

**A Neurologist at large.**

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### **Missing the bus**

It seems that I tend to miss almost always pleasant occasions in my life. I returned from USA after a holiday on 7th July 1998. I had no idea why almost everybody whom I met at Trivandrum Airport congratulated me warmly without really telling me the reason. I was groggy because of the severe jet lag and hence I did not enquire the reason for the exuberant welcome I had. Only the next day when I went to Cosmopolitan Hospital, Trivandrum, I was told that I was selected as the Best Doctor in the State for the year 1998 by the Government of Kerala and the award, citation and a cash prize of Rs. 10,000/- were ceremoniously given to my Hospital in my absence and all the local papers were full of write ups about it. The spate of felicitations and dinners following my arrival were useful for me as my wife remained with my daughter for another month in USA and cooking food by myself was nor a job which I relished.

In fact the same sort of incident occurred when I was elected as the Vice - President of the Neurological Society of India in 1997 at Jaipur. I could not attend the session though every arrangement was made there. ' By a trick played by a private airline I was stranded in Trivandrum Airport without getting a connection to Jaipur. I felt really apologetic but could do nothing other than formally writing to each and every member regarding my absence.

I could perhaps narrate a lot more similar examples but then such is the way of life in the lives of most of us. I was taught fairly early in life to take these mishaps in my stride and to keep a smiling face. It is difficult but then there are no better alternatives.

### **Training in Trivandrum**

I was born on 9th Dec. 1940 (I used to wish that I was born in Jan.1941 ) in Trivandrum. By that time my father (Prof. Dr. Suranad Kunjan Pillai) was already known as one of the important Malayalam writers and the most respected scholar in English, Sanskrit and Malayalam in Kerala. (He was the only Keralite who passed MA in all these languages with honours from Madras University in early 1930's).

My entire educational career was sort of overshadowed by his achievements. When I scored high marks in my school the comment from teachers was a predictable one: "Don't you know that your dad was the State Rank holder?." I used to write Malayalam skits and short stories even as a school student. Of course their comment was always: "Well is that all? Your dad published a poetry collection and couple of novels before he joined the college. Don't you know that they were prescribed as text books for school by the time he became a College student?."

In fact by the time I reached my college my entire ambition to become a writer in Malayalam evaporated as by then I knew that I would be always under his great shadow. Fortunately for me I got admission in Trivandrum Medical College (At that time getting admission in a Medical College was the best recognition a student could have. I was the University rank holder for my B.Sc Degree in 1959). Though I was very keen to pursue my literary career I kept it hidden from every one. What ever I wrote (I continued to publish fairly successful short stories and couple of novels) was under various pseudonyms which no one recognised

anyway.

Trivandrum Medical College is the oldest Medical College in Kerala (started in 1951, incidentally the same year of the beginning of the Neurological Society of India also) and I belonged to the 1960 batch.

We had the great luck to have some very unusual teachers both Indian as well as foreign. Prof. Young (of Anatomy) Prof. Grenell (of Pharmacology), the surgeon, Prof. Raghavachari, the physician, Prof. Anathachary (both from Madras) were our teachers. But right from the beginning I was a disciple of a crazy genius, Prof. G. K. Warriar the physician who was interested in Neurology.

I should add some odd facets of this great man. He was trained by great British Neurologists during his stay in UK for his MRCP. Most of the time he was under the influence of the drugs (he was addicted to a lot of them) but it was a sheer surprise that he could function as a brilliant doctor, spot diagnostician, preceptor of facts, sifter of unwanted data, theoretician, deep thinker, ethanolic, musician, writer, Kathakali exponent and my God! what else. I had the luck later in my life to be with better known neurologists both in India and UK but with total honesty I feel that he surpassed them all in his clinical acumen. His ability to spot diagnosis was legendary and I picked up the knack of this technique which came so useful for me all through my life. After my MBBS and MD in General Medicine I joined in Trivandrum Medical college as a tutor in Medicine (equivalent to the present lecturer) and got promoted as Assistant Professor of Medicine (1970).

It was in mid 1960's post-graduate courses in various medical disciplines were started in selected centres in India. The very idea itself was new, teachers were few, and none had any concrete idea of a structured course. Though there were few teachers well trained in these subjects in excellent centres, many others had only scanty training for brief periods in obscure hospitals in UK or USA. In fact the very concept of such postgraduate courses was an anathema for many foreign scientists. I still remember that there was a vitriolic comment in a very respected American Journal against such an experiment. But the first batch of the DIWMCh candidates came out by late 1960's.

#### All India Institute of Medical Sciences

Though I got admission to DM Neurology at Madras Medical college in 1970, I did not join there (I still remember that it was Dr. K. Jagannathan who interviewed me. I was the only one selected at that time there). Instead I appeared for the selection at All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi after a few months where also I was the only one who got admission among the many other candidates appeared at that time. I chose AIIMS because of its halo of great respectability provided by none other than Prof. Baldev Singh. Only after joining there I came to know that he had already moved out to Neurophysiology and that he was basically and truly a great research worker more than a clinician.

The New Delhi life was really alien to me but I could get adjusted to that - Thanks to my teachers Prof. S. N. Pathak, Dr. Vimla Virmani, Dr. Nonihal Singh and Dr. P. C. Gupta (who appeared once for DM Neurology examination in vain) and my seniors like Dr. Katpal, Dr. Stalin Ganji and Dr. Sumra (the only one who passed DM among them). The plethora of clinical material which I had already seen in a miffusil medical college like in Trivandrum was found racking there but the keenness to probe into the pathogenesis and biochemistry of the neurological illnesses fascinated me.

The plight of the postgraduate students caught between the warring teachers in the Institute during that time was terrible. Further it was revolting to me to see the animal experiments conducted in the Dept but then I had no way of escaping the routine there. Adding to the strain of a very tight and demanding educational programme was the financial and social difficulties I caused to my family. My wife had to bear the entire work of raising my kids who shared the

miseries of my Delhi life. (I got married in 1966 immediately after my house surgeoncy and had already two children by the time I finished my MD Medicine course in Trivandrum).

I was the first in the Institute to pass DM Neurology exam just after 2 years. It was because I was on deputation from the Kerala state service and. I was given just 2 years leave and nothing more. I had very little choice but to pass the examination and leave Delhi for ever. Every other DM candidate in the Institute prior to me was allowed to take the exam only after three and half to four years. Prof. Pathak and Dr. Virmani fortunately allowed me to take the exam after 2 years but it was not an easy job. I still remember Prof. Pathak asking me to analyze the animal data pertaining to the intracranial pressure monitoring just 3 weeks before the exam and how I managed to wriggle out of it. I must thank Dr. Vimla Virmani for all the kindness she showered on me.

Fortunately the clinical examination was easy for me. At the end of Grand viva (Institute had in those days 2 day practical exam even if there was only one candidate, the first day for clinical and the investigations and the second day for Grand viva), one of the external examiners (Prof. N. H. Wadia of Bombay and Prof. G. Arjun Das of Madras) asked me a naughty question: "Dr. Nair, your clinical approach is excellent. Where did you pick it up?"

I had two options - either to tell a pleasing untruth or plain truth. Knowing fully well that I had already crossed the rubicon, I thought I would tell the plain truth "Sir, I learned a lot of theory and investigative neurology here. But I learned clinical neurology from a person whom you may not know. His name is Dr. G. K. Warriar". I could see the faces of my teachers darken across the table. Institute examinations in those days were peculiar in that all the faculty members would sit during the examination though only the examiners would ask the questions. Dr. Wadia asked "Who is this Warriar?". Prof. Baldev Singh saved the day for me: "Dr. Nair, Do you know that Warriar was my first house physician in Neurology in Vellore?".

Even today I still congratulate myself to have told the truth at that time which would have been fatal to me. After the result Dr. Pathak and Dr. Virmani called me and urged me to take up a faculty post at the Institute. There was acute scarcity of teachers in the Dept of Neurology then as Dr. Nonihal Singh and Dr. P. C. Gupta had already left the place leaving only Prof. Pathak and Dr. Virmani to run the department. But the only wish I had was to leave Delhi for ever. Without committing anything I left Delhi the very next day. Had I chosen a job there, probably I would have been still in service there, uprooted, unsettled and ambitious and fighting with some one or other. Malayalees are a peculiar lot, never happy till they return to Kerala.

### **Calicut Days**

Fate plays odd tricks with everyone. I had managed to get a placement immediately after my DM examination for further training in Copenhagen, Denmark (at that time it was the Mecca for electrophysiology training). When I asked for an extension of the leave to the Principal of Calicut Medical College, what I got was a severe warning to return immediately after examination and a threat to throw me out of service if not obeyed. Further he wrote to the Director of AIIMS that as per the bond which I executed to the Govt. of Kerala, I must rejoin service immediately after the examination.

My Calicut days began unceremoniously (May 1973). My designation was changed as Assistant Professor of Neurology from Assistant Professor of Medicine. With the help of Prof. G. K. Warriar, I could start a small medical neurology Unit with 8 beds in Calicut Medical College (1973 May), the first in Malabar region.

In all the Medical colleges in India the superspeciality departments were under the parent departments of medicine or surgery. we had no equipments. But in two years I could get an EEG and a 2 channel EMG machine. The radiology sessions were killing. we were allotted just 2 morning sessions in a week to do the direct puncture carotid angiograms, pneumoencephalograms or myelograms. In this time we had to do as many investigations as possible. It just seems unreal to me now, but we could do 3 or 4 angios, one or two PEGs and a myelogram per session. There was no one else to whom I could discuss these studies. my assistant was a provisional tutor from the Dept. of Medicine who was trained by me to do the myelograms and PEGs.

Perhaps our postgraduates of the present day have no idea of the difficulty we had for these investigations. if we suspected a posterior. fossa lesion and the carotid angio would either be normal or at best might show a hydrocephalus which would mean nothing. we had to do a fractional PEG and an autotomogram and both were to say the least very painful.

My colleague neurosurgeons in Calicut were Dr. C. A. Rajan to start with and later on Dr. K. M. John. Both were very considerate and decent surgeons. But the one who followed Dr. John was a bit too difficult to deal with. The patients admitted in the medical neurology side with suspected posterior fossa lesions requiring ventriculograms kept delayed for weeks on end by him. I was forced to devise our own technique for doing ventriculograms ourselves without a burr hole etc. Though I felt proud. when our paper on the easy technique of ventriculography came in print (Nair K. R. and Kutty K.M. Needle trephination of Skull for conray ventriculography. Ind. J. Radiology. 1977:3 I -35), now I know how crude and traumatic that procedure was as far as the patients were concerned. But then there was no other way to pick up the lesions in the posterior fossa or intraventricular sites.

I should make a passing mention about my colleagues in Calicut Medical College. As per the Indian Medical council the minimum requirement to become a superspeciality teacher was either two year training or DM or MCh Degree in the subject. Hence a few of my colleagues who were interested in Neurology could not get into superspecialitying cadre. Prof. G. K. warrier had already become the Director-professor and Head of the Dept. of Medicine at calicut Medical college. In fact he should be given the credit of introducing Neurology in Kerala. I have already mentioned about his great clinical acumen. Dr. M. G. Sahadevan, Dr. C.B.C. Warriar and Dr. P. K. Abdul Ghafoor were the other physicians interested in Neurology. Dr. Ghafoor was the first person in Kerala State to be appointed tutor in Neurology as he took his MRCP with Neurology as his special subject. But he thought that Neurology had no scope in Kerala then and became an Associate Professor of Medicine. He was the Founder President of Muslim Education Society which tried to uplift the status of Muslim Women. By the time joined in Calicut Medical College he resigned from the Government service because of political intervention. Dr. M. G. Sahadevan is a very versatile teacher - clinician but missed his chance to become the first Professor of Neurology in Kerala because of a personal animosity with one of Kingmaker chiefs of Medicine in Trivandrum Medical College. Dr. C.B.C. Warriar had also some training in Neurology and he was quite fond of cerebrovascular diseases. Excepting Dr. Sahadevan the others are no more. I must give credit to the pioneering work done by these physicians. They could have made my life difficult but instead they were so helpful to me in organizing my department.

There were a series of neurosurgeons posted in Calicut during my tenure in Calicut (1973-1978) Dr. C.A. Rajan, Dr. K.M. John, Dr. K.M. Pisharoti and Dr. S. K. Ramachandran Nair. Dr. C. A. Rajan is very friendly in nature and was of immense help in my initial days at Calicut. He had a tiff with the administration and was transferred to Kottayam Medical College from where Dr. K. M. John was shifted to Calicut. Dr. John was known as 'studious'sllrgeon, very courteous, able and dexterous in the theatre. I could start a weekly combined neurosurgery session with him in Calicut. Soon Dr. John took voluntary retirement and joined in a private hospital. Dr. S. K. Ramachandran Nair came to Calicut after a short interval. Till he got transferred back to Trivandrum he was' in Calicut.

Treating dozens of neurologically sick patients every day left us with precious little time for any research work. But then I had an inkling that the so called statistically oriented research work was bit impossible in our "one man unit", seeing all the patients, writing the case sheets, discharge summaries, documentation of physical findings etc. But fortunately we had plenty of unsolved problems not even discussed even once in my DM days.

Some of them were very peculiar. The girl who limped to my room one day with a loose foot hanging by the skin to her ankle and hobbling on the bare ends of her tibia and fibula was a shock to see. She was sent to me from a nearby Leprosy Centre to check why she did not improve on dapsons. What I found in her was a bilaterally symmetrical pure sensory neuropathy. It was confirmed by nerve conduction studies as well. In a short while I could collect a few more similar cases. When I presented this material at the Chandigarh Conference of NSI in 1976, a collective gasp emanated when the photograph of the girl's foot was shown. My papers on acrodystrophic neuropathy (Neurology India 1976; 24: 94-96, Excerpta Medical 1977; 420: 296-7, J. Assoc. Phys. Ind. 1978; 26: 347-351) gave me confidence that collecting our own clinical material itself would be rewarding enough-enough even to be get a position as an official delegate of the Neurological Society of India at the World Congress of Neurology (Amsterdam 1977).

This was followed by a paper about a small group of patients with clinically definite Multiple sclerosis which also drew adequate attention. In fact that paper is being quoted even now as it is one of the initial papers on MS from South India (Nair K. R., Sahasranamam K.V. Multiple Sclerosis in Malabar J. Assoc. Phys. Ind 1978; 26: 889-893). Even single case reports if adequately documented would be relevant. Our papers on 'Transient ocular bobbing in brain stem encephalitis' (J. Assoc. Phys Ind 1977 : 25: 573-575) and 'isolated brainstem abscess' (Neurology India 1977; 25: 189-190) demonstrated this point. Slowly my colleagues began to accept the concept of superspeciality services.

By that time there were already more than 5 of us in neurosciences in Kerala and we thought that we should form a small group. Sometime in 1976 all of us met in my home at Calicut to form a society which we named as 'KINS' - Kerala Institute of Neuroscientists. Dr. Sambasivan, Dr. S. K. Ramachandran Nair, Dr. Sreekumar, Dr. Vasudeva Iyer and I were the members. Dr. Jacob Chandy who by then retired to Kerala also joined us to grace the occasion. We were able to shoulder the responsibility and conduct an annual meeting of the Neurological Society of India in Trivandrum (1978). Fortunately for us the 1978, NSI conference turned out to be a grand success.

In Nov. 1978, I had two letters one informing me that I was selected for the Commonwealth Scholarship for further training in Neurology under senior teachers like Prof. Simpson of Glasgow, Prof. John Walton of New Castle upon Tyne etc and another letter from the University of Garyounis, Benghazi, Libya asking me to organize a Department of Neurology and to head the same.

I was in a dilemma how to combine these but fortunately the University of Garyounis agreed to sponsor me for the training if I could break this training in 3 months sessions each time so that I could complete the 12 month training, if I joined the University immediately.

I wrote to the Commonwealth Fellowship authorities who were willing for the same so long as the financial commitments were borne by the Garyounis University. Despite all the severe warning from my colleagues against Libya, I accepted this combined offer and mercifully both of them turned out excellently. I could not complete all the 12 month course of Commonwealth fellowship thus. The treatment I had from UK was pleasant. I wanted to learn a lot more about electrophysiology including single fibre EMG, which was a craze during that time. Soon my interest in sfEMG waned and the youngman Dr. Andrew Weiss who was doing it remarked that my lack of interest in sfEMG was shared by his boss, Prof. Simpson also.

My period in Benghazi was useful in another way as well. This was the place where I could set up my second Neurology unit. I could organize an excellent teaching facility in Neurology in that University which was later converted into a National reference centre for Neurology in Libya. My three year stint in that place gained me a lot of friends in UK, Libya, Poland and Yugoslavia (almost all my assistants in neurology there were from these two countries). Some of the senior Indian doctors like Dr. B. S. Singhal, Dr. G. S. Sainani (Bombay-Previous editor of J' Assoc.Phys. India) Dr. Malhotra (Nephrologist of AIIMS, New Delhi) used to come to that place as Visiting Professors and many other senior Indian Medical teachers like Dr. Suri (hematologist from AIIMS), Dr. Maheswan (Chest Physician from Aligarh Muslim University), Dr. Bhargava (of Bikaner who did a lot of work on Porphyria in India) were working in that place. I must concede that I had a wonderful time in Benghazi. Further I could publish a series of papers about Neurology in Libya in their journal After three years I was called back to head the Dept of Neurology at Trivandrum Medical College.

### **Back to Trivandrum**

when I returned to Trivandrum Medical college (1982) I was posted Professor and Head of the Dept. as one of my colleague had left the Dept. for a lucrative job in USA. As soon as he took up the job in Trivandrum, he too returned from USA. The ensuing confusion of transfers back and forth from Calicut to Trivandrum for both of us lasted for some time.

The Dept. of Neurology at Trivandrum Medical college was started (1971-2) one year earlier than that of Calicut Medical college. But when I joined there, it was in moribund shape as the physician who was given the temporary charge during the absence of my colleague grandiosely gave away the beds and other facilities allotted to Neurology to other new specialities. What I inherited was just 6 beds in the male side and 4 beds in female side and an old EEG lab with a dilapidated machine. I had to prove myself in the new surrounding. With the help of a lot of my friends in the Medical college administration, the Government and the University of Kerala, within an year I could establish a full-fledged department with 20 beds, a new ward for strokes and a few new equipments. I went after the files for sanctioning the DM course in Neurology and the first batch of DM course was started in 1983. Since then we did not look back as our academic work progressed steadily and gradually. By 1987 I was promoted the Director-professor of Neurology, the highest academic position a medical teacher could achieve in Kerala. Though another promotion as Principal of a Medical College was thrust on me, luckily I relinquished that administrative job. We concentrated on our academic, teaching and research jobs which gave us a lot of recognition both from different parts of India and abroad. My own candidates by then have already established as good clinician teacher which gave me a lot of satisfaction.

### **Neurology at large**

Right from the beginning of my career I knew that I had to be conversant with everything in neurology - no matter whether it was cerebrovascular disease, cognitive neurology, demyelinating syndromes or molecular neurology for teaching and routine practice. The business of Jack of all trades leaves very much to be desired but then there was no choice. In fact I started my career with a lot of interest in cognitive neurology (Our paper on speech dysfunction was the first of its kind in India. Nair K. R., Virmani V. Speech and Language dysfunction in hemiplegics. Ind. J. Med. Research. 1973; 16: 1395-1403) Out of sheer necessity I had to study paediatric neurology, degenerative diseases, neurovirology, neurochemistry, genetics, geriatric neurology etc for teaching my PGs. The series of CMEs we have conducted in Trivandrum (so far we have conducted 30 CMEs, a few of them were national in nature) actually taught us a lot of new ideas in different subsections of neurology. Gradually as the staff strength of my department grew I could afford to spend a little more time to a subject which I really liked - The movement disorders. It was pleasant to interact with those with similar interest from different parts of India and abroad.

But it was my hobby which brought me a lot of friends. My interest in history of Medicine was an inherited affair and soon I found that it could become an all consummative interest. My books Charcot and his pupils, Despots, Diseases Doctors and the Destiny of Mankind etc had very unexpected rave reviews in very snobbish journals. Another one on semantics equally earned a lot of credit (Topics in Neurosemantics). Perhaps after some time my important hard core neurology papers will be forgotten but these books may be remembered. Such is the stuff fame is made of.

### Neurological Society of India

The first time I went for the NSI was in 1912 for the Lucknow Conference. The paper which I sent for the session was the Speech and Language dysfunction in Hemiplegics. Surprisingly that was in the first session of the Conference. (The first paper was by N.H. Wadia titled is there SMON in India?") Fortunately my presentation went off fairly well. Since that session I have been attending almost all annual conferences of the NSI excepting a few occasions.

However I remember distinctly right from the 1972 session onwards that there were a few neurologists who were keen to form a separate society for the medical neurologists. The idea gradually became more and more strong as years went by. By 1991 at the Manipal conference the idea germinated as the Indian Academy of Neurology. An interim executive committee was formed with Dr. Krishnamoorthy Srinivas, Dr. J. S. Chopra and a few others. The formal elections took place later on, when Dr. J. S. Chopra as the President and Dr. C. U. Velmurugendran as Secretary were returned. Dr. Anupam Das Gupta who succeeded Dr. Chopra could not attend the Delhi and Chandigarh sessions of IAN. I was elected as the Vice President after Dr. Anupam Das Gupta. In the absence of Dr. Das Gupta I had to function as acting president for the

Chandigarh session in 1995. My term as President of IAN for the year 1996 was very pleasant as Dr. Velmurugendran continued as Secretary. My presidential oration at the Indian Academy of Neurology in 1996 at Bangalore was titled "The travails of an Indian Neurologist,,. In that lecture I covered my research work spanned over a period from 1970 to 1996.

Though the neurologists formed our separate society a large number of us were quite unhappy to part with our previous colleagues. We decided that we would actively continue in both the organizations and contribute as much as possible. It is with this idea that I have contested for the election for the vice President of NSI. I was really pleased at the great support I had from the neurosurgeons and neurologists from all over India. I would be taking over the office from Prof. V. K. Kak at the 47th Annual Conference of NSI at my home town, Trivandrum.

### Retirement

Kerala is the only State in India where the retirement age is still 55 years, though life expectancy in Kerala has already crossed 71 years. When I retired from the Medical College service in 1996 April, it was a pleasant affair for me. My own students Dr. Rani Nair and Dr. Shaji Prabhakaran succeeded me as Professors of Neurology at Trivandrum and the other candidates like Dr. James Jose, Dr. Thomas Iype and others took up various faculty positions in other Colleges. Dr. Madhusoodanan was my tutor at Trivandrum till he got his promotion as Assistant professor of Neurology at Kottayam Medical College. I am sure that they will gear up their departments to greater heights.

I still maintain very close contacts with the Medical College Hospital though working in a Private Hospital where my colleagues are my old friends from Trivandrum Medical College Hospital itself. My neurosurgical colleague even now is Prof. Sambasivan with whom I have worked since my postgraduate days.

Unashamedly I am an Indian first and foremost and then a Malayali. I happen to belong to one of the first few batches of fully Indian trained neurologists. Though I had the luck of further training abroad also, I still feel that what I learned from

my small place is far more worthy. What I highlighted all through my career was our own clinical material from Kerala which gave us a lot of recognition not only in India but also outside India. (Total number of papers published 123, Total number of books published.9)

I am indeed proud that I have had lavish support from all over India for projecting only our material without chanting every half a minute the work done in Yale University, Mayo Clinic, Vancouver or London. I was surprised to see that I had wholehearted support from my colleagues from all over India when I contested for election to both Indian Academy of Neurology and Neurological Society of India. With total humbleness and humility I still hold on to the view that what is far more important in India, is the work done in India itself. Perhaps others may not agree with me. That is why I quote (and insist others also to quote) K. Srinivasan for cerebral venous thrombosis, Chopra or Devika Nag for neurotoxicology, Sambasivan for subarachnoid hemorrhage, Mohandas, Kalyanbratha Bhattacharya, Asha Kishore or Madhuri Behari for movement disorders, Velmurugendran for cognitive neurology, K. S. Mani or Sathischandra for reflex epilepsies, N. H. Wadia for craniovertebral anomalies, K. Jaganathan for Madras pattern motor neuron disease, Tandon or Dastur for neurotuberculosis, Ambar Chakravarty for autonomic failure, B. Ramamoorthy for stereotaxic surgery, Virmani or Pravina Shah for psycho-social aspects of epilepsy etc.

### **Content to breathe my native air**

Long back during my postgraduate training period in 1966 there was a period when we had no stipend or financial support from the Government. Three of us decided to go to UK for our MRCP so much so that we would be getting jobs as well during our training period. Within a month of applying all of us got job offers from UK (then it was so, either in UK or USA).

I was skeptical to abandon my MD course in Trivandrum so I went to my dad to find out his opinion. He as usual was in his library before a heap of books. When he was told about my dilemma, he said very quietly "Yes. You may go. Since you are our only son, your mother will be worried. That does not matter. I will console her. But then you should know some thing very definite. If you are good, people and honours will come to you. If you are not, you will go after them. Decide what you want first and then come back and tell me." All three of us were shocked to hear that. one of them asked me when we reached back our hostel: "How do you think that MRCP will come to you if you do not go to UK?" Knowing that my dad already refused professorship in Linguistics in UK and USSR and remained in Trivandrum itself to complete his magnum opus, the Malayalam Lexicon, I thought that I would continue my studies in Trivandrum. I am not sorry that I did so. (He died in 1995 at the age of 85 leaving ablaze of glory, honoured as the greatest scholar Kerala has ever produced). Incidentally I received honorary MRCP and FRCP for the work which I did in Trivandrum itself.

He taught me something more which I could never copy in my life. He taught me to have an "Ana sakthi", Nira' hankara, and "Nir ma mathuam". They are difficult to practise - but he showed me quietly that they can be done. To my knowledge he is the only one who got his 'Padmasree' and D.Litt degrees from different Universities by post without moving out of Trivandrum to receive them from the authorities.

He again taught me a few lines of a great poet:

Happy the man whose wish and care

    a ferv paternal acres bound

Content to breathe his native air

    in his own ground

His words guide me even now.



