

### *The Artist in His Own Words...*

Badagara used to be a small town in Malabar situated in northern Kerala. The railway track and the parallel highway marked the eastern side, while the river going on to meet the Arabian Sea fringed the west of the in-between ground known as Putuppanam. People walked west of the railway track towards their homes, the sea, river, paddy fields and coconut palms, to their occupations and livelihood. My maternal home, Putiyavalappil House was firmly bound on a raised plinth in Putuppanam.

That day, the entire Putuppanam and the highway were under the flood waters that stretched to the eastern hills, leaving the railway track, some tall trees and some houses, among them Putiyavalappil House, as islands, sheltering and extending help to the people and cattle of the rest of Putuppanam. Small households remained cluttered in their boats, afloat, waiting for the swelling waters to subside, weaving friendly patterns with the spirit of the water.

This wonderful time full of life and nature received me into its world. I breathed the air among the Manikoth family, Putiyavalappil House, in June 1945.

Hearing the telegraphic news of my birth, my father visited me from Calicut. The facilities, people of that time and the character of life seems like a myth today. He cycled the forty eight kilometres from Calicut to Badagara and then swam across the floods to see his love and me. Eventful had a different meaning then.

They took me through all the traditional rituals, tempered with love, affection and protection. With this seed awareness, smells, physical habits and contacts, I was taken to Calicut, where my father worked, away from his parental home, the Manikoth Palathai House in Mahe.

In Calicut I grew up, confident and with the focus of my parents. My earliest passion was chasing other forms while my mother was busy working – earthworms, snakes, lizards, chameleons, spiders, scorpions, grasshoppers, butterflies and fishes in water. Captured images in books and toys did not attract me greatly then.

At the age of five and a half years, my father asked me to share the responsibilities of the home with him - cooking, washing and nursing my paternal grandmother. These extended to me direct experiences in life from a very young age. Going to school was a good change - my reason was for friends and teachers' affection. At home was the work and the stories of my grandmother. But I loved to spend most of my time alone, looking at the sky, clouds, marks on the wall, shapes of the trees during the day and through the windows of my bedroom at night, furniture and other objects of day to day use, different forms created by light and shadow, reflections on shiny surfaces, on water, mirror, and in almost everything, thinking, imagining and seeking my dead mother, who I felt would emerge from any of these surfaces at any time. This boosted a separate mental reality that remained dear to me and unknown to others.

Attraction towards graceful movements, surfaces, smell and taste arising from the form, surface and material of the physical world, satisfying to my inner needs, tuned the senses to a higher thrust.

Sweat of the paddy fields at Putuppanam mixed with the salty air, playing hide and seek, the river sides, the trunk of the plantain tree and its leaves, shapes and forms of flowers, vegetables and fruits, the fishes being cut next to the plantain trees by the youthful coastal women, running hands along the timber logs floated down in the river and sunk inside the water as we searched for fishes in groups of young cousins, rubbing against their bodies while playing, fighting, rolling on the sand at the beach, all of us eating, bathing and sleeping together in the hall of Putiyavalappil House in the vacations, returned me closer to life.

As I grew, going to school extended the chance to meet the favourites. On the way I spent hours watching the temple elephants, film posters, rarely some films, animals housed and brought to the veterinary hospital for treatment, restaurants, the dressed up young and old going to the temples and the bazaar, various ritualistic and religious practices where people went into a trance, dancing on the fire with bleeding skulls as they stroked themselves with the weapons of gods, goddesses and spirits of lower dignities, various ritualistic dances processions with physically voluptuous appearances, sensuous body parts, the turns, twists and curves of the temple sculptures. Through all this one kept wondering, looking at the varied appearances of form-sensuality displayed in tremendous vigour and force. The thundering and lightning within kept increasing the sensation about something that one was missing.

The inner urge to come in contact with the unknown, the passionate, attractive and beautiful took form in the decision to study painting at the first option after my higher secondary. I went to Trivandrum School of Art where I was left free to receive, react, share and express the way I wanted to. This improved various skills and the sensations and sensitivities from childhood until then started falling into place and found a sympathetic medium of expression.

Joining the Fine Arts Faculty in Baroda introduced to me the university-town culture, geographically, socially, linguistically, and sensorially diverse from Kerala. The insight to see art objectively and as a parallel science got refined and sharpened. The distance created space and the links got tied in diverse and multifaceted dimensions to the new environment and beyond.

The layers of existence in the physical world experienced while living and working in Delhi since 1990, have strengthened the awareness that the physical manifestations are mere reflections of the inner reality.

Everything past in time that one has known and experienced through the senses, mind, heart, and the things that one seeks, yet to be, form a part of the inner being, pulsating, throbbing, and creating each physical happening. The physical world is only the skin of the total, concealing the inner, real and complete.

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