

Recall ...



## My Ernakulam Days and Archdiocese of Verapoly

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**M**y memories about Ernakulam date from those times when my father was working as the Municipal Commissioner, Alwaye between 1972 and 1976. Though I was bit away from the centre of the city and was placed in a suburban town, my greatest occasions of joy were my occasional visits to Ernakulam accompanied by my parents; to the boat jetty, Children's park, Subash Bose Park, and also MG road, which was a kind of wonder for me in those days. As years rolled by, I left Ernakulam district for good and travelled all across the state. I had my occasional innings again because my father was once again posted in Ernakulam as GCDA secretary for a while. We stayed in Gandhi Nagar and Girinagar for two years. Those were the

times when I just got into engineering education and definitely the visits and the travels, I used to undertake in the red buses in Ernakulam, left an indelible imprint on me. I used to love the buses over here, I used to love the cinema theatres, and relish the food over here. During my attainment of administrative service, by 1995 the family settled down in Ernakulam and I got into IAS in 1996. So I consider my house in Palarivattom as a lucky omen; I became an IAS officer after spending long hours of study in that house in Palarivattom. Thus began my continuous association with Ernakulam.

I was placed in the Kerala cadre and I got married to Ernakulam again in 1999; my wife belongs to

Ernakulam. Afterwards from 2001 till 2004, I was the general manager of Kerala Roads and Bridges Development Corporation (RBDC). Under the leadership of Mr. V. J. Kurian I could learn the art of project management and financial management. Those were the times when lots of railway bridges were constructed by RBDC across the state. The Irumpanam Bridge, Thripunithura Bridge, Kalamassery Bridge etc. were constructed during that time. The best possible road in the city namely the airport seaport highway was completed with my active participation in 2003. My little girl was also born during that time. In 2004, I became the district collector of Ernakulam.

My association with Archdiocese of Verapoly started on day one with myself calling on Archbishop Dr. Daniel Acharuparambil and the Bishop of the Diocese of Cochin, Rev. Dr. John Thattumkal. Those were the times of tremendous developmental activity, Vallarpadom was a dream and I had to take all the steps to realize the dream. I regularly interacted with the Archdiocese and the Diocese of Cochin during those times. We had several lunches and dinners together and I remember the seriousness with which the Archdiocese took note of the significance of Vallarpadom in the national context and in 2005 the then Prime Minister was destined to visit the Vallarpadom Shrine. At the last minute the visit failed to materialise. By the time the district administration had completed all works related to the access to the Shrine including the construction of the first class road. That was a gift, so to speak, from the government to the Archdiocese.

The warmth, affection and the respect with which my family and I were treated in the residence of the Archbishop fills me with nostalgia. Once, when my baby girl cried inside the residence of the Archbishop, the Archbishop was quick to respond. He told me that this was the first cry of a baby in a few decades of time inside the residence. As years rolled by, I could realise the dream of the container terminal in Vallarpadom, the LNG terminal and the Smart

City project. Tremendous work was done in this regard by the administration, in co-operation with the public. It is also worthy to note that the tsunami that struck the Asian waters on 26th December 2004 had caused a trail of havoc along the shores of Cochin. We undertook a massive reconstruction drive. Hundreds of houses were reconstructed; the Archdiocese as well as the diocese of Cochin came up with innovative solutions to provide housing for the homeless. I still remember the yeomen services rendered by Fr. Mathew Kallinkal, the then Director of Ernakulam Social Service Society (ESSS), the social service wing of the Archdiocese, in this regard. The Archbishop often used to remark that he would always have me in his prayers and used to shower me with compliments. Those were the days when I had the occasion to address the students in most of the institutions governed by the various organisations under the Archdiocese. Even during the times of stress, the Archdiocese came forth to support me. The concept of metro rail was also taken shape at that time. We could do the first survey in 2007 for this project.

Time flies past all of us and it did in my case as well. By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2008 I left the collectorship and became the state education director. I could do considerable service for the cause of school education during the period of more than three years, when I was in the chair. I came back to Cochin by the end of 2011 again and became the Managing Director of RBDC. Several more bridges were constructed across the state including Cochin; The Pulleppady and Ponnuruni bridges were constructed. Palarivattom fly-over is a reality today. I decided to renew my friendship with the Archdiocese and had a peaceful meeting with the present Archbishop Rev. Dr. Francis Kallarakal, on the last day of 2014. Even though I was holding weighty portfolios in Trivandrum, I had one fourth in Cochin by virtue of myself being the head of a few institutions here. Several priests, Fr. Clement Valluvassery and Fr. Thomas Pulikal to name a few, have been my great well-wishers for so many years. Mr. Ignatious Gonsalves formerly of Malayala Manorama and presently

active with Archdiocesan activities had always provided me with words of appraise. What I find in the City of Cochin and its people is the spirit which is unique among the public in the state of Kerala. This indomitable spirit of striving for better things in life while holding on to the traditions is a lesson to be learned by all. The city is a mosaic of diverse cultures and one particular polling booth in Mattancherry had voters who spoke a minimum of 10 different languages, Moosa Hajji Essa Hajji school is the one that I am referring to; from the Tulu Brahmins to the persons of Portuguese descent; the list goes on. The diversity of the experiences coupled with the national outlook, and perhaps the international views that hold forth naturally influenced the national evaluation committee when they decided to give 5<sup>th</sup> position to Cochin in the National Smart City Challenge Round. Incidentally I would modestly state that I was the state mission director in charge of preparing the documents for Cochin. Kochi has the potential to become one of the best cities in south Asia and enhance its reputation as a port.

As an industrial and commercial power house, the eastern outskirts of the city would hold the key for the future due to the availability of land in this sector. The vibrant, social and cultured life and the secular philosophy that is deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of the people are the attractions of the city. There are no parallels to the leaders of the religious denominations liberally donating land and extending support for the public cause in the way Kochi has done, and the eloquent pointer in this regard would be the principle stand taken by the Archdiocese of

Verapoly in giving away the land including the cemetery for the purpose of establishing Cochin Shipyard. Across the islands of Vypeen, several initiatives have been taken in the NGO sector for furthering the livelihood of the fisher folk. The greatest challenge before the city and its people would be to retain the concepts of heritage that is so well illustrated in Fortkochi, Mattanchery and various other parts, along with the burst of modernity that is coming along different corridors of the city. This city is getting equated with some of the suburban towns of Mumbai due to the presence of a huge floating population. The traffic jams of Fridays and Saturdays is to be seen to believe - according to certain estimates, about 1 lakh persons make their journey towards their native places from the city. All these call for skilful handling of the issues involved and the perfect co-ordination with various denominations and agencies. Archdiocese of Verapoly, I firmly believe, would be in the forefront of extending any support to the cause of the city in particular and to that of the state in general. This has been my most heartfelt experience during my term as district collector. I firmly hope that the flag of the city is held high by its proud citizenry as well as by the robust organisations led by the Archdiocese of Verapoly. The philosophy that was embedded even during the inception of the Archdiocese, holds good to this day in terms of its intensive relationship with the native as well as the general public. The goodness of the founding fathers has only been enhanced by the fragrance of the words and faiths of those great personalities who adorned the position of the Archbishop through the centuries.

