

# Ali, the 10 ½ Finger Boy

As whispers and rumors circulated, I became aware of Ali's ordeal. Children sometimes mocked him, writing belittling comments on the bathroom wall which we named "BBC"

Some memories remain large and bright, ingrained in your consciousness, accompanying you throughout life's journey. For me, one such indelible memory is the story of my friend, Ali, from my childhood days.

Ali and I, inhabitants of the same neighborhood, shared the same age and the daily walk to school under

the watchful eye of a caretaker ensuring our safety. Ali, a cheerful and carefree boy, wore a perpetual smile that seemed to embrace everyone around him.

Our bond deepened during lunch breaks at school, where, like any curious six-year-olds, we exchanged glances at the contents of each other's Tiffin boxes. The term 'Tiffin,' an Indian English word denoting a 'light meal,' became synonymous with lunch boxes in India. My mother's culinary creations, often sautéed rice with mustard, spices, and curry leaves, filled the air with a delicious aroma that enticed Ali to request a taste. Grateful for his generosity, Ali would share his deluxe lunch, when he opened his tiffin, the glow of turmeric and the pulāv rice, and the spicy sweet aroma of cardamom and other spices elated me. I told him

countless times that his mother was a wonderful cook. As we exchanged meals, we savored the flavors and forged a stronger connection.

I noticed that he would keep his right hand in his pocket as he ate and gesture with his left hand, but it never seemed important to me. It was just how he was.

Despite being from different religious backgrounds – Ali a Muslim and myself a Christian – we attended the same Catholic school for our primary classes. Tragically, Ali faced bullying not for any wrongdoing or religious differences but due to an extra half-finger on his right hand, earning him the label of the '10 and ½ fingered boy.'

As whispers and rumors circulated, I became aware of Ali's ordeal. Children sometimes mocked him,



**Paul Kotturan**