

## Part I of II

### INDIA TO AMERICA: AN ASIAN JOURNEY

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This is a story of rags to riches, and of travails and triumphs. It is a story of pursuing the American Dream and substantially achieving it. My story is duplicated in countless other stories across Asia: young persons who left home for distant shores. The story is also a testimony to the American system that rewards merit and hard work.

This is my story. I have received much help along the way. If I stand tall, it is by standing on the shoulders of others.

I begin with observations on life in rural and small-town India where I grew up, now fast disappearing. I describe my family members who impacted me the most. I narrate my educational achievement in India and then the onward journey to the United States. I have commented on American culture and society, as I experienced it.

The style for setting Titles and Subtitles (**boldface** or CAPS) is not yet uniform. Feedback from readers on content is invited: what should be added and what is better left out? Also, what might be a good title for the life story? Send comments to: [lgoel@uwf.edu](mailto:lgoel@uwf.edu)

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### STATE OF PUNJAB



## Part I of II



### I. IT TAKES A VILLAGE

**1935-1939**

**During this time . . .**

- The ballpoint pen was invented
- Ford Sedan sold for \$611
- Penicillin, the wonder drug, came into use
- “Talkie” films became popular
- Mahatma Gandhi launched the “free India” campaign
- Hitler invaded Poland; WWII began

#### **Beginnings**

I am told that I had a difficult infancy; I almost did not survive. Infant mortality in India before World War II was high. Most infant deaths occurred during the first few months of life. I was dehydrated and did not gain weight, a common malady known as *soka*, i.e. drying up.

At that time an old man age 87 died in the village. His mortal remains were to be carried on a cot (a stringed wooden frame), to the cremation ground. The wooden frame bearing the body is carried by four men on their shoulders. My elder sister Gomti held the withering infant (me) in her arms and hid behind a doorway along the funeral procession path. When the procession reached where she was hiding, quickly and without notice she ran under the wooden frame bearing the coffin and emerged on the other side. As my sister was a young girl of 13 or 14, nobody scolded her for this unusual act. This act (of passing the sick child under the coffin of an old man) was supposed to heal me. By this act, I would attain the life span of the person who had just died. Such was the belief in the village at the time. The belief had merit. I recovered fully.

I am now in my mid-80's. I am unusually robust and fit for my age. Psychologists say that infants who struggle to live and survive develop unusual resilience. My life testifies to the veracity of this theory.

My recorded birth year in the passport is 1935. This is only as estimate. Birth and death records were not maintained in the backwaters of rural India where I was born. A precise dating of people was not important. No driving licenses or voting cards were issued. Capability, not chronological age, was important. A child of ten might be mature enough to tend to animals in one case, and a child of 12 in another. What mattered was maturity, not age.

### **The Village**

I was born in a small village named Ladda, also sometimes known as Ladda Kothi, in the Sangrur District, State of Punjab, India (see map above). I am a product of the homogenous village. Described here is a brief account of the village society and culture. The village was an agricultural community. India's food is produced in villages. Village dwellings were built very close to one another, with winding small lanes for passage of people and bullock-carts. Farms surrounded the village and were within a walking distance from home. The farmer walked to his fields in the morning. The village residents were economically and educationally depressed but socially and culturally robust. Though unlettered, they could recite from memory long tales of victories and defeats. I grew up hearing stories from the Indian religious epics.

A village street



Out of a population of about 1,500 in my village, only some 30 adults could read and write (1950s). None were women.

Although unlettered, the typical villager was not un-intelligent or unwise. With all my higher education, I would not want to match my wits with theirs. Once I received a letter written in Urdu script from an uncle of mine who had only 8<sup>th</sup> grade of education. The letter pleaded for a fair settlement to him in a family property dispute. An astute attorney could not have

written a better plea. My uncle made all the proper arguments for a more favorable settlement to him: family tradition, moral consideration, and the threat of legal action. I was impressed at his pleading. He succeeded.

By modern Western standards, or even by modern Indian standards, life in the village then was dismally poor. People owned very little: few clothes, a pair of sandals, some cooking pans and pots and necessary farm implements. Little else. However, freshly grown organic food was readily available. Clean water and fresh air were abundant. Although India had been subject to periodic famines, none visited Punjab, the granary of India, in my memory.

Social trust led to sharing and pooling of resources. Almost everything was shared: cooking pots, spinning wheels, farm implements, ladders and even small items like scissors and yardsticks. Clothing and personal items would also be shared on a special occasion. When a married man visited his in-laws, status consideration required him to be properly attired and decked out. For this occasion, he would

borrow from his friends a proper attire, and a wrist watch to boot. Sharing and pooling of resources built camaraderie.

**Houses:** Some 80 percent of the people in the village lived in small, windowless *Kuccha* houses, 400 to 1,000 square feet in size. A *kuccha* house is built with unbaked clay bricks. In contrast, a *Pukka* house is built with baked or fired bricks. *Kuccha* houses require yearly maintenance to protect them against the heavy Indian monsoon downpour. The *kuchha* houses are plastered with a mixture of clay and cow dung; the cow-dung which acts as a binding agent. If not properly plastered, *kuccha* houses would crumble during a heavy downpour. I shared in the annual ritual of plastering a *kuccha* house where my father sheltered some animals. This required several steps. First, the potter would deliver a load of clay, usually on a donkey's back. We would then knead the clay by adding water and walking on it with our bare feet. This operation is similar to extracting juice from grapes to make wine. It was fun to jump up and down with bare feet in the mud. The mixture was then plastered on the wall surface with bare hands. It required practice to get a smooth finish.

My Second-story Bedroom and Study



Many houses were windowless. Light entered the house from the front door, usually left ajar (there was no fear of burglary). Light also entered the house from an opening in the ceiling, a sort of skylight. The larger homes consisted of several rooms that opened to a central courtyard in the middle.

My family lived in a better-than-average semi-*Pukka* house. It was a 4 room house with two additional rooms on the second floor. The second story rooms were fitted with windows to catch the summer breeze (see picture on the left). I used one of these rooms as a bedroom-cum-study. Electric power did not come to the village till 1955. Therefore, I studied under a kerosene lamp during most of my school and college.

The village lay along a narrow paved road, about 5 miles from the town of Sangrur. The town was unique in the sense that it boasted a high school and a 4-year college. The short distance made it possible for me to bike to college. This made all the difference, as narrated under "Schooling."

**Cooking:** The cooking was done on a wood-burning clay stove, called the *chulah*. All three meals were cooked fresh. Refrigeration was not available. I remember the savory vegetarian meals that my grandmother prepared. I sat on a low stool in front of the *Chulah*. *Chapaties* (flat Indian bread) were served hot as they came off the stove. The vegetable curries were served with extra *ghee* added for taste and nutrition. I felt that grandmother poured all her love into the food she served.

The modern American kitchen design reminds me of the village kitchen. The modern design accommodates people eating inside the kitchen around the stove. Especially useful is the placement of a preparation and cooking island centered in the modern American kitchen. At mealtime, children sit around the countertop and witness food being prepared by the mother. My daughter Anuradha has inherited the Indian method of feeding each of her three children seated around the cooking island. The bonds created last lifelong.

A yellow Mustard Field:



the cotton pods, and the golden yellow of mustard flowers.

Cultivated farms surrounded the village as far as the eye could see. Punjabi landscape is mostly a flat plain. No hills or forests break the view. The land was cleared centuries ago to make room for crops. The yellow of the mustard plant dominated the landscape in the winter months, giving it a golden hue. I have lived near ocean fronts and on hillsides during my life-span. I long for the flat Punjabi countryside clothed in a symphony of colors: the green of the rice plants, the white of

**Conflict:** Men were busy during the day tending to their crops. Shouting matches sometimes erupted among women in the afternoon, when the household chores were done. Reasons were as diverse as collective living can afford: disputes about garbage disposal, adults drawn into children's fights, a missing item, and hurtful gossip. Choicest curse-words and epithets suggesting sexual impropriety were used to drag family honor into the gutter. We loved to watch the shouting matches—an entertainment par-excellence. The shouting matches have now died down, owing to the spread of TVs and the Internet. After the chores are done, women now watch soap operas rather than fight.

Small-scale thievery existed but serious physical violence was rare. Two murders were committed ca 1940, involving a sexual impropriety. An unmarried girl was induced to run away with her paramour. Family honor was at stake. The incident turned into a family feud, leading to two murders, one from each of the feuding families. These murders are still being talked about some 70 years after the incident. It is remarkable to note that the village had no police force. An assembly (or Panchayat) of five elders adjudicated serious conflict. Social custom governed people's behavior, rather than governmental edicts. Things have changed for the worse now in the recent decades, owing largely to election-generated conflicts. Political parties seeking votes accentuate divisiveness.

**Animals:** Common farm animals in the village included oxen, cows, milk buffalos, camels, donkeys, goats and sheep. Horses were used not for farm labor but to pull a two-wheeled light carriage called *Tonga*. Elephants were used for state processions, not for common transportation. An elephant has a voracious appetite; it can eat up to 200 pounds of hay and greens daily. Only the royal family had several elephants in the stable. The royal family and the dignitaries would ride the elephants during special functions.

Cats and dogs were mostly stray street animals, rather than pets (with some exceptions). Hunting and fishing were not common pastimes, as these are in the West.

Animals were not mistreated or abused. The farmer's livelihood depended on the wellbeing of his cattle. If the farmer starved, so did his cattle. Both cows and buffalos were used for milk. An average cow produced 1 to 2 gallons of milk per day, a small amount compared to the American Jersey or Holstein breeds. The Indian breeds are hardier; also, the milk contains certain amino acids and vitamins that fight against a variety of human diseases: obesity, diabetes, cholesterol, etc. The introduction of Western breeds in India in the recent years has greatly increased milk production but it has also unhappily increased human propensity to disease.

Bullocks or oxen provided the bulk of farm labor, from plowing to transportation. The bullock is a castrated adult calf. The bullock was the Punjabi farmer's most valuable traction animal. When the farmer's bullock died, he grieved as if a member of the family had died. *The* bullock-cart, called the



*Gadda*, was fitted with wooden wheels. It was a slow moving wagon, pulled by two bullocks at about 3 miles per hour. Happily in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the wooden wheels gave way to wheels mounted with used tires. This single improvement made a huge difference in the speed and the carrying capacity of the cart. I rode the card to market on numerous occasions.

Camels were used for longer distance travel. The camel walks faster than a bullock; therefore a distance longer than 4 or 5 miles was usually covered by a camel ride. The camel ride is not comfortable. With the advent of motorised vehicles in the last half-century, bullocks and camels are going out of use.

Farm animals got a day of rest once every fortnight on each *Ekadashi*. The *Ekadashi*, which occurs twice in the lunar month, is a holy day. Many pious people observe a fast on *Ekadashi*.

I grew up around farm livestock; this made me somewhat fearless tending to animals. I learned to feed, water and milk cows. As a young boy, each morning I would lead the cows to a caretaker, known as *Pali*. I wielded a long stick in my hand to manage the animals and deliver them to the caretaker. I felt mighty proud and grown up in this task (imagine a shepherd boy in Biblical stories). Animals grazed through the fields during daylight hours. The animals returned home in the evening. Their hoofs made a dust cloud as they trod the unpaved walkways.

Animals were not killed for meat, as almost all the people were vegetarian. The few who ate meat did so infrequently. Some textbook accounts erroneously indicate that the untouchable caste groups consumed the carcass, the flesh of a dead animal. I knew of no such case. Village elders I have spoken to confirm this observation. Dead animals were not eaten but hauled away by the untouchables and skinned for leather.



One hears much about the fact that Hindus worship cows. Cows are, indeed sacred, just as all animals are sacred. The cow receives special reverence because of its gentle nature and also because it provides milk, an essential part of Indian diet. Lord Krishna is often depicted in the company of cows; he is called Gopala, the cow-herd boy. The value of the cow to Indians cannot be overestimated. The cow furnishes necessary proteins and enzymes in milk, cheese, yogurt, and butter; dung for fuel; skin for leather. Losing a cow or bull is a tragedy for a family. It is considered unethical to kill animals for food, thus it is no wonder that India has the largest number of vegetarians in the world. Indians worship three mothers: mother earth, mother cow and mother human.

Even though we lived in the countryside, no wild animals ever threatened us. We never saw any tigers, cheetahs, wild boars, or other carnivores. Only a deer or a jackal might be spotted in the open fields. Forests were cleared centuries ago for cultivation.

Snakes of several different types were found in the countryside, including the poisonous cobra. Snake charmers would visit the village on occasion and the children would gather around to see the dancing cobra. To my knowledge, cobras cannot hear. The dancing movement of the cobra merely follows the swaying of snake charmer's flute, called the "*been*." No one in the village kept snakes as pets. Children were advised to fear snakes.

**Money Lending:** In *Voiceless India*, Gertrude Emerson writes about the horrors of money lending in the village she studied on the Indo-Nepal border. Some 80 percent of the villagers were indebted, she reported. Interest rates varied from 37.5 to 75 pct.

This pattern did not hold true in the Punjabi villages which I knew.

The merchant Bania community (Vaishya caste) is said to be the traditional money lending clan. But they were universally poor in rural north India. Of the 20 or so Bania families in my village, one-half could not sufficiently feed their families. They owned little land. Their traditional occupation consisted of running retail shops. But the village economy could not support more than 4 or 5 such shops. Therefore, many members of the merchant community lived literally from hand to mouth. Small scale lending of Rs 100 to 500 existed. Interest rates varied generally from 1 to 2 percent per month, or 12 to 24 pct. per year or even less. Father made small loans on items sold on credit in his shop. He himself took loans from a money-lender in the nearby town of Sangrur, with gold and silver ornaments given as security. I tagged-along my father to the money-lender's shop on a couple of occasions. I was fascinated at the sight of large steel security chests in the store where the gold and silver jewelry items were kept.

**Fairs:** A *Baisakhi Mela*, or spring fair was held each April after the wheat harvest near our village. We walked 2 to 3 miles to reach Nankian-walla, the site of the fair. Some people rode bikes or traveled on *tongas*, the 2-wheel horse carriages. Toddlers were carried on the shoulders or backs of the grownups.

A Gurudwara or Sikh temple stood on the fair grounds. First we would pray at the Gurudwara and make a small offering of coins, flowers and sweets. Then we would take a dip in the holy lake in front of the temple. Afterwards we walked the fair grounds. The fair provided endless entertainment and variety of spicy foods. Women often bought glass bangles, bead necklaces, oils and creams. Children usually got



The Gurudwara near Sangrur, which we visited every year.

bamboo flutes and handmade stuffed birds. The handmade parrot with green feathers and a red beak costing a few pennies was a popular item with children. There were also rides in a hand-propelled merry-go-round. One could also watch the Indian style wrestling matches. Victory in a wrestling match meant putting down the opponent flat on his back. Wrestlers did not punch or hurt each other. I would ride the hand-propelled merry-go-round. Once I paid to see a grotesquely fat woman, called "*bara man ki dhoban*"-- a 1008 lb. heavy washer-woman. I recall buying a bamboo flute; I made much noise with it to the annoyance of the elders. The fair continues to this day.

**Caste Breakdown:** Population count in my village was taken by the number of family units, not individuals. Family size varied from 2 to 8. Of the total 300 family units in 1950, the approximate caste breakdown was as follows:

- Jat farmers: 180 families,
- Baniya merchants: 20 families,
- Brahmins (priests, but none practiced the traditional craft): 25 families,
- Service castes (blacksmiths, barbers, carpenters, and weavers etc.): 25 families,
- Chamars or leather workers: 25 families,
- Churahs or sweepers: 25 families
- Muslims (weavers and potters): 20 families

Each caste was traditionally associated with a particular occupation, although not every caste member followed the tradition. Brahmin learning had declined over the centuries under prolonged Islamic rule. Some Brahmins did farm labor rather than priest-craft. Many of the lower castes did share cropping. Economic differences among caste groups were minimal. All were poor. All lived in similar housing and ate similar food. Inter-caste conflict and violence, one hears about much these days, was rare. For each caste group or *jati*, the marriage circle consisted of some 40-50 villages spread within a radius of about 50 miles. With the availability of modern transportation and communication, the marriage circle now encompasses a wider area.

India's caste system in many respects resembles America's ethnic diversity: Germans, Irish, Italians, Jews, Greeks, Polish, Negroes, and so forth. With increase in immigration from Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, ethnic diversity in the U.S. has increased substantially. The United States is becoming

ethnically diverse and culturally and religiously pluralistic. It begins to resemble India. The American “melting-pot” is somewhat of a myth. The new immigrant communities keep to their cultural and religious identity. They marry overwhelmingly within their own group. Certain older minority communities such as the Mormons, the Amish, the Jews and the Blacks also marry predominantly within their own kind. All this adds to the multi-cultural, diverse American landscape.

See my article “India’s Caste System and American Pluralism” at: <http://uwf.edu/lgoel/documents/3.pdf>

India was partitioned in 1947 between Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. The partition led to a large scale migration across the newly created borders, among the largest migrations in history. Muslims migrated from India to Pakistan, and Hindus and Sikhs in the other direction. Many were attacked and killed during their journey in religious riots. Some 10 million crossed the borders; an estimated 1 million died.

My village escaped any acts of violence. Muslims constituted a small number in our village: 20 families out of 300. Because Muslims constituted a small number, they felt insecure. They bolted their front doors and rarely ventured out. Muslims were scattered throughout the village, not concentrated in a single locality. Two of the Muslim families lived in our vicinity. They were befriended by my father. Father had me deliver a stack of *chapaties* (bread) to the two Muslim families for a number of days, morning and evening. It was not considered safe to be protecting Muslims during those awful months. Since I was a child, my behavior drew little attention. I am glad to say that none of the Muslims in our village lost their life or limb. Many left to migrate to Pakistan or to Muslim-majority towns within India. A few stayed behind and continue to live peacefully to this day.

**Civic Virtue.** Social cohesion and a sense of connectedness were strong in the village community. You were expected to put aside your private interests and uphold the community’s reputation. The Greek philosophers called this “civic virtue.” A misdeed or an immoral act brought shame not only on your family, but on the entire village. Similarly, a meritorious deed brought honor to one’s family and the community. The village is the family, writ large. When I left home in 1956 to study in the distant United States, the entire village stood at the gate to wish me good luck. When I returned three years later, the entire village celebrated my success. Even though I am presently settled in the U.S., I make periodic visits to the village. The village tugs at your heart. The village nurtures you and it also lays claims on you. I have donated money first to fulfill family obligations and second for village projects. You put your treasure where your heart is.

Paucity of goods bred social cohesion and led to common sharing. This cohesion is not present in the United States where generally each household has what it needs, and nobody needs to borrow from a neighbor. Recently a neighbor in Pensacola asked to borrow my lawnmower and I was delighted to take part again in this age-old Indian tradition.

Early childhood years in the village were full of gaiety for me. We boys and girls of the same age played in the streets with homemade toys. Boys and girls played together as children and separately after age 12 or 13. We played *gulli-danda*, climbed trees, and played with marbles. Gulli-danda is played with two wooden sticks. The smaller 5-6 inch stick is tapered at both ends and is called gulli. The longer 2-3 foot

stick is swung to hit and bounce the gulli. You may Google “Gulli-danda” for additional information. All types of discarded items were turned into play things. We rolled discarded bicycle tires and metal bucket rims down an incline and chased after them. We also chased donkeys and ponies to ride. When not put in service to carry loads, donkeys were let loose by the owners to wander and forage. Once, while running behind a donkey in an attempt to jump on its back to ride, the donkey kicked me in the groin. I nearly doubled in pain. I quit chasing donkeys and ponies to ride after this incident.



Kids pretty much lived outdoors. Often, we ran around bare-footed. This caused two painful injuries: thorns stuck in one’s bare feet, and second, more painful—hitting one’s big toe against a hard surface. It bled profusely and hurt badly.

There was no fear of being kidnapped, being sexually abused or assaulted in the village. I grew up in a secure, safe and trustful environment.

Child safety is a major concern in large Indian cities now, as it is in the United States.

### Regulator Wall Clock



I inherited a Regulator Wall Clock from my Father, shown in the picture here. It was the only wall clock in the entire village, and was therefore much admired.

Father bought it before the War for mere Rupees 7, or \$2 at the then exchange rate. He hung it on a wall in his retail shop. The clock was a novelty. It chimed at each hour and the half-hour. Many people came to the shop just to hear the clock chime. Most could not read the time as they had had no schooling. Being a middle school student, I could read the clock. Thus, I told the time many times a day to the curious passersby. I showed off my reading skills. I felt grown up and valued, building confidence.

The wall clock now hangs in my study in Pensacola, Florida. I want to leave it as a legacy to my grandchildren. I hope they would honor their heritage and treasure it.

## II. I WON THE PARENTAL LOTTERY

1940-1945

During this time . . .

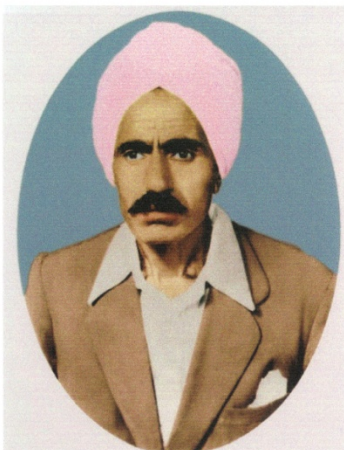
- President Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to a third term
- The Allied Powers win the War
- 42 % of Americans have telephones
- Loaf of bread: 9 cents; US postage stamp: 3 cents; quart of milk: 15 cents
- In India wheat cost Rs. 15 per maund (84 pounds)
- Muslims in India demand Pakistan
- Mahatma Gandhi launches “Quit India” campaign

In her book *You Can Go Home Again* (1995), Monica McGoldrick observes: “we are our father’s children.” Our family belongs to us and we belong to the family. The influence of the family is abiding. The influence lasts more than one generation. No matter how far we travel in miles or education, family influence persists. Home is a state of mind, not a place, where self-definition starts and character is built. The more we can know about our families, the more we know about ourselves. Both the good and the bad part of us are our inheritance.

I won the parental lottery. I have inherited a good set of genes. I support a full head of hair and all my teeth are my own. I have normal blood chemistry and take no medications. I support a positive outlook on life. Seldom am I down in the dumps. I continue to enjoy productive work in my senior years. I write and deliver public speeches (see Curriculum Vita at <http://uwf.edu/lgoel/> ).

Described below are my primary family members, the ones who impacted me the most.

**Mother.** Mother named Paro Devi died when I was about 6. I have few memories of her, and there are no photographs. What a loss I feel! My elder sisters tell me that mother was short in stature, of wheat-like fair complexion, and gentle in disposition. She died during child birth around the age of 44. The frequent pregnancies took their toll. My mother brought forth eight or nine children, six having survived, 3 boys and 3 girls. The children were named (from eldest to youngest): Gomti, Gauran, Ramlal, Chambi, Madan and Krishan. Krishan being the youngest was the darling of the family.



**Father.** For a million reasons, my father is my hero. Named Bant Ram and born about 1900, father completed 7 years of schooling, a high achievement in that time period in rural India. I felt very close to him. Often, I tagged along with him as he made business and social rounds of the village. He was held in high esteem and was known for generosity and large-heartedness. He bore a non-confrontational, mild demeanor. During the rounds, tea and snacks would be offered to us as a mark of respect. The offers were politely refused. I basked in the attention paid to me, the son of a respected father. I thought Father was very special.

Father had many business dealings with the farming community. He purchased bulk farm produce: wheat, corn, barley, cotton, etc. He transported the same to sell at the larger town markets; he earned a small profit by this trade. He had a reputation for fairness; the farmers preferred to sell their grain stock to him rather than to competitors. I was allowed sometimes to ride the wooden wagon, the *Gadda*, hired to transport the grain to the market. The *Gadda* is a two-wheeled wooden cart pulled by two oxen. It took 2 hours to cover the 5 mile distance to reach the town of Dhuri (about 20,000 population in 1950).



The town in India offers many attractions, not available in the village. There were roadside food stalls selling spicy delicacies, fruit of various kind, and ice cream. Usually, I got fruit or ice-cream *kulfi* to eat. Mangoes were among my favorite. Mangoes came in several varieties, some more delicious than others. The fruit and vegetables at that time period were organically grown, without the application of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. They were delicious.

Father also ran a small-scale fabric shop in the village. His inventory included broadcloth, chintz, poplin and muslin. No silks or woolens were stocked as the villagers could not afford such luxuries. His total stock included some 500-700 yards of cottons. For several years, Father won a license to retail cigarettes, snuff and opium in the village, now banned. These licenses were auctioned by the government to highest bidders. Opium was sold as a remedy for aches and pains and also to those few who were addicted to the drug. I assisted Father in the shop during holidays and school breaks. Father was not rich by any stretch of the imagination. He managed to feed his family. I do not recall ever going hungry.

Father was widowed around age 45. Father then interacted socially and romantically with a widow in the village. But romantic alliances between unmarried people were not customary in our culture. Father's reputation and high standing saved him from reproach. Father never re-married. His remarriage was opposed by my very strong-willed grandmother (described subsequently). She argued that bringing a new woman into the family (a stepmom to us children) would create conflict. She was right. Our family has been largely conflict-free.

Father was blessed with a calm disposition; seldom did he lose control or get angry. Seldom did he abandon his state of equipoise. Stoic in his bearing, he looked at both gain and loss with an equal eye. If anything, he tended to exaggerate his gains and minimize his losses. He never nagged me to follow this professional line or that, as only too many Indian parents do. He did not administer physical punishment except only once when I ran away into the fields to avoid going to school. It was very important to him that I attend school and perform well. He held very high expectations of me.

Father suffered from asthma and acute bronchitis during the winter months. I believe this was the result of severe allergic reaction to seasonal pollens. But the diagnosis was poor. The several medications he took (ephedrine pills, Himrod's asthma powder, Ayurvedic mixtures) gave him only temporary relief. I saw him struggle to breathe in winter months. He coughed incessantly and labored to bring up the

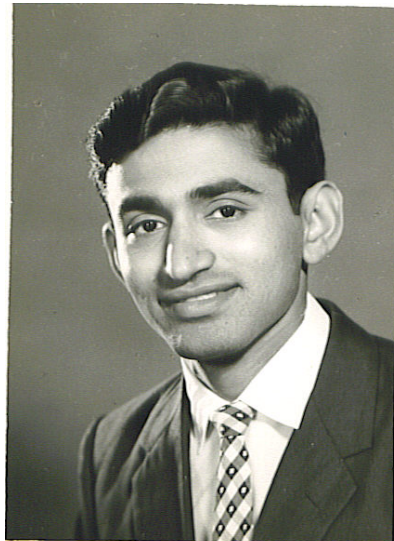
sputum. He was not given to complaining; he bore his burden with fortitude. It was painful to see him suffer so much. I slept on a cot in the second story room alongside his bed. On occasion, I pressed and massaged his legs for relief of aches and pains. The close physical contact worked wonders as a bonding agent between father and son. Father would recover in the spring and summer months and get busy with his trades. Even the winter months when he was sick slowed him only a little.

Father had social and charitable instincts. He got the main village street paved with *pukka* fired bricks. He also built a tree-shaded platform for senior folks to sit and relax in the untouchable section of the village. During my 2010 visit to the village, I saw a group of senior men playing cards at the tree shaded platform. Happily, they narrated to me acts of Father's generosity.

To my regret, Father died in 1975 at age 75, just a couple of months before I reached India during a sabbatical leave. I regret not being physically near him during his last days. I wish I had given him a sum of money, which I know he would have spent on a village project. He never asked for any. I had only small savings as long as he lived. When I acquired wealth, he was no more.



Father with his three Daughters and several Grandchildren, at the village home.



My portrait, age 24

Father was not happy with the fact that I was settled far away in America. He could not travel across the globe, nor bask in my success. He would have liked for me to become a revenue officer, a *Tehsildar*. A *Tehsildar* is a sub-district level administrator with limited executive and judicial powers. The revenue officer exercises much influence in the countryside and often acquires modest wealth.

**Grandmother.** Grandmother named Ganga Devi was born around 1878. She lost her husband at a young age in a cholera epidemic around 1900. She raised Father as a single mother. I remember her as a powerful regal woman, head of the clan. Few dared to cross her. In matters concerning betrothals, weddings, funerals, her word was final.

As subsequently noted, I was sent away from home for purposes of schooling at a young age. When I returned home during summer vacations and holidays, grandmother treated me with special love and

care. I felt that I was my grandma's very favorite. She cooked special foods to help build my "brain power" and "memory bank." A special concoction she prepared was called *Nashasta*—milk of wheat cooked in ghee with lots of almonds and herbs added for strength. I credit grandmother for my well-developed intellect. She outlived my mother by 10 years and thus filled her shoes. She died of old age when I was in middle school. I lost someone very special to me.

**Sister Gomti.** Among my three sisters and two brothers, Gomti was the eldest and almost a generation apart. Gomti was married at age 18 or 19 to a man in a nearby village. I do not know many details except that her husband died after two or three years of marriage. In the meantime, she bore a son. As custom demanded, after her husband's death, she moved back to our family with her year-old son. The child grew to age two or three. Then, her dead husband's family demanded the return of the child to them because, in the prevailing tradition, the child belongs to the father and not the mother. It did not matter that the father of the child was dead. The deceased father's family stood in his place in making the claim. My father put up a weak defense.

One morning, two men showed up at our family's compound riding on a horse. I was a child of 5 or 6 and my memory is weak. Yet, the gruesomeness of the incident has left on me an indelible mark. The two men were relatives of the deceased father of the child, perhaps an older brother and his father. They wanted to take the child back with them, saying "the child is ours." Arguments were made back and forth. Father was timid when it came to putting up a strong defense. In the final scene, I recall that the two men picked up the child as he played around in the compound and loaded him up on the horse. With the child crying and fighting, they fled. My sister was left behind wailing and weeping. There was nothing she could do.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a slave woman Eliza overhears that her infant son was going to be sold to a slave trader. She fled holding the child in her arms. Eliza crossed the Ohio River walking on patches of frozen ice to a settlement of Quakers, who transported her to freedom. My sister could have run away with the child once she knew the intent of the two men. Where could she run to? Who would help? There was no freedom zone for her. She crouched in pain.

Woe to the rural Punjabi tradition that denied the mother her right to raise her child. Woe to my father for his timid response to injustice. Woe to the village community who did not rise up to defend. The day became a long night for my wailing sister. So many cries, so many tears! Such cruelties have their due. The child died within a few months.

Of all the family members, my sister Gomti was the only one who could fight. She had a sharp tongue and stood her ground in argument. Life's circumstances had made her so.



Sister Gomti (2<sup>nd</sup> from left in the picture) was married a second time to Raghubar Dyal, a widower and a middle-school teacher. He was considerably older than her. She fell off a slippery staircase and died in 1989 at age 69. We lost a family linchpin. She meant so much to me.



### III. SCHOOLING AND MAKING BOSOM FRIENDS

#### 1945-1955

During this time . . .

- India won independence, 1947
- Mahatma Gandhi was killed by assassin's bullet, 1948
- The US-USSR Cold War started
- The Marshall Plan was born
- Teacher salary in US: \$4,000/yr; in India: Rs 100/mo.
- Gasoline: 20 cents per gallon; Ford car: \$1300-1,500

No proper school existed in my village, Ladda. The government sanctioned primary school closed because the required number of students did not enroll. With 7<sup>th</sup> grade schooling under his belt, Father valued education. He went to great lengths to assure that I received proper education. A private tutor was hired to instruct some eight to ten children, including me. Father provided the second floor of his shop as living quarters for the teacher cost free. The meals were provided by the student families in rotation. The two meals—lunch and dinner--consisted of the standard Punjabi fare: four or five chapaties, a bowl of daal (lentils), vegetable, pickles and onion slices. On special days, halva or kheer (rice cooked in milk) might be added. I think the teacher was paid a small monthly stipend of Rupees 25 (\$5/mo).

Instruction was provided on our roof terrace. We learned to read and write in the Gurumukhi, Hindi and Urdu scripts. We also memorized long multiplication tables: from one to 20, not only for whole numbers but also for quarters and halves. We could do complex computations in our head, like walking and talking calculators. Memorizing multiplication tables is much more efficient in Hindi language than in English. We wrote our lessons with chalk on soft-stone slates, which could be wiped clean. We also wrote in the sand with a forefinger. Paper notebooks were expensive. The teacher left after two years and the school closed. The living arrangement and the salary were pitiful. Other teachers were tried but nothing worked. I remember attending more than one make-shift primary school in the village.

In spite of all the limitations, I had a good grounding in reading, writing and arithmetic.

In order to continue my interrupted education, Father took me to the nearby township of Sangrur, which boasted a high school and a 4-year college. I was to live with my elder sister Gomti and her teacher husband, Master Raghubar Dyal . Such arrangements of living with members of the extended family for purpose of schooling are common in India. I lived with my sister and brother-in-law for several years and completed high school and some college. Later, I biked 5 miles from my village to college to complete the bachelor's degree.

Separation from my family at age 8 or 9 hit me hard. I missed terribly the company of my siblings and especially the love and care of my grandmother. While living in the home of my brother-in-law, I felt like a stranger in a strange home. My brother-in-law had six children from his previous marriage; three of the boys were about my age. I was sometimes taunted and ridiculed. Among the boys, Romesh was

friendly towards me; we have remained friends throughout our lives. My sister could not much favor me, but she was my support and staff to lean on. I would return to my village home during school breaks and vacations. The journey back to my sister's home in the town was especially painful and full of tears. I went to sleep crying many a night. Several tormented days would pass before I returned to normalcy.

Once I ran away into the village fields to avoid being taken to school after the break was over. I returned hungry and thirsty late into the evening. The family was distraught at my absence. The next morning, Father hit me 4 or 5 times with the sole of his flat shoe as I resisted being sent to school, away from home. This is the only beating I remember ever receiving. Father loaded me onto the rear of his bicycle, with me sobbing and protesting and took me to my sister's place at Sangrur to join school. The agony of the journey is still fresh in my mind. I learnt to live and adjust to unpleasant circumstances. I learned to keep my feelings to myself. This has made me an introvert. I am shy and not overly demonstrative. These traits likely spring forth from my grief-filled childhood experiences.

I do not think highly of the British residential public school system. In the previous century, the British upper classes sent their tender wards to residential public schools, away from home. Children were often caned for slight misbehavior. The coldness and stiff upper-lip of the British higher class may spring from this loveless childhood training. Children should not be separated from their parents, if at all possible, in my opinion.

#### MAKING 'BOSOM' FRIENDS

I developed many close friendships in school. Of course all were male friends as "dating" girls was not part of the cultural milieu in India. I achieved a degree of popularity among my peers. In high school, I was elected as the "General Secretary" of the Student Union, a position similar to a student-body president in the U.S. I was elected to several leadership positions later in college also. I have wondered as to the reasons for seeking popular offices. My unhappy home circumstances may perhaps explain it. To compensate for the lack of love at my adopted home, I sought it outside the home among fellow students.

I recall reading '*Anne of Green Gables*' (by Lucy M. Montgomery) and later watching the movie under the same title. Anne's story is set in Prince Edwards Island, Canada. Anne is an orphan girl; she is sent by the orphanage to live with several foster families. She works hard for her keep and is sometimes exploited. Finally, she is assigned to live at Green Gables, the home of elderly Matthew and Marilla. Anne is an independent and strong-willed girl of 12. Anne excels in studies and wins top honors. To compensate for the lack of parental love, she develops close friendships with her "bosom" friends. Like Anne, my friendships are among my proudest possessions as I accumulated friends throughout my school, college and career. I made "bosom" friends or soul-mates and like Anne I excelled in studies.

My academic performance in school and college was nothing short of stellar. I was the recipient of an academic scholarship in school. The Rs 2-3 monthly stipend was small by the prevailing standards even then, but the boost in confidence was tremendous. I scored the second highest marks in the high school completion exam. My name is inscribed on the Raj High School plaque for the year 1952 to mark this distinction. I topped the list in the B.A. examination in the social sciences and humanities division.

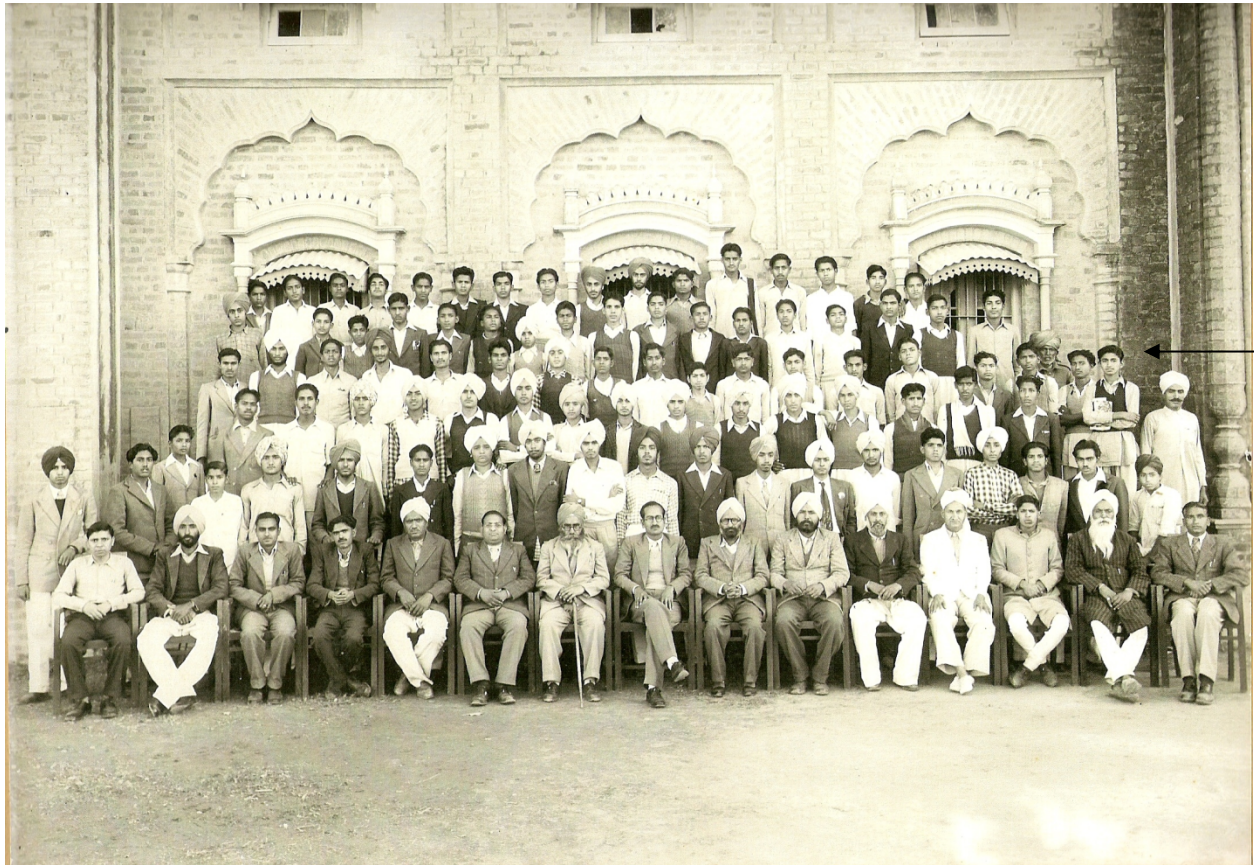
Academic achievement in India frequently brings accolades and popularity. In the US, in contrast, sports achievement leads to popularity and accolades. Academically bright students in the US are sometimes called “nerds,” a negative epithet. The Indian system rewards brains over brawn.

My student leadership roles were not without cost; they got me in trouble with school authorities on occasion. I recall being the ring leader for organizing a student walk-out in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The weather was nice; students wanted to have a picnic rather than stay indoors. We marched outside shouting slogans, like “Today is a Fine Day,” “To the Fields We Go.” Such student demands were common during an overcast cloudy summer day. Since India is a hot country with lots of sunshine, an overcast sky with an occasional gentle drizzle is invariably enchanting. Love blooms. Much romantic poetry in India celebrates the coming of rains after a long hot dry spell. I was the lead slogan monger marching ahead of the students, along with Ram Punia. The headmaster ordered two of the servants to catch hold of the ring leaders. I was dragged to his presence. With a wooden stick, he beat me black and blue. This was not the first time I got into trouble with authorities.

**Corporal Punishment:** This brings me to the practice of corporal punishment in Punjabi schools. Maintaining discipline was not a major problem. Students were well behaved and respectful of teachers. Students did not talk or pass personal notes while being taught, a common problem in the US. Students may be beaten for not properly learning the assigned lessons. If the student failed to correctly answer an academic question, he might be beaten. Four methods of corporal punishment were common in 1950s Punjab: (1) the offending student was asked to stand in the classroom facing a wall. This was embarrassing to the student. (2) A somewhat more severe punishment required the student to sit down in a crouching position, and while extending his arms under his legs catch hold of his ears. The position was uncomfortable but not excruciating. (3) The teacher might twist the offending student’s ear or slap him. (4) The teacher might hit the offending student multiple times with a ruler or a wooden stick on the student’s palm. Practices varied from one teacher to another. Some teachers were downright sadistic. This was rare though. I never saw any student being caned on his buttocks, a British practice I have been told. I was a studious pupil and therefore avoided any punishment on account of academic deficiency. Students were not physically punished in college.

### **High School Photo**

The earliest photo of myself I have is a high school class-picture taken about 1952. I have no baby or childhood pictures of myself. Only richer families took photos of their ‘bundles of joy’ and tiny tots. My family was not among the rich. The high school class-photo attached here evokes many memories. It is taken in front of an impressive looking solid-brick two-story building with arches and window awnings. The building is a throwback to the older embellished architecture, rather than the modern functional drab style.



My High School Photo

I stand in the third row (towards right side), next to a turbaned peon (see the arrow). I am wearing a white shirt, a half-sleeve sweater and a draw-string plain trouser. My hair is stylishly combed back. My arms are folded in front. Interestingly, I am the only student in the picture clutching on to two notebooks inside my folded arms. What do the notebooks signify?—the mark of studiousness, or simply for effect? I do not know. I topped the list at high school graduation. The school maintains a sign-board displaying the names of two top-achieving students for each year. As mentioned before, my name is inscribed on the marquis for the year 1952.

The turbaned person, standing next to me to the right, was the school peon, about the lowest rank on the school totem pole. The peon performed a multitude of tasks: deliver messages from the headmaster to the teachers (before the telephone age), fetch and serve the cool waters from the well on school grounds (I can still taste the freshly drawn healthful water), and strike the school gong at the beginning of each class period. He struck the gong with certain flair, swinging his right arm wide and bringing the full weight of the mallet onto the metal disc. It was a cathartic act, pouring out all the emotion that he held in his bosom.

Fifteen teachers are seated on chairs in front, with the head-master L. D. Gupta taking the center chair. Unfortunately, my favorite teacher of Sanskrit is not in the picture. All the teachers are well-groomed and dressed in trousers and jackets. The 86 students stand in five rows. Some boys have jackets on, others wear sweaters. Clearly, the picture was taken in winter months. No chains, pierced lips, patched jeans or spiky hair are in evidence. The students wearing turbans are Sikhs.

There are no girls in the picture. The girls attended a separate all-girls school. It was not the fashion then to mix boys and girls. According to the prevailing folkways, gender mixing was sure to lead to debauchery. This is the only picture I have from school and childhood days.

## RANBIR COLLEGE, SANGRUR



I attended Ranbir College to earn my bachelor's degree. The College was a small liberal arts institution, located in the provincial township of Sangrur, Punjab. It was named after Maharaja Ranbir Singh of Jind State who ruled from 1887 to 1948. The college opened its doors in 1939 first as a 2-year college and later in 1943 upgraded to a 4-year degree granting institution.

Admission was then readily available for the aspiring student. Tuition fee was nominal at Rs 100 or \$20 per year. Books and supplies cost another Rs

100, or \$20. Most students commuted from their homes in the town and a few from the surrounding nearby villages.

It was a stroke of sheer luck that my village was mere 5 miles from the College, lying along a paved road. I could therefore bike up and down to attend college, which took 30-40 minutes each way. If the village was distanced further or if a paved road did not exist, college would be beyond my reach. My entire life's trajectory would be different. A small blessing has a big pay-off.

The 1956 college enrollment was 450. The college now has of course grown in size. It offered then a liberal arts curriculum, with majors in History, Political Science, Economics, English, Mathematics, and Hindi. The teaching staff of about 30, all with Master's degrees, was well qualified and deeply caring. All the professors were male with the exception of Mrs. Padma Somnath, who taught Hindi. Mrs. Somnath was caring and compassionate, and a stunning beauty to boot. She often treated students to tea and biscuits at her well-decorated home. This influenced me to entertain students at our home in later years during my university teaching career in Florida.

Ranbir College went coeducational around 1954. Some 20 girls entered the college for the first time. This was not without controversy. The merits and demerits of coeducation were hotly debated on campus. The mixing of boys and girls would surely lead to debauchery and immorality, so argued the opponents. Further, the new system is Western in inspiration, not Indian or traditional. The supporters argued for modernity, for ringing out the old and ringing in the new. If India were to progress, girls must be partners in the process of development. Additionally, an equivalent 4-year college for girls did not exist in the State. The latter argument won and girls were admitted. Moral standards did not decline. Boys acquired a healthier attitude about the opposite gender. College students in India are commonly referred to as "boys and girls" rather than men and women as in the US.

**EARNING WHILE LEARNING.** I had grown up with little or no pocket money throughout childhood and school years. My luck changed in college, as I began tutoring high school students in math and English. Tutoring was done at each student's home for one hour, Monday thru Saturday. I received the going rate: Rs 20 per month for each of the 3-4 students I tutored. The Rs 60-80 monthly income that I earned was a handsome amount in that time period. I recall that I bought my first Swiss Roamer watch, costing Rs 70, an expensive item. I also bought a Sheaffer fountain pen (Rs 10) and a used bicycle (Rs 30). I also got my first woolen trousers and a coat or jacket to match.

'Earning while learning' is a common American practice. American students do sundry jobs—mow lawns, clean houses, serve food, and drive taxis. Unfortunately, Indian students would regard such jobs as menial and below their status. 'Dignity of labor' is sorely lacking in India. In my case, tutoring students was perfectly honorable.

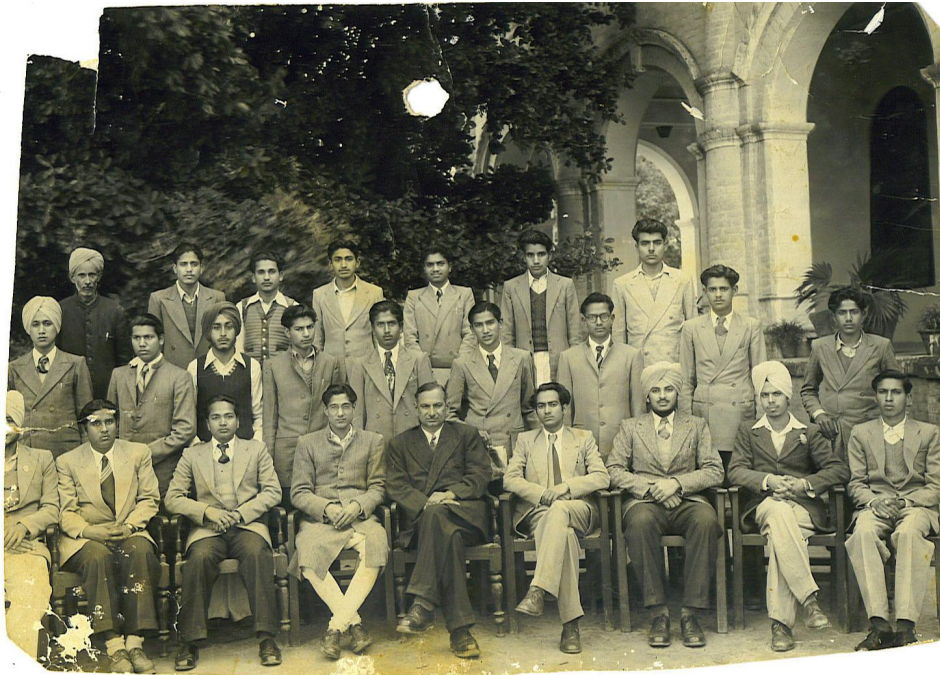
All my college classmates were 16-20 years old. None of the students were married. It would be odd for older persons or for married persons to be on a college campus in India. When I moved to the U.S., I found American college students to be mixed in age distribution. Also, it was not uncommon for students, especially graduate students, to be married. Wives worked at sundry jobs to put their student-husbands through college. This is an ingenious American practice, much to be admired. I myself benefitted from this practice in later years. I completed my Ph.D. on the shoulders of my darling wife Shully, who worked partly during my studentship.

Among my dear friends at Ranbir College included: Satya Prakash, Prem Chand, Hans Raj, Charan Das, Ved Goel, Gursharan Singh, Ram Singh, Surinder Kumar, Krishan Gautam, Mithan, Gulati, Romesh Chand, and several others. Satya Prakash, Gulati and Krishan Gautam participated in debates and declamation contests, as I also did.

#### **Two College Photos, 1954**



Principal Balwant Singh presiding. Mrs Padma Somnath seated in the front row was the only female Professor at the College. I stand in the second row, fifth from right (see the arrow).



I stand in the last row, 4<sup>th</sup> from left.

**Neglecting Sports Participation.** I neglected gymnastics and sports during college. I regret this omission. Participation in sports required a return 30-minute journey to campus in early evening. Domestic chores, tutoring high school students and my own home-work left little spare time. There was also the cost factor of having to buy a tennis racket or cricket-bat and proper sports clothing, none of which I could afford. The sports-related deficiency has stayed with me, to my great regret. I tried learning to play tennis, ping-pong and billiards around age 45-50 at the University in Florida; I was not good at any of these. Thrice I tried to learn ballroom dancing; I made little progress beyond Fox Trot, Waltz, and simple Disco. One of my life's joys has been the ability to swim. I am not afraid of water. Let this be a lesson to young people: sound body and mind go together. I preach to my grandchildren not to shun sports and gymnastics.

Let me add that I developed the habit of walking and short-distance jogging early in life. This practice has stayed with me throughout my life. I continue to walk, jog and swim into my senior years. Many people in India, young and old, men and women, walk in the mornings. During such walks, people often share jokes and engage in banter. Fitness consciousness has increased in the US in the last quarter century. Many Americans now walk, jog or visit the gym.

### **FOLLY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION**

English was the medium of instruction in my college as in most other colleges in India. All exam papers were written in English. Because of my better than average competence in written and spoken English, I often scored high marks in exams. Unfortunately, many students performed poorly because of their difficulty with the English language. In rural and small-town India, English is not commonly spoken at home or in the street. People living in large metropolitan cities like Delhi and Bombay are better exposed to spoken and written English. Top government, business and universities, all function in the English medium. This puts rural and small town people at a disadvantage in seeking admission to top universities or in seeking top-level employment. It may be noted that over 70 percent of India lives in small towns and villages.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote: "It has always been my conviction that Indian parents who train their children to think and talk in English from their infancy betray their children and their country. They deprive them of the spiritual and moral heritage of the nation, and render them to that extent unfit for the service of the country." (See: *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Beacon Paperback Edition, 1957, p. 312)

The use of English language as the medium of instruction was foisted in India by the English ruling elite. Lord Thomas Macaulay provided the following rationale in 1835:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. (Google Macaulay's "Minute upon Indian Education")

Lord Macaulay succeeded beyond his dreams. When the British withdrew from India in 1947, the English educated Indian elite headed by Prime Minister Nehru inherited the mantle of power. They



embraced the use of English in administration and as the medium of instruction in colleges. Thus the old system continued.

The use of English has not served the country well. It is particularly discriminatory against the lower and rural sections of society. The system produces clerks but few great minds. China and Japan both use their national language in governance and as the medium of instruction. Both have outperformed India in economic development and in scientific output. Students should learn their mother tongue first and foremost, and then study English as a second language. The widespread use of English in India has had one positive result, however. Much of the world's computer software work is done by English speaking Indians. India also exports to America and the West many English speaking professionals, enhancing its image in the world. Many leading scientists, engineers, professors and physicians in the US originate from India. As of this writing in 2017, both Google and Microsoft are headed by persons from India: Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google, and Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft. There are many other high placed persons from India serving in top business, academic and medical positions.

#### JIND STATE AND THE TOWNSHIP OF SANGRUR

Readers may be interested in a description of the Jind State, and its capital: the township of Sangrur. Jind was one the several small Princely states under British tutelage, including Patiala, Nabha, Faridkot and Kapurthala. The British controlled foreign and military affairs but allowed autonomy in certain domestic affairs such as education, trade, and police services. Jind was a smaller state at 1332 square miles and Patiala the largest at 5932 square miles. The 1901 Imperial Gazette listed the population of Jind State at 250,000. Sangrur, its capital city, had a population of 11,000 in 1901, which grew to 24,000 in 1950.



**Bara-Dari**—a marble pavilion set in the middle of a man-made lake in Sangrur, the capital of Jind State. It was an enchanting picnic spot. I visited it many times in the company of school friends.



**Diwan Khana or the Royal Seat.** The Maharaja held his court inside the chandeliered large hall. Banasar Gardens with manicured lawns fronted the building. I studied under a shady mango-tree in the lawns for my year-end exams.

Sangrur was said to be laid out after the city of Jaipur, Rajasthan. The main market streets (the bazaars) intersected at right angles. A large water fountain at the town square delighted passersby. Several fine buildings adorned the town: Diwan Khana or the royal seat, a marble pavilion known as Bara-Dari in the middle of a man-made lake (pictured above), temples with adjoining water pools, Ranbir College, a large clubhouse and a Hospital. Members of the royal family and high officials had villas surrounding the

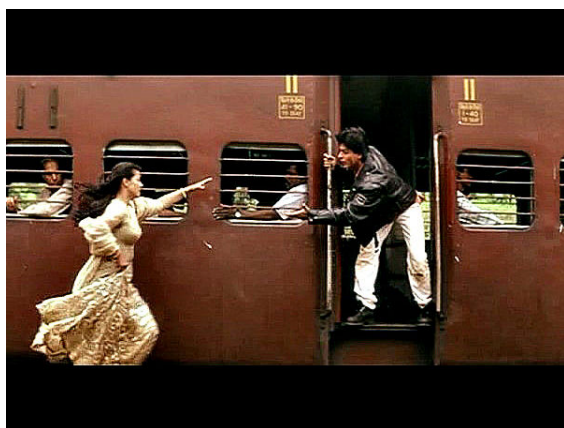
township. A particularly fine facility was the Banasar Gardens with lush green lawns, palm trees and English imported water fountains. I used to study there under a shady mango-tree for my year-end exams. The maharajas lost their thrones after India gained independence in 1947. With royal patronage gone and corrupt officials at the helm, public buildings and parks deteriorated or disappeared altogether. Both the Bara-Dari and the Diwan Khana are in advanced state of disrepair. Houses have been built in public parks to accommodate the doubling and tripling of population. Automobiles and scooters have replaced horse-drawn buggies. Noise pollution now mars the old-time serenity. Development has its costs.

#### TRAIN TRAVEL IN PUNJAB, 1950s

Walking or riding a bullock-cart was the common mode of transportation in rural Punjab before WWII, at a speed of about 3 miles per hour. A camel or a donkey ride provided a quicker pace. Horses were used to pull two-wheeled *Tongas* for hire. Bicycles became common after WWII. An automobile was a rare sight.

Among the better blessings of the British imperial rule was the building of an extensive railway network. One could travel by train to distant places all over the country. I rode the trains to Delhi to get my passport and US Visa. A distance of 150 miles was covered in 6 hours at a cost of Rs 5 or \$1. It was a bargain. The train journey continues to enchant me. The clickety-clack sound of the steel wheels hitting the rails hypnotizes me, and can be heard at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7CRhXsLh3M>

While visiting India, I prefer to travel by train (A/C class) than by plane. I have made some lifelong friendships this way. I met Howard Wheatley from Australia on Delhi-Madras train in 2001. We have stayed friends. Howard twice visited me in the US as my guest. He invited me to visit him in Australia.



Hawkers shout their wares at every train stop in India, providing gaiety. People getting on and off the train present a lively scene. Passengers in the West usually read books or magazines to keep themselves busy. Not so in India. Indian travelers often carry on a loud conversation with fellow-travelers. Personal information is readily exchanged. No line of inquiry is beyond the pale: the nature of one's business, the income earned, marital status, names of important

relatives and so on. When I returned to India in 1960 after a period study in the US, I took a train from Bombay to Delhi to reach my home in Punjab. My luggage labels revealed the fact that I was returning from the US. Foreign travel was still a novelty then. Many questions were asked of me about life in America. The entire compartment was my audience. The ticket-checker sat next to me chatting rather than going around the compartment checking fares. He ignored the fact that I was overweight in carry-on luggage. What a blessing!

**Different Classes of Rail Travel in NW India:** In his popular book, *The Punjabi Century*, Prakash Tandon describes 11 separate layers or classes of train travel in India (1930s time period). The grading was considerably simplified in the branch lines of the Northwest Railways in Punjab. Essentially, there were four classes:

- First class, with roomy padded seats, usually occupied by high government officials and affluent business people.
- An Intermediate class, with padded seats, occupied usually by status-conscious middle class Indians who did not wish to sit with the proletariat.
- Third class, with long wooden unpadded benches, crowded with common folks.
- A separate third-class compartment reserved especially for women.

I traveled third class on most occasions. Only after my wedding in 1963, I traveled first class with my bride in a two-seat private coupe'. I felt luxurious. The popular Frontier Express took us from Bombay to Delhi, a distance of about 900 miles (about 1,400 KM) in 24 hours.

### TALKIES

A talkie is a sound film, where the image and the sound are synchronized, in contrast to a silent film. The 1927 Hollywood production *The Jazz Singer* was the first successful talkie film. India produced its first talkie *Alam Ara* in 1931. The film was shown in large Indian metropolitan cities and was a huge success. Soon, more films were produced in Bombay, the Hollywood of India. Within 20 years, the popularity of the films had spread to smaller towns, including Sangrur. I viewed my very first film during Maharaja Ranbir Singh's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1947. The Jubilee was celebrated with much fanfare in the State. Public buildings were illuminated and sweets distributed to school children. As part of the celebrations, the popular film *Jugnu* was screened in the open air Banasar Gardens. Children, including me, sat on grass in front, adults in the back on chairs and the royal family and dignitaries on a raised platform further behind. I did not much understand the story line but was fascinated with the speaking pictures on the big screen in front.

Subsequently, I saw a number of films when I had my own income from tutoring students: *Chitralekha*, *Bari Behn*, *Mahal*, *Barsat*, *Awara*, *Chori Chori*, etc. Films were shown under a large tent. We sat on a mat in front of the screen for 1/4 Rupee or 5 cents. A chair seat in the rear would cost twice that amount. Indian films were quite melodramatic. The standard story line depicted unfulfilled love. A rich boy meets a poor girl. Such an alliance is not approved by the family. Or, the young lovers belonged to different religions or different castes. Tradition forbade their marriage. Marriage for love was not an



accepted practice in the tradition-bound society then. Sometimes the young lovers would consummate their love secretly or they would simply elope (think Romeo and Juliet). Early films were made with some variation of this theme. Lilted songs and dances were integrated into the story line.

Raj Kapoor and Nargis in *Chori Chori*, 1956

These stories of unfulfilled love impacted me emotionally. I would lie awake at night revisiting the storyline and grieving. The melancholy might last several days. I continue to be moved by romance stories of unrequited love.

*Gone With the Wind* and *Dr. Zhivago* are two of my favorite Hollywood movies. Among Bollywood films, I am moved by *Devdas* and *Parineeta*.

#### IV. "GO WEST, YOUNG MAN"

I graduated in 1956 with a B.A. degree at age 20. Graduation from college required 14 years of schooling in Punjab, rather than 16 years in the US. I scored the highest marks in the Humanities and the Social Sciences batch. What was I to do with the B.A. degree? Many of my classmates became high school teachers. Teaching jobs were relatively easy to find as many new schools opened after India's 1947 Independence. The brighter students went for Engineering or Medicine. I was interested in Law. This would make it possible for me to enter politics, a youthful ambition. Many of our national leaders had studied law: Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and V. B. Patel, among others. Political life attracted me for two reasons: social service and fame. We were then under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi; giving oneself to social service was not empty talk. A law degree would likely lead to the fulfillment of this ambition. But I had no money to attend a distant law college. Father was in no position to bear the cost. The idea was therefore dropped. I was idling away my time.

My Principal, N. K. Aggarwal, uttered the famous words, "Go west, young man." These words were first spoken by newspaperman Horace Greeley in 1850s in the context of westward expansion in the United States. The idea caught my imagination. I began corresponding with the US Information Service in Delhi to learn about American colleges and universities. The United States was opening up as a destination for higher education. The Cold War competition between the US and USSR helped. "Winning the hearts and minds of international students" was then one of the US foreign policy goals.

But how was I to finance such a venture? American higher education was extremely expensive. I looked for financial aid.

Mr. Puran Chand Sawhney came to my help. Mr. Sawhney, the owner and General Manager of Mahalaxmi Sugar Mills in Punjab, had a reputation for generosity. I wrote to Mr. Sawhney requesting financial help to study abroad. I provided him data on my superior academic performance but no means to support foreign study. To my happy surprise, Mr. Sawhney wrote back affirmatively. I was overjoyed at this turn of good fortune. Among the several blessings I have received in life, this surely is among the choicest.

Encouraged by Mr. Sawhney's letter, I applied for admission at several American universities. I recall that I got admitted to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Ohio State College and Oregon State College. I selected Oregon State College because of its low cost at \$1,100 per year (tuition, room and board). I traveled to Mr. Sawhney's summer residence in Mussoorie hills. I met him after waiting two days. He was kind to receive me; he committed Rs 1,000 initial stipend and Rs 250 per month subsequently for

two years. The grant would cover about one-half of the student expenses in the US. I was to earn the rest with part-time work. The United States visa required evidence of ability to support oneself in the US. Sawhney's Letter of Support helped me get the US visa.

I traveled several times by train to Delhi for blood tests and medical examinations to fulfill US visa requirements. This was the first time I traveled farther than 50 miles. As I had lived all my life in rural and small town India, this was the first time when I met a white person. I found the American Consular staff to be cordial and friendly.

Father and family members fully supported my plan to study abroad. The problem was raising adequate funds to pay for the boat fare to America. Sawhney's promised assistance would commence only after joining the college. I needed Rs 2,500-5,000 (\$500-1,000) to make the journey. Father committed all he had, about Rs 1,000. An appeal was made to extended family and friends. Contributions came in, varying in amounts of Rs 50 to 500 (\$10-50). My maternal uncle, Mamaji made the largest contribution at Rs 500 (which was returned to him 4 years later). A total of Rs 2,500 (\$500) was thus raised, a bare minimum. Passage was booked to England on the SS Surriento, an Italian ship at a cost of Rs 1,100 (\$220). Sailing was much cheaper than flying in that time period. The boat would take me from the port of Cochin in south India to England via Aden, Port Said, Genoa and Paris. My plan was to break the journey in England for six months to a year to work and save money to finance my education in the US. I marveled at the modern travel industry. My travel agents Jeena & Co booked my travel that would take me by steamship to Italy, train to Paris and ferry to England. The Rs 1,100 fare for the entire trip was paid in Indian currency. What a marvel!

I had little money but a bagful of confidence to meet any challenge.

**Leaving Home:** The departure day arrived, Oct 14, 1956. My extended family was gathered in the village. Some college friends also arrived to say good-byes. My sisters, Gomti, Gauran and Chambi, did the Arati and Tikka, the departing religious benediction. They fed me a morsel of sweets, marked my forehead with the vermilion Tikka, recited a mantra, and each gave me some cash. Fresh garlands adorned my chest. As I hugged Father, tears rolled down my cheeks. Fortunately, a friend had a camera



and he shot a few pictures. One picture survives, shown here. It seemed that the entire village gathered at the gate to give me their blessing, *Ashirwaad*. We walked 2 miles to the railway station to catch the train to Delhi.

There was happiness mixed with sobbing and tears. I boarded the third-class compartment and stood in the doorway to say my final good-byes. Sister Chambi was waving a white handkerchief. As the train

sped onward, I looked back periodically. Sister Chambi's white handkerchief was still waving. This scene was indelibly engraved in my heart.

I stayed at a public Serai near Chandni Chowk in Delhi for the next three days. A public Serai is a bare-bone, no frills free guesthouse established by a rich benefactor. The accommodation is provided cost free. A two-day train journey took me from Delhi to the port city of Cochin in the state of Kerala in southern India where I would catch the boat to Europe. The beauty of the Kerala countryside struck me as awe-inspiring: palm trees swayed alongside bayous and waterways everywhere. I saw no litter thrown about. Young girls in their short blouses and colorful long skirts walked the streets with a sense of freedom. Their movement lent charm. I had not seen such beauty anywhere.

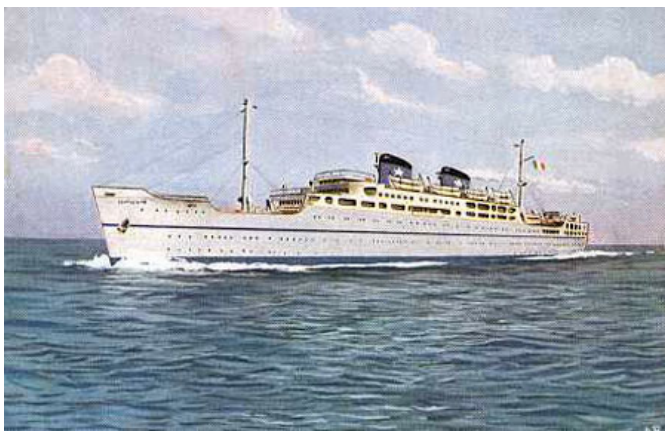
#### ABOARD STEAMSHIP SURRIENTO

I boarded the *SS Surriento* of Italy's Lauro Lines on October 21, 1956. The steamship carried 187 first class and 868 tourist and dormitory class passengers on the Italy-Australia migrant-worker route. It had three decks: first class on the top, tourist class in the middle and a dormitory class at the bottom. I booked a bed in the dormitory class. Some 50 Indian passengers boarded the ship in Cochin, a mixture of students and migrant workers. I was the youngest at age 20. Because of my slender body, I looked even younger. Several city-bred boys, more polished and more fluent in English than I, teased and had fun at my expense, a country bumpkin.

European men and women danced together in the ballroom on the top deck in the evenings. We boys would gather to watch them. I was impressed by the freedom and independence displayed by European women. I was too shy to strike up a conversation with any of them, male or female.

Food was a problem. The Italian food tasted insipid and not suited to Indian taste. Wine was served with each meal; few of the Indian passengers could enjoy it. I took a sip and found it difficult to swallow. I developed an additional problem. My stomach was unsettled; I felt nauseated. I threw up repeatedly on account of the ship's heaving up and down in the waves. I was not alone in this misery. I saw many a passenger leaning over the ship's rails and throwing-up into the deep waters below. Dramamine, the modern motion sickness medicine, was either not developed or not available to us.

#### THE SUEZ BOMBARDMENT (1956)



After 9 days of turbulent passage in the Arabian Sea, the *SS Surriento* dropped anchor at the mouth of the Suez Canal in Egypt. The Suez Canal is a 102 mile long man-made waterway. It joins the Red Sea with the Mediterranean and thus cuts down the travel distance between Asia and Europe by several thousand miles. The French and the British financed its construction and took control of it in 1869. Gamal Abdul Nasser, the popular president of Egypt nationalized the Canal in

1956 and put it under Egyptian command. Britain and France resorted to force. The bombs began to fall on 31 October 1956.

Traffic is a single lane in the Canal. Our ship waited a long time to join the convoy of ships traveling westward to Europe. After traveling a few hours, the ship dropped anchors a second time inside the Canal. Nobody seemed to know the exact reason; there was anxiety and apprehension. Luckily, the convoy sailed the second time and we safely emerged on the Mediterranean side. We learned later that Britain and France had commenced bombarding the Canal Zone. Nasser responded by scuttling ships in the Canal. We escaped. Our ship was in the last convoy to clear the Canal. God was watching over us.

November 2 was Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights. The Indian passengers put together a double celebration: celebrating the festival and safely clearing the Suez. The Captain was invited who offered thanks for a safe passage. Soon, the steamship reached Genoa in Italy, its final port of call. An overnight train took me to Paris and then a ferry delivered me to London. The train from London's Victoria Station to Birmingham, my final destination, was plush with deep maroon padded seats. I had never ridden in such luxury. An English co-traveler offered me a piece of chocolate, which I happily accepted. This was a good omen.

## **ENGLAND**

Britain ruled India for some 200 years, from the 1757 victory at Plassey in Bengal to their withdrawal in 1947. As India was part of the British Empire, Indians could freely enter and settle down in Britain without the need for visas or permits. Britain faced a shortage of manpower during and after the War. As a result many Indians moved to England to work in steel and coal industries. Two of my school mates, brothers Ram Singh and Hari Singh Punia, were then working in Birmingham. I decided to avail myself of their hospitality. They shared a house with half-a- dozen other Punjabi immigrants, all working in various steel mills. I was not expected to pay for room and board as long as I was unemployed—a standard practice among Indian immigrants. Space in the rented house was sparse. All slept on cots in a large upstairs room. The only heat was from the coal-burning fire place. There was no running hot water. Once a week, we would trudge to the community bath house for bathing at 1 shilling per person.

My intent was to work in England for six months to a year, save money and then join college in the US. I spent over a month in England looking for any kind of work, but none came my way. I applied at several steel factories where Indians worked. No luck. While doing rounds in search of employment, accidentally I entered a slaughter house and a meat-processing plant. I saw blood on the floor and large sides of meat hanging from the ceiling. I had never witnessed such a dismal sight. My whole person revolted. I ran from the plant as fast as I could. I also tried for a bus conductor's job because I was good in numbers and thus would be able to handle fares and make correct change. The conductor, and not the driver, collects fares in England. Twice I took the simple arithmetic exam with the Transport Authority. I passed the exam and yet failed to secure employment. Fresh from India, I could not have made myself easily understood to native English speakers. That rather than discrimination might be the real reason for not being hired.

At my roommates' suggestion I applied for and received unemployment checks for about two weeks. I think I received 2 pounds a week. The standard factory work wages in that time period were 8-10

pounds per week (1 pound = 3 US. dollars then). I also saw a physician for a general checkup. He ordered a pair of spectacles for me without any charge, a benefit of the National Health Service (NHS). All British residents including non-citizens were covered under the Service then. I marveled at the British generosity.

Because of my short stay and because of cultural differences, I did not get to know any Britons. The English weather was frigid with an overcast sky, very different from sunny Punjab. As I was not contributing towards my room and board, fellow house-mates hinted that I should move on. There was a problem, however. I did not have the money for the boat fare to New York and then a bus to Oregon, my final destination. I had landed with only 45 pounds in my pocket. Of this, 21 pounds were spent on purchasing a warm coat to ward off frigid English weather, leaving barely 20 pounds with me. My friend Hari came to my rescue and he lent me 40 pounds. I begged and borrowed the additional 25 pounds from roommates. With the borrowed money, I booked the Southampton-New York passage on the SS Queen Mary at 60 pounds for a December 8 departure. The SS Queen Mary was a luxury ship with sumptuous dining halls and ballrooms. I enjoyed very little. Sea-sickness and financial worry kept me to my cabin during the 6-day journey. I did not have enough money to travel from New York to Oregon, my final destination.

#### **ARRIVAL IN NEW YORK: *Nirbal ke bal Ram***

I landed at the New York port with \$75 and some change in my pocket. The bus fare to Oregon State College, a distance of some 3,000 miles (4,800 KM), was \$88. I was thus \$13 short. Naturally, I was a great deal worried. I did not know how I would reach my destination or what would happen to me. The Committee on Friendly Relations among Foreign Students came to my rescue. The Committee was established by the Ford Foundation. It was the Committee's practice to meet arriving foreign students at the NY port to facilitate their transfer to the U.S. The charming young lady who welcomed foreign students heard my story of dire need. After clearing with her office supervisor, she lent me \$15. My prayers were once again answered. I have often wondered what would happen to me if I had not received the help. Would I walk the streets of the City with a hand held out? Would I end up in some inner city ghetto? Would I be deported at government expense to live forever in infamy? *Nirbal ke bal Ram*—God is the strength of the weak. My prayers were heard. Help from unknown sources miraculously appeared. That is the only explanation.

The 4-day bus journey from NY to Oregon drove through towns, down the valleys and over the hills. It was mid-December. Christmas lights sparkled in their thousands like diamonds in the sky. I saw snow for the very first time-- a white sheet covering every leaf and every blade of grass. Beauty spread all around! I continue to be enchanted by Christmas lights against a white backdrop. Besides a few apples I had brought with me from the boat, I ate hardly anything on the 4 day bus ride.



## V. LIFTED TO A HIGHER LEVEL OF THOUGHT AND ACTION IN THE U.S.

1956-1959

During this time . . .

- Russia launched Sputnik into space, 1957
- 36,000 foreign students were enrolled at American universities
- Gallon of milk cost 50 cents; airmail postage: 4 cents
- India held second parliamentary elections, 1956
- Prime Minister Nehru spearheaded the “Non-Alignment” movement
- Tibet revolted against Chinese rule; Dalai Lama fled to India

I spent three years in the US, 1956-59. I was a changed person. I reached there as a country lad and left as a world citizen. No one could live in the United States “without being lifted to a higher level of thought and action,” wrote Har Dyal, a student at the University of California, and later a celebrated fighter for India’s independence. Students were the ones who could reap the greatest benefit. American universities are world class, large in size and cosmopolitan. American universities attract students from around the globe. My world view changed from local to global.

In addition, I learnt about the dignity of labor, as I worked at various manual jobs, described subsequently. This built character. An American proverb says: “Labor raises honest sweat; leisure puts you into debt.” I also found that most Americans consider themselves “middleclass;” there is less of a gap between the rich and the poor. Everyone is treated with respect. Further, Americans are straight-forward in their dealings and less likely to boast and show-off. I internalized these values; this made me a better person. I improved my command of the English language.

I never felt discriminated against because of my ethnicity, race or foreign origin.

But I never mastered the art of social chit-chat at the student lunch table, especially in a larger group. One is expected to banter in a group setting in the US. I found it hard to navigate the art of social conversation. Americans are friendly, but building close friendships was difficult. I developed a sense of self-sufficiency, of liking other people but of not necessarily needing them.

CLASS WORK: I enrolled in January 1957 at Oregon State College (now University) in Engineering. After two quarters, I switched to the University of Oregon at Eugene in a graduate program in Journalism and International Relations. Switching majors was not an easy decision. I agonized over it and had sleepless nights. Engineering was a much highly valued field at that time period in India; jobs were plentiful unlike in the social sciences. But my pursuing a degree in a social science field was the smartest decision I made. I took the road less traveled which made all the difference. Eventually I got the Ph.D. in Political Science at SUNY, Buffalo, described subsequently. This led to a 36-year long immensely fulfilling college teaching career. In my estimation, there is no better career path than college-level teaching in the US.

Graduate course work was challenging. Indian education based on rote memorization had prepared me little to write research papers or to lead seminars. I felt embarrassed at times for lack of basic knowledge. I did not know, for example, about ‘low’ and ‘high’ tides on ocean fronts. Having grown up

in Punjab, I had never visited a beach or watched the to-and-fro water action. “The Extent of Territorial Waters” was the topic of discussion in class. The territorial waters are the waters, with the land beneath them and the air space above them, over which a state claims sovereignty. The territorial water limit is measured from the low-tide mark. States claim 20 miles or more as the extent of territorial waters, although this is disputed. I was ignorant of the simple concepts of low- and high-tide water marks. The kind professor, Miss Blumenthal, offered to take me to the beach to observe the wave action. Kindness poured down in abundance.

I spent many hours at the University library. I gobbled up issues of *The New Republic*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Current History*, *New Statesman* and similar other publications. Also, I read regularly the weekly air-mail edition of the *Hindustan Times*. I came to know more about Indian culture and politics while residing in the US than when I lived in the home country. This is not unusual. Distance makes the heart grow fonder.

Occasionally, local civic and church groups invited me to lecture on India related topics. Americans developed a heightened interest in foreign affairs during this Cold War era. Nehru’s non-alignment foreign policy often came up for discussion. I introduced myself as: “I am from India.” I learned to avoid saying “I am an Indian.” The latter expression could be misconstrued to mean “a native or red Indian.” I developed close friendships with several fellow students: R. Blaine Whipple, Bill Riley and Arthur McDermott, among others. Recently discharged from the military and studying on the GI bill, Arthur introduced me to the joys of beer. Maxi’s bar near the campus was our favorite joint. Beer cost 10 cents a glass then, sometimes only 5 cents. McDermott, Whipple and Riley have kept up with me over the past decades.

I roomed with a Nigerian student for a quarter, when I first reached Oregon. I had never met an African before. He told me about the ravages of the slave trade in West Africa. He admired Mahatma Gandhi as a moral force. I also met students from Trinidad and the West Indies. They spoke accented Hindi. Their ancestors originated from UP and Bihar in north India, and were brought to the West Indies in 1800s as indentured laborers to harvest sugarcane. Rampersad from Trinidad owned a collection of Hindi song albums; we bonded very quickly.



University of Oregon Campus

An American campus is a mini-United Nations. Some 200 international students were then enrolled at the University. We met monthly at the Cosmopolitan Club. I served as its Secretary for a year. Indian students celebrated Diwali and the Republic Day. Chinese students celebrated the Chinese New Year, as the Japanese girls demonstrated the Tea Ceremony and the wearing of the silk Kimono. All nationality groups showcased their culture. We lived and breathed cosmopolitanism.

As described previously, I reached the campus totally broke. I sustained myself with several \$10 loans from the international student office, headed by the kind Dr. Clara Simmerville. Fortunately, the University gave me a tuition waiver. Raghu-nath Lathi, a fellow student, gave me a \$40 loan. Our careers took us in different directions over the years. Lathi does not remember extending me the loan. I most certainly do. Today he owns extensive real estate and is wealthy. God blesses those who lend a helping hand.

#### EARNING WHILE LEARNING IN US

Those willing to work hard are rewarded in America. It is truly a land of opportunity. No stigma attaches to manual work, unlike the case in India. I did a variety of manual jobs to support myself.

- I worked as a member of the “grounds crew”, in the summer of 1957. The crew pulled weeds, trimmed bushes and watered campus lawns. I earned \$557 over the 3 month summer period at \$1.25 per hour. The close working contact with American students taught me much about their ways and manners.
- I worked to clean a large six-bedroom house, Fall 1957. The large home was converted as a living facility for seniors. I vacuumed and mopped the floors, cleaned the toilets and removed the trash. In return I got a free room and three sumptuous meals a day. I believe, the Landlady Mrs. Blanch Lundstrom hired me on compassionate grounds. The benefit I received far exceeded the work I performed. I learned to enjoy American style cooking: ham steaks, mashed potatoes, green-peas, buttermilk pancakes, all home-cooked by the lady. Apple pies were my favorite.

But social conversation at the dining table did not come easily to me. The senior residents, although friendly, had little in common with me. I kept myself secluded to my room in the evening hours. After two quarters at the residence, I moved to the International House near the campus. Some 12-15 international students resided in the House. This was more to my liking. I shared a room with Mr. Ali from the Muslim Aligarh University in India. Meals were prepared individually in the common kitchen. Rent was \$7 per week.

- I was hired to maintain a Reading Room for the School of Journalism, 1958-59. The work consisted of stacking newspapers and magazines on shelves, removing the older ones, and maintaining a log. I received \$15 a week for 10 hours of work @\$1.50 an hour. Adjoining the Reading Room was a small office which I used as my private study room. No other student had similar private space. I felt important. Carol and Margaret, who supervised my work, treated me with kindness. Both were student wives, working in the Dean’s office to put their husbands through college, an ingenious American practice.
- I worked at the Roger Canning Factory, Pendleton, Oregon, Summer 1958. The factory processed peas. I did various jobs: inspecting delivery of peas from the farmers, washing the produce and packaging the same. It was strenuous work, with nighttime shifts as part of the work schedule. I witnessed mounds of peas being trampled upon before being packaged into cans. I did not eat peas for many years to come. I earned \$650 for the summer at \$1.65/hour.

While working at the canning factory in Pendleton, I shared a rented room with Carlos. Of mixed Spanish and native blood, Carlos was a student from Colombia, South America. He introduced me to the

cuisine from his homeland. I learned from him about the effects of Spanish colonial rule in South America, its low and high points. Living in the United States, one learns so much about the world.

Our landlady allowed Carlos and I to use the family room and the kitchen on a limited basis. We were told to vacate the family room before her husband returned from work. Once, the husband returned home earlier than usual. I was in the family room sitting on the stuffed chair watching TV. The husband did not like it. He blurted out angrily: "This is my chair; nobody sits on the chair except me." I got up and moved away quickly. I was embarrassed but it was a learning moment: American husbands guard their privileges jealously.

When Carlos and I vacated the room to return to college, our landlady offered us .50 cents for the few potatoes and onions we left in the cupboard. This was another learning moment. In financial matters, Americans are precise calculators. We thanked the kind lady and did not accept the coin. I admired the American sense of fairness.



**My First Automobile:** From the summer earnings in 1958, I bought my first high-ticket automobile: a 1949-Oldsmobile for \$99. Only America affords such luxury. At that time period in India, only the super rich could afford to own a car, even a used one. I felt that I had arrived. I kept the Oldsmobile polished and shiny.

Also, from my summer earnings, I paid off all the loans.

I received at this time a single \$300 payment on the 2-year scholarship promised by Mr. Sawhney, described earlier. I received none after that. I figured he had a business downturn and could no longer keep to his commitment. I did not write to him as I was now self-supporting. Even though Mr. Sawhney delivered only a very small portion of the money he promised, I am very thankful to him. His "Letter of Support" got me the U.S. Visa. As mentioned earlier, evidence of ability to pay one's way at college is a requirement for the U.S. Visa.

I earned the Master's degree in Journalism and International Relations at the University of Oregon in June 1959. After graduation, I moved to Yuba City, California, to work in its fruit orchards during the summer months. Yuba City is a colorful place; many Punjabi farmers were settled there, described below.

#### YUBA CITY FARMS

Yuba City is located in Central California, 126 miles north of San Francisco. Many Indian Punjabi farmers, mostly Sikhs from the Punjab, were settled in and around Yuba City. All people originating from India were then called Hindu. The term Hindu referred more to nationality than religion. California Hindus played a prominent part in fighting for India's independence. The Ghadar Party (Ghadar=Revolution) was organized in 1913 under the leadership of Har Dyal, a student at the University of California.

More peaches were grown in and around Yuba City than anywhere else in the world, so it was claimed. The area was named “the peach capital of the world.” Mexicans, Indians, Chinese and Japanese did most of the fruit picking. The labor camps were organized by nationality.

I joined one of the Indian camps. Some thirty fruit-pickers were housed in four barn-type buildings with 7-8 narrow cots in each building. The workers included Indian college students on break during the summer and unlettered immigrants from Punjab. We picked peaches 12 hours a day, from 7 to 7, Monday to Saturday, at \$1 per hour. The work was grueling under 100 degree heat. Indian food was served at the camp for a minimum charge. We got *kheer* (rice cooked in milk) for breakfast; *chapaties* and curried vegetables for lunch; *chapaties* and chicken curry for dinner. I loved the Indian cuisine initially, but it got boring after 2-3 weeks. The menu did not change from one day to another.

I bonded with other students working at the camp. Since I was one of the few persons owning an automobile, I was much sought after. We had fabulous time in the evenings and on Sundays, the day of rest.



Yuba City was nick-named “the peach capital of the world.” I was part of a 30-person Indian labor camp. We worked 12 hours a day, 7 to 7, at \$1 per hour. Only certain minimum-size peaches could be sold to the canning factory. The rest, in perfectly good form, were wasted and thrown on the ground.

## NEW YORK CITY

After the peach season ended about August 1959, I moved to New York City, hoping that the City would afford employment, suitable to my education. A number of the commercial houses in NYC had branches in India. I hoped to work for such a commercial house. I thought my college education and facility in Indian languages would serve me well. But this was not to be. I climbed many a high-rise buildings to knock at commercial office doors. I was received cordially but no employment.

New York City is an expensive place. It is necessary to work to support oneself. I took a job at the Schrafft’s restaurant. This was not without some initial hesitation. Schrafft’s was an upscale restaurant in Manhattan on 57<sup>th</sup> Street near Columbus Circle. In the 1961 film "Breakfast at Tiffany's," Audrey Hepburn is shown eating food from Schrafft's Restaurant, as evidenced by the logo on her brown bag. I washed dishes to begin with. Later, I was promoted to deliver coffee to office workers in the nearby high-rise buildings. I recall that I was paid \$1.50 an hour, in addition to getting small tips. During one of the coffee rounds, I met Barbara Friedman, a young Jewish woman who was a student of the Spanish Flamenco dance. Thinking that I was of Spanish origin, she approached me. Gradually we developed a friendship. She helped me visit City’s important landmarks—the Rockefeller Center, the Central Park, the Times Square, Greenwich Village, and others. The Central Park was my favorite.

New York City is an amazing place. The City never quite sleeps. I loved its international character. The United Nations was headquartered on the East River which I visited on more than one occasion. The

underground subway system was then safe and clean. Each ride cost 5 cents. The City fascinated me; the fascination continues to this day. I was lodged at the International Student Center at 38 West 88<sup>th</sup> Street near Central Park. I met Kamal Pal Singh of New Delhi at the Center; we have remained friends ever since.



I walked every day to work at Schrafft's Restaurant on 57<sup>th</sup> Street through the Columbus Circle shown above. New York City is an international city par excellence. It never sleeps.



The beautiful Rockefeller Center attracts many visitors, domestic and international.

## RETURN HOME

Exactly three years after I first set foot on American soil, I left it to return home to India in December 1959. I sailed on the SS Arkadia by way of London. I left with a heavy heart. The United States meant so much to me. I had landed in the U.S. totally broke. I was returning home with a purse of nearly \$1,800, a substantial sum in 1959. I made several life-long friends, including my classmates (McDermott, Whipple, Riley), and Virginia Carleton, my host mother for two years in Oregon. Virginia provided me with home hospitality on Christmas and Thanksgiving. I deeply appreciated these and many other gifts.



On SS Arkadia from US to London, Dec 1959. Kamal Pal Singh is seated next to me.

I made a month long stop in London on my way to India. The stay was uneventful. I visited London's several landmarks: Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square, Westminster Abbey, Parliament House, the Mall, Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park, and St Paul's Cathedral. A Laborite English family invited Kamal and me for a 3-day home stay during Christmas, which I appreciated much. We learnt about the Labor movement in Britain.

I sailed from London to Bombay in January 1960 on the P&O liner SS Carthage. Indian style meals were commonly served

on the vessel, as many of the cooks originated from Goa in India. This pleased me. About half the passengers on board were British white, traveling to India, Sri Lanka or Australia. I made friends with several British co-passengers during the 2-week passage. This was a new phenomenon. The social mixing of the races was not encouraged in previous decades, as noted by Mahatma Gandhi below.

Mahatma Gandhi observed the following in 1890 regarding traveling on English ships:

Sailing eastward from London, the British and Indian passengers mixed freely up to Port Said in Egypt. The closer the ship got to Bombay, the farther the distance between the British and the Indians. When the vessel docked in Bombay, the British barely recognized the Indians.

As mentioned above, I made friends with more than one British co-passengers traveling in 1960. Evidently, much progress was made since Gandhi's observation in 1890s.

When I landed in Bombay in late January, the sweater and the overcoat soon came off. The temperature was pleasant 80 degrees F (26 degrees Celsius). I booked the first available train to Delhi on the way to my home in Punjab. A crowd gathered around me in the train compartment. My luggage tags revealed the fact that I was "foreign returned." All types of questions were asked of me about life in America and England. The ticket-checker sat chatting next to me. He ignored my overweight carry-on luggage, as mentioned previously. Clearly I was in India.

I used several modes of transportation to finally reach my home in the village: a steamship from London to Bombay, an express train to Delhi, a local train to Sangrur, a horse pulled *tonga* to the village outskirts, and finally a walk to my home. The entire village was gathered at the gate to welcome me. There were hugs and kisses as well as tears of joy. I bowed down and touched Father's feet. He lifted me up and embraced me. I hugged my three sisters in turn, each beaming with joy at my safe return. I was emotionally overwhelmed and I shed tears. I was home, sweet home.

I had taken many color slides of life in the US. The color slides were displayed on a white sheet hung at the village gate. Almost the entire village turned out to view the show. Children were seated on bare ground in front and adults sat on their hunches in the rear. The viewing of “color photos” was a new experience for many in the rural community. Most had never seen a film. They were enchanted with the display of color on the screen. Some senior village residents still fondly recall the joy they felt in viewing for the very first time “the color photos.”

## VI. WALKING THE POWER HALLWAYS IN INDIA

### 1960-1963

During this time . . .

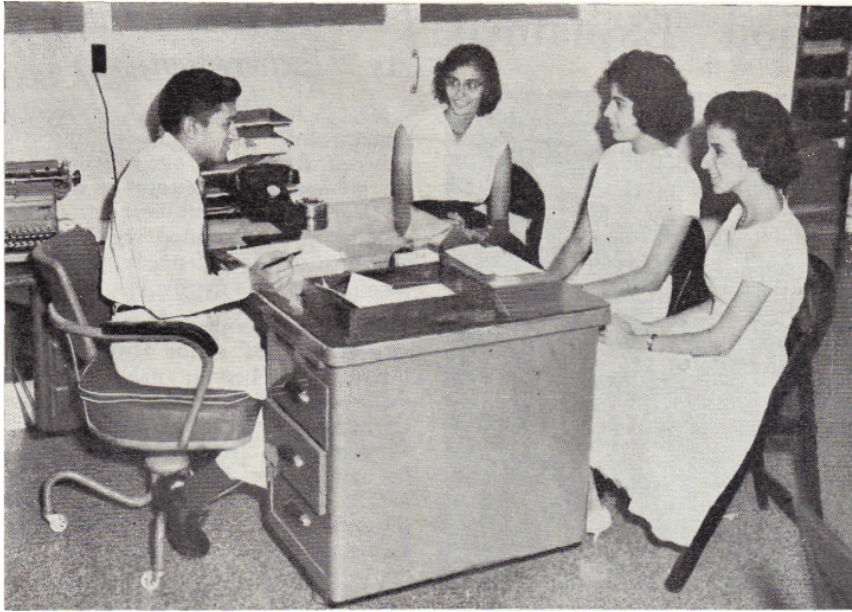
- China attacked India, 1962
- President Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” 1961
- The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962
- The Beatle mania hits America, 1963-64
- Large-frame computers cost tens of thousands of dollars
- Volkswagen Beetle: \$1,500

I returned to India with less than marketable skills. Journalism and International Relations were not in high demand. Engineering was. My education qualified me to work in the ministry of foreign affairs in the nation’s capital. I approached the office of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who headed foreign affairs. I did not get the appointment. Getting a job in India requires “influence.” I had none. I spent several months walking the power hallways of the nation’s capital to no avail. My “foreign education”, once prized in colonial India, was paying little dividend. I was a disappointment to myself and to my family. I moved next to Bombay, the commercial center in India, thinking it would afford greater opportunity. I took odd jobs in the big city, earning as little as Rs 200 per month. The money I had saved in the US sustained me.

**Student Counselor, US Information Service, Bombay:** Finally I got a break in 1961. I was hired by the United States Information Service (USIS), as a Student Counselor. The job required me to counsel Indian students wishing to study in the US. As part of the job, I traveled to college campuses to lecture on the American system of education. The wages were good at Rs 700/mo, and I got to see the country at US government expense. I was quite happy at the job.

The following was published in *Echoes*, a Newsletter of the United States Information Service, 1962.





**Students** visit the USIS Student Counselor, Mr. Madan L. Goel, for personal consultations.

*He answers questions related to study at American universities as a service of USIS.*

STUDENT counseling, an important service of U.S.I.S., is becoming increasingly active. Each month more and more

students receive its benefits.

The stream of students who visit the Student Counselor for personal consultation grows—as many as 20 students a day with assorted problems, ranging from selecting an appropriate institution to defining American terminology. July and August, when most students are about to leave for the United States, are the busiest for the Student Counselor. In August alone, the Student Counseling Section handled 600 queries.

USIS assists students all the way— from the time he decides to study at an American institution to the day he leaves for the U.S. It helps him choose a college or university, helps plan his course of study, and orients him in American ways of living before he leaves India.

Mr. Madan L. Goel, who received his B.A. from the Punjab University and his M.S. from the University of Oregon in the U.S., has been Student Counselor for almost a year now. He explains that the Student Counseling section creates a good deal of understanding among Indian students about the American system of education. There are misconceptions about the availability of part-time jobs, about academic standards of American institutions. Most Indian students believe, says Mr. Goel, that as soon as they land in America jobs will be available. This is not true. Many others think that American colleges and universities give easy scholarships; still others think that a student does not have to work in order to earn a degree in America—that his mere presence on the campus for four years or less will qualify him for a degree, also not true. Students in America *must study hard*. Mr. Goel, who had to work part-time while in the U.S., knows that jobs are not easy to get and that one cannot earn money easily in the U.S." I make it a point," says Mr. Goel, "to clarify these points. It is very important that fundamental misconceptions be clarified before students depart for the U.S. Only then can the transition between conditions in the two countries be made with the least difficulty and the stay there be made meaningful and worthwhile."

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## SOCIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIANS AND AMERICANS

Social relations between the Indian staff and American officers were cordial and in some cases intimate. There was none of the snobbery and aloofness of the British officialdom described by Prakash Tandon in his popular book, *Punjabi Century* (1961). Mr. Tandon (1911-2004), born and raised in Punjab and educated in Britain in Accountancy, worked for the Lever Brothers, a large multinational corporation. He made rapid progress and reached the top rung as manager of the Company in Bombay. Tandon levies high praise on the British bosses. The British officials were not showy, arrogant or unapproachable. They traveled on horseback. Many spoke Hindi. They worked for the Raj rather than to enrich themselves. This was different from the marauding Muslim rulers who preceded the British.

But there was social and economic distance between the British and the Indian, Tandon remorsefully noted.

Senior posts at major business houses were all reserved for Europeans. Salary differentials for similar work were common: Europeans were paid much more and Indians much less. Indians could not enter certain prestigious clubs and hotels reserved only for the Europeans. The British bosses might invite an Indian colleague to their home, but never to their club, "their castle." Many young Indians returning from British universities felt "bruised." Social conversation at gatherings was cumbersome. There was not much to talk about that was of mutual interest. The British looked at Gandhi one way, the Indian staff another. The British stuck to western food, Indians ate curried dishes. See Tandon, *Beyond Punjab* (1971), p 60.

My experience of working with American personnel in Bombay (1961-63) was very different. I never felt "bruised", belittled or slighted. I experienced none of the racism, apartness and snobbery noted by Tandon. Two factors might explain the difference: (1) White snobbery and race consciousness declined markedly after India gained Independence in 1947; (2) Americans are less affected by superior-inferior status demarcation than the British. I found American officers in Bombay easy to work with. They invited the Indian staff to cocktails and dinner parties at their home. I attended several such parties during my two year stint at USIS. I developed rather close friendships with the younger American staff of my age. William Selover, a news reporter and a Christian Scientist by faith, often hung out with me on the weekends. Together, we explored many city cafes and cultural venues. Bill was high on Shully, my future wife, and he encouraged me to pursue my romantic relationship with her. Bill and Marie tied their nuptials in a Bombay church. Shully and I attended the wedding. Obviously, things changed dramatically after the War.

## COSMOPOLITAN BOMBAY

I lived in Bombay (now Mumbai) for 3 years, 1960 to 1963. I came to enjoy the city immensely. I roomed at the centrally located YMCA Guesthouse in Colaba. The rent was cheap and I made great friends there. The city reminded me of New York, especially in its cosmopolitan character. Bombay is the major industrial, financial and entertainment center in India. The economy in Bombay is rooted in a mixture of light and medium manufacturing, textile mills, the stock market and the film industry.

Bombay was a cosmopolitan city par-excellence. People from every region of the country and indeed from many foreign countries were settled there. All ethnic, religious and language groups were intermingled residentially and in work places. Gujaratis and Marathis constituted the two dominant language groups. The relatively small Parsi or Zoroastrian community (some 80,000) contributed significantly to the City's cultural and economic life. Parsis fled Persia (present-day Iran) in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to avoid Muslim persecution. Parsis own many large businesses, the Tata Group being the largest. Sindhi and Punjabi refugees, who migrated into the city from Pakistan after Independence in 1947, were the *nouveau riche*.

### **Jews of Bombay**

Bombay also had two small Jewish communities: Bene Israel and Baghdadi Jews. The Bene Israel traced their presence in India as the result of a ship-wreck many centuries ago. Their numbers grew to about 20,000 in 1960. Of the two Jewish groups in Bombay, they were considerably poorer.

The Baghdadi Jews from Iraq entered India in 1700s after being expelled by the ruling Ottoman Turks. They ran large business houses in Bombay, Calcutta, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore. David Sassoon, who managed to bring part of his wealth out of Iraq, established a large financial empire in India, China and England. His grandson was married into the Rothschild's family in Europe. David Sassoon is best remembered for having built several fine buildings in the city. The Sassoon docks and the Sassoon Library are named after him. Unfortunately, the Baghdadi Jews discriminated against the poorer Bene Israel. The two groups worshipped in separate temples. The Jews made important contribution to Bollywood, India's film industry. Sulochana (Ruby Myers) was a popular Bollywood star in the 1930s. Miss Pramila of Jewish origins was the first Miss India, 1947.

May it be noted that Jews have never been persecuted in India, unlike the case in Christian and Islamic countries. Dr. Nathan Katz writes: "The Indian chapter is one of the happiest of the Jewish Diaspora. . . Indian Jews lived as all Jews should have been allowed to live: free, proud, observant, creative and prosperous, self-realized, full contributors to the host community." See his, *Who Are the Jews of India* (University of California Press, 2000), p 4. Their numbers have declined in recent decades as many migrate to Israel for economic and cultural reasons.

I have lectured on "Who are the Jews of India?" at several forums in the U.S. See my Power Point slides on the present web site.



Sulochana, a 1930s Jewish film actress



Pramila, a Jewish girl, was the first Miss India, 1947

Bombay offered a cosmopolitan and diverse lifestyle with a variety of food, entertainment and night life. The variety was endless to suit each person's taste and pocketbook. One of my favorite pastimes was to hang out at Churchgate cafes in the evenings, in the company of friends. We would sit and watch as men and women trotted the wide avenue to see and to be seen. The ocean front was never far away. We would walk the Marine Drive, facing the sea. Oval in shape and flickering in a thousand and one lights, Marine Drive appeared in the evening like the "Queen's Necklace". From the elevation of Malabar Hills, the view was unforgettable. Juhu Beach in Santa Cruz in the city outskirts was then uncluttered and pristine. It was another favorite weekend retreat.

Bombay is the birthplace for Indian cinema. Many persons associate Bombay with their favorite films. Only once did I visit a film studio and witnessed a scene being enacted. Famous dancers and musicians often made the rounds in Bombay. I loved Bharat Natyam and Kathak dance styles and attended programs at every available opportunity. Once I also attended Ravi Shankar's Sitar concert which went on late into the night. Bombay boasted a well-run public transportation system of trains and buses. People queued up to enter a bus, unusual for other major cities.



Bombay is now called Mumbai. Population doubled from 1960 to 2000. The infrastructure has broken down. The Marine Drive and Churchgate, once pristine, are deteriorated. The Hanging Gardens, my favorite rendezvous, is now littered. The cosmopolitan character was for a while in the 1990s under attack—a campaign to localize the city took hold: "Mumbai for sons of the soil. Outsiders need not enter."

Bombay's Marine Drive



## Walkathon

President Kennedy had thrown a challenge to the American youth to walk 50 miles in less than 20 hours. I brought his challenge to Bombay. I organized a 50-mile "Walkathon," described in the following newspaper article.

### *They Do 50 Miles In 17 Hours 15 Minutes*

**By A Staff Reporter**

The "walkathon" craze came to Bombay when seven young men set out from the Gateway of India for Panvel last week-end.

Three of them completed the distance within President Kennedy's prescribed limit of 50 miles in 20 hours. They did it in 17 hours and 15 minutes,

Said 25-year-old Madan Goel, India's "walkathon" champion: 'It was tough going and the heat knocked most of us out.' The other two who made it to Panvel were N. Bhattarharya and Bipin Davda.

The seven left the Gateway at 10 on Friday night. Two of them dropped out at Vikhroli, one at Thana and one at Mumbra. The rest continued in the now accepted "walkathon" style: stopping only for tea and meals but not for sleep.

They staggered into Panvel at 3:25 on Saturday afternoon. Return journey was by the more conventional means of transport.

The age-group of those who completed the distance was 24 to 27 and those who failed 21 to 25 proving President Kennedy's observation that age has little to do with success and any able-bodied man can do the "Walkathon."

## VII. ROMANCING SHULLY

Shully and I were married in 1963. Our marriage was unconventional. We leaped over several hoops. I was a Vaish, she was a Brahmin. I was from the North, she from the South. I spoke Punjabi as my mother tongue, she spoke Konkani. I was a country boy, she a city girl. When two hearts meet, miracles do happen. Our marriage heralded a new India. Caste, region and language would slowly count for less in marital alliances.

Shully (Sulochana) G. Heblekar was one of the students who popped into my office seeking advice. She had completed the B.Sc. degree in Physics from Wilson College, and wanted to study Engineering in the US. This was highly unusual. It was not then common for girls to be studying Engineering. Immediately, I admired her freshness and independent streak. I advised her on the US colleges to apply to and the procedures for getting financial aid. She returned for additional assistance a few days later. I proposed that she meet me after office hours for counseling, away from the office din. My motive was to see her in a social setting. She fell for this ruse.

Several days would pass before we finally met. It seemed like a long interval. We met at a restaurant in the posh Churchgate area of Bombay. I provided additional appropriate information on Engineering education in the US. I asked her to meet me again. She played along. We met several times. Once, I met her in the thick foliage of the famous Hanging Gardens, away from the city crowds. I held her hand proposing to read her palm. She withdrew it and called my bluff: "This is a trick many boys play. They know nothing about palm-reading. They only want to hold the girl's hand. I know such tricks." She was right. I had little knowledge of palm reading. Many Indian students in America played the role of a palm-reader on unsuspecting American girls.

**Dating:** Dating was not common in India at that time period (1960s). Even though we grew fond of each other, we could not be seen together in public. She had to make excuses to her family for returning home late at awkward hours. Dr. Kenneth Ghent of the University of Oregon, my alma mater, happened to visit Bombay at that time period. He played the cupid (Kama in Hindu mythology) to bring us together. Shully and I offered to show him around in the city. He graciously consented. This provided a perfect opportunity for Shully and I to be together in the evenings for the next several days. She told her parents that she was hosting a visiting American dignitary, and that she would be late returning home. Her behavior was above board. Dr. Ghent figured out the scheme and he played along. We showed him several city spots and he allowed us to spend time together alone. Many years later in 1986, we treated Dr. and Mrs. Ghent to an Indian dinner while we were visiting Eugene, Oregon. Several of my other professors were also invited to the home of Virginia Carleton, where we were staying. Virginia Carleton was my host-mother during my student days in Eugene, 1957-59. Many stories were exchanged, including how Dr. Ghent played the cupid in our romance. We laughed a lot.

Shully and I attended Bill Selover and Marie's nuptials in Bombay. Bill was a journalist on study in India. Shully was beautifully dressed in a deep blue sari with a gold necklace to adorn her chest, the first time I saw her so attractively dressed. After the wedding, we drove in a borrowed car to the Malabar Hills for a romantic evening. She was a gift from heaven. I have re-lived those hours many a time. "Those were the days."

Shully was not flirtish or coquettish, like other girls I knew. She did not playfully toss her curls in a sexual overture. She was not trying to hook me. She had plenty of opportunity to marry within her own Saraswat community. I think she just fell in love. Once in love, she would stake her life on it. Our year-long romance had its ups and downs. I wanted her to be more social around my friends, more demonstrative of her feelings, to share more. She was reserved. I wanted her to philosophize, to analyze, to cogitate. She never did. I wanted to change her, for her to be more modern. She accepted me as I was. She was solid and generous beyond measure. No sacrifice was too great for her. Her beauty was dazzling.

As we could not see each other regularly, Shully and I wrote letters. A few of these letters have survived, to my delight. She penned the following lines in her own handwriting.

INSERT SHULLY'S HANDWRITTEN POEM ABOUT HERE

Do you know you have asked the  
costliest thing  
Ever made by the hand above -  
A woman's heart, and a woman's life,  
And a woman's wonderful love?

Do you know you have asked for this  
priceless thing

As a child might ask for a toy -  
Demanding what others have died to win,  
With reckless dash of a boy?

You have written my lesson of duty out,  
Man-like you have questioned me;

Now stand at the bar of my woman's soul  
Until I shall question Thee.

You require your mutton shall always  
be hot,

Your socks and your shirts shall be  
whole;

I require your heart to be true as  
God's stars,

And pure as heaven your soul.

You require a cook for your mutton and  
beef;

I require a far better thing.

A seamstress you're wanting for stockings  
and shirts;

I look for a man and a king-  
A king for a beautiful realm called home  
And a man that the Maker, God,  
Shall look upon as he did the jiror,  
And said, "It is very good."

I am fair and young, but the rose will  
fade,  
From my soft, young cheek one day;  
Will you love me, then, mid falling leaves,  
As you did mid the bloom of May?  
Is your heart an ocean so strong  
and deep,

I may launch my all on its tide?  
A loving woman finds heaven or hell  
On the day she is made a bride.  
I require all things that are grand  
and true,  
All things that a man should be;  
If you give this all, I would stake  
my life  
To be all you demand of me.



## WE TIE THE KNOT

My job as Student Counselor at the U.S. Information Service (USIS) was a rewarding one. But it was a dead-end job with little chance of promotion. Senior positions were all reserved for American nationals, whereas I was a native employee. Therefore, I decided on additional education and a career change. I applied for admission and financial aid for a Ph.D. program in Political Science at a dozen leading American universities. I was admitted to several but financial assistance was not readily available. Finally, the State University of New York at Buffalo came through and offered me a Graduate Assistantship at \$1,800/year. This was my ticket for a new beginning. God was indeed smiling upon me. The good news arrived in May 1963. I was to join the University in September.

Things moved very rapidly at the matrimonial front. I shared the good news with Shully. I asked if she would please accompany me to the US. She took a while to answer and said “yes”. I was asking her to marry me. We hugged and kissed each other in our mutual joy. We have no custom in India for the man to go down on his knee to propose.

It was not clear how our families would react to our desire to tie the knot. Shully had a harder time convincing her parents than I did. There were several hurdles on her path. I was from Punjab in north India. Punjabis did not have a high reputation in Bombay. They were viewed as overly aggressive and pushy (unjustly, I felt). I was not a Saraswat Brahmin, and most important, I was not “amchi gele,” i.e. I did not speak Konkani, their mother-tongue. Furthermore, I was American educated and westernized. Westernized men make unstable marriage partners. There was no lack of suitable boys in her own Saraswat community for Shully to find a good match. Such were the reasons against our union.

On the other hand, Shully was fixed on going to the US for further studies. Would it not be better if she got married before proceeding to a strange country? She might get into trouble as a single girl. The family had heard reports of American boys taking advantage of innocent Indian girls. The family also knew Shully’s independent streak. She would not be easily dissuaded. And even though I did not speak Konkani, I looked and behaved like a respectable Saraswat boy. “He looks like one of us,” it was said. Shully first took her mother into confidence. It took several days of gentle persuasion. In turn, her mother talked with the father. It took several more days. Finally, they said: “Yes.”

My task was somewhat easier. I traveled to my village and personally broke the news: I was proceeding to the US for further studies in the next three months; I would like to get married before I depart. I showed them pictures of Shully and provided information on her family. My brother-in-law argued in favor of my decision: “it is better that Madan marries before proceeding to the US. If he departs as a single person, chances are he would marry and settle down in the US. He would be lost to us. Plus, the girl in question is beautiful, as evidenced in her photos.” My family had tremendous confidence in my good judgment. I had done nothing to bring disrepute to the family name. For all these reasons, Father said, “yes.”

I returned to Bombay carrying the good news and started immediately to plan the wedding. I got the wedding invitation cards printed and distributed. Shully’s family made other numerous arrangements: booking the hall, hiring the family priest, contracting with food vendors, arranging florists, and so on.

After consulting with the family priest, 14 July 1963 was selected as the auspicious date. Later we learned that July 14 is “Bastille Day,” a day of liberation in French history.

I returned to my village for the second time within a period of three weeks. The usual wedding preparations were in full swing: the cooks preparing sweets for distribution to guests (Ladoos, Barfis, Jalebis, etc.), the tailor sewing new clothes, the cobbler stitching a pair of brocade shoes, and so on. Punjabi Hindu and Sikh weddings are elaborate affairs, lasting several days and incurring much expense. There was the Ladies Sangeet: women singing wedding lullabies on the roof terrace. I was massaged with a paste of turmeric and herbs, giving my skin a yellowish tinge, considered attractive. Then I rode a caparisoned horse in the “ghori ceremony” and paraded around the village. In the past the groom would ride the horse to the wedding hall, led by a 5 or 10-piece brass band.

The wedding party accompanying me to Bombay was to be no more than 12 persons, instead of the customary 80-100. Accommodations were hard to find in crowded Bombay. A large wedding party could not be accommodated. Many friends and family members wanted desperately to join the wedding party. Those left out were ticked off at me for many years to come. The wedding entourage consisted only of men. It was not then the Punjabi custom for women to join, traveling many miles to the bride’s house. Things are different now: women are very much part of the wedding entourage. The 36-hour train journey delivered us to Bombay.

**The Ceremony:** On the appointed day, I was driven to the wedding hall in a large shiny Chevrolet Impala. The Chevy Impala was borrowed from my boss at the US Information Service, Dr. Phillips Bradley. Such big cars were owned only by rich film stars or business tycoons. Leading the Impala was a Naval Officer in full white dress uniform on his motorcycle. Several American officers attended the ceremony followed by a feast. Ours was a simple yet elegant wedding.

The priest chanted Sanskrit mantras and invoked Agni, the Sacred Fire. He made offerings of ghee, rice, herbs and flowers at the altar. The ends of the scarves worn by the bride and the groom were then tied in a knot, signifying indissoluble union. Under the priest’s instruction, we circled the Sacred Fire four times. The guests sprinkled rice and flower petals over us as we circled. The four rounds around the Sacred Fire symbolized four legitimate goals sought by the couple: *Artha, Kama, Dharma and Moksha*.

- *Artha*, material prosperity and well-being.
- *Kama*, pleasure.
- *Dharma*, duty towards parents, family and society.
- *Moksha*, spiritual liberation.

For the honeymoon night, I booked a room at Bombay’s fashionable “Sun ‘N Sand” Hotel at Juhu Beach. It was enchanting. After two days, we traveled with the wedding party back to my village: a 36-hour train journey. Shully and I traveled in a two-berth First Class coupe, a private cabin. A grand reception awaited us in the village. My elder sisters were awash in pride and duly impressed by Shully’s beauty, her sweet manner and her respectful demeanor. All the neighborhood women came to visit and look at the new bride. They commented on bride’s beauty and blessed us with good fortune.

We stayed in the village for next 10 days. We slept on the roof terrace on two adjoining cots under a star-lit summer sky. Millions of stars twinkled overhead, like diamonds in the sky. There were no artificial lights for miles in any direction. Here, when the sun sets, the Milky Way rises. It was magical. The mood for sensory pleasure was incomparable.



Shully in her Wedding Reception Sari, 1963



Our Wedding Reception Photo



American guests at our wedding reception



Guests at the reception

## SARASWAT BRAHMINS

Shully belonged to the very proud and very cohesive Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmin community of South Kanara in Karnataka State. It is the region of Malabar Hills on the West coast of India, about 500 miles south of Bombay. A 1971 survey by the Kanara Saraswat Association (KSA) indicated the total population of the community at 21,000. About one-half or 10,500 were settled in Bombay. They migrated to the city in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to work in government offices and private commercial houses.<sup>1</sup>

The Saraswats trace their origin to Kashmir and Punjab on the banks of the sacred river Saraswati, now dried up. Recent satellite photography depicts the dry river's outline. When Kashmir fell to Muslim invasions in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, they migrated south to avoid oppression and settled in Goa. Goa fell to the Portuguese Catholics in early sixteenth century. The notorious "Inquisition" came to Goa with the result that Hindus were brutally persecuted under Church appointed boards.<sup>2</sup> To escape persecution, Saraswats moved further south to the Kanara region.

Many eminent Saraswats Include: Nandan Nilekani (Infosys, Software), Girish Karnad (writer), Sachin Tendulkar (cricket), Sunil Gavaskar (cricket), Shyam Benegal (Bollywood director), Suman Kalyanpur (singer), M. P. Pandit (spiritual leader), Guru Dutt (actor-director), Prakash Padukone (Badminton), Deepika Padukone (a popular film actress).

Saraswats are a progressive community. The Saraswat girls attended school in early 20<sup>th</sup> century when it was not common for girls to do so. They are strikingly handsome with fair complexion and sharp features. Many are musically talented. Shully's father, Ganesh Heblekar, was an acclaimed singer of *bhajans*, devotional hymns. Shully herself had musical talents. Saraswats are religiously oriented, guided by their living guru, the spiritual guide. I loved their varied cuisine, especially *batata Song* and *ambat*. Saraswats are very proud of their community. Perhaps the smallness of the Saraswat community explains their feelings of cohesion and pride. I do not have similar feelings of cohesion and pride about my very large Agarwal clan, numbering several million and spread about in several northern states of Punjab, Haryana, UP, and Rajasthan.

## MY LIFE STORY CONTINUES IN PART II . . .

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<sup>1</sup> For information on the Saraswat community, see Frank Conlon, *A caste in a changing world: the Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmans, 1700-1935*, UC-Berkeley Press, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Zimler reports in his book *Guardian of the Dawn* that the Portuguese Inquisition in Goa was "the most merciless and cruel ever developed. It was a machinery of death." Over the 250 years (1560 to about 1812), any man, woman or child could be arrested and tortured for simply saying a prayer, wearing a religious symbol or keeping an idol at home. The Portuguese are nostalgic about Goa and think of it as a glorious island, peaceful, multicultural and prosperous. The truth is otherwise. <https://www.amazon.com/Guardian-Dawn-Richard-Zimler/dp/0385338813>  
Visit: [http://www.christianaggression.org/item\\_display.php?id=1126738163&type=articles](http://www.christianaggression.org/item_display.php?id=1126738163&type=articles).

