

The Blade of Grass

Morning light fell on Narayanan's face and as he opened his eyes he heard the birds all in strange delight. He wondered if he should wake up his brother Shivan: but decided against it. He picked up his toothbrush walked out of the house to the well. The sun was very close by and there were many parrots fluttering around the mango trees. A few swans and cranes were also basking in gay abandon near the lily pond.

Narayanan's mother said, in between her *lalitha sahasranaamam*, “*maha-yaaga-kramaaraadhya* ~ ~ *mahaabhairava poojita* ~ ~ *maheshwaramahaakalpa* ~ ~ *mahathaandava-saakshini* ~ ~ *mahaa-kaamesha-mahishi* ~ ~ *mahaa-tripurasundari* ~ ~ ~” (One who Is worshipped as the great sacrifice) ~ ~ (One who is worshipped by the great *bhairava*) ~ ~ (The Supreme one) ~ ~ (One Of Great Cosmic Cycles) ~ ~ (One who is the witness of the Great *thaandava*) ~ ~ (The Great Kamesha's Divine Love) ~ ~ (The Supremely Beautiful one of the Three

lalitha sahasranaamam ~ the mantram of a thousand names of Goddess Lalitha.

Worlds) “Good, you are awake. Do you remember we are going to Thiruvananthapuram today. Brush your teeth and come soon.”

Narayanan realized it is to be a journey and a wonderful journey today. He was all delight and smiled to himself.

Sparrows were drinking the fallen waters from the well, fluttering and singing. A frog croaked and Narayanan peeped into the well.

He saw his face on a large blue sky.

He pushed the bucket into the well and drew water.

He washed his face and started brushing his teeth.

“Yes Narayana come fast. Wake up Shivan too.” *Amma* calls from the kitchen. Narayanan watched the sparrows, then the cranes and parrots and he suddenly thought of Hari in Thiruvananthapuram. He was so fond of Hari: so was Hari fond of him.

Here, Gowri cried just to be aware!

Narayanan went to the cowshed and stroked Meenoo the calf.

Gowri, Meenoo's mother was nodding too inviting him to touch her.

She was nibbling the grass which Njaara Pillai had brought.

Amma Rajalakshmi came out and kept the coffee for Njaraa Pillai in a transparent glass. That was the Njaara Pillai's glass.

She told Narayanan, "Go and call Njaraa Pillai. Tell him the coffee is there. Also, wake up Shivan." Narayanan went round the house searching for Njaara Pillai.

He reached the front veranda: *appa* Raghunathan was reading the Hindu newspaper with the coffee. The coffee smell tempted Narayanan and he went straight in.

"Narayana, get ready quickly ~ we have to go to Thirvananthapuram today. Tomorrow is *Krishna Jayanthi*."

"*Shari appa*, I will wake up Shivan too."

Narayanan went to the bed room shook Shivan a little and said, "Get up Shiva. We are going to Thiruvananthapuram. We

amma ~ mother

appa ~ father

Krishna Jayanthi ~ gokulaashtami ~ Birthday of Lord Krishna.

shari ~ okay

can meet *paatti*, Krishnan *anna*, Rema *akka*, *athai*, Parvathi, Ambika, Hari ~~ everybody!”

Shivan got up and walked towards the well: Narayanan had already drawn from the well and kept the water for Shivan. Shivan took a little water in the brass vessel and splashed it at the sparrows. They sang and flew away.

Narayanan went inside. *Amma* said, “Here is your coffee! You started drinking coffee at two. I started coffee only after I was fourteen.”

Narayanan picked up the stainless steel-glass and said, “some more de-coction *amma*.”

“You are only eight years old and you want the strongest coffee. It is not good. It is that lady Angichi *maami* who taught

paatti ~ grandmother

anna ~ elder brother (elder cousin-brothers or others are also called *anna*)

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called *akka*)

athai ~ father’s sister

amma ~ mother

maami ~ an auntie

you to drink coffee. You were two and I used to give you horlicks. I used to buy five litre jars. You used to throw my horlicks away and drink coffee from Angichi *maami*.” *Amma* was repeating her old story!

“Please *amma*,” Narayanan pleaded again and *amma* poured little more coffee de-coction into the cup for him, continuing “*stotra-priya* ~ ~ *stuti-mati* ~ ~ *shruti samstuta vaibhava* ~ ~ *manasvini* ~ ~ *maanavati*”

[One who is fond of prayers ~ ~ one who is worthy of divine praise ~ ~ one in the divine revelations glorified ~ ~ one who lives in the mental cosmos ~ ~ divinely respected one]

Shivan came in and *amma* gave him Bournvita and Shivan said rather profoundly, “Today is a great day”.

Little later *Amma* bathed them and wrapped them in towels. Then, both the kids were dressed in identical maroon corduroy short-trousers and pink silk shirts: their best attire.

“Now don’t spoil your clothes” ~ *Amma* gave a stern warning and went to the kitchen.

maami ~ an auntie
amma ~ mother

“I think there is enough time to wish good-bye to Saadhana and Shobhana” Narayanan said and the brothers walked through the grass among dragonflies glittering in sunlight, towards the sun: the cranes and swans did not move much. They reached the mud wall with grass and fern on it and a large lizard abruptly stopped in vague curiosity. Shivan tried to bend to pick up a stone and Narayanan held his hand and forbade him. Few parrots were fluttering in and out of the pomegranate tree.

Saadhana saw them through the window, waved and said, “We are coming.”

She was at the wall and Shobhana followed her. They were dressed in identical orange frocks and had a pony tail. Saadhana had an oval face and she was tall. Shobhana was round faced and little. A yellow butterfly landed on the hibiscus, took off again.

“We are about to go to Thiruvananthapuram. We thought we will say good-bye.” Narayanan said.

“Yes we know:” Saadhana replied, “we were waiting. Give Parvathi and Ambika our special enquiries. Rema *akka* also. You will be meeting your friend Hari too.”

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called *akka*)

“Yes! We hope to meet all! We will come back in two days. We must play more ‘ludo’ and ‘snakes and ladders’. I will try to get ‘*trade**’ too from ‘Thiruvananthapuram’. We will get ‘*kappapazham*’ and ‘*mixture*’ too.” ~ Narayanan was planning.

“Narayana! Shiva! Come fast” *amma* was calling out loud. “Go fast. *Amma* may be in a hurry.” Saadhana coaxed.

The brothers said, “Bye-bye” and rushed through the mango grove back home.

Many sparrows chirped and a frog jumped into the pond making circles of light. The lotuses glistened in the cool breeze.

The boys sat on the floor with their *appa*. *Amma* served them fresh *dosha-s*. *Appa* ate four *dosha-s* with *mulagaai-podi* and *nallennai* and the kids ate two each with ghee and sugar.

As *appa* was washing his hands, he said, “Get going ~ we will start soon. I will lock the doors.”

*trade** ~ an Indian name for the dice game ‘monopoly’

kappapazham-s ~ red plantains

mixture ~ salted potpourri snack

amma ~ mother

appa ~ father

dosha ~ a fried dish

mulagaai-podi ~ chilli-powder

nallennai ~ gingely oil

Amma said, “Let me finish eating and I will clean the vessels and close the kitchen. It will take a little time.”

Soon the house was locked. *Appa* said, “Njaara Pille! Give the milk to the temple. Let somebody get the *paayasam!*” They were near the wicket gate. Two lizards brown-pink kept watch on the mud wall with soap-bubble like eyes! There were a few dragonflies in the moist air. There was a faint smell of jasmine merging with the smell of green moist earth.

The white clouds soaked in sunlight opened up above the fields and there was the echo of a temple bell! One could see the many cranes in the fields some still, some fluttering locally.

Two parrots flew past in early morning songs of many birds.

They started walking: *appa* in front *amma* and the kids just behind. Njaara Pillai closed the wicket gate and followed humbly with the luggage. Gowri billowed wildly from the cowshed. Meenoo also made her little moo ~~

paayasam ~ a sweet dish made of milk, rice and sugar; it can also be made with jaggery and ghee; this is used as offerings to the Deity in the temples.

appa ~ father

amma ~ mother

They walked towards the green field: a stray dog too joined them purposefully.

“Whose dog is this Njaara Pillai?” ~ *Appa* asks.

“Nobodys really: but it gets fed by all: his name is Naanu: he is harmless and a good omen” ~ Njaara Pillai responds.

There were a few crows cawing wildly on a tamarind tree.

“They are our *pithrukkal*”, Narayanan softly reminded Shivan.

They crossed the little bridge over the stream: Shivan stopped a while, spat into the stream and watched the fishes cluster around his spittle.

“Enough! enough spitting”, *Amma* said and pushed him gently.

A breeze flowed on the verdant field and there were few birds in air. The golden sun was gently ascending the horizon.

“This year the paddy will yield well it looks like” ~ *Appa* ruminated vaguely.

“Ah! Yes! Did you lock the back door?” ~ *Amma* had a vague doubt.

pithrukkal ~ ancestors

amma ~ mother

appa ~ father

“Of course I did: unless you opened it after I locked it.”
Appa was a little irritated.

They crossed the field and reached the *aayiram aalthara**.
 There were many banyan trees with rustling leaves bristling
 music in the wild breeze: sparrows and koils in a strange har-
 mony of primal notes in exotic fusion fluttered in strange rhythms.
 There was a fragrance of *paarijaatam*.

They mazed through the breeze grove of banyans and reached
 the little Ganapathy temple near the lotus pond. There was
 a mixed temple bouquet of burnt oil, camphor, incense sticks
 and flowers. Narayanan and Shivan could reach the bells in
 this temple. So they ran and reached for the bell, sounded it as
 loudly as possible in sheer glee.

“Don’t make it too loud and scary! Lord Ganapathy will run
 away!” ~ *Appa* reminded.

Appa asked Njaara Pillai for the coconut. He cracked it on
 the allotted rock. Narayanan and Shivan picked up some bits
 and ate them.

*aayiram aalthara** ~ the place of a thousand banyan-s
paarijaatam ~ a powerfully fragrant flower more active during night
appa ~ father

The priest was a young man Anujan Nampoothiri who was studying in the college where *appa* was the principal.

“*Namaskaaram* Saar. Today there is good *ney-paayasam*. Please let me give it to you. First *prasaadam*.”

All received *theertham* and *prasaadam* from him.

Appa put a one rupee coin on the brass plate.

All put the *chandanam* on their forehead and neck.

Anujan packed the *paayasam* in plantain leaves and gave it to *amma*.

“Okay Anujan study well: you can get a distinction or even a rank! *Pooja* alone is not enough!”

Yes! Sir!

“Did you see the lotus pond is full of lotuses?” *amma* ruminated.

namaskaaram ~ respectful greetings (sir).

prasaadam ~ divine offering generally flowers, thulasi and sandal paste.

theertham ~ consecrated water

appa ~ father

chandanam ~ sandal paste

paayasam ~ a sweet dish made of milk, rice and sugar; it can also be made with jaggery and ghee; this is used as offerings to the Deity in the temples.

amma ~ mother

pooja ~ ritualistic worship of the Deities

“Yes! Do you want me to pluck a few?” *appa* asked.

“No! It is okay.”

Shivan and Narayanan rushed near the pond started plucking lotuses.

“Be careful! Shiva! Narayana! Don’t fall down and get wet”
~ *Amma* warned! “It is slippery there!”

The boys returned beaming with many fresh lotuses and some still blooming. Two cranes stood still in the pond.

“Keep them carefully in the car. We can use them for *pooja* in the *Karamanai kovil*.” ~ *Amma*

Njaaraa Pillai opened the thatched shed door and sparrows flew out. The shed was also inhabited by many birds!

In the meantime *Narayanan* found a thick blade of grass nearby: he plucked it and put it into his pocket.

pooja ~ ritualistic worship of the Deities

kovil ~ a temple

amma ~ mother

“*Appa* please tell a story.”

“Okay have you heard the story of *Padmapaada*,
Shankaraachaarya’s great disciple ~”

“I have heard some ~ we want to hear it again ~” Narayanan
said.

“Yes please *appa*,” Shivan added in.

“Okay! It was the wild forests around the banks of Narmada
inhabited by innumerable wild animals ~~ lions, tigers, bears,
leopards, monkeys, birds and what not. But for some tribal
people nobody lived in those dense forests.

“Yes. But one great man had a strange desire!

Great people are often strange ~

He wanted to see Vishnu in the form of Narasimham ~”

“That was *Padmapaada* ~”

“Yes ~ But then he was called ~~~~~”

“He became known as *Padmapaada* much later ~ yes, listen”

Padmapaada ~ lotus footed one
appa ~ father

A cool breeze and the landscapes were all paddy fields.

“This happened before *Padmapaada* became Sri Shankara-achaarya’s disciple. His name was Sanandana. From childhood he was a *bhaktha*: he had his *upanayanam* and *veda abhyaasam* studied *upanishad-s* and *mantra-shaastram*.”

“When he was a young lad he decided that he will do *tapas* and obtain the vision of his favourite deity Narasimha !! He goes to the forests around Narmada and begins practising severe austerities to make Vishnu as Narasimha manifest.”

“Days passed on and he stood in *tapas* without food and water ~ But nothing really happened.”

“One day a passing *vedan* saw this Sanandana with closed eyes in the forest.”

Padmapaada ~ lotus footed one

bhaktha ~ devotee

upanayanam ~ sacred thread ceremony of a Brahmin child from when he is initiated into veda-s.

veda abhyaasam ~ practicing the veda-s.

upanishad-s ~ sacred philosophical texts which are part of the veda-s.

mantra-shastram ~ science of mantram-s.

tapas ~ penance, meditation

vedan ~ forest tribal hunter

The landscape became endless fields on both sides and a few houses were scattered here and there. The sky enveloped in fine blue with few clouds: the road stretched. There was a gentle breeze all around.

“The *vedan* wondered why this poor man was suffering in this forest. So he collected good fruits and on a lotus leaf placed it in front of Sanandana. He found next day the fruits remained untouched. He repeatedly kept fruits in front of the Sanandana deep in meditation. He even tried to wake him up by vague cries. But Sanandana was unmoved.”

“So the *vedan* decides to wait and gets hold of Sanandana as he goes for his morning bath.”

“He asks Sanandana, ‘What are you doing here suffering like this? Why don’t you eat the fruits I bring? What are you looking for in this forest? I know this forest well. I will get it for you immediately.’ ”

“Sanandana replies playfully, ‘I am looking for a special animal. It has the face of a lion and the body of a man.’ ”

“So the *vedan* asks him, ‘Are you sure such an animal exists? I have never seen it in this forest. Are you sure it exists in this forest?’ ”

“Sanandana replies, ‘It exists in all the forests.’ ”

“*Vedan* says, ‘Then I will get it for you today itself by evening’
 ~ The *vedan* goes off with his bow and arrow and searches the forest in fierce concentration. He saw many animals: lions, deer, tigers, bison, monkeys and so on but he did not find the lion headed animal with the body of a man!”

“It was nearly sunset. The *vedan* is highly disturbed that he could not keep the vow to Sanandana. He thinks that he must kill himself for his breach of promise. He takes his sword and as he prays to his tribal gods he hears a strange sound of a lion’s roar”

“He turns back and he is delighted to see the lion faced man animal and he approaches it skillfully and ties it with creepers and telling the animal ‘You funny animal you were hiding here and I never saw you. That good man is waiting for you and I am going to take you to him.’ ”

vedan ~ forest tribal hunter

“He drags Narasimha tied with creepers in front of Sanandana. *Vedan* pays obeisance to Sanandana and tells him. ‘Here at last I got this lion-headed man animal bound for you. I thought I may never get it. Now eat the fruits I have brought.’ ”

“Sanandana opens his eyes and he sees the *vedan* and he sees creepers tied to emptiness in front of him. He comprehended immediately that the *vedan* could see Narasimha tied to the creepers but he could not see.”

“Deeply moved, he wonders why and he hears the *ashariri* voice telling him that the *vedan* in a day obtained the *tapo-phalam* of a million sages. You now go to Kaashi where you will meet your guru Sankaraachaarya. You will encounter Narasimha too in due course!”

The car went through a few more villages and *appa* said musically, “*tan tadei!* We are reaching Kottarakkara.”

“*Appa* shall we get down eat *vada* at *Shankara Bhavan* there?”
Narayanan could not control himself.

vedan ~ forest tribal hunter

ashariri ~ not from a body, a divine voice

tapo-phalam ~ the result of penance(tapas)

appa ~ father

vadai ~ a soft fried cake

Shankara Bhavan ~ Shankara’s abode

“Why you just ate *dosha-s* at home? We can go to Thiruvananthapuram and eat good lunch!”

Appa was in a good mood, “Okay *Shankara Bhavan medu vadai* for Narayanan and Shivan not for *amma*. She will drink water!”

The kids laughed.

“Very funny” ~ *amma* frowned.

Appa parked the car in front of *Shankara Bhavan*, at Kottarakkara junction.

They entered the small hotel.

The owner who sat at the cash knew him and said, “Come in come in sir, on the way to Thiruvananthapuram I suppose.”

“Yes! Hope you are well? How’s your son in college studying? He was specializing in Mathematics right? He once came to me with a coordinate geometry problem I remember.”

dosha ~ a fried dish

appa ~ father

Shankara Bhavan ~ *Shankara*’s abode

medu vadai ~ a soft fried cake

amma ~ mother

“Yes Sir, Mathematics. He got a first class sir! He is very diligent.”

“Dey, Ramu *medu-vadai* four plates ~ Fresh sir.”

“Okay! Let it be your choice!”

They sat at the wooden table and soon Ramu served them *vada-s* on cut plantain leaves.

“It is hot! Don’t burn your mouth! Wait for it to cool a little.”
Amma warned the kids!

“Sar *dosha*, *masal dosha*, *bhaji*, anything more!”

“No just coffee ~ three coffee one bournvita for Shivan.”

Narayanan quietly whispered to the waiter, “strong coffee!”

The coffee and bournvita were served: they drank it and washed their hands and mouth. *Appa* paid the bill and they walked out.

As they entered the car, “the washing place was so dirty”
Amma could not help saying, “Wonder how clean the kitchen will be?”

medu vadai ~ a soft fried cake

amma ~ mother

dosha ~ fried dishes served in the hotel

appa ~ father

The sky turned a little cloudy. They traversed many green paddy fields and coconut farms and little village towns.

Checking the grass blade in his pocket Narayanan says to *appa*, “The rest of *Padmapaada*’s story: I mean Sanandana.”

“I will tell that later. We are reaching Thiruvananthapuram soon.” *Appa* said.

Appa stopped the car in front of a large “*murukkaan kada*” bought many *kappapazham-s*.

They reached Karamanai by nearly one o’ clock. *Amma* handed the *kaappapazham-s* to *Rema akka*. *athai*, and *paatti* hugged the children. *Krishnan anna* unloaded the luggage. He was an engineering student, *athai*’s son.

appa ~ father

Padmapaada ~ lotus footed one

murukkaan kada ~ a pan shop

kappapazham-s ~ red plantains

amma ~ mother

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called akka)

athai ~ father’s sister

paatti ~ grandmother

anna ~ elder brother (elder cousin-brothers or others are also called anna)

“How are you Rajam? How’s everything? Is Gowri giving enough milk? The children have turned big.” *Paatti* asked *amma*. “All well *amma*. We have some lotus flowers. We could give them to the temple in the evening.”

“Narayana come here!” before *Rema akka* could catch him *Narayanan* evaded and went into the house. *Ambika, athai’s* young daughter said “*Narayanan anna*, I got 100 in maths. I am first in class.” *Narayanan* smiled and walked towards the cowshed at the back. He saw little *Paarvathy* sleeping on the wooden cradle.

Narayanan entered the cowshed with great expectations.

Two lizards moved away from him. A few crows cawed on the mango tree.

A squirrel nimbly climbed up the trunk.

Saraswathi and her daughters *Bhaageerathy* and *Urmila* were standing there and they seemed to recognize him. There were two new calves too whose names he did not know. He looked

paatti ~ grandmother

amma ~ mother

athai ~ father’s sister

anna ~ elder brother (elder cousin-brothers or others are also called anna)

for Hari! He could not see him. He went to the little farm behind and searched, but he could not find Hari who was Saraswathi's calf. He felt very sad and he touched the blade of grass in his pocket. He felt tears welling up in his eyes. "He was not a cow! He can't give milk! Have they sold him? To some butcher." Narayanan sat down on a stone near the cowshed and there were many dragonflies soaked in sunlight fluttering there. Two pigeons too fluttered around the tree.

Narayanan started weeping and did not know what to do.

He felt they were all weeping for Hari too: the cows, dragonflies, the crows the pigeons and even the lizards and the hibiscus flowers.

It was lunch time and they were searching for Narayanan. Ambika said he went behind to the cowshed. *Paatti*, *athai*, *amma*, *Rema akka*, Ambika all went behind and found Narayanan sitting in a daze and weeping.

Paatti hugged him and asked, "What happened Narayana?"

paatti ~ grandmother

athai ~ father's sister

amma ~ mother

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called akka)

He was sobbing and said,

“No- th-ing Whe-re-re is Hari? Did you give him to a butcher?”

“No! No!” all of them said together in one voice.

“Where is Hari? I did not see him anywhere. I searched all over.”

“No Narayana, Hari could not be kept here. He was too old: He had almost become a bull. So we sent him to work in the fields.” *Athai* explained.

“You are evil people. You have given him to be butchered because he can’t give milk.”

“No Narayana he is working in the fields and not given to a butcher ~ How can you think *paati* and *athai* will do such a cruel thing?” ~ *amma* reprimanded.

“Maybe you sold him to a farmer ~ How can you be sure the farmer did not sell Hari to a butcher?” Narayanan was still crying. Rema *akka* came close to him and said, “Don’t cry Narayana. I understand your concern. Now let’s go in and eat

athai ~ father’s sister

paatti ~ grandmother

amma ~ mother

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called akka)

lunch! Tomorrow is *gokulaashtami*! There is *kolaattam* in the Temple. You can come to watch. Even Ambika is doing *kolaattam* with other little girls. And the sweets we are going to eat. *cheedai*, *appam* with butter *vella cheedai*, *boli*, *jilebi* ~~~”

They went into the house and ate their lunch: but Narayanan was not happy and ate carelessly despite the food being special: *mulakoottal*, *vendakkai kichadi*, *maampazha pachadi*, *rasam*, *thair*, *appalam*. He finished his meal and went to the veranda.

“Dey, Narayanan and Shivan are here.”

Ramu, Rajan, Mahesh, Ranganath, Subramoni and Shyam were getting ready to play cricket with a tennis ball.

“Come on Narayana, join us! You are a good player.”

gokulaashtami ~ Birthday of Lord Krishna

kolaattam ~ a woman’s dance weaving, moving in a circle and tapping with coloured sticks.

cheedai, *appam vella cheedai*, *boli*, *jilebi* ~ special food items prepared on *gokulaashtami*.

mulakoottal ~ a curry with jeera, coconut and mixed vegetables

vendakkai kichadi ~ lady’s finger raitha

maampazha pachadi ~ a sweet mango curry

rasam ~ a spiced dal soup

thair ~ curds

appalam ~ a fried item to be eaten with rice

“Why? Are you ill? Where is Shivan?”

Shivan came out to the veranda and told Narayanan, “*Anna* let’s play. I also want to learn cricket well.”

Narayanan reluctantly agreed and walked out with Shivan!

They formed the teams: Ramu and Narayanan became the captains and each team had four players.

The game went on for a while!

Ramu’s team scored 27 runs and Narayanan tempted Ramu with a full toss and took a return catch and the team was dismissed.

In return Narayanan’s team scored twenty eight for two wickets: Narayanan told Shivan to hold the bat straight and drive. Shivan scored four runs and he was pleased: Ramu bowled him out with an off break. Narayanan was not out for 16 with two boundaries.

Ramu said, “One more game.”

“No enough! We are going home.”

anna ~ elder brother (elder cousin-brothers or others are also called anna)

“*Anna* I want to play better ~ Will you teach me? I want to learn spin bowling also.” Shivan asked Narayanan as they entered the house.

“Surely, Shiva! That bat was too big for you! When you turn little bigger you will play better. I will teach you other strokes. Let me learn more from Krishnan *anna*. You know he plays for the college team with real pads and cricket ball. He knows many strokes and also how to bowl googly.”

“What is googly?”

“I really don’t know. It will cheat the batsman anyway and get him out – I think you show off break action and bowl leg break.”

Narayanan checked his pocket, the blade of grass was still there. He was sad about Hari: he went to the cowshed.

He then thought he could give the blade of grass to Saraswathi, Hari’s mother. He prayed to Lord Krishna and gave the blade of grass to Saraswathi. She accepted it, ate it and wagged her tail.

anna ~ elder brother (elder cousin-brothers or others are also called anna)

Narayanan went in and Rema *akka* said playfully, “Here comes strong coffee Narayanan ~ *Amma* pour all the de-coction and give him.”

Narayanan ate *murukku* and drank coffee with Rema *akka* Ambika and Shivan.

“We must go to *kovil* today. So don’t go for cricket.”

Evening they went to the *kovil* and Narayanan saw girls big and small with coloured *kol* in their hands and their hair abundant with jasmine flowers and most of them wore jewellery too.

It was a mixed camphor oil, jasmine, thulasi, fragrance there. Rhythmic flames fluttered in the breeze.

They received *theertham* and *prasadam* and put the sandal paste on their forehead. Sharada, Rema *akka*’s classmate asked, “This is Narayanan ~ the new Ramanujan. Doing fourth

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called akka)

amma ~ mother

murukku ~ a fried salted snack made from rice paste.

kovil ~ a temple

kol ~ stick

theertham ~ consecrated water.

prasaadam ~ divine offering generally flowers, thulasi and sandal paste.

class maths when in class two? Right?” “Yes the same old fellow” Rema replied.

The little girls played *kolaattam* first and Ambika also joined them in a circle. She was smiling aimlessly! *Athai* was singing for them and teaching them to move in a circle.

Later the big girls formed the *kolaattam* circle and they were vigorous in dancing.

Narayanan saw that Rema *akka* and her friends danced very well.

“Did you like the *kolaattam* dance Narayana?”

“Yes! Rema *akka*. You and Sharada-*akka* were dancing so well. Even Ambika was good among the juniors!”

“Where is Shivan gone?”

He was outside the temple playing marbles with some kids.

“Look at him!” Rema *akka* caught him and said, “Enough! Enough! Let’s go home little Shivan.”

kolaattam ~ a woman’s dance weaving, moving in a circle and tapping with coloured sticks.

athai ~ father’s sister

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called *akka*)

They ate the night meal of varieties of *sevai*, *sweet coconut sevai*, *elimichampazha sevai*, *uluthamparippu sevai*, *thayir sevai*, with *papads* and pickles. Rema *akka* was encouraging Narayanan to eat. But he was distracted and ate his food reluctantly.

They washed and went to sleep.

Narayanan was very disturbed thinking about Hari despite all that happened during the day. He was praying as he was about to sleep to Lord Krishna again and again to save Hari. He recited, “*hare raama hare raama raama raama hare hare! hare krishna hare krishna krishna krishna hare hare.*” He repeated it again and again and he had tears in his eyes. Soon he fell into deep sleep with the great mantram on his tongue.

Narayanan found himself in a beautiful divine garden! So many flowering trees with fruits, birds, ducks, peacocks, swans, parrots, so many birds and butterflies and deer were singing and

sevai ~ a dish made steaming rice paste like noodles.

sweet coconut sevai ~ *sevai* that is mixed with sugar and coconut gratings.

elimichampazha sevai ~ lemon *sevai*

uluthamparippu sevai ~ a type of dal mixed with *sevai*.

thayir sevai ~ *sevai* with curds and spicing.

papad-s ~ a fried side-dish.

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called *akka*)

engaged in a trance dance. Narayanan too found himself reciting the “*Hare Rama Hare Krishna*” *mantram* and dancing with them. A parrot landed on his shoulder: two butterflies fluttered around his face. There were many cows and calves grazing. There he was, Hari standing with little Lord Krishna who was wearing the peacock feather on his crown and playing the bamboo flute. Narayanan was in great joy and he rushed up and he hugged Hari. Then he turned to Krishna and showed his hand: Krishna touched his hand and suddenly Krishna vanished and Narayanan was wide awake on his bed.

Next morning after breakfast the women were making the *cheeda, boli, jilebi, appam* and so on.

Narayanan and Shivan went out to buy cricket bats and stumps from “Shantha Sports”. Actually it was a holiday. But Krishnan *anna* knew the owner’s son so he arranged for it. They went in the car and Krishnan *anna* drove. Narayanan and Shivan were very delighted.

Narayanan bought a bat size 3 and Shivan bought size 2 although he needed only size 1. They also bought junior stumps and returned triumphantly.

cheedai, boli, jilebi, appam ~ special food items prepared on gokulaashtami
anna ~ elder brother (elder cousin-brothers or others are also called anna)

Krishnan *anna* demonstrated various strokes like square cut, cover drive, late cut, leg glance, sweep, pull and so on with the new bat.

Afternoon, Rema *akka* was making the *kolam*. She was drawing the footsteps of Krishna one after another leading from the front door of the house to the altar at the *Pooja* room.

Narayanan told Rema *akka*, “You know Rema *akka* I had a great dream last night. I saw Hari with Lord Krishna.”

“Really” Rema asked incredulously.

“Yes! *akka*! It was a beautiful garden! I think some *Golokam*. So many birds singing and there were many butterflies too ~ a parrot sat on my shoulder! I saw Hari, ran and hugged him. Then I held my hand and Lord Krishna touched it: then he suddenly disappeared. Lord Krishna was wearing a peacock feather and he had a flute in his hand!”

“Great Narayana! You are very blessed! Don’t tell everybody! They may not believe you and may mock at you.”

anna ~ elder brother (elder cousin-brothers or others are also called anna)

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called akka)

kolam ~ rice paste chakra-s and diagrams drawn on the floor to invite the Gods.

pooja ~ ritualistic worship of the Deities

“Yes! Thank you *akka* for the good advice! Maybe I will tell *amma* also later.”

The day was active with all the houses in the *agrahaarom* making sweets for Krishna. It was *gokulaashtami*.

Evening, the children wanted somebody to be a young Krishna for the “*hare krishna*” procession. Shivan’s name was suggested and accepted: the elder girls dressed up Shivan as Krishna and put a peacock feather crown on his head and gave a flute in his hand!

Shivan was immensely pleased. He went round the *agrahaarom* with other kids who collected sweets from each house chanting “*hare raama hare krishna.*” Narayanan also accompanied them. Some old women remarked looking and fondling Shivan, “Here! Lord Krishna himself has come.” “How beautiful! He looks just like Krishna!” and so on.

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called akka)

amma ~ mother

agrahaarom ~ the regular dwelling place of brahmins living together.

gokulaashtami ~ Birthday of Lord Krishna

Next day after an early lunch, the family got ready to return home from Thiruvananthapuram. *Amma* fell at *paatti*'s feet before the journey. *Rema akka* and *athai* hugged the kids. *Rema akka* was almost crying. *Krishnan anna* put the luggage into the car and *appa*, *amma*, *Narayanan* and *Shivan* got into the car: the children were waving their hands.

Amma once again recited, “*apadaam apharthaaram*” and told the kids to repeat. *Appa* started the car.

During the journey *appa* was singing *raga bhairavi* for long and sang the composition “*yaro ivar yaro*”. The landscape of tropical greens passed on both sides, with few cottages and houses here and there.

They again stopped like a routine in front of ‘*Shankara Bhavan*’ Kottaarakkara, ate the *medu vada-s* with *chutney* and drank

amma ~ mother

paatti ~ grandmother

athai ~ father's sister

akka ~ elder sister (elder cousin-sisters or others are also called akka)

anna ~ elder brother (elder cousin-brothers or others are also called anna)

appa ~ father

“*yaro ivar yaro?*” ~ “Who, who is this one?”

Shankara Bhavan ~ *Shankara*'s abode

medu vadai ~ a soft fried cake

chutney ~ a spiced coconut paste side-dish.

coffee. *Amma* could not stop exclaiming as she entered the car! “I wonder why they can’t keep the washing place clean. It needs little effort.”

Appa continued, “Sanandana went to Kashi became Shankara-*achaarya*’s disciple. He was so devoted to the *guru*.

One day he was on the opposite shore of Ganga plucking kusa grass for the *pooja*. Then the *aacharya* called him. He rushed unaware and walked across the Ganga. Wherever he put his foot on the water a lotus bloomed and the other disciples were astonished and exclaimed, ‘*Padmapaada*’ ~ Thus he became known as *Padma-paada*. Later he has a ‘*Narasimha aikyaa anubhavam*’. I will tell that story later.”

Njaara Pillai was waiting near the car shed and opened the door. Nanu the dog also was straying around. The birds flew out of the shed and the car went in.

amma ~ mother

appa ~ father

pooja ~ ritualistic worship of the Deities

aacharya ~ teacher

Padmapaada ~ lotus footed one

Narasimha aikyaa anubhavam ~ experiencing union with the Deity Lord Narasimha.

As they walked out, Narayanan picked two blades of thick grass and put them into his pocket.

They walked through the *aayiram aalthara*: The Ganapathy temple was not yet open for the evening prayers. Cranes stood still on the lotus pond. Birds made their songs and the breeze welcomed them back.

They crossed the verdant paddy fields crossed the little bridge and Shivan as a habit spat into the stream to see fishes flocking.

The crows outside the house were cawing wildly: a lizard moved along the mud wall: a few dragonflies fluttered in the evening sunlight.

As they entered the gate, Gowri and Meenoo made their calls of delight almost seeing them!

Narayanan went behind to the cow shed. He fondled Meenoo and Gowri gave them a blade of grass each. They swirled their tails and accepted it.

Njaara pillai was coming to milk the cow: he was washing the brass vessel again. Narayanan walked out: the sun was descending: a parrot flew above his head. He walked towards the well to wash his hands and feet. A big frog jumped around.

*aayiram aalthara** ~ the place of a thousand banyan-s

The cranes were waiting in some stupor. Two crows were sipping water from the slush around.

Narayanan stared at the reddening twilight sky and thought of Lord Krishna.

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