

Foreword

This docu-novel seeks to trace the extraordinary companionship of a remarkable couple. It is our hope that readers feel touched by these deeply human experiences and, through them, awaken to a deeper compassion for life's unforeseen trials – especially for those enduring Alzheimer's disease, and for their caregivers who walk that demanding path with grace and devotion.

We wish for *Sharad Ni Sudha* to be not just a narrative, but also a gentle source of insight and inspiration.

This work would not have been possible without the generous cooperation of Mr. Sharad Mehta, his family, and his circle of friends. Their openness and support have made this story come alive.

We are very grateful to Ms. Janki Parikh, for readily translating our original 'Sharadni Sudha' from Gujarati in English, both fluently and expeditiously. She also made valuable suggestions, for which thanks are due.

Our heartfelt thanks also to Zen Opus for his valuable support.

– Prakash Trivedi & Nina Sanghavi

Translator's Note

There was just something about this book that captivated me right from the moment I started to read it. The characters are so real and relatable, and yet the narrative flows with the richness of a novel – at times light-hearted with humor and adventure, at others, deeply moving and inspiring as it captures the unwavering courage and quiet heroism of its characters.

As I translated, my effort was to keep the heart of the original alive – the tenderness, the cultural nuances, the deep humanity – all conveyed through the gentle rhythms of Gujarati thought and speech. The rhythms of languages differ, but emotions don't, and I hope these pages carry the same warmth and poignancy that the original does.

I chose the title *Autumn's Grace* because “Sharad” in the original title carries the meaning of autumn – a season of color, maturity, and reflection, while “Sudha” evokes nectar, grace, and sweetness. Together, they mirror not just the names of the protagonists but also the essence of their journey: a companionship that transcends seasons and endures with dignity and love.

To Sudhaben and Sharadbhai: thank you for demonstrating what companionship truly means.

To Prakashbhai and Ninaben: thank you for giving me the opportunity to bring this English version to life.

And to the readers: if this story moves you, the credit belongs to the authors; it has been my privilege to help their words find you in English.

– Janki Parikh

Prologue

That day, Aalok's home overflowed with joy – laughter spilling through the rooms like sunlight through open windows. The sound of children's chatter, the patter of little feet racing from room to room, love and laughter everywhere.

The occasion? Arin's second birthday.

His sister Aaliya and their cousins Eva and Raina had invited all their friends. The children arrived clutching gifts, wide-eyed with excitement at the promise of balloons, games, pizza and cake, as well as the party favors they'd carry back home like treasure.

When it was time to cut the cake, Sudha, Arin's loving grandmother, gently lifted him into her arms, her face aglow. Of course, the knife wasn't meant for his small fingers – that honor went to his older sister, or perhaps his mother. But Sudha was the one who kissed his cheeks, soft as petals, and smoothed back his hair as if memorizing the moment. When the cake was cut, she scooped up a little piece with her finger and placed it tenderly in his mouth. Arin clapped in delight, and a sweet chorus of "Happy Birthday to you!" rose around them like a wave.

As the final note drifted away and the candles flickered low, Sharad and Aalok stepped forward to take Arin from her arms.

Sudha turned to them, holding the little boy tight in a loving embrace, a faint smile touching her lips.

"Who is he?" she asked. "Whose child is this?"

At that moment, someone leaned in and quietly blew out the last glowing candle.

The Hindu Temple of Malibu

In the picturesque town of Malibu, California, near the tranquil shores of the Pacific Ocean, nestled in serene hills, stands a magnificent white Hindu temple, its pristine white gopurams intricately carved in the grand tradition of South Indian temple architecture. It is not dedicated to Lord Murugan, however, but to Lord Venkateshwara, an avatar of Lord Vishnu. This five-story architectural marvel, standing as a serene beacon of faith and culture, has welcomed devotees and spiritual seekers for years.

The breathtaking natural beauty of Malibu – the rolling hills, the vast sky, and the rhythmic dance of ocean waves – only deepens the temple’s sense of sacredness. More than just a place of worship, this temple awakens the divine consciousness that lies within one’s heart, and fosters a deep spiritual connection with the universe.

Adjacent to the temple of Vishnu – the preserver of the universe – is a relatively smaller yet equally sanctified shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva.

As one enters the Vishnu temple, the mind resonates with the sacred chant:

“Mangalam Bhagavan Vishnu.”

*Auspicious is the Lord, Bhagavan Vishnu – Harbinger of harmony,
Protector of worlds.*

In the same way, upon stepping into the Shiva temple, the soul stirs with the powerful vibrations of the *Mahamrityunjaya Mantra*:

*“Om Tryambakam Yajamahe, Sugandhim Pushtivardhanam,
Urvarukamiva Bandhanan, Mrityor Mukshiya Maamritat!”*

*We offer our worship to the Lord Shiva, the Three-Eyed One,
fragrant with grace, who nourishes all life.*

*Like a ripe fruit severed from the vine, may we be freed from
the bonds of death, yet never from the nectar of immortality!*

If Vishnu is the preserver of the universe and Shiva is the deity of death, it is only through the guidance of both that all souls can navigate the path of immortality. This profound realization dawns in the hearts of visitors within the sacred space of the Malibu Hindu temple, where the eternal forces of preservation and transcendence meet in perfect harmony.

The temple courtyard is alive with activity today – flowers bedeck the space, and a sacred energy fills the air. As visitors remove their shoes and step inside, their feet tingle from the cool, moist marble floor. The air is thick with the fragrance of ghee lamps, and the Upanishadic peace mantras resonate through the hall, easing the turmoil in every heart.

In the temple courtyard, arrangements have been made for the gathering. Chairs have been set up, and a framed photograph adorned with floral garlands rests on a central table. Nearby, a *havan kund* (sacred fire altar) has been prepared, surrounded by seating mats for those participating in the rituals.

Even in her absence, Sudha’s presence is deeply felt.

The prayer assembly begins with chanting peace mantras. Two South Indian priests seat Sudha’s sons, Anurag and Aalok, near the sacrificial fire and commence the Vedic rituals.