

During Visham's youth I thought only that he was naughty; I did not realize how special he was and that everything he did was special, even the naughty things. He prayed all the time. I don't know where Visham learned all the *mantras* and prayers in those early years. It seemed strange to me and everyone else that such a small child was praying and chanting *mantras* continuously. However, everyone genuinely seemed moved by a little child offering all the prayers and *pujas*. I asked him, "How much can you pray? You are always praying; stop praying now!" He seemed frightened of my shouting at him to stop praying, but Visham never stopped praying.

I was against his religious tendencies perhaps because I was not religious; I don't know. I would shout at him, "Stop the *pujas*." He would answer, "But this is only a prayer."

At the time Visham was ten years old, he was acting like a *pandit* — going to the temple every day and offering his *puja*. I shouted at him, "What are you doing? Every morning you offer *pujas* like a *pandit*." He told me, "Yes, I want to be a *pandit*." I said to him, "No, you are not going to be a *pandit*; that is not a job."

Visham saved his school money and used it to buy things he needed for his prayers. One day he bought a big *murti* and hid it at his aunt's house because he knew I would shout at him. He bought clay and cement to make small *murtis*. I was so angry when I heard that he was making the *murtis* that I went to the lady's house who was teaching him to make them. I shouted at her, "How dare you teach my boy these things; I don't want him to do it. He will not become a *pandit*". Later Visham told me that he wanted to make *murtis* and sell them, that that was the work he wanted to do.

When I left home, Visham would play recorded *pujas* and prayers and play them very loudly. When he saw me returning, he would quickly turn everything off. He also offered *pujas*

everywhere with his friends. Often he took a bottle of milk and other ingredients to a friend's house and offered a *puja*. On one such occasion, his dad, grandmother and I were looking for him throughout the whole town and could not find him; I was very scared. At last someone phoned us and told us where he was, doing prayers.