

Her Corner of Earth

The last time I went home was four years ago – to be with Amma on her seventy-eighth birthday. Her birthday falls on the day of the Thiruvonam star in the Malayalam month of Edavam. This year, my brother, Narayanankutty, who lives with his family in Abu Dhabi, would join us in the celebrations. A family get-together after so long.

Last month, during our usual Sunday phone call, Amma said, ‘Gopi, I was just thinking... why don’t I come visit you there? I do not want to postpone the trip to America anymore. You have been calling me for a long time now. So maybe for a month... I will trouble you for just one month, not more.’ I could hear the mischievous smile in Amma’s voice. ‘If you would just send me the plane ticket...’

During our early years in the US, however hard we tried to persuade Amma to visit us, she would find some excuse or the other. And now, at the ripe old age of eighty-two, she was eager to take a trip to the US!

Amma, who had never even boarded a train, now was keen to fly for several hours, all by herself. She had never travelled beyond Guruvayoor. And even that was always in a car, with others.

But Maggie was thrilled to hear about Amma’s plans to visit us. ‘Travelling alone is not a big deal. Many elderly people are doing that these days. She might face some minor speed bumps adjusting to our ways when she actually gets here, but while travelling, not so much. Let her come. It would be a good experience for her.’

Maggie would know. Her family had migrated to America from Germany a long time ago. The early years had been a grim struggle for them, and even today, everyday life was quite a challenge.

Narayanankutty called me a few days later. ‘Look, Etta, at least you should have told her that her age is past the point where she could go on such a long journey. Her health worries me; I don’t think she can

take it. Travelling to Abu Dhabi is different from taking the long flight to the US. On the phone, most of the time, she complains of knee pain. Her rheumatism is acute now.'

'Amma mentioned you are also coming for her birthday,' I said. 'We can all have a nice get-together.'

'I did tell her, yes, but I am not so sure...'

'How stingy you are, Unni! Age is on your side; you should travel and take your children places.'

'My Arab employer is very strict; he does not want me to go on a long leave – you know that Etta. And then there's the children's school, Radhika's job... all that.'

'Yes – and you have not seen our little daughter Lisa. Is it enough for our children to just be e-mail contacts?'

Narayanankutty's miserliness was so legendary, the whole family talked about it. Surely he would not be too happy to shell out money for four plane tickets to the US.

When I called Amma the very next weekend, I could tell she had been anxiously waiting to talk to me. 'Gopi, I have made up my mind.'

'Fantastic! I know well enough, Amma, once you have made a decision, you will not change it.'

'Unni said he too wanted to come. After all, your children have not met.'

I could only snort and nod my head in despair, not wanting to disappoint Amma.

'Here people are making fun of me. "So Grandma, you will be flying over the ocean even before you could take the train to Cochin?" It is like going to college without having been to school, they say. After all, Gopi, is it not a stroke of luck? Flying to another

continent so far away, crossing the seven seas and countless lands? Isn't it exciting?'

'But travelling alone such a long distance! And then, there's the language problem...'

'Isn't it for this very purpose that they put on duty young women in smart dresses on the plane? Is it not their job to help the elderly? Whenever necessary, I will call out to them. As for the question of language, I can handle it in my own way. Who knows, my school education may be good enough to chit-chat with those young things after all! And besides, I have a matriculation certificate!'

I could see my mother clutching the receiver, smiling.

'You will be fine talking to them, Amma? You won't get scared of their modern clothes and foreign accent?'

'Why should I? I am not going to be scared of those girls! They should be the ones worried about me. Is it not their duty to take me safely to New York once I board?'

'And how will you get to the plane? It's a long distance from the car park and there are many formalities and checkpoints in the way!'

'From Bombay, our neighbor Kunhikuttan will help me board the plane. He works at the airport, if you remember. And anyway, won't there be some of our own people on the flight, from Cochin and Kottayam, travelling to America like me? Even otherwise, what's the big problem? I will sleep, dream and pray during the flight. I have heard they even play movies up in the air! Don't worry about me, Gopi.' This time, Amma's soft chuckle was clearly audible. 'And just think of what people would say about my two sons if I never get to sit on a plane, ha!'

For Amma, America was the land of Abraham Lincoln. Amma had grown up adoring two icons – Abraham Lincoln, who had unified America; and Mahatma Gandhi, who had died opposing the Partition of India.

‘You know, Gopi, it was Abraham Lincoln who rescued America, though it was Columbus who discovered it. Lincoln saved a nation from a massive war and freed the slaves.’

Amma remembered and treasured little details like none of us could. On her next phone call, Amma was not prepared to listen to anymore of my lingering doubts about the seemingly endless journey.

‘Since we will be flying at great heights, it may be cold inside the plane; please see I get a nice blanket. I don’t eat meat and fish and they have to be firmly told not to serve me those things. It would not be nice to waste the food once they serve it.’

Amma was relieved to learn that it was possible to have most of her needs taken care of while booking her ticket.

With each passing day, she seemed to grow more excited about her airplane ride across the seas. All she could talk about on the phone was the long flight, Abraham Lincoln, and his America.

‘If only that rascal, Booth, did not shoot him in the head at such a close range!’ I listened to Amma in amazement. I didn’t even remember the name of Lincoln’s assassin till she mentioned him. I even doubted if Maggie – an American by birth – would know.

‘Life is like that, Gopi. Those who have done only good things all their life are called away early by God. Only the evil ones stay back here, struggling, as neither death nor life will want them.’

It had happened years ago, in the month of Midhunam. Father had gone to bathe in the overflowing river at the peak of the monsoon fury. Amma had warned him many times, but to no avail. He had only smiled and said that he had known the river like the back of his hand since childhood. The river even when in spate could not trick him.

But it did. The boatmen said that the river was sharp, flowing with a rare rage that day. Father’s friends swam to the bank and escaped.

But the river snatched Father from us. Only days later did the bloated body float out on the seafront.

I heard Amma's voice falter. She was remembering and trying to forget at the same time.

Narayanankutty called again that day. 'Gopietta, are you sure Amma can make it?'

'Even yesterday when I called she sounded very positive. "I can manage," she said. Anyway, I have sent her the ticket.'

'Suppose she falls ill...'

'Unni, there are excellent hospitals here to take care of her in such a situation. And I will have her insurance ready. That is the normal practice here when elders visit.'

'Amma follows a rather rigid routine,' he said reminding me of her strict regimen with food and medicines. And he was right. Her rules were not negotiable: getting up early in the morning, the elaborate bath after oiling her hair, pure vegetarian food, and then, her Ayurvedic liquid medicines and powders. 'All this would be a bother for Maggie and the children.'

'Unni, all this will be perfectly looked after if Amma has the blessings of Abraham Lincoln, and believe me, she has enough!'

'Abraham Lincoln?'

'Yes, the sixteenth President of the United States of America, of whom she learnt in the eighth standard. Amma knows more about him than I do. You were a history student, but do you remember the name of Lincoln's assassin?'

Narayanankutty laughed. After a while, he said with some hesitation, 'About my coming there... Like I told you, the children, Radhika...'

'I know, it is okay.'

‘I am not sure how Amma will take it.’

‘She may not feel anything. Her mind is now full of the thoughts of the holy land of Lincoln. I am surprised it took her such a long time to realize that she is really visiting Lincoln’s country! Maggie and the children will feel bad, though, that you and your family are not coming. You have not seen Lisa and we have not seen your younger son.’

‘When we saw Lisa’s photo on the computer screen, everyone here was excited – bubbly face, golden hair. My children said she looks like a Barbie doll.’

‘She is Maggie’s carbon copy. Rahul looks like me. That is, like our mother.’

‘Everybody is looking forward to meeting you all. Maybe another time, when all of us have a vacation.’

‘Do you think you can really push away the hurdles, pick up the threads of our family and take a trip? Sometimes I feel that this email thing is a bigger curse than it is a blessing. Because of email, we forget that we have voices, that we can talk to each other.’

I heard Narayanankutty grunt.

‘Luckily computers and the Internet came long past the time when Amma could learn them. Thank God she still talks to her children on the phone.’

Narayanankutty mumbled some excuse and hastily hung up. He was probably worried about the telephone bill. Or about having to make more excuses for not travelling to the US.

The next few days passed by quickly. Maggie and the children were busy making arrangements and getting ready to receive Amma. The kitchen shelves and cupboards, the bed in the spare bedroom and the easy chair were all readied, one by one. Lisa knew about her

grandma only from what Maggie had told her. And Amma had only seen her pictures in the album that I had carried on my last visit.

‘Meeting elderly people is like meeting God,’ Maggie told the children. ‘They are so close to Him, awaiting their final call to heaven.’

The children did not understand any of this, of course. They were very fond of the chubby, chortling grandmas they often saw on TV.

Maggie had been to our family home in Kerala only once in the past.

I remembered her trip – she had been so nervous, really scared about the kind of reception she would get in the village. After all, it was only Narayanankutty I had spoken to about my marriage. He had thought that the trip was best avoided. Amma’s reaction was imaginable.

I did not have the courage to tell Amma beforehand about my choice of a Western girl as my bride, that she would have no role in the marriage. After Father’s death, it was she who had done everything for us. A large heart inside a lean body. Kumaran Uncle’s younger daughter, Parvathi, was perpetually waiting for me. Ever since childhood, the two families had never doubted that we were made for each other. She was also very close to Amma.

I would never forget Amma’s reaction when I told her that I was coming home with my bride. There was no surprise in her voice. But that plaintive moan had kept coming back to me for a long, long time. In an undertone, she asked, “What is her name?”

‘Margaret. Maggie. She works in the same company.’

‘So she is not from our clan?’

‘She is a foreigner. A white American girl.’

‘So the fears I had when you were to cross the seas have come true. You’ve not kept the promises you made!’

I could not say anything. I only said that Maggie was a nice girl.

‘These white people do not bathe and wash their bottoms, no? And they will eat whatever they see.’

‘Amma, she is not like that. She is almost like us now.’

But Amma was not convinced.

‘I used to have so many dreams about my sons,’ she sighed. ‘Now my elder son has brought home a white woman. And the younger one has grabbed a Tamilian.’

I remained silent.

‘It’s okay if you come here with her. But tell her in advance, no fish and meat inside this house. There are family deities here, and snake gods within the serpent grove. You can bring her only if she maintains cleanliness and purity. Or else... there are plenty of hotels in town.’

Amma sounded more hurt than angry.

When we got there, a big surprise was awaiting us outside the house. At the entrance to the corridor stood Amma, holding a brass lamp. Behind her were all the women in the family, chanting mantras to welcome the new bride home. And hidden somewhere behind the pillars, Parvathi.

Maggie did not know what to do when Amma offered her the burning lamp. When I signalled her with my eyes, she took the lamp from Amma’s hands and held it carefully as she entered our home. Standing with the lamp in her hand, Maggie looked beautiful, her face glowing in happiness.

On the veranda, as a newly married couple, we carried out the customary ritual of filling paddy in the measuring pot. Amma’s face looked more relaxed after that.

As we were about to enter the puja room, Amma gestured for Maggie to stand outside. I decided not to enter the room as well and prayed to the gods from outside the door.

Maggie was more curious than amazed. And maybe, out of that curiosity to be more a part of our life at home, even without me having said anything, she bent down, touched Amma's feet and lifted my mother's hands to her head for blessings. Amma was moved.

Within a couple of days, Maggie and Amma became very fond of each other.

'She is a good girl,' Amma gushed. 'Her manners are perfect – perhaps because she belongs to a respectable family.'

I laughed and thought about her parents' rugged struggle in life. What respectability for the people being herded into the gas chambers, I wanted to tell Amma, but couldn't. I wondered how she would react if I told her that she was Jewish, that her forefathers had fled from Hitler's Germany.

'Amma, I don't know much about her family. I only know that her father taught in a college in Boston. Maybe she learned quite a few things being a professor's daughter.'

'Gopi, things learnt at home and those we acquire are different.'

Maggie liked Amma very much. Why she got emotionally attached to the grey-haired old woman in a white sari – she didn't know. To her, Amma perhaps looked divine. She realized that the concept of motherhood was powerful. She felt humbled whenever she sat down in front of Amma or moved about the house with her during the day, helping with the household chores and greeting the neighbours when they visited. She turned to me for an explanation.

'Maggie, it's like this: Mother, for us, is the figure at the centre of all creation across this universe. We have the concept of Mother Earth.

Everything originates and ends in Mother. Amma's blessings mean as much to us as the blessings of God.'

Maggi was fascinated by the idea. 'What language do the two of you talk in?' I teased her one day.

'We do not need a language at all,' Maggi laughed.

'Then?'

'Amma talks in her language and I in my own. And we understand each other perfectly well.'

When our time was up and we were about to leave, Amma hugged Maggie tightly and kissed her on both cheeks. She was on the verge of tears.

On our way back, on the plane, Maggie looked pensive. She said that she was already missing Amma and many other things about our home, and that the fortnight had passed too quickly.

'This is what life here is, Maggie. Within two weeks, you two became so close. Without the burden of language, you spoke so much, shared so much. Like people meeting after years. It would be difficult to make people from elsewhere understand this, and you cannot learn such things from any books. The intensity of a relationship can only be experienced. This is exactly why such ties are inseparable.'

Maggi nodded in silence.

Though we had promised to meet her again sometime soon, on my next visit home, Maggie and the children could not accompany me. I had gone alone. Maggie's work pressure and the children's classes kept them behind. I alone took the long flight home.

One morning Amma came up to me and said, 'It is difficult for old women, if they do not have enough words, to talk with the grandchildren. What kind of life is this?'

A GUEST FOR ARUNDHATHI

Amma had only one plea to us: ‘Your children are growing up in different worlds. At least, teach them some Malayalam so they can talk to their grandmother.’

I knew it would not be easy. But Narayanankutty, despite his wife’s opposition, took care of Amma’s request and hence, his children could speak a little bit of Malayalam.

Maggie, Rahul and Lisa waited eagerly for Amma’s arrival.

Maggie was nervous, worrying how Amma would manage the long flight across the Atlantic. ‘Nineteen hours, almost a whole day.’

‘Don’t worry, she will manage,’ I tried to comfort her. ‘My mother’s skill in handling difficult situations will embarrass any hotshot manager you may have met at work.’ I laughed.

As a child I was surprised by her ability to supervise, at any given time, at least twenty to twenty-five people on the family farm and in the house courtyard as well. Most days, there would easily be about thirty people over for lunch – relatives, farmhands and odd guests. Although we did have a cook and a couple of helpers in the kitchen, Amma’s management was meticulous.

‘Whoa!’ Maggie squealed in surprise seeing Amma come out of the arrival lounge of Newark International Airport, pushing a trolley.

She had draped a red shawl around herself. Despite the fatigue of the flight, a happy smile flooded her face.

As soon as she reached us, Amma hugged Maggie and the children.

‘How was the trip?’ I asked.

‘Nothing much happened. Honestly I have no idea how the time passed. Since they were showing the route map on the screen all the time, we knew where we were. The only nuisance was the movie that they showed. It was so noisy. I pulled off that plug from my ears immediately.’

Amma was running her fingers through Lisa's brown hair. 'My golden doll!'

When she held her tight Lisa snuggled up to her. 'From her picture I could not make out she would be so beautiful!' Amma laughed.

She told us that the woman sitting next to her was a grandmother from Thiruvalla. When she told us that it was that woman's third trip to the US, we laughed. 'Amma, you're lucky to have found such a companion.'

We were now walking out of the airport. 'What luck?' Amma grunted. 'It's her third trip, and still she knows nothing about Abraham Lincoln! She asked me who he is. When I told her that he was shot dead while watching a play at Ford's Theatre in Washington, she asked whether I was talking about Gandhiji. Poor thing! She has heard of neither Gandhi nor Lincoln.'

I laughed. Maggie drove with Rahul in the passenger seat, and Lisa and I sat in the back, beside Amma.

Maggie asked me to translate what Amma had said. 'Lack of general awareness about the Lincoln assassination.' I laughed. Amma nodded in agreement.

'It is really sad how all great people die from gunshots... from Abraham Lincoln to our Indira Gandhi.'

Once again, I translated it for Maggie.

Maggie and Rahul were looking at Amma with great adoration. They talked in hushed voices. Amma was keen to follow them. 'She was saying you really read your history well at school,' I said. 'You have everything at your fingertips.'

'You are right, Gopi. Nowadays, the standards are awful.'

'Amma, if you like, you can take a nap. Our place is a long way off,' I suggested.

‘Sleep? No way. I haven’t come all the way from India to sleep! And anyway, I slept on the plane for a long time.’

We turned onto the highway, leaving the city behind.

Amma whispered to me, ‘Is there a rule here that only women can drive?’

‘No, I thought I could sit and talk to you for a while.’

‘I learned something on the way. To go abroad, you don’t have to learn tables or be well-read. I understood perfectly well what the crew was saying. And they too could follow me.’

‘Not knowing a language could also be a blessing sometimes. Isn’t it, Amma?’

She nodded with a smile.

‘So... Kutty is not coming, I suppose?’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘He mentioned that for my next birthday we all can get together at home. Who knows if I will still be around?’

‘But you are in fine fettle, Amma.’

‘No, let me tell you that I have all the problems that one can have at my age. But I don’t care. I go about doing what I have to do. I know if I am laid up, I would be down for ever. And if that happens, Damodaran and Thulasi will have to carry all the burdens of our household. Since they are with me, I somehow manage.’

‘Your knee pain?’

‘No improvement. But still, there are special days when I manage to walk to our temple, offer puja and listen to a little gossip in the courtyard. I get irritated when people say that for my age I am quite fit.’

I patted Amma on her shoulder.

Amma sat looking out the window for a while, watching the sleek, multilane highway lined neatly with big trees on either side.

‘It is very nice – the wooded roads.’

‘There is something special here that you must see, Amma. With the change of seasons, the colour of leaves starts changing: from green to yellow, purple to red. A lot of tourists come here just to watch the trees change colour. After that, all the leaves start falling one by one. They call it the fall season, and before the onset of winter, the trees look like skeletons. If you stay here for a couple of months you can see all that. This area is called New England.’

‘Another England in America?’ Amma was amazed.

‘Perhaps the first settlers in this area had come from England. That is why we see many townships here with typical English names.’

‘You know Gopi, an African woman sat next to me on the plane. She had boarded at London. A big, black woman. She had wispy curly hair. I guess she was a simple woman. She asked me so many things. It was not the kind of English we learned in school. In the beginning, I did not understand anything.’

‘Must have been French or Caribbean, not British.’

‘Who knows? Anyway, after a while, I began to pick up on what she was saying. And she too could follow me well.’

When I translated this for Maggie, she burst out laughing.

‘Gopi, what is the matter?’

‘I was asking Maggie why people need any language at all.’

‘An old woman needs no language to talk with her grandchildren.’ Amma smiled at Lisa.

‘Yes, Amma, your biggest fan here is Lisa. Why don’t you chat with her a little?’

Amma kissed Lisa’s cheeks and the little one blushed. She started twirling the gold-laced *rudraksha* beads around Amma’s neck. Amma asked her fondly, ‘Do you like them? Then take them.’

‘No Amma, don’t tell her to wear *rudraksha* so early.’

Outside, the landscape had changed. Both sides of the road were now lined with tall pine trees.

‘There are many pine trees around our house too, it’s like living in the woods. And in winter, the whole place will be covered with snow. It is amazing – everything under several feet of snow. If you can stay till Christmas, you can see that too.’

Amma did not seem to hear me. She leaned back on the seat and decided to take a nap. I covered her with a shawl and put Lisa on the other side. After a little while, Amma woke up with a grunt and looked around. She heaved a sigh.

‘What happened, Amma?’

‘Eyy, nothing.’

‘Amma, you seemed to be dreaming.’

‘Hmm...’

‘What did you see? You look a little dazed.’

With some hesitation, she spoke softly. ‘The heaviest rains come down in the month of Midhunam. The river... It’s in spate flooding both banks. The solitary boat... But during the last monsoon, it was very hot.’

I was shocked. She had not forgotten anything. She read my mind and kept mumbling. ‘How can I forget it, Gopi! He left at such a

young age. A man so full of life, he had a fine taste for all the good things. And now, all that remain of him are his unfulfilled wishes.'

Again, I patted her shoulder.

'Though we perform some rituals for the peace of the soul, those who die with unfulfilled desires cannot leave everything behind and go away. They will always be around us. They keep coming back to haunt us even after we cross the seas.'

Amma's eyes were moist. She seemed hesitant to close her eyes again.

Maggie turned around to look at us.

'Gopi, let Amma rest a little,' she said. 'It will take her a couple of days to get rid of the jet lag.'

'Maggie, this is not jet lag. This is the residue of foregone love. It will not be easy to get rid of it just like that.'

Puzzled, she looked at me leaving me no choice but to explain what troubled Amma.

Amma eloped with my father from her rich father's mansion one night. It raised quite a storm in the village. Father was the last remaining heir to a family in decline. During his younger days, he was an irascible man moving around insolently spoiling for a fight. He was never a suitable groom for a girl from an aristocratic family, not fit for the pomp and grandeur that follows a wedding in the royal house. Outraged by her escapade, the girl's family ostracized her. I first met her brothers only when I got the top rank in my engineering exam and my picture came in the newspapers.

'Even before we could plan a life of our own, he was gone,' Amma sighed. 'A strong man, always ready for a fight, was carried away by the river – hard to believe, isn't it?' Amma wiped her tears and nodded at Maggie.

A GUEST FOR ARUNDHATHI

The drive was long and tedious. When we reached home, Amma took another nap.

The first couple of days passed peacefully, and Amma was in a world of her own, lost in her thoughts and dreams.

It was with great difficulty that we could persuade her to come out of her groove and join us. We took her to New York City, the Statue of Liberty, and Washington DC. Of course, an eight-hour drive to Niagara Falls would have been too much for her.

Besides her health, her heart did not seem to be in all the sightseeing. She was not as enthusiastic as she had sounded on the day of her arrival. She was engrossed in deep thought the whole time now.

One evening, before dinner, I sat beside her and held her hands in mine and asked, ‘Amma, are you getting bored?’

‘Eyy... Nothing like that.’

‘There are many more places to see. Actually, we have not seen anything so far; America is a huge country.’

‘Gopi Mon, this is enough. The roads are wide and the cars wonderful. But I cannot sit in the car for a long time. My knees hurt when I get down.’

I knew this was not true. The woollen knee cap I had bought for her was quite comfortable.

‘It has been two weeks since I arrived, isn’t it?’ Amma asked suddenly. ‘Who knows what Thulasi and Damodaran are doing at home?’

It was the first hint.

‘Amma, though you had said one month, we planned and made a programme for a minimum of three months. And the visa is for five years.’

She did not seem to be listening, though.

‘So another fortnight remains, no?’ Amma said, speaking to no one in particular.

I looked at Maggie. Since my mother was counting off the days on her fingers, Maggie knew. ‘Amma, is there any problem here?’

Amma waved her hands to say that there was none and then murmured as if in a soliloquy, ‘This girl would not understand these things. After so many years, it’s for the first time that I am not watering the *tulsi* plant and lighting a lamp on its ledge at dusk.’

I was at a loss for words. I knew that once Amma had made up her mind, there was no point in trying to persuade her to reconsider.

I could guess what was going on in her mind. I was not surprised when she started reminding me gently about the return ticket.

The night before her flight back home, her drawn face hinted at turmoil within her.

‘Amma, is something the matter?’ I saw Maggie talking to her.

‘I don’t know,’ Amma clasped her hands. ‘Something is wrong somewhere; I can feel it but I don’t know exactly what it is.’

‘Are you okay?’

‘I am fine. When I think about leaving this place tomorrow, I get a little unsettled.’ She held Maggie’s arm and smiled. Then she turned to the children. ‘Now, when do I see you again?’

‘Amma, no problem. If you wish, you can postpone the trip. And I can change the ticket,’ I said helpfully. Amma sat quietly for a while and closed her eyes.

A while later she looked at me, fighting back tears. Her voice was thick with emotion. ‘No, my children, it’s better that I leave tomorrow. I still have the courage and strength to get back home.

A GUEST FOR ARUNDHATHI

After a while, when I lose that confidence, I will need others' help. I won't be able to make it on my own. Frankly, I don't trust my health anymore. If I fall ill I may not recover again. And dying in a corner of a foreign land... in somebody else's land! I can't think of it.'

Pausing for a moment, she continued. 'No matter what, I must return to my part of the earth. My land, my air, my water, I want all that. And that too, when I am conscious and able to remember everything. I should be there – in my land now, when I can still see and remember everything, and later too, when I am in the zone that dusk of forgetfulness... '

A spell of deep silence followed. None of us knew what to say.

'The kind earth in which our forefathers sleep, Gopi. The earth guarded by our family deities. How can I make the children understand the value of that earth?'

We had nothing to say – it was beyond all argument. Amma had said everything that needed saying.

The next day, quite unusually for her, Maggie burst into tears at the airport, as did Lisa. My eyes filled up too.

Amma was the only one who did not cry. Finally, I could comprehend the strange glimmer in her eyes: she was the only one who truly understood the full meaning of her journey back home.