

## “I knew ‘Him’ too....”

### A series of tributes to Sh. Lavkumar Khachar

I was born and brought up in a goldsmith (soni) family in Rajkot. Being brought up in a humble ambience, it was believed since childhood that we too shall take up the family profession and work in small shops as entrepreneurs.

Destiny had something else in store for me...In 1978, when I was in class 7<sup>th</sup>, we went for a Nature Camp at Hingolghadh from our school. It was arranged by the World Wildlife Fund, India (WWF-India). The journey by a state transport bus was spent in excitement and anticipation of reaching Hingolghadh.

After we reached there, soon we gathered and sat under a tamarind tree and the camp director, Shri Lavkumar saheb started giving us a brief about what we shall be doing in this camp. His presence was so powerful and seemed far more important than the activities that we were going to do! He formed various groups and directed us to go and climb the hills around and explore around. That was the beginning of my fascination and respect for Lavkumar saheb.

Fortunately, I got to participate in various other nature camps like marine camps at Pirotan island in the Gulf of Kachchh, forest camps at Sasan Gir and Himalayan camps at Vashishtha (Manali) in Himachal Pradesh. Gradually, I started enjoying and actively participating by going in the advance party, which was involved in preparations for the camps under the leadership of Lavkumar saheb. Later, he accepted my request for being a volunteer in his camp at Manali with an aim to train myself for fitness under stringent rules.

In the year 1984, my school friend Manoj Davda and I went to meet Lavkumar saheb with a wish to do something different and out of routine. He then drew a map and said that across the Rohatang pass, run to Lahaul-Spiti valley to reach Keylong (Capital of Lahaul). His order was a challenge that we took up with inner faith, knowing well that we would not be able to take any lift from any vehicle.

He gave us Rs. 100/- for bearing the expenses and necessary luggage for our Marathon. We were so excited! We started running under his guidance along with a letter he had given us for H. H. Maharaja of Keylong to bring his signature as a proof. We did manage to reach Keylong in a joyful and tired state and returned to Vashisth on the 5<sup>th</sup>

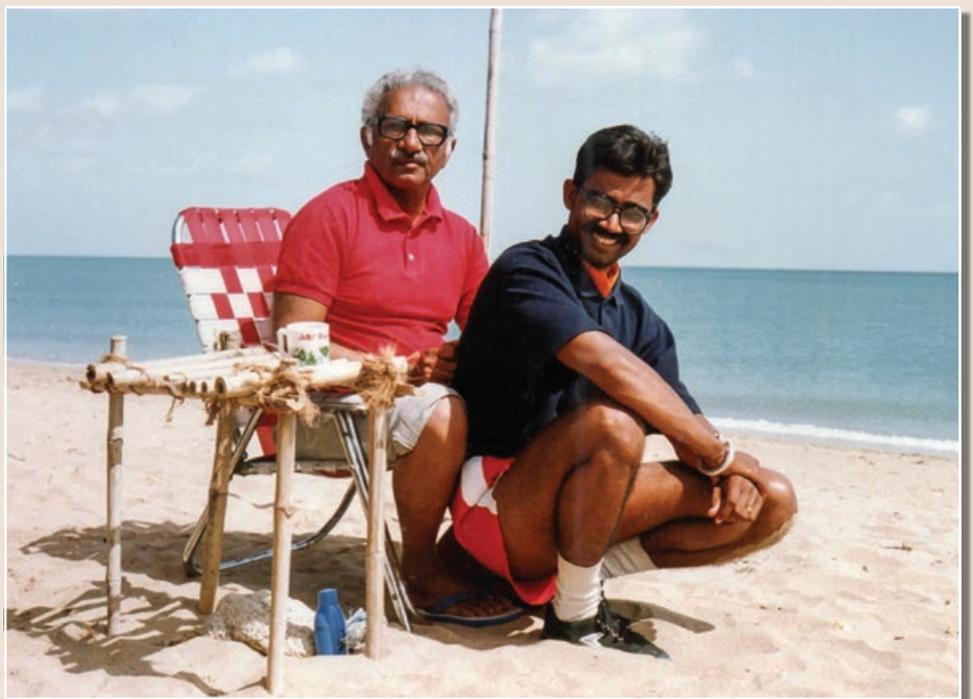
day covering 230 km in this trans-Himalayan marathon. We thought we had achieved so much by doing this.

When we reached Vashishtha camp-site, Saheb was addressing a group from Ahmedabad. Because of being so excited, we broke the protocol and entered with full energy and expanded chest. Saheb made a sign to sit aside which was a little insulting. Later he called us and introduced us to the group. To my surprise, he addressed me as ‘Khadmankdo’ (a very thin person resembling a stick insect!). He challenged the group that if these boys can cross the valley and run a ‘marathon’ this way, you can also do it. He praised us but I took it negatively as I was addressed as a “Khadmankdo” in front of a group. I became very unhappy, but saheb was already preparing something else for me.

Being unhappy with negative ‘praises’, I told sir that I have to go back to Rajkot. (My inner thinking was I am being told “Khadmankdo” because of my slim and lanky appearance, but I would come back to this Man only after becoming ‘somebody!’)

As I didn’t have money, I went to him, requested to leave the camp, he honored my request and gave me money also.

I had to come back to the camp as I’d forgotten my sweater. He saw me and asked me to stand under the Horse chestnut tree. He made me sit there and said, **“Beta, you have a determination and willpower in your mind, keep it alive.....”**. At that moment, whatever he said was all, just a lecture for me. I had decided to go back to Rajkot and





only return to meet him with a stronger and better looking physique, so that no one calls me a “khadmankdo”! Now when I look back, I think this was the turning point in my life.

After reaching Rajkot, I joined an ‘AKHADA’ (Indian parallel of a Gym) and started exercising with strong discipline. For one year, I denied to attend any camps, as I had a burning desire to erase my image as “khadmankdo”...

In the next monsoon Hingolghadh camp, our teacher Shri Dholakiya saheb requested Lavkumar Saheb to allow and bless two students (Girish Adesara and Manoj Davda) by marathon run to Hingolghadh from Rajkot.

We reached Hingolghadh in the August of 1985 in full rains at 10 p.m. Lavkumar Saheb was sitting there in the Gadh (Fort) and enjoying the rains. As a personal teacher, he would always be waiting for us, as and when we were to reach there. He told us to meet after having dinner. He personally made sure that we are given khichdi, milk and bajri-roti (*rotlo*).

After dinner, upon meeting him, he immediately recognized Manoj Davda (very fit and National swimming champion), but asked me, who are you? I replied that I am the same “khadmankdo”, who had met you in Vashisth. He was surprised. Then he asked how I made my body so fit? (I was not a student from his Rajkumar College). I told him that by his encouragement under that Horse Chesnut tree and with my passion, I had started exercising in *Akhada*. Daily at 4:30 in the morning, I did 1,000 squats and 20 rounds of running at the Rajkot Race course ground! Much to my surprise, he replied differently, “I am a teacher and a scientist. Let’s meet

tomorrow morning at 5. I would personally like to count your 1,000 squats.” That time, I again felt very dejected thinking that instead of letting me sleep after running from Rajkot, he wants to test me!

Nevertheless, next day sharp at 5 a.m., he started counting my squats holding my hand. When I reached 999, I could barely stand. But I finished 1,000 with his help. This was my first encounter with him as Master-Disciple (GURU-CHELO). This memorable episode transformed into a long journey, which still continues, though he is not with us anymore, he continues to live in my heart.

I can feel him holding my hand even today to give me that extra push to achieve what I would have otherwise thought impossible. I can say that all that I am today is because of him. He is alive in me. I am not sad that he will not be reading this episode, as I know he is right beside me while I am penning this down.

I chose to write this episode amongst so many incidents in my life because it shows how a student can take challenge from a teacher to make a decision for transforming his life. Such transformation is possible when the Guru is like Lavkumar Saheb – who was a great teacher and when the *chela* always tries his best to become a dedicated student.

We all know that he has touched the lives of so many students. And I hope that every student is fortunate to get this fire of inspiration ignited by a great teacher like Lavkumar Saheb.

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