



Dr. N. Prasanthakumar

# A committed teacher happens

## How I became a Teacher

Teachers often join the institutions and retire at the end of each academic year. But a committed teacher happens. I have always wanted to be one. Several of my teachers motivated me, especially in my MA Programme. I studied at SD College, Alapuzha, once known for the gifted teachers working there. Some of my teachers were more studious and perseverant than the students. I have great admiration to all of them; they were affectionate and devoted.

## My interactions with U.R.Ananthamurthy were wonderful. He gave me lessons in Commitment, the significance of critical insight and originality in research and the need to critique theories before following them. My association with Prof. U.R.Ananthamurthy is one of the greatest gifts of my life.

I passed my MA in 1985. Immediately Pre-Degree was delinked and there was a ban on new appointments in colleges. I joined as an Assistant at Gandhi University office on 30 October 1986. The University office was functioning in a Commercial building opposite to Kottayam Collectorate. Though I was initially disappointed, my exposure to the University system has an abiding impact on me.

I was working in the Examination Section and Dr. N Babu, who later became the Vice Chancellor of Kerala University and President of Tranvancore Devaswom Board, was the Controller of Examinations. He often advised me not to waste my time in the office and try to find a teaching post somewhere. He even helped me in my pursuit. As my ceaseless efforts to change to teaching profession had not materialized, I seriously thought of pursuing higher studies. I applied for MPhil in Madras University in 1988. As the call letter for Interview came late, I could not attend interview that time. The next year I stayed in Madras with Prof. C. A Perumal, the Professor of Politics and friend of Dr. N. Babu, and attended interviews and finally got admission to MPhil.

My contact with our Vice Chancellor Prof. U.R.Ananthamurthy was a turning point in my life. Again it was Dr N Babu

who introduced me to Prof.U.R.Ananthamurthy, who took special interest in my case and sanctioned me leave to pursue MPhil in 1989. My MPhil Programme has been very useful to me throughout my career. We had classes only in the afternoon. I spent the mornings and the evenings in the libraries. I visited the University libraries, British library and



American library twice a week, borrowed books and critical works and read them. I passed my MPhil with commendable grades in 1990. Prof. U.R.Ananthamurthy helped me to choose my topic of dissertation. He also gave me some wonderful insights into the methods of Research and demystified the kind of research I imagined. My interactions with him were wonderful. He gave me lessons in Commitment, the significance of critical insight and originality in research and the need to critique theories before following them. My association with

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Later I joined for PhD at School of Letters Mahatma Gandhi University, under the guidance of Prof. Narendra Prasad as a part time student. He was a good teacher of rare originality and critical insights. But soon he strayed into filmdom and I could not continue my research under him. I

changed my guide in 1991 and carried on my research under Dr. P.P Raveendran who gradually and silently moulded the researcher in me. Incidentally I am one of the earliest researchers in Gender Studies. Dr. P. P. Raveendran is well-versed in critical theories and his guidance helped me to cultivate an aptitude to read and improve on critical theories. Finally, I submitted my PhD thesis in June 1995, in a period of three years and 6 months. Meanwhile, I got

appointment as Lecturer at SN College Nattika. I was awarded PhD in April 1996 five months after my joining the college. In those days the number of PhDs in a college was very small.

I got married in March 1991. I considered myself an accidently married man: as Shakespeare said, "Hanging and wiving are determined by destiny." I am married to the younger daughter of Prof. M. K. Sanoo, renowned writer and critic. He silently influenced me as a teacher and social critic. My mother - in-law used to

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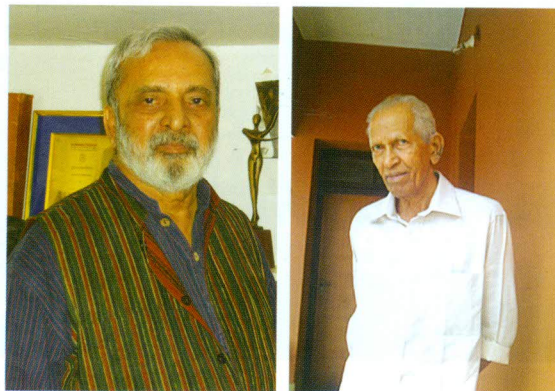
narrate his experiences as a teacher and I unconsciously followed in his footsteps. His patronage is another blessing in my life. Now I set apart most of my time to my students. In this respect he is my role-model.

I had a wonderful and episodic short tenure at S N College Nattika. I joined there at the middle of an academic year and left there after four years at the middle of an academic year. My colleagues were friendly and students very affectionate. I used to teach BA and BCom classes. I also taught last batches of Pre-Degree.

I joined Sree Sankaracharya University in 1999. I was the Director of Thuravoor Regional Campus of the University for two years. At Thuravoor I could create a wonder by producing the best result with almost all students passed in English and a few of them passed with first and second classes. Such cases were extremely rare in the University. I joined our Main Campus Kalady only in 2002. I was approved as a research guide in 2002 and have since been guiding students. The University started MA and MPhil programmes in 2004. Our Curriculum is one of the best offered in Indian Universities. I could take the lead in restructuring the Programme twice with wonderful results.

In the University we attempt to contemporarise English studies. We have appropriated the canons to cultivate alternative and counter hegemonic use of English. So for our students English is no longer a colonialist discourse: it is a derivative discourse in which they can locate their self as a field of possibilities. We have the largest number of applications

for MA and Research Programmes, perhaps the largest in the Universities of Kerala. We offer several specializations to our MA students: language studies, linguistics, new literatures, interdisciplinary study of literature, ELT through ICT, Media Cultures. We also offer MPhil and PhD Programmes in Gender Studies. We have nearly 50 research scholars, many of them UGC-JRF



awardees and one Fulbright Scholar. We have produced 26 PhDs and 72 MPhils.

Meanwhile I had to shoulder many responsibilities at the University. I was the Director of the Main campus for three years from 2006 to 2009. It was a turbulent period and I could successfully overcome many strifes on the campus. I was the Pro- Vice- Chancellor in charge and Registrar in charge. I am a member of the Syndicate now. Though my energies get dispersed in many activities, I have been contributing to the academic and corporate life of the campus. I have always preferred to concentrate on my students. I have produced 16 PhDs and 43 MPhils. I also published four books and several articles. I guided the remarkable research ELT

through ICT that explored the effective application of technology in ELT. I also guided such concepts as alternative nation and maternity discourses. I have always been accessible to my students. I have only my time, the knowledge I acquired from my readings and my exposure and contacts with great academics to share with my students. Most of my students are girls and they see a father figure in me, though I often try to deconstruct all patriarchs.

I could be a successful Education administer at the University. I enjoy unalloyed pride in my success as the Professor and Head of the Department, almost singlehandedly steering my department to stability and progress. But the ecstasy of contentment comes from the joy of my students when they understand the intricacy of theories or the subtlety of literature. I have trained myself to speak for hours on any topic related to literature or literary theory on any occasion.

I believe in commitment to my students. I have always tried to transform myself into an exemplary model for them to follow. Like Christ, I always tempted to tell them "Follow me." Many followed me and they are working as good teachers in colleges in Kerala and outside. I hope they and many others will continue to follow me. My prayer is always to make me worthy to lead them. I think that a committed teacher never dies; he lives in the memory of his students. I repeat, a committed teacher happens.

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