

A Memorable Journey

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I was in the office on a weekday afternoon in early March 2009, checking my email. I noticed an email from Dr Shashi Tharoor. It had been quite some time since I had heard from him following his departure from the UN. Reading it, I sensed urgency in his request to call him at the earliest. He had provided the number where he could be reached.

When I called him, he was in an airport security line and we had to cut our conversation short. He called back and told me that he would be contesting the next Lok Sabha election from Kerala, and that he needed my support. His request came as no surprise as I had once written to him on the eve of his departure from the United Nations, assuring him that if he ever decided to enter the political arena in India and contest an election, I would be happy to help him out. When The Economic Times broke the news that he was flirting with the idea of entering politics in early February 2009, I wrote to him and reaffirmed my commitment.

When we talked this time, our conversation focused on which constituency he would be running from. From the news reports, it became clear that the Congress leadership in Kerala was not eager to embrace his candidacy. However, they were realistic enough to understand that the High Command of the Indian National Congress was interested in Tharoor's candidacy, and so were willing to concede the Palghat seat to him if enough pressure was forthcoming. We both felt that Thiruvananthapuram was the right constituency to run from, as it had the largest urban voting bloc that would understand and appreciate a Tharoor candidacy.

At the end of the conversation, I agreed to come to Kerala to help him with the campaign; however, I mentioned that if it happened to be Palghat, my contacts there would be very limited.

In between, I felt that as the General Secretary of the Indian National Overseas Congress, I should be conveying our point of view regarding a Tharoor candidacy and an appropriate constituency to run from to the leadership of the Indian National Congress. I wrote to the office of Mrs. Sonia Gandhi expressing our strong support from the diaspora.

From then on, it was a game of watching the news reports pouring out of New Delhi on speculative politics. On 19 February, I learned that Dr Tharoor had been granted his wish to compete from the Thiruvnanthapuram constituency. It was indeed a gratifying day for me as I recognized the great significance attached to a former colleague at the United Nations and a non-resident Indian, long away from his home turf, being selected to represent this prestigious constituency. As its history shows, great and prominent leaders from many parties have represented this constituency—stalwarts such as Mr V. K. Krishna Menon, Mr P. K. Vasudevan Nair and K. Karunakaran, to name a few.

One thing I learned early on is that Dr Tharoor loved his Blackberry and could be reached at any time. He was always good at responding in a timely manner, if not immediately. As someone who first introduced Blackberry to the United Nations, I have always promoted the high availability and instant access the device has been famous for. I congratulated him on securing the seat and he responded with a Blackberry message on 12 March as he was leaving for TVM, urging me to join the campaign. It was at least a whole month before the election.

Apart from the fact that we were colleagues at the United Nations, I had interacted with the Tharoor family at a different level. His sons, Ishaan and Kanishk, were classmates of my younger son, Steven, at the United Nations International School in New York. All three were editors of the *Universe*, the school's English newspaper, and spent considerable time together. Lona and I used to meet Mr and Mrs. Tharoor at the parent-teacher conferences and exchange notes on the academic progress of the children. I had noticed that Mr Tharoor made it a point to attend these conferences despite his busy schedule, and was gracious in complementing Steven's academic accomplishments a number of times.

At the UN Pension Fund, we follow a three-week vacation rule that could be granted without special permission from the CEO. Initially I thought of joining

for the last three weeks of the campaign, but upon Tharoor's urging, advanced my departure date by a week. For me, it would be an altogether new experience. I left India forty-two years ago and had never even voted in an election before then. Even in this election, I wouldn't be eligible to vote; yet I was excited to get into grassroots campaigning for the first time in my life.

In addition, I took pride in the fact that, as the founding General Secretary of the Indian National Overseas Congress (INOC), there was an opportunity out there to become part of the real political process. The INOC was created as a link between the Indian National Congress and the diaspora in the United States. It started out as a 'Malayalee' organization, inaugurated by then opposition leader Shri Oommen Chandy in 1998. It later expanded to include people from all regions in India. Smt. Sonia Gandhi went on to inaugurate the expanded organization in 2003 at a function in New York.

The goals of the organization are to function as a forum for NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) residing in the USA, desiring to promote the ideals of democracy, secularism and fraternity so that justice, liberty and equality may be secured for all. The INOC also works towards improving bilateral relations between the two countries: the world's largest democracy and the world's oldest democracy. It also engages in dialogue with Congress leadership on issues that concern the Indian diaspora.

Dr Tharoor was a frequent guest to many of our INOC functions. Other people of a similar status might have shown reluctance to associate with a quasi-political outfit that vouches loyalty to the Indian National Congress. However, he always accepted our invitations gracefully. One notable event was the release of his recently authored book on Nehru, where Dr Tharoor was the chief guest.

What made me travel half-way around the globe to campaign for someone like Shashi Tharoor? His interest in running for the office obviously didn't surprise me. It is very much consistent with his lifelong contribution to public service and humanitarian work. Whether it was the boat people from Vietnam who were seeking shelter in Southeast Asia or Muslims fleeing slaughter by Serbians in Bosnia, Dr Tharoor has always been involved in providing leadership, and offering his skills to relieve the suffering of his fellow human beings. As a colleague at the UN, I was quite impressed with his meteoric rise to one of the highest levels a career civil servant could ever occupy. During his tenure, he has exemplified the best in international service and has been a champion of the weak

and underprivileged. His run for the top position of the United Nations, the position of Secretary-General, was not realized only because the United States used its veto power in favour of the current occupant of that post.

Like many of us, Dr Tharoor has lived outside of Kerala for most of his life. However, he never lost touch with India and never gave up his national passport; besides, he has always been a fervent promoter of his motherland and a passionate advocate of her causes. Most of his books are about India, a clear indication of his keen interest and intellectual prowess in Indian history, culture and tradition.

Another reason I was excited about his candidacy was because of his strong commitment to democratic values and pluralism. He has been a fervent proponent of tolerance and harmony and a vociferous critic of extremism, regardless of which quarter it emanates from. He condemned the Babri Masjid destruction and has been a vocal critic of politically motivated religious riots that divide communities, like those in Gujarat and Orissa.

I also felt that Kerala would be greatly helped in New Delhi by someone of Tharoor's stature, who could make a significant difference in a context where development projects were held up often at the whims and fancies of various interest groups. Given his vast experience in the international arena, I also felt that the country stood to benefit as Dr Tharoor might even know most of the people in the top echelons of power in many countries.

Nevertheless, I realized that Dr Tharoor had a steep climb to make himself acceptable to the electorate. NRIs are constantly asked to invest financially, offer our services or technological skill sets, and advocate further socio-economic development in our home states. However, efforts to play a more active role within the political process have been met with great reservation from powerful circles at home. One often wonders: if Mahatma Gandhi had to return to Kerala to start the independence movement, what would his fate have been? How would he have been received? He was returning from England and South Africa, much like many of our esteemed leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, V. K. Krishna Menon and B. R. Ambedkar, who were all NRIs at one time or another. Before my departure, I had already heard the news that a Tharoor effigy had been burned to protest his candidacy. I wondered: was it going to be confrontational?

I landed in Kochi and headed straight to Thiruvananthapuram with a rest stop over in Kottayam, my wife Lona's (Kinattinmoottil House) hometown. My mother-in-law, Aleyamma Thomas, urged me to take a day's rest before heading

to Thiruvananthapuram, but since I was eager to join the campaign, I declined. On the way, I let Dr Tharoor know of my impending arrival in the city and asked for the place to report. I was directed to the campaign headquarters situated near the Law College and asked to get in touch with a Mr Jacob Joseph, who was coordinating the campaign team.

A residential house at 50 Hibiscus Court, a stone's throw away from the well-known Tharavadu Restaurant, was the centre of action. I met Mr Jacob Joseph, who welcomed me warmly. The place was busy with people streaming in and out, and I stayed there and observed the activities during the afternoon. The media centre had been established there along with a back office fully equipped with PCs and Internet connection. Although additional rooms had been rented to accommodate some of us who were arriving from far away, I preferred to make my own arrangements with a car at my disposal, which made me independent and mobile in terms of flexibility in campaigning on Tharoor's behalf.

The next item on the agenda was to go to Dr Tharoor's house and meet with him. From his interaction with me, he seemed to appreciate my arrival and asked which area I would like to work on; but then instructed me to work with the team at Hibiscus. After spending a day or two at the campaign headquarters, I realized that there was plenty of support there for the back office work, and that Mr Jacob Joseph had taken control over media relations. Therefore, I politely told Dr Tharoor that I could help him in many other ways, especially in reaching out to the various communities, and particularly in working with minority communities. He readily agreed.

One of the first things I wanted to do was to go to the campaign headquarters of the District Pradesh Congress Committee. I went there with a little trepidation as I had become aware of the prevailing tension between the Congress cadre in Thiruvananthapuram DCC and the Tharoor campaign staff, which was mainly drawn from NRIs. I met Mr Thampanoor Ravi there, the Convener of the campaign committee. It was an interesting meeting where he directly told me that they had run many campaigns and could do very well without newly imported NRIs. However, he was gracious in receiving me, and promised to work together in the days ahead.

The following day, I accompanied Dr Tharoor to a number of functions. There was a gathering of Congress party workers at Kesavadasapuram, where several people were eagerly waiting to hear him speak. I have listened to him so many

times and he always seems to be at ease while addressing any type of audience. He is known to be sure-footed in the subject matter and flawless in his delivery. I recollect a function at the United Nations to celebrate Onam for the first time. He spoke for nearly ten minutes on Onam and its significance to the NRIs, and the talk was videotaped. When I asked one of the technical hands in my IT group to transcribe the talk and edit it for a press release, the answer came back attached to the PR, 'no edit necessary'. It was an indication of how well even his impromptu speeches were structured. However, he now had to speak in Malayalam, and for someone who has been away from Kerala his whole life, it appeared to be a monumental task.

Dr Tharoor stood up and introduced himself in simple Malayalam and said he was running from Thiruvananthapuram. He asked for their support and added that the experience he had gained over the years working in the international arena would be put to use to improve the lot of the people in his constituency. It was a very simple message which resonated well with the audience there, and one that he repeated over and over in the days to come. There was no doubt that there was a curiosity factor concerning his candidacy among the audience, indicated by the way people flocked to him after each appearance.

Dr Tharoor was always accompanied by Mr G. S. Babu, who had been assigned to him by the DCC campaign committee. Mr Babu has been an active and dedicated party worker from his youth, and has probably missed opportunities, as others who were much junior to him had bypassed him for higher party positions and Legislative Assembly seats. Dr Tharoor had taken a special liking to him, and from their interaction, it was apparent that he believed that Mr Babu was someone whom he could trust. Mr Babu would work day and night and would always shadow Dr Tharoor in his journeys until the election was won. Mr Pandalam Sudhakaran, a Congress leader, has worked closely with the Tharoor campaign and was quite sincere in his efforts to see him succeed.

On the following morning, we got together at Dr Tharoor's home to start the daily campaign activities. There was also a media frenzy surrounding his campaign. I have seen news outlets from as far away as Denmark come to cover his campaign. Early morning news interviews became routine events.

One particular morning, there was a discussion on the dress code for all who would accompany the candidate. Mr Sharad Nair, Dr Tharoor's cousin and close confidante, talked about wearing '*Nadan mundu* and shirt', especially

for the purpose of downplaying the ‘NRI factor’ in the campaign. Since Dr Tharoor had already switched to the local dress, it was only natural for us to follow. I soon went up to a handloom store at Balaramapuram and made the necessary purchases to conform to the dress code.

One of the early controversies surrounding the Tharoor campaign was the malicious propaganda circulated within the Muslim community that Dr Tharoor was anti-Muslim. Muslims were said to constitute 8–12 per cent of the electorate and were considered a critical constituency for the election. Although the issue was raised by some within the community, there were lingering doubts that the ‘anti-Muslim’ label was the work of disgruntled local party members who were disappointed with a Tharoor candidacy. The basis for this attack was an article Tharoor had written for an Israeli newspaper. I personally felt that this was an area where I should try to help and correct the record. I strongly believe that Dr Tharoor is very secular and there were plenty of paper trails to prove the point. I also found an irony in this whole affair because a VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) site in the US had blacklisted him as anti-Hindu. I have seen over the years that if one stands for true secular principles, one may wind up ruffling feathers on all sides.

I felt compelled to swing into action to protect Tharoor from this unjustifiable line of attacks. I picked up the phone and called the then External Affairs Minister of State, Shri E. Ahamed. We had known each other for quite a long time and I have valued his friendship and advice over the years. I briefed him on the innuendo that was being spread to damage Tharoor’s image and requested him to issue a statement to correct the record. Mr Ahamed had come to know Tharoor personally over the years during his visits to the UN as an Indian delegate to the United Nations. We used to call him a ‘permanent delegate’, keeping in mind the number of times he has addressed the United Nations. Mr Ahamed was busy with his own campaign; however, he promised to help when he got a break.

Mr Ibrahim Khan, the current Assistant Solicitor General, has also been a good friend of mine over the years. We worked together in the All Kerala Balajana Sakhyam in the 1960s and I admired him for his leadership and dedication to his community. I recently got together with him in the Alumni gatherings of the old Balajana Sakhyam leaders, which included Oommen Chandy, M. M. Hassan, Ramesh Chennithala, and many others. I made a call to Mr Ibrahim Khan and briefed him on the mushrooming crisis and requested his help. He was serving as the President of the Indian Lawyer’s Congress as well. He responded by making a trip to Thiruvananthapuram to coordinate the efforts. He played a

key role in getting in touch with many leaders in the community, including Mr A. K. Abubaker, Mr J. K. Shamsudeen, Mr H. G. Mohammed Babu Sait, and so forth. The most important action in this regard was getting the endorsement of the south Kerala Um-Eth-Ulama—an organization of priests and pundits—to this effort. It culminated in getting a message countering such propaganda across to all congregations in various mosques throughout the constituency. There was a similar accusation against another candidate, Mr K. V. Thomas, who was running from the Ernakulum constituency.

I was told that Minister A. K. Antony had requested further help from Mr Ibrahim Khan in this regard, which resulted in the convening of a meeting in Kochi of the Muslim leadership, where the issue that these two candidates, Tharoor and Thomas, were facing in terms of a potential backlash was discussed. A consensus was finally reached at the meeting. A subsequent press release stated that the meeting not only fully endorsed these candidacies, but also announced this as a crucial election where the Congress party needed these two seats, and characterized the current controversy as a distraction from the stated goal. Mr Ibrahim Khan is said to have received a letter of gratitude from 10, Janpath for his efforts on behalf of the two candidates.

I interacted on a regular basis and worked with Mr Kochu Muhamed, Chairman for the minority department of KPCC, and Mr P. Zia Vudeen, the convener for the same. In a number of meetings, we discussed the issue in detail and came to the same conclusion—to take some necessary action with the local Muslim leadership. Mr Kochu Mohamed was very vocal in his defence of Tharoor, and felt very strongly that to further the interest of his community at the central level, especially to support and implement the Sachar commission recommendations, someone of Dr Tharoor's stature was needed. He was also convinced that despite the isolated voices condemning him, including some from the left, there was never any negative response from the Muslim countries that he had dealt with while serving at the United Nations. These efforts culminated in the printing of two pamphlets, one describing the twenty-point programme the current Manmohan Singh ministry had undertaken to help the minority communities in general and the Muslim community in particular, and the other, titled 'Religion, Man and Marxism', discussing the incompatibility of the Marxist ideology and Islamic beliefs. These pamphlets were widely circulated in Muslim community centres and worship places. I was asked to accompany Dr Tharoor in his upcoming *paryadanam* (motorcade

trips through towns and villages). Although I did not reject the suggestion, I was apprehensive about my usefulness, sitting in a follow-up car for days and days, visiting villages where the motorcade stops for a few minutes, and the candidate speaks before moving on to another town and junction.

One of the things I initiated at the outset of the campaign was my recommendation to create a Google group (tharoorcampaign2009) to coordinate the work of all who were involved. The idea was accepted and members added with the approval of Dr Tharoor. The group was a dynamic one, often engaging in discussions on strategies or posting daily developments. We all have witnessed a very successful cyber campaign by President Obama and, without any doubt, it has set a new standard on how to reach the new generation who are hooked to their Blackberrys and cell phones. The media centre at Hibiscus had all the characteristics of a modern campaign centre with robust Internet connectivity, where full-time staff were engaged in passing Google alerts, event downloads, preparation and dissemination of campaign news, along with still images or video footage. Mr Jacob Joseph was the man in charge of media relations. Having had some experience in publishing a technology magazine, to me he appeared to possess the skills necessary for a whole new approach to modern-day campaigning. However, whether Kerala was ready for such a campaign was a question that would only be answered in the days ahead.

Although I felt that an NRI role in many facets of life in Kerala could no longer be dismissed, NRIs becoming directly involved in running for election or campaigning was rare. The Thiruvananthapuram election broke both these traditions. To my surprise, there was another NRI who also declared that he was running for the Lok Sabha seat, and who might have siphoned off votes from the Tharoor bank. It was Mr Vijayan Thomas, a well-known NRI who is said to have contributed a substantial amount to Jai Hind TV, and claimed that he was once promised the TVM seat for his generous contribution. He eventually withdrew after a possible intervention from the High Command which, according to him, promised him a seat in the KPCC. I had several opportunities to talk to him at the DCC campaign office, where we met regularly. He did not mince his words when it came to the treatment of NRIs by the local leadership of the Congress party. He felt that NRIs were being taken advantage of only for their financial resources or technical knowledge, and according to him, the way he has been treated sends a clear message: 'do not come here with any political ambition or wanting to share

a piece of the pie', as he characterized the general attitude of the political power brokers in Kerala.

However, my immediate goal was to reach out to a large percentage of NRIs who had returned to settle down in Thiruvananthapuram. Many of them were from the Central Travancore area and one of the goals was to reach them through friends and acquaintances. Towards this end, I reached out to Mr Daniel Mohan, who is an IT entrepreneur from New Jersey as well as, at the time, the 'Global Chairman' of a section of the World Malayalee Council, an organization that has units around the world. Subsequently, a two-pronged approach was discussed and agreed upon, which would get the returned NRIs directly involved in the campaign, and engage in telephone or email campaigns from their home turf.

A meeting was also arranged for Daniel Mohan and his team to meet Dr Tharoor to set the stage for their involvement in the campaign. We met at the KPCC office on 29 March, and the idea was warmly welcomed by Dr Tharoor. In subsequent meetings with the representatives of the Pravasi Malayalee Welfare Association, a very detailed plan was laid out. In course of time, a team headed by Mr Cherian Samuel, Mr E. Vinod Kumar and Mr Isaac Palappally toured all seven constituencies in a van with posters and sound system, stopping to speak at every junction or corner where they could find a crowd. Returning NRIs were quite upset with the unfriendly attitude of the CPM-led government, which offered them measly help that the NRIs found quite demeaning and insulting. Although Kerala is still a money-order economy that primarily relies on the infusion of remittances from NRIs, there was a disconnect between the political and bureaucratic establishment and the NRIs in this regard. Therefore, when these team leaders saw the prospect of an NRI getting elected and having a voice in higher circles, they were willing to put in the time and effort. I had the opportunity to join this team on several days, stopping at various junctions and speaking to those crowds that gathered around in small circles. Mr Cherian Samuel indeed impressed me with his oratory skills and knowledge of the Pravasi issues, which he touched on in his many speeches during the day. At some junctions, strangers used to bring us coffee, tea and other snacks in appreciation of our efforts. In addition, they printed separate campaign literature, distributing them door-to-door.

It was an opportune time to join the Tharoor campaign as the current CPM-led government was constantly at odds with the Church on a number of issues.

The Church was upset with the Left Government for wanting to put a cap on fees in Church-run schools and colleges. Muslims and Nairs opposed this as well. The Church openly asked the Left Government not to persecute Christians. Christians make up about 19 per cent of Kerala's population, and it was bound to have an effect on the elections. There was widespread dissatisfaction with the Left among the Christian community, and the Congress stood to gain across the state in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The Church's move was likely to impact coastal constituencies—Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Alappuzha, Ernakulam—in the Kottayam belt and northern pockets where Christians have a strong presence.

Against this backdrop, I got in touch with a number of religious leaders, some of whom I knew personally. The most important Christian leader in Thiruvanthapuram whom we called upon was His Grace Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis, Catholicose of the Malankara Catholic Church. I had the good fortune to get to know him while he was the Bishop of the Malankara Catholic community in North America. He is considered one of the most cerebral and politically conscious Christian religious leaders in Kerala of all time. Lately, he had become the conscience of the Christian community, standing up to the intimidation and threats the Christian institutions had to endure on a daily basis from the Left Government. None of these leaders wanted to openly campaign or endorse a candidate. However, it was no secret that they had all agreed that a message needed to be sent, and the Lok Sabha election was the proper time. I had met His Grace a couple of times during my stay in Thiruvananthapuram to discuss the importance of the upcoming election. He appreciated the fact that Tharoor took time out and spent close to an hour discussing various concerns that included the current moves by the Left Government, which the Church considered hostile to its interests.

The true challenge had arisen from the fact that Mr Neelalohitadasan Nadar was running on a BSP ticket and the Nadar community might opt to lean that way. There is a sizable number of Christians among the community who might have voted for the Left in past elections. The objective behind efforts to bring the community together this time under one banner was not elusive any more, considering the rising discontent among voters combined with the attitude of the Left Government towards the Christian community in general. To the latter, Dr Tharoor seemed like the antithesis of the run-of-the-mill politician. They found it refreshing to hear a different voice other than the political oratory they had come to hear and dismiss. Of course, the fact that Dr Tharoor was married to a

Canadian Christian was not unhelpful when it came to the Christian community as a whole.

These efforts enabled the campaign committee to shore up support among the Christian community, and I felt that I could complement them in a small way by meeting with disparate leadership belonging to various denominations. Born into a Pentecostal family as the son of a Pastor, I knew many of the leaders in that group. My father, Pastor T. N. Abraham, who was the General Secretary of the Indian Pentecostal Church in its early days, was a regular visitor to the Thiruvananthapuram area. I have met several people who have joined the church through his inspirational work within the community.

On the first Sunday of my arrival, I joined Dr Tharoor in visiting a number of churches in the city. We first visited a church at Perurkada, pastored by Rev. K. C. Thomas, the General Secretary of the IPC church in Kerala. The church service was in full swing as we were walking in. Rev. Thomas interrupted the service for a few minutes and introduced Tharoor to the congregation. At the end of the introduction, I asked the Pastor to let Tharoor say a few words. Although reluctant—due to the fact that it was a religious service—after pausing for a moment he relented. Tharoor, in his usual ‘seizing of the moment’ manner, asked the congregation for their blessings and prayers. The Pastor looked relieved. At the end, Tharoor told him that I belonged to the same group and, upon realizing my father’s link to the church, he invited me to say a few words. I spoke briefly about our responsibility to come out and openly support the secular and democratic process without mentioning any political affiliation. From there, we went on to Paruthipara Mar Thoma Church, where he was warmly received by the Priest and lay leaders.

In the following weeks, I visited many churches, people and lay leaders to encourage people to get out and vote. On the following Sunday I was joined by Mr James Kurian, a leading lawyer practising in the High Court at Ernakulum. He came to Thiruvananthapuram upon my request to introduce Mr Shakkir Hussain, who is a DCC member as well as the chairman of the NRI Welfare Foundation, and a known community activist. Our relationship goes back several years through Mr Palai K. M. Mathew, who was a mentor to me and to scores of the prominent Congress leaders in the state today. Together, we visited three churches (Sree Karyam, Aramada and Vellaikavadu) on that day, attending their services briefly and addressing the congregation, talking about exercising their constitutional responsibilities that included the right to vote, without mentioning party or candidacy.

Many of these church members have been lackadaisical in their attitude to going out to vote. People were tired of ‘professional politicians’ promising the world when they ask for votes, and then disappearing into thin air. I have heard so often about current MP Mr Pannyan Raveendran’s disappearing act after the election. Many of them were curious about Dr Tharoor and wanted to know more about his attitude and willingness to listen. Most of the time I heard some apprehension across the board that he was too big a personality to limit himself to Thiruvananthapuram, that he would go to New Delhi and the Malayalees might not see him again! This perception was widely shared, and on many occasions I had to assure them of his potential and reach to do great things for Thiruvananthapuram even when he was not physically there. I would interact with small groups and brief them on his knowledge of the international arena, and how it would benefit India to understand global geopolitics better and deal with it in a professional manner. In this regard, I cannot forget the role Mr L. K. Roy played in reaching out to the Nadar Christian community. He arranged a special gathering of fifty church leaders, including about twenty Pastors with sizable congregations at a place in Anthiyoorakonam, where I spoke on the need to exercise their right to vote in support of the freedom of conscience and democracy. He was also instrumental in arranging a number of church visits that also included a Sunday morning meeting in Pulkil near Parassala, one of the largest Christian gatherings from the Nadar community.

The exceptions were the young people I met on the campaign trail. They loved Tharoor and were attracted by his charisma and intellect. This was evident in our trips together to two locations in the city. One was at the All Saints Women’s College, where he was surrounded by students who asked him to autograph anything that came handy. It almost looked as if they were mesmerized by his personality and attracted to his ‘star power’. There was no doubt that he won the hearts and souls on the campus that day and probably all the eligible votes.

The next stop was the Technopark, where Dr Tharoor was already presiding over a ‘Finishing School’ of sorts. He was warmly received by cheering young IT professionals as he made stop after stop at various IT company offices. Dr Tharoor, a believer in technology, saw it as an enabler for the overall economic growth of India. In our conversations in the past, we have discussed how Kerala is lagging behind other southern states as a revenue creator in the field of Information Technology. I briefed him on the work I have initiated to bring this vital issue to focus. As someone who has been working with Information Technology over

the last forty years, I knew the challenges and risks that undertaking IT projects would entail. In 2007, a few of us IT professionals from Kerala created an organization called the 'Kerala Information Technology Alliance' (KITA) (<http://www.kita.in>). Since then, we have focused on bringing greater IT awareness to various academic institutions in Kerala through distinguished lecture series, collaboration with IBM, and by attempting to create business incubators. KITA was inaugurated by Shri Oommen Chandy during his last visit to the US in 2007. It has brought together about 500 IT professionals with origins in Kerala. Dr Tharoor was very supportive of these efforts and his visit to the Technopark simply highlighted his commitment to Technopark and the importance he attached to this industry once again.

Mr Palai K. M. Mathew has been my Guru and mentor since the All Kerala Balajana Sakhyam days. He was the representative of 'Sankarachettan', the unseen mentor of the Sakhyam. 'Malayala Manaorama', and had nurtured the organization to greatness with years of commitment and allocation of financial resources. Mathew sir, as everyone calls him, ran twice from the Idukki constituency and won the Lok Sabha election with thumping majorities. Therefore, he knew a couple of things about politics and winning elections. He was the teacher who used to hold study classes for the current cadre of senior leaders of the Congress party. So I felt it was only fitting for him to come to Thiruvananthapuram and help Dr Tharoor in the process. Despite his age and difficulty in travelling, Mathew sir travelled to Thiruvananthapuram upon my request.

He strongly felt that the Nadar community vote was a key factor, and that it had to be addressed. He long knew and had served together in Parliament with Mr A. Charles, an icon in that community. Mr Charles was a three-time Parliamentarian who was known for his distinguished service and incorruptible ways. Mathew sir called him and set up a meeting. I accompanied Mathew sir to the meeting, and they spent over an hour at his residence exchanging pleasantries and reminiscing about their experiences in New Delhi. In the end, the conversation led to the Tharoor candidacy and how he could be helped. Mr Charles, however, expressed his disappointment that the Thiruvananthapuram seat, the only seat where he felt a representative from the Nadar community could run and win, was no longer within their reach. However, he agreed that since Dr Tharoor had been nominated, the community needed to rally around. Mathew sir encouraged him to start a discussion in their leadership circle to impress upon the community that a vote for the BSP would possibly only benefit the CPI.

Our next stop was a meeting with Mr Shakkir Hussain and Dr M. R. Thampan at the Janasree office at Vazhuthacadu. Mathew sir has known Dr Thampan, the former Director of the Language Institute, over the years, and considered him a great organizer and leader. Soon we were joined by a number of community activists and Congress party workers. One of the ideas that germinated in the meeting was to bring together writers, artists and people in the film industry to endorse the Tharoor candidacy. This was unprecedented as this combination could never agree on a single candidate. Dr Thampan and Shakkir Hussain set the ball rolling. I had informed Dr Tharoor of this development and urged him to attend this very important gathering during a break, as he was fully occupied with the mandate from campaign headquarters to complete the tour of the constituency. The meeting was set at the Trivandrum Press Club one afternoon, and the auditorium was packed with luminaries in their respective fields from all over Kerala. The famous poet and fixture in the community, Smt. Sugatha Kumari, declined to participate, despite a personal invitation from Dr Tharoor. Former Ambassador T. P. Sreenivasan chaired the meeting. Although a bit late, Tharoor arrived to a warm reception. Breaking tradition during the campaign, he spoke in English and acknowledged the significance of this particular meeting in solidarity with his fellow writers, stating that this endorsement from his peers meant the whole world to him. I personally thanked Dr Thampan and Mr Shakkir Hussain after the meeting for their hard work and dedication, and was grateful to Mathew sir for being the catalyst, although he had been unable to participate.

I worked closely with Shakkir in the following days to reach out to a number of leaders in the Muslim community. We met with Haji Alpha Abdel Kader, President of the Thiruvananthapuram Muslim Association, for his endorsement, which culminated in a reception attended by the candidate himself at a later date. Together, we visited the offices of Abbas Sait, district president of the Muslim League, and discussed the attacks emanating from the left as well as from the Muslim community with the help of vested interest groups. They agreed to publish articles in both *Madhyamam* and *Kaumudi* countering these attacks, which appeared over the following days. Dr M. S. Kamarudeen, who is also an IT entrepreneur, accompanied us to a number of these meetings. I distinctly remember his efforts in asking Mr Ahmed Pulikkal, President of the Overseas Indian Congress at Dammam, Saudi Arabia, to re-publish the article in *Madhyamam* daily with the title 'Palestine Ente Swapna Rashtram', accompanied by a photo of Dr Shashi Tharoor and Mr Yasser Arafat.

The Pentecostal Mission Church in Charachira has hundreds of members, and Advocate Charachira Rajeev took me and Shakkir to meet with Pastor Joseph Kutty. Under normal circumstances, they as a group stay aloof from the election process. However, Pastor Kutty came across as politically savvy and eager to help. He expressed the desire to meet with the candidate and discuss issues of his concern. We were told that they have about thirty-five churches in the constituency with substantial membership, and it was worth making an attempt to reach out to them. I talked to Mr Ravi and got an appointment facilitating a meeting with the candidate a day before the election.

As I have stated before, our daily routine began at Tharoor's home where his mother, Mrs. Lily Tharoor, hosted us. Mornings were filled with meeting numerous people who had either come to pay their respects or offer their help. One morning I saw someone in a Rajasthani dress walking into the house with great anticipation. He had come all the way from Rajasthan and wanted to join the campaign. He could hardly speak English, let alone interact with the rural folk who hardly speak Hindi, and Dr Tharoor politely declined his offer and sent him away. It once again illustrated the extent to which a Tharoor campaign invoked interest, not only in Thiruvananthapuram or Kerala, but all across the nation.

I joined the *pariyadanam* on a daily basis for at least a few hours. It was the same routine being laid out by the DCC campaign committee, which was to cover an area of the constituency where there were passable roads, stopping at predetermined junctions for an appeal. The local member of the Legislative Assembly routinely accompanied the candidate in an open jeep. In several constituencies the MLAs did not show up, which illustrated the resentment that prevailed in the hierarchy towards a Tharoor candidacy. Mr George Mercer, the MLA from Kovalam, was seen with Tharoor throughout the *pariyadanam* in Kovalam. However, Mr Sakthan Nadar was called in one day to the Tharoor residence to explain why he was not accompanying Tharoor in his constituency. A pre-recorded song praising the Tharoor candidacy was played aloud as the caravan moved on in between stops.

One thing that many of us began to notice was the curiosity and interest the public all across the constituency had in seeing the candidate. Mothers would run to the edge of the road with their babies in their arms to catch a glimpse of the new candidate they had already heard about. There were times when the motorcade was delayed, and people used to wait at these junctions patiently for hours at a time. There were times when we used to cross other candidates from the

CPI, NCP or BJP, as they were all engaged in the same type of tour. The crowd around the motorcades of these other candidates looked pitiful in comparison to the growing interest in the Tharoor campaign.

I often joined G. S. Babu and Sharad Nair, who travelled just behind the open jeep. There were times when a party stalwart from that locality would join in. Occasionally I would leave the vehicle and interact with party workers who had assembled there. I would ask them how the campaign was running in their blocks. I remember meeting someone I call Aryadev on one such occasion. He spoke bluntly about what was happening in his block. He said the volunteers who felt that their favourite son had been denied the ticket had just abandoned the efforts and walked away. Some others were ready to help only if there was money involved. Given this situation, he said that posters were sitting in offices and very little effort—such as visiting homes or giving ballot samples—was being made.

This was indeed an eye-opening personal experience for me as I realized that the old grassroots workers who believed in Congress values and principles no longer existed. In its place, the party hired hands that were waiting to be greased before any help was rendered. It was a sad reversal of the age-old tradition where volunteerism and sacrificial work were once revered.

The tour brought some exhilarating moments, as well as some sombre ones. As we were moving through the town of Aripuram, we witnessed fifty or so women working near a small pond, cleaning up the surroundings. An inquiry revealed that these women had been employed through the recently introduced National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, initiated and implemented by the Congress-led government at the centre. It was a programme Mrs. Sonia Gandhi took personal interest in and fought for, despite the serious misgivings of top economic advisers. Dr Tharoor stopped the vehicle, got out and personally greeted each and every one of these women, in the process soiling his clothes and muddying his hands. It was indeed a memorable incident, and I felt that the candidate had come a long way from New York. He was now identifying with the true sons and daughters of his motherland.

While passing through the town of Venganur, we were told that Captain Jerry Prem Rajan, a senior military officer who was killed at Kargil while defending the nation against Pakistani intruders, was buried adjacent to his home. Dr Tharoor stopped the vehicle and entered the house before visiting the burial site. It was indeed an emotional moment as the father kept repeating that there was hardly

any politician who stopped by or inquired about their welfare any more. Tears streamed down his face as Tharoor laid a wreath and paid his respects to a war hero. Why these families who made the ultimate sacrifice remain off the radar of politicians still remains a mystery to me!

The Tharoor campaign was already in high gear and efforts were being made to take it to a new level by utilizing state of the art technologies with a new website, group emails and instant messaging. Robot calls were already being made and Google alerts created to monitor all events and news related to the Tharoor campaign. Ambassador T. P. Sreenivasan had become the official spokesperson dealing with the various controversies the opposition tried to throw in the way of a relatively clean campaign. I have known the Ambassador from his days in New York as Deputy Ambassador to the UN. His proficiency in English and Malayalam, and the versatility with which he can deal with any subject matter, especially International Relations, have earned him great admiration and respect throughout the world, especially among the Indian diaspora. He was indeed a great asset to this campaign as the front man, defending Dr Tharoor at times against mean-spirited allegations made without any shred of evidence. One example of such an incident was the accusation levelled against Dr Tharoor by the left that he was an American spy. I recollect how he answered the media with another question: Why then did the United States reject him as the Secretary General?

I recollect an event where I had to get personally involved to save the day. It was the occasion of the formal inauguration of the Tharoor election website. Mr Anand Sharma, Minister of State for External Affairs, was visiting Thiruvananthapuram to monitor the progress of the election in the state. The DCC campaign committee invited him to inaugurate the website. I arrived at the KPCC office along with Jacob Joseph and a few others to witness the event. However, fifteen minutes into the function, I was told that there was no internet connection in the building. I was carrying a laptop with a Reliance broadband card in the car, which was good enough to perform my back office tasks, although I had my cell phone and Blackberry with me for instant communication. I ran to the car to get the laptop and brought it to the room where the people had already gathered. I set it up, opened the tab and minimized it, afraid that the low bandwidth might lead to a 'Bill Gates moment', as failures of demos at critical conferences due to the malfunctioning of hardware or a failure of software are called. Dr Tharoor arrived along with Mr Anand Sharma, whom I knew through my work with

INOC. He clicked on the minimized icon and inaugurated the website, thereby averting a potential embarrassment for the whole campaign. This was another glaring example of the lack of coordination between the two campaign groups.

Although Dr Tharoor had met several Christian religious leaders during the course of the campaign, the Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church was not on the list. Considering the number of people from central Travencore, especially returnees from the Gulf, who were settling down in Thiruvananthapuram, I felt that it was important to reach out. Moreover, Bishop Thomas Mar Timotheos had been a classmate of mine at the Christian College, Chengannur, and I had met him a few times in the US as well. I initially received a lukewarm response from the DCC campaign committee as Dr Tharoor was busy touring the constituency and normally reached home around midnight. There was very little time left for anything else. However, I persevered with my request, and Mr Thampanoor Ravi agreed and scheduled an 11 PM time slot. Mr Jacob Chacko, a prominent member of the Mar Thoma church and an old colleague of mine at the United Nations, was the one to speak to the Bishop and set up a late night meeting. Although the Bishop had to catch an early morning flight, he waited patiently for Tharoor to arrive. Once we began the meeting, Tharoor openly asked for the Bishop's endorsement. The Bishop smiled and said that while they do not openly endorse political candidates, he had the church's good will and blessings. I had sent him an email earlier, specifically mentioning the fact that churches did not endorse political candidates openly, a message he read only after the meeting; he then sent me a note of regret for not having read the note ahead of time.

While travelling with the convoy, especially in the second vehicle, there was a conversation about the leader Mr K. Karunakaran, who regularly called Dr Tharoor and invited him to his house for a chat. Tharoor made few courtesy calls and spent some time with the leader. It was quite obvious that the leader wanted to identify with the campaign and take some credit for its success. Once, after a brief meeting with the leader, Dr Tharoor quipped that if he truly wanted to help, NCP could just withdraw Mr Gangadharan's candidacy: a reference to Muraleedharan's party, which was also contesting the election.

I was frequently in touch with Mr P. J. Kurian MP, a close friend and adviser, and discussed the progress of the campaign with him. During the course of the campaign, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi visited Thiruvananthapuram and appeared together with Dr Tharoor at the stadium behind the Secretariat, where she delivered a very strong speech in defence of the Congress party and its achievements in the last

five years. Mr Kurian briefed me on their mediation with the leadership of the Nair Service Society (NSS), in an effort to gain the whole-hearted support of the Nair community in Thiruvananthapuram, and asked me to convey the message to Dr Tharoor. Although Dr Tharoor belonged to the community, the organization appeared a little hesitant to throw its full support behind him. According to Mr Kurian, he had to work hard to insert certain lines in the text of Mrs. Gandhi's speech on issues of reservation to pacify the leadership and earn their support.

Yet another of my efforts was to communicate with the Indian diaspora in the US and urge them to ask their relatives and friends in Thiruvananthapuram to vote. I regularly sent out news on the progress of the campaign to the ethnic media and wrote an article to be published with the title 'Shashi Tharoor—A man with a mission', which was picked up by a number of websites and newspapers. In addition, I was interviewed by the Wall Street Journal for a piece that touched upon the NRI involvement in the campaign, with specific reference to the use of technology and how it was transforming a campaign in India in a manner similar to the Obama campaign of 2008. I also encouraged a number of people in the US to place advertisements in newspapers, asking the diaspora to make calls to relatives and friends before Election Day. Mr Abraham Varkey, Mr Baby Uralil, and several other community leaders played a significant role in this regard.

During the campaign, I visited the church at Amaravila and met with the Municipal Counsellor, Mr Vijay Kumar. This church is a centre of activity for the Nadar Christian community. With Easter Sunday approaching, I proposed that Dr Tharoor visit the church around 8:00 AM, when he would be able to meet about 4,000 worshippers and offer them Easter greetings. One service would end at 8:15 AM and another start at 8.30 AM. I also felt that he could leave at 8:45 for the R. C. Church at Plankamuri (Vijayan Thomas' home church) and meet more worshippers. I strongly felt that he should have been in the Neyyattinkara area on that Sunday, considering the Neelan factor. It was believed that the Nadar Christian community counted for about three lakh votes, which are critical in swinging the election. However, this did not happen, as one of the campaign leaders shot the idea down, arranging a breakfast meeting with Bishop Gladstone, the Moderator of the CSI Church, instead. Why this was done continues to remain a mystery to me.

On Election Day, I was away in Kottayam and learned that the voter turnout in the TVM city was very low. The irony was that it was the rural folk who came out in droves and stood in line for hours to cast their vote and make Tharoor a

winner. The so-called urban voter Dr Tharoor had heavily counted on took the long weekend off to enjoy themselves and have fun; something Dr Tharoor needs to remember.

Although the Congress party at the state level, under the leadership of Ramesh Chennithala and Oommen Chandy, began campaigning actively for the candidate, the local Congress establishment at other levels was at first reluctant to embrace the candidacy of Dr Tharoor. However, as the electorate became increasingly fascinated by Dr Tharoor and his candidacy, their attitude shifted from caution to a full embrace of his candidacy. The third and fourth tier workers began to get involved in a way that forced the local leadership to jump on to the bandwagon. As Mundakayam of *Manorama* puts it, 'it is the people themselves who elected Mr Tharoor'.

Another incredible thing about the election was the enthusiasm of the young people who were part of the process. I met the father of Fousya Younnes, an MBBS student in Bangalore. He said she was already on her way back home for one purpose—to cast a vote for Tharoor!

Despite all the hype surrounding the use of state of the art technologies, media relations were handled very poorly. I met with P. P. James, John Mundakayam, Markose Abraham, and other respected journalists in the capital to make an assessment of the work at the media centre. They all gave poor grades as they complained of not being kept in the loop and that very little information was forthcoming. It is quite obvious that even in this electronic age, we need a personal touch. This was lacking, and the inexperience at the media centre was quite evident to all. Despite that, they kept up with the reporting, and *Manorama* played a leading role in highlighting Dr Tharoor and introducing him to the electorate.

The campaign was winding down and I was following the *pariydana* vehicles in my own car, a new Honda Civic my brother-in-law Abraham Thomas had lent me for the purpose of the campaign. We were at the Sree Karyam junction and Mr Tharoor had left the open jeep to shake hands with the people. When we were about to leave the junction, his open jeep backed up and hit my car and damaged it. I had to take this in my stride as we moved on to another point to continue the campaign.

It was indeed great team work. At Hibiscus, there were several personalities who were constantly engaged in various tasks. Nandakumar Radhakrishnan of Afras was a constant presence and all of us looked up to him for strategic direction.

I recollect Keerthik Sreedharan who had flown in from New York, E. D. Mathew from Liberia, and Dr Mohan P. Menon, uncle of Dr Tharoor, from Palghat, and several others, who facilitated communication between the campaign team on the field and in the office. Mr Jeevan Kumar focused on all the paperwork necessary to field a candidate, and would carry a bundle of documents all the time. Dr Mohan Menon came across as a calming influence in an otherwise high octane setting. I sought his advice a number of times in dealing with PR activities and admired his evaluation and judgement in that regard. Mr E. D. Mathew was always before the laptop, either drafting a new press statement or countering a negative news item. He is known for his distinctive style in writing, which must have impressed Dr Tharoor in his UN days and led him to invite the former to join the campaign from Liberia.

I invited many of my friends to come over and help with the campaign. Mr Joshy Mathew, film director, Mr Charly Abraham, Alleppey District Panchayat member, and others came to Thiruvananthapuram, contacted their friends or relatives and made a difference. The late K. N. N. S. Shyamasundaran Nair, VC of the Agricultural University, was a good friend of mine. His daughter Dr Anupama Nair (Detroit, MI) made their home available to me so that a number of these visitors could be conveniently accommodated. Shyam's brother, Mr Aravindan Nair (also a relative of former chief minister P. K. Vasudevan Nair), helped us a great deal and made our stay there a pleasant one. Before the election, Aravindan told me that he had always voted for the Left front, but that this time it was for Tharoor. That was a sentiment I heard in a number of places and it was a strong indication that even the Left cadre was breaking its ranks to give Tharoor a convincing win. When there were no visitors, I stayed with Mrs. Achamma Oommen (Kollenvariathu, Kodukulanji, Chengannur), my wife's aunt, who lived in Vazhuthakadu. She not only prepared dinners and waited up till late at night, but also campaigned for Tharoor by going door-to-door, distributing flyers in that high-rise building.

There was once an altercation at one of the stops during the *pariyadanam* between some of the Congress party workers and Mr Jacob Joseph. There was pushing and shoving from the local cadre reflecting a growing uneasiness on the part of establishment, which was frustrated at the campaign bypassing the local people. However, as the campaign progressed, cooperation between the teams grew. As we were travelling through the Manakkadu junction one evening, a campaign meeting took place at one of our brief halts. Independent campaign

meetings with state leaders were being carried out across the constituency simultaneously under the leadership of Mr Shiva Kumar, the DCC president. It was quite apparent that the local leadership had been warned about their lackadaisical support, and visits by Ministers Shri Vayalar Ravi and Shri A. K. Antony only pointed to the significance the High Command attached to the race in Thiruvananthapuram. At the end of the meeting, I had a brief chat with Mr Ramesh Chennithala, the president of KPCC, as he was getting into his car. Mr Shiva Kumar joined in and inquired whether everything was going well with the campaign. I could only shrug my shoulders.

Paryadanam used to make rest stops in between, especially for lunch. At one of the rest stopovers, they arranged lunch for most of us following the candidate. When the candidate arrived at the lunch hall, the local organizers rushed in and took all the seats, and so we had to wait. However, after waiting for half an hour, we were informed that they had run out of food, and some of us had to go to the nearest town to take care of our hunger.

During the *paryadanam*, various news organizations trailed us. CNN-IBN, Asianet, and other news outlets were allocated a day each to observe and report on the campaign. However, one person who was a constant presence in the campaign was Mr Homi Raveendran, who continued to click away with his camera and then rushed to Hibiscus to download them for dissemination to the news organizations.

Although I was away on Election Day, I monitored the election from afar and participated in the ongoing discussion. When the news came that the turnout in the city was fairly low, it was a let-down. That evening, I arrived at the Taj Residency for a thank you and good-bye get together. Tharoor had invited only a select group of people. Only G. S. Babu had been invited from the local Congress party leadership. Tharoor was pacing up and down and clearly looked exhausted; his voice was hoarse from the intense campaigning. Yet he seemed to be relieved and sounded confident about the expected outcome. There were no doubts in anyone's mind about winning the seat, but no one expected the kind of victory that was forthcoming in the next thirty days.

It was indeed an exciting and exhilarating experience being involved in a campaign at the grassroots level. I will cherish the memory of this campaign and what it meant for an NRI for a long time.

One of the things I had done during the campaign was send Tharoor 'reports from the ground' on the progress of the campaign and the issues encountered on

a regular basis. This was my final note to Tharoor two days before the elections as we were winding down the campaign.

1. I visited Kannanmoola Theological Seminary and met with the principal, Rev. Dr G. Shobhnam, along with Shakkir Hussein and had discussions on how to get the vote out.

■ There is a general consensus everywhere that you have already won over the majority of the people in the district. There is also a widespread feeling that it is despite the leadership of the Congress party in Thiruvananthapuram. This time, the second and third level cadre became more enthused and started working; now the leadership has no choice but to follow.

2. I have heard that the print media correspondents are quite unhappy and I visited *Kaumudi*, *Manorama* and *Weekshnam* and talked to many of the correspondents, including Markose and Mundakayam from *Manorama*.

■ Mundakayam expressed his unhappiness over the media management; 'he felt that they were ignored and not in the loop'. He said despite that, they liked the candidate and therefore kept up with the reporting.

■ Obviously these guys are used to personal contacts and we kind of missed the boat a little on that. I had some discussion on that with Jacob; you could have a chat with Mundakayam after the election and that will take care of it; *Manorama* has set the right tone from the very beginning;

■ He also added that it is not the Congress leadership that is helping to elect ST, but the people themselves.

3. The writer's meeting got great coverage. The idea was originally hatched at Janasree office when Palai K. M. Mathew came and Thampan and Zakir Hussein set the ball rolling.
4. Many young people are returning to the city even from places such as Bangalore just to vote. One such student is Fousya Younnes, an MBBS student. When you have time, it would be nice to give her a call. This is a good story for newspapers;
5. Please make a stop tomorrow at The Pentecostal Mission and Salvation Army. TR has approved those.

6. Kaumudi is coming out with a four-page supplement tomorrow on your campaign. They asked me whether we need another 100,000 to be distributed and I presented the matter to Rajiv and of course, we have no funds.

As the campaign is winding down, I feel that my work has just about completed; I may go to Chengannur, my hometown, late tomorrow. I will be leaving TVM on 17th morning for NY.

I will try to catch up with you sometime somewhere tomorrow before I leave.

I have written an article on you and posted it on eMalayalee.com, a popular site for Malayalees in the US.

<http://www.emalayalee.com/USKeralaNewsDetails.aspx?ID=3892>

Indian Americans helping candidates; INOC is mentioned here;

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/Indian-Americans-gear-up-for-Lok-Sabha-elections/articleshow/4396857.cms>

Regards,

George

Dr Tharoor replied, thanking me ('undying gratitude') for my work and wishing me a safe trip back to NY. He invited me to a thank-you party at the Taj Residency on Election Day. And yes, he did call Fausiya Younus.

(Mr George Abraham is Former Chief Technology Officer, United Nations Pension Fund, and General Secretary, Indian National Overseas Congress, USA).