

Dwaraka: Unfading Memories.

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As the car was turning towards the narrow road leading to a two-storied house on a large compound, my heart was beaming with excitement and anxiety equally. I stepped out of the car and proceeded to stealthily open the blue gate that seemed to have never been repainted since we had vacated. Several clothes of different types and colours were hanging from the lines, visually souring the eyes. I was entering the house where we had stayed for some years on rent thirty years ago. The steps leading to the first floor and the very sight of my room right at the verandah flooded my heart with moments that I had gone through those days.

Nothing seemed to have changed. On the left side of the compound, my eyes affectionately searched for the big, tall jackfruit tree, which used to generously let its ripe fruits fall and fill our mouth and stomach with a taste that continues to remain unchallenged by any jackfruit that I have had later in my life. Among the many trees and plants that still continued to stand disarranged, I had to realize the fact that my jackfruit tree did not any longer exist there. Another house – apparently built recently – dotted the area where the jackfruit tree had earlier decorated the premises.

I pressed the doorbell and waited for someone to appear. Who would come out and what would be the reaction to a stranger who wanted to revisit a house where he had lived three decades ago? Will I be asked to get out? Will I be given a warm welcome? Am I ready to accept a cold response to my wish? Why do I all of a sudden want to see this house? Is it the dream that I had just the previous night? Of mangoes and the books in that room near the verandah?

A woman, apparently in her early forties, but with a pleasant face opened the door and sought the purpose of my presence. I introduced myself and presented my wish to see the first floor where we used to live. She invited me into the living room and took me to Dr. Madhavan Nair, owner of the house and now struggling to stand and speak. In his fumbling words, he asked me to take a seat. My attempts to make him understand my name and the purpose of my visit failed.

I recollected the afternoon where Dr. Nair was standing in front of the blue gate and asking us to vacate the house at the earliest possible date and I am sure my refusal to do so until we had gotten another house must have certainly annoyed him that day.

Priya, as she introduced herself to me, gratefully received the few bakery items that I had carried with me. She fetched the keys of the rooms on the first floor, apologizing that these had been left unutilized for a long time, and led me to the steps leading to the first floor. I felt like kissing each of these steps and did not want to hurt these with even the tiniest speck of dirt on my shoes. Everything smelled the same. In my mind, I thanked her for not making any changes to any of the rooms. I was travelling back in time as I moved from one room to the other, to the kitchen and to the open balcony adjoining it, from where I used to climb on to the

terrace and sleep under the sun, often worrying about my future, feeling confused about many things, dreaming of girls and fearing the examinations. I remembered the two shirts of almost identical design my mother had gifted me on an afternoon when I had returned from the college. The tiled neighbour house on the left side has made way to a big, two-storied one. The only bathroom with a toilet inside seemed to have existed all these years without any change. The smell of Lifebuoy soap began to fill the air.

Finally, she accompanied me to the room on the verandah and opened it. Thirty-year-old air suddenly gushed out of it, filling me with the countless days and nights I had spent inside, dreaming and preparing to face the certain and uncertain things awaiting me. My little study table with the books neatly arranged on it, the hanger on which all the few clothes used to hang from, the small coat without any mattress, the cricket bat and the poster of Kapil Dev, all these came back into the room as I gently entered the room, closing my eyes for a moment without allowing Priya to notice it.

I saw my father sitting on the verandah, answering the questions from a police officer, investigating the disappearance of a girl in the neighbourhood. I saw the sapota tree hanging over the roof of my room has apparently been replaced with a smaller one. I saw my friends standing outside the blue gate waiting for me to join the evening shuttle badminton game. I saw a young boy running into the room, completely drenched in the monsoon rain.

“Would you like to drink something”, Priya’s voice broke my thoughts. I thanked her for the kind invitation, stepped down touching the house at as many places and as intensive as possible. As she went inside to call her mother-in-law, I quickly touched the ground to feel it and kiss my finger. I thanked them profusely for their warm reception and allowing me to relive – at least for a short time – the time I had lived there.

The many mango trees of the neighbour we used to steal the ripe mangoes from during the wee hours of the mornings, have also disappeared. I closed the blue gate bearing the name “*Dwaraka*” and moved back into my car, gratefully acknowledging that I have been fortunate to relive something so precious, even after a long period of three decades.
