

Dear Author Unknown,

India was for me, the most enchanting of places – it was my happy place. As an Indian girl born and raised in the United States, I grew up in the American way of life. When I was much younger, I would visit India every summer. I would look forward to meeting my relatives and experiencing the beauty of India. The fond memories of my childhood were of a vibrant, colorful, noisy, busy, lively India. But after a while, we stopped visiting India. It got very expensive for our family to travel, especially because my mother took up to higher studies and my papa was still doing his research and was without a full time job. Consequently, these memories began fading away and were slowly replaced by the realities of my surroundings – America.

I missed the crowing of the peacocks in the backyard of my centuries-old home in India. I longed for the smell of the parched earth after the first monsoon rain. I yearned for the excitement of exploring the busy streets as they came alive as the sun went down. I wanted to once again experience the wonder of caressing a *touch-me-not* and seeing it reawaken the next day. Did I lose all of these precious memories? Or were they hidden somewhere in the deep corners of my mind, waiting to be rekindled and reawakened ...

After several years, last summer I had a chance to visit India again. Just as I landed in India, all my dormant memories came flooding back. They were not lost. The very smell of the streets, the bright and colorful clothes, and mouth-watering street food evoked long forgotten feelings. The little shops on street corners where one could find everything from mini *Lord Ganesh* statues to “Made in China” CD players got me excited once again. The *rikshaw* rides through the narrow winding streets crowded with people, dogs, cattle and pot-holes were perhaps more thrilling than Six Flags. For me, all this was a surreal, fascinating experience.

One day while waiting for the bus in the blistering heat, I started daydreaming. I missed my papa and thought about all of the fun times we had together with my brother, wrestling, dancing, and singing. I suddenly remembered all the bedtime stories my papa used to sing to us. My favorite was *Punyakoti*.

My papa would sing to me the story of Punyakoti in Kannada, his mother tongue, and then translate each line into English for me to understand. I vividly remember being very sad when Punyakoti went to *Arbhuta*, the tiger who, at the time, I thought was mean and scary. Looking back, I now think it was not *Arbhuta*’s fault. After all, he is a tiger and eating the cows was his *dharma*, purpose. My papa would sing it to me over and over, and I would never get tired of it. I pictured myself as Punyakoti’s calf, pleading with her not to return to *Arbhuta*. Nothing shook Punyakoti’s resolve. She kept her promise to the tiger even when she could have easily escaped. She had everything to lose and yet she stuck to her word. This was a powerful lesson for me. I wanted to be as brave as Punyakoti and tell the truth regardless of the consequences. Punyakoti consoles her calf saying “*satyave namma tayi tande ...*” truth is my mother, truth is my father, truth is my God, truth is everything I stand for.

For Punyakoti, truth was God. I thought of this statement over and over again. It always came back to me when I hear in the news the terrorist attacks, all in the name of religion. Punyakoti’s concept of God, which is truth, would perhaps solve all the conflicts between religious zealots. Truth, which is universal, is God. This simple and beautiful life lesson I learnt from Punyakoti is universally applicable, which is why it has continued to affect me.

Additionally, Punyakoti opened my eyes to the abundant literature in my native language with its local flavor and global reach. It inspired me to learn more about my languages, which include my mother's mother tongue (Malayalam), my father's mother tongue (Kannada), and my nation's mother tongue (Hindi). Thank you for widening my views and opening my heart to the richness of Indian literature. American culture and traditions will always be a part of me, and my memories and experiences of India will only enrich it.

Your inspirational poem has not only affected me greatly but has also opened the doors to my rich culture, which I believe will influence me for a long time to come.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Arundathi Nair