

## OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION, SEXUAL MORALITY & MORALS

Summer of 1984. Shooting of *Kuttichathan* was going on. During a lunch break I was in the editing room. A Production manager (it must have been Ponnappan, I am not very sure) came to tell me that just then an altercation had occurred between cinematographer Ashok Kumar's assistant Ms. Vijayalakshmi and one of our key unit members, chief-camera-in-charge Mr. Ayyappan. It had left the girl in tears.

I was fond of both of them. Though a hothead, Ayyappan was hardworking, loyal and very devoted to his equipment. Though a chatterbox, Vijayalaxmi's passion for cinematography had made her venture into a man's world. A few months earlier while shooting film *Mamattukkuttiyammakku*, Fazil hilariously noted the following about the same two individuals. "Ayyappan hugs the camera protectively to prevent it from accidentally toppling over, whenever one of us goes to check frame through the camera viewfinder. He wouldn't do that if it is Vijayalakshmi, since it may seem that he is hugging her .... and that adds to his helplessness". Also, Fazil's cinematographer Anandakuttan during shooting film *Theekkadal* had commented "Ayyappan has his one thousand arms always around the camera".

**Myself** - "Now, why should it concern me when such fights between crew members is part of filmmaking? It could get patched up eventually. .... Right?"

**Ponnappan** - "Well .... No sir! ... I mean jijokutta"

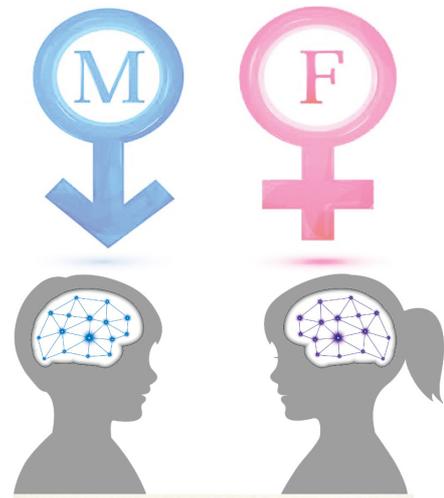
**Myself** - "No? Are you feeling pity because one individual is a female?"

**Ponnappan** - "Errr .... ummm .... besides that jijokutta, ... one is our own staff .... the other is a guest ... she is like every performer who comes here on assignment. That as you know sir, makes a difference".

Though I didn't voice it out, it also made a difference to me because Ashokji, being too gentlemanly unlike other cameramen of great standing, was a bit timid too. He would not take-up his assistant's cause against one of our studio staff since he had to depend on Ayyappan also for having his cinematography job done. So, that demanded a more than fair action from our side.

"Errr .... ahem, ...also jijokutta, our man did use some sexually explicit language which was what saw Vijayalakshmi breakdown in tears".

Ah, that struck a chord ... made my temperature go up!



Matthew 5:27-28  
"You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."

While taking the podium to speak on morality, lest within me assume any pride, I remind myself the following. I do have observed the 7th commandment faithfully. Yet to validate that statement, a definition of the term 'adultery' is needed. From dictionaries to constitutions, on every definition for this term, I pass ... till I come to an uncomfortable statement made by Jesus.

"A person .... looking at a woman with lust, ... has already committed adultery in his heart". Well, there goes away my pride. For, 'adultery' is not merely an act ... but, a purity of the heart.

Without discarding them, whenever I had allowed lustful thoughts entering my mind to be 'processed', it had entered my heart as a sin. Those revealing images - even if they were posters put up in public, and those erotic literature - even if they were world classics, all of them would bear witness against me before the creator who wrote the law ...

WHO IS THE LAW.

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Film Discipline, like every other discipline those days, was a male bastion. Being males ourselves, we had no much reason to complain. But, the fact was that our film industry even in the 1980s was still looked down by the society as a morally deficient profession! Quite a contrast .... because on the flip side, celebrity status enjoyed by film personalities was coveted by almost every lay person. *Now, I did have a grouse there .... about society's perception of our profession.* It occurred at the beginning of my film career .... at the age of 23 .... when searching for new performers in film "Manjil Virinja Pookkal".

My question was *"Why can't we cast performers from families next doors .... good, smart college students ... young men and women - professionals like doctors, engineers & accountants?"*

Fazil, the director *"Try, .... I tell you it is impossible ... to get youngsters from good families to act in films. I can frankly tell you that despite my profession, my own parents won't give one of their daughter or son as spouse to a film personality!!"*

I knew. The behavior of quite a few film personalities were not morally upright. In every walks of life, both good persons and deficient personalities do exist. But those days (as even now) celebrity behavior - especially negative behavior, attracted the most attention.

Hence, I used to tell associate director Siby Malayil *"It is our responsibility .... as youngsters, to show good behavior .... to set an example with high morals .... so as to attract good persons from good families to this profession"*.

I was definitely naive then .... to consider both human behavior & dignity of profession in such simplistic terms. Those were the times\* I thought that society can be made better with good artistic creations! It would take me at least two decades to realize that God has given into every one of our hands the right to choose ... whatever be the message espoused in art.

(\*Those were also the times we engaged in some activism. For example, our love for ecology had seen Siby and myself print posters to protect SILENT VALLEY of Attappady forests from the ravage of a proposed hydroelectric project. Without elders being aware, these 'Save Silent Valley' posters were asked to be put up along with our film posters when teams from our Film Distribution Wing went out on Publicity Campaigns).

And on morality & exemplary behavior ... I was trying to strike a moral high ground based on my own Papa's reputation in the film industry as a person with high morals in his personal life. Yet, there was quicksand underneath. Our parent company 'Udaya Studios Alleppey' had a background of having made 'rape films' in the past. My uncle Kunchacko - a man though with a tender heart inside him, had a fearsome reputation outside and could not be considered a role model for 'morality-in-film-field'. And there I was championing 'morality' with my talk to Siby! No wonder, despite the good films he made, Siby's own characteristics on this matter turned out deficient ... well; that was later in his professional life.



But in those days, this talk on 'perceived morality' had a practical side on our sets and shooting locations. Fazil, Siby and myself together followed a gameplan during our earliest films. Even while following a friendly creative environment, we had to enforce discipline in the workplace. Though we were the creative taskmasters, we were also the youngest (and the newest) there at the filmmaking endeavor. There was always this possibility that we may not be taken seriously. Hence, we followed an act where **I play the bad policeman & Fazil plays the good policeman**. Siby would play up with a hype *"better do what Paachi (Fazil) asks, or Jijokuttan would get angry"*. Loose talks and loitering at the sets were curtailed by cautioning *"Here comes Jijokuttan"*. This produced the intended results .... and was effective to the point that individuals (like Mohanlal) who later in life became celebrities, nervously put up their best behavior when I was around. Of course, the tradeoff was that I couldn't socialize much. It added to the talk that 'Jijo was a distant person'.

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Now at the KUTTICHATHAN SET. Using obscene language before women on my shooting set was definitely not acceptable. And that was what Ayyappan had done.

I said "Call our man here .... I want to talk to him".

Yet, I had a small doubt .... isn't this a matter that a senior person - for instance papa, should handle? I had thrown such a caution away because anger had already arose within me. Alas! Anger had always resulted in my own rash behavior in the past. But, Papa was not there in the studio that day. And, I could then through the full glass door do see Rajeev & Sheker come to look for me ... I understood that they were there because of the same issue. The thing must be serious and should be acted immediately upon.

As the accused walked into the room, I felt my anger go away. I don't know why. That helped in making the situation better. Anger would have complicated the matter. I once had a problem during *Padayottam* shooting in 1981 when I shouted a junior artiste and his sister out of the palace set constructed on the shores of Malampuzha reservoir. That junior artiste - a youth about 20 years old, accused one of my direction assistants for purposely laying hand on his sister! It was unintended .... but the man started hollering about immorality of filmmakers.

I got furious and threw him out. But the irony was that, I understood later, it was nobody other than Priyadarsan who was at the receiving end of this accusation. Priyan felt vindicated .... but cautioned me that in my anger I could have got the issue understood the opposite way .... and in such an event, *it would have been Priyan who got thrown out!!* He was dead right. Despite the anger it was only by providence I got the issue understood correctly.



Back to Kuttichathan days 1984. My remaining anger turned to pity when the accused man started explaining the sordid scenario. He was looking up at me to defend his case. But then, the mistake was definitely his. Yet what he went on was to talk about the unfairness meted out to him when younger technicians (a female, in this case) made it better than him with a few years of training.

I said, "*I sympathize with your predicament ... but, what you did was wrong*".

Flustered, he replied "*I couldn't help it .... she asked for it*"

He still didn't realize the seriousness of the matter. (Looking back, I note that his words were positioned between self-pity & chauvinism).

"*That is no excuse for using sexually explicit language on shooting floor, Ayyappa*" I said. "*I have to expel you from my set*".

He was startled.

"*Sir, ... Would you send me away (terminate my job) for this ... minor matter?*"

He was obviously under the impression that I would stand by him .... whether his action was right or wrong. After all, he was my man.

But he didn't know that it so happened my judgement would not be moved by any filial, loyal or friendly consideration.

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I learned a lesson when I was in 8th standard at 13 years of age. I cheated on my maths answer paper by correcting it with a minus (-) sign after the evaluated answer sheet was given out. I got caught. Contrary to my expectation, my Ammachi didn't defend me before my class teacher. What a shameful predicament for a minor celebrity in Leo XIIIth school of small-town Alleppey! That taught me the lesson that *the right and and the wrong* had nothing to do with personal relationships. Thanks to my mother's stance, I never again considered falsehood as an option even in the most impossible of situations.

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"*Firing, doesn't come under my authority Ayyappa. For that, you have to consult Papa. I*

would be asking Sidhan or Santhosh (his assistants) to take over camera duties from you". This I said knowing fully well that for him the disgrace would be as bad as being fired. "..... Or, you could apologize to her in front of the entire unit".

He was almost on the verge of tears.

To pacify him I found myself telling him that in this business for 2 generations our family had seen many newcomers come and advance in career, status & reputation ... even getting ahead of us. All of us crew members always had nurtured newly come talents without any misgivings as to what would be our own status by furthering these young careers. So why should he hold it against Vijayalakshmi?

*"Jijokutta, I have given love and respect to all new talents you have brought .... they happen to come with impeccable credentials".*

There, I had to remind Ayyappan that Vijayalakshmi, being daughter of famous director B. R. Panthalu, was not lacking in credentials either.

That was when he made some negative comments about Vijayalakshmi's matrimonial status. Angry, I reminded him that his own matrimonial status was no better.

We were not reaching anywhere with such a discussion.

I told him it was an attitude problem (I used the term 'mentality'). Instead of brooding over the aspect - **Him Vs Her**, I said, he should be considering her as his sister and his colleague in film discipline. It was not a question of gender equality. Nor that which demands respect/ parity based on seniority, job status or years in experience. *"At home you did have many siblings Ayyappa .... I am sure you would have fought with your sisters when you grew up .... you may have sometimes blurted curses too ... but, you won't have used obscene or sexually explicit terms Ayyappa, did you? .... Because therein lies a difference. Same here. .... Now coming to your male ego getting hurt, your younger sister - a lab technician, was the family bread winner for a long time .... Your estranged wife - a professional nurse, she earns more than you. You don't have issues with those, do you?"*

He didn't know that Sound Chief Appukkuttan had once told me about Ayyappan's family situation after coming to know of it when our Outdoor Unit with its cinemascope facilities had camped near Ayyappan's home at Quilon for shooting of the film "Meen" (1980).

*"When the noon break is over, apologize in public .... or see that you do not enter the shooting floor"* I said.

Sure enough, as the break was called off, Ayyappan stood in front of the entire cast & crew and apologized to Vijayalakshmi in a brief single line statement. Then, overcome with fury, he was about to add his justification for the wrong. At that moment Ponnappan I distinctly remember cutting him off by snapping "Enough!" (That is the reason I think it could have been Ponnappan who brought the problem to me). To my embarrassment, Vijayalakshmi in tamil fashion came and touched my feet. Seeing me jump backwards, Rigging Supervisor Soman laughed. Sheker later told me that while crying she had been saying that she would be leaving the place if nobody came out to defend her reputation.



Exactly one decade later in summer 1994 I was training for Navodaya Mass Entrainments the staff who were to operate Kishkinta Amusement Park. It was a mixed lot of men and women (or, should I say boys and girls?) One of the topics under HR was *sexual harassment in workplace*. It was a minor topic then. Even in the U.S. & Europe the issue was just about starting to be addressed as a wrong/ misdeed. Both my HR Consultants - Suleiman (from

Kerala) & Raja Krishnamurthy (actor Kitty) left it to me for briefing the staff and spelling out the nonexistent guidelines of those days. Rather than stressing 'gender equality' among colleagues, I found myself going back to what I had said to Ayyappan on sibling relationship between the two genders. Laying down some ground rules, while starting the list with *sexual favor demanded* as the garden variety of sexual harassment, I added sexual innuendos (a-la-Ayyappan) also as one of the no-nos. And, in a couple of days time, I was faced with the consequence of my guidelines - again, in an emotionally scalding manner.

Art Executive **Amaan's** elder son was recruited as a Program Department staff in Kishkinta for creating stage backdrops. From our film company Navodaya, **Amaan** for 2 years had been deputed for constructing the park, and his job at Chennai was coming to an end. One day a report came from the Park Security that **Amaan's** son was being occasionally seen in too close a proximity with one of the tamilian female announcers who also was employed in the Program Department. This news suddenly spread, and the girl to save her reputation, sidestepped the HR Department and went directly to my mother. (Myself being the M.D., Papa the Chairman, ... I suppose that it could be construed that Ammachi is **Mother M.D.** and/ or **Mrs. Chairman** of the company). The girl told my mother that **Amaan's** son had proposed matrimony and hence even as the previous day she secretly had went for a film with him. **Amaan's** son happened to be in the very next room then. That was because having come recently from home, like **Amaan** himself did at Kakkand Studios, his son too at Chennai merited from the home cooking at Ammachi's 'kerala canteen'. A surprised Ammachi called the boy and in the girl's presence asked him if it were true.

*'With a funny smile he says that he had been merely fooling around with her'* (My mother's exact words).

Hearing such a statement from him, the shocked and distraught girl broke down with loud sobs. Crying all the way across the road to the HR Department, she immediately resigned her job and left. She never came back despite Manger Bekelif going to her home for pacifying her.

I was in a spot. **Amaan** happened to be a person I was very much indebted to. Hailing from my hometown, it was he who sat holding Papa when Papa fell down on the road in september 1977 while being chased out of *Udaya Studios Alleppey*. When I started my film adventures with *Cinemascope* early in 1978, and again with newcomers for *Manjil Virinja Pookal* in 1980, it was **M. A. Amaan** as an all-round creative pillar along with our Production Chief M.K. Anand, who always gave me vociferous support. He had recently been with me to Rajasthan deserts for the Bible Episodes shoot. (The only complaint in our film company about **Amaan** was that under his watch the purchase accounts went grey ... and materials went missing). It was only fair that his son - also a talented person, be given a deserving position at Kishkinta Park - a fruit of 2 years of labor **Amaan** also put in.

Yet as the failed romance of a local damsel got circulated in the Park, nepotism & cronyism were the words that were being whispered in hushed voices as a 500 strong, young, mostly tamilian, outspoken, newly trained workforce for the amusement park openly questioned whether they should follow jijosar's HR advices or the example now being set by Kishkinta's key members. While **Amaan's** face got longer and longer, Papa, HR Manager and CEO of the organization were contemplating whether any action if at all was needed. There was no complaint made on record. But, I called **Amaan's** son and asked him to write out a leave request and quickly return home to Alleppey. He was on one year probation and hence would be payed till the end of the period. I won't be confirming his recruitment nor extending the probation.

Justice was done and was seen to be done ... sort of. But **Amaan** cried (literally) "foul"! First **Amaan** asked me how I could let down one of my loyals. I had to tell him about my own misdeed of an answer sheet correction at age 13, and that I had realized that *the right and the wrong* transcends loyalty. Loyalty to Allah comes first. This, as a pious muslim, he understood. I also told him that even if it were one of my own blood relation, upon filial loyalty I wouldn't have acted any different.

Yet again the question was "What wrong has my son done?"

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All of us those days belonged to an orthodox upbringing ... so there was no doubt in **Amaan**'s or Jijo's *old-fashioned* minds as to what **Amaan**'s son had done was indecent and immoral. Offspring from a godly family - one with a good upbringing, is not expected of such loose behavior. In those days it was understood that one's spouse was selected by God ... and HE did it through elders designated by HIM. You can either concur or object. You are not supposed to go seeking your destined mate at bus terminals ... and you are not supposed to test out mutual chemistry with your future spouse within the darkness of cinema halls ... for, by doing those, hormone induced problem comes into play. It affects your judgement too. This is a moral issue.

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Now at Kishkinta it was a question of regulations .... not that of morality. In the boy's fooling around with the girl, the question of wrong didn't come up for Kishkinta as an organization. No rules or bye-laws were violated. Right?

Wrong! I said.

The instant the boy sought to fool a colleague on the area of sexuality, the harassment clause had come into vogue .... the organization can take action. Had to take action. This being a public limited company, we were answerable to share holding members in all our day-to-day deeds. I as the M.D. is duty bound to see regulations and bye-laws are followed. That was what I maintained before **Amaan** .... and also before all such future violators among the Kishkinta staff.

"What would my son do now?" lamented **Amaan**.

I told him that on completion of the park, film projects (Kuttichathan 3D re-release) shall happen and his son could join me for that at Navodaya Studios Kakkanad. Just because the boy had done a mistake, it doesn't mean that I love him any less.

## CONCLUSION

During the subsequent decades that followed the incident of *Ayyappan Vs Vijayalakshmi* (1984), I always looked back at those moments and wondered how I had handled it just perfect. Because, as noted earlier, at my age of 27 years, for every single issue handled well I would have mishandled a dozen other issues with my then hot-tempered nature. It had so happened .... on my rebuke even elderly people had broken down to tears ..... both the accused and the aggrieved have been left distraught after I handled dispute between personalities. All these leaving a bad taste in my own mouth.

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**Chauffeur Salaam** was a new recruit at Navodaya (incidentally, brought in by his neighbor - the same **Amaan**). A tall, always whining character, he would be occasionally taken to task for his carelessness. In one of those early days of his joining, it was found that while he washed the Premier/ Fiat car under his care, water would seep-in to short circuit the horn switch and make it suddenly function aloud. "PAAA .....". This used to create quite a ruckus at our Alleppey home (where Navodaya Offices also functioned and the Outdoor Unit also was stationed - before we shifted in 1984 to Kakkanad). During such horn blast sessions, the senior chauffeur Baby used to scold Salaam while both of them frantically tried to disengage the horn switch ... Fazil, Ignatious & Siby watching the fuss used to make fun of Salaam.

One Sunday evening myself and Ammachi were attending Holy Mass at Latheen Palli (Latin church) Alleppey. Just as the parish priest after the Gospel-reading started what would have been a long long pastoral sermon, the packed church reverberated with a thunderous horn blast. "PAAA .....". Hoping that the horn would give-up if he paused his sermon, the noble priest remained silent for some time. But the horn wouldn't stop its loud long "PAAA .....". As you may have guessed, it was our Fiat car with its front bonnet parked very close to the huge church window. Salaam had brought Ammachi & myself for the mass. As people got flustered and the pews closest to that window started emptying, for some time Ammachi with her face bent down behaved as if the car didn't belong to us. Myself - also face bent down, was hoping that Salaam would any moment be disengaging the horn. After about a minute of her acting nonchalant, Ammachi raised her head to look helplessly at me ... which prompted me to rush out of the church. Salaam having locked the car, was nowhere to be seen. And people already gathered around the car were enquiring for the car keys. I picked up a large stone to smash the driving door-side glass pane. But a good Samaritan had already discovered that the 'quarter glass' on the left-side door was partially open. I put in my hand through that 'quarter glass window' to release the left-side door lock, and once getting inside the car slammed the horn ring repeatedly to stop the 2 minutes long "PAAA .....".

The only good thing about the embarrassing incident was that, once a *deafening silence* had descended inside the church, the priest didn't restart his sermon. The mass continued on that Sunday, and thanks to the truncated sermon, it got finished early by about half an hour.

After the Mass, rushing out before the closing hymn, I find that Salaam had returned but was not even aware an incident had occurred in his absence! The pious members of the congregation by the time they came out of the church got to see a Salaam bawling "WAAAH ....." almost as loud as the car horn that disrupted the church service! He was crying because I had already taken him to task .... and he was scared that he - a father to half a dozen kids, would be fired from his job. This shameful spectacle to which I had reduced Salaam into, was a bigger embarrassment to me that day. Just one of those incidents where I made the situation worse by opening my mouth.

**Suresh Gopi** was an aspiring actor who *almost made it* as one of the two major male characters in our film *Ente Mamaattukkuttiyammakku* 1983. Despite the enthusiasm of that 'boy', director Fazil was not keen to cast him. The casting called for 4 parents - two mature husbands & two mature wives ..... and young Suresh Gopi even with an impressive physique, Fazil found him not 'mature enough' those days. (Those 4 wonderful characters were eventually performed by Kodiyettam Gopi / Sangeetha Naik and Mohanlal / Pornnima Jayaram). But we made it up for Suresh Gopi by calling to cast him in film *Onnumuthal Poojyam Vare* 1986 in a single but very prominent scene ..... and, it was his first film. He was very gratified even with a minor performance .... because he considered it a blessing to start his career with my firm Navodaya (!!!)

Such a blessing aside, one month after the shoot (I think, August 1986) it was a distraught Suresh Gopi who met my Production Exec M.K. Anand at the ground floor production offices of Navodaya Films, door #15 at Palat Sankaran Road, Mahalingapuram, Madras. He walked in after an agonizing experience at door #2, Palat Sankaran Road .... yes, in the very same street as ours where director I. V. Sasi resided. Since her husband was absent, actress Seema Sasi it seems had lambasted him for intruding with acting requests into her privacy. Since Anand found it difficult to console a visibly upset Suresh Gopi, he sent him to me, two flights of stairs up on the first floor, where we had our staying rooms. I should have been then in Madras for the post production of the said film. Anand, being a sensitive human being, had come up and briefed me of the situation before going down and sending Suresh Gopi up.

Though not familiar in assuming the role of an agony uncle, I did try my best to make the fledgling superstar comfortable. Going on 30, I would have been 4 or 5 years elder to him.

"*She told me to go and look myself\* in a mirror, jijosar*" ... was the most painful turn of the knife for Suresh Gopi, after the stab by her pronouncing him unfit for acting. (\**munjiye paaru* is a Tamil expression. I don't know how Ms. Seema could use it).

To console him, I started with instances in the lives of many celebrities who had bitter experiences before making it big. I told about Jesudas, Jayan .... and our own Mammooty. It is not the pronunciation by anybody's tongue that makes your fate ..... but what the Creator's hand had written on your forehead. Such was my (immature?) talk then.

Now, to be really truthful, I should also tell him the fact that there were other hundreds of *Antos* for every *Jesudas* .... dozens of *Sudheers* for every *Mammooty*. Correct?

So in conclusion I told him about the hard facts of life "*Who knows if it is a career in acting that is meant for you ..... maybe, God has even something greater!*"

Sometime really soon I realized that for Suresh Gopi there was nothing greater than being an actor. No sooner he left our premises, Anand once again came rushing up enquiring what had really happened that made Suresh Gopi leave more distraught than the way he arrived here!

"*I consoled him as you asked me, Anand*" was my reply.

"*But, he was sobbing to me while saying that 'even jijosar thinks I cannot be an actor' ....*" tells a perturbed Anand.

One more incident where I made the situation worse by opening my mouth.

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Hence considering the rare cases (like the *Ayyappan Vs Vijayalakshmi* incident for instance) which went right for me, I used to wonder how I could play them just right. A case of probability? Not really. The reason doesn't lie in the realm of mathematics, but in that of spirituality.

Quite late in life I was made to understand the dynamics *within our own selves* of **the right and the wrong**. [Did I say 'dynamics' ? Yes, I did.... because within each of us righteousness coexists with evil in a dynamic equilibrium]. The 'goodness' in me is positioned in a separate area of my 'Operating System' ... which runs on the biological hardware - my brain. Hence, strictly speaking, 'goodness' is not part of my intellect. Yet without my being aware, 'goodness' can come into my intellect to overpower other instinctual emotions of mine. When that occurs, I am under 'grace'. [Grace in English or *Kripa in Sanskrit*, is defined as the action of God on human mind. Or, the permeation of God's characteristics into human behavior]. This area where my 'goodness' is positioned in my 'Operating System' sometimes get activated from outside ... by The Supreme Power(\*). When that happens, 'I am in grace'. Why should such a thing happen? Well; ... because of the prayers others had made on my behalf .... my own scarce good deeds done before .... God's own one-sided benevolence based on HIS future expectations about me ... it could be any of these. This action counteracts our base instincts (hence I said, *dynamic equilibrium*) to guide us to a proper good-of-the-moment. Hence, today I realize that my good handling of some difficult situations were not because of my ability. Something had forced itself into my intellect during those times ..... very similar the way the thing called 'fury' which many times had entered my mind during times of anger, and saw me end-up making the situations worse. By practicing prayers (meditation/ contemplation), you would be able to recognize grace overcoming you .... just as you would recognize fury, lust, etc., building up within you when provoked.

(\* ) because, God is the *only* good, the *supreme* good ... and, the *source* of everything good.

Now what did really go wrong in my attempt to abate Suresh Gopi's anguish? After all, it was out of purely good intentions - unlike other interactions of mine that were exercises in fury-venting.

*'Not being diplomatic' ..... 'Politically incorrect' ..... 'These do happen when you are frank and call a spade a spade' ....* Such would have been my excuses if I plead *'an open-minded personality unlike many other people who are not truthful even to themselves'* in explaining away a bad outcome.

Once again, it is not about intellect. It is not intelligence that puts proper words on your tongue - even while you do brim with the best of intentions to calm a turbulent soul.

Jesus used the metaphor *'blind leading the blind makes both fall into pit'*.

Before I lead Suresh Gopi to consolation, my eyes should have been fully open. That happens only when I am 'filled with love'. Otherwise, it would remain a diplomatic exercise - prone to pitfalls, however good my intentions be. 'Filled with love' is a state-of-the-mind some of the

best parents and teachers do achieve .... oh yes, surprise! .... sometimes very young children also do. Because, God Is Love. Hence, I have noticed that *prayer/ meditation/ contemplation do help before you attempt to console another grieving soul* (I admit. This is a nonsense statement to an intelligent mind).

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On the topic of gender discrimination & sexual harassment, I realize some observations I have made above won't be taken well by people who advocate gender equality. I may get roasted, because I am old-fashioned. So be it.

The genders are not equal \*... they are different .... their sexual sensitivities are different. That is the reason 'sexual innuendo by a male' is as bad as 'provocative attire by a female'. (The opposite of that - innuendo by female & attire by male, rarely happens). Both the above arise from our base instincts - a vestige of the survival codes written during evolution and now existing within each one of us .... which today as children of God, we should abhor. The ideal attitude is those brother-sister relationships at our homes. Ah, the beneficial atmosphere of a large joint family - provided of course, you are willing to choose the right relationship lessons there. Oh, the pitfalls of today's single child families - mostly single parenthood too. The problem in bringing the so-called 'gender equality' to workplace is that whenever you say 'sexual equality', it is construed that females are also given the right to bad behavior - behaviors, which are considered as their (hormone induced) right by males. We forget the fact that such sexual overtures (mating signals) in males is morally bad .... we forget, since a male dominated society had always glossed over their own wrongs.

Now, woman also have the right to freedom over her body. Right?

Wrong! None of us own our bodies (in this context, sexuality).

Instead of males realizing this *limitation over oneself* and the *law written by The Designer*, citing equality and hence sharing those rights with females to partake in the wrongs ..... sorry, I am being reminded of Eve sharing the forbidden fruit with Adam ... only that, this time it is the other way around.

\* Not identical. Different in aspirations, attitude and priorities.

## CONCLUDED

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## AFTERWORD

### പോസ്റ്റ്മാനെ കാണാനില്ല

While taking the podium to speak on morality, lest within me assume any pride, I remind myself the following. I do have observed the 7th commandment faithfully. Yet to validate that statement, a definition of the term 'adultery' is needed. From dictionaries to constitutions, on every definition for this term, I pass ... till I come to an uncomfortable statement made by Jesus.

*"A person .... looking at a woman with lust, ... has already committed adultery in his heart".* Well, there goes away my pride. For, 'adultery' is not merely an act ... but, a purity of the heart.

Without discarding them, whenever I had allowed lustful thoughts entering my mind to be 'processed', it had entered my heart as a sin. Those revealing images - even if they were posters put up in public, and those erotic literature - even if they were world classics,

all of them would bear witness against me  
before the creator who wrote the law ...  
WHO IS THE LAW.

**A few asides ...** (quite a few, rambling).

**Ayyappan** The first time I saw Ayyappan, I even today vividly remember.

1971 summer. The film 'Aaromalunni' was being shot at Udaya Studios Alleppey in the oldest of its three floors (A Thatched shooting floor!) I was 14 years old then (a time I used to carry the sanyo cassette recorder to record directly from the 35mm optical/ mag, film songs of the latest films). My cousin Boban Kunchacko - elder to me by 8 years, took me and my younger brother Jos along to watch the shooting happening at the 'thatched floor'. Tea-break time in the evening, everybody had moved towards the canteen.

On the empty floor we saw an additional new Arriflex IIB Camera stationed along with the old Mitchell Camera of ours. Mounted on the tripod, it was kept covered with black clothe to shield it from dust. Bobachan started explaining to us that the camera, a light-weight Arri, was hired and brought down from Madras for that particular shooting schedule. Our Udaya Studios also had plans to buy one like that - because unlike the American made Mitchell - which was a 'rack-over', this Arri was a 'reflex' camera. A german invention during the second world war, the legendary camera was first used for nazi propaganda & battleground news gathering. Those stories associated with it Bobachan started telling us. In the heat of the battle even American photographers who covered the war used to risk their lives to 'capture' one of those Arris. Bobachan, removing the clothe and was about to check out the camera's Angenieux zoom lens through the viewfinder (our Mitchell had only block lenses) when suddenly a tall dark youth stepped out from the shadows to put back the clothe cover saying in english "no touch" (sic). We were familiar with all our studio staff ... this man obviously was not one of ours. Bobachan stared at him and walked away. While leaving, I saw another stranger running up and enquiring to the first in Tamil "Ennada aachu?" ... and the first dark young man in half tamil/ half malayalam started explaining what had happened. The next thing I remember was the second stranger pulling along the first and coming to Bobachan. By then, we were in front of the performers relaxing after the tea. The second stranger, the senior among the two, started apologizing for the affront the first had shown to Bobachan - *the Scion and Son of the Studio's Owner - Kunchacko, who also was the Film's Director*. Slightly embarrassed Bobachan retorted in front of the cast & crew ... "this man is indeed a responsible camera assistant and what he did was right!" Bobachan then enquired the tall dark young man's whereabouts. He said his name was "Ayyappan" and he had left his home at Quilon to find a job at Madras with 'Sujatha Movietone' - the unit who supplied our studio with all additional equipments needed whenever a very large production like the one that was happening occurred. By next year, I was seeing this Ayyappan in Alleppey as the camera-in-charge of the new Arri IIB Udaya had purchased. I could imagine what would have happened. From Udaya, later Ayyappan came along to Navodaya in 1980 when we setup a 'cinemascope' shooting unit.

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**Personalities & dislikes** At Madras in 1986, while consoling Suresh Gopi on his bad treatment at the gates of I.V.Sasi & Seema, I did touch the topic of 'forgiveness'.

Then I had said something like .. ..... "Do not take it too bad Suresh, ..... because their negativity is beside themselves, and it is rooted from the time both of them had to undergo bitter experiences from the establishment when they first entered the film field ..... Do not get bitter Suresh, lest one day you too become like them".

If it were today, in my consolation I would have added that it is like the "Saas-Bahu phenomenon" or the "Ragging syndrome". A torturous mother-in-law is the one who once as a daughter-in-law had undergone torture herself ..... and become bitter. It is a second year student having undergone cruel ragging the past year, that rags most cruelly during the current year. It is not voluntarily nor consciously. Its just a fulfillment of *They who take up the sword shall perish by it*.

But I did mention to him about my own remorseful experiences that happened during my past

interactions with film personalities like ... Sukumaran & Mammooty (who were then newcomers), Jesudas & Amithab Bachan (who were already veterans). I mentioned that I disliked their attitude in not heeding to my directorial requests, and their pettiness in flaunting defiance with their 'smart talk'. Obviously, they didn't like me. But my problem was that, **I disliked them**. By the time I was talking to Suresh Gopi, I had overcome my problem. A bit late, but thankfully not too late. I was able to empathize with them after my coming to know the bitter experiences all the above mentioned personalities had undergone at the start of their careers. That occurred after I listened to many real-life-film-stories and got time to think about them.

Jesudas & Amithab Bachan had to face abject ridicule, before film chances would be offered to them. (About Jesudas, I heard from Verapoly Diocese. About Bachan I heard from writer Inderraj Anand). Mammooty had to fight for his recompense for every small roles he played early in his career. In fact, I later had come to know of an incident where Mammooty had to argue with Prakasan - one of our own production staff, to validate a home-bound taxi fare.

When hearing this, I asked Prakasan "... why should we become so tight fisted?"

His answer was "*Jijokutta, ... after my paying the fare to Vaikom as he demanded, I tailed him and found that he walked to his Mattancherry home from our Ernakulam Kacherripady office.*"

I was touched. It would have been about 10 kilometers the future superstar had walked that day. I told Prakasan "*That in fact proves the man's needs ... and not your justification in bringing that expense validation to the point of an argument ..... All the more reason for us to be compassionate ..... If you had consulted Anand, he would have given you umpteen instances where we had overlooked reimbursement norms upon human considerations*".

It is better to err on the side of human compassion than being absolutely right on account verification .... for, **The Keeper of all accounts is always watching.**

So I had told Suresh Gopi that, ... during Suresh Gopi's entry attempts to the film field, if he finds jijosar treating him well, it is not because I am a better human being ..... it is because I was never subjected to disgrace at anybody's hands while entering this profession. It was given to me on a platter. In fact, to be entitled virtuous, I should be treating Suresh Gopi .... or for that matter Sukumaran, Mammooty, Jesudas or Amithab Bachan even better. Though it didn't seem to help him then, I had given Suresh Gopi a good advice. It seems we human beings are at our best .... *when imparting advices to others.*

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**Practice, not preach** Sometime during 2002 I stopped over at my Chennai Offices/ residence at Palat Sankaran Road, Mahalingapuram (by then, door #15 had become #20 and Madras had become Chennai) on transit from Mumbai to Kochi. Active in making programs for the 'value based' Jeevan TV Channel, I was not involved in our company's film activities those days. It was my brother Josmon while shooting film **Magic, Magic 3D** (2003) who looked after Navodaya film business. Producer N.G. John (Johnsar) - papa's colleague who had once come to execute Bible TV Serial for our company, was also in charge of our production then.

The new young office staff came to me and said "*One I. V. Sasi from the neighborhood is waiting outside the gate to meet either Johnsar or Josmon .... and both of them are not here in the office at the moment*".

I said "*What do you mean by 'One I. V. Sasi?' It should be 'Mr. I.V. Sasi or Sasisar' ... don't you know? He has made the biggest hits in malayalam cinema ..... and the last one I remember as recent as 7 years ago*".

What I told him was true, .... but I also knew that Sasisar had not made any film in the last 5 or 6 years. So what? even Ramesh Sippy has not done any in the last 2 decades ... nor have I myself, during the past one decade.

"*Why didn't you invite him in and offer a seat?*" I asked the staff as I walked down the stairs.

"*He is hesitant to come in ... just enquired of Johnsar's presence ..... wants to request a favor .... I.V. Sasi's ... sorry sir, .... I mean, Sasisar's film 'Aabharana-chaarthu' dubbed at our Navodaya Audio Studio, Trivandrum is having financial problems ... so I hear from Kerala*"

(A). Johnsar/ N.G. John a.k.a. Geo Kuttappan was one top distributor/ producer who had given I.V. Sasi one of his first major breaks. Johnsar had produced many big hits with I.V. Sasi ... the american film *Ezhaam Kadalil Akkarey* (1979), *Ee Naad* (1982), *Meen* (1980), etc., on his banner of Geo films.

(B). *Navodaya Audio Studio* was a recent awareness venture put up at Trivandrum by my brother Josmon &

director Rajeevkumar for the purpose of inducting Malayalam film industry into desktop filmmaking systems - Avid non-linear editing & Audiovision/ Protocols audio dubbing. It seems Mr. I.V. Sasi was utilizing our facilities at Trivandrum for his film '*Aabharana-chaarthu*' which he got to direct after a long gap.

*"Hello, Sasisar! Please come in"*

From the gate I brought him inside to seat him at Johnsar's ground floor office room.

I must have met Mr. I.V.Sasi only casually 3 or 4 times in the past. The first I clearly remember ... he was shooting *Ithaa Ivide Varey* (1976) with actors Madhu & Soman along with a 'dwindling' flock of ducks for Hari Pothen's production happening at Udaya Studios Alleppey. Final year Bsc. student - that is myself, was listening him talking my papa into making a "train accident film" - a real life incident illustrated in the Reader's Digest magazine I was holding in my hand then. That conversation happened intermittently while lighting was taking place ... and, during takes I was listening Hari Pothen telling papa that duck-currys were the staple menu in their production canteen ... now that the shooting schedule was coming to an end.

The second time I met I.V. Sasi was during my papa's first independent production on Navodaya banner - *Kadathanaattu Maakkom* (1977). I.V. Sasi was editing his *Avalude Raavukal* (1977) next room to our own editing happening in the rented facilities at A.V.M. Studios, Kodambakkom, Madras. Myself an apprentice during our first production, I was invited by I.V. Sasi to view a song of his on the Moviola film editing Machine. "*Rajendu kiranangal ....*". Sekhersar was our editor and Narayanansar was I.V. Sasi's editor.

The third time I met I.V. Sasi was when taking a newly arrived servo zoom control I went to install it on our anamorphic zoom lens at their shooting location for *Meen* (1980) in Quilon. Johnsar the producer was raising a few disparities with me on our 'cinemascope' outdoor unit's call sheet hours, while I.V. Sasi and cinematographer Jayanan Vincent were busy trying out the zoom operation. We had lunch together and later at the seashore location at *Neendakara* Unit chief Balansar was complaining (about camera in-charge Ayyappan) that while on water the camera was being subjected to 'saltwater sprays'.

The last time I remember meeting I.V. Sasi was at Trivandrum in 1985. In the city my brother Josmon was shooting film *Poove Poo Chooda Vaa* with Fazil as the director ... but, I was there planning amusement parks with Architect Jayachandran. Walking around Thampanoor from Hotel Woodlands where I was staying to Hotel Keerthi where the shooting crew were stationed, I suddenly bumped into Mohanlal.

After overcoming our mutual surprise, Mohanlal in his characteristic style held both my shoulders and said "*Pinne jujukutta, vereyonnum thonnaruthu ... I need 500 rupees urgently ..NOW.*"

I answered "*Lalumon, you know I don't carry cash. Come, our unit is here inside at Keerthi hotel ... we'll get it there.*"

He said "*Ayyoo .. sangathi pinneyum kozhayunnu. .... I just asked the hotel manager there ... he said the cashbox was just emptied .... am ashamed to go back there.*"

Mohanlal, though a known film celebrity, had not become a superstar yet. He would become one in two year's time with film *Rajaavinte Makan*. Before that, I would again be shooting film *Onnumuthal Poojyam Varey* with him in a year's time.

I asked "*Why so urgent ... How come you suddenly ran out of cash?*"

"*In my enthusiasm I offered to take along Sasijettan and show him something unique. .... He is waiting for me. But on taking my bike out, I realized there is not enough fuel .... and, that I am short of cash ... ooh, deiviam.. njan vazhakku kelkkum!*" was the retort.

Though the entire situation may seem corny to a person unfamiliar with Mohanlal, it didn't sound totally strange to me. I know how during times of *Manjil Virinja Pookal* (1980), Mohanlal riding a bike on the road suddenly saw Fazil & Siby Malayil traveling in Navodaya's Mahindra Jeep. In a bravado attempt to overtake them, Mohanlal sped around the jeep and was startled to see my pappa (Navodaya Appachan) also there in the Jeep. Losing control he crashed his bike, and with blood running down his leg he stood nonchalantly smiling at pappa as Fazil & Siby kept urging him towards the urgently needed medical attention. It was because of a fractured toe suffered in this injury that the newcomer had to act for a scene in the said film with plaster-cast on his leg. That was Mohanlal for me, Jijo.

Then I saw my car driven by chauffeur Baby come out of hotel Keerthi, and flagged it down. As Baby also got out ("*Ahh ...ithaaruu? ... Lalumono?*"), I told Mohanlal "*There you are ... take the car and fulfill the promise made to Sasisar.*"

"*Oh no! ....Eeeyaaargh! You don't realize. This matter demands discretion*" said Mohanlal with his innocent boy act .... on which, realizing that there was more to the matter than what was said, Baby snickered. I had a vague feeling that it ought to do with a covert VHS video tape ... an English film? with possibility of a remake?

I don't know how that thought crossed my mind. Too docile a reason? .. but being not overtly curious, I let it go. That was when I.V.Sasi (and another person with him) came looking for Mohanlal. From where had they emerged, I never saw. "*Laaley! Eda .. %\*X ❖ !\* !!@!.. enthayeda? ... What the hell happened to you ...*" started off an angry Sasisar. Suddenly seeing familiar faces, he stopped, gained composure, smiled at me .. and quickly pulled Mohanlal away and they were off towards an assignment that got delayed.

Just as I had made him feel comfortable, Mr. Sasi started stating the reason of his coming. Feeling very embarrassed he made it known that due to the producer's financial plight, the dubbed tracks of the last film he had directed '*Aabharana-chaarthu*' was currently being held at our *Navodaya Audio Studio Trivandrum* ... till, as stipulated, payments were made for the services, before taking away the mixed voice tracks. He said it in a few words. He couldn't raise his face to meet my eyes when saying that he hoped requesting Josmon or Johnsar for a deferred payment on behalf of the producer, would help the cause ..... The amount, I understood, was somewhere around 1.5 lakhs.

Apparently, he was not used to requesting financial favors.

I said I would mention this to Johnsar & Josmon and surely have this thing done .... in fact, Josmon or Johnsar would have done it themselves ... a mere phone call from him would have sufficed .... no need to have come all the way here. I said this to him while addressing him with a lot of '*Sasisar*'s. For, I could find that he was feeling much insecure and inferior inside. After my assurance, he seemed hugely relieved. I accompanied him till the gates to see him off. That day I was only practicing what I preached to Suresh Gopi, years ago.

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**Making amends** On seeing him burdened with inferiority, I was consciously following a principle - a principle common in both the disciplines - psychology & spirituality, when responding to I.V. Sasi. I learned it during *Amusement park H.R. trainings* and during *Charismatic Renewal Retreats* in mid 1990s. The only way to remove the inferiority of a person, is to make him feel respected - even when you are at the receiving end of that person's ridicule (well, it can be very difficult). Every one of us who have had an experience in bruised self-respect can easily understand this principle. There was another instance where I had done this. Though not consciously, it did make amends to a bruised self-respect which I had inadvertently caused >>>

This is about Priyadarsan, Goodknight Mohan, Rajeev, Siby .... but I have to start the narrative with Prathap Pothen who came down to see me & Raghunath Paleri doing edit & audio post production on one of the first AVID - desktop nonlinear system, during *Bible Ki Kahaniyan* TV Serial (1993). Though then not part of the Bible Production, Pratap was in our team during script discussions of the Bible project in early 1989. He was keen to do the "Joseph & his brothers" episodes - which was never shot, because the project got wound up after the "Jacob" episodes directed by Raghu. Pratap had also played a major character in our *Onnumutual Poojyam Varey* (1988) directed by Raghu. Now seated before Avid, like us he also was marveled to play with the 'newest filmmaking toy' which dispensed off with armies of assistant directors, editing and sound assistants. While clicking around with the computer mouse, he suddenly guffawed "*You are having a 'horse curse' on you Jijo, ... I come to know this from Priyan*". (Now, that is essentially Mr. Pratap Pothen)

For me, the relationship with actor/ director Pratap Pothen actually starts with his elder brother Hari Pothen's 'Supriya films'. I must have been 10 years old when during a school holiday in 1967 I accompanied pappa on a trip to the state capital - Trivandrum city, and went to visit Mrs. Kulathungal Pothen at a palatial bungalow. Kulathunkal Pothen - the iconic businessman & kingmaker in politics, had expired. His son Hari Pothen wanted to enter film productions - which, when alive, the father had prohibited. Hari Pothen was Pratap's eldest brother .... and Pratap was then studying at Lawrence school in Nilgiris. A few days back Hari Pothen had approached pappa with requests to help him start a film distribution firm. Hari already had started shooting his first film "*Aswamedham*" - a Thoppil Bhasi stage classic.

Pappa had answered "*Let me talk to your mother first*".

Now, their mother was enquiring pappa whether the veterans of Udaya would help her 'fatherless sons'.

Pappa answered "*We have to ... since Harimon has already started shooting. But I wanted to hear from you ma'am ... if Harimon the eldest followed by the younger two brothers gets obsessed with filmmaking, who is going to take care of the financial empire their father has left behind? Don't you know, despite the high visibility we film people (cinemakkaaru) have, in monetary terms our business is peanuts when compared to your BENZ sales & services alone?*"

The mother replied *"That shall be taken care, Appacha ... you must be saying this to protect your turf from being invaded by newcomers"*.

On her reply my pappa laughed and said *"Well, this first production, my firm shall distribute it for him. ... On observing the process and building contacts with the theaters, Harimon can start a distribution company on his own for his subsequent films"*.

I liked all those early Supriya Films - *Aswamedham* (which was distributed by our firm), *Nadi, etc.*, with director Vincentmaster ... just as Pratap was a fan of Udaya's *vadakkanpaattukal* (folklore) films. Later we used to compare notes on songs composed by Vayalar - Devarajan for both of our companies. It seems both of us had made hot-hot acquisitions of the 78 r.p.m. gramophone records of these films. [One other filmmaker related to me whose films I liked was M.O. Joseph of Manjilas. During early 1970s he had made some wonderful films - *Adimakal, Vazhvey Mayam, Anubhavangal Paalickal & Chattakkaari* with director Sethumadhavan].

**YEAR 1993.** *"Horse curse, Pratap?"* I was trying to recollect where I had heard that term before .... *"Oh, oh ... I remember Siby using that term ... when a horse under my instruction was killed for a shot during 1981 film Padayottam's battle scene"*.

*"Oh, so you do own it up?"* asked Pratap *"Nasty, wasn't it?"*

*"Ofcourse I am ashamed... when I look back on that today"* I replied *".... also, another cruelty to an animal I did was stringing up a foxbat for the climatic shot in Kuttichathan (1984) ..... Definitely, I would not do any such today ..... and in the near future I am sure such acts would be made illegal in our country .... just as such shootings have been banned in the U.S. recently"*.

While I was saying this, Pratap surprisingly didn't rise up to the opportunity of an argument the occasion had presented him with ..... for, he never let go such opportune situations. This must be because we have had ample arguments on such ethics before ....

'Were those people in biblical times righteous in their holocausts to God?'

Yes/No.

'Another millennium hence, can a future generation blame us for filling our bellies with dead plants & carcass?' Yes/No.

*"I realize it is not the horse .... come, who is actually cursing me Pratap?"* I asked

*"Who else but Priyadarsan - your onetime assistant"* answered Pratap *"He doesn't like you ... I don't know why"*.

Even I didn't have any idea. Since he had received better offers in 1981 Priyadarsan had left my film Padayottam half way into the shoot. (For a film called *Thenum Vayambum*, I think). I didn't hold it against him .... such things happened in the trade .... though not as frequently as it happens with trainees and interns in IT & BPO fields these days.

After Padayottam, I had met Priyan only fleetingly on a few occasions till 1986 - the year I left the 'film field'. And he was fairly warm to me. ... slowly becoming less warmer as we kept bumping into each other. Once it was in the editing room at Mohanlal's brother-in-law Suresh Balaji's place - doing the final edit of *Kadathanadan Ambadi*, the film we took up to complete on Supreme Court order ([http.link](http://link)). Hearing that Priyan was there, as I walked in to meet him, he turned from the Steinbeck machine, looked me up and down and gave a quizzical look .... that was all ... no conversation. It would seem that he was enquiring 'what are you doing here?' .... except that he smiled as he looked me up and down again. Having come down from a trip abroad, I was wearing western attire. There could have been two reasons .... (1) Siby Malayil had been associated with Priyan in the making of Priyan's earliest films - comedies with Mohanlal, Mukesh, Sreenivasan & Sankar. I had a vague feeling that in those days Siby, having not become a film director at my company, would have not been saying kind words about me to Priyan - for that matter to anybody. (Siby though did become large-hearted later in life, I can say, once he embraced spirituality).

(2) One other reason could have been the production of film *Kadathanadan Ambadi* (1997 - 1999). Though my company Navodaya had taken up the completion & release the Sajan Varghese's film that got embroiled in his tussle with investors of his financial company *Oriental Finance & Exchange*, Priyan as the film's director was not happy when post-release on complaint from theaters I had to step in to trim the film's lengthy 'jungle-vine-swinging-fight'. On invitation from the formidable High Court Judge - Chettur Sankaran Nair, we had stepped in to offer completion of the said film, and it was

myself who followed Sajan's objections unto the Supreme Court in Delhi to overrule the opposition (which the Supreme Court division bench did in a landmark ruling that praised my papa Navodaya Appachan), and hand over production completion to Johnsar & Josmon. I was on trips to Munich and other places involved in amusement parks (like, meeting with Anton Schwarzkopf, the father of steel roller coasters, etc.) by the time the said film got released (Onam 1999). I don't know how it landed on my lap .... while at Ernakulam, Rajan - our distribution manager, comes and tells me that the film released on the previous day is a failure ..... what is agonizing for the audience can be mitigated to an extent by removing two sequences in the lengthy film .... the theater owners were clamoring for action .... and a couple of them contrary to convention had already gone ahead and had done it without the producer's or distributor's (in this case, both by default - my company Navodaya) concurrence. Pappa, Johnsar or Josman were not available (cell phones are another decade away) and hence Rajan was requesting permission from me to enforce what he himself also considered proper - removal of two scenes for the betterment of the film itself.

I remember my childhood visits to Udaya Studios Alleppey ... the visits that became less frequent as 'daily-study-load' increased. Most of my time would be spent at sound department in the midst of the arrays of RCA valve amplifiers mounted on the room walls ... and sometimes with the Photophone PM-45 Optical Recorder while engineer Cheenu (Sreenivasan) from Madras came for services. Then there was the Moviola Editing Machine room, the B&W film laboratory where the dark rooms were inaccessible and mysterious. I would sometime accompany my cousins to the studio to see shooting at the floors ... and that was when we children hung around in the company of performers - filmstars like Prem Nazeer, Sheela, Ummer ..... and many of the supporting casts like Thikkurissi, Adoor Bhasi, ... when they indulged in gossip & idle talk. It was these stars for whom my classmates - for example: Arts Club Ashraf, future MLA Shukkoor, Municipal Chairman Kalyan, used to influence me in having a celebrity invited to our school/ college functions.

Sometimes visiting journalists and key technicians (cinematographer, dance master, assistant director, etc.) would also be in this large group who sat in rings of chairs outside the shooting floor .... and they would be laughing out loud at stories and jokes. Whenever the talk became bawdy, some responsible individual around (it was **definitely not** one among the stars) would ask us children to leave. I remember Bobachan once shooing us kids away, when amidst hoots, whistles and giggles erotic lines in a song by lyricist Vayalar Ramavarma came up for discussion. My parents too didn't approve of our hanging around when cast & crew were discussing or sat playing cards. In fact, my mother was very very observant of what transpired between myself/ my brother and the boys of our age - brothers, kids of the actors or even child performers - newfound friends we came across at the studio.

When I was in 3rd standard at 7 years age, I was made to act in film **Aisha** (1964) as Nazeer & Sheela's son. There was a song in that film based on the Arabian Nights story of 'Badr-UI-Munir'. There was a thick big book - a translation of the story in malayalam language, kept along with the shooting still albums in the studio library. When I picked it up, Nazeer Sar commented that it was a very good story. As a muslim, he would have been familiar with the story. I didn't read well at that young age. But, 3 years hence, I was there acting in film **Mainatharuvi Kolakkess** (1967) again as Sheelamma's son (my dad in that was Mr. Dominic Alummoor - the first occultist seen in film My Dear Kuttichathan).

Now having started reading malayalam stories on my own, I picked up the old book 'Badr-UI-Munir'. My Ammachi immediately pounced on it to check whether the literary content was good.

"Nazeer Sar said it is good" I protested.

"Maybe for him, it is ..... let me see whether it is good for you" said my mother.

### **Tough Act on the shooting sets.**

In a true sense, the 'moral policing' of mine on the shooting floors started at age 20 (even before Fazil & Siby coming into the scene as detailed earlier). Film **Thacholi Ambu** (1978), the first film on which I

got some creative control. Jayan and Ravikumar - two thieves thick in their sinful liaisons, would be joking always amidst the film shoot. Myself as a much younger brother would be smiling away indulgently ... except when the shot was of a serious nature and required emotions unsullied by smalltalk. On Assistant Director Mr. Stanley Jos's meaningful look at me, I would say "... mathi .. mathi, thamasha nirthu". And as professionals, they would comply.

One of my grouses with the earlier Assistant Director Mr. Raghu was that despite his ardor to complete the scheduled call-sheet in time, he used to participate in loose talk ... sexual jokes too, to ease the tension on the sets. It reminds me of a scene in 'Detroit novel' written by Alex Haley ... on the car assembly-line, the supervisor would allow the workmen to make indulge in sexual jokes - a concession for the monotony the all-male workforce had to endure all-day long. The problem comes up when *racially sensitive* talk happen ... the colored men didn't like that!

Jayan knew that it was myself who was responsible in casting him in a 'dual-sacrificial-role' of Thacholi Ambu. His roles along with the offbeat casting of Balan K. Nair turned out to be greater surprises in this hit film than the technological landmark of "Cinemascope" or the casting coup of "*Sivaji Ganeshan as Othenan*". Jayan was grateful to me for that.

It also happened that the conversation would sometimes take a sexual bend ... mostly about female performers in the set. I would be at loss how to respond to this topic which as a child I was taught as 'wrong' ... but then, I did participate in such talks during my school & college days with friends. There was a difference now. My school & college were not co-ed. Here I am now in the proximity of female colleagues (performers, though) who are *not very different* from my mother, aunts or sisters (in fact; most of my cousins were girls). And, here it was also evident to me such a conversation was detrimental to the work atmosphere. It evoked some primal instincts which my parents & teachers had taught us to suppress.

**TO BE CONCLUDED**