**A SLICE OF LIFE WITH TATA**

When thinking of Tata, as grandchildren fondly call him, it is difficult to figure out where to start and where to end.

My first tryst with Tata was earlier than I met him 12 years ago. Oftentimes I wonder, "What good karma could I have possibly done, that God chose to cross my path in life with him ?"

Right after my graduation in Computer Engineering in 2000, I was working in the same software company as Srineet. Upon growing close to him, I learnt from friends later, that he happens to be B.K.S.Iyengar's grandson. My memory flew back to my childhood years, when I used to go about the streets and shops of Pune with my parents. Around the age of 10, I had seen B.K.S.Iyengar's books on display, and discovered that he was globally recognized as a formidable yoga master then.

I wondered what it meant now, and where this is leading to. Little did I know how fortunate this turn of events in my life was.

I was later told that Tata had been informed and he had graciously consented to Srineet's marriage with me. This, despite my non-Iyengar background, and without having even seen me. "All I wish is for the girl to live happily together with us", is what he said.

Being a world renowned figure, and a stern guru from a traditional family, how did he accept this ? How did he support us ? That Srineet had made up his mind, was enough for him. So open-minded and large-hearted he was. He had immensely strong hope and belief. His optimism used to turn reality positive.

My actual meet with him happened later, along with my parents-in-law to be, at their house in Nigadi. 12 December 2002 - the day I vividly remember. I was pleasantly surprised to find that Tata was not formidable at all. On the contrary, he was very warm and approachable. It is by his grace as the eldest one, that I became part of Sridharan family and Iyengar family.

He was personally involved in the engagement ceremony, where he sat down for the rituals, along with Vanita amma and Sridharan appa. It was the first big occasion of the next generation in the family, after a period of several years. Everyone was excited and Tata took keen interest, overseeing all the proceedings himself. Despite being an accomplished personality of international fame, he was so simple and down-to-earth as a family man.

Initially, I was conscious when interacting with him, but he soon opened me up. He was very endearing, even before I was formally married.

Despite his regular yoga practice, correspondence work, institute affairs, social commitments, and convention tours, he was always there for us. He used to enjoy celebrating our wedding anniversary every year, other family events, picnic outings, monsoon drives, television programmes, festival celebrations, like all common people. I found it puzzling initially, till I discovered that his simplicity was his greatness. Another favourite was the relaxing family stay in cool Mahabaleshwar during sizzling summers. When he was back to work, he was totally transformed and absorbed into it. He knew how to live life right, and exemplified it to others.

During one of Tata's early visits to our newly setup home in Aundh, he went about the house looking around observantly. And then happily remarked with twinkling eyes "You have kept the house very well !" I was taken by surprise with this great person's attention to such a mundane matter. I was elated. Being appreciated for this apparently thankless job, would bring a smile to any woman.

Around the time I got married, lower backache had set in and I was feeling weak. He then initiated me into Yoga with therapy practice, starting with twistings.

He knew I had started off as a software engineer, and have been working ever since. I was also running our house independently. He used to say that I am exerting beyond my capacity, at work and at home. Responsibilities at office grew over time. When we were blessed with a baby later, the personal responsibilities rose further. Juggling a demanding technical job at office, along with managing your home and mothering a child, is a tightrope challenge known to all those who do it. Everything depends on you, and you cannot afford to do injustice anywhere. It is immensely satisfying and exhausting at the same time.

Tata started working on me and my health early on, and so did Geeta Periamma and Prashant Mama.

Tata bundled me tightly into difficult twisting poses, stood on my knees to creak open my groins in Baddhakonasana towering over me like Hanuman, opened up my chest for breathing, and lifted me into initially fearsome inversions.

His favourite humour personally with me was - "You got married and generated so much work for me. Had I known this, I would have told Srineet never to marry you!" And he used to burst into roars of child-like laughter, making me break into a grin. I miss those endearing moments.

Later he taught me finer nuances of how to separate the skin from the flesh, how to turn the bones in various poses, how to create space in different parts of the body, how to let the energy flow, and many more such invaluable learnings. Even while practicing now, his words come alive ringing in my ears.

Tata was very open and candid. He has chided me at times for being lazy in class, or being apprehensive of breaking through certain asanas. I have also taken several hard pats from him. And those were hidden blessings, encouraging me at the same time to evolve. "Don't earn your money only to spend on doctors", he used to say. "Earn your health."

Yoga was not only his passion, but his love. He used to do everything about yoga with love - love for the subject, love for the students, love for his duty. He had the uncanny knack of instantly decoding people and their problems. Many a times during practice, when I was gasping in excruciating pain, he used to put the right support at the right place in a flash. When asked about it, he used to say - "I can feel the pain from within".

Many a times he advised teachers - "You all try to follow what I teach, but learn to teach with love and care."

When it was time to bear a child, Tata said my abdomen was hard like stone. "How can a baby be in there ? It should be soft like butter." So he taught me how to widen it, and most importantly, to keep it soft in all poses.

He personally took a lot of effort, along with Geeta Periamma. To me, it felt like he was happy working for his coming great-grandchild.

Once, I was not able to go for practice, and he was awaiting me with a plan of asanas ready in his mind. I was foolish enough not to have realized, and felt terribly sorry and embarassed when I learnt of it later. Tata was more dedicated than me, to my own practice.

At another time, he was holding my ankles up in Shirshasana. His touch was so light and scarcely noticeable, that I was apprehensive. He burst into a smile and said "Your baby inside is smiling, playing football in a vast field!", and that immediately released my tension.

He supervised every detail during my pregnancy, including strengthening the spine, oxygenation for the uterus, supporting my lumbar well in inversions to avoid strain, and to see that the baby aligns well for delivery. I had not ventured thinking how the delivery would go, but with their hard work and by God's grace, I was able to manage a natural delivery. "I had not expected, but she did it.", Tata told Vanita amma.

It was my good fortune and honour to be able to give him the position of a great grandfather with his first great-grandchild, Deeksha. For the same reason, we performed the Kanakābhisheka ceremony for him as our humble gesture, and it gave us immense satisfaction. I owe him a lot and cannot return even a fraction of anything that he did for us.

I used to find solace and joy serving him in small ways. It was heartening to see him relish a simple dish of poha, or the festive diwali faral snacks I used to prepare, or the gourmet basil cheese sandwich which he had taken a liking to. I miss the special cuppa tea I used to make and we sipped together before the therapy classes I attended on Wednesdays. I felt blessed to be doing an occasional oil massage for his legs, or doing simple things like serving him a meal plate, or helping him put on his chappals.

Tata was extremely sharp and had great attention to detail. This is one aspect I could well relate to, as I myself believe everything is in the detail. He used to amaze me by pointing out subtle things in routine life. "Aey Mugdhi, why have the baby's cheeks turned rough. Take care to keep them soft." "Her eyes are taut, she has body heat. Apply this right hair oil."

He used to play fondly with the baby when she was around, enjoy feeding her goodies, putting her into inversions at times, and watching her developments. On special occasions, he blessed her with some personal gifts, which she will treasure forever.

Tata had an aesthetic eye and a refined taste. He took interest in everything, right from picking the best suited apparel colours, saree designs, improving the taste of culinary delights, making art performances more graceful, to following world news and cricket scores.

He never missed anything, despite his tall stature and the huge responsibility of his yoga mission.

I always think he was the Chosen One, destined for this mission. It is incredible how the severe hurdles he encountered through his journey of life and yoga, did not deter him. How he emerged victorious and compassionate. How he achieved this along with other worldly ties and responsibilities.

He brought the profound and elusive subject of yoga within everyone's reach, for the benefit of mankind. That is his enormous contribution to the world. But beyond that, he became the guiding force who touched and revolutionized the lives of many. And each of them very individually and differently, in unique personal ways. His magic transcended all boundaries.

The philosophy of yoga and life is difficult to truly understand and internalize. From my experience so far, it is impossible to fit the jigsaw of life merely with rational logic. Philosophy is required to complete it, comprehend it, and co-exist meaningfully with it. Tata has touched upon these advanced philosophical aspects in his lectures and works. Geeta Periamma and Prashant Mama bring this forth beautifully in their unique ways. But beyond that, their overall presence, way of life, and practice with them, radiates a kind of essence of this philosophy.

Tata had several great qualities - intellect, passion, compassion, vision, wisdom, courage, tenacity, empathy, generosity...it is an endless list. But I have often pondered over what it is that really differentiates him, that sets him apart ?

And I feel it is his magnanimity. Magnanimity in everything he did - in learning, understanding, exploring, teaching, helping, guiding, supporting. Magnanimity of his thought, his action, his work, his belief, his vision.

But above all, he had a magnanimous heart. That gave him his unique magical touch.

That was Tata. Our dear Tata who we will eternally miss.

Just days before he passed away, the last few spoonfuls I was fortunate to have fed him, is my last tearful but precious memory with him.

There is no better way of expressing our gratitude to him, than to continue with his work, his legacy, and his way of life... a life well lived. He has left behind so much for posterity to learn and adopt. I pray that he watches us from heaven, and continues to guide and bless us.

May his gift of yoga keep lighting our lives. It is up to all of us to keep him alive in spirit, in our souls, and in our deeds.

Tata is immortal to us.

- Mugdha Srineet.