

# Treasuring childhood

-Mahesh Balasubramanian

It is summer noon again. After the days' tiresome routine, I returned home. It is again, the same feeling. The dryness outside resembled very closely to the one inside. Dryness - leading to a desire, which can never be satiated. The desire, to be a child again. But as always, I dismissed it as a childish one'. It is like—a never-ending conflict between what we wish & what we get. I' am too exhausted to pay attention to anything, so I retire to bed.

A familiar voice pushed me off my slumber in the evening. The *maamiji* from Jabalpur came to join us for a short stay. After exchanging pleasantries, she handed me a conch-shell, leaving me wondering.

Then, after recollection, my face lit up & I smiled in delight. "A gift to you from Anju", she said, appreciating my memory. The worthless conch-shell my cousin sent me refreshed my treasured childhood memories.

Time to re-live, so went on one of my favorite Jagjit Singh collections, -"*Ye daulat bhi le lo, ye shohrat bhi le lo*".

It was one of those times when we frequented my cousins' place during my summer holidays. One day, we friends together set out for our days' program. We went uphill, roamed & played games which ran like "*papa goes to office while mummy feeds the children*" with small "gives & takes". Throughout, we had bursts of laughter & screams, which made no head or tail. Our pet dog, *moti*

added charm to our “Antarctic” expedition. That’s when Anju spotted the shell & we kept it with us to treasure. Looking downwards to the town engaged in mad rat -race, we felt ourselves above the “worldly affairs”. We were certainly richer that day. Even god seemed to have joined us in our laughter as we whiled away’ from dawn to dusk.

As the sun started setting on the western horizons, we decided to return home, only to realize to our shock that we had lost our way. Our fears increased along with the darkness. Somehow, we traced the way back & reached our homes safely.

After the holidays were over, it was time to return as our new school sessions had started. Days, months and years flew by, and I nearly forgot the treasure we had found. After so many years, the conch-shell, now a temporary escape from the hustle –bustle of daily life, is back in my hands. A treasure then, A treasure now.

“*woh kagaz ki kashti, woh barish ka pani..*” and the song came to a halt & so did my journey. Oh no! So that was just a flash from the past? I wish it were not! Regaining back my state, I blinked to find myself again in the midst of the people engrossed in serious business.