

My Mother

(A very recent English translation of the original 'Ente Amma' in Malayalam penned down on 26-March -2010)

By : Mrs Rachel Mathai , fondly known as Ushamama



It is not possible for me to think of Amma without tears in my eyes. What is my oldest memory of Amma? Is it about making small kochappams by pouring little portions of dough on the Dosa Tava alongside Amma? Is it about holding on to her new cotton sari, when she got ready to go to school for teaching? Is it about the Amma, who sent small special dishes through me to her own aged mother who was staying in her family house not far from us? Is it about the Amma who waited for us to come back from church on Sundays with warm delicious lunch?

My childhood memories of Amma are too many. Those are lying scattered all over my memory without any order, but each scene from it is so vivid and clear. A mother who bought many white lagoon chickens from the block and nurtured them to give us eggs every day. A mother who put whole eggs in vinegar, to dissolve the eggshell in her own way in order to give us a spoon full of home made

calcium everyday. A mother who gave us Sharkaferrole tonic and cod liver capsules regularly. A mother who made us drink cow's milk every night before we went to sleep, even when we act as if we had already slept. A mother who grew a variety of gourds, lady fingers and green spinach to cook nutritious dishes for us. The one who never said anything nasty about anyone. The one, who kept her coolness even when life pushed her to the very limits of her patience. The one, who hardly cried. The one, who carried out her duties one by one, even when Asthma constantly troubled her. The one, who had the enthusiasm of a 20 year old, even at the age of 50.

The calves, cows and goats which Amma nurtured were many. The journeys in which I accompanied her also are many. The mother, who was a teacher by profession, was also a teacher to her children. She used to take my sister and me to numerous school art festivals in the nearby towns.

My mother's fish dishes were my favourites. Those who have not tasted the dishes she cooked are very few in our neighbourhood. She made tasty food very fast as if she was in a hurry. She used to take out good portions and kept aside for my father. She scolded me saying "Pottikochu " ie foolish girl, when I, the youngest , removed the chunky big chicken pieces without eating and preferred to have only the bony pieces from her delicious chicken curry. Many of my memories of mother are linked to the delicious food she prepared for us; more than what I can count!

Mother was also our teacher at school. She used to teach us English, Malayalam and Maths, in her unique interesting style . Maths, which she taught us by keeping together Manjadi and Kunnikuru seeds, is still my favourite subject. By signing, "Five chicks are sitting on the floor, if one flies away, how many are left?" she taught us maths in school.

I can still remember clearly mother going to school in white flowery starched cotton sarees. The mother of five, who had a black mole on her nose, which was humorously called "mookuthy" (nose ring) by her friends. When transferred to a new school faraway, she was mistaken by many as a maiden, and brought marriage proposals from their relatives. My elder sister who helped her to drape saree those days, still tells us this proposal story and laughs a lot. Even at the age of eighty-four, mother carried the radiance of a young lady.



I have stayed in hospitals with mother when she got admitted there. Bringing food for her, eating food with her, making her telling me stories etc. made those days also in my memory as cheerful days. Those were the few days of rest which my mother had in her busy life. She did her duties to the fullest, forgetting everything else. She got up early in the morning at about 4 and worked till 10 at night like an efficient machine. I was the small child, who was always keeping an eye on Amma so as not to allow her do work which is of hard nature. Among her five children who whole-heartedly loved and adored her, I was the youngest. I remember how mother went around telling everyone about her sister's daughter who secured a rank in 10th standard. The same mother kept the happiness within her and kept quiet when her own daughter secured a medal from Chief Minister three years later. My sister kept on teasing her saying "why are you not telling it on the mountains this time".

I remember my mother getting up at 4'o clock along with me, making coffee for me and giving me company when I studied. When the clock struck 10 at night, she insists that I sleep.

The stories mother told in our childhood days also are too many. She told us stories from epics, but what caught our imagination were the actual incidents from her own childhood days which she described vividly. Mother was intelligent. We learned 'subjects' from her at school, but we learned most of the lessons of life from her at home. Mother's own home is not far from our house. She used to send with me 'home cooked small snacks' to her elderly parents who lived there. She broke in to tears, in the middle of the road, when she got the news that her father passed away. What saddened her most was that though she was staying close by, she couldn't be near him when he breathed last. That was one of the rare occasions when I saw her crying.

When Amma was out of my sight for more than five minutes, I used to call out for her loudly and search for her everywhere. She used to get annoyed at this and scolded me saying, "Chevithala tharilla ". I really do not know what exactly it means. I think it is something like, " This girl keeps disturbing me".

Mother gave us advice without uttering it. She didn't believe in preaching, but in practicing it. She always tried to give respect to less privileged people, tried to look only at the goodness in people . I have never heard her raising her voice to anyone. She never had any quarrel with neighbours.

She loved children and grand children alike. I have not heard her calling her two daughters- in-law, who came to our home more than 25 years ago, without adding "mol" to their names. When we teased mother saying, " you love your eldest son more than you love us", she used to shrug it off smilingly saying, "it is all just in your imagination ". The mother who, while sending her 15 year old eldest son to a distant hostel for higher studies, made him take a pledge not to take bath in the river near the hostel. The son honoured the pledge that he had taken. The mother who sent her 4 year old second child to her elder sister's home for a weekend vacation become impatient and brought her back the very second day. The mother who teased her third child for reading Bible verse wrongly as "the Rightous will remain in oma (Pappaya tree) forever" instead of reading "righteous will remain in orma (memory) forever" in his childhood days. The mother, who constantly reminded her fourth child, when his naughtiness crossed the limit, that " you are the one for whom your father had been praying even before you were born." The Mother, who talked to the third son's foreign wife for hours, in a language which she hardly knew. To the youngest daughter she used to say, " you are the surprise child who was born in my old age". There is an age difference of about 40 years between us. The mother, who sent my father every week to see me, when I was in

hostel. The mother, who held her son-in-law closely and said, " you are my forth son". My husband wondered at her ways saying, " Ammachi is the most brilliant and wise person among all of you". The mother who insisted that we come back quickly, when we went out, saying "Iruttokoothu kalikathe vegam varanam" ie come back fast without wasting time. The mother, who looked forward for her children and nephews to come for vacation. The mother, who kept four generations in a string of love, like beads.

The mother, who smiled sweetly even during the last days of her life. The mother who said `goodbye` by waving her hands to me and my brother , indicating that we could leave, when we finished prayer with her. I, who left her hospital room that night saying " okay ..nale varam" did not know that when we came back will see a mother who had already left this world with her eyes closed and locked tightly, with a small smile on her lips. On the third day after her passing, when we came to take her home, she had the same smile on her face. Looking at her, without knowing I uttered "Mother we have come". While giving the last bath to her, many a time, I thought she would open her eyes suddenly. Even the hospital people who helped us bathing and dressing her up said to each other, " Ethra Aishwaryaula Ammachi". It has been 6 days since Amma had left. But Amma's radiance is fully filled within us ..to the rimlike a flame in an oil lamp.

Amma's Ushamol.

(a sketching of Mrs. Rachel Mathai below)

