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Meeting B.P.Govinda

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Horace Walpole wrote several decades ago about 'serendipity'; a fortuitous discovery.

He probably wrote about discoveries that give one an 'aha' effect. I cannot agree more with this for I experienced it myself. I was flying back to India from Sydney, Australia. As direct flights to Chennai, the city where I live, from Australia were not in service, I had to inter-line with another carrier. From Sydney to Singapore I flew on Qantas Airlines and from Singapore to Chennai I chose to fly Indian Airlines.

I flew business class. In the aircraft I flew in to come to Chennai from Singapore, the forward, the business class section was completely vacant but for me. A senior flight purser, the person assigned to the cabin, surely a middle aged man, from the looks of it, was very kind and enquired after my well being.

As the section was empty, shortly after takeoff, he came and sat next to me and made kind enquiries about me. I was struck by his simplicity and sense of humour as he cracked a few harmless jokes. We chatted for a while and I began to realise that I had seen this person somewhere. I asked him if he was from Chennai and where he lived.

Suddenly, I realised that I had seen his picture, perhaps several years ago, in a newspaper. I asked him who he was and he nonchalantly told me his name was B.P. Govinda and he had once captained the Indian Hockey team.

I was awed by this simple admission and for the next 3 hours, till landing was announced, quizzed him on all that I knew about hockey. I asked him what his greatest moment on the field was and he said it was the goal he scored against Pakistan in the World Cup in 1973.

When the aircraft touched down a few hours later, and as I was deplaning, he gave me a bottle of Merlot saying it was his gift to me for having helped him re-live his past.

When you are shorn off all the fame, the greatness and success that you once garnered, it is ordinary moments when stars such as Govinda meet with a common citizen like I, and we pay tribute to the star that brings back for the hero, memories of bygone days.

Many times when I see the erstwhile Indian cricket captain, Venkataraghavan, sitting on a bar stool at the Madras Cricket Club or the Olympian Muneer Sait, also at the same club, being acknowledged, I realise it must be a truly great moment for them to be celebrated for the service they have done for India and now, long after their playing days, to be valued..

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