1957). Looking back now, it could not even be called soft-soft-porno by current standards as can Kalki & Ananda Vikatan Regular newspapers during 1990's & now carry more explicit material & daily material on sex etc.

What a change in attitudes of people in just four decades!

It is not just that the Americans change fast. Indian people have changed their social attitudes at a remarkable speed (acceleration). It is also partly to do with Hindu culture which has got capability for a remarkable adaptation, being very flexible and giving individuals lots of freedom. In the home front, it was as usual the tasty food by Periamma. Not having electricity at home was not a problem. We had some street electric lights — dim bulbs.

We had a "hurricane kerosene" light and another small ~~chimney~~ kerosene chimney light (called Kunuvi ~~vitta~~ Vilakku — sparrow light). ~~The~~ The whole house was to be managed with these lamps. Papa used to work for school even through the dark (after dawn), unlike in Koltaaram, when we used to hear our ~~The~~ Grandpa's story narration.

Sometimes we used to compete for this light — very rarely.

The only furniture available with us ~~a~~ was a desk. It was a short one ~~about~~ less than two ~~and~~ feet in ~~his~~ height, sloping top, a small (flat ~~place with~~ piece with a carved) slot for keeping an ink ~~point~~ pot, a small long thin slot keeping ink-pen — dip and ~~a~~ write. The ~~Kur~~ small Chimney lamp could be kept on it to give light when we ~~work~~ ~~write wi~~ ~~work~~ wrote at night.

Papa ~~used to~~ was a larger user of it. Very often I ~~wish~~ would lie down on the floor

and write my ~~home~~ home work, which was not as heavy as it was for Papa.

While Papa used to play in the street with other girls at Kottaram, she had totally stopped playing on the street once we moved to Palayamkottai totally stopped such play. I don't think she played games in her school. She probably considered herself as a grown up girl.

I had lots of street play - friends. We used to run around the Siva temple. ~~the~~ On one side of the temple, the total street was occupied by weavers. They used to have

having
many stands of long threads, as
if they were a part of a huge
cloth. They used to colour them.
After drying they will roll them.
I was told that they were
Saurashtrians — very fair looking
persons, both men, women and
children. They used to work hard,
right from the morning to
late evening. I could guess
that the language they speak
within themselves was different.
The way they spoke Tamil
was also different. I did
not have any Saurashtrian boy as
a friend. They did not mix up

with us.

I had plenty of opportunities to play in the school. ~~In addition to the~~ Physical Training (PT) was given by the Teacher (at Xaviers) who was a Muslim gentlemen, I think Jamaluddin always dressed in white half-pant & shirt, both well starched and ironed with a shoe on. He taught well and was strict about our actions of left-right or other PT exercises. When we are through with our lessons, he used to go to a distance and under a tree used to ~~will~~ have ~~a g~~ a relaxed smoking of a cigarette. He would have combed ~~his~~ his hair also smartly — well oiled, but

a portion rising up and making a nice looking slope.

The reason he used to give us, sometimes, ~~to~~ was to cut short our PT exercises and allow us to play foot ball or hockey. Ball, hockey sticks etc were provided by the school.

Imagine ~~the~~ playing barefoott or a rough ground. ~~It was~~. I used to go with the foot ball team. The ball was old fashioned. A leather outer & jacket and an inflatable thick rubber bulb (with a ~~few~~ couple

folds and long pipe to breath
down air. Often without the
use of cycle pump, we used
to fill it, after placing the
rubber bubb in the leather
jacket; after sufficient
filling, it is the long pipe
wrap is folded so that air
does not escape & with the
leather lace in the outer jacket
we used to tightly close.
The trick while playing
is was to avoid hitting
that part of the ball; it
can hurt. I had a few times

hit wrongly. Though I used to be running along and sometimes passing the ball ek, I don't recall my doing any great sports feat. I had several disadvantages: I was about two to three years younger to most of the boys in my class, because I any jump promotion to from the fourth to seventh standard. In addition, I had poor growth, ~~weak~~ lean and short, probably because I was not eating well, though Periamma was a great cook and also took

a special care of feeding me.
Papa was a moderate eater.

When I was in Kottaram for four years, I used to run a lot all around the village; I used to also trip and fall often. My knees, most of the time used to have a red dry patch or black one. Those scabs (superficial) are there even now. Similarly at Palayamkottai I used to run around the temple. My getting hurt at the knees had stopped, may be because I had a better control; Obstacles in the street roads were not very different.

On those streets sometimes

a woodcutter (Viraku Vetti — that is a cutter of fuel ~~wood~~ wood) used to come. It is the task of the house owners to get a big size log of ~~wood~~ fuel wood knowing their requirements and perhaps their budget ~~The fuel to~~ The big logs used to in front of the house. Apparently no theft was taking place. The fuel-wood-cutter, usually a thin wiry black body with a small cloth wrapped to cover private parts and the bottoms, ~~was~~ folded tightly back as an ~~long~~ underwear (or (langoti). A small cloth ~~was~~ wrapped around the head, not so much as a turban but to hold the hairs

and absorber of the sweat ~~trickling~~ trickling from the head. ~~He~~ ~~used to go~~ ~~used to go~~ The only tool he had was an axe. Apparently there was a rate for him depending on the size of the wood.

It used to be fascinating to see him cut. Often he ~~with~~ would start in the ~~a~~ morning and would go even beyond noon. Sweat used flow on him like a river. He would pause a while, stretch his body and limbs and restart the cutting process. It was interesting to see him use a wedge to cut bigger pieces slowly and ~~stea~~ steadily. It was fascinating to see such a thin short person do so much of

hard physical work continuously. Pouring sweat or toughness of the fuel ~~wood~~ wood never deterred him. The way used to lift the axe upwards with his two hands clasping the main rod and ~~it~~ swing it towards the wood and ~~it~~ hitting the right place again and again till it splits, was a scence to watch.

~~Probably~~

What kept it going? It was not a period when I was aware of work, force and energy as defined in physics. Nor was I aware of the food ~~the~~ being

the source of energy to work.
But I had regularly noticed
one thing: around noon
time, he would request one of the
household to give water; they
would give it not in glass
or tumbler but in a big
brass 'chemba' (like a small
brass pot). He would
keep it down, then open a
a packet of 'porikadali' (roasted
gram with the upper cover removed;
it will be bright light yellowish)
It would eat it hurriedly
and in between flavour with a
quarter [hemisphere of
palm-gud (karuppatti),

bitten by him. When it was all over, he would lift the chamber of water up and pour the water into his mouth. This was a South-Indian habit not to sip a vessel, even if it had hot coffee in it. May be developed as a hygenic habit. But it was a practice for all. Similarly before starting he would pour a bit of water to the earth, thanking the Mother Earth. This was again universal. In his case, he would lift it slightly higher from the mouth; most of the poured water ~~will~~ would go inside. But a small part ~~will~~ would flow through his neck and body; would

words even wet this "loincloth" ~~He was~~ Again this was done with a great artistic style. It was probably done to cool his body.

I had a special fascination for seeing those who did physical work. I used to go and see in the very back of our house, the excreta - ~~the~~ cleaning woman (called Oddachchi). It was a dry latrine. We would sit on the ~~seat~~ brick-cement platform to excrete. Around the morning time, she will enter from the back door to

clean it. She had a ladle, a long handles ~~cococ~~ ~~cocon~~ "spoon" the one in the cupped form being a coconut shell.

After collecting / scrapping then she ~~it~~ would ~~a~~ ~~the~~ put it in a bucket; then clean the rest of it with water ~~keep~~ kept in a special bucket and using a special broom stick (we were told not to touch them). In fact, she used to be ~~felt~~ feeling bad that I came so near and watching her do these things. Was she worried about a brahmin boy

being polluted? On some occasions, I had gone out with her in the back gali to see what she was doing. A few of them used to join and even aggregate the excreta from the small buckets to a larger vessel. They used to talk to each other in a language which I did not understand. When I asked my Periamma, she told it was Telugu. While my Periamma was very orthodox, she did not chastise me for going near 'Oddachchi's'.

Another interesting person for me to watch was a Andhra Brahmin who used to pull a long & wooden cart on which about 4 to 5 big size 'Kudams' (pots made south Indian style — not made of brass but some cheap Zinc material). His only job the whole day was to fetch fresh water from a canal nearby & about two miles away and deliver at homes. I think it was fixed at one rupee per kudam. I think he was supplying to us, twice a month or more as required. The only dress

he had was an underwear or Kowpeenam, a wet-netted-towel (Valai ~~mundu~~ mundu, in Tamil) wrapped ~~wrapped~~ ~~ate~~ around his hip, ~~a sac~~ a sacred thread (poonool) on his body. Mostly he was unshaven, but never had a beard. May be he was getting a shave once in a fortnight. He wouldn't never talk to any body, never smile; never stop even to watch some thing; he was some what like a trained animal! I was amazed to see his carrying capacity and

and day long work. I used to see him going to several streets and households to deliver water and finally go back to his house.

His wife (I learnt it was his second wife, looking much younger to him) who used to come to our house for cooking during the menstrual periods of my Perianna (who was very strict about the taboo of untouchability during that period). That lady was paid for those three days. When she worked

in our house when he brought water, even then he ~~would~~ would not talk to her! Delivered water, collects the empty kudam and then ~~go~~ go away — that was his routine.

Coming now to my school, the Kristu Raja Vidyalayam had left in me ~~nothing~~ nothing much in memory except for the ~~Physi~~ Skills training teacher, a simple man ~~ethnic~~ with white veshti (the ~~South~~ Tamil style of wearing the dhoti), a half-sleeve white shirt and small white cloth on the

He taught very well — the handloom weaving, binding etc. Other memory was the big white pigs & cages inside the area where the Brothers lives. We could see through the thick iron nets. No memory about other teachers or students. Lots of portraits of Jesus, Mary & Joseph.

It is around St Xavier's High School most of my memory is still afresh. I don't remember the process of my getting back into St Xaviers after the one year which The Rev Father Headmaster had promised to RR & my Periappa.

RR was no more. I do not recall any special effort by Periappa. I got into class 8 ~~III~~ (third form) Section F. That section was because I chose not to take Sanskrit which was taken by most Brahmin boys. It was supposed to give high marks in Matriculation examination.

I do not recall what all were going on, in my head during the first year in Palayamkottai — at school (Krishn Raja) and home. Events were as pleasant and enjoyable as it was in Kottaram, an extension of happy Childhood.

~~149~~ (150)

My age become double-digit after the first year at Palayamkottai (1954). One thing I was getting exposed was to the beautiful Tamil articles in Kalki and Ananda Vikatan. One that attracted me most was R.P.S. Raa. Pi. Sethu Pillai's style of writing. Some of the Bharathi Paadalgal. ~~#50~~

I think there were other options than Special Tamil (Chiyappu Tamil). I somehow took it. Periappa did not apparently have any view on it. He was perhaps confident that I would do well in whatever I do. For some odd reason, I do not recall my having any drive to have the highest scoring marks.

(151)

The particular section I had gone into, was a strange mix of many boys from different communities and capabilities. There were a good number of them who were in the sports category: ~~foo~~ athletes, foot ball, hockey etc. ~~It is~~ There ~~where~~ were many christians (protestants, pentacostals, and other denominations), ~~At~~ a few Muslims (I remember one Ibrahim, very fair and handsome, liked by all) other than catholics, who had ~~a~~ special ~~di~~ sections for them ~~They~~ Catholics had special hostels and special church. ~~Brahmin~~ Probably I was the only Brahmin boy as most of them were in the Sanskrit section. ~~The A~~ There were also fellows who were from richer families: shop keepers, ~~business~~ other ~~co~~ rich agriculturists, other businesses.

A fair number of them stayed in hostels. They had good pocket money to go out and buy sweets (chikki's of different types, injimurappa &c — a ginger preparation etc). I was the youngest because of my two jump promotions. Normally the boys should have completed 12 years (I was just 10) to enter into 8th standard. But a fair number of them would have been around 14 to 15 years or more, had emerging moustaches, some shaved and were ~~proud~~ proud of it. These were the boys, who have failed more than once in various classes.

In general, our section ~~the class~~ was a "college" section especially in the 9th & 10th classes. Our ~~These~~ 9th & 10th classes sections were also a "nursery" for students studying for B.T. (Bachelor of Training) — now B.Ed) in the nearby St Xaviers College and therefore had the advantage of two Professors (Maths & Science) teaching us from that college.

Some of the olders boys were smoking. Some excessively as we could smell when they came near. They were all ~~proud~~ proud of it and would be talking about how they cheated the ward boy to fetch cigarettes and beedis.

In my eighth class, the class teacher was Arulappan. I still remember him. Thin, soft spoken, dressed in spot white Veshti and ~~full sleeve~~ half sleeve shirt. He taught us English. My base for English had come from him: simple sentence, compound sentence, precis writing etc. He was strict on spelling mistakes. The punishment was simple: write the correct spelling in good handwriting 100 times (called 'imposition'). Thanks to that imposition, which I had done ~~a few~~ a couple

of times, I scarcely make any spelling mistake. He had taught us the technique of remembering the right spelling. ~~and~~ Also about exceptions ~~who~~ where sounds are similar but spellings are different; for example. foreign, 'believe'. ~~Mr~~ All these ~~was~~ were taught with mix of Tamil to explain to us. It was a Tamil medium school with English as one of the subject. I also recall his teaching from the Wren & Martin ~~&~~ grammar book. Probably I had a copy which was shared by

Papa and me. There was
also a Hindi teacher: ~~H~~
Thirumalachar. Just introduction
of scripts: some words:
Simple constructions. ~~No so~~
~~None~~ Most students took no
interest because ~~it~~ the
marks in Hindi; did not
count in any final examination.
General, anti-Hindi background
of Tamil Nadu, though officially
it was still Madras State
with large parts of Andhra
(present) and Karnataka were under it.
It was the (legacy) Madras Presidency
under the British.

~~Once~~

~~For every quarter there~~

There was one quarterly, half yearly and annual examination in the school. ~~Once~~ ~~One of~~ For Each of the exams, the Vice-Principal used to come and declare the results in the class. He was a Rev. Father, with nicely trimmed beard and bespectacles. Small figure but looked ferocious, because he ~~with~~ would come with a ~~big~~ long cane with him. After reading out the result of each student, for those who had failed he would call them and beat

is the palm, specially extended as per his instructions. If one pulled the hand to lighten the harshness of the beating, he would repeat it again. The severity of the beating depended on how poorly the student had performed. Each failed subject would attract one beating. I had seen boys crying and struggling with their hands. In one such session, may be half-yearly he read out my marks, which

(normally) were uniformly very high in all subjects. On that day, he reads out the Mathematics results as 39% and after finishing called me to come forward and stretch my hand. Technically I had not failed as the failure mark was 35% I was scared. Arullappan stood watching. The Vice Principal said "Well you always do well; what happened? You require one caning!" and caned me. Fortunately he did it gently. Still I felt very bad, not because of the pain, as it was practically not there,

but because of the humiliation, before the class. Later, Arullappan went ~~and too~~ a to the headmaster's office (I guess) to get my answer papers. He came with a news that I had got 93%, but due to a clerical error it got inscribed as 39% in Vice Principal's list! I felt relieved. But I don't recall the Vice-Principal calling me and saying a few good words. But the class knew ~~not~~ my my results! That was enough for me.

On the contrary the Principal (or Headmaster, I don't recall

how they were named) was one Rev. Father. Kulandaiswamy, with a long flowing beard and some partial bald ~~set~~ head, was a nice person. When he passed by any of the students, he used to smile. We would feel good. I think once he called me and patted me for good performance.

During my 8th class or may even be higher, I had written a few English poems, sticking the rhymes. ~~rhythms~~ I don't know whether I showed them to the teachers. ~~as~~ ~~there~~ ~~They~~ Similarly I had written a fairly large number of poems on ~~Krishna~~ ~~Bhaga~~ Krishna in Tamil adapting from Bhagvatam. I had been writing it in a note book... All

lost in shifting to Bombay later.
I had also attempted my own
crude experiments with cotton
soaked in water! I used to
carefully monitor them; after
some time some black things
appeared and I had thrown them away!
They should have been fungi.
Similarly, I had attempted a
few experiments in electricity
with magnets and coils; all
~~mis~~ done without understanding
& principles! I gave them up.

My science teacher was
tall and
an Iyengar; properly dressed
in Pancha - kacham (Dhoti)
and a nice white shirt. He had a nice tuft.
He taught
very well. The maths teacher was

a brilliant man. Short and dark.
Nice Iyengar naamam in his forehead.
He had a cropped hair (no tufts)
He used to bite his lower
lips often. He wore vesthi,
shirt and a coat, which he
change rarely. The boys used
to sprinkle ink on it to
count how many days he
did not change! Sometimes
he used to get angry but
did not know how to
control the student-mobs! Also
most of them were poor in maths.
I used to enjoy maths classes.

In the 10th class, we
had a Lokachari as a Maths
teacher. This fair person; brilliant

thick glasses; again a veshti, shirt and a grey coat. It was generally told that he took lots of tuition, as he needed money to marry of many daughters he had. Many students in the class also took tuition from him. ~~So w~~ In general he was also teased by boys; he used to try to spot the trouble makers and ~~gi~~ would give one 'kuttu' on the head. Once he ~~did to~~ gave one 'kuttu' (that is folding the palm and landing the four finger bones forcefully ~~write~~ right ~~fo~~ on the skull). I was

I want on pleading that I did not do any mischief. He realised it and made my neighbouring student Gregory (who used to take tuition from him but still do mischief in class), stand on the bench! Gregory was his tuition-student!

K. Ramanathan was a dark, part bald person with protuding eyes. Veshti and a thin jibba. He was quite knowledgeable Tamil teacher (general Tamil) But somehow, the ~~teachers~~ students used to tease him, irritate him in his class.

On the contrary, Balasubramanium ~~the Speech~~

the special Tamil teacher was unique. He wore pant and a shirt of the same colour (may be what is called Safari suit now) Very soft spoken person. He made me love Tamil. He insisted that any of the Tamil ~~&~~ poem / or poem cheyyul (verse) / should be ~~sung~~ sung and not ~~told~~ read as a prose! He taught the intricacies of grammar & Tamil prose and poetry, with a great simplicity. Added on to it, his insistance on saying the poem ~~with~~ as a simple song with rythms

helped me a great deal
in memorising Great Tamil
poems, very easily. I remember
them even now. The natural
rythm with simple rules on
the start of the words etc, made
me later ~~a g~~ write
Tamil poems later in life.

After the leaving in the
10th standard when I was
just 12 years (entering into 13 years)
no formal training in Tamil
for me later. It is a pity
that I could not physically
present my first Tamil

(168)

SKM

poetry book "Nenjaga Malargal" (Blossoms of the Heart) to him. When I wrote to St Xaviers High School around 2000 to give his & Ramanathan's address if they ~~are~~ were alive and if not a relative's address. I had sent the books, requesting to hand over to them or keep in their library. No ~~concern~~ reply at all. Though they sent me ~~later~~ a letter for 125th year celebrations much later, there were no mention of the Tamil teachers.

"Later I became a member of the Alumni by paying the amount, even then, no response. Only some fund raising letters from the Principal. It is sad to note

that the schools do not even bother to keep a record of their teachers. Worse still, they don't even reply when some one seriously requests for information. May be, St. Xaviers High School having been a great school for more than a century, it has produced many "great" persons, VIP's etc. Therefore they may (my) not be bothering about correspondence.

But I find this attitude of not caring for the teachers who made the schools and colleges still persists in most of our institutions even now when e-contacts are so easy.

Though I myself was poor in sports due to my age-disadvantage and frail body, I used to take part in some discussions between boys about the achievements of St Xaviers School at the sports: various events. St Xaviers (a Catholic school) and St. Johns (Protestant school) which was very close by divided by a road a high fence on both sides (!) were severe competitors in everything: academics, to sports. Catholic-Protestant animosities was ~~cleverly~~ cleverly handled by the school authorities to convert the competition as a School-nationalism. In fact many boys who were heroes who won the sports event were protestant boys such as from my ~~class~~ section.

~~Rarely~~ A few times, I had gone to the edge of the fence, through the rubble beyond the playground, to ~~look at~~ see how St Johns

looked like. ~~I used to~~ Since I went barefooted as did other boys, sometimes used to be pricked very badly by thorns. Sometimes tips of the thorns used break inside. It ~~used~~ would swell; after a few days the ~~skin used to~~ would get soft, and ~~then~~ it could be ~~peel~~ peeled off. The tip of the thorn would be there. Not always would I report these to Periappa ~~or~~ or Periamma, except when things were in bad shape requiring a cloth bandage.

For some time, Periappa used to tell me to use the Bata shoe sent from Bombay by my father. It did not fit well, and caused problems. Also, I did not want to look like an odd exception. So barefoot walking, running etc

was the norm. Periappa had his leather chappal with tyre nailed as the sole, the same which he wore at Kottaram. Periamma would not wear a chappal. For her ~~that~~ using leather was not ~~consid~~ a "pure" habit. But she did not walk much out to market place etc, as the hawkers of vegetables, and etc would come to the street. Periappa, taking me often used to go to the shops to get cooking ~~and~~ and other household materials. Rice came from Kottaram. Papa also went barefooted only; but her trip was to the school and back. Occasionally to the Sivan temple near by and sometimes, coming with me, to see the Navaratri festivals.

* * *

It is time to take a pause in the writing on events in my life and instead write about two individuals, who had made a tremendous contributions to the early years of my life: that is about my Periappa (Sankara Iyer) and Periamma (Subbulakshmi)

When I look back into my life as a whole, these were the only two individuals to whom I could not repay anything much, (Four)

in terms of facilities or a better standard of living etc. It is mostly because I had not stabilized myself in life financially [before their passing away] It was during the early stage of my

P.T.O

career with a low government salary. I had no base of money nor any inheritance from family. When I went to join the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) at my age 20 (official 21) in July 1964 for Ph.D. programme, my allowance was Rs. 300 per month. The only cash I had was Rs. 1500 which I had saved with the Fellowship money of Rs. 75/- p.m for 10 months a year for two years @ 100 when I did M.Sc. at the Bombay University attached to D.G. Ruparel College. That fellowship was a special recognition of my getting a first class in B.Sc. (Hons) in Physics. ~~I was the~~ first classes

were rare.

Later I brought ~~them~~ both of them, after a hostel stay of 6 months, in a small shared house in ~~Paldi, Ah~~ Tagore Society, Paldi, Ahmedabad. ~~Dr ga~~ ~~Though~~ Though living conditions were nominal (my scholarship was Rs. 300/- pm and Rs. 100 was ~~what~~ in rent!), I was happy that I could give my Periappa & Periamma a freedom from the oppressive conditions of the "joint family" (1957-1964) we had in Bombay, "run" by my father S. Yagnaswami. Medical attention I could give was very

P.T.O

minimal. There was a allopathic doctor nearby. Of course, in those days medical knowledge available to the world and in India, was very minimal. For example for my Periamma ~~s~~ arthritic pain (just developing), there was nothing equivalent to Combiflam (1964). Later in Bangalore, the treatment for her blood pressure or hyper tension was minimal...

Nor could I give them a number of new clothes ~~or~~ nor could I take Periamma to visit a few places in India. ~~It~~ My frequent travels were official with very little facilities.

So they gave, gave, gave, to me and my elder sister

Papa. They gave up the good house they had built for themselves and my grandfather in Kottaram. They gave up the small piece of land and the rice from it. ~~They came and~~ ~~to~~ Periappa's one good source of income was the kirana shop he ran in the village, on a commercially strategic ~~rd~~ road, linking Mellappattam - Kottaram - Manakkadu. He gave up that too, to Palavesam Pillai who took care of it and us.

Even then he had some money to support our education in Palayamkottai. When the Periamma decided to come to Bombay

(P.T.O.)

leaving all their separate good life, it was due to their affection, ~~for~~ love and bondage for Papa and me. They did not, ~~for~~ perhaps, know that they will lose all their freedoms in Bombay. I had to helplessly watch that situation from my age of 13 to 20, till I could have my own income. I could not compensate for that pain of ~~the~~ about eight years they have gone through for the sake of Papa and me. Especially they were concerned that I ~~do not~~ did not suffer. They were aware of the hostility shown by my father towards me

and wanted to be protective. Their
paesence and the security of
their ~~love~~ love couples with
the economic independence of Ambulu
and her love for me, helped.

For all others in my
life (personal, official or otherwise), I could return in
equal amount, or more. For
many (persons in my life) I had done a lot of help
and in return got many bad
things also from some of them
or a cautious neglect from most!

But for my Periappa and
Perianna, I was the receiver;
they suffered for me. But
I gave back very little. Only
thing they were happy was

(P.T.O)

See Gomati (Goma) my life.
~~an~~ They loved her. She loved them
Though they stayed together only
for a few years after marriage,
She gave them the affection
and above all a beautiful
baby son. Periappa and Periama
was very keen to see a son
through me!

I personally still feel
the VOID ~~the~~ and pain that I
could not do much more;
as their demise was too early
in my career.

Now coming back
to these two great souls, their
~~life~~ lives shall been, great
in many ways. I will try to

give some glimpse, as I heard from them and others.

My mother loved both of them as if they were her parents. Her own parental home was not a pleasant one. Periappa would be about 21 years elder to my mother and Periamma about 16 years elder.

An ideal parents from the standard of those days — except that this "daughter" came to them ~~as~~ just when she entered her teens. God had destined that ~~it~~ she gave Periappa and Periamma not only love and affection,

(P.T.O)

~~three~~ three ~~beant~~ children to play with (as Periappa & Periamma were issueless)

The amount of ~~stories~~ stories my ~~Periapp~~ Periamma used to tell ~~stories of~~ about my first (dead) sister ~~was~~ would look like fairy tales. In her brief life time of one year she (my elder sister, my mothers first child) had charmed everybody in the ~~at~~ village. She talked too! All in a hurry. ~~&~~ Periamma used to describe about her brief illness (Karappaan) in Tamil when she (child) used to ~~lie~~ ~~by~~ lye on ~~&~~ Periamma's lap for a few days before death. Periamma had many ~~boils~~ boil-marks on her thigh, ~~we~~ which she ~~will~~ would show as the remembrance of the child. Apparently

giving donkey's milk ~~when~~ at the infant stages would have immunised the child. Why they missed it, is not clear. Probably, Karappaan was getting rarer. Papa and I were given donkey's milk ~~at~~ at the infant stages.

My grandfather had ~~told~~ told me a few times (dear) that the horoscope of my first elder sister was so good with all signs being in the most ideal places. He said that it would be so rare to have it and if at all, the child would have survived ~~in a~~ as a princess. He used to add, not in a poor Brahmin family.

Thus because of my Amma's deep love and affection for them, she became the ~~dau~~ daughter of the childless couple. And naturally her children, were their most loved ones for ~~which~~ whom, they were prepared to sacrifice ~~their~~ the comforts and

(P.T.O)

freedom of their lives. While being so, my mother died and left two of us in their care and custody! What a play of fate!!

My Periappa's childhood life ~~was vari~~ as told by him and Periamma were varied, sometimes enjoyable and some time difficult. His mother (my grandmother) Lakshmi was sick most of the time; I do not know what exactly it is. I ~~had seen her cryin~~ recall seeing her curled up in Bhojmahal when I was still in Bombay before mother's death. Whether it was some form depression or physical ailment I do not know. Nor did I try to find out.

My grandfather being a Ganapaadigal had to go ~~from~~ ~~place~~ to different Veda teaching

centres (Veda Paatha shala).
Tiruchendur was one of them. Thatha
(grandpa) had told me several times
about his love for Lord Murugan
(Subramanya). Though the family
God was Venkateswara (we still have
the panchaloka vigraha with us),
he had in his pooja a special
silver vigraha of Lord Subrahmanya.
He initiated teaching me Subrahmanya
Bhujangam, those wonderful and musical 32 Slokas
by Adi Sankara; on his Ishtadevata.
It was indeed Periappa who perfected
my reciting it/singing it and also meaning
of the Sloka as a whole.

This process of my grandpa's
frequent transfers affected the formal
education of Periappa. About He went to
a school only for two years. Periappa
had a great talent for music. He

had told me that he would go ~~to~~ to the temple early and spend time with those who play Nadhaswaram (the long pipes music instrument specially prevalent in Tamil Nadu) and mathalam (the big drummer instrument which is worn on the body and using two hands thus freed, the drummer will use the fingers to give taala. The fingers are fortified with a specially plastered caps).

Playing of ~~Nadhaswaram~~ Nadaswaram & Mathalam will be special sight to watch. Even more in the ~~Tamil~~ marriages of Tamil Nadu, it is a must. One person will be in the back with the ~~one~~ the long Nadaswaram pipe, just creating the sound to keep the 'Swaram'.

As a Brahmin boy, and a handsome one, Ganapadigal's son, my periappa Sankaran

was loved by them. They taught him music as ~~they~~ these musicians were good in classical carnatic vocal songs as well. In fact the Nadaswaram is the piper version of it. So the knowledge and skills of Periappa (Sankaran) in carnatic music (Sangeeta jnanam) & grew tremendously. I have heard him singing at home and later when Jayashree was ~~[illegible]~~ taught in Bombay. The music teachers used to respect his knowledge.

Periappa had also told me that in addition to his music he used to enjoy eating the tender coconut which were offered as prasadam. He used to feed on them along with jaggery or Karuppatti (black palm jaggery). Since he had lot of good food and being young,

he also ~~gra~~ got training from the local pahelwans (or payilwans as it is told in Tamil), in lifting, rolling etc of Kanla kattai & which were local versions of exercise material for building up body, strengthening elbows etc.

When I had seen him the village when he was around late forty or near fifty, he still had a nice flat torso: A big broad chest without any loose muscle. No tummy. In between I used to play with his elbow muscle. "Periappa tighten your elbow muscle, I want to succeed by pressing it!" I had never! It used to be like a rock. This was 88, even after, his health had

deteorarates due to asthma which he got around 35 years, when he came back from Cochin. (Kochi)

So the young Sankaran has excellent and strong body and was well trained in music. Of the conventional Sanskrit studies he was well versed in slokas and epics like Shyamala dhandakam. He knew the meanings of each of them. I have seen reading some of them, in his later years as well.

He was very good in some of the fine literary works in Sanskrit.

He possesses a musical voice to recite them. He understood their meanings. In this context, one poignant scene still in my memory is the last rites done by Periappa (Sankara Iyer) for my Thatha. That was

in Bombay. It was a massive function, not for ostentatious activities, but because so many persons walked along ~~the~~ to the cremation ground from Goregaon to Malad crematorium. People competed to carry the Stretcher (called Paadai in Tamil) made traditionally. I was supposed to carry the fire pot (prerogative and duty of the grandson). ~~Periappa~~ I was about 15. Periappa around 58 ~~56~~ years of age. He was sad but did not cry. ~~or looked~~ Nor did he look distraught. Well, his father had spent a full good life. Saw many good things through a

a few terrible things like losing a young daughter-in-law Visalakshi and seeing his wonderful grand daughter Laxmi (Ambulu) getting widowed, ~~Tooo~~ who was taking care of him (as a nurse) when he was bed ridden during the last years of his around 80 plus. He would have been pained by the terrible disharmony in the house, where all his three children (~~Periappa~~ Sankaran, ~~Attai~~ Kamala & Yagnaswami) were together with all his surviving grand children: Lakshmi, by then a widow but has become a teacher, leaving behind her tragedy, Rajalakshmi, Sundararajan and Jayashree, in the Goregaon house. That is the

the great irony of life. Perhaps his dementia would have been partly due to that.

So his departure at a ripe old age was not something that was not expected, So Sankara Iyer was walking too.

When the rites were done, many Sanskrit Slokas and Vedic chants were done. Sankara Iyer repeated them with full flow of his melodious voice. ~~The~~ At the last stage, the small pieces of wood was placed on Thatha's broad Chest, and a number of Slokas / Vedic hymns were chanted before lighting the ~~pay~~ pyre.

~~At~~ While reciting with his musical voice at some point Sankara Iyer broke down, unable to continue the recital. After a few minutes, he composed himself and started reciting musically. It was not the same old flow.

Later after returning home I asked Periappa, "Why did you cry so much? You were calm and composed all the way." Then he told me about the meanings of those hymns/sloka. They will go somewhat like this " I used to be on your lap as a young child etc " — fully describing the childhood relations to the father

and the subsequent phase. They were not invocation to gods or prayers in the usual sense. It was the memories of the poignancy of the human relations, poignantly recalled after the person has departed!

Such was his knowledge of Sanskrit in the context of understanding slokas & hymns. He may not have been a grammarian type scholar.

Periappa has not narrated every bit of his life age by age or as people by people to me. For example he had not told about his

mother, birth of his sister Kamala
~~etc~~. or birth of ~~any father~~ his
younger brother and how they lived.

Periamma used to tell about
some of these; perhaps ~~&~~ young
Sankara Iyer might have told his
wife. One item was that my
grandpa was very short tempered.
Periamma used to add that
all the Kausika gotra males
were short tempered, though
they are good after the surge!

Without telling in such
a way Periappa had told me
an interesting event of his
life, when he was about 16 years
of age. Both his ~~brother~~ sister
& brother would have been born.

~~Sankara~~ His father in a fit of anger beat Sankaran with one of the pile of firewood, very badly. That left Sankaran, sad and angry. He got away from the house and got into a train for ~~Chess~~ Madras (now Chennai) This, I think, was from Tiruchendur ~~He had~~ Sankaran had heard about Sir C.V. Ramaswamy Iyer in Madras and that he helps poor Brahmin boys.

Sankaran managed to reach Sir CVR's house one morning, with all the dirt of train travel, with some rubble in the face etc. The attendants

made him sit in a place.
After some time Sir CVR came.
Periappa describes that he looked
like Maha Vishnu - so handsome
and with charismatic stature. (Gambhiram
is the word used in Tamil)

He straightaway starts
asking him questions, not so
much about whereabouts but
about his knowledge of things.
Sankaran explained briefly what
all he knew.

One question from Sir CVR!
"(Ambi, (that is a word for young Brahmin Boy, derived from Thambi younger brother)
Can you tell me the Sloka
in Subrahmanya Bhujangam
where the Lord is described as
a child?"

Pat came the answer
from Sankaran, Ro reciting

the shloka "Ihaayaahi Vatseti..." # "
in his melodious voice with
correct pronunciation (Uchchaarana)

Sir CVR: "Good... Is there any
other?"

Sankaran: "No Sir"

CVR: "Very Good"

Then he shifted to Kalidasa's
works, Raghvamsa, Shyamala
Dandakam etc. Periappa had told
me about particular items but
I have forgotten, because of my
poor knowledge of Sanskrit.

Sankaran was not only master
of those items, but also could
sing melodiously and describe
the meaning as a beautiful

narrative.

Sir CVR was highly impressed. He called the attendants and told them to arrange for shaving and bath for the young ~~man~~ man. And also to give a good hot breakfast, idli, dosa, chutney & sambaar. Then he told them and also seeing Sankaran that he ~~would~~ would stay there in that house (there ~~was a~~ were special rooms for such persons) as long as he wanted.

Periappa told me that he stayed about a month and then returned home. He did not tell us to how the reception was back at home! His father

also would have realised his foolishness.

Periamma, Subbulakshmi did not say much about her childhood. By the time she came to this world she was so immersed in this family that her parents, school etc were distant memories. She had passed 8th standard as she was in Madurai city. That was a very high education for a girl, in those time and age. She was brilliant in maths, in chess, carrom etc. She was a great believer in all the ~~acts~~ 'aachaarams' (prescribed religious practices and taboos).

At the time of their marriage Sankaran would have been 18 and she was 13. She was dark but had exceptionally beautiful face. Some snippets she said was that the ~~Kottaram~~ villagers ~~will ask as~~ in ~~a the~~ her in-law place would comment as to why Sundara Ganapaadigal had to go all the way to Madurai to get a girl as daughter-in-law, why not within Tirunelveli district?

She had also told us that she had seen the house of M. S. Subbalakshmi's mother's house in Madurai when she was a young girl.

I have no clear idea

as to where the younger couple Sankaran & Subbalakshmi ~~did~~ they lived and what they did. Sundara Ganapaadigal (SG) did not own a house in Kottaram. His father ~~was~~ Sankara Deekshitar (SD) stayed in his own house, which was given to his third ~~Son~~ Son Vishwanathan, as he was sick with severe bronchitis and could not earn much. The other three sons went out of village. SG was probably working (teaching Vedas) at Tiruchendur or Kallidai-kurichi.

Probably the young couple might then come to Kottaram and then went out.

SD's love for Subbalakshmi (SL) was special. So was her love and devotion to him. Maybe it developed after they ~~came~~ (SI & SL) came back from Kochi, permenantly back home as SA had also retired.

SI would have decided that there was no point in hanging around in Kottaram or with his father. ~~The~~ His music, his physical prowess or Sanskrit ~~sht~~ sloka / hymn knowledge was not going to give him ~~to~~ a decent earning to support him and his wife. He was very pragmatic, as I saw him when I grew and I learnt a lot from

SI as to how to take unemotional and pragmatic decisions.

SI or SL had told us as to why and how they decides to go to Kochi. But one thing I could infer was that SI was not a great believer in the ~~was~~ ritualistic aachaarams of ~~the~~ an orthodox Brahmin family. SL very much was! So SI would have decided that he ~~can~~ could not be doing the traditional 'upaadhyaayam', priestly functions going to individual houses for death anniversaries, and conducting other religious functions / poojas.

So he (SI) took the opportunity to join a Brahmin rice trader (he traded other goods like beetel nuts etc also). Getting rice from Burma and sending goods to other countries etc. SI ~~was a~~ masters such account keeping and in future trading & (he had described how they ~~will~~ would buy and sell goods which ~~are~~ were in the ships). I think his ~~boss~~ boss was one Lakshmana Swami Iyer (LSI). Being in trade SI also developed the breadth of his vision of life, much beyond the narrow confines of Brahmin's life in a village. That is the reason he was very different when he lives in

Kottarana in his newly built house, where we joined him later.

In those days Normally, many Brahmins who went to Kochi, ~~the~~ Tiruvananthapuram ek used to leave their ~~wife~~ wives and children back home. Some of them had 'Sambandham' (relation) an accepted practice, with local women. SI and SL were different. ~~the~~ They always lived together. There was a strong bond of love between them.

~~SI had~~

Periappa had described to me about the intricacies of those trade — sometimes they face losses, then gain ek. I did not understand and therefore they are not in my memory.

SL being a great cook, mastered many of the ~~kera~~ Kerala dishes: Kaalan, Olan etc. She used to describe about them to us. Life in ~~Det~~ Kochi for SI and SL was apparently very good, as I inferred by Periamma's narration to us. It was a great period for the young ~~count~~ couple. Probably around his mid-thirty SI starts having asthmatic attacks. I am not sure whether it starts in Cochi or later.

~~I did not~~ I do not have a clear idea as to why SI & SL decides to leave the ~~the~~ enjoyable life.

P.T.O

Maybe the beginning of the European wars, ~~or~~ and the Japanese extensions causing ~~uncer~~ uncertainty in trade. And the British diverting much of India grown rice to Britain to feed their soldiers. Or his father getting old and wanting to settle down in Kottaram. I had never asked Periappa or Perianma in my Palayamkottai days. Bombay life was too difficult for such relaxed talks! But one thing was ~~it~~ sure S.I had earned some good money to begin a life in Kottaram: a shop and money lending to create new income. ~~How~~ Rice came from own fields. It was Periappa who built the house in Kottaram where ~~I grew~~ we grew. It is good even

~~May be beginnings of the~~
~~European war.~~ ~ 2000.

now when I ~~visited~~ in ~~2005~~.
Periappa had ~~cast~~ also
bought nice gold and diamond
ornaments for Periamma. We
will talk about the ornaments
later in other decades, including
the one covering ~~2015~~ 2015 when
it was burgled and came back!

~~***~~

More on Periamma &
Periappa in later chapters.

* * *

We will now continue with
the glimpses of Palayamkottai
life.

The shop keepers in Palayamkottai had a ~~great~~ great respect for Periappa as he was prompt in payments to them. He himself had been a shop keeper! During our trips to the shops, he used to sometime go to a hotel. It was run by his cousin Venkataraman (who was Jaya's father Sundaram's elder brother). He was dark, very weak. Used to sit in the cash box. Sometimes walking a few steps inside the hotel, which was quite big. We never ate there or took ~~tea~~ coffee. ~~Periapt~~ Periappa would just talk to him. Venkataraman was dark. His chest was almost without any flesh, all ribs could be seen. His eyes were popping as if

he was under great strain. He was always struggling to ~~tri~~ breath. Periappa told me that he was suffering from ~~TD~~ TB. Perhaps ~~TD~~ TB was ~~pr~~ very prevalent those days but did not ~~ca~~ carry the taboo. But leprosy did, ~~was~~ as was the case ~~withous~~ with our rich neighbour who did not have any visitor at all.

Though we did not go to any movie (cinema) at all, we saw lots of advertising — posters, and also hand driven cart ~~driven~~ with big posters and a electric dynamo driven

music system giving glimpses
of songs and dialogues, in
the pichures. ~~I kno~~ I
~~read~~ heard many of
them. M.R. Radha's ~~actin~~
acted film about his
becoming a leper in the
end (after spending a lot
of time with a prostitute,
a wrong prejudicial connection
which existing then, linking
prostitutes with leprosy!). Those
boys who ~~saw~~ saw the pichure, used
to be talking about how
they use ~~wax~~ wax to show
this leprosy affected fingers.

It was during the ~~fifti~~ 1950's when Annadurai was entering politics in a major way and using cinema as a medium of attracting the Tamil people. Some of his talks also used to be played along in ~~the Lo~~ ~~electric~~ ~~dynamo driven~~ ~~carts~~ hand driven carts with electric dynamo power audio system. (At that time I did not know any engineer; they all would have been ~~valve~~ radio valve systems. We had such a valve radio, National Ecko, at Bombay when we went there in 1957)

Annadurai's alliterative Tamil (adukkumozhi, in Tamil) was attractive. I mention about it in my first Tamil poetry book "Nenjaga Malargal" = Blossoms of the Heart). I do not think I was attracted by any of the political message by them. It was mostly about conjured picture of Dravidian, while most of it was about Tamil. I have never heard them tell about Telugu, Malayalam or Kannada. It was all Tamil supremacy!

Only other message was the anti-Brahmin slogans and diatribes. Though I ~~did not~~ did not personally suffer that much due to these anti-Brahmin ~~tir~~ tirades, especially because the student in my eccletic class were very kind to me (as younger brother for them), ~~I~~ it did ~~not~~ affect me peripherally.

My ~~F~~ Periappa ~~was~~ was a Brahmin with no external

features – ~~sca~~ sacred thread and a tuft hanging in the back side of his head (it was mostly white by them). ~~W~~ He wanted to bring fresh food for me to the school. Therefore with his cheppal (fortified in its sole with tyre rubber) he used to walk all the way to the school ~~du~~ for giving me food at the lunch time. And return after I eat.

I used to hear~~t~~ some ~~ma~~ nasty

and ridiculing remarks by some students about him, just ~~the~~ because he was a Brahmin. I could not fight with them. I ~~can~~ was so puny too! My solution to the problem was to ask my Periappa not to come to school and I would carry the food in a ~~tookku~~ vessel. Periappa did not like it. But I forced it on him without telling him the reason!! I ~~had~~ ~~head~~ had an experience of being a hounded

minority at such an young age. Later when we were in Bombay (1957-1964) I had such an experience during the rise of Shiv Sena — being a South Indian. ~~It was not just in the~~ Such a ~~Act~~ sentiment was even with those who attended D. G. Ruparel College, in which I studies. Papa and I, would be described as 'Southies' — a term to describe a set of conservative, un-modern people! Not

all Maharashtrians carries such a sentiment.

So was it with my life Palayamkottai; all boys in my ~~school~~ class and my teachers took me for what I was.

Fortunately, it did not leave with me a clanmishness. I should actually thank Subrahmaniya Bharati, whose songs started attracting me around my age of 10. Later at Bombay, it was an addition

(220)

I Swami Vivekananda's writings since my age of ~~13 14, th~~ 13-14 years thanks to the books bought my uncle (Attai Kamala's husband, Ambadi's father) N.S. Iyer.

Starting from Bharathi I looked at humanity as one, right from my age of 10. I was not worried about these aberrations of anti-Brahminism. At the same time, I did not want to hear bad words

my Periappa. So I learnt how to balance myself amidst these conflicting emotions.

There would have been several factors contributing to this. My teachers like Arulappan (a Christian, ~~from~~ not from Brahmin caste), ~~and~~ my P. T. teacher, a Muslim ~~the~~ and several others, being nice to me. ~~By~~ Tamil teacher Balasubramaniam, introducing to the beauty of Tamil poems, which carried many Bhakti poems, which also included poems by Tamil

Christians, Tamil Muslims etc. The classical Tamil Bhakti poems are great in their universal outlook; egalitarian; full of compassion to whole of humanity. Those in the "Dravidian" movement did not look at them or quote them, due ~~to~~ to their bigotted, narrow vision of the Tamil Society. Fortunately Balasubramaniam ~~& Ra~~ and because of him, my love for Bharati poems, saved me from the bigotry or

Or a typical ~~Bt~~ Brahmin ~~Act~~ reaction to them.

I learnt to pick up good where I can see and leave the rest. In Annadurai, I saw the beauty of use of Tamil language; and no more!!

~~On~~ ~~from~~ Further on, for a boy ~~to~~ brought up in ~~E~~ a Brahmin village in Kottaram, I ~~da~~ suddenly saw ~~intro~~ an introduction to Christianity at the Kristu Raja Vidyalayam.

The portraits of Mary, Josesph and Jesus Christ were very attractive. ~~They~~ That did not attract me to Christianity.

The proselatysing pamphlets ~~and~~ distributers in the streets of ~~the~~ Palayamkottai and the words they spoke were positively repulsive. They were very derogatory of Hinduism and told too crudely. I do not know whether ~~they~~ succeeded in ~~prose~~ conversion. Only success they ~~might~~ have got, is through

concessions for Christian students for admission to the schools.

But what I saw in St. Xavier's High School puzzles me further. I had taken for granted, ~~that~~ in the short one-year exposure ~~to~~ ~~it~~ Christianity that all Christians ~~are~~ were same and equal. But I found that in St. Xavier's high school, only Catholic boys had a special status. They were places in Sections A & B, C for Sanskit boys.

They had concessions in fees and probably free lunch. They were taken to the church for prayers. It was not allowed for protestant ~~and other~~ students and christian students of other denominations. Even though the protestant boys in my section brought kudos in sports, they have to stay in a ~~se~~ separate hostel — common for Hindus, Muslims and other. Catholic ~~hostels~~ hostels were separate. (I don't know how it is now!)

I also learnt that there was another denomination called ~~Paul~~ 'Pentacostal'. One sweet boy Anthony was there. All other Christian boys used to tease him; & mock about their drum-beats.

All these divisions opened my mind to the diversity of belief. — There is no one Hindu, Christian or Muslim. (I did not know at that time that there was a Sunni

~~Sha~~ and Shia. Now
I know their diversities)

In the midst of these narrow, bigotted activities, I had heard about ~~the~~ Muthuramalinga Thevar, coming and giving speeches. I did not attend; nor was I knowing what it was it all about. But it was something different; it was too early in my life to know about Subhas Chandra Bose. That type of political understanding took place only after I went to Bombay. What stayed in my mind, was his stirring of whole of Palayamkottai

Something totally different and not connected with this was a person fully dressed in layered gown, almost like the European ladies, who ~~walk~~ (would walk in front of Siva temple) around the main road which was used by us to go to the school. ~~It was~~ That person was something very different, but did not look like a woman; there was some 'manishness' in the face. But dressed very well; face also cleaned up. People used to hush that 'it was an 'Ali' — Tamil word for an eunuch. That person used to go regularly; not teased by any body but

Strangely looked at. That was my first introduction to an eunuch (probably more accurately described as ~~Eunuchs~~ transgender) Later I had been introduced to many eunuchs when I went to Bombay — more about it later. In Bombay they were called 'Chakka'.

* *

Coming back to the homefront, as a usual routine Periamma used to give us oil ~~to~~ bath. It was a little bit heated gingelly oil (til oil — 'Nallenai' in Tamil) with red chilly and a couple of black peppers. The custom was to have a bath on Wednesdays for boys, Friday for girls.

Papa used to perhaps enjoy it. For me it was a nightmare. Periamma used to forcefully catch me, hold and smear the oil from head to toe. I had to be like that for about an hour. Then it was washed with 'cheeyakkai Podi', a grease removing agent made of certain nut. It was very popular. But for me after the bath, my body used to itch all over. Used to take time to subsidise.

Periamma used to take it as a tantrum by me. For some days, she used to take the help of Krishnamma who was a part-time help who would come to our house

to clean the vessels, ~~and mop~~ wash clothes and mop the floors. She was very fair, slim and exceptionally beautiful. ~~Something~~ Her fair colour was very ~~un~~ unusual among Tamil people. She has some gentle green tatoos on her hands. She did not work for other houses. So we felt something special about her. Being much younger to Periamma, she was able to catch hold of me and smear me with oil and massage too. She will give bath ~~all~~ also; difficult to hold a reluctant person, this boy who can slip away. But did it masterly with great affection. I ~~will~~ recall

"Krishnamma, ~~vendaam~~ Veyndaam" (I don't want it!) " All in vain. I was being given a great health exercise!

Later seeing my great itching afterwards, slowly the ~~ka~~ oil & ~~bath~~ bath routine was relaxed and I was out of it much later. Now I realise that it might have been an allergic reaction — to Cheeyakkai powder. I had not tried to experiment & find determine!

Castor oil routine was stopped and when needed a tablet of ~~pano~~ 'Pragolax' was given.

One routine was the

(234 given by Periamma)

milk at night for Papa & me before we go to sleep. Dr was boiled and cooled milk (one small tumbler). This routine was there at Kottaram and Palayamkottai, discontinued when we went to Bombay. Dr. Abdul Kalam told me he continues the routine started by his mother, even when he went to hostel etc and in later life.

Palayamkottai life was full of dynamism. ~~Totts~~ Temple festivals, the Ratha (holy chariot) being pulled, cinema advertisements with loud music and ~~dpc~~ 'dialogues' repeated from the scenes, some

political processions and loudness associated with it. There were also advertisement rounds for wrestling fights — Dara Singh versus King Kong was the high point. There were also other names including Chinese and European ones. I don't remember them. In addition to hand cart driven posters, lots of exciting descriptions. Also many pamphlets. I used to read all of them. Some of the boys in my class might have gone for some of these and they would

boastingly describe the events. I ~~would~~ would be a mute listener! They did not attract me.

But one event (which used to repeat a few times in a year by different teams) was the non-stop cycling around an encircled area for one week. Eating, easing for nature (probably only urine) by restricting themselves to ~~soft~~ liquid food), ~~etc~~ changing of dresses are all to be done without getting down from the cycle. In between they show some acrobatics too!

There might probably be some sponsor; a large crowd used to be around the encircled area. Some money (usually coins) ~~was~~ used to be thrown. Sometimes the cyclist pick up ~~and also~~ the coin and ~~showed~~ showed. There was a helper who collects the money. Otherwise for spectators there is no compulsion to pay. I used to watch for some time. Used to admire their tenacity and stamina, waking all night etc. I don't know ~~such~~ whether such things exist in Tamil Nadu now, in towns or villages.

Other major attraction was the nine-day Navaratri festivals. The town (Palayamkottai) was full of Kali temples. All of them get activated during that period. ~~One~~ One temple takes a lead for going round the town — Utsava. Each day the Kali name is different. Muthumaari etc as per the temple. Beautiful decoration of the ~~the~~ seat of Kali Amman, driven in an automobile on which the decorations are done. A dynamo cart would follow the car — ~~car~~ Chariot, providing electricity for the beautiful (colourful) electric bulb decorations.

I used to go to see. Papa used to come sometime. The floral decorations of Amman was also very good. No doubt lot of music in praise of God.

I was told that in earlier days, at the end of Utsava when ~~Kodi is~~ Amman brought back to the temple lots of sacrifical offerings of goats and sheep. (In my Koltaram days, as I had explained herein, lots of peeled goats / sheep used to be taken in carts of to Manakkadu from Mellappattam area)

As a part of "modernisation" of India, such animal ~~sacrifices~~ sacrifices had been prohibited and therefore ~~the~~ pumpkins filled with kumkuma used to be broken as a symbolic of animal sacrifice.

Later days, I also accepted as a progressive measure. Now I wonder whether it ~~is~~ was the prejudice of the white men which prevailed or was it the general aversion of the brahmins to meat or both?

The 'progressives' who ~~did~~ spearheaded such a prohibition of animal sacrifice themselves eat lots of meat. British were ~~also~~ always full of meat eating. The animals killed for such commercial eating are not necessarily treated humanely. ~~Now~~ To me now it appears that many 'progressive' Indian intellectuals had fallen into the British (Western) strategy of deriding everything Hindu thus making Indians in general look at their own civilisational past with disdain.

I am not suggesting

a return to ~~the~~ animal-
sacrifice, but we need to
understand the hypocrisy
of the 'progressives' in deriding
Hindu, Indic culture in
many other areas.

For modernising India
it is not just enough to
adopt the ~~a~~ science, technology,
engineering, business, medical
and military practices derived
from the developed West, but
also learn to appreciate
(and even be proud of) our
own civilisational past, which
was much more inclusive,

with much deeper understandig
g the diversity g Nature and
human beings (in fact all
beings and inanimate too)
and their interconnectedness.

I learnt these in
my own way from the writings
g Sri Aurobindo, Swami
Vivekananda, Subramanya Bharati
and several others. Also my
close following science — physics,
astronomy, biology etc — have
given different perspectives g
life and about India. They
get reflected in my poems
too (Tamil & English.)

Thanks to Dr. N. Ramani recently (2015) my poetry book ~~they~~ have all been placed in a google site yasunajankavithaigal available for a free download.

Another school related event was a picnic to Krishnan Koil which ~~is~~ is nearby Palayamkottai. Periappa was reluctant as he was afraid of some unruliness amongst boys which may hurt me. I was adamant ~~on~~ (one of the few rare cases. Another three I am narrating later!). So ~~I~~ I went with

the school team. Nothing untoward happened. I really enjoyed seeing beautiful sculptures.

Visits to our home by two individuals is worth mentioning. Practically there were no visitors. Periappa used to discourage them. ~~In &~~ ~~In~~ During our Kottaram stay, Periamma's ~~Syst~~ sister Kunja Maami & Rajam Iyer came from Vattalagundu. Nice person. Kunja Mami was very pretty and Rajam Iyer much elder to her (he had Mami as second wife after the death of his ~~secon~~ first wife) Even then the couple was issue-less

Rajam Iyer was very knowledgeable and used to tell many things.

It is after such a visit Periamma used to 'fight' with Periappa, how home-bound both of them ~~were~~; how she was not able to go and see her relatives and also relatives from in-law side, who were ~~near~~ nearby. Periappa had his own method of handling her. Periamma had to accept it as a way of life. Periappa had several reasons for it, one of it being the limited financial resources he had, which was

to be conserved for supporting Papa, me & ~~Thta~~ Grandpa (his father).

With a house in Palayamkottai a number of our distant relatives and ~~from~~ persons from Kottaram would have ~~liked~~ to liked to leave their wards in our house during crucial examination periods. Otherwise those boys used to walk to the school (5 miles one way and back). Both Periappa & Periamma discouraged it, as ~~it~~ we could not afford.

Still one person, a Kameswaran from a distant relative came and stayed with us.

The arrangement was that he was given free accomodation to stay, and use bath / toilet facilities. But he had to eat outside of his own. Sometimes ~~Periapp~~ Perianma ~~will~~ would give him food.

He was poor in studies. Probably it was the matriculation examination. He was given the upper floor which we rarely used. He was a great artist, painter. All self learnt, ~~god~~ God-given gift. He was a master in painting temples and its ~~e~~ inners / surrounding as was done by Silpi in Anandavikatatan serials. We used

appreciate it. ~~How he d~~ After his examination was over, he went away. I do not know what happened in his exams. I do not know whether Periappa & Periappa were informed through a post-card.

Another sad thing about him (irritating for us) was that he was having perpetual loose motions. We ~~will t~~ would try to rush to the dry latrine, immediately after its wash by the 'Oddachi', so that we could escape the outpouring. When we did not succeed, the ~~pla~~ latrine inside ~~will~~ would all be full

g loose slush. ~~Even now~~ ~~now~~ After growing up I learnt more about India's health (especially after I took charge of TIFAC, Technology Forecasting & Assessment Council in 1988), most Indians even now (2005) suffer from amoebosis and diahhrea. There are many child deaths due to severe diahhrea and gastro-intestinal problems. The elite of India are all absorbed with themselves and no one bothers about these paras. They would talk of Food Security, how much of free food etc.

but ~~talk~~ without tackling this disease which would be affecting about 80% of Indians, one cannot expect better productivity. Solving Overcoming this disease will require hygenic habitats (not necessarily posh concrete building), clean water for washing, bathing, drinking etc. These are mundane things even for our great socialist and leftist champions of poor people!

I am happy that I was able to contribute to some extent to the waste-water recycling - reuse (by promoting it

and encouraging those who do it). In a major project as Waste Management in Bombay, we built a number of ~~this~~ pre-fab latrines. We will see it in later chapters.

I want to flag this as a crucial area for India, if even upto 2030, if India earnestly takes up Swacch Bhaarat. I keep writing on it, ~~which is all~~ talking about it even in Convocations etc, which is what I can do now (2015)

Another interesting person totally different, who used to visit our home from the

Maharajapuram (place where 'rich' — by the then local standards — built bungalows). He would come in his car. He was my mother's direct Mama; mother's mother's direct brother. He was Mama-Thatha in Tamil (Grand Mama). He was childless too even after his second marriage (after the death of his first wife). He was a senior officer in Govt of India (not remember exact job) and had been in Bombay as well. He was good in music and had been a jury for many Carnatic music events in Bombay. For a brief period he had also supported my Mama (mother's

our brother, orphaned as his parents and sisters – my mother and her younger sister – had died. ~~Those are~~ There are a number of events around Mami Mama which I would narrate during the B'bay and later parts of life.

Grand Mama ~~was~~ was desirous of seeing his niece's two children. Hence his visits. Again his coming in a car, was a prestigious event for the neighbourhood. He was a medium height ~~size~~ ~~but~~ (more on tall side by those days' standards);

Strong stocky build; black and full of hair in the body (back and front). Sometimes, I had imagined him equal to a bear!

During one of his trips he started singing ~~Kala~~ "Kamala sulochana, vimala thaDagini..." — small short song on Devi. He desired me to repeat. I did. I think over a period, I had ~~by~~ memorized the whole thing & which I can sing even now. I ~~do~~ did so under a funny (but serious) situation at the request of a lady ~~o~~ of during Navaraatri festival in New Delhi. About it later in 1990–2000 decade.

Normally I never ask ~~&~~ Periappa to do things which ~~were~~ costly. Also things for which Periappa had to work hard ~~I go a~~ such as going a long distance etc. To best of my knowledge there were three exceptions during the four years of Palayamkottai life.

One was ~~the~~ an eye test. Due to thin body & big head my ~~the~~ eyes would look like coming out as a round ball. So the boys used to say with half knowledge of short sight etc. that I might have a short sight, and might become worse, if not attended soon. Also I

used to have some head ache
not a regular feature but a
few times. That might have
been due to sinus. But
this was also attributed to
short sight. Hence an eye test
was a must. Unlike what
happens, we had to go to
Tirunelveli and wait in queue
for the eye doctor. He was
famous (probably only one
specialist in those days. I
recall his name starts
in L, may be Lokanathan)

I started pestering
Periappa. He was not very much
convinced. Perhaps he would have
realised that I did not have

any symptom of a shortsighted person. Finally he agreed. It was a bus journey to Tirunelveli, long wait. ~~D~~ The doctor tested, ~~I~~ my eyes were perfect.

Other item was about a book of 'Bharatiar Paadalgal' I ~~was a~~ had been so greatly attracted by Subramania Bharatiar right from my 10th year. as I learnt Chirappu (special) Tamil ~~Cata~~ (also ~~in~~ articles in Kalki, Ananda Vikatan — I think that Triloka Seetharaman started a serial ~~2~~), I desired to have a copy. I think I went to ~~it~~ see the exhibition and saw the book by Sree Magal Pathippagam (1956) bound hard copy. It was Rs. 6/- (six)

a huge money ~~these~~ those days. I pestered Periappa and got a personal copy. I have preserved the copy ~~so~~ through various of my travels. ~~the~~ Only thing I lost was the colour portrait of Bhendah in its cover page (loose flap). It is ~~with~~ with me even now. I think on ~~hind~~ hind sight that was an investment that had great impact on my life.

The third item concerns a Sudden ~~liking~~ or infatuation for ~~to~~ Shirdi Sai Baba, more for a small ~~for~~ flat icon (near circular) which would be worn

on my neck with a black thread. I might have seen many (or some) ~~lads~~ boys wearing. I had seen ~~Chri~~ some Christian boys wearing such an icon of Jesus, or Mary or rarely Joseph. Periappa did not like the idea, I think. He tried to dissuade me for long. ~~At So we ha~~ Finally we had to start shopping for it. Probably it was not a popular choice. It was difficult to ~~search~~ get after lots of search. Still I was insistent. Finally after a few days, we got. ~~I wore~~. I kept it with me.

On that day Periappa, being

troubled by several rounds of searches for a silly item was angry. He caught me and held firmly with him. In one of my thigh, he ~~used~~ pinched hard with his thumb and one other (probably index finger). "Will you do such things afterwards?" ~~What~~ Later he left me.

It was a stern warning. I knew what I did was not good. For a small item like this which was so difficult to get, I had troubled him by making him walk around so many shops, several times.

I felt bad too. After that night's sleep, in the morning I saw a ~~&~~ green patch in my thigh. I went and showed Periappa. He felt & bad, He said "I did not want to beat you in ~~the~~ my anger, so carefully held you and ~~the~~ ~~to~~ pressed hard a part which was muscular. Any way remember the message. I won't ~~now~~ never try to punish. You yourselves regulate yourselves."

He did not do it again. I think I also did not create a situation like that.