

Nobility And Perseverance - A Tribute To Kanwal Muthu



(1942 - 2022)

Kanwal Muthu, whom we knew as Nanaji at home, was born as a pure soul, unruffled by the worldly concerns, unmindful of personal gain. As we were close in childhood, I saw to my amazement as well as to my concern, how he connected with people without fear and favor. At that time in his life I do not think he ever had a quarrel with anyone. I realize now that his fearlessness came from the purity of his soul, as reflected to him through his consciousness. See the picture above and look into his eyes, you will understand what I am talking about.

Lucky was Nanaji as he was born to special parents. His father, Dr. Dwarika Nath Muthu, was a noble man, who at times gave money to his patients to buy medicines and defray other expenditures, rather than take it from them as his rightful fees. For his compassion and generosity he was nicknamed Satyayogi Doctor. His mother, Roopawati, my father's sister, doted on her children the like

of which I have never seen. The parents treated the two children they had like God-given gifts, which they must raise with infinite care. Sometimes I thought they were going beyond the reality of life and raising them as softies.

Kanwal spent his pre-college life in small towns like Sopore, Anantnag, etc. He had a protected and privileged childhood in company with his highly dotting parents, a younger brother, who was very different than him, and the special treatment he got from the public surrounding him, being a town medical officer's son.

I spent a lot of time with the Muthu family, as I was a functional orphan, having been sent by my parents to Kashmir to pursue my studies, while they lived in New Delhi, on the basis that education in Kashmir was superior to the one dispensed in New Delhi. Although I was not convinced of that evaluation, I ended up spending six years of my boyhood with my uncle and other relatives. I spent time with Muthus in Srinagar, Sopore, and Pahalgam. During the F.Sc exam preparation, which would be about 12th grade in the modern school system, I ended up spending about a month and a half with Muthu family at their Ganpatyar, Srinagar residence. Muthus liked me very much and so the extent of the time I spent with them.

Kanwal while riding a bicycle would shout greetings to his friends and neighbors, without shyness and decorum considerations, which was not considered good taste. But he did not care as his heart had given him the green light. In the third year of college, which was the first year of B.A., he went for the enrollment very early in the morning, so that he would get the roll number one, so that people at the college would remember him easily. At this time in Kanwal's life he did not have much ambition in his education. He was not very fond of reading books, nor had any high interest in sports. His interest in girls was sharp and durable, which was augmented by their response to his overtures, propelled quite a bit by his Hollywood - looks. See the picture above to confirm this. He just wanted to have a good time in this period of his life.

Kanwal's seriousness about his life started when after his finishing B.A. in Kashmir he joined Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute in Bombay for the studies in engineering. Away from the love of his parents and comforts of his home, he faced life in its raw and challenging state. He was disappointed with some of his performance at the Institute but he did not allow it to make a mark on him. Proverbially he hit the sack but then got up quickly, steadied himself, and strode the path in front of him determinedly. This was the birth of new Kanwal, the personality that would guide him through the rest of his life. He became a serious man and ambitions took root in him. That is why I have called him a man of nobility and perseverance. Nobility he was born with but perseverance he cultivated. After VJTI he taught at Regional Engineering College in Srinagar for five years. Some of the people he taught and those who were his colleagues have told me that he was a very good teacher. They also told me that he was good also outside the classroom.

After the first tenure at Regional Engineering College, Kanwal decided to do M.Tech from IIT Delhi. He secured a first class in it, lashing at his VJTI performance. He re-joined Regional Engineering College for a couple of years. At this point he came to the realization that he was not an academician, as he confided to me a few years ago. So, henceforth he changed his tables and worked in manufacturing. He worked with several companies at high management levels. While doing that he maintained his interest in engineering societies, as he was fond of organizing events and meeting people. Ideally, he should have been in politics, but that would have been too risky an undertaking. After he stopped working for companies, he opened his own consulting company. So, Kanwal actually never retired. Below is a listing of his academic and professional careers.

But the glory of his life was to end, as it happens with most of the human lives. It was in early 2017 when Kanwal was attending the wedding of the daughter of his cousin in Delhi, he suffered a heart attack. Maybe, he could have come back fully after that, as he had lived a healthy life for the most part, but it was followed with two more heart attacks in the next year and a half. As if they were not enough

burden on his health, he incurred a fracture of the femur bone and suffered prostate cancer. The multiplicity of his ailments produced a serious setback to his recovery. Then after some five years after his first illness, he passed away on Oct. 24, 2022, on Diwali day.

We see in Kanwal's life there were two pivotal factors that gave it shape. One was his inborn nobility, the other his perseverance. Never did I see him harboring a grudge against someone who may have hurt him. He was naturally benign with people. Past did not weigh heavy in his life, present and future were his path. He was not an intellectual but a doer. That is why he was always doing something. In his mature years he had cut socializing, spending more time with his family. He loved his children very much, especially his daughter. He or his wife had given them cute nicknames: Minnah and Baya.

Like the string of lakes in my neighborhood which I frequently visit, Nanaji was a scintillating phenomenon of nature that I was connected with from childhood. Though he had become remote and uncommunicative with the passage of time, he was always there for me. But now he is in the company of stars: beyond reach but yet inspiring.

Academic and Professional Histories:

Full name: Kanwal Krishen Muthu

Actual date of birth: January 18, 1942

Official date of birth: January 20, 1942

Academic History:

I do not have information where Kanwal did his high schooling and F.Sc., but he

joined Amar Singh College, Srinagar, in 1958, for B.A. I guess he completed it in 1960.

He joined Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute, Bombay, in 1960, and graduated B.Tech, Mechanical Engineering, in 1964.

Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, 1970-72. Graduated M. Tech., Industrial Engineering.

Professional History:

Regional Engineering College, Srinagar, Kashmir: 1965-70. Taught in Mechanical Engineering Dept.

Regional Engineering College, Srinagar, Kashmir: 1972-73. Taught in Mechanical Engineering Dept. again after M.Tech. from IIT Delhi.

Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi: 1973-75. Taught in Mechanical Engineering Dept.

Kelvinator Of India: Joined in 1975.

Weston Electronics: Joined in 1988.

Hero Honda Motors: Joined in 1991. He moved from the position of G.M.

Commercial to V.P. HR & TQM.

Lumax Industries: joined 1995 as VP.

Corporate Consultancy Services: Launched his own consulting firm in 1998. Provided management consulting services and conducted in-company training programs all over India.

Membership of Professional Organizations and Societies:

All India Management Association (AIMA)

Delhi Management Association (DMA). Served as president for one term.

Indian Institution of Industrial Engineering (IIIE)

Indian Society of Mechanical Engineers (ISME)

Operational Research Society of India (ORSI)

Picture of Kanwal taken in Pahalgam, Kashmir, May 1957:



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