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## Tracing my Ancestry

Varun Andrews  
varunandrews@yahoo.com

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Genetics and Genealogy: Tracing My Ancestry

Varun Andrews

HONR 1000N

Dr. Schmitt Lavin and Dr. Doan

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## **Abstract**

The importance of family was always emphasized to me growing up. When examining the idea of family, there are multiple aspects, but this project allowed me to explore my ancestor's experiences. I was able to understand how every one of my relatives used community as a way to live their lives to the fullest. The importance of building a community was instilled in me from when I was young by my parents. I have been to India eight times in my life so I have always known a great deal of information about my relatives. I appreciated this as I was able to feel connected to something larger than myself. This journey has allowed me to understand and connect with my family and relatives on a deeper level.

It was fairly difficult for me to find any information about my ancestors from generations ago due to incomplete records and information. That being said, I learned a great deal from my parents and my grandparents who were able to recall their own and their parents' experiences. Using 23andMe, I was able to find out that I was 100% Central and South Asian. More specifically, I was 100% Malayali which did not surprise me. This is what my parents had told me from when I was very little. My paternal and maternal haplogroup showed Q-M346 and U1a3 respectively. Then, I was able to obtain information about the experiences of two sets of great-grandparents. The narrative continues to focus on the lives of my grandparents on my paternal and maternal side. I wanted to highlight their occupations, experiences, and their relationship with their kids. These relationships and experiences affected the outcomes of my parents who were able to celebrate their successes and face any challenges. Community is what allowed my family to provide for each other and make their children's lives better than their own.

## Ancestry

Before I go into detail about my family, I wanted to highlight my genetic ancestry which I was able to obtain using a company called 23andMe. I had an idea of what my ancestry was before I got the results back. I was told by my parents that I was Malayalee since my birth. Malayalee's are a subgroup of people that predominantly live in the state of Kerala in India. I knew that I was South Indian but I was curious to find out whether there was a small percentage of mixed ancestry. Unfortunately, the results that came back were disappointing in that regard. My results showed that I was 100% Southern South Asian and 100% in the Malayali subgroup. Again, this was not surprising as I learned Malayalam, my parents' native language, and visited Kerala many times in my life. While I was disappointed I did not have any mixed ancestry, I do take immense pride in my ancestry. Kerala is one of the most diverse and successful states in India. It is diverse in the sense that it has the largest Christian population in India. I would fit this criterion because I am Christian as well.

It is important to note that different Malayalee Christians have different denominations. My family has been under the Knanaya Jacobite or Syrian Orthodox denomination for generations. This is also another reason why I was not surprised by my 100% ancestry. The story behind the Knanaya people centers around the story that there were 72 families that came from Syria in A.D. 72 led by a man named Knai Thoma. These 72 families immigrated to Kerala where they settled. The only rule amongst these families is that the descendants of those families have to marry another Knanaya person in order to keep the blood "pure". If a person was to marry someone outside of the community, they would get excommunicated. This practice is still alive today. It is a practice that was kept alive by my great grandfathers, grandparents, and parents. This would essentially confirm that I am 100% in the Malayalee subgroup.

## **Haplogroups:**

Using 23andMe again I was also able to obtain information about both my maternal and paternal haplogroups. Haplogroups show where your ancestors are from and possible migration routes. My maternal haplogroup is U1a3. Haplogroup U can be traced back to a woman who lived 50,000 years ago. The descendants of this woman migrated into three different continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. My ancestor most likely migrated into Asia but more specifically, somewhere in the middle east. My maternal haplogroup U1a3 more specifically can be traced back to a woman who lived 13,500 years ago. This is a relatively uncommon haplogroup amongst most 23andMe customers, so there are more details that can be added about this maternal line.

On the other hand, my paternal haplogroup was Q-M346. Haplogroup Q arose around 30,000-35,000 years ago in the north-central Asia region. It is believed that these men hunted mammoths and other large prehistoric animals that may have inhabited the region. This haplogroup is most common in Mongolian populations, but also in 2% of Indian men that carry this haplogroup. My father would fall into this 2%. The haplogroup Q-M346 can be traced back to a man who lived 28,000 years ago. I found it surprising that I showed this haplogroup considering how rare it was for Indian men.

While these haplogroups presented me with new information, this did cause me to question my belief that all Knanaya people migrated from Syria. While my mom's haplogroup may support this assertion, my father's does not. My father's haplogroup indicates that he is from the north-central Asia region. There is no overwhelming evidence from the data presented to indicate that any of his ancestors made it to the Middle East. This does make me question how

accurate the story of the Knanaya people is. I do not know if I will ever receive a definite answer to the validity of this story, but it is an interesting point to consider.

### **Joseph Kochuthazhathu and Eliamma Joseph**

My story begins from Joseph Kochuthazhathu and Eliamma Joseph. These were my great grandparents on my paternal side. They are also my grandfather's parents. While it was hard to gather a lot of information in terms of dates, I was able to get an idea of how their family operated. Joseph and Eliamma had four children: KJ Andrews, KJ Joseph, KJ Zachariah and KJ Jacob. Clearly, everyone was named KJ which was short for Kochuthazhathu Joseph. Kochuthazhathu was the family name and Joseph was the fathers name. According to my father the reason as to why they all had the same first name remains unknown but the naming conventions were not as structured as they are now. KJ Andrews, my grandfather, decided to pass down his last name of Andrews, hence my last name.

Joseph and Eliamma raised their kids in Chingavanam, Kerala throughout the entirety of their life. Joseph was a businessman and worked in the wholesale rice industry. He would buy rice from farmers and then sell the rice to retail businesses. This was the family's main source of income as Eliamma was a housewife. Eliamma had to take care of her four kids as Joseph would often be conducting business. Due to the uncertainty of business, Joseph and Eliamma did struggle at times to support their kids. In times of trouble, they were able to find support and community through their church. Joseph and Eliamma would often get together with families from their church to have food and other social activities. The church provided a support system and as well as an avenue to grow religiously. In fact, their son KJ Jacob was inspired and became a priest at St. Johns church, the church they attended every Sunday.

## **KJ Andrews and Pennamma Oolattil**

My grandparents on my paternal side, KJ Andrews and Pennamma Oolattil played a big role in each of their children's lives. KJ Andrews, the second oldest son of Joseph Kochuthazhathu and Eliamma Joseph was born in 1932 and took after his father in many ways. KJ adopted the same occupation as his father and went into the wholesale rice business in his early 20's. KJ first bought a warehouse in 1954 in which he resold rice to retail businesses, similar to his father. After about ten years of working in this business, his business started to fail and things took a turn for the worse. KJ sold the warehouse in 1965 and decided to work for a construction company to have a source of income. He worked for this construction company for 2-3 years before he decided to venture into something new. In 1969, he decided to take up farming and bought a rice farm. Unfortunately, he did not find his passion in farming and 4 years later went back into business. This time around he created a store called Lovedale that sold things like cement, bricks, and stone. After years of uncertainty, this was the business that he finally settled on. His store continues to be maintained by his nephew and is still running today.

Pennamma Oolattil on the other hand, was raised in Rani in a very big family. She was born in 1933 and had four brothers and three sisters. She knew what it took to live with a large family. She did not go to school for long and dropped out in eighth grade. She got married when she was 24 years old to KJ Andrews. She did not pursue a job as she was still living in a culture where it was expected for the woman to take care of the household. She stayed in the home and looked after a big family of her own. My grandmother had her first child, Lowsey, in 1955. She would continue on to have two daughters and one son in the next five years. Taking care of four children was difficult enough but she was hit with another surprise. From 1963-1970, she had another four boys. Her youngest sons Rony and Roby were twins. To summarize, she had eight

children over a fifteen-year span. When KJ struggled with his business, the family also struggled. Pennamma was the person to keep the whole family together and strong throughout the highs and lows. She found a way to feed eight children three times a day. As the three oldest sisters, Lowsey, Lowley, and Dolley got older, they helped Pennamma take care of the younger brothers until the sisters got married. It was not all sunshine and rainbows for KJ and Pennamma as they experienced two tragedies within a couple years of each other.

### **Ruby Andrews:**

Ruby was the oldest son of the family. The family role eldest son had immense meaning and bore a great deal of responsibility within the family. It was the job of the eldest son to be a role model for his siblings as well as to find a solid hard-working job. Ruby was born in 1960 and was everything you could ask for in an eldest son. He was hardworking, smart, and determined. He was able to get a degree in engineering and started to work on ships as early as 18. His greatest accomplishment was getting hired as the fourth officer on a cargo ship called "The Kairali". The "Kairali" left Goa in 1979 and was meant to sail to Germany after stopping at a port in Africa. Tragedy struck the Andrews family when they learned that the ship never made it to Africa. All communication was lost and nothing was ever heard from anyone on that ship ever again. While no one knows what exactly happened, KJ and Pennamma decided to come to terms with the fact that Ruby died, one year after the ship went missing. Ruby was 19 years old when he died. Ruby's death was a large tragedy in the family and is something that is still tough to talk about today.

Two years later after the death of their eldest son, their eldest daughter Lowsey, also became sick. She was diagnosed with stomach cancer and fought valiantly for six months before she too passed away in 1988. Her husband died shortly after in 1990 from lung cancer. They left



behind three children who were not even ten at that time. Pennamma and KJ took in Lowsey's children and became their official legal guardians until they all became 18. KJ and Pennamma's marriage and life was defined through their children. They were able to successfully see the immigration of all of their kids to America. They would both periodically come to America and check in on everyone during the 2000s. All they wanted for their kids was better and easier lives than the ones they had. They fought valiantly for this until Pennamma's death in 2010 and KJ's death in 2014.

### **Cherian Thomas and Eliamma Cherian**

Cherian Thomas and Eliamma Cherian are my great grandparents on my maternal side and my grandfather's parents. Cherian and Eliamma raised their kids in Mazhukeer, Kerala. This is about 35 minutes away from Chingavanam for perspective. They only had two kids: a daughter and a son. The gender norms were very apparent for their family as Eliamma was a housewife as well. Eliamma grew up in Rani, India approximately an hour away from Mazhukeer. She moved to Mazhukeer after she married Cherian as Cherian's farm was still in Mazhukeer. Cherian was a farmer, as was many other people at the time. Kerala was deeply entrenched in the agricultural business. He farmed foods such as rice and sugarcane. Cherian and Eliamma worked together to look after their two kids in order to make sure they were successful. Their main priority with their kids was to make sure they both completed school. While their daughter did not move forward with a college degree, their son (my grandfather) went to college to get a degree in civil engineering. Once their son was married and had children, both Cherian and Eliamma helped take care and look after my mother and her siblings. Cherian still looked

after the farm but had an increased role in the house as he got older. Cherian died 12 years after my mother was born in 1988 and Eliamma shortly after that in 1990.

### **KC Thomas and Leelamma Abraham**

KC Thomas and Leelamma Abraham are my grandparents on my maternal side. KC Thomas was born in 1944. KC is short for Kocheethra which was his family name. He was the oldest of two and was characterized by his academic drive. He grew up and graduated high school in Mazhukeer. He then went to college when he was 18 and obtained a degree in civil engineering. In 1965, when he turned 21, he went to look for work. There were not many openings in Kerala and eventually took a job in Odisha, India. Odisha was in North India while Kerala was in South. It took three days to travel from Odisha to Kerala on a train. He would take this trip periodically. In 1971, he took a trip back to Kerala to marry Leelamma Abraham. KC and Leelamma moved from Kerala to Odisha until 1977. At this point they had three kids and they wanted to raise their kids in Kerala, which was closer to family. In Odisha, they were strangers. KC would try to come back to Kerala once every two months to visit his kids. Leelamma would travel with the kids to Odisha every summer. KC continued to work as a civil engineer in Odisha until he was 50 years old. In 1994, he finally came back to Kerala and decided to follow in his father's footsteps to become a farmer. To this day, KC has multiple acres of farmland and has a very large passion for farming.

Leelamma's life revolved around her children. Her main goal was to make sure that all her children lived religiously and had stable jobs once they got older. She was the primary caretaker since KC was not in the house often. She continued the role of the primary caretaker even as her kids immigrated to the United States. She was a second mom for me and played a big

role in my upbringing. She even became a US Citizen in order to look after me and my sister until we were both old enough to take care of ourselves. KC would join Leelamma in the United States for months at a time but they have now finally settled back in Mazhukeer.

### **Roby Andrews:**

Travelling back to my paternal side, I want to focus on my father. Roby Andrews was a twin and the youngest of eight children. He was born on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1970 to KJ and Pennamma Andrews. He had to deal with the positives and the negatives of growing up in a large family. Ultimately, he was able to learn the value of his siblings. All of the siblings worked as a unit to make sure the needs of all of the kids were being met. His parents struggled at times to take care of everyone which is why he placed a great deal of importance on employment. He lived in Chingavanam during his childhood and graduated high school in 1989. Although, he did not have much time to settle he immigrated to America in 1991 with his twin brother, Rony. They worked together to make a living in America. Roby immigrated to Nutley, New Jersey because his uncle lived in the same town and was an avenue for support. Roby lived with his uncle for three months before finding a job at a factory and moving into his own apartment. After working at the factory for two to three years he quit. He then decided to work two jobs while going to community college. While he did not finish community college he decided to go back and get a full time-job at another factory. He worked there until 1998, when he decided that he wanted to get married. This is where he met Rosi Thomas.

## **Rosi Thomas**

My mother Rosi Andrews, was the third oldest of four children and was born in Odisha, India on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1976. After she turned one, her mother Leelamma, made the decision to move back to Mazhukeer, Kerala. This is where Rosi was raised and grew up. Due to the fact that her father was not always present she relied on her grandparents and her mother for a significant portion of her life. She describes having a very fun childhood, a lot which revolved around the community that was formed by her neighborhood. There were many kids in her neighborhood that were around her age and would play almost every day. Education was important in her family and thus important to her. She graduated high school from Mazhukeer in 1992 and decided to go to nursing school. This was primarily motivated by her older brother who chose to go to nursing school a few years before this time. She moved away from home and decided to go to nursing school in Chennai, India for four years. She graduated in 1996 and came back to Kerala where she worked as an operation room nurse for two years. It was 1998 and she was also looking to get married which is when she found Roby Andrews.

## **Marriage:**

My parents Roby and Rosi were both looking to get married in 1998. Since Roby was working in America, there was not much he could do to search for a wife. As in most arranged marriages, he used his parents to look for any families who had a daughter that was interested in marriage. One thing that is important to point out is that they both had to marry someone that was Knanaya. This limited the field somewhat which allowed Roby's family to hear through the grapevines that Rosi was looking to get married. The families exchanged pictures of what each person looked like and decided to continue through with the marriage. Due to the fact that they

were on different continents, Roby and Rosi got to know each other through phone calls. In December 1998, Roby eventually made his way back to India and met Rosi in person for the first time. Two weeks later on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999 they got married. Roby could not stay for long in India due to work, so he had to go back to New Jersey at the end of January. They had a long-distance marriage until Rosi finally got her Visa and was able to come America in July of 1999.

### **Life in America:**

This was a new beginning for both Roby and Rosi, but this is what they had ultimately wanted. They wanted to raise a family in America so that their kids could chase the American dream. In 1999, after Roby was married he found a stable job at the United States Postal Service. Roby and Rosi lived in Bloomfield, New Jersey with his brothers Rony and Roji as well as their wives. They all lived in the same apartment for two years so the adjustment to America was made easier. They all relied on each other for help and support as they navigated life in a completely new country. The support and community that was built amongst these three families allowed them all to thrive and is a big reason as to why I am where I am today.

My mom became pregnant in 2000. Up until this point she was studying for her nursing tests. Although, she made the executive decision not to look for any nursing jobs until after the delivery. On September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2000 she gave birth to a baby boy named Varun Andrews. Soon after, she got her first nursing job at Hackensack Meridian Health Mountainside Medical Center Montclair, NJ in 2001. After two years of living in Bloomfield my parents moved to Lawrenceville, NJ an hour south of Bloomsfield. My dad was able to find another job at the United States Postal Service as a clerk and my mom another nursing job at Robert Wood Johnson Hospital. We moved one last time to Bordentown, NJ which was fifteen minutes away

from Lawrenceville. This is where I would spend my entire childhood. Right as we were moving, my sister, Sarah Andrews was born on November 15<sup>th</sup>, in 2005. Sarah is now 15 and a freshman in high school. I am 20 and a junior here at Nova Southeastern University.

One of the biggest things that my parents wanted to instill in both my sister and I was community. This was bigger than education or success. They wanted us to stay connected with our family because they believed that family will stick by you through thick and thin. I was able to build this community through my cousins from both my paternal and maternal side. All my dad's living siblings live within an hour of each other so there was never a period of time where we went without seeing each other (besides 2020). Both my mom's brothers lived five minutes away at one point in time. I found that every family and every person used community as a way to be successful and lead happy lives. My parents did a fantastic job of instilling that in me and I hope to pass that value down through my future children.

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