



## Sunday School and Yuvajana Sakhyam days- When I look back after fifty years.

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Every day after the morning prayer I turn to the news papers. News items and some of the regular columns are the main attractions, but I never fail to play the game of Sudoku appearing in one of the news papers. Although I occasionally played Sudoku, this mentally stimulating game was added to my routine after retirement (about four years back). Only after a few instances of not being able to recall whether I had taken my pills did I take up Sudoku as a tool to exercise my aging brain. Memory is a strange phenomenon. As we advance in age, we tend to forget recent events or experiences in our life but nonetheless we retain a very vivid and clear memory of some of the older experiences. While one can not generalize this as a rule, I can surely vouch in my case that old memories die hard.

I remember the very first Bible verse I was taught. I was born and brought up in a small village in Kerala and I was less than four years of age when this incident took place. An Achen from our church had come to visit my aged grand father. I was either standing or sitting beside my grandfather while they were talking. I do not remember what they were discussing. During those days in our villages, one of the readily available snacks was boiled eggs with salt and pepper and the Achen was offered the same with a cup of coffee. Achen then gently called me to his side, took one of the boiled eggs, broke a piece out of it and put it in to my mouth and asked me to eat it. When I ate it, he taught me to say, “ I am the bread of life”(njan jeevante appam aakunnu.). I still recall his smiling face and the intent in his eyes with which he made me repeat the verse. I have never witnessed any teaching more eloquent than this, ever in my life! I will not forget this verse till my last breath. I came to know that this verse was taken from John 6:35 etc, much later in my life. When ever I remember or talk about this incident, I marvel at the sense of propriety and the wisdom of that great and respected Achen. I thank God with all humility for our blessed spiritual fathers.

Another instance that stands out in my childhood memory is the, “nullari” ( it is also called as “njullari”) which we children brought to the Sunday School as our offertory. It was a small measure of rice, more than a pinch, but less than a handful, which could be picked up from a bowl of rice using fingers of one hand. These grains of rice were then neatly packed in folded paper packets and brought to the Sunday School. At the time of the offertory the children came forward in a line towards the table where the basket meant for collecting the packets was kept and placed the packets in it with reverence. This was a novel and unique way of collection in those days. There was no difference of being rich or poor. All the children had invariably



brought only the “nullari”. It was definitely a relief for those who did not have money or coins to bring. Later on all these packets were unfolded and the contents were emptied out and auctioned to raise money for the Sunday school activities. This mode of offertory collection is no longer in practice now. But during my reflective moments while recalling things from the past, I fondly remember this practice of collecting “nullari”. As I think of this practice, I am reminded of the famous poem of Rabindranatha Tagore in Gitanjali (poem no.50), where the Lord has given back the beggar his least little grain in the form of “a least little grain of gold “.

I became a member of the Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam about fifty years back and was associated with its activities in our village areas in Kerala till I left for north India in 1971. Time has changed a lot since then. Along with the advancement in all spheres of life, activities of the Yuvajana Sakhyam have significantly evolved as well. The Yuvajana Sakhyam primarily nourishes and provides for the spiritual needs of its members. It also helps the members to develop their other human faculties which are essential for a successful life. I see a lot of similarities from my yuvajana Sakhyam days as well. I remember the Yuvajana Sakhyam of my days in Kerala more for the opportunities it had provided its members for nurturing their talents, as during those days such forums for nurturing the talents were fewer in number. There were discussions, debates and various competitions on the platform of the Yuvajana Sakhyam. Many parish units had brought out “Kaiyeshuthu Masika” (Handwritten Magazines) on those days. All these activities, in one way or the other, always helped them later in their lives.

The parishes in our villages were a bit far apart from one another with some of these being at distances of six to seven kilometers. During those days, neither public transport system nor private vehicles were available for certain routes. Centre meetings some times were held at some of these far-off parishes. The youth walked the entire distance to such venues in the morning and walked back home in the afternoon again. We did not feel bad about it because we knew that our parents had even walked greater distances at their time to attend various conventions and prayer meetings, sometimes returning home late in the night or in the early hours after midnight. The youth of the present time does not need to walk long distances to attend any meetings because of the improvement in the transport system over the years. But I am sure that, given a challenge, they are capable of doing better than us.

The Yuvajana Sakhyam activities in the northern part of our country were different altogether. I am talking about the year 1976 and onwards. I was based in Rajasthan and this was part of the north zone of the Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam and it comprised of the youth of our parishes and congregations in Rajasthan, Delhi, U.P., parts of M.P., cities like Nagpur, Faridabad etc. The units attached to the parishes and congregations were very active at their parish or congregation level.. The only



activity at the zonal level at that time was holding the annual zonal conferences, where youths of the zone came and camped for three days. The Zonal Conferences gave opportunity to the Mar Thoma youths of the zone to come together and meet one another. Later on similar conferences were organized at state levels and they were known as regional conferences and the frequency of the Zonal Conference was reduced to once in two or three years. There are many in these states whom I had met during these conferences. Some of them are still known and still in touch with me.

As I sit back and look at the Sunday School Samajam and the Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam and the fruits of its services we have enjoyed in these years, I realize that we have every reason to thank God. I have full faith in our younger generation and in their talents and capabilities. What all they need to do is to utilize their resources with a sense of purpose based on the faith and belief we uphold. May our young grow from strength to strength.

Let me take this opportunity to wish the family a Happy Easter 2015 !