

Nirmala Sailing Expedition Surat-Lakshadweep-Surat

This book is dedicated to

My wife

Mita Shah

Without whose support

I could not have sailed

To

Lakshadweep Islands.

Rajen P. Shah

Surat

India

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I would like to thank co-owner of the yacht Dr. Bipin Desai and his wife Gita Desai without whose financial and moral support, I could not have built the boat and sailed so extensively. Dr. Anand Vaidya remained as my first mate and stood by in difficult sailing condition and was there like pillar during all 40 days. Ashutosh Mohile correspondence with Lakshadweep authority to obtain entry permit, his local knowledge and Coast Guard support was unparalleled. Bhisma Desai, Nidhi Desai and Ajit Pathak were of great help as crew members during our return journey from New Manglore to Surat.

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“There is nothing – absolutely nothing half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats” – Kenneth Grahame.

Preface:

Sailing is more than a competitive sport. It is enjoyed by millions in the west who sail for relaxation and, for the truly hooked; it quickly becomes a way of life. Sailing was necessary to the sea farers who explored the seas that cover 2/3rd of the earth’s surface and who helped to develop nations through world trade and conquest. Sailing for me is a hobby I have found after the age of 60, which gives me a sense of freedom, relaxation, serenity, a joy of travel and adrenaline surging excitement which can all be summed up in one word: *“Happiness”*.

In 2007 I decided to construct an Indian made catamaran, because she would sail in shallow water of South Gujarat and may be beached or grounded without any problem; something a mono-hull would not be able to do. For six months I read reviews of many designers all over the world before narrowing down my choice to an English designer Mr. Richard Woods. *Golden Cat* is a sailing catamaran built in Hitesh's boat yard at Billimora, Gujarat. She was locally made from wood and ply after considering the more expensive option of an imported fiber glass mono hull. She was commissioned on 25th December 2010 with the breaking of a coconut.

In January and February 2011, extensive trials were conducted around her port Vasi-Borsi, Surat to sort out teething problems and test out her strength and weaknesses. As our confidence in her increased, we decided to sail a little further away from home. In March and April she sailed from Vansi-Borsi (Surat) to Umargam – a 100 nautical mile (nm) round trip, Diu – a 250 nm round trip, and lastly to Mumbai – a 270 nm round trip. During her second year in 2012 her longest sail was to Goa – a 750 nm round trip.

In May 2012, *Golden Cat* was beached during high water inside Purna river estuary near a small fishing village Vasi-Borsi Machchliwada, Surat on a narrow strip of land between the Arabian Sea and Purna river back water. She was then tied to trees, where she would remain during the south west monsoon which extends from June to September before embarking for our dream voyage to Lakshadweep. This small creek is well protected from open sea as well as monsoon floods of the river.

A boat is always there – you never stop worrying about her whether you are aboard or ashore – she is always a presence in the mind and you are conscious of her at all times.



She may be laid up in safe place for the monsoon, but wherever you may be – at home or in your virtuous bed, traveling, partying with your friends with flying champagne corks - a part of your consciousness is always reserved. When the wind moans round the eaves of the house and in print you read about monsoon waves damaging coastal houses it has a special significance and you check with the boat keeper Vivek and his grand father Bhagvanbhai Tandel who live nearby. Men lie awake worrying about their

bank balances, their waist-lines, their wives, mistresses (actual or potential), but sailors worry about their boats.(1)

A boat is something more than an ingenious arrangement of wood and copper and iron – it has a soul, a personality, and eccentricities of behavior that are endearing. It becomes part of a person, coloring his whole life with a romance that is unknown to those who do not understand a way of life connected with boats. The older is a boat the stronger its power. It gains in stature with each new experience – people look at boats with wonder and say names of places where she has been to. Golden Cat has become a very real part of our lives – Bipin and I love her with deep respect. Over the last two years affection has ripened into a bond of mutual sympathy and understanding. We came to understand what she would do and what she would not, what pleased her and what caused her discontent. Now we had asked her to take us to Lakshadweep without fail by giving us whatever she had.

Hitesh Wadia, the boat builder, started repair and refitting work which took about two weeks. We had one week left to install all accessories, which were taken home before monsoon for safe storage. Electronic gadgets such as GPS, radar, AIS (automatic information system), VHF radio, a new anemometer, a new log meter, depth sounder, autopilot, magnetic compass were installed along with a Yamaha out board motor. A main sail with boom and a head sail-genoa were rigged. All ropes and lines for controlling sail known as running riggings were threaded through the bull eyes, clutches, stoppers and pulleys. Three batteries with a charger, Honda generator, and four solar panels were placed in their designated place and the electric circuit designed as per advice from my cousin Dr. Sunil Sheth (Phd in Physics) was tested. The vessel was well prepared for this long voyage with assistance from Bipin's chauffer-turned-sailor Madhukar Sonavane, electrical engineer Girish Mirani and his two wiremen Mahesh Chauhan and Mahesh Mistry, fitters Sunder Patil and Bapu Mali and the boat builder Hitesh Wadia's two workmen namely Bhagu Patel and Natu Lakdawala.

The sail plan was just like any other cruiser. The Genoa was attached to the forestay which had roller reefing – a mechanism for reducing the sail's area by pulling in a line that winds the polyester canvas around a foil, like wrapping a piece of paper around a pencil. The main sail is shortened by hauling on a series of lines that pulled the sail down the mast in three stages, known as reefs; therefore these lines are called reefing lines. There is a compelling simplicity about making headway under sail: no motor, no lubrication or fuel, no noise – just the wind in the sails and the boat in harmony with nature. She also had a Yamaha out board motor as an auxiliary engine to facilitate maneuvering in a port and narrow channels or to keep moving in calm condition and an inflatable dinghy for the crew to go on shore.

Inside the galley was a gas stove and dinning table for 5 people, a small top open table refrigerator of 50 liters capacity, which ran on 12 v batteries. There were utensils and cutlery that any kitchen should have. There was a wash basin with a tap having a micro-switch which would turn on an electric pump connected to a 125 liter water tank stored underneath.

The head (toilet) had a WC, a shower and a wash basin. The WC would use salt water from the sea and dispose off waste directly into the ocean with a manual pump up when pushed up and down like a bicycle pump. It had a tap and shower attached to a 75 liters water tank.

Introduction:

I, Rajen Shah, the skipper and the primary owner of Golden Cat, learnt to sail a dinghy “Sun Fish” in 1974 at Massachusetts, USA when I was studying at a university.

There was no scope of sailing in Surat when I returned from the USA in 1977. My first sailing attempt in Surat was in a pond, on a windsurfer owned by Nature Club of Surat in 1985. I saw a windsurfing school on a beach of Mauritius, when I was on a holiday with my family in 1986. I immediately enrolled and learnt the sport. I acquired a second hand windsurf board from Shilpin Patel, Pondicherry and continued to windsurf for many years as it became one of my favorite sports along with tennis, cycling and trekking.

My interest in sailing a cruiser - a long distance sailing boat - was awakened when I was visiting the UK with my family in 2007. I was in search of a hobby which I could pursue after 60. I had many questions in mind: “Could I learn sailing at this age? Could I own a boat and maintain her without any existing infrastructure in the State of Gujarat? Which type of boat would be suitable for the Western coast of India? Where would be a safe place around Surat to park the boat? How would I overcome problem of sea sickness?”

After the wedding reception of my daughter in London, I joined a sailing school for five days at Poole, UK in April 2008. After six months, I went to England again to do the Royal Yacht Association (RYA) Day-skipper course, which involved 5 days classroom learning covering various subjects like navigation, weather and safety, and 5 days practical sailing lessons. There was then no looking back as I passed various courses - Coastal Skipper, First Aid, Weather, Radar, VHF radio license and finally RYA Yachtmaster Coastal – a commercial qualification.

Before the boat was built, I had dreamt of Sailing to Daman, across Bay of Khambhat and to my Nargol House near Umargam. All my dreams came true in 2011 – the first year of owning Golden Cat. I had not even thought of sailing to Goa and Diu in 2010,

but having done that in 2012, my eyes were set on something bigger – the Lakshadweep Islands during the year 2013.



For most people in Surat, understanding my psyche of participating in this extreme sport was beyond their grasp. Most people in our society would consider me crazy - not enlightened – for doing this. Sailing is not just a challenge for me, but it is about continually seeing and experiencing new things.

Who would sail with me? Most sports activities need a buddy to pursue them. In recreational sailing a skipper needs 2 to 4 crew members. I had done trekking, cycling and windsurfing in the company of Dr. Bipin Desai for the last 12 years. Both of us jointly owned a ski boat and a sailing dinghy; therefore he was my natural choice. He not only agreed to sail with me, but also accepted to jointly own the boat as a minor partner. He was pediatrician to my two daughters. He completed his specialization in pediatrics in the USA and was one of very few to return to India in the 1960s. He established the first children's hospital in Surat.

The second crew member, Gita Desai married Bipin when she was 65 and Bipin 68 as both had lost their spouses. She was impressed to see Bipin's other interest, a power boat "Draupadi", parked in his garage. She knew that he was the right man for her second marriage, ten years after her first husband passed away. After the wedding, she learnt cycling and swimming and participated in all his activities. Long distance sailing is mainly a man's sport, but she delightfully agreed to join. She was an excellent look out person as her eyes and observational skills were very sharp. She of course performed another most important function – cooking! You are fortunate if you can have food cooked by a woman on a boat. Everybody on the boat candidly called her Captain Cook.



The third crew member, Dr. Anand Vaidya – a tall, robust Aurvedic doctor and financial investor by profession – was another natural choice for me as a first mate (deputy skipper). Anand and I were both on the managing committee of the Nature Club Surat. We became close friends during a mountaineering expedition to the Himalayas and a trip to the Bharatpur bird sanctuary. He joined Bipin and I on a regular basis during windsurfing sessions at Tapi River. Anand had been an avid sports person from his school time. He passed his advanced mountaineering course from Nehru Institute Mountaineering School (NIM) and climbed many peaks in Himalayas. He married Anita - a mountaineer from Himachal Pradesh - so that they could both pursue the sport together. In his heydays he excelled in both water and snow skiing in such a short time that he could beat his coaches in skill and speed at the end of each course. He learn the ropes of sailing quickly. I knew that he was the right man as my first mate as he was brave and prepared to face any adverse conditions with a smiling face.



Daily sailing notes:

On 8th January 2012, Bipin, Gita, Anand and I weighed the anchor at Vasi-Borsi, Surat. Very close people – my wife Mita Shah, Anand's wife Anita, two daughters, mother and sister; Gita's daughters and their family and my daughter's in-laws the Doshis were present to flag us off. We had not told many of our friends about our date and time of departure as we wanted to keep it low key.

January 8/ Day 01 departed from Borsi-Surat/ Distance Logged 62 nm:

At 10:30 we left in a strong tidal current against us in the Purna river. We were delighted to notice that a southerly wind of 15 knots had picked up. The Golden Cat's 9.9 horsepower (hp) motor was not powerful enough to take her against this strong current so we employed wind propulsion with large sails. The advantages of a sail boat over a power boat are numerous such as the ability to go long distances without refueling. Abhilash Tomy from the Indian Navy was the first Indian to succeed in circumnavigating solo and non-stop under sail, and he did this on a sail boat made in Goa.

Her luck with the wind was short lived as it reduced to less than 6 knots - not enough for sailing by the time she cleared the mouth of the river and entered open sea. We expected the sea breeze to pick up in the absence of the north easterly wind which persists during winter time and is also known as the north eastern monsoon. She was under power for two hours when she felt a light breeze from the north. We hoisted our new colorful spinnaker sail, which is a large chute – a 13 meters tall and 7 meters wide triangle with a total area of 75 square meters made of thin polyester rip-stop nylon taffeta. This is also called a sail for light wind blowing from aft or behind. This sail looks like a triangular kite with 5 lines attached to it. The line from the top is called a halyard for hoisting; as for the other four ropes, two are from the port corner and two are from the starboard corner. I do not know the real reason, but I assume that to avoid confusion, out of two ropes on both sides one is called a sheet and the other one is called a guy. The guys and sheets are trimmed by pulling or slackening continuously to change the sail's angle so that it remains full of wind and under optimum power – a lot of hard work and uninterrupted attention is required. We would have been sailing very slow with conventional sails but with the spinnaker up we got a good speed of 6 knots in 8-10 knots wind. At 18:00 hours we decided to drop the spinnaker as we didn't want to sail with it in dark as we were still novices with it. We had hot dinner made by the hands of Gita complemented by hot tea and coffee. Gita and I were on duty during first part of the night from 22:00 to 02:00. She was on look out and would report to me if she saw anything around us. I was keeping check on the GPS and radar, would trim the sail as the wind changed and wrote a log book every hour. Hourly marking of our position on a

marine paper chart should be given utmost importance: this would confirm that we were on a correct track and we could determine an approximate position if the GPS broke down. The most important thing I was taught in a school was to sail without GPS because it is an electronic instrument which could break down or show an incorrect position. At night we would sail in 20 meters contour which was 10 nm from the shore to avoid fishing stakes as they were not visible at night. On the same route last year when we were returning from Goa, our motor got caught in a fishing net bending one of the brackets and therefore we would be careful this time to stay away from the coast. Bipin and Anand took over during second half of the night from 02:00 to 06:00. Many sailors practice 3 hours shifts at night, but I had figured out that two night shifts would give better chance to recover as you get 4 hours of uninterrupted sleep. Anand being my first mate would be acting as skipper with Bipin. By midnight we had sailed 62 nm at an average speed of 4.6 nm per hour. Sail boats are expected to average around 5 nm, which a non-sailor may find ridiculously slow in times of high speed cars, trains and airplanes, but one must remember that this is a recreation activity and not a transport option.

January 9/Day 2 crossed Mumbai shipping channel/Dist logged 97 nm: None of us would like to miss sunrise and sunset as both were seen over water, which is possible from a boat or from a small island in the mid sea. They were some of the best moments: sunrise would bring the first ray of sun and its warmth ended our anxiety of sailing in the dark for almost 12 hours; and the sunset would bring back the cool evening air. A northerly light wind prevailed the whole night so we had made a slow but steady progress southward toward Mumbai. We had sailed to Vasai which is 104 nm from Borsi -Surat. We had our autopilot working all the time taking the strain off the helmsman. An autopilot is a pilot direction indicator (PDI) device which maintains a compass bearing by moving the steering to and fro automatically in a gradual manner to keep the boat in the pre-determined direction. This was a great boon after I had installed it in the previous year with the help of Girish Mirani, an electrical engineer and the boat builder Hitesh Wadia. I bought it from a Westmarine store in New York without knowing of its suitability for our boat, but there was no end to my happiness to see it working successfully. My risk of buying it paid off during our first trip to Goa. In the absence of this great product, one person would have been always tied up at the steering to maintain course just like in car. Research is going on to develop an auto pilot of a car, which is expected to be available commercially within five to ten years. It was easier to develop one for a boat than a car because on water there is little traffic away from harbor and you can sail in a straight line for hours and sometimes for days. Autopilot was not capable of avoiding a collision so one person must always be on the lookout and must change to manual mode if any obstruction was seen. We carry on almost all activities on our moving boat like cooking, reading, playing music and cards, yoga,

mobile chats, internet browsing, sleeping, etcetera that you would in your house. On land you may see beautiful landscape with a forest or garden and here we could see the huge vastness of the sea and the beautiful coastline. When traveling by boat we did not have to pack or unpack, neither carry baggage at a railway station or airport, nor check in or out of hotels. Our boat was our vehicle-cum-home just like a recreational vehicle. The air is always fresh and there is no hustle and bustle of people. It is a very relaxing to travel when the weather is fair, but it could become an adventure when the wind starts blowing more than 15 knots, and the adrenaline starts flowing in winds of more than 20 knots. It would be definitely risky to sail in a gale which is 30 to 40 knots and a storm which is in excess of 40 knots wind.

We celebrate Utarayan (a kite flying festival) on 14th January because the NE wind picks up following the calm of two to three months after monsoon ends in September. In Surat the month of October is the hottest due to high humidity and lack of wind. It starts getting cooler in November and December, but there is very little wind. Today at 13:00 hours we were experiencing calm in the afternoon though we would expect a sea breeze which is created as the cold air from the sea rushes to meet the rising hot air on land. This is a basic we have all learnt in high school. The expected velocity of the sea breeze is between 10 to 15 knots and is effective up to 10 nm from land. For some reason the breeze was absent thus we would motor for the whole afternoon. We were feeling frustrated as we were feeling the heat of direct sun light and the engine noise was annoying. We were also having pity for the kite flying enthusiast standing on the terrace in anticipation of wind.

We crossed the shipping lanes of Mumbai staying away from Mumbai port limit as we didn't want any unnecessary trouble from the port security. Once we adjusted her course when she was on a collision course with one of the ships. In the sea you must determine well in advance if you are going to collide or not as boats don't have breaks. One must check the bearing of a ship crossing in front of you with a hand held compass or determine it visually at 5 minutes intervals. You could say that you were on collision course with a vessel whose bearing would not change. Sail boats can stay on course if they are on a collision course with another small power boat as they have priority as per international rule, but they must give way to large ships which are restricted in their ability to maneuver, especially in narrow shipping lanes. Most fishermen did not know the rules as they do not attend a navigation school, and many times Golden Cat had to give way to them. We wanted to cross the shipping channel of Mumbai before dark which we did at 4 knots speed under power due to favorable tidal currents. Tidal currents keep getting stronger as you sail north of Mumbai, therefore it would be best to sail southwards when the tide is ebbing and northward when it is flooding. It would be best to anchor if the tide was against you and it was calm. The whole idea of

recreational sailing was to use natural elements like sea currents and wind in your favor as there was no sense burning valuable fuel when both these elements would be against you. We were sailing to enjoy the complete freedom from being on time as we had no appointments to keep and no strict target to reach a particular destination on time.

We continued sailing at night in a light land breeze, which is opposite of a sea breeze. At night land cools down bringing the temperature of land lower than the air temperature on water creating a breeze from land to sea.

January 10/ Day 03 reached Ganpatipule/ Dist logged 88 nm:

Early in the morning at 04:40 the land breeze stopped prematurely, thus we continued motoring. We were tired after sailing for a second night consecutively with poor wind conditions and the noise of the engine, therefore we decided to anchor near Dabhol creek and wait for wind. I was tempted to get closer to the beautiful green landscape surrounded by hills rising out of the sea, but was soon opposed by Anand and Bipin. They feared that coastal marine security would be attracted if we would go too close, wasting our valuable time. We had a few bad experiences in the previous years with police at Dandi, Gujarat and Devgarh, Maharashtra as they detained us for a few hours for no reason. At Dandi they wanted my ID, which was on my boat, but they would not let me go get it. They wanted us to give them a statement in writing that we would not come again by boat, which Anand refused to sign. We were released after our friend from Navsari intervened with the help of an influential person. At Devgarh, they would say that we were illegally swimming in the sea though such law does not exist. Here the land police is swine. There are so many unnecessary laws that a man can't live without breaking them. At both of these places we had not broken any laws, but we were still harassed. Having said this, I would like to state that there have been exceptions as we have met many extremely helpful marine security people. I assume that they are still newly appointed after the Mumbai terror attack and have not learnt to get fat.

As soon as we anchored in 10 meters of water, Anand dived into the water with his new snorkeling gear. We all joined him to cool down our heated bodies in the windless scorching sun. We felt relaxed swimming around the boat when suddenly Bipin appeared from under water in panic. He said, "I experienced very strong current and would like to climb the boat". He wanted to climb up to the boat from the starboard side where there was no ladder so I asked him to swim to portside, but the current had scared him so much that he would not dare. He feared that the current may push him far away from the boat. Anand and I being stronger could manage to swim against the current, but it is important that one must assess the strength of the current before going into the water even if the boat is anchored and shore is not too far away. I knew that it

was a bad decision on my part to let everybody swim at the same time, because if the current pulled us all away from the boat than there would be nobody on the boat to launch a rescue operation or call for help. An activity apparently looking very safe and innocent may build itself up to produce a misfortune which, to our small world, could be a disaster.

The wind had picked up from behind and it was time to leave. Anand said that the spinnaker sail could be hoisted without the main sail up according to a video he had seen. The boat designer Richard Wood had written in his spinnaker article that the spinnaker should be always hoisted and brought down in the wind shadow of the main sail. Both of us were new to the spinnaker and wanted to try new things, so we tried to hoist the spinnaker without the main sail up and got into trouble as it got all entangled and was impossible to tame. It was scary to see it fluttering violently which made it impossible to hold the sheets and bring it down to the deck. Anand was almost air lifted trying to pull down. We could have damaged the sail if it had got in contact with the sharp edges of the anchor. It could have been dangerous if the sail went under the hull. I changed the direction of the boat into the wind to bring the sail on board but that made things worse as the apparent wind velocity increased further. Finally, I motored at full throttle with the wind behind so that the apparent wind would reduce. It worked and the sail was brought down to our great relief after an hour of wrestling. Another lesson learnt that things look too simple on video when they are performed by experts, but never deviate from the basics that you have learnt.



We got under way with our conventional sail and later raised the spinnaker to pick up a good speed. Our pleasure to sail fast with spinnaker was short lived as our steering cable broke. We again struggled as we lost control of the boat and I tried to control the rudder in an awkward position. After hard work we could get the spinnaker down again and a jury tiller was attached. A large trawler came near us as they thought that we were having some problems and to enquire who we were. We had a chat in Hindi with the skipper about our voyage and problems. He suggested that we should sail to Dabhol port, where we could get help to fix the cable, but we didn't need any external help as we had a spare cable which we could replace ourselves. Later, he also agreed that Ganpatipule would be a good place to stop as we could get a good shelter from the wind. We anchored at 19:00 hour when it was almost dark, had our hot dinner prepared by Gita and were fast asleep instantly. This was our first overnight stop after sailing 3 days and 2 nights without stop. No wonder we were deprived of sleep and were exhausted. Sailing at night was demanding for the skipper who must navigate with accuracy and uninterrupted attention.

Jan 11/ Day 04/ 55 nm:

After sleeping for 10 hours, we were rejuvenated with all our strength back and our morale up. Anand and I got our tools, spare blocks and a 6 mm wire rope out on the deck. When we were about to start our repair work, a boat approached us with two policemen. One of them was from customs. He checked all our papers and asked a few questions. They verified identity of all four crew members. Our offering a cup of tea didn't bring a smile on their face as it would not build fat. I could read their mind, "*Chai me kya leneka.*" I gave them two polyester saris as souvenirs from Surat – the largest polyester fabrics manufacturing center in India. During the whole trip, we were never harassed by any officials as most of them were more than happy with our offerings of textiles souvenirs from Surat.

Gita wanted to go to the famous Ganpati Temple to worship while we replaced the broken cable. We requested one of the tourist power boats to take Gita to the temple for prayer. He offered to drop her off for free but declined to drop her back even if we would pay his price. He said, "She could return by an auto-rickshaw." Finally, she dropped the idea of "*darshan*".

Our steering had two pieces of steel cables – one for left turns and another for right turns - and one of these had broken. As explained in the beginning, we had feared this at the start of the trip and were well prepared with spares. I noticed that the other one was also worn out, but to save time I decided to replace it at New Mangalore, which was an error in my judgment.

By the time we finished the repair job, we felt the heat of southern sun. We dived into the sea to bathe and cool down our bodies as our boat doesn't have air-conditioning. A quick fresh water shower of about 1 liter per person was sufficient to wash off salt water from our tanned skin. Another alternative on a yacht with limited fresh water is to wipe out salt water with a wet towel. The sea water here is very blue unlike south Gujarat, which added the fun of bathing in the sea.

Water is a very precious commodity during sailing. The major usage of water was in doing the dishes, but Gita and Anand had found an innovative method. We would first wash the dishes and utensils with sea water than wash with fresh water and soap to remove oil, if required. Unlike at home, a fresh water rinse was not given after the second wash with soap, but the cutlery was first allowed to drain all soapy water in the second basin before wiping them with a clean dry cloth. In UK where sea water is freezing cold, they would add hot water and soap to facilitate easy removal of grease. They would not rinse them again with fresh water to save water. In south Gujarat where water is murky, we had to give a fresh water rinse after an initial wash with sea water to remove mud. But here in south of India, the sea water was so good that many times we didn't give them a fresh water rinse at all. In India there were no marinas where we could refill water with a hose and get fuel from a marine petrol pump. We had to manually fetch water and fuel in jerry cans on our dinghy from shore. We kept our water consumption as low as 20-25 liters per day or about 5 liters (half a bucket) per person per head. It would be impossible to manage with such a small quantity of water on land.

At 10:45, we weighed anchor and were underway towards Goa. There was no sign of wind till 13:00, but a light NW sea breeze picked up and we switched off our engine. Sometimes we were motor sailing, which means that you use both wind and engine power together thus getting more speed than wind alone. Sailing without the engine in light wind is too slow and frustrating. In 2012 we had sailed non-stop from Mumbai to Goa without switching on our engine, but this time we were not lucky. It was a worrisome matter as we still had a long way to go.

Jan 12/ Day 05/ 85 nm/ Goa:

We continued sailing the whole day without much wind. Sometime we would sail slowly in light wind and other time motor sail. We sailed for almost 33 hours and logged 140 nm at an average speed of 4.25 knots.

We started entering Agonda Beach of south Goa at dawn. It was tricky to enter the unknown bay at night. I had carefully studied marine charts for anchoring possibilities in the last 3 bays of extreme southern Goa. I found that Agonda was the most suitable and safe as there were no rocks in the middle of the bay and it gave good protection from a

northerly wind. We saw numerous lights of many fishing boats anchored for the night which was a proof of good protection from wind. We wanted to pass all these boats and anchor as close to the beach as possible so that next morning we could take a short trip in our dinghy to the shore. I was at the helm, Anand at the radar and Bipin at the bow keeping constant vigilance. Anand was keeping watch for any unlit boats or obstructions on the radar, Bipin for fishing nets and obstructions not visible on radar and I was steering keeping a constant eye on the depth sounder and was ready to react if I heard anything from either Anand or Bipin. We motored slowly at 2-3 knots speed, passed all of the anchored boats and finally we were in about 8 meter depth at about 200 meters distance from the beach. I didn't want to get too close where the shore waves would break. As soon as we anchored our hot meal was waiting for us. Gita was doing her part of work – cooking when we were all busy piloting inside the bay. Bipin said, "Well done" as it was a great experience of piloting in crowded unknown water at night. It was taught to me at sailing school to avoid entering an unknown harbor at night, but I could do it as I had a good team to work with.

Jan 13/ Day 06/ 27 nm/ Departure from Goa:

Anand and I went to the shore in our Zodiac dinghy after having breakfast, as Bipin and Gita opted to stay on board. There were many restaurants, bars and water sports facilities. We requested a water sports guy to look after our inflatable raft while we were shopping for ration, fuel and potable water. We had consumed 3 tanks (75 liters) of petrol during our 387nmi (715km) journey from Surat, which came to 9.55 km per liter. I was not happy about consuming so much fuel, but then we didn't have time to wait for wind as we needed to reach Mangalore on January 15, where our fifth crew member Ashotosh Mohile would join us.

The water sports guy arranged for two tanks (50 lit) of fuel as we couldn't buy it in jerry cans from petrol pumps as per a new impractical law. The law was imposed to stop misuse of petrol by antisocial elements, but such laws were harassment for people wanting petrol for genuine need. In my opinion such laws don't stop miscreants for doing harmful activities as there were a number of ways to get fuel by paying a premium which we did. Such laws were enacted to be broken, were harassment to the general public, promote black marketing, and kept police fat. The taxi driver who took us to a market was also grumbling that he had to go through so much hassle when his cab ran out of fuel.

We bought rations from a nearby market and 40 liters of drinking water which we had consumed after leaving Surat at an average rate of 2 liters per day per person. On returning to Agonda beach, we ordered beer and fish for lunch at a restaurant shack, which also had a few rooms for guests. We had experienced that most beach

restaurants in Goa served excellent food. This may not be a place for a typical vegetarian Indian tourist with Indian taste buds. After a nap we headed back to the boat. A light westerly sea breeze had picked up and the waves were breaking on the shore which looked quite docile from a distance. We had 40 liters drinking water, 50 liters petrol and 20 kilos of ration on the dinghy. Anand was leading the dinghy from the bow with a painter – a bow rope in his hand, while I was pushing her from stern. Suddenly a large wave broke on us and I was thrown back. We would have lost everything if Anand hadn't held the painter tightly with all his might. Anand, being a mountaineer, 6 feet tall and weighing 92 kilos, was the strongest and heaviest among us. Once we crossed the breaking wave zone, Anand climbed into the dinghy but I couldn't as I was not strong enough to pull myself up on my own. Our 2 hp Yamaha OBM came in handy to reach the Golden Cat.

At 17:00 we were underway towards Mangalore. There was not much wind till 2:00, therefore we could log 30 nm by midnight at an average speed of 3 knots by motoring. We were encountered by many trawlers at night. Trawlers always moved in a large group as if they were out to sweep all living things from the Arabian Sea. We had learnt by now to stay away from such a group. Once I tried to go through a group instead of going around them and was very close to a collision as they would not deviate from their course or slow down.

Jan 14/ Day 07/ 79 nm:

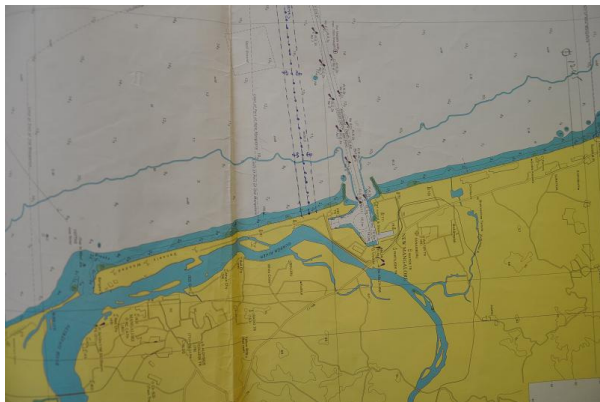
At 19:00 we anchored to rest for the night. There were many rocks jutting out of the water around this area. One of the Islands looked very interesting and we vowed to return some other time.

I had decided that we would not sail two nights consecutively. Night sailing deprived sleep and it would be suicidal to not keep full attention. It would be impossible to launch a rescue operation if we had a collision and the boat sank at night. A person in the water in the dark would be almost impossible to locate, though we were all wearing self inflatable life jackets with blinkers. Those fishing trawlers gave me anxiety because we couldn't figure out whether they were anchored or moving. A white light on a boat means that it was anchored, but most of these fishing boats had white lights on whether anchored or moving. All boats should have a red light on portside, green on starboard side and white on the stern when underway as per international rules. This year I saw a few with red and green lights - a good change from my last year experience of sailing to Goa, when such lights didn't exist on any of these trawlers. I hope that soon things would change and all of them would have lights as per rules. It would greatly ease navigation; and chances of collision at night would reduce drastically.

Jan 15/ Day 08/ 33 nm/ arrived New Mangalore:

At 06:00 I felt wind in my sleep and jumped out of bed in excitement. We made good progress until calm returned at 11:00 hour. We reached the entrance of New Mangalore port at 15:00.

I called the Indian Coast Guard on the telephone numbers given by Commandant Ashutosh Mohile. They told me to call channel 12 or 14 on VHF radio. The port officer asked us to wait till he received confirmation from the coast guard. Channel 16 is an emergency channel all over the world; therefore it is not used for communication other than a Mayday or Pan-pan or an emergency call. It was mandatory in all countries to have a radio license, so that you know protocols and did not create nuisance. You are taught the selection of channels for various purposes and the method of giving a Mayday (SOS) call that is short but clear for a rescuer. Most of the Indian fishermen do not have a VHF radio license therefore create nuisance on channel 16 and are not caught and punished. I hope that some kind of discipline and responsibility would be taught to them.



We had to wait for half an hour before getting a nod to enter the port. A security boat approached us as soon as we entered the port limit to note down details of our crew members and the boat. The coast guard asked us to come along port side of their ship. We kept fenders on the starboard side and with the bow and stern sheet already attached. Fenders are cylindrical in shape made from rubber material inflated with compressed air which give a cushion effect between two hard surfaces and protects the hull from scratching or breaking. Many power boats in India use old car tires as they are cheaper than fenders though they are too heavy. Coast guard people picked up both lines and secured them on their ship so that both stern and bow remained close to the ship. We also attached two spring lines to the ship to arrest forward and backward movements. They served us tea and biscuits as soon as we boarded their ship. Ashutosh had booked a room at the Coast Guard guest house in the city, but to get

there we needed port IDs without which we could walk out but would not be able to re-enter. There were a lot of logistics involved; as a result we couldn't get them till the office closed at 17:00. We had no choice but to stay on our boat. The commandant and staff were very accommodative. They let us use their toilets and we had a first fresh water bath with soap. At night they served us dinner in their dinning hall – a first night that Gita didn't have to cook.

Jan 16/ Day 09/ New Mangalore:

Hot tea and breakfast were served in the ship cafeteria. Ashutosh arrived at 10:00. We still didn't have port IDs; therefore we decided that Ashutosh would manage an ID for Anand so that they could go out to purchase ration and fuel.



We filled up all our tanks with a water hose provided by the ship and charged our batteries by connecting with a power line on the ship. Water and electric connection are a very basic facility provided on marinas abroad. This was a luxury for us as there were no marinas on this coast. We had to bring water and fuel in jerry cans and charge our batteries with four solar panels or use a Honda generator.

I had called a boat repair guy as we had found some water leaking in from the transom steps at the stern. I wanted to beach the boat in high water so that we could fix the small leaks with waterproof putty. This was important as we were to sail 150 nm non-stop and away from the coast. The repair guy didn't show up as promised so I decided to beach the boat with help of Bipin. Though we were short of hands, we did it quite well by dropping anchor from the bow and reversing on a beach. We tied both sides of the stern to trees which were far away. I started applying silicone putty with my bare hands on the bolts of the ladder and all possible pin holes as soon as the tide went out and the stern was out of water. The repair guy kept telling me that he would come, but he showed up just before dark when the work was done. It was too late and I had done the sealing job the best I could, but some areas were still wet on which the glue would not stick. I requested him to get me a hair dryer. I finished rest of the job hoping that there wouldn't be any more leaks. It was night and we were waiting for high water to re-float our boat so that we could get going. It was a hard work for me as I was continuously on the job for the afternoon and evening. The silicone glue was so sticky that it took almost 3 days to completely get rid of it from my hands. Ashutosh introduced one of his colleagues, also a sailor, with whom we chatted till it was time to leave for Kadmat Island, Lakshadweep. At 23:00 hour we motored slowly out of the port into the dark and away from the main coast line of India – our first blue water sailing.

For the first time I saw iridescent bubbles, which were beautiful in varied shapes. But they were the falsest thing in the sea. I enjoyed watching them coming from the front and then going under our boat every few minutes. Sometimes a large group was scary as you felt that they would collide and destroy you.

Jan 17/ Day 10/ 104 nm/ crossing of Laccadive sea:

Commandant Ashutosh Mohile had joined us as a fifth crew member on board. I had met him in Surat when he was posted for some months to supervise the repair of a Coast Guard ship. Once I invited him to go windsurfing with some friends to Narmada River near Bharuch. After I taught him the basics, he was windsurfing on his own. He got carried by strong tide towards sea and was rescued by a local ferry boat which dropped him back. We became very close friends since then. I had invited him to sail a dinghy at my Nargol beach house when he was posted at Daman. We listened to his thrilling story of an air crash and a miraculous survival. He impressed us with his capacity to command a fleet of Dornier planes. He had been an avid sailor in his heydays. At 23 he had sailed from Cochin to Okha in an open boat (without toilet or kitchen) with the help of a compass as the only navigational instrument. He had also participated in a number of regattas and he had a number of interesting tales. He accompanied me during the first boat show at Mumbai in 2006 along with Bipin and Gita, when the idea for owning a cruiser sailing boat was sown for the first time. I always

discussed with him on phone various aspects about designing and building a yacht before finalizing to build this catamaran.



We motored for the whole night and the morning as there was not a sign of light breeze. We had 162 liters petrol on board and we had already used up 25 liters on the first day. We still had 14 days to go. Fuel would be difficult to get on those islands; it would be pricier and contaminated. We were here to sail and not motor. Ashutosh decided to sail in a very light breeze and use his light wind expertise. He had sailed from Cochin to Okha on a boat which didn't have a motor, thus had learnt the art of sailing in any condition especially in light wind. We were sailing at 3 knots, which I thought was a good speed because under power we would do 4 knots. We could do 5 knots at full throttle with our 9.9HP Yamaha OBM, but would consume too much fuel therefore I had decided to keep our cruising speed 4 knots or less. In absence of an rpm meter, I had to rely on the judgment of my ears and the engine vibration.

At 21:00 hour, the wind started building to our delight and the Golden Cat started moving at 4 knots. After a few hours the wind increased to 15 knots and we were doing 5-6 knots. Finally the NE wind that was anxiously awaited since we left Surat had arrived. Anand and Ashutosh volunteered to skipper between 22:00 and 02:30. Gita would rest the whole night as she was relieved for the night duty of look out due to the availability of an extra expert sailor, Ashutosh.



Jan 18/ Day 11/ 54 nm/ arrived Kadmat Island:

Bipin and I woke up at 02:00 and took charge at 02:30. Ashutosh had started getting nervous as the wind was hovering at around 18 knots and the sea had built up to a wave height of 1 m. He slept on the deck worrying whether the boat would withstand it or disintegrate. I assured him that we had sailed in these conditions numerous times and there was no reason to be uptight. He finally went to his cabin and fell asleep. In the darkness of early morning I didn't want to run into Kiltan Island which we were bypassing before reaching our planned stop at Kadamat Island. In fact we didn't have

permission to stop at Kiltan. Ashutosh and I had worked over time to take a entry permit to sail to various islands of Lakshadweep. First we applied through a tourist office in Cochi, but they would not issue a permit as we were not traveling to the Islands by a public ferry or a commercial airplane.



We were asked to approach a higher authority like a collector or an administrator as it was a rare case that someone from the mainland would sail in his private boat to the Islands. This had not happened in the last few years therefore there was no standard procedure. It was clear that we would not be able to sail to these islands unless we could get a direct nod from the collector or the administrator who were difficult to contact on phone. I requested that Ashutosh use his Coast Guard office in Lakshadweep to follow up. He finally managed to obtain an oral assurance for the permit from the administrator and the collector just two days before our departure. On arrival at Kavaratti we would pay permit charges for stopping at five islands and a fee per person per day for visiting the islands. It looked as if the islanders were not tourist-friendly like Maldivians which is just a few hundred miles south. Maldives being an independent country became tourist friendly as they would not survive without tourist and hotel income. The Lakshadweep economy is supported by Indian taxpayers' money and therefore they have little incentive to attract tourists for their livelihood. This was my conclusion before departure,

but we found that people there were extremely friendly and helpful. Many times they would not expect remuneration in return for providing services as they would consider us as their guests.

I was keeping sharp eyes on the depth sounder, radar and GPS. There were reefs extending almost ½ mile offshore from Kiltan. I took the bearing of a light house of Kiltan to verify her position on the GPS. You shouldn't follow GPS blindly as an error as with any other electronic instrument can put you in grave trouble. Alternative navigation methods like visual sighting in day light, a light house and radar at night should be used in association with GPS. In the first twilight we could see the island on our starboard side. Kadmat was 20 nm from here, thus we guessed that we would be there at around 09:00 considering our speed of 6 to 7 knots. In the morning I matched increasing wind with less sail by reefing to keep our boat at a safe speed in average wave heights of 1.5m. Golden Cat was hitting the waves with great power and speed, spraying water on us. We were enjoying the moderate breeze after waiting for 9 days.

We sighted Kadmat Island at 8:00. We anchored in the western side, leeward side of the island, and called up the port office for permission and direction to enter the port. They said that we didn't have permission to come into the atoll (inside reef barrier) for anchorage. Ashutosh talked to them and informed them that we had the permission from the administrator and the tourist department, and that the papers were with them. After a delay we were cleared and were asked to sail on the eastern side of the island, where there was a marked channel. A police boat arrived and a very fit, young and handsome police inspector came aboard along with two constables. He asked us to follow his boat, but the channel was narrow therefore I wanted to motor so that we would have full control. It was advisable to motor a sail boat when you are entering a narrow channel or a crowded anchorage because you can maneuver in any direction, stop and reverse.

I pulled the starter string and the OBM fired up, but it stalled immediately when the gear lever was shifted to forward. Ashutosh said that we were going to sail with wind propulsion, but the little voice inside me kept telling me "no". Ashutosh had sailed a lot on smaller boats, but that was many years ago. Secondly, managing a 20-24 footer sail boat is different than a 34 footer cruiser; therefore I didn't think that he would start sailing in the channel without motor, without planning, without briefing the crew and without informing me – the skipper. By protocol, it should be the skipper who should take charge when sailing inside a harbor, but then there was confusion in authority here. Ashutosh has been captain on Coast Guard ships and had more sailing experience than me but had forgotten that handling one boat is different than the other. He had not maneuvered this boat before, but he had entered the channel and started shouting to trim the sail as soon as we started drifting outside the channel. I started the engine half

a dozen of times, but it would stop as soon as I would shift the lever forward as a rope had wound around the propeller a dozen times. I left the OBM alone and ran for help. Before I could understand the situation, our boat hit a rock on the starboard side and the steering became jammed. Anand rushed to shift the rudder by hand thinking that the steering cable might have broken again but he could not move it. We dropped the anchor mid way into the channel and requested that the security boat provide us a tow boat. A small fishing boat arrived and towed us into the safe anchorage where we would assess the amount of damage. I thought that it was the end of our journey as she may be beyond repair if the hull had cracked and had started leaking. First Anand dived in with his snorkel and reported that the hull was not damaged but that the stock of the starboard rudder had bent. To reconfirm, I swam across the whole hull with my snorkel while sliding my palm over the starboard side of the hull from bow to stern to feel for a crack or an uneven surface. I also checked inside the bilge for leakage. I took a deep breath of relief when damage to the hull was ruled out.

We dismantled the rudder and took it to the shore after lunch. We were met by the police constable, who volunteered to take one of us to a workshop on his bike with the heavy rudder. Anand being the strongest man on board decided to go on the bike, while Ashutosh and I walked around the island. We were thirsty, but couldn't find a place to buy a soft drink or packaged drinking water. Suddenly, we thought that this is a place full of coconut trees, thus we should be drinking coconut water. We entered a small *dhaba* – a restaurant – and ordered coconut water. To our surprise we were declined, but in a short time a man appeared and asked us to follow him to a group of coconut trees nearby. A very masculine man came, put a small piece of rope around the tree and climbed the 15 meter tree at lightning speed. In a few minutes there was a rain of coconuts. The same man, after descending, chipped the coconut top, made a hole and gave it to us to drink. Each one of us drank 3 in a row without a straw to quench our thirst. We wanted some more for our friends therefore he climbed another tree and we had some more in a short time. Now, we had a heavy jute bag full of coconuts to carry to the boat. We requested if the same guy could drop the bag near the jetty from where we would pick it up. We paid him to see if it was enough, he gave us a smile. These people were not greedy; they had neither learnt the art of marketing nor cheating but I felt bad for paying so little compared to the mainland. I believed that the majority of us must have been like this at the time of independence in 1947 – straight forward, naïve and satisfied.

We walked back to the *dak* bungalow – a government guest house – where we had booked two rooms between the five of us. We requested to keep one room for Gita and Bipin as three of us had opted to sleep aboard.

We were still anxiously waiting for Anand to give us news on the bent stock. After some time he appeared with a clean haircut. I wondered whether he went to fix the rudder or get a haircut. He said that the rudder stock was straightened with some difficulty with help of a hydraulic press which was not expected on this small island. We went to the boat with the coconuts which were left for us at the jetty as promised. We installed the rudder and found it as smooth as before. It was evening and time to celebrate our crossing of Lacadive Sea safely and the repairing of the rudder. We had sailed almost 150 miles in 40 hours.

We laughed over the story of Anand's haircut. The constable who took him for the rudder repair was requested by Anand to take him for haircut. He took him to a local hair saloon, but the barber was not around. After looking around, he picked up a pair of scissors and a comb. Anand got a shock of a lifetime, "Are you going to cut my hair?" He said, "Don't worry. I know how to cut hair." Most of the conversations were made in English as they were more conversant in English than Hindi. We went to the boat after dinner.

Jan 19/ Day 12/ 30 nm/ departed Kadmat Island:

In the morning we went to the *dak* bungalow and were met by Bipin, Gita and the deputy collector of the island. After exchanging dialogue and a few photographs we finished our breakfast and got into a waiting minibus which took us to the peninsula of the island. A government owned resort stood there with a stunning view of turquoise blue water. We were met by a scuba instructor who led us to the scuba center. We filled up a form and picked up snorkels and flippers. We were told to wait as it was planned to go diving after lunch when we met an old man from the tourist department who came around to make sure that we were taken care of. He told us that he had sailed in a sail boat 30 years ago from the mainland when there were not many power boats around.

We were in seventh heaven as soon as we went under water. In 1994 I had dived at Bungaram Island for the first time in my life after which I had never had a second chance until this day. We went back to the jetty after spending the whole afternoon doing scuba and snorkeling where we were met by the smart police inspector who had received us the previous day. I gave him, the constable and the rudder repairer a souvenir of textiles made in Surat. Initially they resisted, but on my insistence they accepted. We went to our boat in Zodiac and started preparing to leave. Suddenly the inspector climbed the ladder from nowhere. We had invited him to see our boat earlier, but he was tied up with some work. As soon as he found time, he swam to us and asked us to leave immediately as it was getting dark. He said the inter-island ships had not resumed operation that day because of rough water. Despite his warning of rough conditions, we left for Bangaram Island. The wind was still blowing at about 15 knots

and there were many white horses, but I thought that it was an ideal weather for sailing. The Golden Cat sailed quickly towards the island.

Ashutosh and I discussed the approach to Bungaram. Our estimated time of arrival (ETA) was 02:00, but she would not be able to enter the western side of the lagoon at night as marking buoys were neither lit nor accurately charted. The water inside the reef is infested with many reefs and rocks: we could hit another rock or a coral if we tried to enter at night. To wait for daybreak on the northern or western side was not advisable due to the rough conditions in the NE breeze. Ashutosh suggested that we sail on the southern side so that we would be on the leeward side of the island or in the wind shadow where we would wait for daybreak. We wouldn't be able to anchor on this side as the next contour after the reef was more than 200 meters deep. He suggested that we keep sailing to and fro on the southern side until morning, and then go onto the eastern side between Agatti and Bangaram Islands to meet the pilot boat that Ashutosh had arranged. His suggestions were not only convincing, but his local knowledge was very much appreciated by me. He had sailed in this area on Coast Guard ships, and knew what he was doing. I could have made a fatal mistake without him; teamwork and discussion were extremely important in sailing. Anand and Ashutosh sailed towards the island after we finished dinner made by captain cook.

Jan 20/ DAY 13/ 14 nm/ Arrived Bangaram Island:

From 02:00 onwards Bipin and I took charge and kept sailing to and fro on the southern and leeward sides of the island waiting for daybreak as planned. Although we were about 2 miles away, my depth sounder didn't have any numbers which meant that it was too deep for the sounder to measure. The sea was quiet as the island provided protection from wind. I was tired due to the scuba and snorkeling on the previous day. Bipin agreed to manage the boat on his own so that I could catch up on my sleep. The boat sailed on auto pilot towards Agatti lighthouse while Bipin kept watch. The lighthouse was a perfect landmark towards which he would continue to sail safely, but he must wake me instantly if the bearing changed as we were not too far away from the dangerous reefs around the island.

By the first light break, we were all awake. We followed the pilot boat in a zigzag path, avoiding rocks and reefs inside the atoll. It took us almost an hour to sail to the safe anchorage and find a permanent mooring buoy on which we moored our Cat. Mita, Rajita, Archita and I were on a family holiday here for 10 days in 1994. There was a German diving instructor on this resort at that time who taught me diving along with another visiting German couple. I loved it so much that I promised myself to return one day, and here I was 18 years later.



Collector Shri Vasanthkumar arrived with his wife, young son and his pretty sister-in-law visiting from the USA. After a quick lunch, we proceeded for another shallow water scuba dive. Bungaram is the only island where consumption of alcohol is allowed. We had dinner, which included fresh fish which we all enjoyed. Late at night after a long conversation with the manager of the tourist department, we went to our floating home in the RIB.

Jan 21/ Day 14/ 10 nm/ Bangaram Island to Agatti Island:

We sailed out of the lagoon of Bungaram behind a pilot boat. After a brief sail we were near the Agatti Island entrance. Another pilot boat arrived to take us into the lagoon of Agatti through the channel marked with red and green buoys. We were met by Mr. Jaffer - a handsome, tall, street-smart and a muscular local from the tourist department who spoke fluent English.

This was the only island with an airport. Two commercial airlines operated daily flights from Kochi but Kingfisher Airline discontinued operation as she went bankrupt and Indian Airlines stopped its flights as the government refused to subsidize this loss making route. Ship was the only mode of transport from the Mainland.

Mr. Jafer had hired a taxi to go to the *dak* bungalow and then to a rest house where we rented a room for Gita and Bipin. In the evening we walked around the market and were met by an Indian Airlines booking agent, who also arranged home stays for tourists. He wanted to show us homes where we could stay if we came next time or wanted to recommend to other friends.

We were met by a deputy collector of the island in his office – a kind man and a thorough gentleman - who came to see our boat in the evening. We had impressed upon him that this was one of the first sailing yachts built in India and we could help them build more for inter island transport and tourism. They would be cheap to operate as they were wind powered. Thirty years ago, the islanders were traveling, exporting and importing goods from the mainland by sail boats. Sailing was a forgotten art after the introduction of motorized boats and ships. The deputy collector and others were amazed when we demonstrated the massive spinnaker which they had never seen before. We anchored about a mile north from the main jetty near a secluded beach. In the afternoon Jaffer arranged lunch and dinner at the *dak* bungalow. The next morning we planned a visit to a nearby island by dinghy where we would snorkel. We told two locals guides to be there at sharp 08:00 hour as we didn't want to waste any time. We sang a few old Hindi songs on the foredeck trampoline before hitting our bunks. On a catamaran, the trampoline is the best place to socialize.

Jan 22/ Day15/ Agatti Island:



The next morning plans were delayed as we woke up late and also the guides showed up after 08:30, but it was a blessing in disguise. By the time we were preparing to leave, Bipin came over unexpectedly and gave us the bad news that Gita had broken her wrist the previous night as she had slipped in the guest house room. I had gifted Bipin a water proof pouch in which he could carry his belongings in the Dinghy so that they could remain dry and safe. Unfortunately the sack was leaky and water had seeped in

and all his belongings, including the video camera, were wet. Inside the guestroom the water dripped out forming a small pool near their bed. In the middle of the night, Gita stepped on the water and slipped, breaking the right wrist. Bipin opined that they would have to go to the hospital and then return back to Surat as it wouldn't be possible for her to sail anymore. Among the group of Lakshadweep Islands, Agatti was the only island which had a fully fledged hospital with a qualified orthopedic surgeon. I decided to go with Bipin to the guest house and then to the hospital to find out the gravity of the problem. Bipin had come on a motorcycle with the guest house manager as he had no time to wait for the taxi. Now we were three and one motor cycle, and no other public transport was in sight. The manager was driving, Bipin sat in the middle and I was the last man hanging and holding on Bipin as there was hardly any space left at the back of the seat. We often see three people on a bike, but this was the first time I experienced it myself. Anand and Ashutosh had a big laugh at it when I described our triple *savari* – ride after a couple of days. Anand thought that he had missed an unusual chance of taking a picture of us.

At the guest house I was shocked to see Gita in severe pain as Bipin could not administer Brufane for the whole night as the first aid kit was on the boat. The severe and prolonged pain had put her into shock. He immediately administered the pain killers brought from the boat and we called a taxi. In contrast to all the public hospitals, this was not crowded at all. She was taken to the casualty room where the doctor came promptly to examine her. After looking at the x-ray, the doctor recommended that the broken wrist would have to be set under general anesthesia (GA), which couldn't be given until 12 noon as she had taken some food at 08:00.

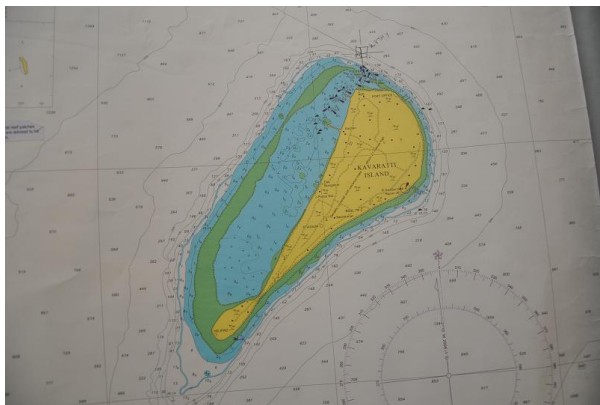
We were in a debate as we had 3 options. The first option was to undergo reset of the bone without GA if they wanted to leave for Cochin by ship departing at 14:00 hour. This was ruled out as she refused to tolerate any more pain. The second option was to travel without reset, but in this case the pain would continue for 36 hours until they would reach Surat. She would have to undergo surgery as the bones would partially heal and the reset would not be possible. The third and the last option were to delay her return trip by a day so that the doctor would have sufficient time to do the procedure under GA. We opted for the 3rd option after a long discussion, which was a correct decision in the end. She was greatly relieved of her agony after the bones were reset into the original place. We took her to the guest house where she rested for the night.

We had asked Jaffer to buy their ship tickets for Cochin in a captain's cabin soon after reaching the hospital, but after deciding to stay overnight; we cancelled their tickets. A set of new tickets were purchased on the ship departing the next day.

At night Jaffer had arranged for a BBQ on a secluded white sandy beach, where there was not a soul as far as we could see. A big fish was being cooked by the time we arrived by a local expert. Anand, Ashutosh, Jaffer, a scuba instructor from a scuba school and I had a late night party. We learnt about the local customs and politics from the two locals. The big fish was served with dried coconut pieces and sweet coconut *Tadi* extracted from a trunk of a coconut tree. We all had a big local meal and drank the *Tadi* to our hearts' content before going to our floating home for the night.

Jan 23/ Day16/ 40 nm/ Agatti to Kavaratti Island

In the morning we sailed north near the town center and to the jetty. Gita had slept well in the guest house and was relieved of her pain as the bones were in their original place. The taxi arrived and they departed for the jetty from where they would embark on the ship for Surat via Cochin while we went to our boat. We separated with heavy hearts after having a great sailing adventure during the past 2 weeks.



We called the port office on channel 12 of the VHF radio for clearance and quickly departed as needed to reach Kavaratti Island - our next destination - before dark. The wind was fair from the north, perfect for our symmetrical spinnaker as we were sailing SW. The Cat zoomed at 8 knots and we were there before dark. We had sailed 40 nautical miles in just 5 hours - our fastest pace in the whole trip. Ashutosh was holding a sheet of the spinnaker all the time to trim the sail to perfection. We were again met by a pilot boat at 18:30 which led us inside the lagoon of Kavaratti where we tied her to a large mooring buoy very near to the sports center. A mooring buoy is a permanent anchor with one end of thick nylon rod tied to a large floating buoy and another free rod with which you secure a boat. This is a capital island with an administrative office and the greatest population among the group islands.

We went ashore to the sports center where we were met by scuba school officials. We completed all the paper work so that we could start our scuba lessons from the next day. We went to a guest house of the coast guard in an auto rickshaw where Ashutosh

had booked two rooms. Out of the two rooms, one was already occupied by another officer therefore we were left with just one which we three shared for the next 5 nights. There was a double bed and a bathroom with a water heater. We took turns to shower before going to the dining room where our food was waiting for us. It was 22:00 hour, but the staff was still there to serve us hot meals. Ashutosh and I shared the double bed while Anand volunteered to sleep on a mattress.

Jan 24/ day17/ first day on Kavaratti Island :

After having a delicious *Idli* for breakfast, we went to the sport center where our scuba class began. We were made acquainted with the scuba equipment. In the afternoon was our first diving session which lasted for three hours as our instructor, Linhare Denzel, clubbed two classes together to speed up our learning. All of us had dived a few times in the past therefore this was a chance to brush up on all the basic techniques that we had learnt earlier. We were taught to retrieve our masks in the water, share oxygen with our buddies, balance in the water and many other points as per the book of PADI.COM. The sports center was quite well organized. It had a classroom, where a director from PADI was preparing locals to be scuba instructors. The idea was to develop these islands for scuba tourism. Maldives, the neighboring island country, had been well developed as super luxury tourist destination because besides fishing this is the only industry to support their economy. Fisheries accounted for 2/3rd and tourism accounted for 1/3rd of their economy. In contrast, Lakshadweep had not developed as a tourist destination because the islanders, politicians and administrators were not in favor of bikinis, nude beaches, bars and restaurant. The majority of the islanders' needs were subsidized by Indian Government; therefore western style tourism was not a necessity for their survival. Bungaram was the only island which had opened for tourists with a private hotel, but a legal dispute had put its development in the doldrums leaving about 50 people jobless.

Jan25/ DAY 17/ Second day at Kavaratti:

We had two open water dives – one in the morning and the second in the evening; both up to 12 meters. I still had problems staying in the neutral position as I kept going up and down, but Anand and Ashutosh were doing better because they had dived in recent years whereas my last experience was 18 years ago. Lead weights were added to our gear so that our body buoyancy would be in equilibrium; otherwise it would be impossible to go underwater or sink. Once in equilibrium, we could go down or up by controlling our breath. We must reduce our buoyancy by breathing out to go down, breathing in to increase buoyancy to come up, and breathing normally to maintain equilibrium or maintain the same depth. After the morning dive, we were served a hot

meal on the beach. We also started reading a 250 pages PADI book, which we had to thoroughly study for a written test at the end of the course.

A lot of activities started taking place on the beach to prepare for the celebration of Independence Day. A large stage with a canopy was being erected for VVIP as both the celebration of Independence Day and the opening of the sports center were to take place on the next day. We were also requested to participate with our Golden Cat by sailing in front of the spectators. In the afternoon, the administrator Rajesh Prasad IAS visited us, whom we took for a short sailing trip with his friend from the USA. He wrote in the yacht log book, "I had a wonderful experience of sailing in the boat, which was first of its kind- unique experience of my life. I wish best to the sailing team."



Jan26/ Day 19/ Third day at Kavaratti Island and celebration:

In the morning, a large group of people started gathering along with many dignitaries. All of them had great interest in us as people rarely sailed from the mainland. Very few people have sailed to these islands in a sail boat and none in the last few years. We were probably the first ones to do so in an Indian made yacht, which should go in the annals of Indian yachting history according to Arjun award winner Gulshan Rai.

During the celebration, hundreds of children participated in a bubble making game as they wore oxygen tanks and made bubbles under water. There were jet skis, windsurfers and speed boats. Anand showed his water skiing skills in difficult and

choppy conditions. Ashutosh and I sailed the Golden Cat with the colorful spinnaker. It was greatest water sports show we have ever seen in India.

In the evening, we were invited by the administrator to his residence for high tea. The location was stunning, overlooking the blue water from a height, and the people were friendly. We were a big party – a crowd of bureaucrats and politicians who had become our comrades for evening talk. Surprisingly, the place had no pretensions but the sea food was incomparable. There was no liquor as this is a Muslim territory. Their questions were, “How was your sailing? Did you have any difficulties?” Our questions



were, “Do you intend to develop these islands as a tourist destination like the Maldives? What is your vision for the islands?” We had an interesting chat with the administrator, the collector and the Member of Parliament. The beautiful sister-in-law of the collector asked, “Where is the guy who was water skiing at the show?”

We started reading the scuba book like any other good students after coming back to the guest house. I had thought that it would be easy to finish the book in a few hours, but to contrary of my belief it was very lengthy as there were many new terminologies

and procedures to memorize. Every day, all of us would study the book in the evening until we fell asleep, in the morning as soon as we woke up, and in between our scuba dives.

For the last five years between 2008 and 2012 I had studied volumes on sailing. I passed the RYA/MCA Yachtmaster Coastal exam in April 2012, after a number of other RYA exams such as Competent Crew – a basic sailing course, Day skipper, Coastal Skipper, First Aid, Radar and VHF radio and weather and meteorology. I had thought that I was finally done with studies, but here I was doing it again – a never ending studying and learning process. Learning is a life time continuous process for all of us, but to be involved in serious study for examination is different. In the last five years I had studied and accumulated volumes of sailing books which was more than I had done during my M.Sc. or M.B.A education.

We couldn't do any dives today because our instructor was tired at the end of the day after organizing bubble making for almost 50 children.

Jan 27/ DAY-20/ Fourth day at Kavaratti:



In the morning we finished our remaining two dives with a gap of one hour. By mistake, I swam on top of a large bull ray and upset her. I was called back by the instructor with panic signs when the bull ray with a wing diameter of 2 to 3 meters rose like a giant cloud and passed very close to us. We took a deep breath of relief. The underwater corals and sea life were so much in abundance and rich that I would not be able to do justice by describing it here. One must come here to personally witness and fully appreciate it. In the afternoon Shri Hamdullah Syed – M.P. Lakshadweep visited Golden Cat. He wrote in the log book, "It was wonderful and excellent experience getting into the yacht. I extend my good wishes to the sailing team." He enjoyed chatting with us so

much that he spent almost four hours chatting with us. Next day he sent coconuts as a present.

At night we had planned to study our PADI book but we had a dinner invitation from the coast guards. They had set up dinner for us on their beautiful private beach. We were then taken to a gazebo where the meal was served to us in great style, which was possible because of Ashutosh. We were given an advance invitation to stay in their new guest house under construction in a location that we all envied. We thanked the officers for their hospitality and returned to the guest house determined to return to the island soon.

Jan 28/ Day 21/ Fifth day at Kavaratti:

Today was the last day and we had to finish studying to give the final PADI written exam in the evening. The whole day we were studying like school children on the beach, preparing for the final exam in the evening. Today, we were all physically relaxed as there were no more dives; we had completed all four open water dives – a prerequisite for completion of the course. Examination papers were given to us at 20:00, which we all passed with distinction. We went to the guest house with great satisfaction with our certificates.

I had earlier lost one of my shoes in an Auto rickshaw. The shoe was returned to me even though we didn't have the rickshaw number or the driver's name, which would have not been possible anywhere else. Here stealing and theft were unheard of. Everybody would leave their houses open and the shop keeper would go for lunch in the afternoon keeping his shop unguarded. An American Vietnamese PADI scuba director from Thailand said that this was the first place in his life that he did not lock his room.

Jan 29/ DAY 22/ 39 nm/ Departure from Kavaratti Island:

We packed all our belongings and left for the sports complex from where our boat stood about 200 meters away. On the way we bought rations from one of the modern stores which had all the provisions that were needed.

A Maharashtrian family of about 10 people had become quite friendly with us since they were staying in the quarters of the sports complex where we spent most of our time. Ashutosh started describing our voyage to them in Marathi, which really amazed them. We said good bye to everybody and left for our next and the last island, Andrott, at 10:35 am. There was a light breeze and the boat speed was three knots. Our bearing was 80 degrees and the wind was from the NW, which was from the beam reach or from the side of the boat. By midnight we had sailed 39 nm.

Jan 30/ Day-22/ 31 nm/ Arrived Androth Island:

At about 03:00 the wind freshened and our speed increased to 4 knots. Early in the morning there was a land fall, which was Andrott. We entered a well marked harbor and moored along a long wooden *Dhaw* at 07:00 in the morning.



We were again met by a coast guard and port officers, who told us to switch our mooring along an inter island catamaran ferry at 11:00 as the *dhaw* was to sail out. A lot of local boys swam to our boat as they were curious. Ashutosh and I slept and Anand went snorkeling until the ferry arrived.

On the jetty we were given 3 bicycles by our coast guard friends. It was very thoughtful of them as auto rickshaws were not easily available on this little island. We cycled to the *dak* bungalow where we took a bath and had a well prepared hot lunch. After resting for a while Ashutosh went to the coast guard station to have a meeting with his colleagues and local fishermen. The local officers wanted him to listen to their problems and give guidance even though he was not on an official visit.

When I woke up after a power nap at 16:00, Anand had already gone snorkeling. I had enough of the sea; therefore I decided to explore the town by bicycle. I was met by school girls who were friendly and wanted to make conversation with me. Andrott was not a tourist island; therefore these girls were fascinated to see me. They could speak very little English and no Hindi. They were shy and ran away as I aimed my camera at them. The entire street network here was single lane and made of cement concrete instead commonly used asphalt and was named after an IAS officer along the inauguration date.

My next stop was at easterly lighthouse, where some boys played badminton with a proper court marking and net. I was surprised to see that all the houses were made of cement and slums were non-existent on these islands even though I was under the impression that the locals were *adivasis* and impoverished. All of them had water recharging facilities to store monsoon water for drinking. I couldn't find poor people in rags on these islands in contrast to mainland India. I saw schools and school children dressed in clean uniforms. On the whole, it left a good impression in my mind though they were not very tourist friendly. You can understand it because they were not dependent on tourist for their livelihood. On the way, a local recommended that I visit a nearby beach which was very wide and beautiful. It would have been full of hotels and tourists anywhere else in the world, but here were just a few local boys playing football.

In the evening I was back to the *dak* bungalow, where two coast guard officers treated us to a complimentary dinner. We went to the boat at night as we had planned to leave early in the morning before the departure time of the ferry.

Jan 31/ Day 24/ 86 nm/ Sailing from Androth to New Mangalore:

We weighed anchor at 05:35 in the dark and motored between two buoys – red blinking light on port and green on starboard avoiding going near the retention wall on the port and shallows on the starboard sides.

New Mangalore, our next destination on the mainland, is 151 miles from Andrott. I had planned the whole trip in such a way that we would sail most of the time in a favorable wind direction making it possible to sail up to here by consuming just 25 liters of petrol. I

had feared that the wind would not be in our favor on this passage which turned out to be true.

We kept tacking for an hour and found that we were making very slow progress – in other words Velocity Made Good (VMG) towards our destination was low. We had to reach the port in two days if we were to attend an evening annual Coast Guard celebratory function. Eventually we decided to motor. At about seven in the morning the wind veered to our right at 100° unexpectedly and we could sail at a good speed. Then we looked behind and saw that no land was visible. We said good bye to the Lakshadweep Islands as if to a lover whom we might never see again.

We were lucky to have wind from a favorable direction most of the time at force 4 and maintained a boat speed of 5 knots. The dolphins were cutting through the water below a flight of fish and would be in the water, driving at speed, when the fish dropped. It was a big school of dolphins, I thought. They were widespread and the flying fish had little chance. The flying fish were too big for birds and they went too fast. We also saw a barracuda jumping on the surface of the water probably to get away from a bigger fish. We became very fond of flying fish and they were our principal friends on the ocean as they showed up as soon as we needed company. We crossed a couple of boats in the whole day.



February 1/ Day 25/ 66 nm/ Arrived New Mangalore:

At night the iridescent bubbles were beautiful. I moved forward on the trampoline on the bow to see them while we were sailing on auto-pilot. On this return trip I was really enjoying the sight as they became visible in groups every few minutes. Their formations were in different abstract shapes and 3 meters in length and width. As more and more kept coming, my imagination started changing. Some time I would think of them as a big sea animal that was attacking from up front and other times I imagined them as if they

were lights of under water cities over which we were sailing. Sometimes I feared that they would crash into the boat and destroy us, but they were the falsest things in the sea. I have read that big sea turtles love to eat them. (2)

In 24 hours we had sailed 100 nm. New Mangalore was 51 nm away and the wind had eased at 04:00 hour therefore we were motoring at 4 knots average speed. The sun rose thinly from the sea. Then the sun was bright and the glare came on the water and then it rose clear, and the flat sea sent it back in our eyes. 'Dolphin' Anand said aloud. 'Big Dolphin.' He threw a fishing line with artificial bait given to us by the fishery department as a gift, but we had no luck for the whole day as the fish knew that the bait was not real. As planned we entered New Mangalore harbor and anchored alongside a coast guard ship at 18:45 just before it was dark.

We washed our boat with fresh water from the ship and left for the coast guard guest house. We had a hot shower and a few drinks as we celebrated our return. It was a coast guard day therefore there was a celebration going on in the ground outside our rooms, but we were more interested in our private celebration and talking about the memorable moments from the last few days.

February 2/ Day 26/ New Mangalore:

We had consumed 50 liters of petrol from Mangalore to Mangalore during our 2-week five-island tour which works out to be 12.5 liters per person or slightly less than 1 liter per person per day. Most of us living in cities would use much more than that doing our normal activities like going to work, buying groceries, and visiting people.

In the afternoon we got our fuel cans refilled, went for lunch in a five star hotel and had a quick city tour. I couldn't remember when I last had a meal in a fancy restaurant - it was a good change but our meals on those islands were an unforgettable experience. This was our last meal with Ashutosh as his train to Chennai was at 16:00. We went to the railway station to see him off and kept talking about our good memories of the trip until the train arrived.

Anand and I went to the best seafood restaurant in the town in the evening suggested by our taxi driver. This restaurant was on a hill overlooking the night lights of the city. We shared a giant crab of about 1 kilo which was well cooked and delicious..

February 3/ DAY 27/ 8 nm :

Today morning we went to a small nearby market to buy rations for our onward journey. Buying vegetables is a duty of my cook or chauffer as per a list given by Mita at home; therefore for me it was a new experience. I used to buy groceries when I was studying

in the USA from a department store, but it was easy there as I picked up packets. I never bought fresh vegetables as it was too much hassle to cut them and cook. Burger King and McDonald hamburgers were our staple diet. Deciding on quantities was complicated for me as I had to judge our daily consumption and the number of days before they would perish. We didn't want to buy too much so that it would rot before we could eat and not too little either. We had to decide on which vegetables might have to be stored in the refrigerator and which ones would stay out. Would the vegetables to be refrigerated fit into our tiny 50 liter fridge? The fridge opened from the top unlike our home one so that the heavy cold air would not escape, therefore preserving valuable battery power. Anand was a great help in deciding the quantities we needed.

I decided to get my hair cut in a local hair cutting saloon across from the vegetable market, as my hair had grown quite long after two months. I wanted to get a haircut in the beginning of the trip but could not find time due to the hectic preparation.

We had lunch at the guest house and sent our taxi to the airport to pick up Bhisma and Nidhi Desai. Bhism had accepted my invitation to join us from Mangalore as we would be short of hands when Ashutosh departed. Three would be a minimum number of crew if we were sailing long distances.

Both of them were young - in their mid 20's - and had married a year ago. I knew Bhisma when he was a child as his father, Dilip, would bring him to the tennis court to play with us. I played quite a bit of tennis with him as he grew older, stronger and better. Eventually he became a top player in Surat and started playing state and national level tournaments. He went to study at a university in Pune so that he could train himself under a tennis coach of his choice to become a professional. Once he was ranked in the top 50 at national level, but left tennis a few years ago to join his father's business in Surat. He married Nidhi - a Maharashtrian - in 2012 whom he had met in Pune. I had mentioned sailing to him once, and his face lit up with excitement. Immediately, I knew that he was a right candidate as my future crew member. Most people would be afraid of open water and sailing, which made my task to find right people as my crew very difficult. Sailing was considered a men's sport all over the world; therefore it would be next to impossible to find a woman interested in sailing in India. I wondered whether Bhisma would come for sailing without Nidhi as they were recently married, but Nidhi decided to come without hesitation.

Nidhi had been going to gym since she married Bhisma. Once I was invited to their house for dinner where they fixed me a delicious Mojito drink and were an excellent host and hostesses. She also showed me her biceps and told me how Bhisma encouraged her to get fitter after they married, which impressed me. It meant that she had no hang ups of a traditional Indian woman, who would prefer to remain delicate and

fair. Most women I knew wouldn't go sailing as they wanted to avoid a sun tan to remain fair and therefore beautiful! I had identified both of them as potential young crew members for my boat. Bhisma helped me with sailing and Nidhi cooked delicious Maharastrian style curry and pasta. She was also interested in learning sailing therefore they both started reading the sailing books and were learning the ropes quickly and with passion. I patted my own back for finding both of them as perfect crew members. Most married women would not let their husbands go sailing because they are afraid of water and cannot manage without them for long periods. For that matter I give full marks and appreciation to my wife Mita for letting me stay away from her for weeks to fulfill my dreams and passion.



The previous day we had tried to get a New Mangalore port entry permit for both of them. We spent a lot of time trying to download their photos for the permit in an internet center but in we couldn't get a print out of the right size and quality. Next we were to go to a photographer to get a good quality print and then to the port office to get the permit issued. All this took a long time and the office had already closed. The next two days were the weekend therefore the offices would remain close. We were all wondering, "How would we take them inside the port." Ashutosh was worried about us getting caught if we tried to smuggle them illegally.

I suddenly had an idea, "Anand and I could sail out of the port and pick them up from a beach." Ashutosh told me, "I couldn't have thought of such a simple solution." We sent our taxi to pick them up from the airport. They were holed up in a procession on the way

as Anand and I impatiently waited in the guest house. This was the first time we felt that we had nothing to do and were getting bored.

As soon as they arrived, we took their luggage to the port and asked them to wait at nearby tourist beach. I held them to hire a boat from the beach as soon as they saw us near the beach.

We had trouble again trying to enter the port. The port authority would not allow our taxi to enter the port limit as she didn't have a permit. We hired another taxi with a permit to drop us at our boat, but this one couldn't enter the area of the Indian Coast Guard as it required another permit. We had too much luggage to walk with all the way to the boat, but we had no option but to walk over 200 meters with each one of us carrying 25 kilos. Our boat was covered with black soot flying from the next ship which was unloading magnesium ore. We tried to quickly wash it off and depart.

Bhisma and Nidhi were dropped by a power boat accompanied by two coast guard boys. We sailed close to the shore in light wind and dropped the anchor as soon as it was dark. I didn't want to sail at night with inexperienced crew on the first day. I spent sometime to brief them about safety and the boat, which mainly included wearing life jacket, transferring to the life raft, man over board (MOB), flares, and the use of the gas stove and manual toilets. They were given the port side cabin with attached toilet and a double bunk having a width of 1.4 meter originally reserved for Bipin and Gita. They looked very happy and excited with the arrangements.

February 4/ Day 28 / 68 nm / New Mangalore to Netrani Island:

Early in the morning, we felt the land breeze coming from west. In order to take advantage, we left at 03:30 and maintained 3 to 4 knots boat speed. Anand was chatting with his friend in Dehra Dun, when he mentioned, "There is an island known as Netrani (pigeon) in the region, which is famous for scuba". I started searching the marine chart for some time then suddenly found it. It was only 50 nm from our location and it was feasible to reach there by evening. We had seen this island on 15th January while sailing to N. Mangalore, but never had thought that we would visit it during this return trip.

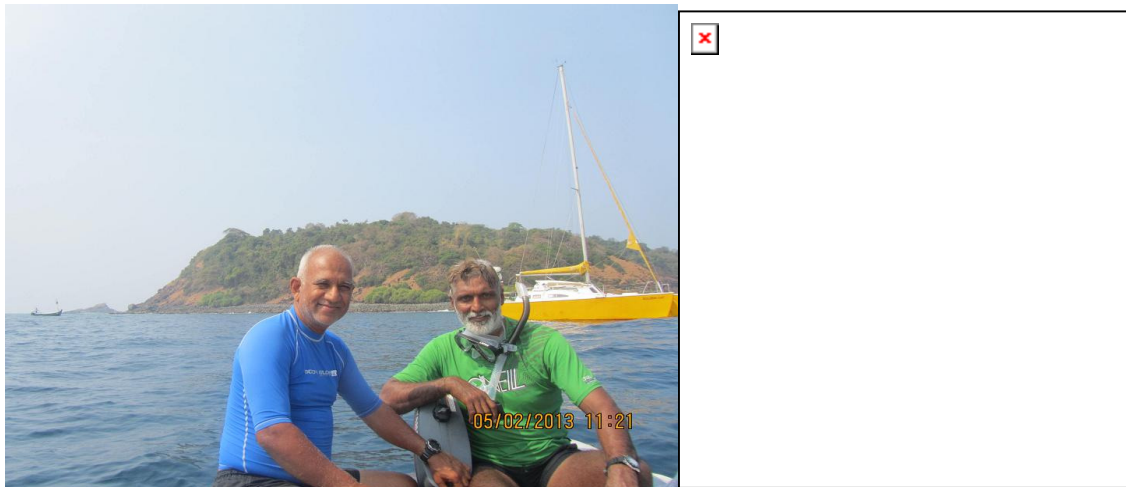
Anand got the telephone number of the scuba diving company and fixed up an appointment for 10:00 next morning. We changed our bearing towards the island, but the wind was close haul and the speed too slow to reach the islands before dark. I decided to motor sail, which means you use combined power from the motor as well as the sail. We sighted the island at about 17:30. Near the island we encountered the

longest fishing net I had ever seen. We motored for quite some time to eventually find a gap to get through the net and close to the island for anchoring. The scuba company had told us to anchor where there would be other boats, but we saw none at that time. The sea was slightly rough due to a NE wind; therefore we decided to anchor on the western side to get good wind protection. We approached very carefully at idle speed as we were afraid of hitting a rock. There were many rocks near the shore on which the waves were breaking violently. The chart showed 3.2 m depth in the area, but we still had about 20m depth which put me in a dilemma. Should I go closer to the island to find shallower water for anchoring and face the risk of hitting a rock? At this moment a fishing boat approached us, as they wanted to anchor for the night too. With their guidance, we anchored in 20 m depth. Our anchor rod is 60 m, which was short for the depth as we needed 80 m - four times the depth. A longer rod would be risky if the boat circled around the anchor at night going towards the island which was about 100 meters from us. The fishermen came aboard to see our boat. We were worried because they were under heavy influence of alcohol. I told Nidhi to stay inside her cabin. After sometime they left and Nidhi cooked a nice dinner.

February 5/ Day 29/ Netrani (Pigeon) Island:

The sea was calm, the sky was clear and the air temperature was very pleasant. Anand had already started snorkeling and shouted to us to join him. We launched our dinghy so that we could snorkel near the island and get the help of the dinghy if we tired or wanted to return to the boat. It would be risky to take the yacht near the island as there were many rocks. I saw a large school of white small fish and Anand saw an eel.





The scuba boat arrived at 11:00. The scuba master was from Nepal, a country which is land locked. He also had with him three scuba clients from Kazakhstan, also a land locked country-no wonder they all loved water.

After the first dive to 12m we rested for an hour and dived for a second time. The water was crystal clear. We saw numerous large eels having black color with white spots. They will camouflage under rocks and corals with their mouth open to snap on a fish when she came close, just like a snake pounding on a rat in a burrow. We saw many fish which were different to those we saw in Lakshadweep. After learning scuba diving my interest in underwater marine life had been awakened. Hopefully by the next year I will turn from a bird watcher to a fish and marine life watcher.

At 16:00 hour, the scuba instructor and his clients left and it was quiet again. We were now in debate of our next action. The island had no inhabitants and was covered with dense foliage. There was a temple, where some pilgrims had gone up during the day, but after they left in the evening it was peaceful. I could get mobile signals from the mainland which was 10 nm away. I checked the weather for the next few days and found that we would encounter strong winds gusting more than 25 knots. I had sailed the Golden Cat in 20 knots wind a year ago when she got flooded due to a design problem and was about to sink. Though the design lacuna was removed subsequently, I was little nervous.

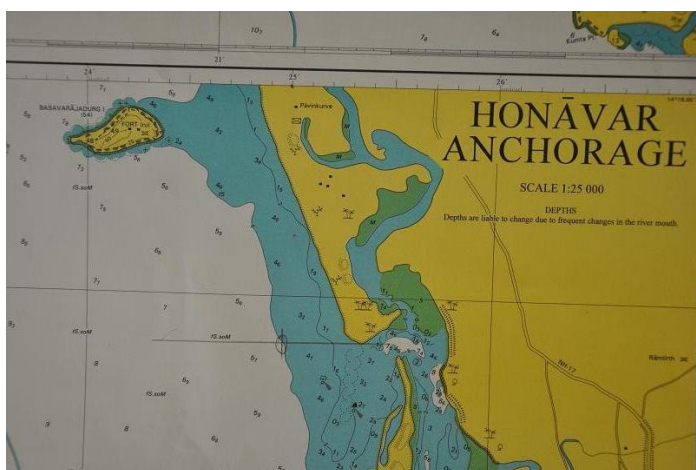
The place was so beautiful that Anand and I decided that we should stay back and let the bad weather pass away. We planned to stay here for one more day and climb the steep cliff on the next day. In the evening the wind picked up and we were feeling uncomfortable staying in this condition for the whole night. We thought that we should anchor in the south as the wind had veered from NE to northerly. We didn't trust the

chart, but had no other options. We motored to the south in the wind shadow and found calm conditions where we could stay overnight, but it was still too deep to anchor. We had to move closer in a lesser depth, but the danger was the rocks. We anchored in 30m water and decided to survey the area for rocks with our snorkels. We were satisfied that if we moved to 20 m from 30 m near the island, we would be safe if the boat swung towards the island at night. We had a wonderful evening in this heavenly place where the sound of breaking waves was heard all night though some times it was scary.

February 6/ Day 30/ 31 nm/ Netrani Island to Basavarajdurg Fort Island:

In the morning we were preparing to trek the island. My worry was to leave the boat alone without any crew on board. Beside the danger of fisherman stealing, the more serious problem would be if the anchor lost ground and the boat swept away in deep sea. While I was debating with myself a boat arrived with many pilgrims. Within some time there were at least 15 boats, each carrying about 30 pilgrims. The empty island was suddenly crowded and full of human activity. The whole charm of going on the island was lost, thus we decided to start sailing towards Goa.

I checked the weather on the internet again. There was a prediction of strong wind at 17:30, which would continue for the next couple of days because of disturbances in the north. Bipin told me on the phone that there had been un-seasonally heavy rainfall in Delhi as well as in western India with strong winds, which may have also affected south India. I started searching the marine charts for shelter, in case the wind got strong.



After sailing for about 6 hours, the wind strengthened as predicted to 23 knots (strong breeze) and the waves got bigger. It was advisable for a small vessel of our size to remain in harbor, but we were already in the open water. I could not sail in this condition

at night; therefore we needed to find shelter where we could get good protection from wind and a good sleep. We were about 10 nm from the Basavarajdurg Island where I planned to take shelter. We wanted to sail north but the wind was from 30 degrees on starboard which was too close for sailing in the direction we wanted to go. I tried to motor with our auxiliary OBM of 9.9 hp, but it was not powerful enough to negotiate 1.5 m waves and 23 knots wind from the bow. We were motoring at a snail's speed of 1.5-2 knots, which would take us another 5 hours to reach our destination which was 10 nm away. We decided to keep sailing and tacking initially with one reef. When the boat was moving at 7 knots, there was a lot of bridge deck banging and spraying of water on us. We shortened the sail further by adding a second reef. The boat slowed down to 3-4 knots and it was smooth sailing except for when some freak breaking waves of 3 meters height hit us. We solved the problem of rough ride, but created another problem. The boat was too slow and lacked power to tack therefore we decided to do control jibing instead. There are two methods of turning a sailing craft; one is tacking and the second is jibing. Tacking means you turn the boat into the wind, while jibing is just the opposite. You must be careful while jibing as the boom swings very fast and could smash your head, injuring you seriously or throwing you over board.

At 18:00, we were only 2 nm from Basavarajdurg Fort Island, but we had to sail 4 nm due to tacking in a zigzags pattern. There were numerous fishing boats anchored there for the night to protect them from northerly wind. We anchored as soon as we were at safe distance from other fishing boats ahead of us. I would have liked to go closer to have better wind protection, but it was difficult to see things in the dark. I would not like to get into a collision at night as boats would swing in circles around their anchors due to changing currents and wind.

Bhisma and Nidhi were sea sick and although they didn't throw up, they were not feeling well. Both went to sleep without taking any food. I was also not feeling too good either, but I felt better as the sea was calm where we anchored. Today I was more tired than any other day, as we had to work our way upwind and I was anxious as I had never sailed on this boat in wind speed excess of 20 knots.

February 7/ Day 31 /40 nmi / Basavarajdurg Fort Island to Belekeri:

We woke up early to find that most of the fishing boats were gone and it was calm, to my disbelief. I talked to Ashutosh about the forecast. He said that there would be swells of 2 meters, but wind would not be as strong as the previous day.

We weighed anchor at 07:40 and faced swells as soon as we were away from the sheltered water. I had more confidence in my boat for her sea worthiness and now I hoped that she might survive a gale - 30 to 35 knots wind (60 km/h). Just like the

previous day, wind picked up in the afternoon to 20 knots and we continued sailing close haul. At times we would tack to keep on course. In the evening at 17:00 the wind was again at force 6 gusting at 24 knots. Today we did better, because we had gained confidence from the previous day.

I did not want to sail in the rough water therefore I carefully studied the marine chart to find good shelter. I planned to anchor in a bay surrounded by hills from three sides near Belekere. Progress was slow as we sailed 40 nm in about 12 hours. We had planned to reach South Goa today but the strong wind against us had prevented us from making good process. Distance sailed in the last two days was only 70 nm – the slowest pace of our trip. However, this was to be expected as we were sailing northwards into the wind.

As we entered the bay the sun was setting behind the hills and the view of protruding rocks in the water in the backdrop of sunset was astounding. We got some excellent photographs. As soon as we entered the bay, the sea became quieter and the wind lighter. Eventually we felt that we were in a lake surrounded on all 3 sides by small hills with dense forest. These hills had no houses, except one observation tower. We informed Ashutosh in Chennai about our position and that we were safe. He said that we could expect company as we were very close to a navy base. We were so impressed with the location that we could spend a few days here, but it was high time Anand and I sailed back home to meet our spouses.



February 8/ Day 32/ 30 nm:

In the morning, we sailed past the navy base, where we crossed some big navy ships ahead of us. We were expecting the company of navy security as we sailed past their

base really close, but they must have presumed that we were a friendly boat as we had our sails up.

We sailed past the beautiful Karwar harbor. The weather was clear and the temperature cooler and more comfortable than down south. I told Bhisma to book their room at the Lalit Hotel, South Goa. Now, I was sure of reaching in the evening. We anchored outside the hotel at the mouth of Talpona River. A hotel power boat picked up Bhisma and Nidhi. They had not really celebrated their first wedding anniversary so it was time to do so. Anand and I went ashore in our dinghy and treated ourselves to a beachside massage from the hands of locals. We were waiting for the tide to come in so that we could motor inside Talpona River and alongside the pontoon of the hotel, where the boat would be safe. The water sports guy from the hotel said that we could enter the river anytime as the water was deep enough. We entered the narrow entrance of the river which had numerous rocks on our starboard side. The hotel staff guided us safely to the pontoon, where we secured our boat with bow, stern and two spring lines.

We took a taxi to a nearby beach, where we had had a delicious meal when sailing the previous year. All the restaurants on the beach arranged tables with candle light – a very pleasant and stunning atmosphere. After the fabulous meal we went to the boat, and Bhisma and Nidhi went to their hotel room. At night we decided to stay back for one more day so that we could refill the ration and fuel that we needed for the remaining journey to Surat.

Feb 9/ Day 32/ South Goa:

We had consumed 37 liters of petrol between New Manglore and Goa and had logged 178 nm or 330 km - in other words our vessel averaged 9 km per liter. We had spent the last 5 days in very beautiful places, where most tourists cannot reach by road or air and had delicious home made meals prepared by Nidhi. What more does a man need for his happiness!



In the morning we walked to the reception with empty jerry cans for drinking water and fuel. Anand took a picture of me, which shows the contrast of sailing in India to abroad where there would be numerous marinas having fuel pumps, water hoses and electric connections. Despite all these inconveniences and challenges compared to sailing in the western world, we were thoroughly enjoying ourselves.

We called up our hotel manager to find out about availability of petrol, but he declined therefore we decided to buy in the market. We gave our taxi driver money for petrol plus a tip to manage the fuel and leave the cans at the reception.

Ajit Pathak, whom I have known from my child hood, arrived from Surat as our new crew member. We went to the same kindergarten and school till we were 10. We were together in Mauritius in 1986, where we both learned windsurfing. I continued the sport but he gave it up. He was one person I knew who loved water and would travel alone to different places – in contrast to most people I knew he would travel in a ghetto. He was Brahmin by birth, who are traditionally vegetarian, chant *slokas* and do religious ceremonies. He would do none of this, but instead he had acquired the art of storytelling as he could describe a simple incident in the most interesting manner. We didn't meet often, but would have many things to talk whenever we did. We would often meet at parties where he would tell me his traveling adventures. He had been taking interest in boats and visiting boat shows in Goa much before I got interested. He had dreamt of building a boat, but they had still remained as dreams. He couldn't believe me when I told him about my decision to build a sailing yacht. Once he mentioned to me that a locally built boat would fall apart, but in 2012 he did dare to sail with me when he confessed, "My dreams have remained dreams, but you have fulfilled your dreams". I always enjoyed his company and his cooking; therefore I invited him to sail with me from Goa to Surat, which he gladly accepted knowing very well that the boat had proven her sea worthiness and would not fall apart.



February 10/ Day 34/ 51 nm/ :

Five of us continued our journey northwards in 10 to 15 knots wind. We sailed only about 56 nm in the whole day as the wind angle was either close reach, close haul or too light. Ashutosh had taught me some techniques of sailing in light wind; therefore I would sail in wind between 6 to 8 knots without turning on the motor.

February 11/ Day 35/ 71 nm/ Ambolgarh Bay near Vijaydurg

Today also we continued either motoring or sailing in light wind. I was debating whether to anchor in the Vijaygurg bay or Jaitpur bay for the night halt. Then I saw Ambolgadh Bay in the chart - a little north of both, which looked less populated and offered better protection at night from northerly wind.

We went in and anchored at 18:00. Soon a fishing boat came to us and advised us to move more north near the shore for better wind protection. He mentioned something about boats circling at night which we couldn't understand. At 19:00 hour about five fishing boats surrounded us and anchored very close to us. We couldn't figure out their intention. After some waiting they asked a few questions about our journey which we answered as we didn't want to be rude. I called up the marine police and the coast guard to report and seek help, but nobody replied. Finally, one guy told us that they would be trawling the whole night in circles therefore it would be advisable for us to move out of their way. We moved further north in 3 meter depth where we would not come in their way. Until we went to sleep, these boats would keep going around the bay trawling but they didn't bother us.

On a small hillock facing this beautiful bay, there was a shabby looking guest house - a location one would dream of having a house. There was also a temple on the shore.

February 12 & 13/ Day 36 & 37/ 112 nm

In the morning we enjoyed a swim in the bay when a fisherman approached us in his canoe. He had about 10 small fish still alive in the bilge water, which he wanted to sell. We were tempted to buy, but than Ajit said, "I could cook, but have never cleaned it." We bought it anyway than we started cleaning it. Anand was watching us and smiling, who later came to our rescue when he saw that we were making a mess of it. He finally got it cleaned and Ajit cooked it for lunch. It was the first time that I had seen a beautiful fish dying in my hands, therefore I was sad and couldn't eat much though it was delicious.

There was a submerged rock in the north of this bay; therefore we carefully motored out of the bay keeping our boat near the southern coast. I heard a horn from astern soon

after we were out of the bay and sailing north. There was a marine police boat. We stopped and let the security guard ASI M.E.Hafiz come on our boat and ask a few questions. When I asked, "Do you want to see our papers?" he replied, "You must be having them." He was one of the most practical and decent ASI I have ever met. We have observed that most marine police were friendly and non-corrupt probably because they were still newly employed. He was about to leave when I offered a souvenir from Surat which he politely refused but I insisted that he accept it for his wife. The sea breeze picked up in the afternoon which was close reach therefore we made good progress for a while.

Bhisma and Nidhi wanted to reach Surat no later than 15th February. The possibility to reach Surat looked dim in the absence of fair wind from a favorable direction. We could stop at Murud, Revdanda or Marine Drive in Mumbai, from where they could go to Surat by train or airplane.

I wouldn't enter Mumbai port because of the huge anchoring charges quoted to me earlier. Back Bay of Marine drive was not a part of Mumbai Port, though it would be a high security area. Our entering there would definitely attract local police attention and could create complications and delay. Ajit vetoed us saying, "Why do you want to invite trouble when you can avoid it." Next choice fell for Revdanda, which was a commercial port. We were in no mood to waste our valuable time with port authorities and their securities.

Murud-Janjira looked like a good option where there were two island forts, which I wanted to see. I found a bay near Dongri Bunder having good protection from a northerly wind and it had a jetty, suggesting a safe landing. The Admiralty Sailing Direction book recommended that small vessels could get good protection behind the Janjira Fort. Next morning we could drop Bhisma and Nidhi at the jetty from where they could take a taxi to Mandva anchorage to take a ferry to Mumbai.

I discussed stopping at Dongri Bunder with my crew, but Ajit was against this too. He said, "This is a notorious place used by the gangster Dawood and many others as base for smuggling." He probably thought that the place must be still hounded by his predecessor and wouldn't be a safe location for an overnight stay. Dongri to Dubai is the first ever attempt to chronicle the history of the Mumbai mafia, but later I found out that this was different from Dongri village near Mumbai.

This time I put my foot down as there was no other ideal location having good protection from the open sea. In my mind it would be an ideal place to visit as it had a history behind it with Janjira fort. I thought, "It would be better to face Dawood than our fat bureaucrats, who may waste our hours doing paper work and at times threaten to

detain". I was in no mood to face our mainland authorities after meeting so many of the friendly and helpful people of Lakshadweep. In a novel "Atlas Shrug" the author wrote, "When you know that in order to produce, you need to obtain permission from men who produce nothing. When you see that money is flowing to those who deal not in goods but in favors, when you see that men get rich more easily by graft rather than by work, and your law don't protect you against them but protect them against you. You know that your society is doomed." Now we need a thousand Anna Hazare to save our country from going in to chaos. I have sailed to a number of places abroad where I have never faced so much of red tape. In 2009, I sailed from UK to France, but nobody checked us on arrival for our passports and nobody stopped us on the way. Once I was grounded, and the coast guard promptly came to tow my boat from the shallow water.

In order to reach the bay quickly we should pass between main land and a reef. An error would mean a ship wreck. My skill to navigate was at test. You cannot depend upon GPS solely as it could lack in accuracy by as much as 100 meters or it could stop functioning any time due to loss of satellite signal or power failure. I took a bearing of a light house and piloted between two dangers, which were submerged under water.

We anchored at 17:00 in quiet Dongri Bay just west of Janjira fort. The fort surrounded by the sea looked gorgeous and the surrounding was pretty with a few houses on the beach – another excellent location for tourism and water sports. The Dongri bay had two hills behind which lay Murud town.

A small ferry boat stopped by and advised us to move close to the northern hill to get better protection from the wind and away from some submerged rocks on the west side. After sometime we had company as a fishing boat also anchored. We had our evening swim before dinner.



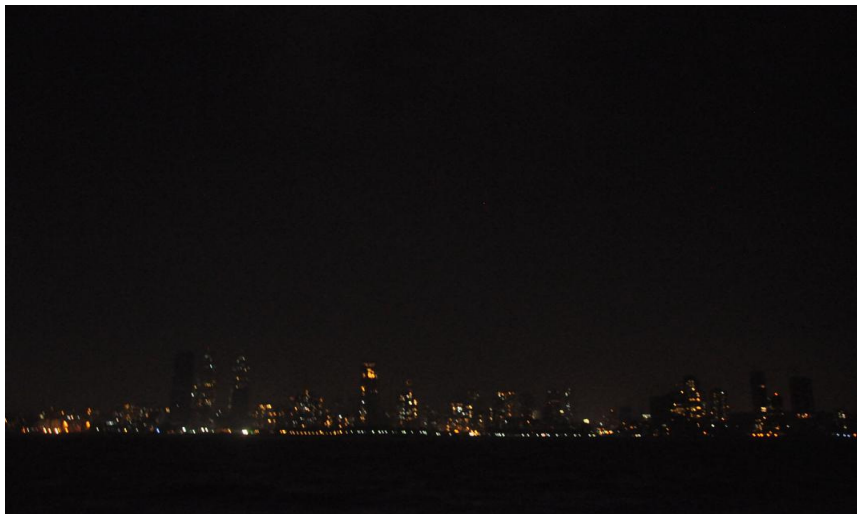
February 14/ Day 38/ Murud to Mumbai:

Ajit used his contacts in Alibagh, who had known people in Murud. A taxi was arranged for Bhisma and Nidhi. I could see that they hated to leave us as they were genuinely

enjoying sailing. Ajit had also arranged a person who took two empty jerry cans for petrol each of 25 liters for refill. We had consumed 50 liters between Goa and Murud. Now we had all our tanks full, which was more than enough for us to reach Surat non-stop even if we had to motor all the way.

We left Murud at 09:00, when it was calm. We crossed the shipping channel of Mumbai port and sailed carefully to avoid a ship on collision course. We also saw a navy or coast guard ship crossing us at a great speed.

We continued sailing in the evening as wind and tide were in our favor. We anchored at 19:20 hour in front of Breach Candy on western coast Mumbai. There was a tall building in front of us, which was identified by Ajit and Anand as Mukesh Ambani's residence. We had passed very close to Marine Drive, Malabar Hill and Napeancy road, where they have high security, but nobody showed up. We were expecting marine police to check on us late at night when we came to know through a phone call that there was a terrorist threat in Bandra, but they did not show up because of lax security in the water or their fear of navigating at night.



February 15/ Day 39/ 64 nm/ Towards Surat from Mumbai:

We took a short nap before weighing the anchor at 01:20 in the dark as the current turned northward. There was no wind but the current was favorable in the direction we were going. I was taught in RYA schools, U.K. the fundamentals of using two elements – wind and currents. As you go north of Mumbai, the current starts getting stronger therefore I would sail for 6 hours when the current would be favorable and stop for 6 hours as the current would be against us. I would certainly continue to sail against the current if the wind would be favorable and my boat speed would be at least 3 knots

against the current. I would not motor if the current would be against us as it would be a criminal waste of fuel.

When we were near Santa Cruz where Mumbai airport is located, the sky was lined up with planes. There was hardly a gap of 2 minutes between two landing planes. Ajit commented that one mistake was going to cost the lives of hundreds of people. On the radar it looked as if they were colliding with our boat as they passed overhead.

After two hours of motoring at 03:30 we started encountering numerous fishing nets. I decided to anchor and sleep instead getting entangled in the maze of nets. I think we made a mistake for not sailing in 20 meters contour where we could have avoided the nets.

At 08:30 we weighed anchor and moved away from the coast in 10 meters contour. A steady force 3 wind picked up, but it was again close haul. Late in the evening it backed to left hand and was close reach, increasing our speed. We had sailed 64 nm towards Surat in 16 hours at an average speed of 4 knots. We were near Dahanu which is half way between Surat and Mumbai.

February 16/ Day-40

Anand skippered till 02:00, and then it was my turn to take over. From Dahanu our sailing direction changed to NE at 13 degree bearing, while the wind was from 295 degree. An angle of 80 degrees was good and she picked up more speed as the wind freshened to force 5. It was time to reef and shorten our sail canvas for safety as sea was getting rough. I was in a dilemma, "Should I wake up Anand to help me reef or try it myself all alone?" I eased the main sail, slackened the halyard, climbed to the mast, pulled down the sail; hooked cringle into the horn, tightened the halyard and the first reef sheet. It was done and I was happy to be able to do it all by myself without anybody's help for the first time. The boat zoomed at an average speed of 6 knots and had sailed 66 nm between 00:30 to 11:30 hours to reach the entrance of Purna River.

We called up home and said that we would be arriving at Vasi-Borsi at 16:00 hours as the tide would allow us to enter the estuary. We celebrated our success and had our lunch before landing. We were welcomed by our family members with flowers. Reporters from Gujarat Mitra - a Gujarati daily newspaper - took some pictures for their front page news.

Our voyage had ended after 40 days with seven people participating in it. We had consumed 275 liters of petrol and had logged 1700 nautical miles – 3145 km averaging 11.44 km per liter. We had logged 43 nm - 80 km per day.

References:

- 1) Girl Stella's Voyage to Cuba - Frank Mulville
- 2) The Oldman and the Sea – Earnest Hemingway
- 3) Sailing Manual – Steve Sleight

END