

MALDIVES TALES

Now, as I am sitting in front of my computer and thinking about writing Maldives Tales, my dream to become a writer became true and materialized. Everything happens for a reason and there is no coincidence. Life always put me in very tricky and delicate situations so that I could feel the hands of Providence always in my life, supporting and sustaining me, as well as those of the evil one, trying to hamper my dream to be a writer to come true. I tried myriad ways to get exposure and experience, to bring out the best in me. I went chasing a dream to be a writer and that dream came pursuing me and I learned that the best is yet to come, all is always for better and now is the best and most opportune time for everything, even in this Corona times. Since I had an accident, breaking my right leg, I had to postpone a Middle East trip, the very next day and that saved me from getting stranded in some airport and undergoing quarantine there.

There is such an episode in my life that I always wanted to forget, but never could, and it always came popping up on the monitor of my mind, like a disco, snorkeling in the shallow seas, scuba diving, beach parties or even a hard drink of Tequila with a pinch of pepper on the expense account, the life at Pathala resort in Maldives, a sought after destination of the billionaires and connoisseurs of the world, who did not know what else to do with their money, which they had plenty. I was offered money and wisdom on two platters and I chose wisdom and became a poet. Poets die poor, while novelists get richer and richer.

It was quite accidentally that I landed up there and I still get goose pimples thinking about my first journey there and my last trip. Some time ago I made a futile attempt to reach the resort I was in. I had to abort the attempt and came away half way through. The first time, a good friend sent me there and another friend took the ticket, and my ticket was only one way. It was like burning the bridge.

To me Maldives is a land of dreams, tranquility, synchronizing with serenity, exotic sun, sand and sea, and all those who visited there once would be like the Lotus Eaters, never wanting to return home, so captivating, mesmerizing and alluring in its charm and attraction. When we are

high up in the sky, the pearly islands, almost a thousand, scattered in the blue ocean attract and beckon us, with such a charm that we cannot leave or get acquitted from.

The impact that Maldives had in my life was tremendous and I became a different person altogether, I became a writer, a universal citizen, a dude or a real connoisseur in the true sense of the word, and the kind of exposure I got there, even a million dollars could not buy. Good experiences and bad experiences balance at a point, the equilibrium in life, wants and needs coinciding, we had everything we wanted and don't need anything anymore and then one get the urge to write. An unhappy childhood and if the negative was more in the graph, the more passionate would be the writing and love and love failures would add more charm to it. That was the ultimate for a writer to start his saga of writing. My life had all the ingredients to become a writer and it was waiting to overflow at the tip of my finger to the key board, the media I chose to write after my computer training in American College, Madurai in 1991. I got into the midst of a triangular love story, very passionate, intimate and I became the deciding factor of the climax of the story and I tried to make it a comedy.

1

It was 1990s, the computers were making their debut in the world, and there was so much of controversy going on as to whether they should be permitted in the offices, whether they would displace the workforce, whether they would really reduce the work load and how to learn the artificial language to operate them. I was sent to American College, Madurai to learn how to use the computer. To know what to learn and the modus operandi, I visited a friend who was giving training for using computers and while we were gabbing and making fun of each other, the man sitting next to me asked, what I was doing and hearing that I was an accountant, he told me that they needed an accountant in Maldives and whether I was interested in coming.

Without thinking twice I said yes, I saw it as a God given chance to get away from the strife in my office. He told me to send an email with my bio data, the first thing I did after reaching American College. The training was good and the American Professor who was the coordinator,

used to pull my legs and tease me, that on the last day, in the farewell party I organized a skit to pay him back in the same coin.

I covered up a guy with a blanket and brought him to the stage and told them that it was a skunk, a fierce looking animal from Africa and only brave people could look at it. Susan from Stella Maria College came, parted the blanket slightly, looked inside and fell fainting as previously agreed. I lifted her up, sent her off and Malka Singh from a college in Punjab came and looked inside and ran for his life. The audience were sitting tight with apprehension and then I announced that the most courageous and brave person in the whole group was that American Professor and requested him to come and have a look at the animal.

He got up with courage, looked at his wife and everyone around him with a sneer, came and parted the blanket to look at the animal and it fell down, fainting. He stood there looking like a clown, when all were laughing at him and even his wife denounced him, he smiled at me and told me that he would never forget me and that skit. Though about computer I did not learn much, I enjoyed the stay there, the prayer services in the chapel and the company and fellowship of some techies from all over India. The trip to and fro was such an awesome experience in the meter gage train, through scenic places like Kulathupuzha, Chenkotta, Ambasamudram and Punalur and the bridges and tunnels built by the British were amazing.

The appointment order to join for the job at Maldives was waiting for me when I came back. I had to get concurrence from the government to go abroad and my friend in the Government secretariat arranged it. Since I took leave, a colleague was promoted to my post, his life's greatest ambition fulfilled, because I was appointed when he was eligible to get promoted to my post. He kept that grudge in his mind and I had to pay the hell later, as it was by accident, I landed up there.

I was a constant visitor of Kurisumala Ashram, Vagamon and Francis Acharya, the Belgian abbot there inducted me to Veda, Vedanta, Yoga and meditation. I was also in constant touch with Guru Nithya Chaithanya Yathi of Fernhill, Ooty and he invited me there to become his disciple. It was Nirvana I was looking for, but life offered me unbearable agony and pain, because of a false step

that I took. I was thinking of booking my ticket to go to Ooty, to work in a Public School there, owned by my former boss, as I had settled the accounts of Kuttiady estate, Calicut which was pending for five years. It was a Herculean task, as there was no record for anything and I had to make the accounts out of my fancy, imagination and used all my creativity.

I was staying at Pala and my life there was full of adventure and fun. I was given a car for my travelling and could stay in top hotels like Priya Tourist Home, Pala, Alakapuri, Calicut etc. Even the stay in the estate bungalow at Kuttiady was fun; I slept on the bed slept by the Britisher who built it. I did not know the hazards and perils of the job till I left it, my boss could not go there, his life was threatened, and there was police protection for the estate from encroaching people from the neighborhoods.

Lucky that I did not stay there; and I brought all available records to Pala and did my work there. It was a tight rope walk and I do not know how I did it, may be at gun point, I had no other go, the burden of my family was on me and I settled the last part of the accounts at an Income Tax hearing at Vadakara office. Somehow or other I convinced the officer and came away after paying him some bribe, I only paid him half and kept the other half to anchor myself in life.

Soon I was travelling with a group of merchants from Pala, who went to Trivandrum for their annual convention and I met two of my seniors in the college. One of them told me about an opening at a college in Trivandrum and I applied for it and was called for the interview. Abbot of Kurisumala, Francis Acharya, offered to give me a letter of introduction to the principal there, and I came for the interview and got the first rank. May be it was my destiny and all that I had to undergo and suffer in the bargain later, which was all predestined to be there for me. But I came out of it all in flying colors, retired as the office head, was at the helm of affairs when the President of India visited our college, for its Golden Jubilee and also paved the way for the top most score for our college in the NAAC accreditation. More than three thousand friends I have in face book and most of them are former students from there who remember me with gratitude and are pleased to meet me in the course of my travelling around. I tried to be maximum helpful to people, did smart work, more work in the least possible time, the easiest way possible, never

putting off for another time or sending away people to come the other day, using the computer, which was initiated from American College, Madurai.

I did all my writing using computer, I collected what I wrote and kept them in CDs and even posted it in my own website which was there as early as 1995, my cousin Alex Andrews hosting it from New Jersey. The dream and goal of my life was to be a writer and it materialized and became true, more than thirty of my books are there in Amazon Kindle and “E-novels of Paul G.” brought out by SBPRA Books, Texas and Novels of Paul G. by Notion Press, Chennai and four books of poetry. I wrote all those books after my sojourn to Maldives, which changed my life and fate.

2

I became friendly with two fellow passengers in the flight to Maldives and later they played a decisive role in my life, one was Dr. Sanal, working in the National hospital, Male’ and the other was Krishnan a school teacher there. I was supposed to meet Ramesh, my colleague and to proceed to the airport with him. But he went ahead of me and checked in and I tried to find him inside the flight and told the air hostess to trace him. She told me that she couldn’t find him.

As I was tense with apprehension my fellow passenger, Dr. Sanal consoled me and assured me that he would take me to the main land and to my office. Krishnan on my left seat, assured me that I could stay with him for the time being, in his school staff quarters. I was feeling terrible head ache throughout the journey and when I saw the pearly islands, scattered in the blue ocean, my heart leapt with some untold joy. Soon the aircraft landed and we went to the customs and emigration to check out and Dr. Sanal asked the sentry boy standing there with a Sten gun to find out Ramesh, and he said that, there he went, just checked out from there. I went after him, caught hold of his hand, shook it and said that I was pleased to meet him, but I was not sure whether he was pleased to meet me. We got in the boat to the main land and the doctor ushered a car and dropped Krishnan in his quarters and dropped us at our office and he left, promising me of any help, anytime, I needed.

We went and reported to our office, to the General Manager who conducted the interview in Trivandrum for recruiting us there. He introduced us to all the staff there and showed us our accommodation, close to the office, a studio apartment with two beds and a toilet attached. He took us to a restaurant, close by and we had some typical Maldivian food, which I did not like at all. We had good sleep and reported for work the next day. I had to monitor the payments from tour operators and payments to a branch resort. Ramesh was settling the payments to creditors in a tricky way, appeasing the greediest first, always with a part payment.

We were running the show perfectly and the stay in the mainland was fabulous. I used to visit Dr. Sanal in National Hospital and was introduced to Hema, a nurse there and Antha, his assistant and translator. Once Hema was found at the staff quarters of Krishnan and I was glad that they were friends and made for each other. Dr. Sanal was making passes at both Hema and Antha and none of them took him serious.

I used to spend my evenings in the National Library and the librarian, Jiff was so friendly and I used to clear my doubts in Library Science which I was still trying to learn from IGNO University. I came across many fascinating books and Jiff introduced me to a number of great authors. Thulfy was the assistant librarian and she took a lot of trouble to reserve good books for me when they were returned. I read many wonderful books and it was a tremendous reading experience for me and it was a deciding factor for my becoming a writer.

Meeting Sylvia at the library being introduced by Jiff, opened a new vista in front of me in the form of UN parties and a new circle of friends in the Indian High Commission. She was an avid reader and we used to exchange our expertise on different authors and good books. I used to crack some jokes to Sylvia; that paved the way for me to be invited to one UN party and that reserved a niche for me in the hearts of those people and a standing invitation for all the parties at the UN and the Indian High Commission.

I came across Jan and Mark at hotel Alia, they were the friends of Sylvia; both of them were married to Maldivian ladies and resort owners. They had their wives and children at home also. I used to play table tennis with them and spent the evenings on discussions and discourses, mostly

philosophy. They were very eager to hear about Hinduism and the Indian Philosophy and I explained to them about *Purushartham*, the Hindu way of looking at life, to do one's duty, *Karma*, to make *Artha*, sufficient money, without *Kama*, lust and greed, and only with *Dharma*, good moral principles, to reach *Moksha*, the heaven, the ultimate destiny of human life. They had accepted Islam and tried to attract me to it, but I did not want to become one, though the baits and lures were high, like resorts and big business houses in Maldives and on one condition that I should marry a lady from there. With the one wife that I had, I was finding it so difficult to manage and she was driving me crazy, asking me to come for the delivery of our baby, it was going to be a Caesarean and she was so scared of the operation. As the date drew closer, I applied for paternity leave, and it was granted on a condition that I met the travel expenses, nothing should go wrong in the office and I should make alternate arrangements. I trained and entrusted my portfolios to Ramesh.

The next day I was airborne and landed up in Trivandrum. Stayed with a friend and visited the college I worked. Met my colleagues and went to my wife's place. She was all one big tummy and was so scared about the impending delivery. The day we had to report to the hospital was a *harthal* and no vehicles were permitted on the road. We started walking and my fear was whether the delivery would take place on the road. We reached the hospital; got her admitted and the doctor told me that she would do the caesarean the next day.

I made a decision that changed our fate and destiny and told the doctor that since that day was thirteenth and Friday, we would have the surgery on fourteenth Saturday. She said okay, and the next day was such an inauspicious day with some special harm for the father as per the horoscope and I would have even lost my life. I had to pay the hell later, suffer inhuman suffering, but ultimately that all helped me in my career as a writer and the best in me was

brought out and the better was yet to come. Saw the baby and mother, stayed with them for one or two days and I flew back to Maldives and the real story began.

The moment that I came to my office, I found something fishy, my chair was occupied by Ramesh and I had no place to sit. I went to the GM and he told me that they had made some shuffle in the office, as Ramesh could manage the things there, I would be sent to our resort, Pathala to be the accounts manager there. The fun was that Ramesh had to do my share of the job also at the same pay, though it was his idea of the shuffling in the office, on the hope of getting my pay. I decided to go to the resort the next day and went and bode farewell to all my friends in Male' as I had made lots of contacts there. Mark, Jan and Sylvia gave me a send-off party which was so memorable. I had liked them and their company and the intellectual discourses we had, were going to be over. Sylvia gifted me with a table tennis racket, as I was becoming a good player and I told her that it was very thoughtful of her. We had some mugs of beer and Jan toasted that may my dream to become a writer come true and told me to go extra mile in whatever I did, kept the contacts of people on similar lines, kept the faith blazing and learning from defeat, budgeting time and money, keeping healthy and loving every one, controlling the mind with self-discipline, concentrating on the thing I did and making it a habit of life. They all promised to keep in touch and the next day I began my life of adventure, fun and thrill, which turned out to be a tragedy or a comedy, I am not so sure in the end. My conviction was that it had ended up as a comedy or I would not be writing this.

4

I realized that the most important and precious things in life are time and money. It was so difficult to make an extra buck in today's competitive world and all were trying to snatch away from those who have not, even what little they have, by hook or crook. To find an honest means to make money is very important in life. Then to multiply and preserve it is much more important.

We have so many wants in life and desires to have many things that others have but our needs are relatively few and that too, the necessities, comforts and luxuries in the order of priorities.

Always go for necessities first and give them top priority. Save every penny, never wasting a single buck and always create assets. Our spending should be for capital assets and not for revenue expenses. Food, clothes and shelter are priorities in life, but spending for fun and frolicking are a sheer waste and misuse of the money. The more we wallow in such pleasures like drinking, dancing, smoking and squandering, the more we lose our precious money, time and health. Ultimately we will feel glad, sad and mad for indulging in such vices and may not be able to get out of such bad habits, a vicious circle later in life and become an addict and a problem for us and others.

I had some spiritual encounters there in Maldives, without any religious activities I learned to pray by myself relating to my maker, coining my own prayers, not reading or muttering by heart, which did not appeal to me. Our minds would never stick to it, not knowing what we pray. To me prayer was to close the eyes and speak out what we wanted to tell our God. We could be praising, on and on, thanking, repenting for our trespasses and imploring, for our needs and that of others.

To keep the mind under control, it was always good to go on praising God, in all possible ways we can imagine, for the great things He did in our lives and for sustaining us, when so many are removed from this earth every day by Corona. For the tasty food we ate, for the stylish dress we wore, for the jobs and trade we do to make a living, and for the good health, which all of us have, thank Him profusely and profoundly.

We would need so many things in our lives and pray to God to grant us all that. It may be anything we need, pray with faith that we already received it as everything is ours for the asking. Pray to God and request to humans. We should feel sorry for the sins of omissions and commissions that we did. Confess to God with a firm resolution, not to repeat them in future. In silence we can hear His voice as our conscience, if we attune our mind to His calling. When feeling depressed or unhappy, keep praising God and when in dire need, cry out to God and have a deep faith that we have somebody who cares and looks after us. Fear the Lord and love Him with all our heart and soul. Have deep faith that He will take care of us and nothing untoward would happen to us unless He permits it for our good. On the shallow waters of the tranquil sea, lying on an air mattress I used to pray and praise God, feeling his caring hands in that unknown

land where I had no one to take care of me. In desperation I used to lie on the beach at night, gazing at the sky and the numerous stars in it and tried to locate me in that small corner of the universe and still in communion with my Lord.

Time after time I could feel the hands of the providence taking care of me, I never went without food, I always had a place to sleep and there were people near me to help me out. I learned to pray, praise, thank, repent and implore to God in the Maldives.

5

Treasure Island was a cruise, that travelled to resorts unloading the tourists and I also got into it to reach my new destination, Pathala Resort, a small island in the Ari Atoll. Dr. Sanal and Krishnan came to see me off, and I invited them to the resort, that became a bone of contention between them in their wooing and warfare for winning the love of the same lady, Hema. I saw love and consideration in Krishnan, lust and greed manifested in Dr. Sanal, the two lovers in their strategy to win the affection of the same lady.

The sea was calm, dolphins, flying fish and mantas were seen on the way and when I got fed up with the same monotonous view of the sea, I went to the deck of the ship and soon fell asleep. When I woke up from the stupor I saw near me a handsome couple sleeping close to each other. I waited for them to wake up, I smiled at them, got introduced to them as Henry and Hazel, also going to Pathala. They came to shoot an ad film in the back ground of a resort in Maldives, using remote sensing cameras and sophisticated gadgets, to get the natural look for an ad film, as a project for his M.S. in film directing from a university in Brussels. He sought my help in taking some visuals on the beach and seashore. I liked them, the help she was doing for the man she loved and agreed to help them on one condition that I would take the visuals only with the clothes on. First we came to our branch resort Mayfushi, had breakfast, sandwiches and hot coffee. Some of the guests got down there.

I tried to make friends with some of them who were coming to our resort and they were all very cordial. They chose Pathala because of the excellent diving facility there. They all had training in

deep sea diving and were looking forward to the captivating coral reefs and underwater flora and fauna, the star attractions of Pathala.

We reached the jetty, the landing and I climbed over the small wooden bridge and put my first step into that dreamy, exotic and captivating island, for a new phase of my life of fun, adventure and ecstasy, indescribable. The receptionist gave us all a wet perfumed napkin to wipe our sweating faces. Harris, the manager came to receive me, showed my office and accommodation. He took me to the bar for a drink, an appetizer he told me and also that I had an expense account for the choicest drinks, any time I wanted.

The food in the restaurant was European, and a roasted lobster was especially tasty. Tuna were fried and kept in heaps and I came to realize that it was the only fish they ate and there were times when my food was only boiled tuna, with the water it was boiled as gravy. The guests kept such decorum and manners when they had the food, no loud talking and always took the same seats that were reserved for them.

The bar was the nerve centre of the resort, most visited by the guests, all the choicest liquors of the world were displayed there, inviting and alluring, but the price so exorbitant and expensive. Everyone was encouraged to drink as much as they could, it was the main income for the resort and the biggest expense was buying tuna, which I found out later to be fraudulent and a source for misappropriating the funds. It came free from the sea and they charged exorbitant amounts for catching it, at their whims and fancies and kept spurious vouchers, bills and receipts.

I had a closer look at the cottages, which were thatched huts, a round construction, a sitting room, bedroom with a cot and a toilet with a commode and shower. Some had split air conditioners, but most of them had just a fan in the middle. They were on the fabulous beaches of Maldives, staying in those cottages, costing five hundred to thousand dollars per night. By the time they came to settle the bills and check out only the guests realized they had lost such a lot of money, which they paid at home as a package tour and using credit cards. It meant that they had to work harder during the next season.

I used to get regular calls from Dr. Sanal and Krishnan. The doctor was full of stories about his amorous adventures with Antha, how shapely she was and at times he used to mention that he liked Hema and would say that a good wife should be like her. He was switching his attention between those two ladies. Antha was willing to oblige him any time, but Hema kept a distance and did not fall for his amorous approaches. He knew that Krishnan also liked her and doubted that it was the reason for her keeping aloof. I kept neutral in my attitude and decided to support the most deserving and genuine one among them and my sympathy went with Krishnan and Hema, who would be a great wife for him. With her amicable and soft-spoken caring nature, Krishnan was the right type of man for her, with maturity and integrity, coupled with efficiency and erudition, and I was in his favor.

6

It was officially that I went to Male' but I made it a point to visit all my acquaintances there. At National hospital, Dr. Sanal was in top form, among the two ladies he admired, witty and charming. He was examining a patient, a middle-aged lady who used to become unconscious on and off, he cross examined her and found out the cause of the illness was due to the nagging of the second wife of her husband who held an upper hand in the house hold and to get the attention of her husband, she used to fall unconscious.

When Antha narrated her plight, Dr. Sanal advised her to take bath every day, wear clean clothes, look attractive and show more consideration and care for her husband and act friendly to the other wife, not to compete with her, but to collaborate with her in running the household and assured her that her situation would improve and sickness go away. By way of treatment he prescribed some sleeping pills for the other wife and asked her to make her take it after supper on the pretext of vitamin support for her paleness and tiredness. I smiled at the cleverness of the doctor, but was aghast when he told me that he wanted to visit our resort for a week end and ask Hema whether she would like to come. I told him that Antha would be a better choice and he said that it was a good idea, while I felt relieved about rescuing Hema, I was sure that he was heading for trouble.

I visited hotel Alia and my friends were there to spend the evening. I played with them table tennis and had a mug of beer. I invited Sylvia to the resort and promised some discount to Mark and Jan to bring their whole house hold for a week end. I told them the latest joke about my late father, who was a doctor in the high ranges of Idukki. He had to attend to a delivery at an estate bungalow as the lady could not be moved. He had a small suit case with all his gadgets. Sometime later he came out and asked the waiting husband to give him a big knife, and later a hammer and they all were flabbergasted. The delivery was smooth, the cry of the child was heard, and all were happy; especially the husband, but his mother wondered why my father had asked for a knife and hammer. He told them that it was for opening the suitcase as its lock was stuck.

Krishnan came to collect me and I decided to spend the night with him at his staff quarters. He was doing self-cooking and we had some rice and beef curry with curd. It was all so tasty and I felt envy for the woman he would marry, because he was such a good cook.

Before going to sleep he asked my help in talking to Hema about his love for her and desire to get married and to avert Dr. Sanal from making passes at her. Hema told him that the doctor was just interested only in a physical relationship and he is so weak on his moral side. She had seen him unnecessarily fiddling lady patients by way of examination and ill-used Antha many times. She could not understand the real disposition of Antha, what was in her mind and why she yielded to Sanal.

I told him that I would find out the attitude of Hema, and invited them to the resort, to come in the morning and spent the day, not to make passes or have sex with her before marriage and be the maximum loving, caring and courteous. He was a man of integrity and principles and I felt happy to help him. I knew that Hema was also an upright lady and both of them would make a good and perfect couple.

I visited my former office and met Ramesh. He was so jealous of me, my fabulous life in the resort and it was he who should have gone there as accounts manger, if he had not displaced me.

I came to know that he was pulling the strings to come there. I left them and took a speed boat so that I could reach Pathala earlier than before.

The difference between the life in the resort and the main land was that the resort was so isolated and cut off from the world. The guests wanted just that, away from the hustle and bustle of the cities, from crowds, traffic jams, schedules and deadlines of the everyday rut. They wanted a peaceful holiday and may go back, rejuvenated and with a better perspective to face the life and job at home with a better flair and renewed vigor.

The allurements of the resort were getting into me too and I bought all the materials needed to do the writing which was trying to gush out of me. When I sat on the beach, with pure and pristine sand, the calm and serene sea, all turned me on to write and the thought about my child and wife made me euphoric and romantic. While having some discussions with the guests I used to get good ideas and I sat down on the beach and scribbled them down, looking at the lolling waves and turbulent movement of the sea that turned on the poet in me.

7

On Trivia I called it, one after another, poems came gushing out of me, all symmetric, which did not need much editing, almost a hundred of them. I was perplexed at the variety of the topics, some relevant international themes, because of the crowd I was interacting with and the outcome of the discussions I had with them. They were also surprised at the relevance of the theme and the freshness of the ideas, when I showed the poems to some of the guests.

Sitting on the beach and looking at the lolling waves, with the gentle breeze winnowing over me, I got the right ambience to scribble down, whatever that came to my mind and later I posted it in my office computer. The last poem that I wrote there was 'On Slumber', why the almighty God permitted all the atrocities that were happening in the world, why He was in slumber and indifferent to the cruelties and man-made calamities. We should not question the integrity of God and we would never know why He did something to some people, yes, I lost my job and had to flee, leaving everything because of that wrong move.

I did not learn my lesson, later on when there was a competition in the poetry.com, I decided to send that poem to New York as an entry, sat in the computer room of the college I worked to type it out, somebody accidentally locked the room and I could get out only after four hours. I decided to send it through Speed Post at Quilon railway station, but slept off and did not get down in Quilon. The next stop was at Mavelikkara and I was aghast. The train stopped somewhere in the outskirts of Karunagappally station and I jumped down. The train went away; there was no sign of any station or people, all in utter darkness. I prayed and cried out to God, asking for forgiveness, soon an auto rickshaw came that way; I was offered a lift to the highway and was able to reach home, though very late.

The poem was shortlisted for a thousand dollars prize money, but I lost in the finals and the collection of poems *On Trivia* was published as a book, nicely printed by my friend Cresance D'zousa and released by Prof. Madhusoodhanan Nair, the poet of Kerala at a function in the Public Library hall in Quilon. The function was hosted by *Sangamam*, the fellowship of co-passengers in the train. They also organized the hosting of my author website www.paulg.in at my home, *Paradise* by Professor Udayakumar, the then rotary governor, former director of college development council and a fellow train passenger. The second edition of the poems, *Agony* was released by the late Maharaja of Travancore, with the cover page *Agony*, a painting by my dear friend, late Dr. Francis Karitra, who drew that painting with blood flowing out of his eyes, heart-broken, after receiving the wedding invitation of the woman he loved. He was drawing an oil painting; he drew that image behind the wedding card, hiding his agony and pain in that painting.

Same way another poem also got me into controversy and much criticism was made about the climax that I changed it conveniently. In the poem 'On son of God', I just mentioned that the son of God really came, but was taken aback by seeing such a lot of followers, not knowing him really, having different brand names, rituals and mode of worshipping, denouncing the other factions as fake and fighting for the church assets. He told them not to fight and become one group, instead of many, and they told him that if he said that again they would crucify him once

again. I changed the ending in a later version as he did not come for all that, but to save us from the clutches of the devil and to save our soul. While interacting with the richest people of the world I realized that money never made anyone really rich. The true riches of life were sound health, self-discipline, positive outlook, freedom from fear, hope that the best is yet to come, faith that everything will be taken care of, all was always for the better, discernment to know the motive of others, readiness to share, open mind, harmony in relationships, a job or trade that one love to do creatively and financial security. That was the longest poem that I wrote, including Niagara Syndrome, that we are rowing a boat on a sunny evening in a calm river quite aimlessly and suddenly a waterfall comes and we are about to fall into it unaware. Most of us are afflicted by that syndrome and only when a tragedy takes place, we came out of that.

The poem that I liked the most from my collection came out of a midnight trip on a full moon day with my teacher and poet, Professor Madhusoodhanan Nair, and poetry was gushing out of us, and the contention that many of us would bargain to a fisher woman, auto driver or a cobbler on the street, but spent exorbitant amounts in bars, jewelers, and textile shops without any hesitation, the poem 'frugality' was born.

It was a wisdom dawning on me when I wrote the 'ultimate', why there was competition and conflict in the world, describing the interaction of a pack of dogs, their fight for power and sex, which I witnessed in the football stadium at Pala, on a full moon night, I was sitting there, cogitating and brooding over, and realized that the most important baits were sex, booze or money to get things done.

The euphoric life and intellectual discourses and discussions, the disco and choicest liquors of the world all made those poems to gush out of me and I had the poems as a soft copy and mailed them to my email address, when I left Maldives and it came out as my masterpiece and made me an internationally published poet. An American poet, Professor Tony Connor, whose host I was when he visited Trivandrum, suggested Poetry.com as a forum to begin publishing my poems and I tried publishing in it.

Henry and Hazel approached me to help them shoot their movie on the beach and while they were doing snorkeling. I told them that I wanted to see the camera and how it worked. It looked like any other SLR, but was much sophisticated with lots of functions, and it could be converted as a video recorder as well as good enough to shoot underwater. We decided to have two sessions, one in the evening and one in the morning.

That evening we set up the camera on a tripod on the beach, near the sea and started our session. Henry told me to take anything that happened in front and he assured me that he would do the editing to make it presentable. There were three things I had to be careful, when taking stills, I had to make sure that the objects were in the middle, while zooming I had to make sure that the clarity was not compromised and in the video mood I had to see that the action was recorded at the right time.

I was behind the camera, the evening sun was casting a red tint, and they came striding slowly in front of the camera, hand in hand, in casual dress. When they came close to the camera, I took some stills and saw some passionate and intimate scenes, reveling western movies. It was all so natural and they never cared to look at the camera. That intimacy they had to each other was manifested in their movements, and I wondered that they were selling it for money. We decided to have the scenes in the sea, the next day morning.

I set the tripod on the beach, little down into the sea, and the waves were not strong. They came in swimming dress, with snorkeling masks on the face. Slowly they swam in front of the camera, intertwining I kept the camera focused and zooming as needed. I was taken aback by the movements they made, but I went on shooting. They came back to the shore in between and recouped sufficient energy for the next session.

I was surprised when Dr. Sanal and Antha landed on one fine evening there. I received them warmly and got them a cottage on the beach near the sea. They stripped, changed to swimming dress and rushed to the sea. I sat watching them and their amorous pranks, astonished at the

perfect shape of Antha, a feast for the eyes and any man would be tempted. Dr. Sanal winked at me.

Taking the hint I left the place and I guessed what he was going to do on the lone beach with no one around. Seeing such a lot of perfect shapes of blondes and brunettes I did not feel anything special. I was waiting for them in the bar and soon they turned up in fresh clothes and gleaming. She had a sly smile on her face when she looked at me, but Dr. Sanal was in good cheer and laughing from ear to ear at the foolish remarks that Antha was making.

I ordered whisky on the rocks for us and gin tonic for Antha. That night there was going to be Disco in the bar; the middle portion was cleared as the rink. He joined the gang who were dancing and Antha also followed suit. The drink was taking effect on him and it was fun, his monkey dance, at the tune of the thunderous music and high metal songs I sat sipping the drink and enjoying the different expressions on the beautiful face of Antha. She was catching up to the tempo of the dance and doing it as good as any western lady.

Dr. Sanal had asked me not to have dinner from the restaurant as Hema had sent some boiled tapioca with fish curry; she knew that I would love that. After the disco we went to their cottage and sat down to have the food. She was sitting close to the doctor and he suggested that she came and sat with me. I was aghast and told them that I was vowed to be loyal to my better half, wife and I can't break that vow for my head would blow off, if I broke the wedding vow. I ate the food and got away from there and left them for the amorous adventures they were waiting for. She looked at me disappointed.

We had breakfast together and told them to go for snorkeling and I would join them for lunch. I had my work to do and the deeper I went into the intricacies of the accounts I was baffled and found something fishy. From the interaction of Rashid the assistant manager with the purchase-in-charge, Wahab, I knew there was something they were trying to hide from me and how ever hard I tried I couldn't figure it out.

There was a primitive spread sheet program called Quotro Pro, designed by my predecessor, an Australian accountant there. As soon as we fed the details on the debit and credit sides, it would

tally by itself; if the account was correct but I had my doubts that if some variables were wrong, about its accuracy. I found it at last; the purchase of tuna for the restaurant was an overhead on which exorbitant amounts were spent, whereas for lobsters it was not that high, though they were much more costly. I did not show any hint of suspicion, and waited for more concrete evidence to nail the purchase manager. He wouldn't be doing it alone and then I saw the involvement of the assistant manager also as a possibility. Manager Harris did not bother about such things as long as things were going on smooth. I tagged a voucher, and went digging more into its authenticity as a test case and the result was amazing.

Dr. Sanal came to check out and I gave him a good discount and charged the drinks on my expense account after consulting Harris. He was so happy and pleased about his stay in the resort and the disco, but Antha seemed like a monkey that had bitten row ginger, especially after the crude love making of the doctor. In secret he told me that he was planning to come again, if Hema was willing, and I dissuaded him from that, and send them off in Treasure Island, a cruise that came our way.

11

One fine morning I was surprised to have two visitors, Krishnan and Hema. They came without informing and I received them without showing my surprise, I knew there would be some reason behind their visit. I took them to the restaurant and ordered them breakfast. While eating I confronted them, I was afraid of the worst, like some assault from the side of Dr. Sanal. My intuition was proved right, Krishnan told me that the doctor was always making passes at her, speaking in suggestive language and even proposed to her. She knew by instinct that he was after her flesh and not soul, once she yielded and complied she would be a gone case. Antha was paying for it, had to be always at his beck and call and oblige him whenever he demanded.

They wanted me to interfere and avert the doctor from further atrocities to Hema, by way of amorous approaches. I told them not to worry, in the due course of time I would interfere and just to test them, asked them whether they needed a cottage to spend the day. Krishnan told me

that they were not that type and they would spend the day on the beach and leave by the evening boat. He even declined the drink that I offered him.

There were two hammocks tied to adjoining coconut trees, frequented by honeymoon couple and I led them there. I told them to enjoy the breeze on the sea shore and went back to my work. I hoped that they would share and built up an intimacy between each other, so that she would have the courage and moral strength to resist the amorous approaches of the doctor. They would be a perfect couple, made for each other and I wanted to do the cupid's work, and support them as much as I could.

It was time for them to leave and I just discussed with them about their future plans and ideas of getting settled. They were resolute about working some more time to make enough money to get settled. Then they would go home, get married and come back to work as long as they can, as it was so difficult to get a job in Kerala. The salary they were getting was fairly good, compared to the Indian standards, especially since they were getting paid in US dollars.

She confided something privately about Dr. Sanal, how he was taken for a ride and taken advantage by Antha, exploiting him to the maximum and extracting all his salary, by way of jewellery, clothes and expensive gifts. She kept him tied to her apron strings, by baiting him with sex and denying it, when he was so much interested in her. He lost all his integrity, self-control, and self-esteem. Hema could only stand aside and watch, the cat and mouse game and requested my help to make the doctor aware of the dangerous terrain he was treading and the quagmire into which he was about to fall.

I assured them that I would interfere, and if things were getting out of hand, I would come to the main land Male' and confront them. They told me that as good friends, we should see to it that the poor doctor should not be allowed to be exploited, swindled and cheated. We were sure that in the end she would coolly walk off and he would be emotionally and mentally shattered.

Krishnan figured out a strategy, to put an end to it by making the doctor propose to Antha for marriage, and confront her. They were sure that she would never agree for the proposal and to stop the amorous exploitation, ask the doctor to forget her and to propose to Hema, in front of

her in that instant, and then Hema would tackle the situation by acting concerned and getting him out of the fad. Krishnan also agreed to cooperate. We agreed that at the first possible chance I would go and meet the doctor and Antha, and get the proposal done. They asked me to buy two fake diamond rings and take it along, to show Antha at the time of proposing. We were all sure that she would never agree for the proposal, and then Hema playing the trump card, could incapacitate Antha from further exploiting the doctor.

I saw them getting into the cruise Treasure Island, such a handsome pair in love, there was no lust or illicit cravings in their relationship, and I wanted them not to burn their fingers by trying to help Dr. Sanal, who was acting like a simpleton. He was loveable and innocent, that was why he could be so easily cheated and taken for a ride by Antha. They both waved at me adieu and disappeared among the crowd on the deck of the boat, enjoying the pleasant evening sun and soft breeze. I thought about my wife and child, far off, and wondered when I would be able to see them. To drown the sorrow, I went to the bar and had a cocktail, Bloody Mary, fixed by the Srilankan barman, only for me, less harmful stuff among the horrible brands of liquor displayed there. I gulped down the booze slowly and had a look at the happenings inside the bar, the different dispositions of the crowd there. All were glad when they had the drink, they took it slowly, enjoying it thoroughly and soon they would become mad with its effect on them slowly catching up and sad when they saw the exorbitant bill, and loose the impact of the drink and fun they had. It was universal, the reactions of people drinking, except that in India, where people would gulp down the drink as fast as they could, taking in as much as they could, especially when they get it free, to win some favor or to do some atrocities as a bait or lure or trap.

That day, Hazel and Hendry requested my help to capture some visuals of the underwater scenes of scuba diving, with the diving outfit and all. I accompanied them on the boat that went to the diving spot, and one after another, they lowered into the sea, and disappeared under the tranquil façade of the blue ocean. I tried to capture as much as I can of them lowering into the sea but after that the images were a blur.

All of a sudden, the two of them surfaced, embracing each other, and I focused on them, floating on the surface with their mask and other outfits on, and took video of their swimming together. After those gimmicks they went diving into the belly of the sea and did not turn up for some time.

The time allotted for the diving was over, their oxygen tanks were almost empty, and they surfaced one after another. I took more of their visuals, as they removed the masks and other paraphernalia like the oxygen cylinders and all. I put the video mode on as the boat went back to the resort and captured some dolphins that came our way, jumping and sneezing to catch our attention. They were so harmless, in spite of their huge size, looked so gentle. There were also flying fish, sea gulls and mantas, on the way and I tried to capture as much as possible to give an authentic look to the episode.

They thanked me for my help and told me that they would do the editing of the movie that night itself and email the rushes to his university. I wished them the very best and told the boy, not to forget the sacrifice she made for him and not to go for a better model after his studies were over and getting a good placement. They thanked me for my help and support, and I told them to make a meaningful and healthy relationship in future. She had such an innocent, sweet and meek looking face, sleek and slim body that was not at all alluring or sensuous. One thing I liked about them was that they had no inhibitions and pretensions or she no ill-feelings. I told them that she was doing a great thing especially for their future career. They told me that they would never get married or have children and just live together. I knew that it was futile arguing with them or trying to persuade them to marry, because they had their mind set and decided on what they were doing. I would never forget them or the visuals of passion and love I had seen when I shot those scenes for them.

I saw lights in their cottage, even after midnight, and was late purposefully, when they came for checking out and depart by the cruise that came and unloaded another crowd of guests into our resort. I was surprised to see that their payment was made by transfer promptly and on time before their departure. I checked the server and found that a large file of data was transferred around midnight. Everything worked out the way they planned and my only wish was that it had

the expected and desired result and he became a big time director and she an actress, the way they wanted and hoped for.

13

Things were brewing up in such a way that I wanted to make a thorough system analysis and find out some discrepancy that I was sure, taking place. Funds were flowing to one overhead, purchase of tuna for the kitchen, and the vouchers that they kept were not convincing enough. I tagged a particular payment, went tracing to its original voucher and found it to be so unconvincing, that I contacted the person who had signed as receiver and came to know that he never got that payment on that day.

I noted the details of the whole payment and same way traced another similar voucher on a later day and did the same checking and cross checked with the receiver and came to know that he never got that payment. I noted the details of that payment and to be more thorough, asked the details of some payment really made to him, took the date, amount and other details and it was not found in our records.

I had enough evidence to nail the culprits, but pretended as if I had not suspected anything and waited for a chance when they would make a false move and fall into the trap that I had set for them to fall. I found the house keeper and the assistant manager who was supposed to make the payments, conspiring with each other, and talking in hushed tones between each other, when I looked at them intently.

But the arrival of Ramesh for a visit made the scene much worse, and he teamed up with them, to make hay while the sun was shining. He even took up the role of a mediator to negotiate for those scoundrels and suggested that I kept quiet and my share of the loot would come to me accordingly. He requested me to just ignore the matter and overlook that as a clerical error. I knew what he had in mind and so made a report of the whole situation and took copies of the spurious vouchers and kept them in my back pack. I wanted to display them and discuss that matter with the general manager when I went to the main land.

Soon the chance came, in the form of a phone call from Krishnan asking me to come to the main land and interact with the doctor as we had agreed before. I set sailed at the first possible chance to go to Male', when there was a transfer of guests to the airport. I knew that Ramesh was looking for a chance to creep into the administration of the resort, but I overlooked that possibility, when I left for the main land. Ramesh came to the resort and joined hands with those thugs and with his expertise and knowledge of accounts and auditing, destroyed all the evidences that I had noted and made the accounts fool proof and perfect. All the evidences that I had earmarked were tampered with to make them convincing enough, by tampering with the ledger and making them tally and perfect without any loop holes to be found out, in future audit, the trick only a very professional accountant could do.

I had to pay dearly for that oversight in the future developments that took place. He lobbied against me with everyone to be reckoned with in the resort and tarnished my image by spreading the rumor that it was as a punishment transfer that I came to the resort. Same way he won the favor of the manager of the resort, and tried to creep in there, at the very first chance possible.

14

The first thing that I did after landing at Male' was to go to the head office and have a meeting with the GM and other authorities there. I pinpointed the evidences that I had brought and presented the extent of corruption that had taken place. They were not surprised and told me that a much worse racket had been operating there, and it was with great difficulty that they could clear the muddle, but the old crew was retained and they found new modus operandi.

They assured me that proper corrective measures would be taken in the due course and I left the place half convinced. By evening I visited Dr. Sanal and suggested that it was Valentine's Day, a very auspicious day for proposing and persuaded him to usher Antha for a treat to Daffodils a restaurant close to Majeedy Maagu. I showed him the rings and he believed that they were real diamonds and requested him to propose to Antha. I never mentioned to him what I had in mind and it was a very costly error and miscalculation that I made. I had arranged Hema to make a call on my mobile phone after I made a missed call and act agreeable to what Dr. Sanal said.

We three got out of the hospital and walked to the restaurant, got in there, I ordered three ice creams and gave the box containing the rings to Dr. Sanal. He took the hint and blurted out, “Antha, shall we get married?” offering a ring to be put on her finger. “Kwoba?”, meaning ‘what’ in Dhivehi, she just giggled and withdrew her hand saying, “No Sanal, I can’t think of getting married to you, let’s always remain friends.”

I made the missed call without them noticing. Sanal was thunder struck and not opening his mouth or saying anything. Suddenly my phone rang; I said ‘Hello’ and went on describing how Dr. Sanal proposed to Antha and she declining it. I added the tag line, why don’t I ask him to propose to you, and cut the phone. Hearing about proposing, Antha got furious and left the place. She understood to whom I was speaking and what I was hinting at, but poor Dr. Sanal was not aware of it and it would have cost him his life. I ate her share of ice cream also, stayed the night with Dr. Sanal and left for the resort the next morning.

15

News had reached the resort even before me that I had reported the matter about corruption in the office to the head office and they were waiting for me to give me some task. Ramesh was at the helm of the conspiracy and he wanted to dethrone me and acquire my position. The modus operandi was to defame me with some allegations that I would leave the place without a fight or stand my ground.

As I was thunderstruck and de-motivated, tragic news arrived in the form of a phone call from Hema, Antha tried to poison the doctor, putting some Mentos in a Coco Cola which acted like cyanide. Unwittingly he drank it, was in critical condition, after being made to vomit many times to get rid of the poison getting into his system. Both Krishnan and Hema were near him and once the doctor gained consciousness he had to be air lifted to Trivandrum to a better hospital with more facilities.

I felt concerned about my friend more than the stinking job there, took a paper and wrote a resignation letter and handed over to the manager and told him that I was leaving on the next

boat that came for the transfer of guests. He did not say anything, accepted the letter and I told him to inform the head office about it and did my packing.

The staff there, hearing that I was leaving came to bid me farewell, one after another and I too felt sad in leaving the place all of a sudden. I thanked many of them who had been affectionate and kind in their dealings and told them that I would never forget them or my stay in that island resort. I downloaded the poems from the computer and kept it as a soft copy and also emailed them to my own email id.

Ramesh and gang were keeping away and they could not understand the reason why I was leaving the place, without even explaining my stand as they knew too well that it was they who should have been leaving the place. Except them few, the whole crowd on the island came to see me off and I boarded the speed boat that left the small pearly island to which I had fallen in love and where the poet in me was born. It was fading away from my vision, but the short sojourn there was so memorable, my interaction with the guests, the booze and food, the sea and beaches, it was an unpaid holiday for me, a rare treat that I would always cherish in my mind. As no good things would last long, my life in the resort also did not last long.

16

I rushed to the hospital, and saw the condition of the doctor was improving, and told them to arrange his transfer to a good hospital in Trivandrum. I reached the head office and reported there and told them that I had resigned my job, how impersonal the manager and other officials there were about it, and so I did not want to work anymore in Maldives and going back to my country. They told me to think twice, as the opening which Ramesh left was vacant there and I could immediately join for the work there. I told them that I had made up my mind about the whole thing and adamant in leaving the job and requested them to arrange my exit papers and okay the ticket which I already had. Neither did I tell them about the real reason of leaving the country.

Both our papers were ready simultaneously and before leaving to the airport the GM of the company called all my colleagues together, who were working with me once, in a meeting to give a send-off to me. He was lavish in praising and approbation about my discovery of the fraud

and misappropriation in the resort, my cleverness to probe deeper and collected all concrete evidences that could nail them. He told them that he was giving me a gift as appreciation for the timely help that I did and gave a cash gift of thousand dollars.

I thanked them all and got away from there, knowing very well that it was Ramesh who was behind the clearing up job of accounts in the resort and I had a feeling that he would replace me once I am gone. Those thugs would have given me a fortune, instead of the thousand dollars that the GM gifted me. I went to my bank at Male' and withdrew the maximum possible amount in my account and went to the hospital.

Dr. Sanal had gained consciousness, but was very tired. When he saw me, he was so relieved and looked at Krishnan and Hema who had been attending to him the whole night, without sleep. He slowly collected their hands and joined them together, as if blessing their reunion. As he was being pushed to the entrance on a wheel chair, he saw the face of Antha, peeping at him, smiled at her and waved his hands in her direction, though they were strapped with tubes and needles for giving injection. She hid herself behind a shelf and Dr. Sanal saved her face, without going for filing a complaint against her.

At the departure terminal of the airport, just before embarking into the flight, Dr. Sanal was looking for someone, and they came, Hema and Krishnan. He smiled at them, pulled out a small packet from his pocket, the fake diamond rings which he still believed to be real diamonds and signaled them to put on each other's fingers. With me as the only other witness they exchanged the engagement rings and I pushed the wheelchair into the tarmac, Dr. Sanal waving at them Chao.

Life treated me quite badly after coming back from Maldives. I got Dr. Sanal good treatment and after getting discharged from the hospital he preferred to go back to his native place and practice there, the nightmare of Antha still haunting him. I tried to get back my old job in the college, but the guy who was posted in my leave vacancy would not step down and he tried many a trick to incapacitate me from joining for the job. When I was selected for the job he was eligible to get

promoted to my post, now when he got my post and was getting the feel of it and enjoying it, he did not want to step down. I waited till the period of my leave was over and went and joined there one fine morning.

I went on with my work, travelling between Quilon and Trivandrum, a distance of a hundred and sixty kilometers every day, till my senior in the office had some bright idea to displace me, to put his nephew in my position, as he was going to retire and I would be becoming the office head. He tried all tactics, did not succeed and as a last resort increased the pressure in my work and with the help of my colleague, a nun, dumped all the difficult work on me and made it impossible for me to operate and perform.

There was no other go, no way to survive and I contacted the people in Maldives whether I could come over there on a visit and find some job. I went on a visit, could not get the entry visa and returned back empty handed.

I went back to my office and things had changed for the better and the threat to my chair was over. I joined back and could retire as the office head, getting a handsome pension and lots of money from the government by way of gratuity. Though I did not give in to the baits and temptations of bribes, misappropriations and manipulations, I was given my rightful share by the Almighty. The climax of the story was Krishnan phoning and telling me one day that Hema gave birth to a healthy boy and they were going to call him Sanal.