

I came back to Jacksonville, on Thursday, January the 30th. I started from charlotte, NC at around 1230 in the noon. I woke up at 10 AM and started off the day thinking of the 6 hour drive that I have to do today. I opened the blinds on the side window by putting my fingers inbetween them, too lazy to stand up and rotate the blinds revolver. I was looking outside through the window half sitting and half leaning. It was drizzling and attracting. I wanted to jump out and pluck out a neem tree branch and brush my teeth in the drizzling rain. But, I am not in karaikudi.

Another day in my life started off with same e-mail. After checking e-mail and brushing my teeth and applying coconut oil all over my fully grown, bhagavathar style black hair and taking bath singing with nusrat and eating thayir sadam, I finally made up my mind that it is time to leave. By now, the time was 1230 and it was raining heavily outside. I called up PK and told him where I would keep the house key. I went out and wet myself in the fresh rain. I was smiling to myself seeing the rain and myself. I checked the fuel in my car and thought I would fill gas in georgia, where gas would be cheaper. I knew the way back home, I-77 South, I-26 East, I-95 South and I am back in Jacksonville. It was not a big deal. I double checked this with the Rand McNallay map that I had in my car. I am all set. I started driving my car through the heavy rains of Charlotte, on I-77 South. More than the rain, the water sprayed by bigger cars and trucks from the side on to my car wind shield was more and was giving me more pain in driving than the rain itself. With great care, I drove my car out of charlotte surrounded by scary trucks and rain in the next half hour.

The moment I drove out of charlotte, the cold outside caught my body temperature and I had to look out for the next rest area to stop for a nature's call. I told myself that I will not drink water for atleast another one hour so that I don't have to stop till I reach a gas station where I can fill cheap gas. Charlotte is half in North Carolina and half in South Carolina. I have to drive south from the northern part. The other day when PK was taking me along the same road to a nearby store, he had told me how the South Carolina state wants to attract people living in charlotte to stay in South Carolina part of the town so that they get more money in the state. The road I-77 South runs through charlotte from North Carolina to South Carolina. When my car reached the border and went inside the South Carolina part, suddenly, I felt that my car was running very smoothly and did not have any water splashing from the cars and trucks going beside me. I remembered PK's words of how SC attracts people. I was impressed. Hmm. Atleast I can drive well through rain without trouble from splashing rain water.

But, that does not mean that I should expect the same kind of attitude from SC through out their state. After driving through for almost half an hour through I-77 in SC, I found that the roads suddenly changed to something worse than the NC roads. Hahaha. What a set of cheats. Anyway, I started driving more carefully and was hoping that I will get out of rain quickly and see savannah soon. The only other thing that was lightening me up was 'Satellite Saaamiyaar', a crazy mohan drama that I had taken from karthik in May, 2002 when I drove to Oklahoma State Univ. at Stillwater, Oklahoma. Madhu, Cheenu, Sivaraman, Mythili, Janaki, all the same characters handling the new Alapuzha Appachan. Hahaha. Good fun while driving.

So, at the end of the one hour drama, I suddenly remember that I have been driving for almost 85 miles and I have not found my exit. I was supposed to have found it at 90 miles. I switch off satellite saamiyaar and come back to the road signs .. Have I missed the exit? I was not sure. I was sure that I was driving south and I had my map with me, but I did not remember seeing the places that I

am seeing now while going on I-77 North. Hmm! Strange! I just thought to myself, let me drive for another 15 or 20 miles and I should hit something. And so I did. I was not that dumb. I did find my exit I-26 East towards Savannah.

Savannah is supposed to be a beautiful place in the US with lot of history. There are stories about savannah that describe about voodoo practices. Clint Eastwood took a picture by the name 'Midnight in the garden of good and Evil' based on a true voodoo story from savannah. This is an interesting film for people who believe in life after death or of the haunting spirits. While I was thinking about this, I was wondering why I did not think about all this while I was driving on my way on I-26 West when I was going to Chralotte ten days ago. Hey, I was driving by the night, remember, I said to myself. So, why am I thinking about all this now? The movie struck me immediately because of the beautiful lush green picturization depicted in the movie. I opened my eyes again from my thoughts to see the beautiful fresh green trees outside on both sides of the road. I was awe stuck to see the beauty of nature. The greenery was not just in the levaees. It was in the stem, the branch of all trees. It had just rained, probably in the morning there and the rain had caught up with me up north in Charlotte. No doubt, this fresh green attracts everyone. I was immediately singing and dancing in my car. I put new energetic songs that I could dance to, opened the windows of my car and breathed the fresh air. Amma, Appa, why are you not with me now? I wished you were here with me enjoying this drive, the nature, the beautiful greenery, the fresh air, the smell from the moist sand and ofcourse the smooth sound of my 154,000 mile-run toyota camry engine. Yes, my car crossed the 154,000 mile exactly then. I gave my car a big kiss for successfully completing its run.

Suddenly, my thoughts reached the smokies. I had been there almost an year back in March of 2002. The scenery was pretty similar, the lush green, fresh air, drizzling rain. When I had started off for smokies, my car stopped in between Manhattan and Kansas City. I had thought about this many a times and it may sound stupid to some people. That was the only time I cursed my car. It stopped. From then on, whenever I took my car out, I used to talk to it and tell it to run like a young horse. It never stopped again. Even now, I talk to it saying, I will give you a good service if you take me there without pain and it obeys. Strange? Stupid? Superstitious? I don't care anyway. It works for me.

My drive through I-26 does not take me into Savannah, but takes me through the outside of the place. For a moment, I thought I would step into Savannah and see whats there.. but then, nay, I want to see the rest of the drive way scenary before I reach jacksonville before dark.

Georgia. I love to drive in this state because, it offers one of the cheapest price for gas. I hate to drive in this state because most roads are always under construction and the speed limit is mostly 65 m.p.h. AAhhh!! Why is it only 65 here when Oklahoma can have 75? I stopped at the first exit in Georgia and filled gas. To my surprise, the coffee, the potato chips, everything was below the normal price there. Vow! Georgia is the place to be! The place I stopped in georgia had a cop visiting the gas station too. There were only three people there, the cashier, the cop and me. There was utter silence in the whole place when I went to fill gas and buy coffee. Probably, the cop was looking at me closely. I was tired, hair all messed up because of air from open windows, not shaven cleanly, dress not so clean, a dirty sports shoe. Did the cop start thinking that I was arabic? Is he going to get racial? Hmm. I started to think faster. How do I know or distract what he is thinking? "the coffee is pretty cheap.. ahm?", I said. The cop said, " You are damn right! I come here for the coffee and the doughnut.. They are damn cheap here". Oof! Thank god.. "have a

nice day, officer. Thank you madame!" I went out with both the cop and the cashier lady smiling "have a nice day sir!". Hmmm! Probably, all that these people needed was a friendly face. That's right. A simple smile can achieve a lot of things. Everyday gives me something to learn.

And so off I go from the gas station in Georgia with another 3 hours of drive towards Jacksonville (Jax). Jax is on the northern tip of Florida. North to Florida is Georgia. So, the moment I enter Florida, I hit Jax. I was already in I-95 south. The road now is pretty straight. I can put the car in cruise and doze off. But, I had the coffee and bally sagoo going on strong in my car. I started thinking that if I drive again alone, I will keep a photo or paint a ball with eyes and nose and talk to it. It is a good idea for keeping something going and not getting inactive while being alone. I would call my imaginary friend "Kumar", like 'Wilson' in the movie Castaway. Haha! What strange ideas I get while driving.

Oh wow! I am only 2 hours away now. That should not be bad, I thought. But, the last 2 hours of a 6 to 7 hour drive are the worst part of driving alone. This is where one really gets into a frustrating mood and really thinks everyone else is driving the wrong way. Haha! I had the same feeling when I drove from Kansas to Birmingham. Soma can tell more here, I guess. He was with me seeing me cursing the drivers on the left and the right. This is the time when I started to feel that it is not far away, it is just there and I am going to reach there just now, though I knew that it is surely going to take me another 2 hours or more to reach.

The man who bears patience during the most impatient of times is the one who wins over his senses. No, I am not a sanyasi yet. So, I just kept on going for the next two hours. I reached Jax in exactly the next 2 hours, switched on the local National Public Radio (NPR) FM channel and started listening to the latest news there. During the drive through downtown to the house, I looked back at my day today. The only two things I could remember were the sudden eye-catching, beautiful green and the encounter at the gas station. Well, I felt very happy that GOD gave me a very happy moment for the day and also showed me something to learn. I went to bed with a deep sigh.. what a day! Hey wait, But, shouldn't I be penning down all this? Ahmm! I will do it tomorrow.. and tomorrow becomes day after tomorrow and it becomes a week after tomorrow until I finally, really took the initiative to write this down. I hope you enjoyed it.