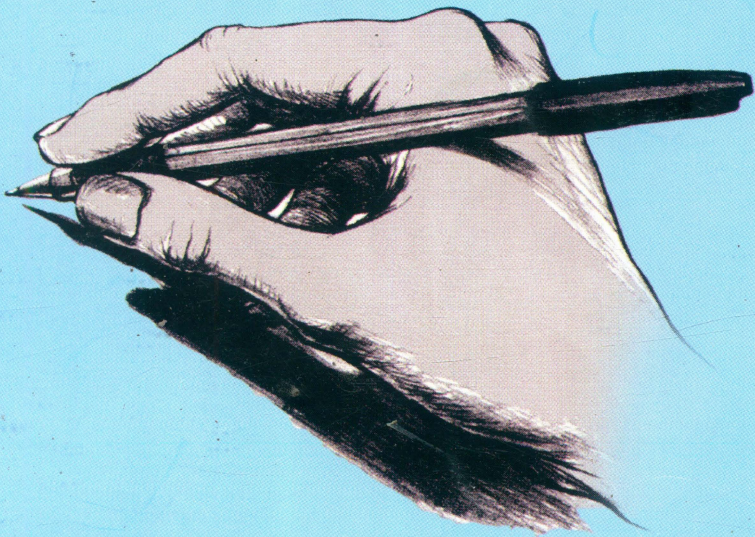


Life - As I've seen it

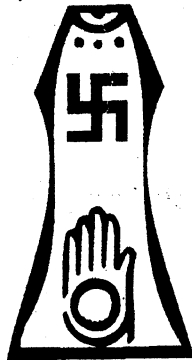
Urmila S. Dholakia



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Life - As I've seen it

BY
URMILA DHOLAKIA



Life - As I've seen it
by Urmila S. Dholakia

First Edition

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DEDICATION

I offer this book at the feet of my beloved mother and father as an expression of my deeply rooted respect for them. They gave prime importance to education and simplicity in their lives. Their noble intentions and their blessings have guided and inspired me throughout my life. I am deeply grateful for all they have done for me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

At 85 young years, Urmilaben Dholakia is an unusually energetic person. Sure enough, at this age she has experienced the joys and sorrows of life but she has handled them with dignity and unparalleled courage. She is a religious compassionate lady, always an advocate for women's rights and education.

For over 20 years she served as a warden for Shri Sarojini Devi Ladies Hostel at the M.S. University of Baroda, India. Although this was a high administrative post, she never acted as administrator. She was a loving and gentle mother figure to all the girls who stayed in the hostel always looking after their safety and welfare. Through her extensive travels and stays in different countries, she has experienced different cultures and lives. This memoir is a testimony of her experiences.

Her simple but powerful language makes this book even more enjoyable. Through her honest and truthful narration of the observations and experiences, she hopes to bring a kind of social awareness in our younger generation. I am confident that this book will be an inspiration to our younger generation here and abroad.

Dr. Sharmisthaben Soneji (Koba Ashram)

Translation by Niyati Pandya

LIFE AT KOBASHRAM

Established by Saint Shri Atmanandji and Pujya Bahenshri, Shrimad Rajchandra Adhyatmik Sadhana Kendra - Koba Theological Ashram - is a quiet beautiful place in Ahmedabad, India. They have developed it with love, devotion and spiritual knowledge. It is a sanctuary of spiritual peace and devotion.

It is indeed a treat to watch Pujya Bahenshri, as she greets every Ashram resident with a warm and welcoming smile. As soon as you enter the Ashram, you experience her genuine, nurturing love towards all Ashram residents. Her doors are always open to anyone in need of anything. Even a chance interaction with Pujya Bahenshri is enough to forget all worries and feel inner peace. The entire atmosphere of the Ashram is so tranquil and inviting that you forget all worldly cares while you are there. Ashram residents live a pious life chanting spiritual hymns and devoting their time in community service.

I consider myself to be the most fortunate person to have stayed among such selfless Ashram residents, and more so, under the loving care of Pujya Bahenshri.

Respectfully,

Urmila Dholakia

Translation by Niyati Pandya

INTRODUCTION

Collection of my articles in the form of a booklet is being done for the first time. In this I have narrated my experiences.

I was fond of writing since my childhood. Gradually, this interest increased. Once I gathered the courage of writing an article and showed it to my father. He was very happy to read that article and expressed his blessings. I was overwhelmed by my father's happiness. I shall never forget this. I could clearly see that my father's happiness represents his wishes and feelings. This was the source of my inspiration which explained to me the importance of reading, writing and thinking.

I present this collection before you today to commemorate the memory of my father. I try to write the elementary lessons in the field of literature. My father's blessings guide me on this path. According to him, literature was more important than worldly wealth. He always attached greater importance to education.

The track of our life, going through ups and downs, accumulates various experiences. I am unfolding this bundle of experiences today before you. I hope you will like this exercise.

My dream was to get my articles printed in the form of a book. How to fulfill this dream was an important question. But today this wish is getting fulfilled.

Wishes, Desires, Dreams- a mind spins these daily, almost as a mundane task. To have these

wishes, desires and dreams turn into reality, sparks the flame of hope and belief. When I published my book "Mara Anubhavo (My Experiences)" in Gujarati, I had never imagined it could be translated into English. But today this translated version has become a reality. It makes me believe in the power of the Almighty in our lives.

How did this monumental task get accomplished? To have a book fully translated in a few weeks seems like a herculean task; but my friends spiritedly stepped forward and embraced the work. This energy formed the bedrock of the translated book being completed in such a short period of time.

The friends and family members who translated the book are all busy, productive professionals with active careers of their own. For them to take time out to help produce the translated book means a great deal to me. Mere words cannot express my gratitude towards them. I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart.

The ever creative and imaginative Mr. Sunil Vasavada planted the seed in my mind of capturing my experiences as a dorm mom in writing; and actually publishing a book. I had never imagined myself as an author; but once I began writing, the words and chapters just started flowing. Once the book was published in Gujarati, I never even thought of translating the book into English. Dr. Uday Nanavaty, filled my sails with hope. He set this ship afloat by taking time out of

his busy practice to translate the lengthiest passages of my book. I saw the possibility!

Other people also helped sail my ship of hope into the right dock. Mr. Harendrabhai Vasavada, who had come from San Jose to visit his daughter, listened to my dream. He translated passages and sent them to me. My sail filled with the winds of possibilities. Drs. Vikram and Amita Mehta, strong supporters of literature and culture, also fed my sails. They said they would be honored to help me out. My ship started sailing on waves of joy. Sharadbhai and Chitraben Dixit had heard of my endeavors through their daughter, Neha. They called me and asked for specific passages to translate. My ship was riding high into reality. Mita the "Badshah" of school is the principal of a large comprehensive middle school. I hesitated asking such a busy lady but I took a gamble and it paid off. My ship rolled forward with full speed ahead. Madhuriben Shah, my dear niece also translated passages. My ship was sailing strong into harbor. Niyatiben Pandya, noted and knowledgeable literary enthusiast, lent her hand as well. With lightening speed, she produced a rainbow of translated passages. Without her editorial support, this translation would not have been possible.

Leelaben has sent a beautiful article from Canada. She was very busy with her son's wedding yet she took out time to send the article in time for which, I am very grateful to her.

"Without the valuable contribution of Shri Babubhai

in translating the Introduction, Swamiji's Blessings and Urvi's Letter, this project would not have been complete."

Carrying the words, support and faith of my friends and family, I am launching my ship for its journey. Enjoy the ride.

Translation by Mrs. Mita Vasavada

MRUDULABAHEN: MY IDOL

What can I say about Mrudulabahen? A pen in her hands generates a crackling, vibrant spring, like the ones from *Gangotri*. It is inconceivable that my first book would not contain her input. I barely asked, and I received more than I asked for in a few moments, like sweet offerings from a short prayer!

Her valuable, genuine words, like pure notes from a flute, decorate my book with sprinkles of pearls. Her books and articles are like a wishing well for me, granting whatever I need!

Mrudulabahen has written about the various moods of the human heart. We heartily request her to keep on writing big lakes of thought, so people can take a dip in them, and enjoy.

Translation by Chitrâben Sharad

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Translation by Chitrāben Sharad

BLESSED SELF!

We are blessed when we feel happy giving joy and happiness to everyone around us. The glow of our joyful giving shall be shining all through our own life.

I always feel that glow of joyful giving around Urmilaji whom I lovingly call Amma.

Amma told me that she had written a book in Gujarati narrating her experiences. And I am very happy to know that the book is now being translated into English for the benefit of the younger generation. I am eagerly waiting to read the awesome experiences of my Amma.

I am praying that our younger generation will enjoy the book and feel happy giving joy and happiness to everyone around!

- *Swami Dheerananda*

PUJYA SWAMIJI - A GREAT TEACHER

On entering the children's class-room being conducted at Bal Vihar of Chinmaya Mission, a wonderful scene could be seen. Children aged 10 to 12 years were reciting the sholkas of Bhagwad Geeta in sweet tone with correct pronunciations. If we hear this, closing our eyes, we feel that saints are speaking this in the children's language. There was consciousness amongst these children. They were reciting in rhythm with understanding. It appeared as if these children were speaking the language of Krishna with love. There were children of six years also.

Several questions arose while seeing this:

These questions are: Who is teaching these children systematically memorizing and reciting these shlokas and by what magic they have been mesmerized?

I was happy to know that Swamiji Shree Dheeranandji of Chinmaya Mission at Washington D.C. has taught these good lessons to these children.

Swamiji has laid special emphasis on correct pronunciations, which created vibrations spreading energy in the atmosphere. Swami Dheeranandji is conducting such classes for the last several years, and has created a wonderful institution by training thousands of children. After seeing this, we can clearly visualize that these children will bring back the period of Satyug.

With profound respectful regards to the great Guru Shree Swami Dheeranandji!

-Urmila Dholakia

Translation by Prof. H. C. Dholakia

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[I worked for 25 years as a Warden of Sarojini Naidu Hall, M. S. University Ladies Hostels, Vadodara. During that period, I experienced and passed through so many delicate and difficult situations. In this book, I have honestly narrated all these true and factual episodes as they have happened. I am sure, parents of lady-students would be very much interested in knowing these situations and how I, as a Warden, handled them.]

MY EXPERIENCES SAPNA

Childhood is full of imaginations and innocence. Nothing else matters. The so called worldly wisdom has not entered the psyche. Childhood has a very special and valuable gift of innocence and simplicity. Child is true believes all that is happening in the world. In childhood, one flies with the wings of thoughts, desires and wishes. I am still trying to fathom my childhood today. I reminisce in the memory of my childhood with faded flashes of incidents.

Since childhood, I was interested in the world outside. I loved to climb the tree, sway far away with the waves, getting lost in nature with breeze of the wind, etc. Responsibility was not yet thrust upon me. Around this time, students of Vadodara Arya Ladies School came to Calcutta (now Kolkata) for cultural program of music, dance etc. These

students were of my age and were staying in the girls' hostel. Seeing this, the "eternal" question popped up in my mind – how much freedom and independence these girls are enjoying in the "hostel life". I was under the illusion that to remain outside means freedom. I also wished for such freedom and enjoyment! Alas! Such thought-castles are always built in the dreams during childhood. However, such dreams are hardly fulfilled but the memories are ingrained in the mind. Slowly and surely, I felt as if these memories are indicating something to me. I had a premonition that such thoughts were surfacing in my mind for some definite purpose. Time thus works at its own pace and whatever is going to happen, happens at the exact right moment.

One evening, my door-bell rang. I was surprised to see three ladies standing outside when I opened my door. Sensing my surprise, they announced that they were the resident of Sarojini Naidu Ladies Hostel of M. S. University. They just came to know from the office of the chief Warden that I have been appointed as the Warden of their hostel. Their hostel committee had decided to arrange "Welcome Party" in my honor. They came to invite me for the party.

I was overjoyed to see such happy faces of these ladies. They lovingly mentioned that they were my daughters and I was mother to them. Hearing such nice sentiments, love overflowed in my heart. I can never forget this moment. Such a beautiful and memorable opportunity had knocked at my door. I firmly believed that this was God's Grace! I

became mother to these 300 daughters in just one day! What can be luckier than this? How will I be able to absorb the love of 300 daughters when I am not able to absorb the love of my one daughter? Suddenly, I was reminded of one of the most beautiful Gujarati poetry about "Mother" - "જનનીની જોડ જો નહીં જડે રે લોલ" loosely translated, it means you can never get match to "mother" anywhere in the world. Mother's compassion, love and sacrifices are unparalleled. Would I be able to justify the sentiment of this poet? I was surrounded by many such thoughts!

Will I be able to give motherly love to these girls living away from their parents? Will I be able to protect these adolescent girls from the vagaries of the world? How will I be able to balance the twin requirements of freedom of the girls and hostel discipline? Surely, I will have to learn patience and love first. This is the dawn of sweet and blooming adolescence! How do I handle these sparks? How much strictness, pressure or advices would be effective? How can you stretch such a delicate thread? Once it is broken, it may create a permanent distance. I was filled with so many such questions.

I had a strong feeling that only God can throw (give?) light and guidance in this darkness. I felt, that God has cautioned my soul to firmly determine "to be mother of all girls". Forget the difference between my daughter and daughters of others. God's this message reverberated in my mind. I was

being convinced that daughters are garlands and not burdens. With such a flow of inspiration, plans started emerging in my mind. I understood the necessity of cultivating patience and bravery. Suddenly I felt as if I have become huge from the dwarf. I felt as if a spacious palace had emerged before my mind.

Now I became aware about my duties – administration of university office, handling of money transactions, keeping accounts, food arrangements for girls, security and cleanliness of entire hostel complex/campus and observing/maintaining hostel rules and regulations. I had no knowledge of any of these matters. I was in the unknown territory. I remembered God and sought His Blessings for this responsibility. I proceeded with the faith that I would learn as I proceed with my work. Thus, my childhood dream fructified.

Here is the first and the very crucial act of the hostel drama, demanding my skill of handling and understanding of the situation. This first act has given me the deep understanding of how to handle difficulties in future, with open mind and without any ego. So here is the first scene of the first act.

Mohan, office peon came and told me "Madam, Security Officer of the University wants to see you. I have made him sit in your office room". I had no information from the Chief Warden's Office about this Security Officer. So I became alert.

"Madam, Namaste, I am the Security Officer"

He gave his introduction showing his imposing appearance.

"Yes, I saw you for the first time. What is the matter?" I asked.

He replied "Madam, I want some information from Sapna from Room No. 1. Will you please call her?"

I was astonished to hear his reply. How does this officer know that Sapna is staying in room number 1?

However, since I was new and was ignorant of this matter, I thought, maybe this is within Hostel Regulations. I, therefore, summoned Sapna to my office.

As soon as Sapna came, he started asking questions – "What time did you return to the Hostel last night?", "Who was with you?"

I was wondering, with what authority this officer was asking such questions? But before I ask this officer anything, Sapna took control of the matter and fearlessly replied that it was none of his business. She knew her responsibility about the matter and she properly observed the regulations of the hostel. She had taken "Late Pass" from the Warden yesterday and signed the register after returning to the hostel within time limit.

Sapna was absolutely self-confident. She was a senior student and she did not break any rule. So instead of being scared, she asked the officer as to who gave authority to him to ask such questions

about where she had been, with whom she had gone and what time she returned? This was her personal matter and what was the need to know all these? At this, the officer got scared as his game of intimidating the girl was foiled. His ego got squashed and he had to apologize to Sapna.

This was a new experience for me. So I could not understand as to what I should do? However, I was convinced that Sapna had decided to solve this problem her own way before I speak anything. She faced the situation truthfully. I, therefore, supported her by remaining silent. This incident taught me a concrete lesson and gave me quite a few suggestions necessary for the warden to know for future guidance.

After this incident I meticulously researched about the officer's duty. After my research, I submitted my report to the Chief Warden stating that the security officer exceeded his authority and intimidated one of the hostel girls by asking unnecessary questions. I also suggested that strict action should be taken against this officer so as to avoid recurrence of such incident in future. If any officer wants to visit ladies hostel for any matter, he should obtain written permission from the Chief Warden and he should carry such Authority Letter while visiting Ladies hostel. The Chief Warden decided to officially declare the rules after deliberating with all the wardens.

This incident has alerted me so much and taught a lesson and I always remembered this

mistake before making any decisions in future. It became very clear to me that since these students have put full faith in me, I should find out a compromise solution for all future incidents after openly discussing the matter with all concerned. This will foster and strengthen confidence of both the parties. They would quietly listen to whatever guidance I may give. This would solve any problem amicably. I clearly felt that this is the missing link in "relationship" between youths and elders (these days). Ego also plays its role.

Today when I introspect about incidents of 25 years of my hostel life, I clearly see that the lesson I learned from first incident has taught me how to avoid the mistake-trap. This understanding has always kept me aware and awake to ensure that no injustice is done to any of the thousands girls. The girls on their part were also trying to act truthfully.

Thus, my life's journey with young girls became blissful forever.

Date: 19.08.2013

Translation by Shree Harindra Vasavada

MY EXPERIENCE OF AN INCIDENT...

In a hostel, the experiences and the journeys through the night of students are unique. Some fall asleep studying, some wake up worrying about their exams. Some fall asleep after their tea, some start their studies with their tea cup in hand.

I keep my ears open when I start my rounds through the hostel during the night. All the friends congregate within their own rooms. While unwinding at the end of the day, everyone was fully engrossed in merriment and revisiting the day's events. These cherished experiences only happen in a place like this.

On a beautiful night like this, one experience stood out. That night, I had gone to sleep at 10:30pm. All of a sudden, I heard the screams from the girls room. My eyes opened, I ran outside and saw the girls yelling "theif, theif!". I noticed two girls were extremely scared and the other girls were taking them to another room. Both those girls were in tears - I consoled both of them and gave them water. One of the girls attempted to tell her story - naturally, I was curious to know what she had to say.

These two girls were roommates, they were close friends who supported each other through

thick and thin. It's especially at times like these where you need the closeness that only room mates could provide. With that one of the girls started telling her story.

It was around 10:30 that we had fallen asleep while talking to each other. I fell asleep quickly. A little while later, in my sleep I felt that there was someone's hand around my neck. I woke up with a startle and saw a man standing next to my bed. I freaked out! I quickly took hold of the man's hand. He was startled and snatched his hand away and quickly ran out the door. At this moment my roommate also woke up and we jumped out of our beds and ran after the man who had just left the room. Everyone was awake by then and were screaming "theif their" but were unable to catch him. By then he was able to get through the main gates of the hostel and disappear.

As we continued to discuss the events, the young girl presented her theory. "I think the thief was looking to steal my necklace. But when the necklace scraped against my neck and woke me up, he was unable to complete his mission." He had completely covered his face leaving only his eyes open with a slit.

Listening to this girl's account, I thought to myself, wow how courageous this girl is. Imagine having someone standing over your bed and reacting by grasping his arm and going on the offensive rather than getting scared and trying to run away. Because of her courageousness the

thief ran away without achieving his goal.

Upon hearing these details, I commended her on her quick thinking and valor. I told her that "your example of self defence in a time of need taught us all a lot today". I quickly promised her that I'd get to the bottom of this mystery. My mind was reeling from the events and I realized that this must have been an inside job with connections to a gang that was keeping an eye on the girls in the hostel. Without inside help there was no way someone could get into the hostel as the thief did this evening. I need to quickly take steps around this matter because if this news got out to the girls in the campus it would not go well.

Once the thief had collected all the details, the thief and his helpers must have congregated somewhere near the hostel waiting for the opportune moment to strike. I thought to myself, could there be a connection between the University security officer and this incident? I had already had a bad experience in the past with the security officer and wasn't very fond of him to begin with. This incident happened at night and this particular security officer used to make is rounds of the hostel from time to time. These thoughts made me think there must be some validity to these theories. I came to the conclusion that, to get more information I'll have to go to the night peon to find out what he knew. So, I called him to my home and started interrogating him.

I asked him: "Are you aware of the incident that occurred last night?"

He answered: "Yep I am aware of all of the details"

"Where were you when the robbery occurred?"

"Ben, I was in the bathroom, as soon as I heard the screams of their their I ran out of the bathroom"

"When you went out did you close the main door behind you?"

"Yes ben, I did leave and close the door behind me, I also took the keys with me."

"So then how did the thief get out of the hostel through the door you had locked"

"Ben, Yep that's the one thing I can't figure out, I investigated that and looked around to see if I could understand what happened but to no avail."

"Can you think of anyone who you think is involved in this incident?"

"No way, I don't know anything, this is the first time something like this has happened in all of my years of service." He defended himself in this manner.

Based on what I heard as his defence, I was convinced that he was lying. Primarily because he had the keys to the main door and there is no way the thief could have come in or out of the hostel any other way. I figured I should ask around some more.

I asked around again. In our compound there are three ladies hostels that face each other. I called the other hostel's night peons, and in secrecy started interrogating him. Out of all of the peons, one of them spoke up and told me that on the same night the incident had occurred, he had seen our hostel's peon discussing something with the University's security guard outside the door of our hostel. That's it!! With the strength of this truth, I felt God was helping me to achieve justice in this incident and I will be successful in getting to the bottom of it for the girls. I again called our peon to my home and I took him into confidence and asked him to tell me the whole truth. I told him, *I've figured out all of the details and if you try to lie about anything you'll be caught red handed.* If you tell me the truth, then I will ensure that you are not punished for what you have done. I promise you that. If you make any excuses and don't tell the truth you'll get further entangled in the issue and it'll get much worse for you. Then once the university knows about what happened you'll likely lose your job.

You have no option but to tell me the truth, and by doing so you'll save yourself from the police.

He took heed of my words and started sobbing. Ben, please save me, if this gets out I'll lose my job and everything and I will end up a street beggar. You are compassionate, and therefore I trust you that you'll save me from my fate. Today I will tell you the full reality of what

happened and I promise you that i'll never do something like this again. Ben, all these years I behaved honestly in my job at the hostel. But since this security officer has come along, all of us peons have been experiencing a lot of challenges. The officer is threatening that he could do anything to anyone at anytime. So, all of us are very afraid of him. The security officer with his gang makes us do these types of activities. But, no one is standing up to him out of fear of repercussion. Today, since you have promised me, I have faith you could report him to the university.

The peon, opened up and told me his story of how the leader of this incident was the security officer. Based on his planning, he had set up multiple gang members around the perimeter of the hostel and had sent one of the members in to the hostel to steal the necklace. The peon had been told to keep the door open and not lock it and at that time the peon was to remain in the bathroom. The security officer had said "My gang will quickly finish this job, no one will ever know. You have nothing to fear" if anything happens then take my name and you'll be off the hook, I'll take responsibility for that. This job will be done in about 10-15 mins, if you don't listen to me and don't do this, you'll lose your job and your family will fall on hard times. Ben, I was very scared so I agreed to go along with what he was asking me to do.

Based on his plan, if the girl hadn't gotten up

then no one would have ever known what had happened. He's been doing a lot of these types of activities. I told the peon that I was thankful for the fact that he had told me the truth and I promised him that he won't be persecuted at all for these events because he had been so open with me. Because, this chapter was so quietly and easily closed I felt a sense of relief and was thankful to God for his unwavering support.

Now my main job was to document and communicate to the university on how their security officer whose job was to protect the students had turned and become the violator and was preying on the students himself. I had to report this to the Chairman himself. I had to ensure that in the report I clearly outline how this security officer could be dangerous to the students in the future.

I also informed the Chairman that this wasn't the first incident where the security officer was involved. With the fact that we have now these two incidents involving the security officer, we must act swiftly and ensure that he is reprimanded appropriately.

The Chairman was shocked and quickly took steps to rectify the situation. He ran a further investigation and spoke to many departments and each one reported back that the officer was corrupt. Thus my case was even strengthened further by the investigation.

After all of the investigations were completed, the Chairman sent us a notification that the

university's committee had made a decision to fire the security officer. This surely was a drastic step for the University. It brought in a great sense of relief for the hostel girls.

I am happy to say that Sarojini Devi hostel was made safer by one woman who fearlessly fought the intruder. All the students who lived in the hostel saw this incident as an encouragement to defend themselves when something like this happened. This story of greed does not end here.

Oneday the local newspaper ran a very important headline for me. On the front page the headline read "The security officer who previously worked in the University was caught along with his gang in a robbery incident."! This proved how important and timely our work was!

19th Aug. 2013

Translation by Paulomi & Leela Gudka

“MANISHA”

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda is renowned the world over. Because of the English Medium here, students from all over the world come here to study. The University has Faculties teaching all subjects. It is also noteworthy that there are many residential hostels for students coming from different parts of the country and abroad. Thus there are thousands of students residing on this campus.

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda deserves the credit for this love for knowledge. I was appointed as a warden of Sarojini Naidu Hall of the M. S. University. This opportunity provided the valuable experience of residing in the academic atmosphere and understanding the cultural diversities of India through the students.

In Sarojinidevi Hall, Gujarati girl students from families residing in Africa are in a sizable number. Because of this a little Africa is created here. They assemble at leisure at night and enjoy gossiping-talking. Sometimes I also join their pleasant company. I feel happy seeing these girls enjoying in this manner. Often these girls come to my room bringing their problems and find the solutions.

Just as events happen in people's lives, they also happen in the life of a hostel. I write about one such incident.

One afternoon after lunch, when I was about to lie down for rest, there was a knock on the

door. I saw Sunita and her friend at the door. I saw their sad faces and invited them in to talk. Amidst sobs, Sunita narrated her problem. "I was in a hurry to go to the train station to receive a friend. I always put my gold necklace and bracelet on the ledge when I take a bath, and wear them after, but today in a hurry, I forgot to do so. On return, I checked and the items were gone. I was nervous and asked around, but no one knew anything about it. So we came to you for guidance."

I was concerned about such an incident and comforted Sunita by telling her that these things do happen, but they also get resolved; she should calm down and take it easy. My mind went full speed on figuring out how to investigate, and identifying who can be trusted. I scanned my mind for experienced and mature students who could make discreet inquiries. A few faces popped up in my mind. I told them about the incident, and asked them to inquire about the culprit; but there were no results.

I visited Sunita's room frequently to console her, and tell her to have faith. Her mother had specially made this for her and she was embarrassed to lose it. We were losing hope as time passed by. One evening, my call bell rang and I saw Manisha, one of my confidantes, with a happy face.

Manisha said, "I have pleasant news for you. I was very much disturbed by seeing Sunita's pain, and I tried extra hard to investigate. So, I

met Sunita and her friends and prepared a timeline of events. I checked with the servant ladies about the ins and outs of people during that timeframe, assuring them of their safety and secrecy. I was worried about police involvement and its effect on us. The ladies gave a few names, but they were afraid of direct involvement. So, I took it in my hands to inquire.

They suggested Hema. I did not know her very well, so when I visited her, she became anxious. Then I explained that there is a possibility that the warden will involve the police, and if they undertake inquiries, it would be bad for the hostel's reputation. In addition, the thief would be in very big trouble. But if the thief were to confide in the warden, the thief would be protected from public humiliation."

Listening to me, Hema became afraid. She felt she could trust me. Hema told the truth that she got tempted with easy money, but now she was afraid that her career would be ruined. I assured her that the warden is understanding, and will help and save her.

Hema thought that through. She had lost the nerve to face the warden. She asked me to deliver the jewelry to you on her behalf. So here I am. Here is the jewelry. Now I will tell Hema that all is well, and this will really comfort Hema."

I felt I was in a dreamland, and Manisha was an angel. I felt the Grace of the Almighty within me. I felt I was chosen to deliver peace to Sunita. It was a divine moment for me. Only God's Grace

could have resolved such a situation in five days. It was about time Sunita's pained face turned into a wide smiley one.

I hurried to Sunita's room to feel this Grace again. Sunita's friends were trying to make her feel better. All the girls looked at me with anticipation. "Distribute sweets today!" I exclaimed. Suddenly, cheerfully the girls hugged me. I gave the jewelry to Sunita. Everybody became ecstatic, and a dance of joy evolved. It felt as though tree leaves were playfully fluttering in nice, cool breezes after the rain.

What I surmise from this incident is that, what is really yours cannot be taken away. We lose faith when troubles come, but we should hold onto faith and not allow anything to shake it. We have been given strength in the form of faith. As in this incident, what was lost did come back in its own time!

Sunita was curious about how the jewelry was found, and how the culprit was caught, but I told her to let it go, and just be happy that she got it back. The main thing I have to mention is that the genuine desire to help, and concern for others' well-being, is a great virtue. This particular virtue of Manisha is what brought the story to a happy end.

The real jewel found in this incident is Manisha. She is an ornament to our hostel.

Translation by Mrs. Chitra Sharad

GROUP SPIRIT

M. S. University in Baroda is a renowned place of learning. Under massive Neem trees, students and professors busily walk through the campus, conversing about studies. Laughter and productivity resonate throughout the area. It has a large sprawling campus that houses 20 dormitories/hostels and each hostel holds about 300 students. Campus life for students involves not only studies but socializing and of course, eating. Food services and meal quality and plans along with the bill for meals become much debated issues for students. As the "warden" or Resident Advisor of an all girl hostel, I would deal directly with these issues.

A while ago I had learned that students at Ahmedabad's Gujarat University had gone on strike due to issues in food bills and the matter had become very serious. The warden of any dorm bears full responsibility for providing quality meals at a reasonable rate. When I took charge of this hostel, the first step I took was to meet with the "working committee" of senior girls. My intention was to learn firsthand about any issues in the hostel and have a close, collegial relationship so problems can get solved efficiently; so these girls could focus on their studies. I had assured them that I would work alongside of them to get to the root cause of issues and reach viable solutions.

At the very first meeting the working committee registered their concerns about the food bill increasing each month. I assured them that I would investigate it and come back with solutions that would satisfy all the parties involved.

The very next day I took bull by the horn and started working on resolving this issue. I called the kitchen staff and asked them to bring their account books. I spoke to the staff that this is our first meeting and we need to come together and share a vision for our responsibilities towards the students. At that meeting, I outlined our common vision that not a single penny should be wasted in purchasing groceries, supplies and equipment required to prepare food and maintain the kitchen. I told the staff that I am not going to dig up the past but as of today I clearly expected full fiscal responsibility from each person. I emphatically stated that not even a small infraction would be tolerated.

We established some ground rules, guidelines and an action plan to reach our goals. We included some senior students from the working committee to make sure that they understood how the food bill was developed and charged. Our transparent system yielded effective results soon. The food bill went down and the food quality went up. What a seesaw at the hostel! Was everyone happy? No! I did hear grumbling from some kitchen staff but I was thrilled that we were making good progress and every month the girls started enjoying the dropping food bill. We reached our goal. Our food bill was

the lowest amongst all the other hostels in the university and we became campus talk.

I had no idea that my action plan would have such ripples. The Pro Vice Chancellor of the University commended me at a meeting and asked other wardens to implement similar action plans and working environment.

We learned a lot from this experience and achievement. Any new endeavor brings changes – some goods; some bad. We have to be ready to deal with both.

It did not end here. Let me share how these changes created a cyclone brewing over me.

Mornings at a girls' hostel is an amazing experience. With the rising sun, you can hear the chirping and joyful songs of birds. Just in this manner, the hostel explodes with sounds in the morning. Girls rushing headlong to the bathroom to get dressed; complaining of running late; girls talking to staff about what to clean and what to leave alone; girls gathered around the table doing justice to breakfast. All the flurry of activity teaches these young women to take responsibility for themselves and their learning. The morning rituals are an integral part of any hostel culture and education.

On one such morning, I heard some curious sounds. The lady custodian was telling the girls that meals not be served today as the kitchen staff was on strike! My ears instantly perked up in concern. What was I hearing? The kitchen that I run and am

in charge of is closed – locked. And I did not even have a hint?

I ran towards the kitchen and what I saw when I got there shocked me. Where there would be pots of food cooking-daal, bhaat, shaak – was completely empty. The burners were off and no aroma of “vaghar” in the air. The head cook and kitchen staff was nowhere to be found.

Aha! It was the head cook – the culprit behind the crisis. He had called a no-work strike and the staff had joined him. I was stunned. I had no idea of any unmet demands, or concerns at all. How had they decided on such an irresponsible action? I was concerned about 300 girls being fed breakfast. These students would need to pack lunch.

Immediately I called a meeting with food committee students to discuss the crisis and develop some sort of response. During this meeting we discussed how the new action probably cramped the kitchen supervisor's extra income. Most kitchen supervisors negotiate kickbacks from vendors. With our new plan the supervisor had to maintain transparent accounts. This left no room for higher bids and kick back income; so he must have instigated this strike. He used the staff as his weapons in this fight.

I saw the head cook and his staff sitting out in the back yard. They were also without food – no breakfast; not even tea. What to do? My committee and I decided to start taking charge and getting to

work in the kitchen. I met the head cook and asked him what the essential issue was. He told me that cost of living had gone up but their salaries had not increased. If you increase our wages, we will get back to work. No pay raise, no work! I asked if they had ever requested this before using proper channels and he responded that they had not. I reminded them that when we formed the new committee, raises and facilities were improved. So, why out of the blue would they be demanding more pay now?

It was really hard for me to digest and comprehend why they were doing what they were doing. I told them that the only way to solve this would be to go through the proper channels and negotiations.

This did not solve the problem of 300 hungry girls waiting for food. I knew I would have to solve this crisis with military strategy. I rang the emergency bell and called all the girls to a meeting in the main hall. I told the girls that we have a crisis. The kitchen staff is twisting our arms and demanding more pay. They think that we will not be able to function without them. We have a choice. We can fight or we can submit. Right away, the main hall was filled with righteous shouts of "We fight! We fight!" (Nahi Jukenge, Nahi Jukenge). I was proud and excited to see the energy of these ladies. I shouted over the din, "Let's go! I am with you!"

With this type of enthusiasm we organized ourselves into work groups. Some went to cut vegetables; some to make the dough for roti; others worked to fire up the big stoves and get the daal and bhaat cooking. In just a small amount of time, the kitchen was humming with activity.

Laughter and harmony filled the kitchen. Girls excitedly showed off their cooking and organizational talents. I could hardly contain my joy. The same girls who fussed around about their hair and clothes were now mature ladies tackling this problem with courage, energy and enthusiasm. It is always more fun to work as a team and these energized women had the table set with plates, spoons, bowls and napkins before the noon lunch hour. Even I was assigned a job. Today, my heart filled with happiness as I called out the names of each girl in a triumphant roll call.

At exactly noon we began lunch and the girls went off to classes as usual. It was amazing to see such strength, courage and wisdom from the girls. It was a matter of pride for the university. But what about the main issue? The head cook and his staff was still outside, hungry, tired, waiting, watching.

How long can anyone hold out on someone else's word? The head cook was not a political person. He was just a pawn in the big union games. He came to me with his hands folded and apologized for the error of his ways. He said they want to put the whole matter behind them and get

back to work. The girls and I warmly welcomed them back. The girls who had not gone to classes told the kitchen staff that today they would be treated to lunch at the table. The staff blushed and said please don't embarrass us this way. Saying this they all ran off to the kitchen.

On this day the ladies of Sarojinidevi Hostel learned how to fight against injustice and politics; how to stand shoulder to shoulder and work as a team. I know each one of the girls remembers this day fondly in their hearts as they recreated a mini-Hindustan-full of civic fervor and independence. These 300 women raised the flag of co-operation, unity and made the University proud.

Translated by Mita Badshah

PRASANNA

Even now whenever I remember Prasanna, a student in my hostel, my mind becomes cheerful. Her name exemplified her character. I am remembering her today after a long time!

The word Prasanna means a flower that is smiling and blossoming. The twinkle in her eyes would make you forget your sorrow. When she would talk, the time would fly. She mingled with everyone like sugar in milk. Such was my Prasanna.

Prasanna studied at the Home-Science College and was bright student. When I remember this pleasant girl, one incident in particular comes to my mind. It was about a situation that came up very unexpectedly.

Soon after arriving in the hostel, Prasanna became very popular due to her friendly nature. Her cheerfulness also attracted me. One day she told me, "Aunty I am engaged and my fiancé is pursuing his PhD in the USA. He is a very bright student and is also encouraging me to study. Our dream is that I get my M.Sc. degree from here. My in-laws also stay close to Vadodara and he is their only son. They all love me and are very supportive of my education." I was very happy to know all this. She was lucky to be married in such cultured family. What could be better then this?

Things were running smoothly and suddenly an unexpected challenge came up. This is likely due to bad karma. Let me narrate to you how a small situation turned out to be a big problem and how solving that was a real challenge. One afternoon my peon came and told me, "Ben, Prasanna's in-laws have come to meet you." I called them in my house. They looked worried. I started with casual conversations to lighten the mood. They said, "We are having some problems and that's why we have come. We are sure that you will be able to help us out. We know that you care for Prasanna and she also respects you like a mother." I told them, "You are right. Prasanna is like my daughter and I respect her a lot. If she is in trouble, then I will try hard to solve it, you do not worry at all. There is always a solution to any problem." That gave them comfort and they started sharing their concern.

"Prasanna has not been attending her classes for some time. This was because during one of her classes, she got into an argument with her teacher related to her class work. Very quickly it turned into a heated exchange. The teacher became very angry and asked Prasanna to get out of the class. Unable to bear the insult, Prasanna left the class hurt. She went home and cried. She then decided she would never attend this teacher's class and also she would quit her studies altogether. Her pride was hurt and she felt very depressed."

"She then told everything to our son and also mentioned that she would not be going back to the

college to the same teacher. Our son was very worried after reading her letter and so he wrote back to her to calm her down. But she was very upset and could not be consoled. She wrote back to him that I do not plan to study ahead and so will not be able to fulfill your dreams of marrying an educated wife. However I do have a solution for this. I believe that we call off our engagement so you are then free to get married to other educated girl, and I will give my full consent to this."

"Our son loved Prasanna and so he was very worried after reading this letter. He is extremely wise and does not want to break this relationship at any cost. He understands that she is still in shock and the only remedy to this is time. Her mind should calm down after some time has passed. Our son has written to us that we all should not worry as, 'I am sure it will get better with time, please go and meet Mrs. Urmilaben who is the warden of the hostel. Prasanna has very good relations with her and that will be good for her.' That is the reason why we are here to meet you with the hope of solving this problem."

I was alarmed to learn this. I could not believe this could have happened to Prasanna as I knew her nature. However, I had to accept that sometimes these things can happen in life.

I consoled her in-laws and told them not to worry. I told them, "I know her teacher well and knowing Prasanna's mature nature, I am sure we

could solve this problem. I will start working on it right away." I calmed them down so they left a little relieved.

Prasanna's story made me feel very sad. I could not forget her smiling face. It was hard to believe that this could have happened to her. So much had happened and she had just kept it to herself. She had not told me also. I knew I would have to be careful. I knew her teacher well and she also respected me. She was known to get angry easily at students and so some students did not like her. For these reasons I was worried as to how I would solve this problem. I knew that by trying patiently, positive results would come.

The next day I called Prasanna's friend and asked her to give me all the details. She said, "Prasanna does not go to college and sits in her room alone and keeps thinking. She is in a very delicate mental state. I am trying to convince her and I have also suggested her to come to you to discuss this issue. She is not ready to do this as she is afraid people will know about her situation. For now she has decided that she will not go back to attend this teacher's class."

After learning this, I called Prassana to my home. She came but appeared very sad. After some casual conversations, I got to the point. I started asking her why she was not going to the college. Prasanna told me about the incidence with her teacher and said, "Aunty, I am not going to attend

her class." I tried to calm her down. I wanted her to understand that she should confront any situation that she face in life. Instead of giving up, one should look for alternative solutions. I told her to think more about this, and to not feel pressurized. I advised her not to quit her studies. I told her she is unnecessarily becoming a victim of this situation, and so was her family.

I could see that Prasanna was feeling calmer and beginning to think positively. I took this opportunity to point out that I knew her teacher well and we mutually respected each other so this should help us. I suggested, that if she agrees then we can meet with the teacher.

Prasanna appeared relieved but still could not forgo the bitterness in her heart. She said, "Aunty, I do feel good after talking to you and I do agree with what you say but I do want some time to think over this. So after two days I will come to meet you." We agreed to do this as I did not want to put pressure on her. She thanked me and left.

Next day I went to meet the teacher. In the past I had met her for some issues with other students. She was happy to see me. She appeared less angry and ready to resolve the issue. I took this opportunity and told her about how both her and Prasanna were like my daughters and that I was proud of both of them. My wish was successful resolution of this issue from both the sides. The teacher said she would work on this. I was very happy to hear this.

We then started discussing how to solve this. The teacher said, "I know Prasanna is an able and bright student. But sometimes situations turn and unexpected things do happen. But I really wish that she pursues her studies further. We both shall work on this." She said there was one way to do this: "You will have to convince Prasanna to come to my class once."

"I know that she is scared but once she comes to my class, I will make her feel welcomed and comfortable." I also thought that this was a respectful way for both of them and so I agreed.

Now the question I had was whether Prasanna would agree to this. Would her self respect get hurt? How could I prepare her? I started to lose sleep over this. But faith in the Lord-Bhagwan is amazing as it always gives you real peace.

The next day Prasanna came to meet me. I could see that she had quietened down and was ready to make a decision. She came forward and told me, "Aunty I think you are right. I am very much interested in studies and my fiancé also wants the same. I encouraged her and told her about my meeting with her teacher. I told her about the teacher's positive response in detail. I said, "She knows your interest in education and she is hoping that you start your studies back soon. She is waiting to welcome you to her class, so you should go ahead and start attending the class. "Prasanna was still skeptical about her teacher's response.

She was afraid to get insulted in front of her friends. I also got little worried after seeing her response. It will not help unless both the parties cooperate. I kept thinking of the solution.

At last I asked Prasanna how to solve this and if she had any answers. Prasanna thought a little and said to me, "Aunty, I am scared to go alone but if you accompany me then I don't mind going. I was a little afraid that the teacher may not like this. It was important however not to miss this opportunity but at the same time to preserve their self-respects. Therefore, I said to Prasanna, "I will go with you but I will only be in the background so nobody will notice me. I was sure that as soon as the teacher saw Prasanna, she would call her inside and I would stand in the corner unnoticed by the teacher. That way, I would not be in the picture when they both met with each other. So, I told her I would join her. Prasanna was very happy to hear this. We both left for the college and I could see Prasanna's enthusiasm.

I had informed the teacher about Prasanna's arrival and so she was ready to welcome her. Prasanna arrived in her original enthusiastic nature and stepped at the door. As soon as she reached there the teacher got up from the chair and said 'welcome', embracing her. Prasanna also embraced her happily. I watched from a distance with tears of joy in my eyes. I could see her fiancé's dream of higher education being fulfilled and the smiling faces of the in-laws in front of my eyes.

The next morning Prasanna came to my house with her in-laws. Seeing her smiling face, the in-laws embraced me with joy. Prasanna's face beamed with determination, and they shared sweets and good wishes with me.

Today, upon remembering Prasanna's incidence, I feel like sharing few thoughts without which this will not complete.

"The mind is very fickle. It jumps to hasty conclusions in a fraction of a second. It is hard to tame this mind. During critical moments if one exercise patience and if decisions are made with understanding then many adversities can be avoided. This incidence proves that in this fast moving world, many adverse situations can be avoided though exercising patience and quieting the mind."

Translation by Urvi Mehta

WHERE A THOUSAND AND FLOWERS BLOOM

It is in the nature of flowers to bloom and fill the air with their fragrance. It is even more so in a flower garden. Such flowers beautify the world and make it worth living in. This is equally true about another creation of nature, people, some of whom fill the world with their good deeds and thereby propagate their "fragrance". Such actions by people should be universal, but the question is: Why is such human "fragrance" becoming rare? Where has the human being gone wrong? Why is the symbiotic relationship between nature and humans breaking down? Why have the streams of love dried out? Looking around us today, it is natural that such questions arise in our mind, but there are no satisfactory answers. Nevertheless, I continue to try.

While searching for answers to my questions. I came across a real-life story and I started feeling that perhaps the people in this story can answer my questions. The story is about one hundred years old, but the fragrance left by the people remains immortal. A vivid picture emerges of an extended family's intertwined relationships when we remember their story. They also point the way towards resolving and solving the complex questions and conflicts that arise in modern life. The hope that we

can all learn to correct our ways has prompted me to bring this story to you.

I start this story by "Once upon a time...". Life was much simpler then; problems were easily solved by the sagacity of people. Extended families lived interdependent lives and everything was shared. Respect towards other family members and mutual duties were paramount in their lives. "Mine" was subordinated to "ours". Karamchandbhai was born in one such family. The family was poor. His father was industrious and honest, but a lack of education severely limited his income. The situation was so bad that this nine-member family could not get even two square meals a day. Karamchandbhai's mother Indraben was a self-respecting, calm, and cultured lady. She tried to augment the meager household income by performing menial work for her neighbors. Thus, she was able to marry off her five daughters in spite of the family's difficult financial situation. She also understood the importance of education and so borrowed money to educate her two sons Karamchandbhai and Dosabhai. Her sons had experienced first hand how people treated their family because of its financial situation, but their parents' resilience had taught the two sons some important lessons. The two worked hard to improve their family's condition and, due to the grace of God, their hard work paid off and their financial situation improved beyond all dreams. But, alas, their father did not live to enjoy the fruits of his son's labors.

The sons, however, were determined to fill their mother's old age with all the material comforts they could provide and so they used their newly-earned wealth to acquire a house, car, servants, and other means of making their her life comfortable. Despite these material comforts, the two brothers were deeply sad that their success came too late for their father.

Just as surely as day follows night, the two sons' hard work and God's grace were also followed by the marriage of the older Dosabhai and the birth of a child to his wife. Soon, the grandmother Indraben was completely absorbed in bringing up Dosabhai's two sons and four daughters. Then, a suitable bride was found for the younger Karamchandbhai who, reflecting the family's prosperity, was married in a ceremony notable for the lavish banquet organized for their entire community. Their ancestors' family culture was still alive and well, and was evident in the harmonious life Indraben, and her sons and their respective families lived. As time went by, however, emptiness was felt in this extended family's life by the inability of Karamchandbhai and his wife Manekben to have a child. A medical examination revealed that, due to some physiological problem, Manekben could not conceive. This news shocked everyone in the family. But, everyone had to accept what nature had ordained.

Everyone, that is, except Manekben who proposed that Karamchandbhai should marry again

to have a child. Her husband, however, would not even hear about this proposal and refused to marry again to safeguard Manekben's stake and status in the family. So, Manekben worked on Indraben who then convinced Karamchandbhai that this arrangement could work. Karamchandbhai reluctantly agreed and Indraben found another suitable bride, Gulabben, for him. Family tradition dictated that everyone live together harmoniously in the extended family and so Gulabben was accepted into the family by everyone with enthusiasm and love. Indraben was beside herself with joy when Gulabben and Karamchandbhai fulfilled the purpose for which the second marriage had taken place. In her old age, she would often tell stories of the family's earlier hardships to her grandchildren to pass on the experience to future generations. Fully satisfied with the fruits of her hard work, she passed away leaving this large extended family consisting of her two sons, their three wives, and many grandchildren.

Dosabhai and Karamchadbhai, much saddened by the loss of their mother, wanted to keep their parents' memory alive and spread the light their parents had brought to their life to other people. So, they established a Trust fund to perform good deeds. Among other deeds, they founded the first school for the girls in the Kutch district, the Indraben Girls School, with modern sports facilities and a well-stocked library, where girls are provided education free of charge. A countless number of girls have benefited from this School to this day.

They also built a facility in the city to teach girls to sew clothes where thousands of girls have learned this skill and become self-sufficient. Across the street from the school, the brothers built a "Dharmashala" – an inn for pilgrims – named after their late father. Even today after 80 years, this Dharmashala provides all those who want to spend the night or a few days with a well-maintained and clean place to stay. The good intentions of the two brothers in establishing these institutions are so palpably clear to the people of the city and the district that they have also participated in these institutions' activities with joy and without any petty politics.

In the mean time, due to the grace of God and the blessings of Indraben and her late husband, the number of children in the extended family increased to 18. But, still, the family tradition prevailed and the entire family lived under one roof harmoniously. Manekben treated Karamchandbhai – Gulabben's children as her own despite occasional petty disputes between her and Gulabben. Everyone kept the entire family's interests in mind and smoothed over difficulties inherent in such a large extended family.

This story has taught me that it is very important to stay focused on what is important in life. While it is very easy to see faults in others, one's own adaptability to others' needs and nature should take precedence in the interest of the greater good. One last example from Manekben's life proves

this point. She had lived her life very peacefully for others and her death was also consistent with her life. One morning, she prepared an offering to take to a temple as was her daily ritual. Before going to the temple, she sat for one hour in meditation so that her soul would become free from all worldly attachments. Before she finished the meditation, she became unconscious. Other family members quickly rushed to her aid and tried to revive her by feeding her drinking water. Manekben revived for a moment and told them not to feed her water as she had vowed to become free from all worldly attachments. Then, she passed away just as a driver was preparing the family car to take her to the temple. It was as if her preparation of the ritual offering to God and her vow to become free from all worldly attachments had taken her in God's presence. What a way to live life and to leave life! What a blooming of a family of flowers in nature's garden!

Translation by Dr. Vikram Mehta

LIFE: A THREE PART PLAY

[Note: This is a true story. The lady in this story is a Maharastrian woman who currently lives in Mumbai, India. She told me her life story, and upon hearing it . I could not resist from sharing her hardships and making her story known].

Life has many seasons: glorious Spring, with new beginnings and flower buds blossoming into life, joyous Summer, in which families meet their loved ones and celebrate the wonderful sunlight, yet some are destined to live their life in Fall. Fall can be beautiful, but for our protagonist, it means a life full of unwarranted grief and life shattering events. Life is full of happy and sad moments, all of which flow in a stream of emotion that transcends time. From the present, I am unveiling the curtains from the dreadful past.

ACT ONE: CHILDHOOD

Childhood is always a happy phase of life. As kids, we do not have any worries or trouble – we are simply a body bubbling with joy, up and down, with a mind constantly playing hide-and-seek, as if you are a worry free monk. I, unfortunately, did not have such a childhood. My childhood was riddled with responsibilities.

My middle class family was teeming with young children. I was the eldest child and a daughter, so

from baby-sitting my siblings to completing house chores, my responsibilities were piling up on me and I would assume them naturally. Sometimes I wanted to play hide and seek, or play tag, or just get soaked in rain or jump from a tree like Hanumanji – but the shackles of being the eldest daughter would not allow me to have fun.

Luckily, I had a safe haven in my chore-filled life: school. School was my favorite time of the day because it was my own time. I use to feel relieved by talking freely with my friends and feel like a real child. But this innocent childhood went away very quickly, and suddenly I was a teenager.

The world was changing in front of me. I started sensing the chemistry between men and women. My mind was clouded by fantasies. What may have been random flirtations started seeming real. The spring of youth was wrapping me in it's whirlwind.

I had entered young adulthood. It was an exciting yet confusing phase of life. But when did my parents worry about my confused mind at this tender age? They did not even know about sexuality and sexual urges. This ignorance about sexuality was so common-place in society that it was almost hereditary. My parents did not have any formal education about sexual drives of growing youth.

The trouble is that this ignorance is still prevalent today. In the educated world, this subject has been openly discussed and addressed. From

my experience, I feel that academic knowledge without educations about sexuality is like zeros without a one-insignificant. So many young girls have been trapped in this ignorant whirlwind of sexuality. I used to have many questions about my sexuality, but I had no one to resort to or confide in. My school friends use to confess their confusion and ignorance about the subject with me – oh what a pathetic, scary state!

Although I was raising my siblings, I had no idea how they were beings born. Even today, I am not sure who will teach young innocent girls that the circumstances around you are like werewolves and that digressions are associated with severe consequences. Who will give the true knowledge about sexuality to these young girls? Such innocence is lost even before the innocence blooms. Such girls end up in terrible spots in society. They become pregnant without their knowledge or they end up with diseases. Parents end up helping their helpless child or sadly some of them end up committing suicide. I have experienced this terrible feeling.

ACT -2: YOUTH

I was 18 and my youth was in full bloom. Lovebirds were getting ready to fly in my heart. I was being sucked into situation without my own awareness. I started liking a young, handsome boy. It was love at first sight for the both of us. Youth was on our side. He was a very loving and caring

boy. He was about four years older than me so neither one of us understood the real world. We would secretly meet, providing trust and comfort to each other and dream of a lovely life together.

We were getting serious. We vowed to marry each other and start building our dreams without any foundation of reality. It was becoming difficult to meet secretly, with all sorts of social policing and under the watchful eyes of our parents. But who can conquer the love of lovebirds? We were so absorbed in each other that we forgot the rest of the world. Time was moving fast and finally time itself revealed the truth. Slowly, signs of our love life were taking shape on my body. My mother became very cautious. She kept a very close eye on me.

My problem was that I was ignorant of my own situation. I had no knowledge about this subject. I was afraid of my mother's questioning eyes. I was beginning to understand her concerns. I never imagined that my love will express publicly so quickly. The result of my action sent a chill down my spine. For the first time, I realized my reality.

After revealing my indiscretions to my mother, she explained what was happening to my body. She understood and immediately took control of the situation. She started looking into my lover's family very closely. She soon concluded that he was useless, and not worthy of my hand in marriage. The reason why, however, was unclear to me.

My mother informed me of why our marriage

would be impossible; my boyfriend belonged to a wealthier family and was from a higher class. No one in his family would care for me, especially given the circumstances. His family was so aristocratic, that they would not even throw a sideways glance in my direction. I was ignorant of the oppressed life that spoiled brats like my boyfriend lived; he was completely helpless. I realized that a man who does not work for his own money, and has no sense of earning, is not a true man. When I realized all of this, it was too late. My mom concluded that if we wasted any more time, then people and society would destroy the rest of my life.

To get out of my misery, my mother thought long and hard. Her wisdom bore its fruit. Under false pretense, she took me to a small, unknown village near Pune. In due time, my first daughter was born. My mother planned ahead. After leaving my daughter in the safety an orphanage, my mother and I returned to Bombay. There was some gossip, but the matter shortly resolved itself. People became busy with new gossip and forgot about my incident.

Now my mother wanted me to get married soon. My pregnancy ruined my value as a potential bride. I had to accept whoever was willing to marry me. No one felt the need to understand me or help me. Love was out of the question. I was trapped in the social norms. I was living the life of a dead body. I could not understand for what fault of mine was my life so miserable. Why did I lose the right to express my own views of desires? I was getting

confused within the rigid walls of my house.

Finally, my mother found a quick fix for my marriage. The dates were fixed soon after. There was a simple reason for this quick marriage. Both sets of parents were trying to solve their children's troubles. I had no right to question the whole thing. I was to quietly agree to the marriage. Under such a tense and awkward situation, I was welcomed into my in-law's residence.

The reason behind the groom's insistence on the marriage became apparent after the first night; my husband told me that he was not interested in marrying me. So even though we were married, we would not live or be husband and wife. His parents had forced him to marry me to fulfill their wishes. He already liked another girl and he was determined to marry her. Where would I go for justice? I was speechless. I had to follow the marching orders of my new lord. There was nothing like bravery left in me anymore. Again, I was a victim of circumstances. My husband then told me how I should help him. He had his plans made out, and in fact, with my help, it was going to be easy for him. Everything started happening per our plan. His only trouble was that the girl's parents also did not agree on their marriage, so we had to abduct my husband's true love. We planned the event in stages. We left his home in Mumbai under the false pretense of a Honeymoon. The second day, my husband went to meet his girlfriend at a predetermined place. He waited, and waited, and

waited, but luck was not with him – she never showed up.

Every day, my husband would religiously return to that place and wait for his lover to arrive, but he would always return home in despair. Finally, he lost hope. The truth again revealed itself. Upon inquiry, it turned out that her parents were aware of my husband and their daughter's relationship, and had arranged her wedding secretly at her uncle's home. She was married overnight. My husband could not handle the shock of her marriage, and committed suicide of a railway track the next day.

I was cornered. I was a burden on my in-laws. There is no end to selfishness- I had my first experience. Who would help someone like me other than my parents? My in-laws sent me back to my parents, where I was still a basket of problems for my own family. And soon upon my return, my mother started spinning the wheels of marriage and once again, I was a victim of it.

In the first act, I was gifted with motherhood without a wedding, and in the second act, I was married and then suddenly a widow. I could hardly imagine what hell and third act of life would bring. My mother's search resulted in yet another life partner for me. I was completing 24 at that time. My youth had blossomed, and I was hopeful that a young man would come into my life and complete my heart. Unfortunately, my hopes and dreams were no defense against destruction.

Finally, my second wedding day came. The band was playing in the front yard. A forty-five-year old man showed up on the doorstep for the wedding. I suddenly sprouted goose bumps of fear—was that my future husband? The band was playing so loudly that no one could hear my muffled sobs. I felt like a fish trapped in the fish net society. The wedding began. Right next to the groom, there was a forty-year old lady that was clearly in charge of the wedding event. It was then that my new reality dawned on me; the lady was my groom's first wife. I was going to be the forty-five-years old man's mistress.

I felt like I was entering the jail of marriage under close watch. The trouble was that my husband himself was a victim of this strict jailer-type woman. I went to that house mechanically. How can I call it my home? How can I call my house when husband's first wife was already there?

I learned that in reality, my husband and his first wife had a very good relationship and were financially secure, but they did not have a child. So, I was being sacrificed to fulfill their desire for a child. I was just a surrogate woman brought in the house to bear children.

I had to follow strict rules in this relationship. I was to stay with my husband only to bear the child, and he would be my husband only to impregnate me and call himself the father of the child. I had to sacrifice my gift of motherhood as if it was not my

right. To love and raise my own biological children was not an option. My husband had ordered that on behalf of his first wife. There was no question about what my wish was or was not. The reigns were in his first wife's hands, and my life was steered in any directions that she wished. I had to live in this jail, which I was to call my home. Even my maternal family was not going to help me this time.

Under these circumstances, my life continued on. I was the mother of three children, but I felt that the fruits of my labor were stolen right out of my hands. I carried and gave birth to three children, but had no right to call them my own. Thus, sadly, what is meant to be the joyous Spring season of one's life turned into the miserable season of Fall.

Today, I am forty-five-years old. I have entered the fourth phase of my life. My husband passed away, and his first wife is now an elderly lady. Along with living life, I have learned a lot through my experiences. Today, an inner strength has given me a new life. Now, I know that inner strength very well. Wielding this strength, I have seized full control of my life and circumstances. My children are all grown up, and I was able to plant some seeds of wisdom into them at the appropriate time. With God's grace and my few grains of wisdom, my children are leading a good life.

Having seen the result of finding my own inner strength, I wonder what life would have been like if someone had helped me seek this strength earlier

in my life. I could have liberated myself from the clutches of my circumstances rather than helplessly waste my youth away. I hope that this story will help someone else learn from my mistakes and realize that they, too, have the inner strength to overcome anything. I hope people that read my story are inspired to persevere through all of life's ups and downs, and realize that they have the strength to do so.

I have a special request to all parents: raise your sons valiantly to be like Shivaji, one of the greatest warriors in Indian history, but also raise your daughters to be powerful and strong like Jansi ki Rani.

Translation by Dr. Uday Nanavati

LEARNING IS LIVING

"Indrabai Girls High school" is a jewel of Goddess Saraswati, in the capital city of Kutch. This school is the pride of Bhuj. All of the girls in the district come there to receive their education and they all live brilliant lives. The flags of Knowledge fly high on this school, and they relay the story of two brothers who cultivated this garden of knowledge with their herculean efforts, generous donations, and full dedication to their purpose.

Two brothers named Karamchandbhai and Dosabhai are the main pillars of this institute and this abode of learning is their living dream. To understand how their dream became reality, we have to know their life history. Both were born in financial poverty. Their father, Laachandbhai, was an honest, simple and hardworking fellow. In spite of working 10 plus hours every day, he was unable to sustain his family. Hunger was prevalent in the house every night. Their mother used to work in a grain mill, and whatever she earned, she saved in a bag labeled as "immediate needs account".

When Dosabhai, the elder brother, understood the hard labor of his parents, he felt himself awoken. Upon looking at his family's circumstances, he decided to give up school in spite of his young age. He went to a far off land, Calcutta, to start working. After gaining some work experience, he

called his brother to join him in the hard working environment of Calcutta.

Their wealth of experience started to grow exponentially, largely due to their uncanny enthusiasm. They earned the trust of the businessmen through their hard work and honesty. People started respecting the duo as they slowly started making progress in the business world. The Goddess of wealth was showering Her blessings upon them and slowly, but surely, their income was skyrocketing. They were both made partners in an extremely well reputed firm. In addition to their material wealth, the values their parents had bestowed upon them were also blossoming as they both gave priority to simplicity and humility.

Their impoverished childhood gave them a sense of direction; they wanted to help the poor come out of the shackles of poverty and thought donating would be an effective way to do this. However, rather than donating monetary wealth, they decided to share the wealth of knowledge. Remembering their mother's purse for immediate needs, they began to set keeping 10% of their earnings to help others. Although they were still poor, they had started this savings accounts right from the beginning. They formed a plan as to how to use this money wisely and started executing their plan right – why wait to put a good plan into action?

Their first plan of action was woman's education. The first task of this plan was to start an

elementary school for young girls. This story dates back to over 100 years ago. In those days, young girls were practically illiterate. The reason was simple; there was no school for young girls in the village. Every parent thought education would spoil his or her daughter's innocence. They thought that, if educated, their girls would behave wildly and that could lead to dishonor. This false notion was deeply rooted in society and changing this view was a staggering task. It was like trying to illuminate a dark night sky. To complete such an impossible task, the brothers courageously joined hands with, and started their work in the Lord's name.

They decided to start the girl's school in a single room in the middle of the village, so that girls would not have to go far to study. The hardest task was to find a female teacher and to prepare her. They convinced a teacher named Laximben to take on the task. Laxmiben was afraid of societal resistance and her fears came true. As soon as she started for her school on the first day, a fierce protest erupted in the village. There was fanatic and violent resistance and she was forced to return home after being pelted with stones.

The brothers soon realized that the task had proved harder than they initially thought. However, they were confident and had their hearts and minds fully into it. Patience and bravery was in their character and they resolved to find a way out. They contacted Mr. Gijubhai Badheka, who was in the city of Bhavnagar, and described their difficulties to

education and he quickly found an answer. He appointed Manoramaben, a selfless-service oriented, fearless and idealistic women's educator to lead the school.

Manoramaben accepted the challenge. The whole scene was being repeated. On one side of the road was Manoramaben and on the other, a violent mob. But the circumstances were different this time. Manoramaben was determined to wage her battle. Like a trained soldier she shouted, "Come on, who is willing to fight me?" No one had seen such a fierce and forceful lady before. The mob dispersed and gave up the fight. It is true that truly brave people can defeat all enemies.

The violence abated, but the protests were displayed on the walls with vulgar graffiti. People started writing slogans. They requested to boycott the school and urged others to think about the dishonor education would bring them! Finally, they resorted to writing vulgar messages about Manoramaben. These dirty tricks lasted for a short time, but how far can a flat tire travel? In the end, truth is always triumphant. Eventually, women's education became available in the city of Bhuj. The society gradually understood the value of education, and their misgivings were dispelled. A school that started with two girls had increased in number, and this is how Indrabai Girls High School was born.

As time went on, students and classes started growing and now education up until the Metriculate

(11th grade) was available. Where previously education was totally absent, girls were now graduating from high school. Isn't that a miracle in itself? To date, innumerable girls have received their education at this school, and the spreading of the wealth of knowledge will continue into the future. The brothers' belief that hard work bears sweet fruits came true. Today, the school is complete with all modern amenities. A beautiful library, tennis courts and an atmosphere of freedom all contribute greatly to development of these young girls. The school's main hallway is decorated with a full size portrait of Indrabai. Every time the brothers would visit this portrait – they would proudly proclaim that they had two real mothers. One being Indrabai, who was a fountain of love, and the other being Indrabai High School, the mother of knowledge. Knowledge's onward march continued with time. After the high school came time to start a college. Girls had to go out of town to receive higher education. Most of the people could not afford the fares to travel long distances for education. The brothers started working hard again and started a Lalan College for higher learning in Bhuj. The Ganges of knowledge was flowing through the city of Bhuj and student life was in full blossom in the city. The brothers continued such virtuous activities and kept on pouring donations into such good deeds. Again, a great new plan was beginning in their hearts.

The brothers decided to pay tribute to their father by dedicating a religious school at the

entrance of the city to him. The school bore the name of their father – “Lalchand Thavar Mahajan Vadi”. The school has been a place to rest for countless families and travelers. It became a picnic spot for families who could not afford a vacation. The facility was kept clean and the buildings were kept up to date. They have strict rules to maintain cleanliness and have kept a good flow of money so that the facility remains in excellent condition even today. Both brothers cultivated a powerful vision and paid attention to detail such that every project they started became completely successful.

Next, they turned attention to health and medical needs. Seventy years ago, people in that community were uninformed when it came to childbirth and pregnancy care. It was commonly believed that only women who did not have mothers needed to go to the hospital to deliver. They dispelled this myth and to avoid calamities associated with childbirth, the brothers started a “maternity wing” in the city hospital. It was no easy task but the brothers were ready again. They assigned the responsibility of running the maternity ward to an experienced female doctor and provided her with the latest instruments necessary. As result, many more women survived labor and delivery. Many more children also survived and infant mortality was reduced. After this successful endeavor, they started yet another service project-sewing school.

If women can sew at home, they can bring in addition revenue. Through sewing school, women would become self-confident and self-sufficient which was vital for societal growth and prosperity. The brothers hired a woman who was well trained and qualified to teach and purchased many foot-operated sewing machines. Woman started attending the school and they rapidly grew the business and became quite successful in a short period of time.

In this manner, they expanded their positive influence. Unfortunately the elder brother Dosabhai passed away. Now Karamchandbhai had to work even harder.

After tackling education, health and business, Karamchandbhai decided to focus on hunger. He knew the pains of hunger very well as he had experienced it first hand during his childhood. Thus, he wanted to help provide the needy with food. One day, he invited some of the poor folks in the city who were hungry to eat at his home. He started a kitchen for his city in his home and asked his staff to start preparing meals that day.

At about noon, the guests arrived. This included many elderly people, many beggars, and many who had not eaten a meal for a long period of time. Every one ate to their heart's content and they all blessed him from the bottom of their hearts. Soon, this became a routine. News of the kitchen spread rapidly. Hunger was widely prevalent but more than that, the food was served with such care that

everyone felt satisfied. This was a golden moment for Karamchandbhai.

He wanted this food kitchen to continue forever so he registered it as "Janata Sastu Bhojanalay" – (Public Affordable Eatery). He formed a trust and deposited handsome sums of money so that the kitchen could continue just from the interest on his deposits. People started celebrating personal events by feeding the hungry at this charitable trust. Thus, society started donating to this noble cause. Literally thousands of families have benefitted from this noble action and health has improved tremendously for the poor with good nutrition. Many people also found employment with this activity. This institution was Karamchandbhai's favorite child and even today, it is feeding people with the same love as it did when it first started.

In those days, there was no running water in Bhuj and the water wells were far off. The brothers were on it again. They found the answer in their own back yard. They offered their own land and had a deep well dug in it. The Lord's blessings were with them. Although many wells in Kutch had salty water, their well was full of fresh drinking water that could be filled in pots. People soon started flocking to the well every day and would sing joyfully while fetching the water. It was like a festival in their home every day. They started serving buttermilk at their home. Both the brothers wanted to start activities such that the whole community would be at their home every day. So, they adopted a few

buffaloes and asked a cowherd family to live in their compound. As they had planned, every morning, they would make large barrels of buttermilk and ladies of the town started lining up. The younger women started delivering the buttermilk to the whole town.

Such beautiful activities are like the crown jewel or like beautiful flowers pots. On one side there is Indrabai Girls High School where young girls enjoy the bliss of education, and on the other side there is Mahajan Vadi – where travelers enjoy calm, peace, and serenity. Both facilities showcase the brothers' love and admiration towards their parents. Today, across from the Mahajan vadi is Indra Park, where locals enjoy pleasant evenings amongst fragrant flowers and well-manicured gardens.

Both of the brothers understood each other better than anyone else. The younger brother revered the older brother like a Guru. They were like Lord Ram-Lakshmana. They grew up like beautiful lotuses in spite of their poverty. They became wealthy but remained noble and never had a sense of false pride. With great self-control they maintained their nobility and through their beautiful qualities they spread the fragrance of good deeds throughout. They both served their mother with devotion. Indrabai's only regret was that her husband could not cherish all of the wealth and good deeds their sons were doing. However, their fathers last words to Indrabai were, "You don't worry; I am not giving you anything else but these two lions

(brothers). They will protect you." His prophecy was surely fulfilled.

Both brothers felt they had a lot in their life. They saw poverty, enjoyed wealth, and cherished their happy family. At a young age, they decided to value good deeds rather than to pursue status. They were young, earned a lot and were yet to settle their own children. They were content with their life and they had decided that providing education to children is very important, something both of them could not afford. This had troubled them a lot. However, they accepted giving up their profession over providing service with a prayer in their heart – On Lord Carry Me from the Darkness of Ignorance to the Brilliance of Knowledge!!"

Translation by Dr. Uday Nanavati

I AM READY

In India, there is a very good joint family system in which three generations can live together with love and understanding. There is no competition but rather a sense of co-operation. One of the great advantages of this system is that the seniors do not feel lonely. They are looked after with love and respect. In turn, the grandchildren receive tremendous love and wisdom from their grandparents.

The following true story aptly illustrates this. Bharat was the youngest grandson in his joint family. He and his grandmother shared an extremely close and love-filled bond. Bharat knew that she loved to travel. He wanted to bring her to Kolkata where he lived. However, due to her old age, she refused to go. Bharat felt he will make sure to take her comfortably.

Knowing Bharat's wishes, Bharat's aunt asked his grandmother, "Ma, are you going to Calcutta with Bharat?"

Ma replied firmly "Oh no, how can I travel at this age?"

Bharat's aunt told her, "Bharat has already bought tickets in preparation to take you."

"Bharat is very crazy (gandiyo), but is very affectionate and loving. I am very weak, as I am

aging.”

All the members of the joint family were absolutely certain that this time Bharat's plan would not come to fruition. However, Bharat was determined, just like the character Bharat in the Ramayana, who had made a vow to return Ayodhya's throne to Sri Rama only. Now let's see the scenario below.

“hello grandma, have you made all preparations?” Bharat said, trying his luck.

“Preparations for what?” Ma said, shocked.

“Going to Kolkata.”

“Look, Bharat, don't insist on it. You do not know about my problems. I stagger while walking with my cane, I frequently have to go to the restroom, I have poor vision. There are lots of problems.” Grandma responded as she tried to explain her situation.

“Grandma, I have already prepared a long list of your difficulties, with even more than what you just mentioned, and I have thought of solutions also. So do not worry.”

“Wow! How did you find solutions to my problems?” Grandma exclaimed.

“Look grandma, if you become tired, I will carry you, I have reserved seats close to the restroom, and I am going to carry all your toilet needs in my shoulder bag.”

Grandma was taken aback; she said “would

you not feel ashamed carrying all these things?"

Grandma, has your gandiyo ever felt ashamed while doing anything for you?" he replied.

Bharat had won the battle and all of the family members were astonished as Grandma declared, "I AM READY!"

After reaching Kolkata, grandma congratulated and patted Bharat's back saying, "well my grandson, I wish everyone had such a loving and caring grandson". Grandma lovingly showered her blessings on Bharat, who received them wholeheartedly.

Translation by Shri Harindra Vasavda

ON THE OCCASION OF 80TH BIRTH DAY CELEBRATION OF MY BROTHER PRANJIVAN

I, Urmila am the younger sister of Pranjivan.

We were a joint family. Our extended family all lived under one roof. Our parents use to manage our home efficiently. And all the members of the family use to obey them. We brothers and sisters all lived together, play & fight all the times but next moment we were together. Pranjivan grow up in such a family.

Pranjivan was second child and eldest among the brothers. When he was old enough, the discussion of his engagement started, my parents were busy in finding appropriate match for him. We siblings were also very excited He went to Mandvi, (Kutch) to see girls. There Pranjivan met his future bride, our beloved Jayabhabhi. He fell in love at first sight. Our parents and brothers and sisters were eagerly awaiting Pranjivan return from Mandvi to Bhuj.

When he came, his happy and smiling face told us that he had fallen in love. All of us siblings, showered him with questions like how was the girl? What was so special about her?

How did she look and what was her nature like? etc, etc... And I am so happy to state that Pranjivan's response in one sentence made all of us very very happy. Pranjivan said that not only she was beautiful but more than that Jaya was very loving and family oriented. This quality of hers made him choose her as life partner. This also showed how much Pranjivan loved and valued his family. These feelings cannot be taught they came from within.

On the other hand, Jayabhabhi proved Pranjivan's statement true all through her life. Every single member of our extended family witnessed her love, care and sacrifices for everyone.

Pranjivan and Jayabhabhi started their married life in Kolkata. He fulfilled his responsibility towards our family happily and with full justice. He loved his extended family equally. In all this, Jayabhabhi was an ideal partner. She supported him whole heartedly sometimes even initiated all this.

Pranjivan had same hard core loyal principle. He believed in hard work and ethics and crossed all the obstacles in life with that conviction in mind. He was very active in his local community as well. Always ready to help to both of them. He was very popular amongst his circle of friends. Their home was like a meeting place and respite. All his friends near and dear ones would love to

gather at their house due to their large hearted nature and wonderful hospitality. Every guest was always received with warmth and care, regardless. This was because both their hearts were simple and unselfish. Even today people remember their love, warmth and hospitality.

Pranjivan also volunteered in Calcutta Kutchi Sangh. He worked very hard and with sincerity. He was very well loved there by everyone. He was the key person in uniting the three sections: viz Dasa, Visa and Gurjar. Achievements like this are never without honesty, selflessness and sincerity. Because of these virtues and his hard dedication he was awarded with "Maan-Patra" and was called the "link that joined the sections."

This was one of the events in his life. Let us remember few more.

Whenever one wants to help others or work for others, one has to decide very quickly. If one waits to think then the opportunity is lost. It is a virtue to grab such opportunity. Pranjivan also grabbed one such opportunity. He took it as his first duty.

My father was suddenly diagnosed with cancer by a doctor. And he was advised to go to Tata Cancer hospital in Bombay immediately. My father was in a shock. But being a brave person, he soon recovered and first thing he did was called Pranjivan and asked him to accompany my father to Bombay. When Pranjivan heard

everything, he agreed in a moment, He did not once think about his own family, little kids, business and other important issues which no one else would be able to do. He only thought at that moment was about his father's well being. And my father also remembered and needed Pranjivan. Such was the trust and loyalty. Next day the whole extended joint family gathered to send my father and Pranjivan to Bombay with heavy heart. My cousin (and oldest of all the Siblings) Godavariben who was my father's favorite asked Pranjivan to take good care of her uncle and bring him back hale & hearty. Pranjivan also confidently said "Do not worry, I will surely bring father back in good health soon. He had trust and confidence in his voice. Only people with clear conscience and selfless nature can have their strength. And surely enough he brought my father back, hale and hearty from such nearly fatal illness. Similar event also happened in Pranjivan's own life. Back in 1984, Pranjivan suffered heart attack. His condition was very serious and critical. Both Jayabhabhi, and my mother were inconsolable. His heart stopped pumping but his friend revived him back by pounding on his heart. He was taken to the hospital. It seemed all of Culcutta had gathered in the hospital. In a day, everyone from our family came from far and near. It was touch and go case. Then Jayabhabhi turned to God and prayed with faith. On one hand it seemed Pranjivan's life was coming to an

end and on the other hand it was Jayabhabhi's faith in God. Eventually just as Pranjivan's faith had won and brought my father back similarly Jayabhabhi's faith won and Pranjivan survived. No good deed goes unnoticed by destiny. The whole family and community was ecstatic.

This was the emotional side of Pranjivan. Now let's look at the brave side of Pranjivan.

I use to live in Birlapur which was like an outing for Calcutta people. There was a public bus which connected Birlapur with Kolkata. It was always overcrowded and people would fight inside. One day Pranjivan's elder daughter Chandrika who was barely 9-10 years old asked her father that she wanted to go to Faiba's house (my house) in Birlapur. Pranjivan thought for a second and saw this as a good opportunity to instill fearlessness and confidence in his young daughter. He asked her, "If I put you in the public bus that goes to Faiba's house in Birlapur, would you go alone?" Chandrika was also equally brave like her father and agreed to go alone. Thus, she was sent alone in the bus to Faiba's house. And she reached safely. Such are Pranjivan, his wife and Children.

Translation by Mrs. Madhuri K. Shah

TRUE SERVICE

Kishanbhai lived a very simple and honest life. He loved to help others and lived to serve the community. When he became a widower, his children were busy with their life. He had no regrets for this. He lived alone in his house and he was enjoying the bliss of living independently. He started a practice where he would cook enough food for himself and an additional helping for a hungry person. Kishanbhai would walk outside and hand - deliver this fresh meal to one person by the end of the day. He kept up with his selfless routine for many years.

One day when he went out to feed the hungry, he saw a lady sadly sitting near a temple. His heart was filled with compassion and he asked her what was wrong. Recognizing the kindness in Kishanbhai, the lady admitted that her husband was alcoholic and demanded money from her. His alcoholism was worsening their poverty. One day in a drunken rage, he beat her up and threw her out of their house. She was from a noble family, so she sat outside her house for three days without any food or water, but her husband did not let her back in. Thus hungrily, she was sitting near the temple trying to figure out her next move.

Kishanbhai fed her food and made arrangements for her to stay in part of the premises

of the temple. She would help with the upkeep of the temple and would offer her prayers so the administrators at the temple were very pleased with her. Every day, Kishanbhai would bring her food and feed her with love and compassion. This way, the lady settled down and it became a routine for Kishanbhai. If Kishanbhai could not bring food for her, other devotees of the temple would take care of the lady for few days.

Suddenly, Kishanbhai fell ill and could not help the lady with food. He was very upset about it but he was helpless himself. Three or four days passed away like that.

Then one morning, Kishanbhai saw a group of people coming to his house from the temple. The leader of the group told Kishanbhai that the lady's health had deteriorated all of a sudden. She had a heart attack and she passed away. Kishanbhai went to the temple and he felt very sorry that he could not help her this time around.

The temple administrator opened the belongings of the lady. There was a small purse with two golden bangles and a special note. The note was that after her death, the golden bangles should be given to Kishanbhai and that he should give her final rights. Thus, this woman who had kept her remaining wealth for the rainy day gave it away with faith to Kishanbhai.

In this way, the woman had made a final will. Kishanbhai cried a lot and he created a memorial in

the lady's name with the two golden bangles and some of his own assets. He made sure that if any hungry person came by; they would get food from this memorial. After the incidence, Kishanbhai would go to temple every day and feed the hungry in her memory. Kishanbhai and the lady thus had this eternal bond of selfless love. Kishanbhai continues this true service of feeding the hungry every single day. This great deed of Kishanbhai done with attitude of selfless service is a true inspiration for all of us.

Translation by Dr. Uday Naravati

COMPASSION

(Devotion to the people is Devotion to the
Supreme Self)

What a monsoon it was in Gujarat that year! Torrential rains and overflowing rivers inundated large areas of the state and there was utter devastation all around! Thousands of people lost their homes and properties to floods. Particularly affected were the poor, slum dwellers who lost everything. There was shortage of food and clean water everywhere causing wide spread starvation and sickness.

I was quite disturbed to see the people suffering around us. Just as I was thinking about ways to help them, a number of girls from my hostel came to talk to me and expressed their wish to help these poor people! I was pleased with their proposition and we started planning a mission to help the people affected by floods. Our first challenge was to collect enough funds for this mission. None of us had any experience in this matter but all of us were driven by compassion and were determined to help the helpless people!

As if God heard our prayers, we got a fantastic offer from a well-wisher, Mr. Oza. Mr. Oza was the manager of 'Nataraj' Theatre. A very popular movie starring Dharmendra and Hemamalini was opening

in 'Nataraj' on the very next day. Mr. Oza generously donated to us the entire amount earned from the opening show of the movie! All the girls helped distribute tickets for the show and we received more than enough donations to launch our mission! All of us were touched by Mr. Oza's help and expressed our sincere gratitude.

We formed a committee to make sure that the donation we received was used efficiently and effectively. We met with the commissioner of Vadodara to learn details about the most devastated areas and villages around Vadodara. The commissioner was also very happy to see dedication of all the students and designed a plan for relief work in selected villages where we can go by jeeps and distribute essential items.

We embarked on our relief mission with great enthusiasm. About 300 girls participated in purchasing and packaging basic household items, clothes, and food items such as wheat, rice, and lentils. We loaded all the packages in the Jeeps and travelled to the villages affected the most by the floods. Everywhere we went the girls distributed the packets with care and in organized fashion. I was so proud to see their diligence and thought of their parents who would also be equally proud to see them at this noble endeavor! The girls happily sang and took pictures during our travel. We returned to the hostel after a long, tiring day. The girls were greeted and praised for their efforts for helping others and were treated to a special dinner that

evening with sweets and savory dishes they loved! I noticed that the girls were tired but still very happy that they had opportunity to serve the needy people. I couldn't help but think that a tree of selfless service to help others was planted today and with sufficient encouragement it will grow and bear sweet fruits of compassion and more service to benefit the society.

At the end of the flood relief operation we realized that we still had a substantial amount of funds left with us. It was my responsibility to ensure that the money donated by others would be used in appropriate cause. I was anxiously looking for such a cause when with God's grace I saw a fitting opportunity!

Once during my usual stroll I passed by a small hut and saw inside a young child moaning and lying sick with fever. I went in and looked around the shack but saw no one. There was a piece of bread and a glass of water left for the child but he was alone! I was shocked and sad to see the child in this condition! I decided to stay with him until someone from his family would come. After a while his parents came. I asked them how they could leave the sick child alone. The mother said 'Ben, what can we do? We have to go to work, otherwise there would be no food and he will starve! Everyday we have to first go out to cut 'Daatan' (small sticks cut from a tree that are used for cleaning teeth) and then sell them in the market. We use whatever we earn each day to buy food.

Look I got some flour today so that I can make bread for the child" I was upset to see their condition and started thinking if there was any solution for this. Just at that moment I remembered the left over funds we had! That was it! Finally God presented a perfect situation where this money could be put to very good use!

After a few days I went back to the same slum area. I met with a few student-volunteers working in the area and talked to them about the situation. The volunteers suggested that we start an elementary school in a near by community hall provided by the municipality where children from the poor, working parents would be looked after by a teacher. I offered to pay for the expenses. We decided to hire a teacher who would stay with the children from 9 AM to 5 PM everyday. Everyday the school activities would include playing games, singing, and keep the children safe and clean. If any one was sick, the teacher should report to me. In my hostel there were several medical students who offered to help sick children. They also volunteered to give them periodic physical check-up.

We went to the slum area and held a meeting with the working parents in the community. We explained the plan to start a school for their children. We promised that the children would be under proper supervision and would not be allowed to roam around. The parents were extremely happy to learn about this arrangement. The very next day we started the school! We arranged for rugs for

children to sit, a pot of drinking water, napkins etc. A cafe-taker was hired who also took care of cleaning the hall. The plan was very successful, and the number of students attending the school grew steadily.

We found a kind and caring teacher who loved to work with children. She suggested to me that we should get a blackboard, slates, pens and a few children's books so that she can teach elementary reading and writing to the children. I loved her idea and immediately arranged to get the things she had asked for.

Very soon, with her dedication and affection, a number of children learned reading, writing, and basic mathematics. The teacher decided to meet with their parents and suggested that these children should be enrolled in regular, municipal school so that they can continue their education. The parents were thrilled to hear that! They said that "we don't have time or understanding about this matter, how grateful we are for your guidance!" Not only were they excited to send their children to school but they insisted on paying tuition for them with great pride!

Every couple of weeks the teacher would take the children to 'sayaji baag', a park near by, for picnic! She would take bananas, peanuts, 'chevdo' for snacks; sometimes even 'khichadi and kadhi' and would ask children to form a neat line to get the food! The parents, when they heard about the picnic, told me that they would be happy to provide

Life - As I've seen it

snacks for the children! They were poor and had to do hard labor for living but were always cheerful and ready to fulfill their responsibilities.

Translation by Dr. Amita V. Mehta

RATANBEN

Ratanben's life was full of hardship. She had no financial help and was solely responsible for raising and feeding her children. In order to make ends meet, she worked as a house cleaner in several households. She was very meticulous and clean. She was so thorough that her employers loved her and treated her as a family member.

Although she led such a destitute life, Ratanben always seemed happy. She was extremely content with life and with what God had given her. She never entertained ill thoughts even in her misery and never complained about anything. Also, since she was such a nice person, she could not see any evil in others.

She was a great devotee of Naag Devta- the Snake God – and she never failed to observe a fast on the auspicious day of Naag Panchami. Kind hearted as she was, she did not expect any favors from her Naag Devta. It was a pure, unwavering, selfless devotion.

Once it so happened that one of the families she worked for had a big birthday celebration at home. There were many guests, singing and enjoying good food and friends. Ratanben was happy to see so many people enjoying themselves. She had a lot more work to do that evening. It happened to be a Naag Panchami fast for her and yet she was happily going on about her chores.

Finally, all the work was done, dishes washed, and the house was clean again. It was getting late and she was hungry. As soon as her prayer was completed, she sat down to dinner. She was happy that Dudhpaak-favorite food of her Naag-devta was being served.

But what did she see? As soon as she removed the lid of the Dudhpaak Bowl, she saw that nothing was there! It was empty! She was shocked for a moment. What could have happened; who could have eaten all the Dudhpaak? She wondered. The next minute she gained her composure. "No, that is not nice, Ratan;" she said to herself, "Whoever ate the Dudhpaak, perhaps needed it more than I did; and I am glad that I could make someone happy." She immediately felt content. "May the person who ate the Dudhpaak be happy, and satisfied?" She did not even realize that she said that aloud.

And, a miracle happened. Naag Devta appeared before her. She was so overjoyed to see her beloved Naag Devta right in front of her that she was speechless for a minute. Naag devta said: I wanted to test your devotion and endurance. Therefore, I ate the Dudhpaak. You have indeed impressed me with your unwavering devotion and your kind selfless nature. May all your wishes come true." And, with that, he disappeared leaving Ratanben spellbound.

Translation by Niyati P. Pandya

[Letter from my daughter on my 70th birthday]

"AFFECTION"

Pujya Ma,

Having lived in America, I apologise for my language, drowsing between Gujarati and English. I have a lot to convey to you on the happy occasion of your 70th birthday. Ma, you are my hero. I am your great admirer.

I don't have to go far to search for bold and exemplary people. Your courage, spirit and optimism will always inspire me throughout my life.

My children have also immensely benefitted from this. You deserve the credit for making us so big and clever by fighting single-handedly through all good or bad days.

Many Many Happy Returns of the Day Ma.
Respectful Regards,

- Urvi M. Mehta

Translation by Prof. H. C. Dholkia

"CHOICE IS YOURS"

Without I, my, mine, Everything is fine.
As ego gone, happiness is born.

Mind is pure, Truth comes sure,
Knowledge gives light, all will be right.

Life is duty, full of beauty,
Good opportunity, God has given,
Choice is yours, hell or heaven.

Life is flowing, with full of challenge,
Choice is yours, friendship or revenge.

Good thinking, brings true power,
If clouds are there, should be shower.

Time has value in life, as husband with wife,
Parents love each other, family grows better.

Children learn Love, Knowledge, Culture,
Bread becomes tasty, full of butter.

Family is a sweet home, place of rest,
Choice is yours; make just O.K or the best.

God is with you, giving pure Love,
Choice is yours, take it or give up.

