

## **The Lonely Path Ahead**

Kuriakose sat in the back of the cab, gazing out the window as the city of Kochi rushed by. He was a middle-aged man with a bald head and a pair of glasses perched on his nose. He wore ordinary clothes: a simple full-sleeve check shirt and regular pants. Despite his simple appearance, warmth and kindness emanated from him, as if he had a gentle soul just waiting to be discovered. As he travelled, the once-familiar streets blurred, indistinguishable from one another as the rain pounded against the windshield. The cab driver, Hari, seemed to understand the weight of the moment, his normally chatty nature curbed by the sadness in the air.

Beside Kuriakose sat his youngest son, Joseph. He was a recent software graduate who going abroad for higher studies. He was an intelligent- good-looking twenty-two-year-old with a lot of ambitions. They had hardly spoken since leaving the house, both lost in their thoughts as they approached the airport. Kuriakose couldn't help but feel a heavy sense of loss, as if a piece of his heart was being torn away with Joseph's departure to Australia. The knowledge that he would soon be alone pierced his mind. He had two sons, Eldhose and Joseph. Eldhose had been settled in Canada for 5-6 years now. The only contact with him was through random video calls, which had become far too rare. His wife, Emily, was a home nurse in New Zealand. They were separated for the past ten years. His thoughts of being alone at home amplified the feeling of emptiness that consumed him.

As the cab drew closer to the airport, Kuriakose could feel his palms sweating. The thought of saying goodbye to his beloved son was almost too much to bear. When they finally arrived, Kuriakose stepped out of the cab and walked towards the airport entrance. Joseph's eyes became gloomy, his ordinarily cheerful demeanour subdued as he prepared to leave his father behind.

As they stood in the airport, surrounded by the hustle and bustle of travellers coming and going, Kuriakose couldn't help but feel a sense of finality settling over him. This was it - his son was leaving, and he didn't know when or if he would see him again. He wanted to hold on to Joseph, to keep him close and protect him from the harsh realities of the world, but he knew that wasn't possible. He clung to his son for a moment longer than he should have; the tears streamed down his face as he whispered, "Call immediately once you reach there! You took all the papers, right?" he said. "Yes, *Appa*, I will call when I reach there!" Joseph replied before finally releasing him and turning to walk toward the gate. "Take care, *mone*. *Appa* will miss you!" said Kuriakose.

Kuriakose stood rooted to the spot, watching as Joseph disappeared from view, a sinking feeling in his chest. He knew he would miss Joseph terribly, but he also knew this was an excellent opportunity for him to grow his career. As he returned to the cab, Kuriakose couldn't help but wonder what the future would hold. He kept ruminating about the memories he had with Joseph. He remembered how they cooked chicken curry together every weekend, the movies they watched, and their small fights. He remembered the day he slapped Joseph for smoking a cigarette. "Maybe I should not have hit you that hard, sorry Jo," he said to himself with teary eyes. All he knew for sure was that things would never be the same again. When he reached his home, he felt everything was different. "From now onwards, you are a free man with no responsibilities; you just have to

enjoy life, isn't it, Kuriakose *chetta*?" Hari commented. He had nothing but a slight wince on his face. He opened the door to his empty house, the silence echoing off the walls and filling every corner of the once lively home. Once adorned with a colourful tapestry of life, the walls now stand bare, stripped of vitality, and faded like the memories they once held. The air is still, stagnant, and heavy as if it carries the weight of a thousand unspoken words. He couldn't help but feel the weight of loneliness bearing down on him, the realization that his sons were all grown up and building lives of their settling in. He missed the sound of their laughter, the chaos of family dinners, and the simple pleasure of having them close by.

The following day, at around half past eleven, Kuriakose was reading the newspaper when his phone rang. It was a WhatsApp video call from Eldhose, his eldest son. Kuriakose's heart leapt at the sound of his son's voice, eager for any connection with his children. They spoke briefly, catching up on Joseph and other news. He asked, "Eldho, I took a loan of eleven lakhs for Joseph's tuition fees. I didn't want a financial burden, but what else can a retired registrar do?" He paused for some time, hoping Eldhose would say anything or send him money. But instead, Eldho drifted away from the topic by calling his children to talk to their grandpa. "*Appa* see who is coming?" Eldho smartly digressed.

Kuriakose was more than happy to see his grandchildren. He exclaimed, "Hello, Hellooooo!!" At first, they were excited to talk to their grandfather, but as the conversation continued, Kuriakose could sense a shift in their tone. They started making fun of his accent, teasing him for his broken English. Kuriakose's heart sank as he tried to keep up with the conversation, struggling to understand their jokes and quips. He tried to laugh and play along with their teasing, but he couldn't

shake the feeling that he was being mocked. The words stung, reminding him of his insecurities and the limitations of his education. He hopefully waited for Eldho to interrupt and tell his children to stop, but his wait was eternal. He tried to push down the emotion, not wanting to show weakness in front of his grandchildren, but the insults added pain to his loneliness. Trying to push away the sadness, he said, "Oh wait, someone is calling". And without waiting for a reply, he hung up as he got up from his chair and went to the door, pretending that someone was calling for him. Standing alone in the hallway, the numbness began to subside, and he leaned against the wall, struggling to hold back the overwhelming tide of sadness that threatened to engulf him.

As days passed, Kuriakose kept busy to take his mind away from his loneliness. He was making his valuable time to be productive. One day as he sifted through his old photos, letters, and newspaper cuttings, it was like digging through the dusty pages of his autobiography. Memories flooded back to him like a rushing river, each one bringing its own set of emotions and feelings. It was like he was mining for gems, discovering precious moments he had long forgotten. He felt delighted while thinking about his golden times. The time when he was studying at Mahatma Gandhi University, the days when he was so much involved in politics and writing. The time when he was the leader of the college union; a peak period in his life. He remembered some days he read out his stories to his fellow comrades after union meetings. After a few days, he slowly rediscovered his passion for writing. His pen became his magic wand, as he started writing a lot. Soon he spent all his time writing, apart from cooking and going to the club. As he wrote, he could feel the weight of his past lifting off his shoulders. It was like he was purging his soul, releasing all the emotions. Writing became his salvation when he started writing in his favourite genre, realistic fiction. He wrote many short stories engraved from his thoughts and experiences. Then

he began to take his stories to the neighbourhood club, read them out loud, and discuss them. Soon it became one of his favourite things; he would skip lunch to finish writing his story before dusk. One day, one of the listeners in the club suggested he send his story to some publishers. He encouraged Kuriakose to do it.

And when he finally mustered the courage to send his work to a famous publisher, it was like he was throwing a bottle with a message into the sea, unsure if anyone would ever read it. But to his surprise, he received a response from the publisher, ready to publish his work after mentioning a few corrections and changes to his story. It was like getting out of a dark tunnel to a new land of possibilities and an exciting future. He felt fluttering butterflies moving around his stomach. "I want to thank all of my friends at the club," he said to himself; without wasting time, he rushed around his house with excitement and adrenaline. He took some money from his shelf and hurried towards his scooter. Kuriakose's heart was beating faster than ever before. All his college days, when he spent hours writing and hustling hard to get his writing published, flashed before him. He was finally going to be a published author. As he drove, his mind buzzed about what sweets to buy. His heart was filled with excitement and anticipation as he thought about the compliments and congratulatory messages coming his way. His mind was consumed with thoughts of his journey to this point. He had found his voice, his purpose, and his passion. And now, with his book set to be published, he felt like he was on top of the world.

After buying some sweets, he continued to drive to the club. In his excitement, he didn't see the autorickshaw coming straight to him, sending him hurtling straight into the metal contraption. Onlookers raced to assist, but horror set in as they realized his right arm was trapped under the

vehicle, and he lost consciousness. When many more people came, they lifted the auto, and somehow he was taken to the hospital in critical condition. The doctors rushed him into the emergency room. The hospital room was filled with the constant beeping of machines, his breathing, and the silence of his thoughts. The darkness of the hospital room was a stark contrast to the brightness of his recent success.

After a day, Kuriakose slowly opened his eyes, feeling disoriented and confused. The previous day's events flooded his mind as he looked around the hospital room, bringing a wave of panic. His right hand was heavily bandaged and immobilized, and the realization of his loss hit him like a ton of bricks. He saw Madhu, one of his friends, come in with the doctor. The doctor asked, "How are you now, Kuriakose?" "I am alive, doctor," he said. "Good-good, you might need to stay for a week here. You got blows in multiple body parts; we must observe it," said the doctor. "Okay, doctor, doctor, what happened to my hand? Why is it plastered this much?" he asked. "You lost some flesh in your fingers, and we did surgery for it to be back normal. However, it will have some implications and limitations. You won't be able to remove this plaster for three months," said the doctor. A sudden jolt of anxiety coursed through him as he contemplated the news. He looked at his right palm, immediately raised his voice, and asked, "Will I be able to write?" "Not immediately, but we will have to check the progress; only then can I tell," said the doctor while he moved from the bed to check the reports.

Kuriakose felt a sudden numbness, and for a few seconds, he got detached from his surroundings. Madhu went close to him and said, "You don't have to think about all of these now; take a rest". He nodded and dived back into his own deep thoughts. His writing hand, the tool that had brought him so much joy and finally led him to success, was now severely injured, perhaps beyond repair.

The thought of never being able to write again, of losing the one thing that had given him purpose and hope, was unbearable.

That night, as his friend Madhu stayed by his side, Kuriakose watched him struggle with discomfort and unease. He realized that he didn't want to burden him with his pain and misery, so he made a decision. The next day, he called Joseph and told him about the incident. He was shocked, but as his immigration had been very recent, he had difficulty making ends meet. Kuriakose understood his situation and then called his elder son, Eldhose. "Haa *Appa*, how is everything going?" he answered. Kuriakose told him everything and asked him to come to Kochi for his assistance for at least for few weeks. "Oh, *Appa*, it won't be possible right now. I am close to getting a Canadian permanent residency; I have an interview in the coming week I can't risk jeopardizing it. I might be able to come next month only" Kuriakose's felt his hope shatter like fragile glass, his hands shivering as he hung up without saying it. Tears started flooding his eyes; he could not hold them back. He felt depressed as he lay on his back and cried for hours.

Later that night, Madhu came, as usual, to stay as his bystander. A gloomy-eyed Kuriakose called him to his side and said, "Madhu, I don't know how to thank you for your help; I will never forget it. My children will reach here by tomorrow and take care of me. You may go home and get out of this hospital atmosphere." Madhu listened to it and thought it was true. "Madhu, before you leave, I need one last help from you; I need you to edit the title of my story and send it to the publisher," he said. "Sure, Kuriakose, tell me the title," Madhu asked eagerly. Kuriakose whispered, "The Lonely Path Ahead."

## **Commentary**

The point of view from which a story is told is a crucial creative decision. In my short story, "The Lonely Path Ahead," I chose to tell the story from a third-person limited perspective. This allowed me to focus on the experiences and thoughts of Kuriakose, the protagonist, while still maintaining some distance and objectivity.

Kuriakose's thoughts and emotions are central to the story, and this is why I chose to tell the story from his perspective. By being able to delve into his mind and explore his feelings, I was able to create a more nuanced and empathetic portrayal of his struggles. This also allowed me to highlight the contrast between his external stoicism and his internal turmoil.

Furthermore, the decision to heavily rely on dialogue was also intentional. As the story revolves around the relationships between Kuriakose and his friends and family, dialogue was the most effective tool to develop these connections. It also allowed me to reveal character traits and motivations through conversation and subtext, rather than relying solely on exposition or narrative description. In terms of the story's ending, I chose to leave it open-ended. This decision was made to reflect the uncertainty and ambiguity of Kuriakose's future, as he faces a life without his greatest passion and purpose. This also allows readers to draw their own conclusions and interpretations, and creates a sense of intrigue and engagement.

The creative decisions I chose were made with the aim of creating a character-driven story that explores themes of loss, identity, and the importance of human connections. The use of third-person limited perspective, dialogue-heavy approach, and open-ended ending were all chosen to enhance these themes and create a more immersive and thought-provoking reading experience.