

## **ON A VISIT TO MY HOME LAND**

**Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ**

“I am a ‘gamadiyo’ (villager). I was born in a village and I grew up in a village.” I told an young Gujarati friend, Albert. But I was shocked with the response of my urban friend. “Fr. Varghese, don’t say, you are a ‘gamadiyo’!” he said.

I have taken Albert and five other young friends to Kerala for enjoying holidays with me in my parental home. My home is situated in a farm land amidst different cultivations and rice-fields in a village called Ennalloor in Ernakulam District. There were no houses around at calling-out distance.

My grandfather’s traditional house was there at a distance of 200 meters from my house. I was born in that traditional house. But when I was about 6 years old my father built a separate house and we were staying separately away from my grandfather’s house. My mother after finishing her works at home went every day to help my grandmother in the family house. My grandfather and my father were every day out working in the fields and so in our joint family we children spent day times in the grandfather’s house. We used to come only for sleeping to the new house.

Between the two houses and the areas around there were rice fields and the plantation of coconuts, arracknuts, cashewnuts and peper. There were also cultivation of different kinds of vegetables. Rice-fields were cultivated twice a year where plenty of water was available. Everything needed for daily home consumption was produced in our fields.

Then, we also kept bullocks for tilling the rice fields, cows and goats for milk for home consumption. We grew also fruits like plantains, papayas, pinapples, mangoes, jack-fruits in our fields. We had everything at home which one finds in middle class farming families. Before I left after studying upto 11th standards I used to help my father in all the farming activities. So I knew farming and I am happy and proud to call myself a “villager” and a son of a farmer.

In my childhood we used to go for our morning duties among the closeby bushes where we also kept pigs in the open. So with a mug of water we also took a stick to keep the pigs away. But while we children reached high school and college for our studies, my father built first time in our village two toilets and a bath room touching our house.

As time passed my uncle, a headmaster of a government school pulled down our traditional house and built a new bungalow. When the new house, built by my father, was 40 years old, a two-storey bungalow with all modern amenities was built by my father and brother in the same location of the first house which had six rooms and long corridors in front and back. In my house and village all things needed are at home or within easy reach as in a city. A road reaches upto my house and there is a car in the car-porch.

Albert and my other friends came to such a house and village and stayed with me for a week. My parents, brother and sister-in-law played very good hosts to them. My friends walked with me around our vast farm lands and saw everything. My father was the first farmer to cultivate rubber plantation in my village. Then within ten to fifteen years rubber plantations came up everywhere

in our region. My young friends were very impressed by the plantations of coconuts, arracknuts, pepper, rubber and rice cultivation.

On one day after returning to Ahmedabad while talking to Albert about the home visit I told him proudly, "I am a 'gamdiyo' (villager). I was born in a village and I grew up in a village." But Albert protested my use of the word 'gamdiyo'. I used the word "villager" for me as I was born and brought up in a village. But in the mind of Albert "villager" means a rustic person and the city people often use the word "villager" in a derogatory way in conversations.

My mother tongue, Malayalam has no equivalent to the word 'gamdiyo' in Gujarati. I used the word 'gamdiyo' (villager) in the sense that I was once a resident of a village. But if I take the situation of Kerala today, in spite of being born and brought up in a village, I cannot use the word 'gamdiyo' in the sense I used it in the past. Kerala villages are no more the villages of the past. Most of the villages have been urbanised with extensive roads and other excellent communication facilities. From any place in Kerala even from remote villages people can contact the whole world through phone and internet. Kerala has become a model state in many areas of development.

I have returned to Ahmedabad after celebrating my mother's 91st birthday at home in October 2007. We, all the nine brothers and sisters, had decided about a year back that all of us would gather at home to celebrate mother's birthday. But due to urgent engagements my two Religious Sisters and one priest brother, who are serving respectively in Panjab, Gujarat and Nagaland could not come home to celebrate mother's birthday. But my three married brothers and one married sister in Kerala decided to celebrate the birthday with inviting other close relatives. As a result more than 120 relatives gathered in my house to celebrate my mother's 91st birthday.

We celebrated mother's birthday in a grand way. In the celebration I realised the development of Kerala over the past two-three decades. Most of our relatives came driving their own cars. In the past like my father the vast majority of my relatives were farmers. But now in every house there are one or more persons employed or doing business. In many houses one or more members are employed abroad and earning well. Before employment was limited to the teaching profession. But now many young men and women are working in India and abroad in areas like technology and engineering. There were also a considerable number of young persons employed in medical profession and there were only very few people in the teaching profession! Like my two brothers there were a considerable number of relatives who were running their own business enterprises.

In my father's time people used to say that if a person has enough rice fields to cultivate, then that person would not die of hunger. But now my three brothers say that it is cheaper and profitable to buy rice than cultivate the rice fields! So one of my brothers has sold his rice fields and bought land for rubber plantation. The rice fields of my two other brothers were lying untilled for the last two years; but this year they have given the vacant rice fields to other farmers to cultivate pineapple for a fixed amount of money.

My recent visit to Kerala proclaims to me from the roof tops that the Kerala of today and the Kerala I left some 45 years back are as different as the sky and the earth! During the last few decades Kerala has progressed by leaps and bounds. Today even though Kerala lacks industries,

the state is pointed out as example of developments especially in educational, social, medical and economic fields.

Kerala was the first state in the whole of India to attain 100 per cent literacy in 1991. In comparison with other states the different religious communities and societies live in peace and harmony in Kerala. Then, the state has the highest rate of per capita roads. Bus and taxi services are very good and they are easily available even in small villages.

Slums and very small hutments are not seen in Kerala. Due to the efforts of developing big and small villages in stead of developing only a few cities and towns, services and other amenities are available in villages or are easily accessible from villages in nearby towns and cities. So people from villages can easily reach nearby towns and cities with ease and speed. They do not feel the need to leave their villages and migrate to the cities. On the other hand, the pure air of villages, clean drinking water and the availability of open space, etc. are attractions to city people and they prefer to go and stay in the villages.

Some three years back a young friend and poet, Sri Prakash Chauhan 'Jelal' came and stayed with me at home. Casually talking he paid a tribute to the development of Kerala. Travelling on highways connecting big cities and other roads connecting villages he said to me: "Here in Kerala traveling from one city to another city or from one village to another village, one does not know where one city or village ends and where another begins because there are houses and other buildings all along the roads!"

I shall give you another example of the development of Kerala. In my teenage I went to Alwaye with my parents. At that time to cover a distance of 50 kilometers we changed buses three times and we took nearly half a day to cover the whole distance and we stayed in a hotel to be able to participate in the ordination ceremony of my uncle on the following day morning. Last time when I went home for my mother's 91st birthday, I got down at Alwaye railway station. With my nephew Sanu who came to pick me up, it took less than one hour to cover 50 kilometer distance between my house and the railway station!

Today there is high unemployment in Kerala because the educated youth do not get jobs according to their qualifications. But those, who are willing to work, get one or other small or big jobs. There is high shortage of labourers in Kerala. So many people not only from the neighbouring states but also from the North Indian states come to Kerala and earn well sharing Kerala's prosperity. Many educated people from Kerala go out of the state and of the country and earn well bringing prosperity to Kerala. (contact the author: [ciss@satyam.net.in](mailto:ciss@satyam.net.in))

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