



## **Africa – An Essay**

Malobi S Sinha

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## **PRELUDE**

This is an eyewitness account of a life spent growing up in Kenya, East Africa, until the attempted coup in 1983. It is indeed an essay on the times spent there.

## **REVIEWS**

"Sinha writes with fluidity, candour, as well as surprising layers of complexity..."  
.....Amazon.com

The 'flame' trees that lined the only road from Nairobi city to Jomo Kenyatta airport whizzed by as we drove past. Occasionally, a giraffe or impala stood out in the dusk, silhouetted against the setting sun, and a strange tugging at my heart made me want to stamp my feet and yell out "No! I want to stay! I don't want to go!" I had a feeling of helplessness, as though precious riches were slipping through my fingers, and I couldn't do anything at all to stop them.

We had arrived in Kenya in the summer of '74. Dad had had an offer of a job with the 'East African Power and Lighting Company,' (which extended over Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania), and had accepted the offer on a contract basis – for two years. The contract, however, was gradually extended to four, then six, eight, and finally ten years, after which Dad held the "topmost-position-but-one" in the company. (The top position was never allowed to be held by a 'foreigner' but would always belong to an African).

However, my sister and I, one and two years of age respectively, did not know nor care about such matters when we arrived at 'Nairobi airport' as it was then called. Both of us had suffered from serious bouts of malaria on the plane, and were still feverish when we landed. One of my first memories is one of discordance, as though my roots (if one can have roots at that young an age) had been pulled out and left dangling in the air.

Gradually, we began to settle in and got more accustomed to our new life. It was certainly very luxurious – we had an 'ayah' to do the cooking and cleaning, a gardener, and also a houseboy who washed the car and did some cleaning. Our neighbours (not that we had many – and those we did have lived one kilometre away at the closest) were all friendly; and we discovered that the Africans, despite their dark, rugged exteriors, were very helpful, and eager to make friends. If you were nice to them, you had gained a friend for life – but woe betide you if you ever make an enemy of one.

We did, however, hear of many incidents of burglaries, break-ins, and sometimes murder, during our stay in Kenya, and these stories did nothing to comfort us in the initial stages of our settling-in.

After the first six months or so, the years seem to have flashed by, and when I try to recapture in my mind the lifestyle that we led, and the things we did, a myriad of colourful images chase one another through my mind.

Our stays in Mombasa, a seaside resort we visited once a year, have left vague imprints in my mind of palm trees, shimmering white sands, and clear blue seas, of days of sunshine and freedom. At other times, we went to Nanyuki, at the foothills of Mt. Kenya; and of our stays there I remember mostly the long walks in the crisp, fresh morning air, and the cosy little fire we used to light in the lounge in the bitterly cold nights.

Interspersed with those images of places and scenes are images of my school friends, half of them whose names seem to be just at the tip of my tongue, but which I can't quite remember.

Kenya became my home – it seemed as though I had had no other. The beaches in Mombasa, the giraffe and impala, lions, and chimpanzees that we saw on our safaris, in game parks and reserves; the harsh savannah lands that surrounded us as soon as we got out into the countryside – these were all a part of my world – things which I had grown to love.

And then came the fateful Sunday – 1st August 1982 – when it was announced suddenly, out of the blue, that president Daniel Arap Moi had been overthrown, and Kenya was now to be ruled by a military government. While the country was still in shock at the news, groups of looters plundered shops, supermarkets and houses, taking everything they could lay their hands on.

Order was eventually restored, and the president was back in control, but the damage had already been done. ‘Foreigners’ to the country (i.e. the non-African community) were made to realize anew the instability of the luxurious lifestyle that they were leading; the instability, in fact of the whole political situation in Kenya.

Dad had decided that we had stayed long enough in Kenya. He hadn’t meant, he said, to stay much longer than four or five years, anyway, as he had known of the political unrest in Africa. It was time to leave. But, leave for where? Kenya was my home – I belonged here!

Dad had had several offers of jobs in various places – Bombay, Saudi Arabia, Zambia, the United States, Australia – all that remained for us to do was to pick the date of departure, and later, Dad would consider which offer he would accept. The main thing at that moment was for us to leave the country as soon as possible.

The next few days were filled with activity and passed very quickly – too quickly. The suitcases had to be packed, items that we couldn’t take with us had to be sold, tickets had to be purchased; there was no time for any feeling or emotion, and I seemed to go about in a daze, as though I knew this wasn’t happening to me, that it was a nightmare from which I would soon wake up.

But, finally, the day of departure arrived, and I knew this wasn’t a dream. As I looked at our suitcases, all packed and ready, there was an unbearable ache inside me, and my throat felt tight, constricted somehow. I wanted to shout to my parents “Hey, stop! What are you doing? Where’re we going? This is home!”

But I didn’t say anything, for I knew that it was not – the attempted coup, though it had failed, had shown me. We were strangers in a foreign land; a land that was home only to the impalas, giraffe, lions and cheetahs that we saw on safari – to the shy Africans who peeked out at us from behind their mud houses.

For us, our stay in Kenya would become a hazy, unreal period in our lives; a bitter-sweet dream, all too brief. And, in time, our last day in Kenya would come to mark not only the end of an exotic, perhaps unique lifestyle, but also the start of a fresh new one.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Malobi S Sinha was born in India, and then spent the early years of her childhood in the freedom and vastness of Kenya, in East Africa; her family then migrated to Australia when she was in Primary School. Her collections of poetry, and literary work (articles and poetry) have been published in various magazines and e-zines such as AEHS (Blog), Our Day of Passing (Anthology), The Writer's Drawer, Liphar Magazine, Poetry Pasta, 10 Day Book Club, Melaleuca, Words With JAM, Beyond India Monthly, The Compulsive Reader, Le Nouveau Monde Vert, The Australian Reader, Kaj-Mahkah, Sankalan, Bangla Sahitya Sansad and Thylazine. Her first collection of YA Sci-Fi/Fantasy short stories, The Castle and Other Stories, was published by Cresco Books in October 2014. Her book of Poetry, Savannah, was published by Poseidon Books in 2010. Malobi is also a Social Media Consultant. She completed a Bachelors of Engineering from Monash University and a Graduate Certificate in Accounting from Deakin University, as well as a Certificate in Technical Writing from the UWA. Malobi's website can be found at: [www.malobisinha.com](http://www.malobisinha.com). She lives in Victoria with her husband.

## **Books by Malobi S Sinha**

*Garth*, Private Publication, 2022, ISBN: 9781005603120  
*Our Day of Passing (Anthology)*, Ingrid Hall, 2016, ISBN: 9781523471683  
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## **Written Publications (Magazines & E-zines) of Malobi S Sinha**

*AEHS (Blog)* (2020-2022, Australia)  
*Anthology – Our Day of Passing* (2016, USA)  
*Liphar Magazine* (2014, USA)  
*The Writer's Drawer* (2014, Israel)  
*Poetry Pasta* (2014, USA)  
*10 Day Book Club* (2013, USA)  
*Melaleuca* (2010, 2011, 2013, Aus)  
*Le Nouveau Monde Vert* (2008, UK)  
*Words With JAM* (2009, 2010, UK)  
*Beyond India Monthly* (2009, Aus)  
*The Compulsive Reader* (2009, Aus)  
*The Australian Reader* (2008, Aus)  
*Bangla Sahitya Sansad* (2008-2018, Aus)  
*Sankalan* (2006-2020, Aus)  
*Kaj-Mahkah* (2006, USA)  
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