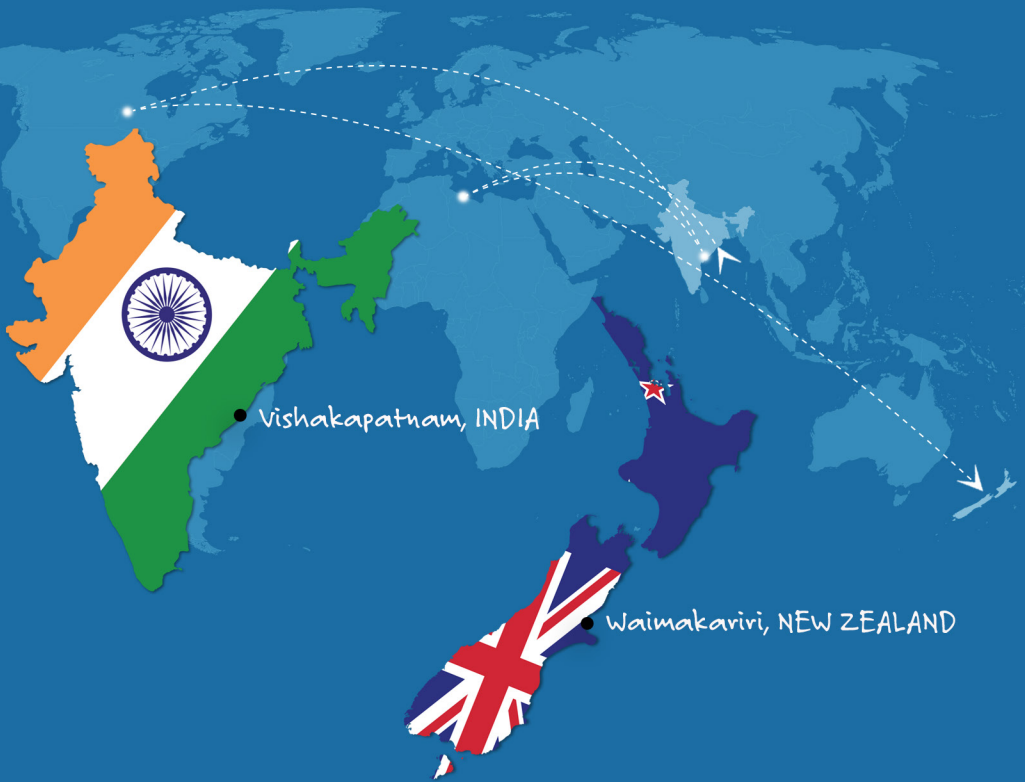


# PACKING for a new life



## **Migrant Suitcase Padi Nistala**

from Visakhapatnam, India to  
Libya, to U.S.A, to Canada, to  
New Zealand, Year 2007.

## The Story

This suitcase story is about my parents Mr & Mrs N.K Rao who immigrated from Visakhapatnam, India to Tripoli, Libya with us five children in 1979. My dad was 39 years old, mum was 37 and we were all under 10 years of age. I am their eldest child. At that time my parents, the five of us, my dad's mum and his mentally challenged brother all lived in the same house. Dad worked as a supervisor at a fertilizer company and was the sole bread-winner of the family. On Dec 2nd 1978 a tragedy struck I lost my 5 year old sister in a terrible accident.

Our house we lived in was still under construction. The situation was dire-piling debt, meagre resources and a large family of dependants.

Dad along with his friends were considering overseas opportunities. He got selected for a supervisor role in Eternit cement pipes company in Libya. Mum was totally against his leaving but after much persuasion she sort of agreed and dad left for Libya in June 1979. Mum chose to work as a teacher at our school.

For months there was hardly any communication from my dad. And in Feb 1980 he could sponsor mum and only 3 kids. To my mum's utter distress she had to leave behind my youngest sister and brother with my grandma and move to Libya. I was 9 years old then. My sister and brother joined us in 10 months thereafter.



I have fond memories of Libya- we experienced lavishness with plenty of food and generally better living standards. We also experienced amazing kindness and generosity from Libyans. Even with language and cultural barriers they were so eager to help, expecting nothing in return. We communicated in a crude sign language for the most part. We lived closer to dad's work with other immigrant families from Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia and India. We grew veggies, had parties and dinners as a community. We picked up a few words of Arabic but people mostly just went about and did things for each other- language did not seem to be a barrier at all. My mum taught English to women at Arab army school.

We blissfully lived there for 3 happy years and that was the only time in our entire lives, when it was just mum, dad and us kids. In 1984 another tragedy struck – my dad's brother died in a horrible train accident. It was that incident and the fact that schooling for us was getting harder, my parents decided to move back to India. For the next 4 years dad worked in Libya and Abu-Dhabi, lived there by himself, visited us every 5 months while mum and us kids stayed in India for our schooling and education.

Life back in India definitely improved for us- we had our first refrigerator, colour TV, all sorts of electronic goods that none in the neighbourhood had. Overall, Libya was a positive experience for my family. We had few more things in life than people around us but that did not deter my parents from being down to earth, humble and generous as they always were.

Settling into a different culture had its challenges but my parents embraced it by taking some of their culture with them and also adopting some from others people they mingled with.

***“I left India in my 20's and moved to the US to study Bachelors in computer science. I lived, studied and worked in Chicago for 7 years. There on I had an amazing opportunity to move to Canada along with my friends - worked a few more years and became a naturalised citizen. I met my Kiwi husband in Toronto which prompted my move to NZ. Many interesting stories later I am now settled in Waimakariri and travel overseas to see my family (spread across 7 countries) whenever I can.***

## Food

There were no Indian places to eat in Libya at that time so any taste close to home had to be brought from India. We had parties just around one South-Indian dish (Dosa). The ingredients were precious but people enjoyed it by sharing with friends. My mum and dad took with them rice, lentils, pickles, spices, utensils to prepare various South-Indian foods like dosa, idly, chutneys.

## Clothing

My mum always wore sarees so she packed all kinds of sarees for casual wear, daily wear and silk sarees for special occasions. There were also traditional outfits (long skirts and blouses) for us three sisters. Some traditional clothes like kurta pyjama for my dad and brothers. Mum did not have much gold jewellery- the one gold necklace she had was stolen just days before departing to Libya. She did pack few trinkets, chains, bracelets for us girls



## Religious items

There are several rituals and festivals during a year and my parents tried their best to follow some of these by taking a few religious items like-copper and brass items, religious symbols and objects, pictures of deities, oil lamps. Also took religious books like Bhagawad Gita and Ramayana.

## Music

Mum and dad both loved singing and listening to South Indian classical music also known as Carnatic music. They took with them cassette tapes and vinyl records (LPs) of bhajans, religious songs, light music, movie songs, South-Indian instrument music like veena, flute, ghatam.

## Books

Comic books with Indian folk tales for kids were quite popular back then and we packed few of our favourites like Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal tales. My dad was an avid reader he loved books on philosophy and biographies like Think and grow rich, Law of success, My experiments with truth.



The national flag of India is a horizontal rectangular tricolour of India saffron, white and India green; with the Ashoka Chakra, a 24-spoke wheel, in navy blue at its centre. It was adopted in its present form during a meeting of the Constituent Assembly held on 22 July 1947, and it became the official flag of the Dominion of India on 15 August 1947. The flag was subsequently retained as that of the Republic of India.

China

Middle East

India

## Country and its history

**Republic of India** is in South Asia. It is the 7th largest country by area and the 2nd most populated country with 1.3 billion people. India is a federal union comprising 29 states and 7 union territories. Mumbai is the largest city and New Delhi is the capital.

The Indus Valley Civilisation is the 1st urban culture that is now Pakistan and western India, which flourished during 2500–1900 BCE. The early Indian medieval age, 600 CE to 1200 CE, is defined by regional kingdoms and cultural diversity. By the early 18th century a number of European trading companies, including the English East India Company, had established coastal outposts.

In 1858 after a rebellion, the company was suppressed and India was under the direct administration of the British government. The non-violent movement, of which Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi would become the leader began around 1920. The independence was declared on the 15th August 1947, but tempered by the partition of India into two states: India and Pakistan. The constitution was completed on the 26th January 1950, which put in place a secular and democratic republic.

With a service sector of 55.6%, an industrial sector of 26.3% and agricultural sector of 18.1%, the Indian economy is emerging. Hindi and English are the 2 official languages and the principal religions are Hinduism (79.8%), Islam (14.2%), Christianity (2.3%) and Sikhism (1.7%). The earliest literature in India, between 1500 BCE and 1200 CE, was in the Sanskrit language. The Indian film industry, Bollywood, produces the world's most-watched cinema.

***This Suitcase exhibit is prepared by Padi Nistala-James with the help of Komala Kumar.***





Visakhapatnam, INDIA



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