

In My Own Words

“Where has this Sidharthan been all this time?”

It was a casual remark at the end of a teacher training workshop in Kerala. A few others smiled and nodded in agreement. They had seen someone they hadn’t expected—someone constantly interacting with participants, answering questions, sharing stories, and moving effortlessly through discussions.

I smiled too. But the comment stayed with me. Anyone who has worked with me at Zoo Outreach Organisation would probably describe me as quiet. Not withdrawn or hesitant, but someone who prefers to observe before speaking. I speak when there is something to say, especially when work demands it, but I have never been the most talkative person in the room. Over time, that quietness had

become almost a part of how my colleagues knew me.

The workshop itself was part of the Save Denise and Friends campaign on freshwater conservation, and brought together teachers from Kerala’s National Green Corps programme.

Our educator, Payal Molur, led the sessions. Since she does not speak Malayalam, I naturally found myself interacting more with the participants.

At least, that was my role on paper.

What unfolded throughout the workshop felt less like translation and more like conversation. Questions led to discussions. Discussions turned into stories, and stories often ended with



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shared laughter. I found myself explaining ideas, exchanging experiences, and engaging with the teachers in a way that felt completely natural.

It was only afterwards, when my colleagues remarked that they had discovered “another Sidharthan”, that I began to think about what had actually happened.

Was it the educator in me finally finding the right opportunity? Was it the confidence that had quietly grown through months of conservation training and field experience? Or was it simply the comfort of speaking in my mother tongue?

Perhaps it was all of these.

We often think of language as something we either know or do not know. If we are fluent in a language, we assume communication should come naturally. But fluency and naturalness are not always the same. A language we learn can become familiar, even comfortable. A mother tongue is different. It is not merely learned; it is acquired. Long before we understand grammar or vocabulary, it becomes intertwined with our thoughts, emotions, humour, and memories.

Perhaps that is why speaking in our mother tongue often feels less like translating ideas and more like allowing them to flow.

Working in a multilingual organisation has taught me the importance of communicating across languages and cultures. Every language opens a door to new people and new perspectives. Yet this experience reminded me that our mother tongue opens a different kind

of door. It allows us to communicate with a spontaneity and ease that is difficult to recreate elsewhere. The knowledge remains the same, but the expression becomes effortless.

Looking back, I still cannot say with certainty what made that workshop different. Maybe it was the setting. Maybe it was the accumulated confidence that comes with experience. Maybe it was simply Malayalam giving my thoughts their most natural voice.

Whatever the reason, the experience left me with a question that continues to linger. Is language really a barrier?

Or is it, sometimes, the bridge that allows us to become the most authentic version of ourselves?

Sidharthan

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Citation: Sidharthan (2026). In My Own Words. In *Zoo's Print* 41(8): 57–58.