

FROM THE VALLEY OF HOPE TOWARDS THE MOUNTAIN OF HAPPINESS

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Nausikaa Haupt is an avid traveller who writes about her splendid experiences in the media. She has been to Artic and Antarctica, both are the extreme ends of the Earth. She has also been to Mongolia and other exotic places where not many have travelled in the highlands, mountain ranges and meadows as well close to it, China. Having been to Africa, countries like Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and many of the exotic Safari parks, enjoying and narrating the fascinating landscape and the exciting animal kingdom. Miss Nausikaa is from Sweden and working at the Curia of the Catholic Diocese of Sweden in Stockholm. She describes her exciting travel in the Southern India and especially the stay at Vettom Resorts whose major interest is to recharge the people through the integration of the body, mind and soul and making a pilgrimage through their life with hope and happiness and the exotic

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nature surrounding the Resort and attain wellness, wholeness and holiness.

One of the most exciting events in our great journey through Southern India, Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, was excellently organized and guided by Rev. Dr. Mathew Chandrankunnel CMI, was that of the stay at the Vettom Resorts, Kudayathoor, Kerala. We arrived at the resort in the evening. As soon as we reached the hall on the third floor, looking outside through the open space above the grills, we saw the starry sky reflected in the flowing river along with the splendid lights around the resort reflecting all over the river and the extended lake. At a distance one could see the huge mountain ranges and the lights shining from the Churches built upon the top of the mountain ranges. One could count on that clear sky, almost seven ranges of mountains whose peaks were stunning and were touching the clouds. It was indeed a magnificent vision of nature pacifying and mellowing all our tiredness and confirming the often heard slogan about Kerala, "God's own Country!". Mountains, lake, trees, meadows, simple but elegant house constructions, all fusing into the stunning beauty and wholeness of nature was indeed an unforgettable experience from the very outset. As we sat there to dine, Fr. Mathew started singing songs from in his mother tongue Malayalam, especially the thrilling songs used to be sung during the long snake like boat races happening in the beautiful spring time when the nature is adorned with flowers and the fields are flowing with ripe paddy branches. As the tempo was rising, we the Swedish took over and started singing our own beautiful songs of winter and spring and the atmosphere was really charged with joy, happiness and peals of laughter. We 11 from Sweden and the owner of the resort, Sunny and his family and his cousin Joset and family also joined us. The singing and the sharing of jokes continued releasing the tiredness and revitalizing our bodies and minds.

Then the delicious dishes were brought. Kappa, known as Cassava or Tapioka, a favourite dish is served. Kappa is a root like potatoes that grows profusely well in that area. During April – May after the first rain, the Kappa stick is stuck in the earth where already manure is heaped. The stick grows into a tall green lean bush and within eight months long and round roots are formed around the stem stuck into the mud, is harvested and sliced. These sliced roots

are then boiled and a mixture made up of coconut, chilly and other spices are pasted by grinding it and then added and mixed giving a yellowish hue. It looks like potato pure but much tastier than it. This is one of the delicious dishes known as Kappa Veichathu. The varieties of curries, chicken, beef, fish added taste to the kappa thousand fold. The delicious taste, the fragrance, the colour all made us to eat more than we could. The taste of Kerala dishes is still lingering on our tongues!

Then some of us crossed over the bridge and reached the opposite side of the river where the accommodation was arranged. We were given rooms inside the hill. After keeping the things in the room we came out and saw the beautiful meadow. Standing over there, we could see the contours of a huge hill overlooking the lake and the river. As it was after 10 PM, there was total silence everywhere. It was only broken by the cicadas and the night creatures singing loudly. Some of the fireflies were hovering around us. As we lay down on the meadows watching the starry sky and the shooting stars and listening to the chorus of the night insects, it was indeed a memorable night. As we were lying down, we felt as if the stars were falling down, some of the fire flies were descending on our bodies and lighting small spaces. It was an enchanting experience. Some of us stayed on the meadows watching the night sky and the imposing mountain and listening to the night concert of the insects! It was almost midnight when I went to the rooms and embraced the soft bed and fell asleep.

Before the dawn I got up and went up to the meadows. My friends were already there sitting and waiting for the rise of the morning sun. The birds were already in the air flying and chirping. Eagles were already high up hovering and gliding. The mountains were so huge and one could see as the height of the mountain is increasing while the height of the trees decreasing and on the top there was only grass and small bushes. The red hue of the sun was already visible and still the farthest mountain ranges were immersed in the fog. The red sun with its glowing rays started gushing out suddenly as we were watching this enchanting scenery holding our breath. As the sun was visible some of us, seeing the green carpet started doing yoga postures. Fr. Mathew has already taught us some of the simple forms of yoga while conducting a retreat for us and a few important breathing techniques. Some qualified yoga performers among us started doing

the Padmasana, sitting in lotus posture and I myself on *Sirshasana*, the head posture. Looking upside down was beautiful and felt the blood flowing into my head and enjoyed those moments of bliss. Then, we enjoyed warm and delicious tea with its taste and fragrance; we shared our impressions on Kerala as really a place of beauty and majesty.

As we had the refreshing and packing done, then the round boats came. There is a dam called Malankara, five km away from here. The water was flowing from the Idukki reservoir to generate electricity at the nearby Moolamattom Power House. Afterwards the water flows out through the river and the Malankara dam stores this water. Thus the flowing water and the lake connecting the two sides of the river make the environment so beautiful. One could see people in small country boats going early in the morning collecting the fishes from the nets they have placed in the river during the night.

Large migrating birds were also searching for fish and crabs on the bank. The round boats took us towards the other side of the bank where breakfast was ready. Dosa with chutney, appam and fishmolly were delicious. Everybody was so energized and was asking what's next. Our luggage was kept in the bus and the next destination was kept a secret by Fr. Mathew. As the bus started climbing, driven by the expert Joy, we could see the fascinating hills. As we reached a beautiful mountain range the bus stopped and we were asked to get down and sit on Jeeps which were better adapted to the hilly roads. Eleven of us were in two Jeeps and I was on the side of the Jeep and could take photos of the houses and the smiling people who were waving their hands as if welcoming us to this land of beauty. The road was really bumpy because it is being constructed. Huge trucks were removing boulders that were broken and collected by the JCBs. The road travel on such a road was as if we were having a total body massage. As we reached the top of the Ilaveezhaponchira (the lake where no leaves but flowers only falling) it was a totally fresh climate and there were no trees, only tall grass everywhere. From there one could see the Malankara dam and the resort and the water body. There were a few bridges across the river and the elongated catchment area with blue waters and the dam from the top of the mountain seemed like a guitar. When we were on the top of the mountain, the whole environment was engulfed in silence, majesty power and beauty

of nature. Each one went walking and contemplating on the mesmerizing environment. After half an hour all of us came together and some of them went by the Jeep by the rough road to the resort which is established at the top of another mountain. We 7 of us went with Fr. Mathew and Fr. Peder . It was really tough as there was tall grass and large rocks in between. But Mathew paved the way for us to a flat rock and we sat there drinking water and some of us lying down on the warm rock. Then Maria Pedersen had an idea to make us lie down in the form of a cross. Then the other friends who have already reached the resort asked her why she didn't arrange us in a triangle – a symbol of Trinity. All of a sudden she forced us in a triangle. Those who were on the top took our photographs. After a few minutes, we reached the resort that is on the top of the mountain and were happy to admire the captivating scenery. The series of mountain ranges, the water bodies, the white Churches on the top of the mountains, deep valleys were all enthralling beauty. We all sat there and relaxed. Some took a shower and some others took rest because of exhaustion. The solitude, silence, the beauty of the nature was really impressive and people caught up in this power of nature withdrawn to themselves contemplating on the pilgrimage of life and the surrounding beauty.

Then it was almost two in the afternoon. Though the sun was striking strongly through the clouds, there was no heat since the mountain was 3000 feet above the sea level. Rice cooked with beef had already been brought from the Resort. It was known as Biriyani. It is a delicious preparation specialized by the Muslims. There were sliced onions, salad, yogurt, salt and pepper mixed together. After this delicious meal, we went down to the valley to continue our journey to Kurisumala - the mountain of the cross.

When we were in the resort, I had the opportunity to interact with the owner of the Resort, Sunny Vettom. He is an entrepreneur who was working in Kuwait and established successfully a software firm. He had huge firms queuing up for making contract with him in developing software programmes for their companies and had thus a wonderful carrier. He invested those savings in the resort. Sunny envisions that this place is not a mere tourist resort. It needed to be a recharging centre, where people who have depressed feelings, encountering failures in business or family life or office or anyone

with a wounded heart or consciousness could come here, stay and undergo therapy of body, psyche and soul and could survive and conquer their life once again. So with that intention, Sunny wanted to have an Ayurveda Unit with the consultation of a doctor with medicinal accompaniment trained people to give massage and other natural recuperation and enhancement of the body. Along with that psychologists and psychiatrists would help the persons to help encounter life and regenerate energy and make them whole again by the application of advanced psycho-spiritual therapies. There will also be opportunities for spiritual growth for the Christians, Hindus and Muslims who are coming here.

Sunny showed me the Catholic Church which is beside the Resort and the Mosque is in the vicinity. The Hindu Temple was also close by. Thus, in Kerala people belonging to these religious traditions, and he had already planned acquaintance with these three religious centres and collaborated to conduct programmes for them.

He has also larger visions. As the mountain above is more than 3000 feet higher, Sunny plans to organize hang gliding from the top to the resort. From the mountain Ilaveezhaponchira where we were, people could stay there and hang gliding down to the resort enjoying the deep valley and the river and the mountain ranges. The gliding strip is already there and some practices of hang gliding are also given there. Also hiking, trekking, mountain climbing and other adventurous sports are planned. Joset is in charge of these facilities. By participating in the adventurous sports, one can regain confidence and have the courage to encounter tough challenges in life. Joset's wife Lincy and their daughter Muthe were all supportive of us and explained to us the varieties of curries and other food items.

Sunny has a plan to have animals like horses, elephants, cows, goats, chicken and other pet animals which can converse with humans who are depressed with feelings of failure or challenges can come and receive the comfort and love from these animals, birds and pets. Thus, Sunny plans to make the resort something extra ordinary and wanted to dedicate it for regeneration, wellness and wholeness. He also plans retreats, mindfulness and meditation programmes, Music Concerts, Sufi Festivals, Dance Festivals etc. He also plans to organize children's programmes so that their own consciousness could be structured and give them training in encountering life successfully.

So Sunny is rechristening his resort with all these intentions in his mind. The Resort in the valley surrounding the river and the lake will be called Valley of Hope. When people lose hope in life, according to him, they are destined to fail and have no energy to encounter the challenges of life with toughness. So the Valley of Hope is the place where people could come and recharge their energies and rejuvenate themselves. The resort at the top of the mountain will be called Mountain of happiness. So with hope and resilient energy, anyone can climb the mountain of Happiness.

As I was listening to the ideas of Sunny, I could visualize how this resort is going to be in the future; energizing people to make quantum leaps into the higher states of consciousness and through hope achieve happiness. Sunny has the exciting farsightedness to bring together the body, psyche and the pneuma (spirit) into an inextricably intertwined continuum. Merely treating the body or the mind human cannot achieve wellness or wholeness. The whole human person, including the soul or the spirit, mind and the body is needed to be treated in order to achieve wellness and wholeness and holiness. I promised Sunny that I would be an ambassador for his vision for this incredible paradise, and would definitely recommend this to people to be recharged and to be rejuvenated, so that they could strive towards wholeness in life and achieve happiness.