

Satya Ramani Vadlamani
My Mother. My Strength.
My Lifeline



BlueRoseONE.com
S t o r i e s M a t t e r

New Delhi • London

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

India | U.K.

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ISBN: 978-93-7310-639-7

Cover design: Daksh

Typesetting: Tanya Raj Upadhyay

First Edition: October 2025

Prologue

There was a time when my mother was my world, and I was hers. Today, I watch her lying on the bed — frail, almost weightless, her skin barely cloaking the bones beneath. She writhes in pain, yet not a word of complaint escapes her lips. I feel an ache that words can't quite contain, a helplessness that swallows me whole.

The woman who once held me, fought for me, and loved me with every breath now looks at me with distant eyes. Perhaps she no longer knows me... or perhaps she is slowly teaching me to live in a world where she will no longer be.

Memories flood in — of laughter, of her voice calling my name, of the way her eyes lit up when she saw me. My heart swells, and so do my eyes. At Haritha's gentle insistence, I have decided to put her story into words. Not just her story — our story. Because she is more than my mother. She is my strength, my lifeline... and this is her memoir.

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Chapter 1:

The World Before Me



Long before I ever opened my eyes to this world, there was a young woman with dreams stitched quietly into her heart. She grew up in a time when life was simpler, yet not without its battles. Her days were filled with the rhythm of chores, the chatter of family, and the quiet spaces where she would slip into her thoughts.

She was my mother — though, in those days, she was simply a daughter, a sister, a friend. Her laughter was unrestrained, the kind that made you want to laugh along without knowing why. She carried herself with a grace that was not taught but born of a deep kindness, a patience that would one day define her role as a mother.

She had dreams — not loud or grand, but steady ones. She wanted a home filled with warmth, a family to nurture, and a life where love outweighed hardship. She never imagined that one day she would be someone's

world — my world. But life, in its quiet wisdom, was already leading her toward me.

I often wonder about that time before I knew her — the girl she was, the woman she was becoming, and the ways she was unknowingly preparing for the role she would cherish most: being my mother.

She was born as the eldest daughter to a pair of doting parents on July 24th, 1943, and was lovingly named Sitamahalakshmi. Before her came an older brother, Bhaskaramurthy, her first friend and lifelong confidant. She entered the world with a golden complexion that seemed to catch the sunlight, a gift she inherited from her father.

In the years that followed, four more sisters joined the family, each bringing their own personality and energy into the home. School days, she would often recall, were filled with joy and camaraderie. She was especially close to her brother in her early years, sharing secrets and laughter, and later formed a deep bond with her youngest siblings.

Her father, a postmaster by profession and also head of Gram Panchayat, held a progressive belief for his time — that girls deserved the same education as boys. He harbored a dream of seeing her become a doctor, but she, humble about her abilities, felt she might not be capable of such a demanding path. Still, she excelled in her studies, her grace matched only by her good manners.

Her schooldays were filled with the simple joys of childhood and the bonds that shaped her early years. Each morning, she would set off to school with her brother and her youngest uncle – though, true to the ways of brothers, they often walked ahead while making her carry the lunch bag. She never complained; instead, she carried it with a quiet strength that reflected her nature even as a child.

She was deeply loved and well taken care of, and in those years, her brother became more than just family – he was her best friend, her confidant, and her companion through all of life's little adventures.

As she grew older, her circle of friendship widened. In college, she found joy in the company of her close friends, like Shirisha, with whom she shared laughter, secrets, and the kind of youthful camaraderie that leaves an everlasting imprint. These friendships and bonds became the threads that wove her into the woman she was destined to become.

By the time she turned eighteen, she had blossomed into a tall, slender young woman – golden-skinned, slim as a willow, educated, and poised. She carried herself with quiet dignity, the kind that made people take notice without her ever trying. The world lay before her, unshaped and full of possibilities.

Chapter 2:

Becoming a Wife and a Mother,



She had no shortage of suitors — good matches from well-to-do families, men who were lawyers, doctors, and successful businessmen. But my mother was never swayed by wealth or appearances. For her, looks were fleeting; what truly mattered was education, kindness, and the ability to respect and nurture her independence.

She found all of that in my father. At the time, he had just completed his Master's degree and was working as a junior lecturer at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology in Bombay. What drew her to him was not status or title, but his honesty, his open-hearted nature, and the easy warmth in his smile.

He was dark and undeniably handsome, a happy-go-lucky man who carried life lightly, the youngest son in a large, sprawling family. In him, she saw not only a

partner but a friend — someone who would allow her to remain herself while standing beside her. It was a choice made with both her head and her heart, and it would shape the rest of her life.

My mother's marriage had its own share of light-hearted moments — and a few stories she would retell with both amusement and a touch of exasperation.

The day before the wedding in Kakinada, my father had gone on a drinking binge with his cousins. By the time the ceremony began on May 17th, 1963, he was thoroughly “sozzled,” as my mother would say with a mix of irritation and laughter. So much so that it was my maternal grandmother who had to guide his hands to tie the three sacred knots of the mangalsutra around her neck.

Chapter 3: A Red Saree, an Iron Bed, and Rs. 50



Mom's marriage had its own fun moments—some she told with a smile, others with a sigh. One of her favourites was about the time she misheard my father's confession. When he had said he could not do without cigarettes, she took it as him saying he rarely smoked. And she had been very firm—no dowry would be given. Yet, somehow, a sum of Rs. 500/- was asked for and given by her father to her in-laws—something my father knew nothing about. She blamed him for that all his life, though deep down she knew he hadn't been part of it.

After the whirlwind of ceremonies and tearful farewells, they set off for Mumbai—a city neither of them knew well, but which would soon become the canvas of their shared life. Mom often laughed about an incident from that journey. She was wearing a striking red saree,

her face glowing with the mix of bridal blush and travel excitement. A man sitting across from them kept staring at her. Irritated, she told my father, but he merely smiled, his nose buried in his novel. Finally, unable to take it anymore, she stood up and, in her broken Hindi, snapped at the man—asking if he had no sisters and why he was staring at her. The poor fellow turned beet red, grabbed his belongings, and hurried away to another compartment. My father, still grinning, turned a page and quietly calmed her down. It was their first adventure together as husband and wife, a small but telling glimpse of their personalities—her fiery spirit and his calm steadiness.

As per Mom, when they arrived in Mumbai, all my father owned was an iron bed and a loan of Rs. 50 on his head. That was it—no house, no jewellery, no property, no financial cushion. Just a newlywed couple, a piece of metal furniture, and a small debt that in those days felt much heavier than it sounds now.

From that humble beginning to where they eventually reached is nothing short of a saga—a story of fighting against adversities with bare hands and unbreakable resolve. There were years when every rupee had to be counted twice, when dreams were postponed because life demanded sacrifices, when they learned that strength isn't in what you have but in how you hold on to each other.

Mom would always say it wasn't the iron bed or the Rs. 50 loan that defined those days—it was the iron in their will and the wealth in their determination. Through early mornings and sleepless nights, through failures and small triumphs, they built their world brick by brick. The city tested them, but together, they stood. And somewhere along the way, the bed and the loan became part of family folklore—symbols not of poverty, but of a beginning from which everything was possible.

Chapter 4:

The July Morning I Arrived



Life in Mumbai had barely begun to find its rhythm when my story began. Mom, already adjusting to the demands of a new city, a modest home, and a husband with big dreams but few possessions, found herself carrying her first child—me.

Pregnancy was not an easy ride for her. She had persistent nausea, yet the flow of visiting relatives never stopped. In those days, relatives in town would simply appear at your doorstep if they had any work in Mumbai, and the hostess was expected to serve them as if it were a festival. For my mom, that meant preparing elaborate Brahminical meals—full thalis with all the traditional dishes—even when she could barely keep food down herself.

As if that wasn't enough, she was sent to Hyderabad for a time to care for her ailing sister-in-law. No one

seemed to think twice about the load on her shoulders—it was just how families functioned then. From there, she travelled to Kakinada, where she would eventually deliver me.

Dad, who was away at the time, sent her a box of apples from Shimla, a thoughtful gesture to keep her strength up. But by the time they reached her, half had been misplaced along the way and the rest had begun to rot—a small but telling sign of how even love had to fight the hurdles of those days.

Outside a modest village hospital, a gathering of anxious faces awaited the arrival of the family's first grandchild, their collective hope palpable in the cool air. At precisely 2:15 AM on 15th of July, 1964, a wail pierced the night, and a nurse emerged with glimmering excitement, announcing, "Doctor, your wife is born!"

On that murmuring, monsoon night, laughter and joy erupted. A handsome young doctor rushed through the doors, cradling a dark-skinned newborn who was wailing fervently. A young girl dashed out to fetch cow's milk for the infant. Who were these people? The excitement of birth surrounded me, but the identity of this "wife" was a puzzle.

Well, I was born. The newborn wailing in the doctor's arms was I—a soft rain pattering against the window, marking the transition into a new life. The young doctor who picked me up was none other than my

maternal uncle. Freshly licensed in medicine, he bore the weight of family expectations—an age-old assumption in the villages that a niece would eventually marry her maternal uncle.

My mother, a vision of beauty, tall and fair, was a sight to behold even in her moment of fatigue. Though pale and tired from the trials of labor, her face glowed with a blend of pride and happiness as she held me close to her heart.

My father, a lecturer with IIT Bombay, was dark and handsome, his voice warm and reassuring. In his first letter to my mother post my birth, he penned joyfully, “I understand my daughter has been born with my color. Well, I do not expect her to be Miss India or Miss Universe. I will love her for life.”

And he meant every word. He and my mother proved it every single day—through struggles, sacrifices, and small acts of quiet support. They were my backbone, my shield, and my strength. If I stand tall today, it is because I was carried on the shoulders of two people who never let go of my hand.

Strange things happened, however. Initially dark-skinned, I transformed into a fair, pink, chubby infant within weeks—a delightful surprise for my parents.

Chapter 5:

Growing Up in a Mini India



By the time I was born, my father had moved to the pristine IIT campus in Powai. We were allotted quarters—simple, functional, and surrounded by the lush green spaces that made the campus feel like a world of its own. IIT Powai in those days was more than just an academic hub—it was a mini India. Families from every corner of the country lived there, bringing their languages, cuisines, and customs with them. Neighbours became friends, and friends became extended family.

Dad's institute was just a short walk from our home, and my childhood friendships bloomed in the neighbouring quarters and buildings. We roamed freely, our world bounded by the safe, leafy streets of the campus. There was always a game to play, a tree to climb, or a festival to celebrate.

I was always given first priority in everything—a privilege I didn't fully grasp at the time but now look back on with gratitude. If there were cashewnuts in the upma, they would find their way into my plate first. If I wanted a cycle, my father made sure I had it. They may not have had much in material terms, but for me, nothing ever felt lacking.

After my birth, my father made the bold decision to pursue his PhD. It meant long hours at the institute, buried in research, sometimes leaving early in the morning and returning only late at night. My mother, left to care for me on her own for much of the day, became my anchor and my constant companion. She filled my world with stories, routines, and the security of knowing that I was always loved and protected.

The IIT campus was the backdrop to my earliest lessons in life—how to mix with people from different cultures, how to value education, and how to carry yourself with quiet pride. Those years in Powai weren't just my childhood; they were the foundation of my worldview.

Chapter 6: Early Childhood



A couple of years later, the scene shifted to a verdant campus in a bustling metro city. Here, I was in my element—a gregarious, carefree child, the apple of my father’s eye and a source of worry for my mother. I had developed a habit of vanishing to spend time with friends without so much as a word, much to her dismay. My extroverted nature allowed me to forge connections with strangers effortlessly, sending my mother into a state of perpetual worry.

I recall my mother narrating an amusing incident during my school interview: instead of reciting a nursery rhyme, I confidently belted out a romantic film song, leaving the interviewing committee both amused and shocked. It seemed my romantic streak had arrived early.

I was a child who lived half in her books and half in her imagination. The stories I read opened doors to

other worlds—palaces, battles, adventures, romances. I could lose myself for hours, curled up in a corner with a book, while the world around me faded into the background. In those pages, I was free to be anyone—an explorer, a queen, a warrior, even a dreamer chasing clouds.

But when I wasn't inside those imagined worlds, I was very much alive in the real one, and often in ways that worried Mummy endlessly. I was a tomboy, always running, climbing, laughing too loudly, skidding my knees, or sneaking off with friends on small adventures. To me, the world outside our home was another playground, and I was eager to test its boundaries.

Mummy, though, saw it differently. To her, I was her only child—her precious one after the miscarriages that had followed my birth. She had poured every bit of her heart and soul into me. And so, whenever I slipped away too long, her heart would begin to pound with fear. She would become frantic, searching the streets, calling my name, her face etched with worry until she found me again. I never understood her anxiety then; I thought it was fussing. But today, I recognize it for what it was—the raw love of a mother whose whole world was bound up in her child.

Looking back, I see how different we were. I was restless, reckless, untamed by rules, a girl who wanted to climb trees and race the boys. She, on the other hand,

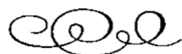
was careful, grounded, and deeply protective. Yet, instead of crushing my spirit, she tried—sometimes sternly, sometimes tenderly—to guide it. She scolded me, yes, but her arms were always open when I came running back, disheveled and beaming.

That balance between us—the wildness of my imagination and her unshakable care—defined our bond in those years. I lived as though the world belonged to me, while she lived as though her only purpose was to keep me safe within it. And somehow, between my books, my adventures, and her love, I grew up feeling that nothing was impossible, because there was always Mummy to steady me when I stumbled.

Books were my other great love. I devoured novels so relentlessly that my report cards often read: *lives in an imaginary world*. Between friends, cycling, reading, and school, my days were joyously full. My tomboy spirit thrived on adventure, and my best friends were my bicycle, my bookshelf, and my playmates.

Chapter 7:

Sacrifices and the sound of Peacocks



My mother, a vision of beauty—tall, fair, and elegant—was not just admired for her looks but also for her intellect and determination.

After marriage, Mummy did not allow her world to shrink into only domestic duties. She had already completed her B.A. before marriage, but settling into Bombay gave her fresh determination. She enrolled in a distance-learning Master's program at SNDT University, juggling household responsibilities with long hours of study. I remember how she would sit late into the night with her books, her eyes heavy with fatigue but her spirit unbroken. Education for her was not simply about a degree—it was about dignity, independence, and the ability to stand on her own feet.

Once she earned her Master's degree, Mummy was ready to step into the role she had long dreamed of: becoming a teacher. But every path has its hurdles. When she applied, schools told her that a B.Ed. was a compulsory prerequisite. Many in her place might have given up, but Mummy was not built that way. She decided she would go wherever it took to fulfill this requirement, even if it meant leaving Bombay for a while.

And so, our lives took an unexpected turn to Vizianagaram, where she enrolled in M.R. College for her B.Ed. She could not bear the thought of leaving me behind, even though I was just in Standard 1, so she withdrew me from school and took me along. For her, education and motherhood were not separate journeys—she carried both together, side by side.

In Vizianagaram, she rented a small room inside a vast, timeworn Maharaja's palace. To others it may have seemed inconvenient or even strange, but for me, it was magical. Our room was modest—just one space that doubled as kitchen and bedroom. The mornings carried the smell of rice boiling on a small kerosene stove, the evenings were lit dimly, and yet the palace walls held secrets and echoes of grandeur.

My aunt, Varalupinni as I called her, joined us and became my companion while Mummy went to college each day. She looked after me tenderly, making sure I

ate, studied, and played, while Mummy devoted herself to her classes. To keep me occupied, I was admitted into a local school. But honestly, my strongest memories are not of classrooms, but of chasing peacocks across the palace grounds, their shimmering feathers trailing like rainbows as I ran behind them with the innocence of a child.

I didn't realize it then, but that year taught me my first lessons in sacrifice and resilience. While I played freely in those wide palace gardens, Mummy was battling fatigue, commuting daily, and pouring herself into studies that would open the doors for her career. She was building a foundation—not just for herself, but for me too.

After a year, her hard work bore fruit. She earned her B.Ed. degree, and with relief and joy, we returned to Bombay. Yet, reality had another obstacle waiting: my school refused to recognize the year I had studied in Vizianagaram. I was asked to repeat Standard 1. At the time, I felt like I had lost something precious, as though I had been left behind. But today, I see it differently—it became a symbol of my mother's determination. She was willing to risk disruption in her own life and mine, because she believed so strongly in the value of education.

That year in Vizianagaram remains etched in my heart—a chapter of palace walls, peacock feathers, my

aunt's gentle care, and above all, a mother who showed me that strength means moving forward, no matter how many times you have to start again.

This dedication for education eventually led her to take up a teaching position at St. Joseph's High School in Marol, Andheri, where she would leave a lasting impact on countless young minds. Her School was about twenty kilometres away from home. She rose early each morning to prepare breakfast, pack lunches, and still reach her school before 9 AM. My father's institute and my school were within walking distance of home, making life easier. After school, I would toss my bag aside, change clothes, grab a snack, and slide down the bannister—my “official lift”—before running to my best friend's house. Evening playtime was sacred until the sun went down.

Bedtime meant curling up with a novel or listening to ABBA and Boney M on my Philips tape recorder—my father would often tiptoe in later to turn it off.

Chapter 8:

Summers of love and laughter



Mummy's life after my birth was not without its sorrows. She suffered a couple of miscarriages, and after that, both my parents decided not to try for more children. I was to be their only one, and perhaps that is why their love and dreams were poured into me with such fullness.

One of my earliest memories from childhood was of Saidas Uncle. I must have been around five or six when he arrived at our house in Bombay. He had just completed his B.Sc. in Rajahmundry and was sent to the city to make a living. He was a distant cousin of Mummy's, and when he came to her, seeking help with both work and accommodation, my parents welcomed him without hesitation.

I still remember his earnestness—hope in his eyes, uncertainty in his steps. He managed to secure a job as a

lab assistant at Kendriya Vidyalaya, and from there, his story became one of grit and determination. Slowly, through hard work and persistence, he rose to become a big business magnate in Bangalore. Yet, despite his success, he never forgot the hand that steadied him when he first stumbled into the city. He always called Mummy his goddess, a reminder of how one act of kindness can shape a life forever. We attended his wedding, shared many moments of joy with him, and years later, when I set up my own plant, he stood by me as a guarantor, continuing the bond that had begun in trust and affection.

Mummy's generosity, however, was not limited to distant relatives. My father's elder brother lost his wife at a young age, leaving my three cousins without a mother. Every summer, they would come to Bombay and stay with us. To Mummy, they were never just nieces and nephews—they were her own children. She cared for them with the same sincerity and affection she gave me, often putting aside her own rest.

Those summers were busy for her: my exams to prepare for, cousins to look after, and her own pile of paper corrections from school. Four hungry children and an endless list of chores—it could have been overwhelming. And yet, Mummy never let us feel the weight of her struggles. Our days were filled with laughter, games, and that cozy, unspoken sense of belonging that only her presence could create.

At the end of the holidays, our family ritual was to set off by car. First, we would drive to Hyderabad to drop my cousins home, and then continue to Vizag for our own vacation. Those drives themselves were a story—Dad, who loved old cars, would often buy one just for the trip. We would travel all the way to Vizag in that car, packed with luggage, snacks, and chatter, only for him to sell the car there and bring us back by train.

The holidays in Vizag were magical. My grandmother's house was always overflowing with people—maternal cousins, aunts, laughter, and the kind of simple joys that made time slip away unnoticed. We never felt the heat of the Andhra summers; the warmth of family, the fun and frolic, and Mummy's gentle presence made it feel like paradise. And before we knew it, the holidays would end, and Bombay would call us back to routine.

Looking back, I realize how much Mummy managed, quietly and tirelessly, to make those years so full of love—for me, for my cousins, and for everyone who crossed her path. She was at once a mother, a sister, a teacher, and a friend to many, giving of herself without ever asking in return.

Chapter 9: European Sojourn



When I was twelve, my father left for a two-year research program in Europe. My uncle suggested my mother travel alone and leave me in his care, but the thought of her leaving me behind was unbearable. Thankfully, she promised to take me during the summer of 1976—provided I did well in exams. When report card day arrived, she told me I was going regardless. My 76% was enough.

It was my first flight. We traveled via Air India to Amsterdam and then SAS to Copenhagen, where my father greeted us warmly. We settled into a collegium apartment, and I fell in love with Denmark immediately.

A surprise awaited us the next day: the Danish Ministry required I be enrolled in school. All international schools were full, so I began learning Danish with my mother. Initially placed in Class Four, I

was quickly moved to Class Seven, surrounded by fun-loving sixteen-year-olds who helped me with Danish while I helped with English. They took me swimming, hiking, and treated me like a younger sibling.

My thirteenth birthday passed quietly at home—Mom was protective and declined my friends' invitation to take me out. In contrast, Dad made Mom's birthday sparkle with champagne, roses, and a green chiffon sari. Dad was the romantic; Mom was the pragmatist.

I spent a year studying in Denmark, attending festivals, tasting smorgasbord, and learning about Viking heritage. The people were gentle and welcoming, and I treasured every moment.

Chapter 10: The Tomboy Turns Swan



Back in India, teenage life brought new changes. During a hostel beach picnic, I attempted to swim off a cliff despite my poor skills. I floundered until a boy rescued me. It was my first brush with a fluttery, unfamiliar feeling—quickly drowned out by my mother’s scolding.

At sixteen, I had long hair, fair skin, and a figure that hinted at grace. For my birthday, I wore a black chiffon dress and silver heels from Kanpur. The celebration was grand—friends, relatives, laughter, and the warm glow of love filled the air.

As I write about my growing up years with mom, I find myself smiling at the countless ways she filled my life with love and strength.

I was all of seventeen when love came into my life—sudden, sweet, and overwhelming. Eswar and I would steal secret moments together, our meetings tucked away from the eyes of the world, but never from the sharp gaze of my mother. Nothing ever truly escaped her. She found out, of course, and when she did, her disappointment was written across her face in a way that pierced me more deeply than any scolding could.

My father was overseas at the time, and so it was my mother who first carried the burden of discovery. For a woman who guarded me so fiercely, the thought of her only daughter slipping into something as consuming as love—before she was even an adult in her eyes—was terrifying. She was upset, yes, but also protective in her own way.

The day Eswar came home to meet her, his heart open and words honest, he declared to her that he was in love with me. My mother, in all her quiet strength, looked him in the eye and told him firmly that I was still a minor, that my father was not in town, and that until he returned, Eswar had no business being around me. It was not anger so much as conviction—her belief that she was safeguarding me, even if it meant pushing against what I wanted.

When she finally told my father over the crackling phone line, the news cut him deeply. He had always carried big dreams for me—dreams of higher studies, of

academic brilliance, of a future unclouded by distractions. The thought that love had already wrapped itself around me at such a young age felt like a betrayal of all that he had envisioned. The weight of it was so heavy that he sought solace in the wrong place—drinking with his colleague, Dr. Sten Rettrup—trying to drown the sense of helplessness.

And he was not entirely wrong in his fears. Being in love at that age did pull me away from my studies. My heart was elsewhere, and as much as I wanted to, I could not summon the single-minded focus needed to clear the IIT JEE exams. It was love, and it was youth, and it was both beautiful and costly. By sheer luck—or perhaps fate—I found my way into GITAM, where I pursued engineering. Life, as it so often does, unfolded in ways no one could have fully planned.

Through it all, my mother's watchful eyes never left me. Even when she was upset, even when she disapproved, the thread of her love never snapped. She was the guardian of my childhood, the silent keeper of my mistakes, and the first witness to my journey into love and womanhood.

College life at GITAM was a new chapter, but not an easy one. The campus buzzed with energy, friendships, and the beginnings of adulthood, yet I felt adrift. I was away from home for the first time, and the absence of the familiar left me aching. At first, I called it

homesickness, but soon I realized it was more than that—I was lovesick. My thoughts circled endlessly back to Eswar. Every lecture, every hostel evening, every meal in the mess hall felt incomplete without him.

While my peers were busy diving into books, projects, and late-night laughter, I wrestled with an emptiness that only deepened with time. Letters and phone calls weren't enough. I longed for permanence, for certainty, for the comfort of knowing that he was mine and I was his, without the shadow of disapproval hanging over us.

It was then that I did what most daughters would never dare—I pushed, pleaded, and all but forced my parents into agreeing to my marriage. I was barely out of my second year, my life still unfolding, but my heart refused to wait. My parents resisted, of course. They had always imagined a different trajectory for me—graduate studies, career, a life built on independence and achievements. To them, marriage at that stage meant compromise, a detour too sharp to correct.

But I was relentless. My mother, caught between her own instincts and the stubborn will of her only child, finally gave in. She must have known, deep inside, that resisting me would only break the fragile bond we shared. For her, it wasn't surrender—it was sacrifice. She chose to stand by me, even if it meant watching the future she had envisioned for me take a different shape.

Looking back now, I can see how much courage it took for her to bend. To let go of her dreams for mine, even when she doubted my choices. To walk beside me, even when she feared I was walking too fast, too young, and perhaps toward heartache. She didn't just give me away in marriage—she gave me the freedom to carve my own life, mistakes and all.

At seventeen, love had felt like rebellion. At nineteen, it became my destiny. And through it all, my mother was there—first as the voice of resistance, then as the quiet strength that held me up when I thought I knew best.

Love marriage and Arjun A Daughter's Leap, A Mother's Embrace

The wedding came sooner than my parents had ever imagined it would. For them, it wasn't just about the rituals or the match—it was about watching their daughter step into womanhood before she had fully finished being a girl. My father, though reluctant at first, eventually accepted the inevitability. My mother, as always, carried the heaviest part of the journey within her heart.

I can still picture her in those days leading up to the ceremony. She was everywhere at once—overseeing arrangements, managing relatives, ensuring traditions were upheld—yet beneath her efficiency was a current of worry and tenderness. She smiled, but her eyes often

lingered on me, searching, questioning, as if trying to measure whether I was truly ready for the leap I was about to take.

On the day itself, as the rituals unfolded, I felt a strange mix of excitement and fear. The colors, the music, the scent of flowers and incense—all of it wrapped around me, yet my mind kept drifting back to my mother. She stood by me like a pillar, making sure I was adorned just right, whispering gentle reminders, smoothing every crease in my sari and in my nerves. To everyone else, she was the dutiful mother of the bride. To me, she was my anchor, silently reminding me that even as I stepped into a new life, I was still her daughter.

When the moment came for her to give me away, I saw her struggle. Her hands were steady, but her heart wasn't. For years she had been the shield between me and the world—scolding, guiding, worrying, protecting. Now she had to let go, to hand me over to someone else's care, someone she wasn't sure could love me the way she did. That moment was not just about tradition; it was about a mother's deepest fear and greatest act of love—releasing her child into the unknown.

For me, the wedding was a dream fulfilled. For her, it was a quiet heartbreak she masked with grace. Yet she never let me feel her pain. She celebrated me, supported me, and carried me into that new chapter with all the dignity and love she had always given.

Looking back, I realize my wedding was not just the union of two people—it was also a turning point in the bond between my mother and me. I was no longer just her little girl who needed guarding; I was a wife now, with responsibilities of my own. And yet, in her eyes, I would always remain that child she once held close, the one she worried about when I stayed out too long, the one she tried to protect from falling in love too soon.

Both my parents carried a silent weight of worry about my marriage. On one hand, they respected Eswar's family deeply—his father, my late father-in-law, was a towering figure in the pharmaceutical industry, highly regarded for his knowledge and leadership. Yet behind that respect lay unease. His family came from a conservative background, worlds apart from the freer, more open environment in which I had been raised. My parents knew me well—I was soft by nature, sheltered in many ways, and they feared whether I could truly adapt to a household bound by stricter traditions.

What troubled them even more were Eswar's drinking habits, something they had noticed early on. To them, it was a red flag that could shadow my future happiness. They never said these things to me harshly; their love wouldn't allow that. But in their silences, their glances, and in the caution of their words, I could feel their fears. Still, once the marriage was set, they stood firmly behind me, doing everything they could to see me through.

Life carried me forward quickly. I finished my engineering, and in my final year, Arjun came into my world—my firstborn, my joy. Those months were a blur of balancing studies with motherhood, of sleepless nights and examination mornings. In those moments, my mother became my lifeline once again. She took leave from work for two months, coming down to Vizag to cradle me through the chaos, to hold Arjun when my arms grew tired, to remind me that I was not alone. Her presence was not just practical—it was emotional, a reminder that even though I was a wife and mother now, I was still her child who needed her.

But duty called her back to Bombay. Work had always been a part of her identity, and she couldn't remain away for too long. So, after much discussion, it was decided that Arjun would stay with my parents in Bombay while Eswar and I continued in Vizag. It was not an easy decision, but in hindsight, it was the best one. My parents poured all their love into him. Despite their busy schedules, they found joy in every gurgle, every first step, every word. To them, Arjun wasn't just a grandson—he was a second chance at parenting, a new sunshine in their lives. He became the apple of their eyes, the center of their world.

When my studies were finally done, I realized something important: Arjun wasn't truly happy in Vizag. He was more at ease, more alive, in Bombay with my parents. His bond with them was already deep and

natural, and I couldn't bear to pull him away from that joy. And so, I chose to return to Mumbai, to bring my life closer to theirs once again.

Looking back, I see how much of my journey was shaped not only by the choices I made, but also by the love and sacrifices my parents quietly wove into every stage of my life. They had worried, they had feared, but in the end, they gave me space to make my own decisions while cushioning me with their unwavering support.

Rose coloured Dreams to Reality, when my mother gave up her dreams to build mine

By the time I returned to Bombay, the rose-colored glasses of romance had slipped quietly off my eyes. The glow of young love had dimmed under the weight of responsibility, and the need for independence—both personal and financial—loomed larger than ever before. I was no longer just a daughter or a wife; I was a mother, a woman, and I felt the urgent pull to carve out an identity of my own.

Once again, my parents became my anchor. They understood my restlessness, my hunger for purpose, even before I fully expressed it. With their encouragement, I joined my very first job. The pay was meager, hardly enough to meet even the basics, but for me it wasn't about the salary—it was about standing on my own feet.

At the same time, life was growing complicated. My father-in-law, a highly respected senior executive in a big

pharmaceutical company, had been transferred to Mumbai. We lived with my in-laws, and while there was a sense of security in being part of a larger household, it also brought its own challenges. My father-in-law, steeped in his conservative values, frowned upon the idea of me working. A woman's place, in his view, was firmly within the home, tending to her children and family. But I couldn't let that vision cage me.

With my father's encouragement, I decided to step out on my own and began exporting gems and jewellery. It was a bold experiment, but one that gave me a taste of independence I had long craved. Just when life seemed to find a rhythm, everything changed.

In 1991, my father was diagnosed with a heart condition that required bypass surgery. The news shook us all, but it was my mother who bore the heaviest blow. Watching her partner, her steady companion, go through such uncertainty took its toll. She had always been a woman of immense strength, a teacher deeply devoted to her students, her novels, and her independence. But the stress of those months triggered something irreversible—her eyesight began to fail. Retinal vision loss crept in, dimming the world for a woman who had once devoured books with such joy. Suddenly, she had to make a heartbreaking choice: to let go of her profession, to step back from her beloved teaching, because she could no longer correct papers or manage her duties the way she always had.

My father's surgery, thankfully, went well. Around the same time, life brought me both joy and responsibility in equal measure—I was pregnant with my second child. In 1992, I gave birth to my son Krishna, and with his arrival, my role as a mother deepened, even as my role as a woman seeking independence grew more urgent.

It was also the year that fate nudged me toward my true calling. An opportunity opened up in the pharmaceutical field—a job that felt both promising and daunting. The irony was not lost on me: it was in the very same company where my father-in-law worked. What might have been a matter of pride for another family turned into a storm for ours.

My father-in-law was adamantly against the idea. He told me bluntly that if I took up the position, I would have to find alternate arrangements for my children because he would not permit my mother-in-law to shoulder their care. His words stung, but they also crystallized my resolve. I needed this job. With two children, and with a husband sinking deeper into alcohol, my future could not depend on fragile ground. I had to build something strong, something lasting, for myself and for my boys.

And once again, it was my parents—my eternal safety net—who stepped in. My mother, already grappling with the loss of her eyesight and her career, made the most

selfless decision of all. She opted for voluntary retirement, choosing to dedicate herself entirely to caring for Arjun and Krishna so that I could step out and chase the career that would one day become my life's work.

I look back on that time with a mix of gratitude and awe. My mother, who had once feared that young love would derail my studies, now stood behind me as I rebuilt myself, one determined step at a time. She gave up her own career so mine could flourish. She gave up her books, her classroom, her independence—but in doing so, she gave me wings.

Stepping into the pharmaceutical industry was like walking into a whole new world. The work was demanding, the expectations high, and the learning curve steep. I was a young mother of two, uncertain of the road ahead, but determined to hold my ground. Every day felt like a test of endurance—balancing boardroom pressures with the quiet weight of motherhood.

What made it possible was the unshakable support I had behind me. While I was fighting for a foothold in my career, my mother was the one holding the fort at home. She had given up her own profession, her books, and even her independence, to make sure Arjun and Krishna grew up in a cocoon of love and security. Her days revolved around their meals, their lessons, their

laughter and tears—every detail of their childhood carried her touch.

I often wondered how she found the strength. With her eyesight failing, she must have felt the sting of losing the world she once knew so well—the fine print of novels, the handwritten answer sheets of students, even the small pleasures of reading a newspaper on her own. Yet she never let her grief spill into our lives. To the boys, she was a grandmother full of stories, warmth, and unwavering presence. To me, she was still my mother—guiding, protecting, and silently cheering me on.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere at home remained complicated. My father-in-law's disapproval of my working never really faded, and Eswar's drinking continued to cast a long shadow over our lives. There were nights when I felt crushed under the weight of it all, wondering if I had chosen too difficult a path. But every morning, I rose again, driven by the thought that my children deserved better, and that I had to build a life strong enough to withstand the storms.

In the office, I began to grow. The pharmaceutical world fascinated me—the science, the innovation, the possibility of creating something meaningful. Slowly, my work was noticed. Opportunities began to open, and I seized them, even when they came with sacrifice. My career became not just a job, but a mission—to prove to

myself, to my children, and perhaps even to those who doubted me, that I could stand tall.

Through it all, my parents remained my constant. My father, after his surgery, was more cautious with his health but no less engaged with life. He encouraged me at every step, offering the kind of practical advice that steadied me. My mother, though increasingly limited in what she could do for herself, poured her entire being into giving me the space to climb.

Looking back, I realize that those years were the crucible in which my life was forged. I was no longer the seventeen-year-old girl in love, nor the homesick student, nor the young bride. I was a woman—shaped by challenges, lifted by sacrifices, and propelled forward by a mother's love that knew no bounds.

The youngest General Manager, A Daughter's Rise, A mother's Resolve

My career began to take on a new shape and momentum. From working as an Exports Manager at Armour Chemicals, I climbed steadily, learning the ropes of an industry that was still heavily male-dominated. When I was offered the position of General Manager at Ajanta Pharma, I carried not only the title but also the pride of being recognized as the youngest GM in a space where women were often relegated to the margins. For me, it was more than an achievement—it was a declaration that I belonged, that hard work and

determination could carve space even in the hardest of places.

In 1995, another turning point arrived with the passing of my father-in-law. His death closed one chapter but opened another. Eswar, in search of better prospects, shifted to Ankleshwar, leaving me more deeply entangled in my own career path in Bombay. The children, my work, and the responsibilities of life all pressed in on me, and once again, it was my parents who gave me the grounding I needed. Without their support—practical, emotional, and moral—I don't think I could have achieved what I did. They were the net that caught me every time I stumbled, the cushion that softened every hard fall.

There were moments, more than once, when I felt the pull to break free of my marriage. Eswar's struggles with alcohol, the growing distance between us, and the sheer weight of being both breadwinner and emotional anchor left me wondering whether divorce was the only way to reclaim peace. My heart told me one thing, but my circumstances told me another.

It was my mother who became the strongest voice in those turbulent moments. She was dead against the idea of divorce. To her, marriage was not just about two individuals but about a family, about children, about the sanctity of bonds even when they were tested to their limits. She felt strongly that separating from Eswar would

not be right—not for me, not for Arjun and Krishna. Her words carried authority born not of stubbornness, but of love and a deeply ingrained belief in the institution of family.

Looking back, I see how her conviction shaped my choices. At times, I resented her firmness. I longed for her to say, “Do what makes you happy.” Instead, she reminded me of responsibility, of endurance, of the long view rather than the short relief. In her own way, she kept me tethered to a path that might have seemed harder at the time but perhaps preserved more than it broke.

Through it all, I kept building—my career, my resilience, my children’s future. And behind me, as always, stood my parents, carrying the weight of my world so that I could keep moving forward.

Roots of Murli Krishna Pharma , Sacrifices that built life into a company

The birth of Murli Krishna Pharma was not just a turning point in my life—it was a transformation for my entire family. Dreams demand sacrifices, and mine demanded more than most. I had reached a stage where my work required constant travel—fundraising, meeting new customers, convincing people to believe in a vision that had not yet materialized. For that, I needed my parents close to the plant, close to my children, close to the very heart of this new venture.

It was not a small ask. My parents had built their lives in Bombay. They had their routines, their comforts, their friends. After my father's retirement, their plan had always been to return to Andhra, to spend their years in familiar surroundings, among people they had known all their lives. Instead, I pulled them into an unknown, dusty little town in Maharashtra—Shirur. It was far from the life they had envisioned, far from the world they loved.

To make matters harder, my younger son Krishna had to be transplanted from bustling Bombay to Shirur. For a young boy used to the energy of the city, the change must have been bewildering. And yet, without complaint, my parents gathered him under their wing and gave him a home filled with warmth, even in a place that felt strange.

But the sacrifices didn't stop there. My parents went beyond giving their time and presence—they gave their very savings. All their pension funds, all that they had carefully set aside for their own twilight years, they poured into Murli Krishna Pharma. What was meant to give them comfort in retirement instead became the seed capital for my dreams. They never once made me feel guilty for it. They never once reminded me of what they had given up. They simply stood by me, quietly determined to see me succeed.

My father threw himself into the R&D with the same intensity he had once poured into his own career. His scientific mind, his discipline, his ability to think clearly in moments of doubt became an invaluable pillar of the company. My mother, despite her eyesight challenges and the limitations she had begun to face, took charge of administration, finance, and purchases. She managed suppliers, balanced accounts, and kept the machinery of the company turning in ways I could never have managed alone.

Meanwhile, Arjun was grown enough to begin carving his own path. He stayed back in Bombay, pursuing engineering at Atharva College, while we anchored ourselves in Shirur. It was a strange division of family, but one stitched together with purpose.

Looking back now, I realize how extraordinary those years were. Murli Krishna Pharma was never just my company—it was our family's shared mission. My parents, who should have been resting, reading, traveling, and enjoying their grandchildren, instead found themselves running operations in a remote town. My mother, who had once loved her teaching and her novels, now counted bills, signed purchase orders, and kept a sharp eye on expenses. She had reinvented herself completely, because I needed her to.

It is no exaggeration to say that without my mother and father, Murli Krishna Pharma would not have been

born. Their sacrifices—their savings, their time, their dreams—were the true foundation upon which the company stood. And their love was the invisible force that kept me going through the sleepless nights, the constant travel, and the crushing uncertainties of entrepreneurship.

While my parents were the pillars who steadied the home front, Eswar too played his part in the building of Murli Krishna Pharma. For all the struggles our marriage had endured, in those days he stood beside me when it mattered. He contributed money towards the company's foundation and, more importantly, worked tirelessly in setting up the plant. His knowledge, his presence, and his ability to get things moving on the ground became vital in those fragile beginnings.

But those early days in Shirur were anything but easy. The MIDC was a barren stretch then—industrial plots marked out in dust, the air heavy with the scent of chemicals, and hardly any signs of comfort. Even a simple cup of decent tea was impossible to find, let alone the amenities one associates with city life. We lived without the luxuries of Bombay or the familiar warmth of Andhra, constantly improvising to make life livable.

There were days when exhaustion and doubt pressed down heavily, when I wondered if I had asked too much of everyone I loved. Yet, somehow, we managed to draw strength from each other. My parents,

Eswar, my children—all became part of this shared experiment, this gamble that consumed our lives.

And in the middle of this barren landscape, something extraordinary was beginning to grow—not just a company, but a story of grit, sacrifice, and relentless determination.

Chapter 11:

When Life Demanded Everything



Life at Murli Krishna Pharma had begun to take shape, but the road was still harsh. The company was growing, and so was I, yet every step forward seemed to demand a new kind of strength. Somewhere along the way, I had stopped asking for life to get easier—I simply became tougher.

In the middle of this whirlwind stood Krishna, at the peak of his teenage storms. My parents bore the brunt of his moods, his tantrums, his rebellion against the world. They had already sacrificed so much for me and the company, yet they quietly absorbed his frustrations too. Their patience was tested again and again, but they never once wavered in their love for him.

When it was time for his 10th standard, my parents shifted base once more, this time to Pune, so that Krishna could receive better coaching for entrance

exams. Later, they even went with him to Vizag. Vizag was not an unfamiliar place—it was where all my relatives lived, a city filled with the comfort of extended family and childhood ties. But for my parents, it was still another uprooting, another adjustment, another selfless act to ensure Krishna had the best chance.

They stayed with him there so that he could attend a reputed coaching class and prepare for the JEE entrance exams. Eventually, Krishna chose medicine, and his journey took him to Debrecen University in Hungary. My father, despite his age and health, traveled with him and stayed until Krishna could adjust to the rhythms of a foreign land. Later, when Krishna moved on to the UK, my father's presence and guidance gave him the courage to find his footing there as well.

Through all this, my mother anchored everything else. She kept the household steady, she supported me as my career consumed me, and she gave my children the love and balance they needed. Even as her own health and eyesight began to falter, she refused to let us feel it—she simply kept giving.

But then came the storm years. In 2013, tragedy struck when Eswar passed away due to multiple organ failure. For all the turbulence of our marriage, his death left a void that shook me deeply. A part of my past, a part of my story, was gone. I found myself at a crossroads, contemplating remarriage, wondering if companionship might help me face the years ahead.

Surprisingly, my father supported me. He told me that life was too long to walk alone, that I deserved happiness and a partner. But this idea tore open a rift within the family. Arjun, my elder son, was fiercely opposed. His anger spilled into a painful conflict with my father—the very grandfather who had adored him beyond words. The two of them, once inseparable, could no longer see eye to eye.

And then, just a year later, life dealt another cruel blow. In 2014, my father passed away from cancer. The grief of losing him was almost unbearable. But layered on top of that was the sorrow that he and Arjun had not reconciled before the end. That wound remains open in Arjun's heart even today—a regret that shadows him, because he lost not just his grandfather but the chance to make peace with him.

In the space of two years, I had lost my husband, my father, and the easy harmony of my family. It felt as though the ground beneath me had split open. Yet in that darkness, it was my mother who quietly, steadfastly, held us together. Her resilience, her acceptance of life's cruelties without bitterness, and her unwavering love became the glue that kept us from breaking apart entirely. She had already given up so much—her career, her dreams, her savings—but even in grief, she remained our anchor.

Chapter 12:

A Rock, a Glow, and a Final Gift



After losing my father and Eswar, our family of six had become four. Life felt hollow, and the responsibilities pressing on me were heavier than ever. Arjun wanted to go to the US for his master's, Krishna was studying overseas, and both paths required immense financial support, even as I continued to shoulder the demands of running the plant.

Through it all, my mother remained my unshakable strength. She never once let her own pain show, never complained about the burdens that seemed endless. Instead, she stood beside me like a rock, taking over the complete administration, purchase, and finance at Murli Krishna Pharma. By doing so, she freed me to focus on running the plant in the right direction. Those were some of the toughest years of our lives, but together, we weathered them. Life, somehow, moved on.

Fast forward to 2020. Krishna was preparing to join Cambridge University for his PhD, and he expressed his desire to get married. It was me and mom who found him a wonderful match through a marriage platform. When he met Haritha, he liked her instantly, and they got engaged in August 2020. I can still remember the glow on my mother's face that day—pure happiness radiating from her as though she had been waiting for this moment all her life.

Haritha moved to Shirur in November 2020, and with her came light. The house that had fallen silent after my father's death suddenly bloomed again—with laughter, curiosity, youth, and the sound of festivals being celebrated once more. Haritha followed both me and mom around, learning, listening, and adding her own spark. To Haritha, my mother became “Nannamma,” a second mother, protective and affectionate, while I was the “Athayya.” Mom fussed over her, kept her shielded, and though she didn't like me taking Haritha to social gatherings, she rejoiced in seeing her travel with me around the world. Under my guidance and mom's watchful eyes, Haritha blossomed into a fine Business Development professional at MKPPL.

The wedding finally took place in May 2022 at the sacred Tirumala hills. My mother was in her full element. Despite her age and ailments, she ensured that every ceremony was conducted with grace and dignity, and that every guest felt cared for. Her pride and joy glowed

brighter than ever, for she had seen her grandson step into a new chapter of life.

Around this time, we also built a new house in Shirur with a lift, keeping her knee problem in mind. She was deeply involved in every detail, and her sharpness showed even in business matters. During our new capacity expansions at MKP, it was mom who saved the company over 1 million USD, negotiating and re-checking costs after the purchase department's efforts. She never let her contribution diminish; she stayed relevant, active, and vital.

Her last travels were to Bangkok in January 2023 and to Dubai in July 2023—memories she cherished, even as her health began to falter. Soon after, she was diagnosed with cancer. It was a battle that would test her more than anything else, but she refused to give in easily. She endured radiation, chemotherapy, and unrelenting pain with only one goal in mind: to live long enough to see her family at their peak. She wanted to be there for my awards, for Krishna's PhD, for Arjun's successes in Canada. She carried one sorrow—the wish to see Arjun married, a wish left unfulfilled. She met him last in January 2024, and that meeting stayed etched in her heart.

Her greatest joy came when Haritha became pregnant. She clung to life with renewed purpose, making plans on how she would guide her great-

grandchild, how she would fill another generation with her wisdom and love. Even when her body was failing, her spirit fought fiercely.

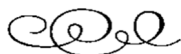
In August 2024, she underwent an emergency surgery and barely survived. On September 21st, she returned home, fragile but alive. On September 23rd, Maya was born—her great-granddaughter, her final gift from life. On September 24th, she saw Maya for the first time, and a reason to live returned to her. Though bedridden, she drew immense joy from watching Maya's tiny face, holding her close, and blessing her with every ounce of love left in her heart.

She insisted on personally overseeing the baby's naming ceremony, gifting Maya a gold bowl as though passing down a piece of her legacy. She watched her great-granddaughter's Annaprasanna with pride. For a brief, shining time, the baby's presence brought my mother back to life, giving her happiness despite the unrelenting pain.

But in the end, even her willpower could not triumph over the disease. As the pain grew beyond endurance, her body began to give way. She had lived for us, fought for us, sacrificed for us—but now it was time for her to rest.

Chapter 13:

Goodbye, my strength-A farewell of Love



On August 12, my mother's earthly journey came to an end. That day, everything around me felt still, as though the world itself had stopped to honor her. Even now, it feels unreal to put these words down, as if by writing them I make them more permanent. Losing her was not just losing a parent — it was losing my anchor, my confidante, the person who held every part of me together.

And yet, even in her passing, she left behind an unshakable presence. I feel her in every memory, in every value she instilled in me, in the quiet strength she passed on. Her absence is profound, but so is her everlasting influence on my life.

So while August 12 will always remain the day my world shifted, it is also the day I realized that love does not end with a heartbeat. My mother's love lives on – in me, in everyone she touched, and in the countless lives she made brighter simply by being herself.

The farewell she received was a reflection of that love. On that day, her nieces and nephews stood shoulder to shoulder with her grandchildren and even her great-grandchild, all united in grief but also in pride. Her employees – who had always seen her not just as a leader but as a mother figure – were there, too, along with friends, neighbors, and countless others whose lives she had quietly touched.

It was not an ordinary funeral. It felt as if the entire town had gathered. Cavalcades of bikes and cars trailed behind the Vaikuntha Rath as it carried her gently on her last journey. Showers of flowers rained down upon her, as though the earth itself wanted to bow in gratitude. The air was heavy with both tears and reverence.

I remember standing there, watching wave after wave of people arrive, and feeling overwhelmed. I hadn't expected such numbers. But in that moment, I understood something deeply – my mother's life had never been small, never confined to our family alone. She had quietly built a legacy of love, respect, and strength that reached far beyond what I had imagined.

Her farewell was not only an end but also a testament to the life she lived – one that left an imprint on everyone she met. In those moments, I realized that while her physical presence had left us, her story was far from over. It continues to live on in every memory, every lesson, every act of love she gave.

The farewell was not just a ritual; it was a reminder of how deeply she had shaped my life. As I watched the final moments of the ceremony, memories came rushing in—not of her illness or frailty, but of the countless times she had been my pillar of strength.

Mummy was never just my mother; she was my shield, my guide, and my silent companion in every step of life. When I stumbled, she steadied me. When I doubted myself, she filled me with courage. When the world seemed harsh, she softened it with her love.

Even in her quiet ways, she was a force—teaching me that true strength doesn't need noise or show. It is in patience, in resilience, in holding on to hope when everything else seems to fade. That strength became the foundation of my own life, the gift she left me to carry forward.

Now, in her absence, I understand even more the depth of what she was to me. She was not only the heart of our home but the compass of my soul. Losing her feels like losing the ground beneath my feet, and yet, I know she is still within me. Her strength has become mine, and

her love will remain the unseen hand that steadies me
for the rest of my life.

Mummy was, and always will be, my strength—my
forever guide in this journey.

Blog from my father:



This piece was penned by my late father, Dr. Challa R. Sarma, Emeritus Scientist, IIT Bombay, in February 2014. To me, he was more than a father — he was my first teacher, my greatest mentor, a wellspring of wisdom, and above all, a deeply humane and grounded soul. Though he left us on 2 March 2014 at 3:00 a.m. at Hinduja Hospital, Mumbai, he remains alive in the hearts and memories of his students, colleagues, and family.

As I share his words today, I do so with a prayer — that someone, somewhere, may stumble upon this blog and find the courage to give up the “cancer stick.” For my father, cigarettes began as a seemingly harmless habit and grew into a lifelong struggle that cost him his health, his peace, and ultimately, his life. Daddy, I miss you. I try, each day, to see the world through your eyes, and I hope I have inherited at least a fragment of your ability to face life’s uncertainties with wisdom and grace.

Myself and My Cigarette(s)

The story begins in Madras (now Chennai) of the 1940s. I was a ten-year-old boy, just admitted to P.S. High School, Mylapore. At that time, Madras was more like a glorified village, and Mylapore was its heart — the center

of culture, learning, and devotion. Its three great landmarks stood out in memory: the ancient Kapaleeswarar Temple with its vast teppakulam (water tank), the bustling Luz Corner, and the serene Santhome Beach.

On weekends, we children often wandered to the beach, relishing snacks sold by hawkers – tenga, manga, batani, and sundal, all tossed together with generous helpings of fiery red chilli powder. Life was simple, joyous, and innocent.

But the world around us was still scarred by the Second World War. Blackouts were routine. Every half hour, the local ARP man would walk down the streets shouting, “Switch off your lights – air raid!” At once, the city would plunge into pitch darkness. And in that darkness, one thing always glowed: the dim, flickering lights of cigarette shops.

These shops were small wonderlands, stacked to the ceiling with brightly illustrated packets: Woodbine, Three Castles, Craven A, Players. I remember watching strangers buy a packet, strike a match, light up, inhale deeply, and exhale in slow streams of smoke – sometimes even forming perfect rings. For us young boys, it was a spectacle, almost magical. And yet, curiously, I did not feel tempted.

Cinema, too, tried its best. In the black-and-white films of the day, villains swaggered across screens, fists

raised, lips curled around a cigarette. Glossy magazines carried back-cover advertisements: the rugged Marlboro man riding into a golden sunset across a cactus-strewn desert, a cigarette clamped firmly in his mouth. None of this tempted me.

It was only years later, in an unlikely setting, that temptation finally caught me.

The scene now shifts to the dusty town of Aligarh, where I had gone to pursue my M.Sc. in Physics. Coming from South India, with its idli-sambar traditions, I found it difficult to adjust to the heavy North Indian fare served at the hostel. Flies swarmed everywhere, making eating an ordeal. We often escaped to Rahmet Mia's hotel, where our standing request was: "Please remove all the flies from the dosa before serving it."

But the greatest torment was the hostel toilet — a primitive set of holes in a raised platform. The stench was overpowering, enough to make one gag and lose whatever little food one had managed to eat. One day, a friend suggested a strange solution: "Buy a pack of Charminar cigarettes. Light one before entering the toilet. The smoke will mask the smell."

I tried it. It worked. And so began a habit that would bind itself to my mornings and, soon, to the rest of my life. By 1955, smoking had become inseparable from my daily routine.

I moved on to IIT Bombay. In 1963, I got married. During our courtship, my future wife asked me, “Do you smoke?” With disarming honesty, I replied, “I am a hard smoker.” But she misheard it as, “I am hardly a smoker.” We married. For her, the truth revealed itself slowly, painfully, and what followed was a lifetime of her gentle warnings, her silent suffering, and my stubbornness.

Smoking became my silent companion — in the laboratory, during long nights of research, in moments of celebration, in hours of stress. It dulled hunger, filled silence, and fooled me into believing it gave me focus. What it truly gave me was disease.

The years rolled on, and my gift from smoking arrived in the form of arterial blockages. I underwent my first bypass surgery. Even then, fifteen days after the operation, I returned to smoking, ignoring my wife’s despair. That bypass lasted ten years. By 2002, I needed another — this time at thrice the cost.

Still, I did not stop. A decade later, I was smoking ten cigarettes a day.

Then came September 2013. One evening, while watching television, I felt my heart racing uncontrollably. My daughter, just home from work, insisted we rush to a hospital. My pulse was 170. Emergency treatment saved me that night, but my troubles had only begun. Heavy blood thinners, strict diets, and endless restrictions followed.

On 15 December 2013, I could barely breathe. Another hospital visit revealed that three-quarters of my right lung was filled with fluid. Tests showed malignant cells. A CT scan, a PET scan, and a painful biopsy confirmed what I had feared: lung cancer.

The treatment that followed was grueling. Though modern medicines were gentler than those of the past, I still endured nausea, loss of appetite, and endless fatigue. The financial toll was staggering – by my estimate, nearly ₹22 lakhs between 1992 and 2014. But the greater toll was the loss of dignity, the weight of suffering, and the silent judgment in the pitying looks of non-smokers.

And so, I ask myself: was it worth it? Was the fleeting pleasure of holding a three-inch tube of burning poison between my lips worth this endless parade of hospitals, bills, and pain? The answer, of course, is no.

At the age of 78, I could only pray:

“May God help me with my request – to take me away with the least possible pain and suffering.”

A Daughter's Reflection

As I reread my father's words, my heart aches. Cigarettes promised glamour, relief, and companionship, but in the end, they only gave him suffering. His story is not unique; it is the story of countless men and women who fall prey to nicotine's false allure.

If you are reading this and you smoke, please pause. Think of the cost — not only in money, but in health, dignity, and in the hearts of those who love you. My father's wisdom, hard-won and painfully written, lives on as a warning. May it save even one life.

Daddy, I carry you with me. I try to see the world through your eyes, to inherit your strength, your humor, your wisdom. I miss you more than words can hold.

MY MOTHER, MY STRENGTH, MY LIFELINE



SATYA RAMANI VADLAMANI



MY MOTHER, MY STRENGTH, MY LIFELINE



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