



இறந்த காலங்கள்..

ஜெயகாந்தன்

REMINISCENCES

Anantha Sarma alighted from the car and stepped on the paved walkway that snaked along the sea shore. His grandchildren, who occupied the car rear seat, were eagerly looking forward to their next stop at a movie theater, and cheerfully waved their hands in a parting gesture. The driver, who had opened the door for Sarma and then stood aside on the left side of the car, politely asked him: “Is it all right if I come back to pick you up - with the children - after the movie?”

Sarma could hear nothing in the gusty wind blowing across the beach; for some time now, his hearing had been impaired.

“Grandpa, Mani is saying something!” That was Anantha Sarma’s maternal grandson Pacha who slowly raised his hand, pressed it to his lips, and shrieked - his voice rising above the din of the

stiff breeze.

That was too much for Sarma's ears; he admonished the boy: "Why do you have to shout like that?" Then he turned to the driver, and in a voice cool and courteous, said: "What do you want?"

"Nothing in particular . . ." the driver said as if apologizing. "I want to know if I can pick you at half past nine on my way to the movie house to get the kids back home; or should I come earlier?"

"Don't do that? Why don't you come here after you drop the kids at home? I don't want to roam around movie houses or shops with them."

Mani had asked because the drive from home in Mambalam to the beach was quite a long one; he preferred to avoid it, if only he could, and now that Sarma wanted him to make this additional trip, the driver was less than pleased. Sarma noticed the grin on Mani's face and understood his displeasure.

"Why don't you do this? How about coming here after you pick up the children after the movie?"

“I can, but by then the time would be half-past nine!”

“That's fine. See if you can make it earlier. This is summer, and if I stay outdoors for a while, it would do me no harm!” Then Sarma thought: ‘Maybe the driver thinks it is waste of a time to make an extra trip to oblige an old fogy like me! . . . Maybe he is right!’

After the car departed, Sarma began walking slowly and steadily with his glossy walking stick. Because his feet were like a child's - tender and pinkish - even a small marble or stone caught between his feet and footwear caused him excruciating pain.

‘Useless fellows! Why the hell there is no cement flooring this side of the road - just like over there?’ he cursed. ‘They have left the road unpaved, and I can hardly walk!’ He strongly condemned the city officials in his heart.

He wore a light, decrepit *dhoti*; it was improvised from an eight-foot *dhoti* cut into two. As he walked, the tail end of the loincloth hanging between his two