

## **'Paradise Lost': Richard Vasey**

The plane from Chennai to Trivandrum was oversold and chaos reigned in the hothouse airport terminal. A group of fantastically attractive West Indian men snaked their way through the throng wearing headphones and bored expressions of the entitled used to being VIP's. 'They're THE cricket team', was the hushed whispers that followed them. At the destination, the team was spirited away in ancient vehicles while the rest of the passengers had to fight for space on the only bus to Kovalam Beach.

This was the 1980's and the backpacker boy and girl revelled in the pristine, shallow waters and the sunset reflecting off the basaltic sands. Feeling hungry, the couple made their way to the rainforest and palm groves fringing the beach. They met a local dressed in a long-sleeved shirt of impossible whiteness, his head topped with a heavy turban. The boy asked directions to the nearest restaurant and was taken aback by beautifully delivered English, 'You will be enjoying the food from Salim's place, just follow the track.' The man emphasised what he was saying by nodding his head from side to side as he spoke. The girl said, 'You speak such good English.' 'Madam', said the man, 'it is the only language I speak!'

The track wound its way through the dense undergrowth, finally opening to beautifully maintained paddy fields and a large lake with a thatched hut on the foreshore. The backpackers asked whether they were at Salim's place and a young girl motioned them to sit at low tables. An hour went past with no hint on what was on the menu. Suddenly there was a commotion as a group of happy young men arrive carrying a large sack suspended from bamboo poles. The sack was dropped to the ground and large fish started flopping around.

The tables were spread with banana leaves and large dollops of fish and rice were deposited in their centres. The backpackers sat uncomfortably until the young girl motioned with her hand to demonstrate how to eat the wonderful meal. Plastic beakers arrived and filled with an aromatic coconut drink. The men sat around on their haunches in wonder at the westerners eating with their hands.

'COMING SOON! LUXURY KOVALAM BEACH RESORT "PALM GROVES". THE ULTIMATE BEACH FRONT EXPERIENCE.' (THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS JULY 2020).