

An Adieu to Lavkumar Khachar

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As I settle in my garden chair, I notice, on one of the uppermost branches of 'Karanj' (*Pongamia pinnata*) sparsely dotted with half dried leaves, a parakeet couple assembling and making their intentions to pair for the coming season obvious. Soon they fly away, one chasing the other, and the next to come is a drongo who would glance upon the ground below and leave in a moment for a more lucrative perch, a lamp-post nearby, lighted just a while ago. Dwindling day light now only makes it possible to see darkened shapes of a couple of more visitors -a sunbird and a bulbul. The trees too, like me seem to sense the gentle unrest shown by the birds, as they prepare to settle to their respective roosting spots.

While scanning my garden at the twilight my eyes freeze at the sight of a garden 'jhula' (swing), where I imagine, a man sitting in a coloured kurta and a white pajama, taking stock of every corner of my gardenscape through his hypermetropic lenses! No, it's not that he preferred the 'jhula', in fact he never did. Last time when I made him sit on it, it was to take his photograph from a distant corner so that he would stand out conspicuously amidst the different shades and tones of the greens. My heart still senses his aura and eyes create a figure, so upright posing a pertinent question through his beaming look.

He would sometimes sit on the very same 'jhula' to watch a Hoopoe pair nesting in a nest-box (which it did for three consecutive years!) placed on a high beam running across the verandah to the right of the swing. He loved to see nest-boxes occupied by our avian friends. He loved to talk simple things, discuss out issues and draw out simple solutions. He never saw wildlife and its conservation in isolation. He would always place the common citizen in the center of any debate on Nature.

Most of all, he wanted the youth to go back to Nature. He believed, the passion of conservation lies in every young heart, only it needs to be aroused and nurtured. And he also believed, the only way to do it is to expose him to wilderness. It was his conjecture, that everything will fall in place only if an individual and subsequently the society identify and then connect themselves with nature. For him placing a nest-box on a column and a feeding tray in the balcony were as much important as, declaration of National Parks and Sanctuaries.

While sitting he would immediately size up the birdlife in my garden and probe into plant and tree diversity around. He would readily offer a prescription for newer species of shrubs, climbers and trees which needed to be introduced. He always insisted that I should have a small pond or a track of flowing water as 'water element' was glaringly missing from my garden.

He loved sugar-less black coffee and a jug full of cold water at his disposal, so that he can sip it at ease while reflecting on any topic.

His advocacy for indigenous plants and tree species was quite loud and clear. He himself would implement all his fancy ideas of planting native vegetation in his garden or at work places. His touch to a garden meant, it would surely have a well pruned hedge of 'Karamda' (*Carissa conjesta*), 'Awal' (*Cassia auriculata*) or 'Aamli' (*Tamarindus indica*), a green vertical wall covered by climbers, a *Ficus* tree in one corner kept in a proper shape, in addition to an undulating landscape with scores of native and exotic shrubs and bushes.

One outstanding quality of his was, to pen his thoughts on a paper while consuming coffee sip by sip and dispatch that bundle of beautiful cursive handwritings to the concerned recipient, neatly enveloped with his bold signature inscribed on one side of it. Not only did he write regularly for 'Vihang', he also periodically communicated with me, spelling out his explicit views, opinions and beliefs and occasionally showing his concerns with a bit of advice, some suggestions and a few words of blessings. A loving phrase "Take care of yourself", at the end of his 'inland letter' would literally take care of my anguish, my moods and my impatience at that point of time!

The Gujarati quarterly 'Vihang' which I had an opportunity to edit, carried his articles under a regular column which was named as 'Vihangavlokan' - meaning a bird's eye (over)view. In this column he would talk on a vast variety of subjects of his liking, ranging from 'how to create a micro-climate suitable to birds around your residence' to 'how a birdwatcher should observe discipline and restraint while reporting a new bird species'.

He was an ardent fan of 'Vihang', more so because it was in Gujarati. His discontentment almost amounting to frustration, about not being able to write and communicate in Gujarati haunted him till the end. He always praised my write-ups and editorials and encouraged me to write more and more. "Bakulbhai, write at least one page a day", he would tell me and what an honour and recognition for 'Vihang' it was, when he exclaimed, "Bakulbhai, you cannot stop 'Vihang' before having published my Obituary!!"

In fact, an obituary is rather out of context for a soul so great! His words and wisdom will always remain etched in our hearts and in spirit will keep on inspiring generations to come; that's why this is an adieu and not an obituary! □



"I liken Society to a garden, where the gardener has to take care not to permit weeds to take over or the more vigorous plants choking the others. The greater the variety of plants, the greater the need for vigilance by the gardener."



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“Having had the good fortune of having Lived my childhood surrounded by Nature, it has been difficult to understand the bleak and often claustrophobic upbringing of most children growing up cut off from Nature. It was in Rajkumar College, Rajkot where as a House Master privileged to train growing boys that I discovered the miraculous change in character of the boys when exposed to the great outdoors even for short periods. A week in the Himalaya would inculcate high discipline and spur metabolic processes to produce almost visible growth! A concern for Nature abiding. Thus, when I launched WWF-India’s Youth Education Movement in 1976, Nature Camps were conceived as important tool to arouse love for Nature. Hingolgadh, Pirotan, Gir and Himalaya became emotive experiences for thousands of school children and youth of Gujarat. The difference between these camps and others must be that each participant is central to the programme, and the experience generating a simple message that Nature is a joy to Live in and more important, showing that each individual is stronger than he or she thinks”.

“Every Human Activity must be backed by a commitment to the future and children are the future.”