

Vasumathy
Somasundaram

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6 October 1958 — 31 January 1996

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Reason

There is Reason
For every pain that we must bear,
For every burden, every care
There is a Reason.

For every grief that crushes our heart
For every scalding tear we shed,
There is a Reason.

For every hurt, for every plight,
For every lonely, painful night,
There is a Reason.

Yet, if we trust God, as we all must,
It all can turn to be for our good,
He knows the Reason.

. . .

*From Collection of Quotes,
Swami Chinmayananda.*

Vasumathy Somasundaram

Akkaraipattu used to be a sleepy village on the East Coast of Sri Lanka. Beyond the market, on the lonely road running along the coast to Pottuvil is Mannankulam Estate, a coconut grove with a large house. Somasundaram and Ranjanie were expecting their second child. Early on Monday morning at 4.30 a.m. on 6th October 1958, the family doctor delivered a baby girl to Ranjanie — Vasumathy was born.

In 1960, the family set up home in Colombo in order for Vasumathy and her brother Dharmavasan to attend school. Ranjanie had been a student of St Bridget's Convent and this prompted her to admit her two children to the Montessori class at St Bridget's. Vasumathy continued to the main school and was there till she finished her Advanced Levels. The friendships made during this period endured despite most of her school-friends being scattered around the globe.

The school holidays were spent in Akkaraipattu with cousins, friends and relatives who would descend to Akkaraipattu. They would all accompany her father to the paddy fields in the morning, walk around the coconut estate, go fishing in the lagoon and swimming in the river. They were carefree days, with tremendous fun.

Vasumathy qualified as an Accountant and became a member of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants in 1986. Early in her career, she worked as a Tax Assistant for Someswaran Jayawickrema Manthri and Company, and as a Project Officer for Accounting Systems and Services Limited.

Her marriage in 1988, arranged according to Tamil Hindu custom, was short-lived. Despite the pressures and emotional trauma that ensued, her quiet inner strength reinforced by her faith made her build up a new life. She worked for a short time in England at Rhone Poulenc Chemicals Limited, Middlesex as Assistant to the Financial Accountant before returning to Colombo. Once back in Colombo she set about re-establishing contacts and working single-mindedly on building up a career.

Since 1989, Vasu worked at the International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI) where she excelled in several senior management positions. She was responsible for financial, budgetary and administrative functions in the Information Office, the Office of the Deputy Director General, and the Director for Research. In 1994, Vasumathy received IIMI's annual Award for Excellence in support of the Institute's programmes, in recognition of her extraordinary commitment, great professional skills and the sustained high quality of services provided. The period at IIMI was one of the happiest periods in Vasumathy's life where she built up her professional career and independence. Also, she made many good friends.

There was also a spiritual side to Vasumathy which made her strong. Since 1980, she had been following Swami Chinmayananda's teachings and was close to him. She assisted with the various programmes the Mission carried out in Sri Lanka and also visited Swami Chinmayananda whenever possible. This involvement enhanced her

strength to cope and support her family through some very difficult times that they have had to undergo in the last ten years.

Travel was a passion for Vasumathy. She knew South India like the back of her hand, especially the saree shops. However, she did not stop there. She went round Europe, spent time in England, visited Tanzania and went on safari, explored cities such as Delhi, Bangkok and Singapore.

Sometime ago she had applied to emigrate to Australia, as she felt that she may be able to widen her horizons. The approval came through early in 1995 and she did a trip to Australia in July/August 1995 to see if she really wanted to go there. The vast amount of friends and relations were absolutely delighted by her plans and did everything to convince her to move to Australia.

Her plan was to move to Australia in January and she booked her flight for 3 February 1996. She did everything to tidy up her affairs in Sri Lanka before her departure. One of those jobs was that of closing her file at the Employees Provident Fund and collecting her contributions to take with her to Australia. This particular job had been delayed due to various bureaucratic procedures and her final appointment was to be on 31 January 1996 at the Central Bank. Tragically for her, the appointment coincided with the bomb blast at 10.50 a.m. which ripped the Central Bank building and many others in the vicinity.

Her last few days mirror the various aspects of Vasumathy. The previous weekend she visited Kataragama, a temple famous throughout the ages, with her parents. On Tuesday evening she had a farewell dinner with her oldest friends. On Wednesday morning she rushed into office early to finish off some work before going to the Central Bank. On the way she stopped off at Nawaloka Hospital to see a close friend's mother who was ill in hospital.

She led a peaceful life, hurting no-one, going about her business as best as she could. She reached out to people, and in her own quiet way had a remarkable influence on them.

Why Should We Act?

Action is the answer – not inaction. Running away from problems is cowardice – and the result of cowardice is sorrow, shame and defeat. Facing the situation is courage – and the blessings of courage are splendour and success.

The personality of Arjuna, now drowned into a hysterical confusion, is not available for any advice or guidance. Arjuna is now shattered so completely, that he has come to a dull, static condition of uncomprehending coma. This is the “Arjuna disease”.

This is a universal ailment, not only individuals, but even communities and nations can enter into such an Arjuna mood of impotency and an overwhelming state of perplexity arising from a total sense of frustration. We are seeing this calamitous mood among the youth all around us everywhere in the world.

Arjuna is persuaded to act, to face the outer situation to crash into the problem, rather than to listlessly drop his spear and pull back from combat. An action is noble because of the ideal towards which one strives; in itself an action is neither good nor bad. It is the *motive* in the heart of man that makes an act either good or bad. Once we are careful to choose for ourselves the right type of motive to inspire our activities, the achievement is not only spectacular, but the entire effort becomes rewarding in terms of the feeling of peace and the sense of fulfilment that floods the bosom.

When we work joyously to gain a great ideal or goal, our efficiency increases. An idle hand loses all its abilities even though the individual's proficiency may not have dried up. Proficiency in any field we gain through study and discussion in institutes and colleges. The knowledge we have gathered in our proficiency when expressed through diligent and planned activities becomes the play of efficiency in us.

Success in life depends not on *proficiency* but entirely on efficiency. Proficiency in an individual is not creative until it transforms itself into efficiency. The means is to act – to act diligently, with your heart in your work, with a gusto to improve, a spirit to outshine your own present abilities. This spirit of challenging yourself by yourself is the secret of self-improvement and personality unfoldment.

Condensed from The Art of Man Making by Swami Chinmayananda

Thou to me art parents, Lord,
Thou all kinsmen that I need,
Thou to me art loved ones fair,
Thou art treasure rich indeed.
Family, friends, home art Thou,
Life and joy I draw from Thee,
False world's goods by Thee I leave,
Gold, pearls, wealth art Thou to me.

*Thirunavukkarasu Swami
(Translated from Tamil)*

It was Thyself Thou didst give and me Thou didst take,
Beneficent Lord, who is the gainer?
Endless bliss have I gained. What hast Thou gained from me?
O Lord that hast made my heart thy temple,
Siva, dweller in the great holy shrine,
O Father, Sovereign, Thou hast made my body, Thy abode,
For it I have naught to give in return.

*Manikkavasagar Swami
(Translated from Tamil)*

Teaching about Revenge

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'. But now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap you on the left cheek too. And if someone takes you to court to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well.

Love for Enemies

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your friends, hate your enemies'. But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the children of God. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do evil. Why should God reward you if you love only the people who love you? Even the tax collectors do that! And if you speak only to your friends, have you done anything out of the ordinary?

From The Good News Bible, Matthew 5

The only way to bring peace to the earth is to learn to make our own life peaceful.

From Buddha's Little Instruction Book by Jack Kornfield

Through many a round of birth and death I ran,
Nor found the builder I sought. Life's stream
Is birth and death and birth with sorrow filled,
Now house-holder, thou'rt seen! No more shalt build!
Broken are all thy rafters, split thy beam!

*Dhammapada
(A translation)*

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

Divine master
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Prayer of St Francis of Assisi

Message from Swami Jivanananda

We knew Vasumathy from the time she was a toddler. Being the only daughter of Mr and Mrs K V Somasundaram of Akkaraipattu, she enjoyed the love and protective care of her parents and of her only brother Dharmavasan.

She grew up in an atmosphere of piety, service and charity so scrupulously practised by her parents. She too, as she grew up, practised these virtues following in her parent's footsteps. This was self-evident when she voluntarily took up the maintenance of a child in the Ramakrishna Mission Boy's Home (Orphanage) and sent her contribution towards that every month without fail.

We received a letter from her in November 1995, along with her contribution with the following words with prophetic irony: "I returned from Australia in mid-September and have been busy since then. Hoping to go back in January 1996. I will come over to Batticaloa before that."

But, alas, the inscrutable hand of Destiny had chalked out her young life otherwise. She never went to Australia but disappeared from our eyes never to be seen anymore. This sudden disappearance left a trail of unforgettable sorrow in all who knew her.

Life and Death are in the hands of God. A band of minstrels, coming from nowhere, sing and dance and disappear as fast as they come. Our life is like that.

We sincerely pray to Bhagavan Sri Ramkrishna to bless the dear Atman of Vasumathy with eternal Peace and Bliss. May He bless the parents with strength of mind and courage at heart to withstand their irreparable loss in life.

*Ramakrishna Mission
Batticaloa*

Message from Swamini Vimalananda

With great sadness I read about the blast at the Central Bank in Colombo. I was even more shocked that the blast took the life of Vasumathy Somasundaram. Even though I had only met her briefly, she left an impression in my mind of being a fine person, dedicated to her profession, efficient in her work and God-fearing. I was touched by her love for Pujya Gurudev Chinmayanandaji.

In the Gita the Lord tells Arjuna, "Do not grieve for those who do not deserve grieving." One who has fared her life well but all our best wishes for the soul's onward journey towards ultimate liberation.

With Prem and Om

In the Service of the Lord

*Chinmaya Garden Trust
Coimbatore, India*

Message from Swami Tatwananda

"It is unborn and eternal. It is ever immutable. Never destroyed in the destructible body.

Bhagavad Gita – Chapter II.

Life is infinite. It finds expression in infinite ways. Human body – a name and a form of given situation is a perpetual means for this perennial expression. It has a meaning, beauty and purpose. Having revealed its inherent meaning it vanishes from our sight – but life is not extinguished into non-existence by such events.

Vasumathy Somasundaram was one such expression of beauty and dignity of that immortality. She enchanted and enriched every relationship through her quiet dignity and proven serenity of mind. She was endeared by one and all. I received the news about her sudden demise under very sad circumstances with shock and agony. It created a poignant sense of loss in us.

The human mind has acquired the habit of realising the significance of life and its beauties with relative time-scale. Especially if the gift is rare – but short-lived the sense of loss is enormous. But life refuses to admit our habitual time scale to reveal the mysteries in its entirety. Whether the span of life is short or long, the gift was token of His Grace and it is always full and complete. This is what the Hindu way of life asserts as "*Eswara Prasadam*" – God's Gift. Let us at this moment of profound grief, derive solace from this vision, Otherwise the sudden invisibility of His Gift – endearingly known to all of us as Vasu would only weaken our spirits and engulf us in deep sorrow.

The love, care, hospitality, and human decency with which Vasu served the Chinmaya Movement during my stay in Colombo, would ever remain green memories for deep appreciation and mould special prayers in tune with the nature of life for her.

I share the grief in every dimension with her beloved parents in whom the sense of missing, at this moment, is far beyond our grasp and solace. Yet it is my sincere prayer that the All Merciful and the Compassionate Lord reveals His Grace in the form of required inner strength and understanding of life with which they could overcome sadness.

Trust in His Grace. Sharing your feelings with profound prayers.

*Madurai,
India*

Whither Mankind Today

This is a very pertinent question, raised at the background of the deteriorating world situation today. This question has been raking the minds of all sensible and peace-loving people all over the world since long.

With all the wealth and comforts that modern science and technology has begotten us, is life on earth really enjoyable and fulfilling? What have we bequeathed to our children and to posterity? Plenty of ways and means to increase the comforts of life, while at the same time, unfortunately, more destructive ideas and means also, making life on earth meaningless.

Where have we gone wrong? Is modern science to be blamed then? Should we then do away with that science and go back to the tribal age? It is not necessary to do so, and it is impossible also. Along with nurturing the knowledge of the material science, we forgot to nurture the knowledge of spiritual science. That is where we went wrong. Echoing the same truth, Bertrand Russell says, "Unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow only". How true are his words! Paraphrasing the same idea, another Western thinker has said, "Our immense success in the development of physical sciences has not been particularly successful in formulating the better philosophies of life".

The modern age has paid more attention to understand and conquer the external world, without caring at the same time, to understand and develop the inner world, i.e., the mind, thinking that the external world is everything in contributing to the joy of life, which is not truly a hundred percent. Peace and joy of life depend more on the quality of the mind than the external world. This is a factual experience of life. When the mind is under the grip of deep sorrow or disappointment, nothing is relished by the person at that moment. The world, with all its beauties and comforts, fails to entertain and comfort him then. This only shows that happiness and misery depend on the state of the mind, and the external world only gives the suggestion to the mind. Pointing out this fact, Swami Vivekananda says, "Machines never made mankind happy, and never will. He who is trying to make us believe this, will claim that happiness is in the machine; but it is always in the mind. That man alone who is the lord of his mind can become happy, none else". But unfortunately the present day education pays very little attention towards developing the quality of the mind. Instead, as Swami Vivekananda points out, to stuff the brains of students with some information has become the aim of education today. Even the renowned scientist Albert Einstein has admitted this fact when he says "The advance of knowledge at present is reduced to extracting one incomprehensible from another incomprehensible".

The aim of religion is also the same, to improve the quality of the mind, so that man behaves as man, concerned about the welfare of others also. In the absence of

such mind-culture, he succumbs to his animal instincts, bringing misery to himself and others as well. The famous scripture Srimad Bhagavad Gita has very effectively brought out this truth. "The mind verily is both the friend and the foe of man. To him, who has subdued his lower instincts to dominate his mind, the mind acts like a friend. But to him, who has allowed his lower instincts to dominate his mind, the mind acts as the enemy." (Ch 6-4,5) "He who has conquered his mind, is not easily assailed by even the greatest calamity in life." (Ch 6-22) Rather "he experiences the endless bliss which is beyond the ken of the senses" (Ch 6-21), and "becomes friendly and compassionate to all without any touch of hatred." (Ch 15-13) Thus, the mind acts as the friend for one who has cultured it through proper education and religious practices. It goes without saying that the man of untrained mind meets with restlessness and misery in life, creating problems not only to himself, but also to others.

Hinduism has pointed out certain unchangeable facts about life and human personality, as we see in the Katha Upanishad, a popular Hindu scripture: "The sense objects are superior to the senses; the mind is superior to the sense objects; the intellect superior to the mind; the Self, the basis of human personality, superior to the intellect". So the human personality begins from the gross level of human body, proceeds through subtler aspects of mind and intellect, till it culminates in Self. From the above we understand that the sense objects are more powerful than the senses, and so enslave the senses easily. If the mind is not trained to be strong, it also, through the senses, gets enslaved to the world. Says the same Upanishad, "He who is devoid of right understanding, and with the mind always undisciplined, his senses become uncontrolled like the uncontrolled horses of a charioteer." So when the senses dominate the life, it is lowered to the animal level. The flesh has overpowered the spirit. So if a man has to keep himself above this animal nature, the mind then has to be educated and trained to be strong enough to resist the temptations of the flesh. The Gita cautions man about the evil effects of sense objects as follows: "It is natural for each organ to feel attraction or aversion in respect of objects pertaining to each sense. Do not come under their sway, for they are enemies." (Ch 3-34)

Life is a journey towards everlasting peace and joy. This can never be obtained by manipulating the external forces of nature, though they yield to some basic comforts. But this can be obtained by manipulating the spiritual forces lying hidden deep in the mind, through mind-culture.

Will the world listen to this truth of life? Sooner the better.

Swami Athmaghanananda
Ramakrishna Mission
Colombo

You have left... But still we remember ...

"I still think the purpose of life is to be happy, to be useful, to be responsible, to be honourable, to be compassionate. It is above all to matter; to count, to stand for something, to have made some difference that you lived at all." said Leo Rosten.

In this world, all of us want to be happy. The baby wants milk, a toddler cries for a toy, a boy desires a companion. An adult runs after everything. An elder sometimes pauses to look at the nature of happiness. From the first day, when we enter into this world, to the last day of our life we seek happiness. One thing is very interesting to note. Happiness keeps shifting from milk to toy, toy to companion, companion to something else and so on.

Very rarely do we remember, when we seek happiness that there are other things that one must go without to make it wholesome. Leo Rosten makes a list of it, you must be useful, responsible, honourable, compassionate and finally stand for something. He declares if you are so then you would have made the difference that you have lived.

Yes, Vasumathy, was that person whom Leo Rosten described. She extended a hand of help to all and was useful to the family and others. She passed her CIMA and held a responsible job at the International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI).

She led a life which was honourable causing pain to none. The haves and have-nots made no difference to her. Her love was the same to all. To the distressed her compassion flowed in abundance. The desolate and destitute found solace in her company.

At times, turbulent weather rocked her life. At crossroads she was tossed. She survived because she stood for something. From where did she get this something? Yes Vasumathy was closely associated with our Guru Maharaj Swami Chinmayananda for the last 18 years. She listened ardently to Swamijee's lectures and read his work so diligently. She found that "something to stand for" in Swamijee's directions.

One ship drives East and another to the West
With the self-same winds that blow.
It's the set of the sails
And not the gales
That decides the way to go
Like the winds of the sea are the ways of fate
As they voyage along through life
It's the will of the soul
That decides its goal
And not the calm or the strife.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, American Poet

Yes, Vasu, you have left us, but we still remember you.

Eassuwaren, Colombo

A Tribute – Some Thoughts

Vasu was a devotee of the Lord. I was amazed to see in her library and study table highly philosophical and religious books. No doubt contact with saints, sages and holy men had moulded her life. Saints and sages have stressed from time to time, the necessity to seek the company of holy men. Sri Ramakrishna mentions that not only does one find peace of mind in the company of holy men but also it frees him from attachment to sense objects and creates Love and Faith in God. He emphasises, over and over again, the need to keep holy company for one's spiritual progress.

Vasu was blessed by Swami Chinmayananda and often sought his company and that of his disciples and devotees. This contact enabled her to face the challenges of life with fortitude and equanimity, to serve her parents with love and devotion and to grow spiritually. On 9 November 1995, less than three months before she left her mortal coil, Vasu was specially privileged to perform *Paduka Pooja* to her Guru under the guidance of Swamini Vimalananda, a direct disciple of her Gurudev. At the conclusion of the *pooja* she served Swamini and other devotees with food specially prepared by her. Perhaps it was a farewell to the world.

To quote from Swami Tilak "Nobody can escape death and nobody is going to die before his time. The duration of this life is fixed and whenever we are to die, only then will we die. When the moment comes, there is no escape. No man can run away to another place. It is said that the place of death will automatically attract the person there. And when I have to die in an accident, I have to die – I have to die". So too Vasu met her end under tragic circumstances on 31 January 1996 caught in the blast at the Central Bank. May her Atma repose peacefully at the Lotus Feet of her Guru.

When grief or sorrow comes unexpectedly what can one do? It is only prayer to the Lord and Guru that can give one peace and fortitude. Faith in God and Guru will give immense strength to the parents to bear this great irreparable loss – loss of one's own only daughter.

Swami Vivekananda says "Such is the Lord's will ... Every one will go home when his task is done – some earlier, and some later, that is all."

*R. Sivagnanasothy
Colombo*

Question

God, again and again through the ages you have sent messengers
To this pitiless world:

They have said, 'Forgive everyone', they have said,

'Love one another –

Rid your hearts of evil.'

They are revered and remembered, yet still in these dark days

We turn them away with hollow greetings,

from outside the doors of our houses.

And meanwhile I see secretive hatred murdering the helpless

Under cover of night;

And Justice weeping silently and furtively at power misused,

No hope of redress.

I see young men working themselves into a frenzy,

In agony dashing their heads against stone to no avail.

My voice is choked today; I have no music in my flute:

Black moonless night

Has imprisoned my world, plunged it into nightmare.

And this is why,

With tears in my eyes, I ask:

Those who have poisoned your air,

those who have extinguished your light,

Can it be that you have forgiven them?

Can it be that you love them?

From Collection of Poems by Rabindranath Tagore

Farewell to Vasu Akka

Dear Vasu Akka,

Thank you for all that you have taught and showed us: simplicity, determination, courage, self-confidence and the will to pursue with goals, even in times of trouble. Above all, you have shown us the true value of life. I know that your memories will be cherished forever by all those who are near and dear to you in mind and spirit. Remembered for all your admirable qualities and, moreover, for your gentle, understanding and forgiving nature. Two wooden polished dolls that you gave me as your gift, stand before me on my bedside table, a constant reminder of you and the good times we shared together. You were and always will be, a role model and an inspiration to my sister and I.

You have gone to a better place – may you find peace and joy.

Your loving cousin,

Dhivyaa Kailasapathy
Sydney, Australia

For Vasu

I remember her well when she was two or three,
When they came to live next door
With her little big brother, mother and grandmother
And her father who travelled from afar,
Bright and playful she was then,
And all those years we've seen since then.

From days to months, and months to years,
Our two families friendships did grow,
Through ups and downs, parents and children alike,
Hand in hand with only kindness to the fore,
Wove a tapestry of beautiful true friendship
That was to last a long long time.

Now when some of the players are no more,
Time and place matter less and less,
For families and their sincere friends,
As vivid memories will always remain,
Of friendships forged with kindness alone,
Vasu we will always remember you.

*Gita Gunatilleke
Wellington, New Zealand'*

Farewell

We have been very close family friends for over thirty years, and there are memories of good times spent together, even at Akkaraipattu. The dinner we had with Vasu on 30 January 1996, seems to me as if it was an act of some Karmic force to get her oldest friends together for a last meal.

I had requested her to keep the 30th free for a meal at my house. However, it worked out that Dharma, Julie Piyandani and Anil, Gayathri, Kumudini and I decided to take her out to dinner as she had little time to spend with each one of us before migrating to Australia, a few days later. We were to meet at Piyandani's and then decide on where to go for dinner but Vasu had decided that we go to 'Gourmet Palace' saying the food was good, and indeed it was. We took a few photographs, before we left, and walked for dinner. It was a lovely evening, everyone was happy.

I remember three things Vasu mentioning at dinner: that her father had said next Thai Pongal he will be in Australia; her IIMI friends were going to save monthly for a visit to see her; and finally that she was going to collect her EPF cheque the next day.

After dinner everyone was asked to Piyandani's for coffee. I decided not to stop by for coffee, so did Vasu. We were having a quiet chat while walking to our car. I asked her why she could not collect the cheque later when she comes back from Australia and she replied "I prefer to finish it off Ajitha".

So she did finish off everything she had to do before she made her final departure. Clothes she was going to wear left on her bed, bags to take to Australia packed and left in her room, a lovely evening and dinner with her oldest friends which included her brother. The next morning she visited IIMI where she worked for the last time before she left for Australia and drove to collect her cheque.

To me it seemed as if she really said good bye to everybody and everything on her onward journey to a better and peaceful place where she belongs. She will continue to be a part of my family joining the closest of them who have left me alone, over the past years.

*Ajitha Gunaratne
Colombo*

Appreciation

Vasu walked
Into our life
With love, affection
And understanding.

We gave her
All our love, affection,
Understanding, and
A large room
In our hearts.

Suddenly,
She left;
To start 'a new life',
Taking with her
Only love and
Affection —
Which is all
She needs for a
Happy Eternity.

Chinnachinnamma

For Archies Akka,

Even if a star dies, its light still shines on forever... She is my star.

Gehanjali

"We look forward..., and find, as it were, black marigolds, and a silence.

*From the extended family: Asoka and Vijeyalakshmie Amarasinghe and Children
Colombo*

You were cheerful Vasu,
The last time I saw you;
When I cautioned you
To go with care —
You went, unaware,
To unexpected welcome
In a Luminous Place, with
No sin, and no one
To fund planned death.

Asoka

Archies Akka

You will always remain young in our
memory, ever green.

Your praises can be sung —
but we have your sincerity seen.

Our jasmines were filled with bloom
for garlands, to glow away the gloom.

Myanathi

By morning the Flock had forgotten its insanity, but
Fletcher had not. "Jonathan, remember what you
said a long time ago, about loving the Flock enough
to return to it and help it learn?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand how you manage to love a
mob of birds that has just tried to kill you."

"Oh, Fletch, you don't love that! You don't love
hatred and evil, of course. You have to practise and
see the real gull, the good in every one of them, and
to help them see it in themselves. That's what I
mean by love. It's fun, when you get the knack of
it."

*From Jonathan Livingston Seagull – A Story by .
Richard Bach*

I think
When it rains
Let her not get wet

And when it storms
Will she not catch a cold

And I also think
That this thinking
Does not help

Because you will never again
Get wet or catch a cold

Because it will never rain
Or storm any more
For you.

*Bert Schierbeek , 1986
(Translated from the Dutch)*

Tributes

Vasu's sterling qualities of head and heart and her gentle manner endeared her to all of us who had the good fortune to be her friend. Vasu carried her learning lightly and her counsel and guidance were readily available to friends and acquaintances alike. We still cherish the memory of that last dinner we enjoyed with her that day before death so cruelly snatched her away from us. She was then brimming with life and over the meal she dwelt on her plans to start a new life Down Under in a few days. Verily, it has been said, in the midst of Life we are in Death. However, we console ourselves knowing that to live in the hearts of those we leave behind, is not to die.

May Vasu's soul rest in peace.

Kumudini de Zoysa (Chutu)
Colombo

Vasu,

You gave me strength in times of need with your friendship which I valued and will never forget.

You will always live with us in spirit.

With love and affection

Piyandani Dissanayake
Colombo

My dearest Vasu,

When I think of you, there are so many memories, how we used to discuss our day on the phone in the evening, how you, together with Grandma, taught me to make *thosais* and *uppuma*, how we used to go shopping together, visiting friends or searching for new restaurants ... But more than that I will always remember how you faced life and its challenges and seemed to come out stronger every time. You would tell me to “keep bouncing like a rubber ball” as your Swami told you.

With our group of friends, which we proudly called the International Women's Network, we tried to support each other in each other's decisions in life. That was not always easy, we had to accept and respect each others' different paths in life. For you and me it meant transforming from friends to sisters-in-law. But we have come full circle, Vasu, realised the consequences and accepted our new relationship in life.

Our last memory of you will always stay with me: the farewell dinner which we had with you on Tuesday night. You were at peace with the world and everyone in it, happy, sparkling and ready to go, looking forward to a new life, feeling on top of the world.

My dear Vasu, you will always remain a part of our life, your family is my family, when I look in Dharma's eyes, I see your eyes.

Julie van der Blik
Battaramulla

Vasumathy was what we called her back then in 1966. I still have vivid memories of when I first met her at Rhona Marjan's elocution lessons when Vasu, Dharmavasan, my cousin Kumudini (Chutu) and I were in the same class. We learnt to pronounce our A's reciting a little poem "David was a sailor gay."

Over the next eight years we saw each other once a week as we cheerfully went to our weekly lessons. Our parents would take it in turns at shuttling us by bus to Asoka Gardens. I remember when reading "My Family and Other Animals" by Gerald Durrell as our assigned text, Vasu once found it so funny that she laughed till she cried.

It is hard to believe that I have known her for almost thirty years. Long forgotten details of my association with her have now taken on a sudden importance. Usually they fade into oblivion because we take it so much for granted that our friends will grow with us and generate more memories.

Vasu always gave me a distinct feeling of quiet strength. Her strength was evident as she went through many turbulent events in her life. I became much closer to her during the year she spent in London and often marvelled at the remarkable recovery she made since her abortive marriage. She transformed into a strong and independent person and made such headway in her career.

In her last letter to me written early in December she sounded as she always does. Measured words of optimism about her departure to Australia. Vasu was never one for excesses.

A few days before her death I bought a copy of the Bhagavad Gita which brought back strong memories of our conversations about it. Let me quote from the Gita words by the Blessed One (Chapter II, Verses 27, 30) in response to Sanjay:

For to one that is born death is certain,
And birth is certain for one that has died;
Therefore, the thing being unavoidable,
Thou shouldst not mourn.

This embodied (soul) is eternally unslayable
In the body of everyone, son of Bharatha;
Therefore all beings
Thou shouldst not mourn.

May these words console us all.

*Neela de Zoysa
Cambridge, Massachusetts*



Vasu, you will always be with us in spirit

Ajitha, Chutu, Gayathree, Julie, Piyandani and Anil

In affectionate memory of Vasu

I first met Vasu in 1989 when she came for an interview for a key position in my office. It would be a very demanding professional assignment, entrusted *inter alia* with responsibility for and carrying out all those activities I did not like doing, and thus leaving me free to concentrate on matters I enjoy doing! She was the outside runner in a short-list of five candidates, the only one with no relevant subject professional exposure but with management qualifications and experience. As we listened through the shining exposés of the achievements and potential of the professionals, it became clear that there was only one possible candidate – a person with inner strength and determination, serenity, foresight and acumen. With these gifts of character, you do not need advanced technical training and experience to tackle what you have to do in life.

Later only did I learn that Vasu had attended the selection interviews at a time and in the very midst of intense disturbance and emotional stress in her personal life that would have downed many a strong person, and yet she was capable of both presenting her case extremely well, and moreover capable of laughing at and talking down the interviewing panel's wit who was conducting his own selection process by verbal provocation, and indeed reducing the other candidates to stunned silence.

So Vasu came to work with us in 1989. It was a difficult job and I did not spare her. She could have chosen the easy option of constant referral of problems and issues, but instead she chose to carry out her assignments independently, accurately recognising my "need to know" levels, and thus quietly taking upon herself many responsibilities and burdens that were legitimately mine. To me the most telling example was her skills with people; I have since realised that she shielded me in very large measure from the quantum of petty intrigues which tend to pervade organisational systems, thus enabling me to keep a clear mind about essentials. She too kept a clear mind, albeit encumbered with the hassles.

A couple of years later, the wheel turned. I went through a difficult period, much less capable of overcoming it than my friend Vasu. For whatever reason, possibly in a foresight of premonition, she had given me, for my previous birthday, a book entitled *The Art of Man-Making*, a commentary of the *Bhagavad Gita* by Swami Chinmayananda. My cynical nature instinctively felt that it must have been a book she had to hand at that particular moment. (A fairly good rule in life is to trust one's instinctive reactions, one's first judgements; but in this instance I was wrong.) The gift was well foreseen and planned. That I saw after two years of soul-searching and as I emerged from my personal holocaust, for the first time stronger through adversity.

And so, as the years went by, we met – not frequently but regularly. Low key. Catching up on news and that sort of thing. A gradual realisation that we shared many interests, many of them unsaid or softly spoken.

Then circumstances decided Vasu to leave for Australia to start, for some time at any rate, a new life there. She was due to leave in early February of 1996. Early January, I had to leave for London unexpectedly. Profiting from a missed flight, the night before my departure Vasu and I decided to dine together. Why, I did not then know. But the impelling instinctive reaction was right this time. Effectively, we had unfinished business; we had to say goodbye to each other in this life. I recall we had even joked to that effect, although neither of us could have imagined the circumstances.

There are events in life for which one deliberately plans, or which are planned for us; there are directions in which we steer or are steered by the very conduct of our lives; then again, there are events over which we have no control either by deliberate will or good conduct. In each of these streams one can be a victim or master. Vasu was master of her life and her will and conduct, and if death were to take her away before the full physical measure of a human span, it could only be an event outside her control or ken. So be it.

Creation and death, chaos and order, are fragmentary perceptions of a larger, infinite, cosmos which our limited consciousness is unable in life to comprehend. We have to bear with it. No doubt Vasu now has a better perception. I leave her with some lines from the *Rig Veda*. Perhaps they will be clear to her now; if not, doubtless she will consider them serenely and with a twinkle of humour:

"Whence this creation has arisen – perhaps it formed itself or perhaps it did not – the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows – or perhaps he does not know."

Francis O'Kelly
Colombo

A Tribute

When Dharma asked me to write something about Vasu, it was with much hesitation and thought that I said I would, because it is not easy for me to talk about someone, who, in her own quiet special way, was one of the finest persons I knew.

How do I begin to describe my friendship with Vasu? It began over six years ago when she interviewed me for my present job at IIMI. Those first few months were rather hectic and chaotic at times but through all this life was just a breeze for Vasu. There she was sailing down the hotel corridors in her beautiful crisp cotton sarees, going about her work in her usual professional way. She was quiet and dignified in everything she said and did, able to hold her own with those at the top and also gaining their respect and admiration at the same time. She and I started many activities after office together and each and every one of those days were full of fun and excitement. She gave so much and never asked for anything in return. What I will treasure most are the beautiful memories of the last gift she gave me for my birthday – a day out down South where we had the time of our lives, with not a care in the world while the rest were hard at work that day.

My only regret is that I did not thank her enough for everything she gave and did for me because she never said goodbye.

I journey, now, to meet an end
Where deed of past the future blend
And what I pass, in love's embrace,
I leave for better in its place
But God must often hear me say:
I wish I lived my life this way.

Thank you and goodbye, dear friend

*Veronica Lumanauw
Colombo*

"From Vasu I learned that those things are better which are perfected by nature than those which are finished by art."



A Simple Farewell

My dear Vasu

This is my only means of saying good-bye given our delay in meeting after my return. We were not to know that the day we were to meet would be your last and your disappearance would throw us into disarray as we so desperately searched. I know that you would understand my loss for words, the unfamiliarity in putting into public form a private grief: for you always were quick to sense the unspoken! I do this more for your family and those left behind than for myself.

You were a deceptively gentle, sincere and subtly unobtrusive soul who cringed from loud, outward expressions of emotion and hypocrisy. Indeed, you were the very personification of the lines "So placidly among the noise and haste..." (Desiderata, undated). Your gentle, wry humour would often see the funny and philosophical angle of even the more harder to bear aspects of life. Your belief in the absolutes of right and wrong, and your cheery faith in the ultimate weighing up of one's actions would always give you the strength to laughingly "turn the other cheek". I think one of the more outstanding qualities you possessed was the rarest one – an innate dignity in sticking to your principles in dealing with everyone while taking care to consciously hurt no one. It is all the more cruelly ironic that it was someone like you who had to be taken from life so soon.

Often the many valuable intangible presences in our lives take on an omnipotent meaning upon their absence. Such absences enable us to further dis-aggregate the essential from the unessential and redefine our priorities. Your sudden death has achieved this with so many people I knew – all the more touching as it would have embarrassed you so! Your gifts to us are many: each of us have our own. Thus, in leaving us behind you have truly left behind something of yourself, something good to continue in a somewhat hard and difficult world without rancour as you would have wished.

I can only wish you good-bye Vasu, and silently promise that I will carry your lessons with me. I will miss you – not only in our many get-togethers and in our homes – but also as a genuine friend. May you be always at peace.

*Kiran Dhanapala
Colombo*

Tribute to Vasu

Our earliest memories of Vasu were in 1969 as children in Primary school. We played together, and chatted over the balcony as we shared a common wall. We used to commute back and forth together to St Bridget's.

She participated in many of our family events, such as our house warming which she attended with her father at 4 o'clock in the morning when we moved from 28th Lane. Vasu was a sensitive person, always considerate towards her friends and family. In 1986, she gave us the moral support our family needed. She was a source of strength in the many challenges her family faced.

In 1992, when I was in Colombo for a brief stay on my way to Australia, she picked me up and took me to dinner with Piyandani. I was delighted to see how she had blossomed into an effervescent personality from a quiet young girl.

We were very happy that Vasu had chosen to make Canberra her home. Her friends in Canberra including Ahalya and I were looking forward to her arrival this month. The cruel blow of fate has snatched away the new life she was going to begin in Australia.

When I think of Vasu, her lovely smile, beautiful eyelashes and wavy long hair flash before me. She will be fondly remembered by every member of our family, our mother Pushpa Manikkalingam, Sukanya, Renuka, Manimekala, Ahalya, Ram, Shan and Parvatha.

*Sukanya Thurairajah
Canberra, Australia*

A Tribute

Vasu, as I knew her, was game for most things. When we first met at IIMI five years ago, she was in the throes of French lessons at the Alliance. I found it hard to believe anyone who worked hard all week would want to spend half the weekend month after month learning a foreign language. So infectious was Vasu's enthusiasm however, that a year later, I found myself grappling with the infamous 'Espace' textbook and discussing 'participe passé' verbs over lunch in office.

Lunch, in the old IIMI days, we always brought from our respective homes as there was yet no office cafeteria. I first came to know about Vasu's grandmother through the contents of Vasu's lunch box. *Ammamma* was a great cook and kept Vasu going with a daily supply of delicious chicken legs amongst other delectables. She also included every day one ripe, juicy banana which Vasu never ate herself but happily distributed amongst the rest of the lunch group in halves or quarters depending on demand. We never knew if Vasu's grandmother ever suspected this travesty but the daily banana never failed to appear.

Talking of food, I was never more surprised than to discover that Vasu cooked! Somehow, it seemed impossible that an independent-minded young lady accountant who drove herself (she could handle the reverse gear at top speed) and studied French would know how to make home-made *panir* from scratch. And those delicious *pooris* rolled out to the thinness of a crêpe before being fried! I still have the recipes which Vasu wrote out for me one day in office. Although I have yet to try my hand at either, I sampled Vasu's excellent efforts many times.

Almost equally astonishing was Vasu's adeptness at starching those exquisite sarees which she wore to office. Somehow, I hadn't associated Vasu with such domestic details and remember listening incredulously to her meticulous instruction about how much starch should be used and for what period of soaking. The results were always impeccable. But then, Vasu had an unusual taste in clothes. In India, she always managed to pick up the most extraordinary earth colours – mustards, beiges, browns, deep greens and burnt oranges – which she echoed across a range of salwars, skirts and sarees. In more recent times, Vasu had moved away from her starched sarees to light, colourful Barefoot creations which seemed to mirror her transition from more formal and traditional ways towards her impending change of lifestyle in Australia.

Vasu loved to travel. Her most exotic trip was going on safari in Kenya and Tanzania in 1993. My instructions to Vasu were to bring me back a chimpanzee poster. She knew I was mad about primates so she sent me a picture postcard of a thoughtful-looking chimp. "Hi Sharmini" it read. "Greetings from Tanzania. Dar-es-Salam reminds me of Batti and it is a very nice city. We are on safari for a week and right now we are at Ngorongoro Crater and tomorrow we leave for Serengeti. The animals are just wonderful

and we are freezing over here! Love, Vasu. P.S. I have already got a poster for you!" I still have her poster – of a baby chimpanzee with enormous liquid eyes and a quotation from Jane Goodall – which has been hanging in my office since.

At the more domestic end of the animal kingdom, we both loved cats. The joys and tragedies of our respective felines made gripping conversation year after year. We paid a congratulatory visit when Vasu's cat gave birth to kittens inside the ornamental flower pot on the verandah. We consoled with Vasu when her female cat was fatally injured by another animal. There was also the endless saga of the IIMI cat and her numerous offspring. Vasu played foster aunt to many litters which were lovingly nurtured in my office and eventually given away to scores of gullible, kind-hearted IIMI employees.

Vasu, it seemed, never kept still. In her last months, she was happier and prettier than I have ever known her, at the high point of her life. And that is how I will always remember her.

Sharmini Blok
Colombo

A Tribute to Vasu Somasundaram

Vasu was one of the truly special people at IIMI – someone who had a very real impact on all of us who had the privilege of working with her. In her work, Vasu was professional, dedicated, positive, and enormously supportive to the Institute. And as a person, Vasu was genuine, warm, caring, and thoughtful to all, whatever their position at IIMI might be. I particularly valued her simplicity, her personal touch, her friendliness, her ability to reach out – whether it be to help organise a Christmas party for the Institute or to lend a hand to Julie and myself when we really needed it.

In December 1994, as I was stepping down from IIMI, Vasu gave me a little book that is very important to me. It is called “We Must ... Notes on Self Improvement”, by Swami Chinmayananda. Inside, she wrote me a personal note, which I will always treasure, to let me know why she wanted me to have this book that, she said, had always been a source of inspiration to her. And it is clear that this was so, because all of us who worked with Vasu know that throughout her short period with us she made a conscious effort to live her day-to-day life in ways that made her spiritual faith and beliefs come alive and have a positive effect on all those around her. So let me end this tribute by quoting a brief passage from this book, which seems to me to capture very well what Vasu stood for:

Pure, We Must Be
Sincere, We Must Become
Earnestness, We Must Befriend
Dedicated Living, We Must Bequeath
Joyous Living, We Must Behold, when we live in and
for the Beloved alone.

Roberto Lenton
New York

It is with great sadness that I learned of the death of Vasu. I have a high regard for Vasu and only recently, just before my own departure from IIMI, I had the opportunity to pay tribute to her at the farewell party in our department. She had great talents and skills in the field of financial management in which she worked so competently during the three years that she and I worked together at IIMI. She worked hard for the Institute but also kept something in reserve for her other interests, which made her such an interesting person. I will remember her particularly for her cheerful company and her personal interest in her colleagues and others. I am sure that these attributes would have helped her a great deal in succeeding equally well in the future she was about to embark upon in Australia.

It is very sad that by that devastating bomb explosion her life has to come to an end and that the promises she held can no longer be brought to fruition. She and I planned to stay in contact as I was keen to follow her career in the country I had lived in myself and like so much. It will not be so. However, I will continue to remember her life and I mourn her death.

Jacob Kijne
Wageningen, The Netherlands

I was deeply distressed to learn of the sad news of Vasu's accident. I immensely valued the association with her during my stay at IIMI, first as Director of Research and later as Deputy Director General and Director for International Co-operation. She was my administrative and budget assistant for more than two years, and I can say without hesitation that she provided my division with excellent support. Vasu was intelligent, hard working and intellectually stimulating. Her commitment and loyalty was superb. She combined many diverse qualities. She was an effective communicator, helper and an excellent team member. She always pointed out what she thought was right and defended that position skilfully, and very often succeeded in influencing the outcome, but when a decision was taken that was different. She implemented it very faithfully.

The team with which she worked was both multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary, both in the country programmes as well as at the headquarters, and her ability to make all these people comfortable was remarkable. Her helpful attitude and effective interaction brought out the best from her colleagues, for which she was highly respected. These were rare qualities which benefited all who came in contact with her: I will for long remember her support, help, dedication and commitment, which she gave to IIMI and to myself during the time we worked together. IIMI has lost a very valuable staff member and I, a trusted colleague and friend.

May her soul rest in peace.

Khalid Mohtadullah
Pakistan

It was only a year ago that I joined IIMI as the Interim Director. I soon learned that there were a number of very bright people that seemed to make IIMI tick. Vasu was one of them. There were issues related to the operation of our national programmes in other parts of the world that only Vasu seemed to have the answers to. Many relied on Vasu. Everyone liked Vasu. She had an extraordinary knack of communicating easily with people from all walks of life.

But Vasu was never at home in just one place. She wanted to see the world. When she went to look for a job in Australia last August, my first thought was, that will be a wonderful new challenge for her. I wrote a letter of recommendation on her behalf to one of my friends in Canberra. My second thought was, how will we replace her – not just in the job, but in the person. The answer is, of course, we won't. And now our loss is everyone's loss. She was a beautiful lady.

The following is a verse in memory of Vasu which I recited at my mother's memorial service just three years ago in February:

And when the stream
Which overflowed the soul was passed away,
A consciousness remained that it had left
Deposited upon the silent shore
Of memories, images, and precious thoughts,
That shall not die and cannot be destroyed.

William Wordsworth, Excursions

Farewell Vasu and God Speed.

Randy Barker
Colombo

Tributes

Vasu was a very special girl. At work she was very serious. She did the work with full responsibility. Vasu was a hard worker. She worked late in the evening and during the weekends when it was necessary to accomplish what is needed to be done in time. She took care of everything and did not miss any single point. We were glad to hear from Vasu, in one of her last letters to us, that she was nominated and selected for the 1994 award for programme support at IIMI. We felt that this was a very appropriate recognition of her excellent performance at work.

Vasu knew that we have an open heart to her and open home. When Vasu felt a little uncomfortable at work or in life she knew that she can come to us at any time to share this with us as well as her dreams and programmes for the future. We were very glad to have the opportunity to discuss with her and advise her on various matters. We discussed her plan to continue her study in a university in England. Later, she had the plan to move to Australia. We were very happy for her. We told our son in Australia to expect her there and to help her settle there. We thought that in Australia we may have a good opportunity to meet again with Vasu.

It is very sad that in one second all the dreams of Vasu for her future disappeared. We shall miss her very much. We would like to let you know that we admire and love Vasu and we shall remember her.

Aliza and Shaul Manor

It is with very great shock and sorrow that I have learnt about the unfortunate and premature demise of Ms Vasu Somasundaram. Vasu represented the finest features of a human being. Her compassion, helpfulness and love and consideration for all her colleagues, friends and fellow-workers made her a unique individual, liked and loved by everyone who came into contact with her. Her premature death in a violent explosion is a grim reminder of the need to promote the message of love and peace which Vasu embodied in her personality. I pray for the peace of the departed soul.

M S Swaminathan
India

Observations

To the vulgar the world of appearance on the physical world is very solid and is the great reality. Saints, philosophers, statesmen, mathematicians, scientists and artists have shown there is more to the world than mere appearance. The vulgar spend much time in anger, hatred, jealousies and dullness, frivolities and greed, anxieties and miscalculations. Such time and energies are ill spent. Love and friendship, the appreciation of beauty and the pursuit of truth deserve our time and energies better. Time spent in work and calculation is well spent. Just as man cannot live without air, water and food, so he needs love, beauty, goodness and knowledge.

There are many who have disrespect towards man and beast and things. Not only are church and temple, priest and saint, holy ground. I think it more religious to consider all men and beasts and things as holy ground. And I think it probably correct to have respect towards all these. There are many people who have the weakness of, feeling contempt and uttering words of contempt towards persons, animals and things. I believe this is a waste of time and a great wrong-doing.

I remember parts of a poem I learnt at school which I would like to quote here.

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight
But they while their companions slept
Were toiling upwards in the night.

The lives of great men remind us:

That we can make our lives sublime
And departing leave behind us
Foot-prints on the sands of time
Foot-prints that perhaps another
Ship wrecked and forlorn brother
Seeing shall take heart again
Let us then be up and doing
With a heart for any fate
Still achieving still pursuing
Learn to labour and wait.

Irunthathi Dharmaretnam, Batticaloa
Written by Vasumathy's late uncle Puvirajakeerthi Dharmaretnam

A Favourite Poem of Vasu

I cannot promise you a lifetime, or even a day,
For my days and yours are bound to others
through a lifetime of commitment.
What I can offer is simply ... Me.

For whatever amount of time we can steal.

I offer you laughter
for laughter is beauty.

I offer you honesty
for honesty is pure.

I offer you
patience for patience is needed to gain trust.

I offer sincerity
for through my sincerity

I will show you my inner being and desires ...

All I ask in return
is for you to be honest and open
for through your honesty and openness
I will receive from you all that I can offer.

Roger C Van Horn

On Children

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, speak to us of children.

And he said:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,
and though they are with yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backwards nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.

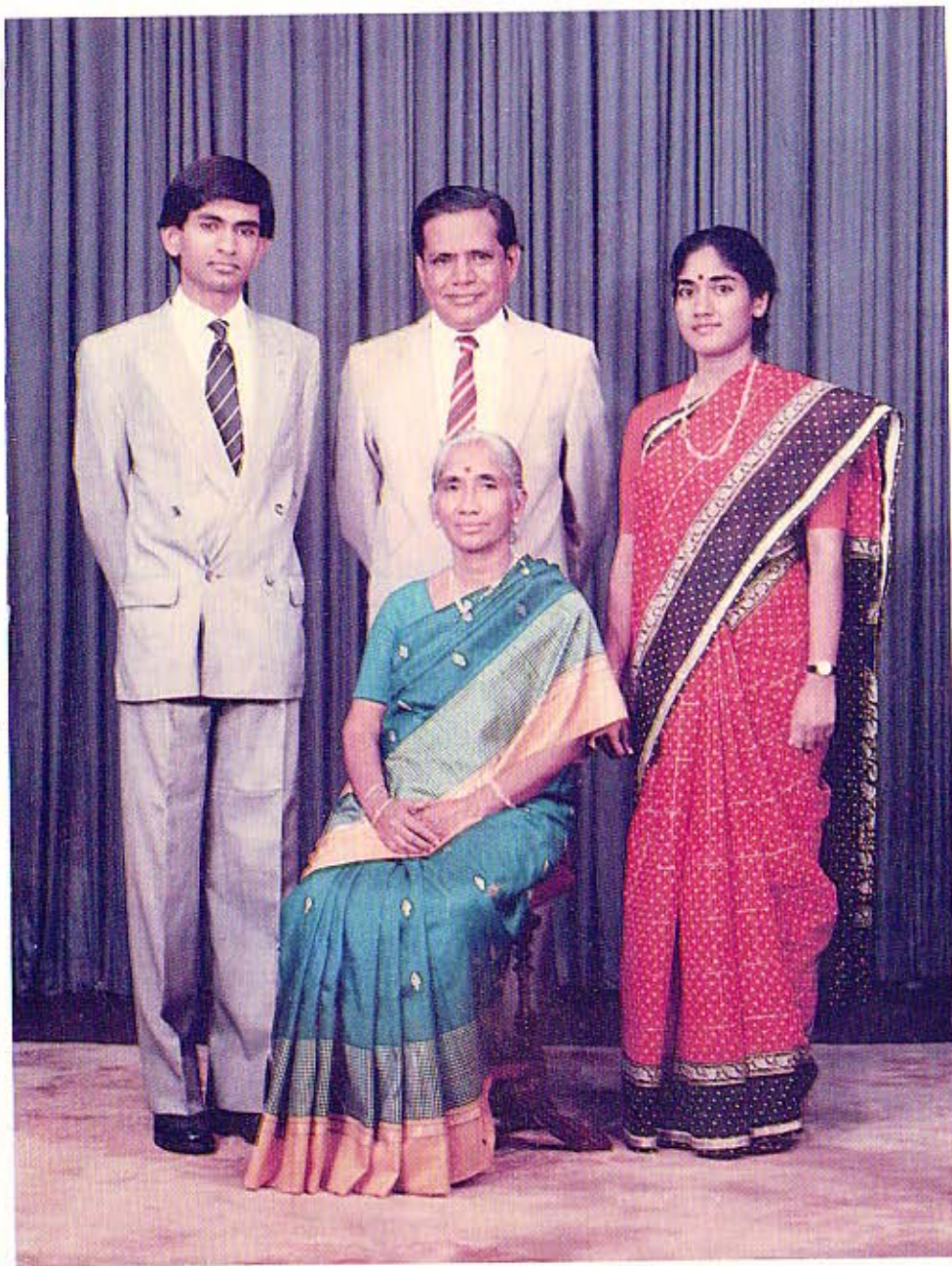
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might
that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable.

•
From The Prophet by Kahlil Gibran







To my sister

We played hide-and-seek and went fishing
 We raced along the bunds and went swimming
 We tried to catch the little crabs as they ran into the sea
 We teased the dog and climbed the mango tree
 We pestered Sami to tell us elephant stories
 We walked to the beach and paddled in the sea
 We built a raft of drums and set sail in the lagoon
 At night we watched the sky for flying saucers.

Annah you say, Baba I say.
 From Saudi you said "It's very difficult here."
 I said "Come over on holiday."
 From Australia you said "It's very nice here."
 I said "How about jobs and housing?"
 From Tanzania you said "The animals are great."
 I said "Buy me an African carving."
 What will you say and what do I say?

We went on trips whenever I came from London:
 Ratnapura for Christmas, Villa for relaxation,
 Singapore for shopping, Bangkok for sightseeing,
 Madras was work for me and pleasure for you.

We worried about Appah, Ammah and Grandma
 You told me about the troubles for Appah
 You called me when Grandma fell
 I said "Wear your seat-belt."

"I can take more luggage," you said.
 I bought you a suitcase. You had everything packed.
 "When will you come to Australia?" you said.
 "Later this year," I said. "Good. Bring me this," you said,
 And gave me your Scrabble and Textile book.
 We went to dinner and you said "I need to finalise my EPF tomorrow."
 You said "I have made all my decisions. You order the food."
 You walked into the night with a fresh hairdo and a new dress.

*S Dharmavasan
 Battaramulla*

At this time of my parting, wish me good luck, my friends! The sky is flushed with the dawn and my path lies beautiful.

Ask not what I have with me to take there. I start on my journey with empty hands and an expectant heart.

I shall put on my wedding garland. Mine is not the red-brown dress of the traveller, and though there are dangers on the way I have no fear in my mind.

The evening star will come out when my voyage is done and the plaintive notes of the twilight melodies be struck up from the King's gateway.

From Gitanjali – Song Offerings by Rabindranath Tagore

