

AS I lay on my bed in the intensive care unit of Bangalore's Manipal Hospital, I felt helpless, as never before in my life. The previous night, I had had a stroke which paralysed the left side of my body.

At 28, I was a product manager with a Swedish multinational company in Bangalore. I was living life to its fullest when fate struck. That night, I was returning home from a New Year's party, when I was hit by a truck. My helmet saved my life, but even so, I had a severe head injury. This injury had resulted in the formation of several blood clots in the front temporal

Though I originally hailed from Kerala, my father had migrated to Ahmedabad in the '50s. I was born and brought up there. It was home for me.

After graduating in biochemistry from St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, in 1987, I worked for five years before completing my M. B. A. in Pune. I worked with healthcare multinationals and so, after campus interviews, I joined a Swedish



GRAPHICS: JYOTI SINGH VISHWANATH

HOW POETRY SAVED ME

He was partially blind and paralysed. But when god closes one door, he opens another, says M. MENON

lobe of my right brain. My paralytic stroke had been a direct result of these clots putting excessive pressure on my right brain.

The left side of my body had become numb. My left limbs had lost sensation as well as power and I couldn't even wiggle the little finger of my left hand. Both my left limbs had become dead weights.

Life comes to a standstill

It was like a bad dream come true when my neurosurgeon gave me the shocking news that surgery had cleared the blood clots, but the pressure on my brain had left both my left limbs paralysed.

But the doctor told me not to lose hope. There was still a chance that I might regain some functioning of my limbs, he said. His words did not comfort me. All I could think was that, at 28, I was a bed-ridden cripple, a thousand miles away from my parents.

pharmaceutical in Bangalore. I also taught product management at the Mount Carmel Institute of Management, because I had wanted to keep in touch with academics.

Life was evenly balanced between work and fun till that fateful new year's night. Invited to the party by my students, I met with the accident on my way back.

I had been the typical Sagittarian — bubbly, enthusiastic and full of joie de vivre. I couldn't bear the thought of being an invalid. But my condition showed little improvement. I had been rendered partially blind, as the muscles of my left eye were paralysed, and the nurses had to read me my letters. One of my colleagues would bring me my mail to me regularly.

The slow process towards recovery

One morning, I received a poetry book in the mail. I had sent one of my poems, 'The Ride', to Dr. Krishna Srinivas, editor of the

international monthly, 'The Poet'. The nurse told me that my poem had been published in 'The Poet'.

It was the beginning of my recovery. I painstakingly taught myself to read with my right eye and, soon, I could read all the books that were brought to me.

When I was in the healthcare industry, I had come across two books on alternate healing: 'Quantum Healing' by Dr. Deepak Chopra and 'The Power Of The Subconscious Mind' by Joseph Murphy. The central themes of both had been about how any affliction from amnesia to paralysis could be completely cured through the power of the mind.

I arranged for these books to be brought to my hospital room and began reading them over and over again. I also decided to put theory into practice and began the mind power exercises from the books. The fact that I believed that I could get back to normal would prove vital to the success of mind healing.

*NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT IDENTITY

I also began writing poems. They were an outpouring of my deepest feelings. I knew I had the talent, all I needed was the inclination and the time. My unexpected hospitalisation provided me the time. And my paralysis left me unable to do anything physical.

After several attempts, I managed to communicate to my nurse that I wanted to write. She brought some paper and a pen. We got going. I communicated with her by blinking — one blink was A; two, B; and 26 blinks meant Z.

Creativity surges

And the painful process of writing poems began. It took me two days to write my first poem. My first victory! Completing my first anthology of poems became my reason for existence. I lived in a poetic universe and, soon, poems started flowing from my eyelids.

My poems became songs of my soul. My awareness of this world heightened, I began to feel one with the universe.

'Torment' was one of my earliest creations:

Lonely and cold, in the dinginess
of the cave,
Fastened tight to a stout pole,
With ropes curled around my
feeble body...
Like snakes spitting venom at
their hapless victims,
In mortal fear and writhing pain,
I lay in torturous wait for my
tormentors.

Not five, not 50, but 100s of
them,
Slashing swords and swishing
canes,
They rushed in like bees from
a hive,

Their hearts bursting with fury,
Against their defenceless prey.

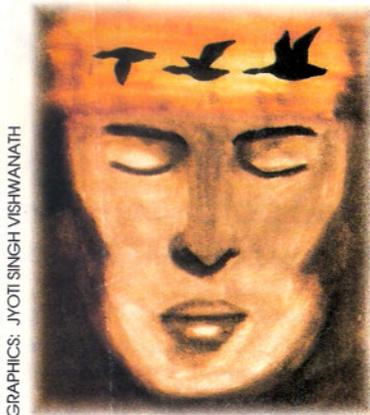
Left to right, right to left, their
hands they moved,
Their whips and canes found

their destination
Upon my fragile body.

Blood oozed from a thousand
wounds,
They bruised me afresh, rejoicing
at my pain,
But never a tear did I shed,
Facing upto my agony with
courage.

No, this is neither folklore nor
fantasy,
It is the life of a dumb animal
Tortured by the lashing whip of
its master.

Every poem was a triumph of



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mind over matter. I was so engrossed in composing, reading, correcting and editing the poems I had already written, that I did not even realise my condition had been rapidly improving.

One fine morning, sensation returned to the little finger of my left hand. I was ecstatic. And, after four weeks of confinement, I was discharged from hospital. My recovery had passed me by.

By then, I had written my 30th poem; my left hand had regained power as well as sensation, becoming as normal as my right. Now, I could sit upright and write my poems myself. This was the clincher. My poetic output began to rise exponentially and, within the next 12 weeks, 50 more pieces of verse flew out of my pen. Now, it was only a matter of time before I had an anthology of poems.

I started physiotherapy sessions and exercise helped my left leg regain its lost strength. Soon, I could walk with support. One of my friends offered me his computer for keying in my verses. It was good exercise for the fingers of my left hand. It took me a mere four weeks to enter my collection of poems into the computer.

My friend helped me design the book and finally, I was reading the first printed copy of my anthology of poems. I called it 'Environment Friendly Poetry', as the inspiration for these poems had come from Mother Nature. I decided to donate all profits from the sale of my book to environment protection organisations in India.

I then began mailing appeals for sponsorship to enable PEN (Poets for Environment and Nature) to publish 'Environment Friendly Poetry'.

Life's many avenues

One morning, I got the good news. A major firm agreed with my cause and informed me it would gladly sponsor my collection. And, accompanied by my printer, I selected handmade recycled paper from the Khadi Gramodyog Centre at the Sabarmati Ashram.

A few days later, I was holding freshly printed copies of 'Environment Friendly Poetry'.

My recovery from paralysis was 100 per cent complete, too — when god closes one door, he opens several others.

I quit my job and decided to become self employed, in order to devote more time to writing poems and to set up PEN, the environment protection organisation based at Bangalore, whose activities include environment education, awareness and prevention of cruelty to animals.

I also conduct poetry therapy sessions for those who have been dealt cruel blows by fate and who have not yet harnessed the infinite power of their subconscious minds through poetry."