

My Parents

Dr. SK Mishra
Retd. Professor of Economics
North-Eastern Hill University,
Shillong, Meghalaya

I was born in Tarar (a village in Bhagalpur District of Bihar) on August 18, 1950 as the second son and 7th child of my parents, Smt. Tara Devi and Shri Anant Mishra. My eldest sister, Gauri, was somewhat 19 years elder to me, and following her, there were four more sisters, Katyayani, Bimla, Hira (who died premature) and Sandhya, and a brother. My brother, who was between Katyayani and Bimla, is about 13 years elder to me. I also had two younger brothers (Khuda, who died in his childhood, about two and a half years old) and Himanshu, somewhat 6 years younger to me. Among my siblings only two are alive now; Katyayani, who might be some 82 years old and my elder brother, Budh Kumar Mishra, who is about 79 years old. My parents died in a ripe old age; my mother in 1989 and my father in 1993 while he had crossed 90 years of age.

My father, son of Shri Johari Mishra, was born in 1901 as the eldest among the three sons (my father, Anant Mishra, and my two uncles, Girija Mishra and Ambika Mishra) of my (paternal) grandparents. My father had an elder sister, Shishta Devi and two younger sisters, Nita and Bina Devi. My grandfather died premature, while my father was in his early teens. That was a great loss to the family. My grandmother had immense responsibilities on her – of rearing her children and marrying off her eldest daughter. The family did not have much landed property, only four acres of farm land, and no other source of income. Maintaining a family of seven persons with the produce of four acres of farm land, cultivated by sharecroppers, was hard and, therefore, my father, with his siblings, had nothing to aspire for except meagre subsistence. Poverty and helplessness deeply struck his psyche and impacted his personality, which became a part of him. When he was about in his mid-teenage, the First World War broke out. The war-time scarcities and instabilities intensified the miseries of the people in general and the family of my grandmother was no exception. There was no school in the village. Hence, education of my father (as well as my uncles) was only informal.

On the behest of Gandhi Ji, Indians cooperated with the British in the World War-I and were expecting favourable returns for the same. When the War was over, the British came out only with modest proceedings that made the people, especially the young people, disappointed. Especially the young blood had started joining struggle for independence at an unprecedented scale since Gandhi Ji came to Bihar in 1917. My father, having no engagement and attraction at home chose to join the struggle. Incidences like Jalianwala Bagh massacre took place in 1919 that led to wide-spread unrest. At that time, Banaras was a hotspot of the youths eager to add to the cause of Indian Independence. He moved to Banaras where he lived on the dole for over seven years, moved in the company of the active members of the struggle for Independence and educated himself, helped by the charitable intelligentsia there. He was an intelligent and hardworking man. He picked up Sanskrit, read Ayurveda, started liking socialism, developed a keen understanding of socio-economic dynamics especially in the rural areas and began disliking the zamindars and big landholders. Sanskrit and Ayurveda went hand in hand since the books of Ayurveda were mostly in Sanskrit. His confidence in and plea for Ayurveda were very pragmatic. He held that due to poverty in the villages, their inhabitants often fell sick and found themselves unable to obtain the services of allopathic doctors as their treatment as well as the cost of medicine was out of the reach of the poor people. Ayurveda, which taught how to diagnose and treat the ailment with the medicines that were made from herbs most of which were locally available, could efficiently serve the people. Moreover, most of the ailments, if taken care of in time, did not need much medicine as the life forces automatically corrected the imbalances. Only a few diseases required expert treatment and costly medicines and

not many people acquired such diseases. Of course, some diseases were hard to tackle and a few of them came only to go away with life. Doctors could not do anything with such diseases. Overall, a practitioner of Ayurveda would always have an opportunity to earn enough for his livelihood and also serve the poor people in the villages. Thus, practicing Ayurveda would resolve *swartha* (self service) and *paramartha* (social service) quite in harmony with each other. Moreover, it would be in the nationalistic spirit since it would minimize the dependence on allopathic system that was alien and helped the alien government. He claimed to have been a student of *vaidya* Trimbak Shastri, who was a famous Ayurvedic practitioner of his time in Banaras (see Freitag, 1989, p. 258) and that he was fully convinced of the argument in favour of practicing Ayurveda. A similar view was expressed by Shri Ram Prasad 'Bismil' in his autobiography (which he wrote in jail weeks before he was hanged till death by the British):

“मेरे विचार से ग्राम संगठन की सबसे सुगम रीति यही हो सकती है कि युवकों में शहरी जीवन छोड़कर ग्रामीण जीवन के प्रति प्रीति उत्पन्न हो। जो युवक मिडिल, एण्ट्रेन्स, एफ० ए०, बी० ए० पास करने में हजारों रुपए नष्ट करके दस, पन्द्रह, बीस या तीस रुपए की नौकरी के लिए ठोकें खाते फिरते हैं उन्हें नौकरी का आसरा छोड़कर कोई उद्योग जैसे बड़ईगिरी, लुहारगिरी, दर्जी का काम, धोबी का काम, जूते बनाना, कपड़ा बुनना, मकान बनाना, राजगिरी इत्यादि सीख लेना चाहिए। यदि जरा साफ सुथरे रहना हो तो वैद्यक सीखें। किसी ग्राम या कस्बे में जाकर काम शुरू करें। उपरोक्त कामों में कोई काम भी ऐसा नहीं है, जिसमें चार या पांच घण्टा मेहनत करके तीस रुपये मासिक की आय न हो जाए। ग्राम में लकड़ी या कपड़ों का मूल्य बहुत कम होता है और यदि किसी जमींदार की कृपा हो गई और एक सूखा हुआ वृक्ष कटवा दिया तो छः महीने के लिए ईंधन की छुट्टी हो गई। शुद्ध घी, दूध सस्ते दामों में मिल जाता है और स्वयं एक या दो गाय या भैंस पाल ली, तब तो आम के आम गुठलियों के दाम ही मिल गये। चारा सस्ता मिलता है। घी-दूध बाल बच्चे खाते ही हैं। कंडों का ईंधन होता है और यदि किसी की कृपा हो गई तो फसल पर एक या दो भुस की गाड़ी बिना मूल्य ही मिल जाती है। अधिकतर कामकाजियों को गांव में चारा, लकड़ी के लिए पैसा खर्च नहीं करना पड़ता। हजारों अच्छे-अच्छे ग्राम हैं जिनमें वैद्य, दर्जी, धोबी निवास ही नहीं करते। उन ग्रामों के लोगों को दस, बीस कोस दूर दौड़ना पड़ता है। वे इतने दुःखी होते हैं कि जिनका अनुमान करना कठिन है। विवाह आदि के अवसरों पर यथासमय कपड़े नहीं मिलते। काष्ठादिक औषधियां बड़े बड़े कस्बों में नहीं मिलतीं। यदि मामूली अत्तार बनकर ही कस्बे में बैठ जाएं, और दो-चार किताबें देख कर ही औषध दिया करें तो भी तीस-चालीस रुपये मासिक की आय तो कहीं गई ही नहीं। इस प्रकार उदर निर्वाह तथा परिवार का प्रबन्ध हो जाता है। ग्रामों की अधिक जनसंख्या से परिचय हो जाता है। परिचय ही नहीं, जिसका एक समय जरूरत पर काम निकल गया, वह आभारी हो जाता है।” (Bismil, 1927: section 5.10 परिणाम)।

As a person, my father was a man of medium height, about 5'8", and strong, balanced muscular constitution. He was fair but with some dark brownish complexion, with no fat, absolutely non-bulging belly. He retained his teeth and eyesight in tact even before his death at a little over 90 years. He was a vegetarian, emphasized on eating a lot of green vegetables with little or no salt at all, and avoided oily and spicy food preparations. His preference for boiled food often increased the hours of my mother working in the kitchen since she as well as many of my siblings including me liked oily, spicy and fried food preparations. He was very meticulous on keeping clean, taking bath everyday for a considerable time. I do not remember him ever using soaps. Instead, he used earth, brought from the paddy fields as soap while taking bath. He cleaned his clothes with water only while taking bath, and surprisingly, his clothes were never dirty. He used soil, and sometimes mustard oil with a little salt added to it, for cleaning his teeth. He was an early riser and a lover of physical exercise early in the morning. I have closely seen him for about 20 years. I do not remember of him falling sick even for once. We had a small library, of about 500 books, most of them were in Sanskrit, dealing with Ayurveda, Puranas, Upnishads, astrology, literature, etc. He loved books. He was a regular reader.

My father was fairly talkative. As he was residing in a village where most of the people were simply limited to the rural world around them, he had a lot to tell them about the life he had had in Banaras. He often used to describe his personal contact with the people such as JB Kripalani, Meenu

Masani, RM Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan, MM Malaviya, Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, Vinoba Bhave, etc. that shaped his worldview. In the locality he was considered as a Pundit, a scholar of the Indian system of knowledge, and rightly so because, in my opinion, there was none in the rural setting who was so well versed in Puranas, Upanishadas, astrology, Ayurveda, religious texts, Karmakanda (directives on rituals in performing various *sanskaras* including *upanayan* or sacred thread ceremony, marriage, and *shraddha* or the last rights of the dead) as well as the currents in the national politics. He had a sharp memory; he could cite from the Sanskrit texts and if needed could fast locate them in the book wherefrom he cited. However, he was not in the profession of *jajmani*, which was the traditional profession of the Brahmins in the village. In those matters he offered his services as a consultant or a guide only.

My father firmly believed that the prevailing formal education system in which the students joined the schools and colleges for obtaining degrees such as matriculation, BA, MA, etc. and prepared themselves for jobs was not the right type of education system. He held that the education system that was based on select and unconnected topics in syllabus, annual examination, failing and passing etc. was against the principles of sound learning. He held the view that the purpose of education was not to acquire a lot of information only but to be able to use the wealth of information in a holistic manner for solving the practical problems and for acquiring further knowledge by self-study and investigation. He always stressed on the fact that he himself acquired knowledge in that manner.

He never wanted to send his children to the village school, although there was a Primary as well as a Secondary School in the village. He taught all his children at home and all of them were taught Sanskrit. Initially, people in the village were doubtful if his approach would be fruitful and we, his children, would ever be educated. However, in due course, he showed that he was right and his peculiar way to education was effective. My eldest brother, Shri Budh Kumar Mishra, appeared privately in Madhyama examination (which was considered equivalent to matriculation for the purpose of admission to the Ayurvedic College in Nathnagar, Bhagalpur) and secured admission into the Ayurvedic college. My father had given my elder brother enough training in Sanskrit, Amarakosh, Panini's Astaadhyaayi and Sanskrit texts of Ayurveda such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Bhava Prakash, Madanpala's Nighantu, Ashtanga Hyidayam, Maadhav Nidaanam, etc. all of which were available in our small library at home, that my elder brother felt quite homely when his teachers were teaching the subject. He was a bright student, fully devoted to Ayurveda. He obtained his GAMS degree and the training as a house surgeon. He became a qualified and insightful Ayurvedic doctor. After completing his training as a house surgeon, he practised for a year or so whereupon he decided to make himself familiar with the regular course of education. He appeared in the Secondary School examination privately, passed it, and took admission into Marwari college from where he did his BA. Then he did his MA in English from the Post-Graduate Department of English in Bhagalpur University. After that he returned to the profession and became a physician and continued in that profession lifelong.

My father wanted to make me a Sanskrit scholar and under that plan my education in Sanskrit began. I picked up Sanskrit quite well, got Amarakosha and Laghu Siddhanta Kaumudi by heart, read Panchatantram, and some works of Kalidasa such as Raghubansham (and Ritusanharam), read some of the Puranas and some Upanishads. However, my education stagnated very soon. Under the circumstances then prevailing, I was admitted to Class X in Tarar High School and my formal education began since the middle of 1963. I must admit, however, that education given to me by my father had made my fundamentals so strong that I never found difficulties in my formal education. I studied economics, specialized in statistics and econometrics, ventured into newer branches of economics, became a fairly good computer programmer and remained risk taking in academic adventures throughout my life.

I see that there was something special in the method of teaching that my father practiced. Later on, when I read the autobiography of John Stuart Mill (Mill, 1873), it reminded me of my own early life as the student of my father. There were a number of similarities between James Mill (father of John Stuart Mill) and my father. On the method of teaching his father adopted, J.S. Mill wrote: “a considerable part of almost every day was employed in the instruction of his children: in the case of one of whom, myself, he exerted an amount of labour, care, and perseverance rarely, if ever, employed for a similar purpose, in endeavouring to give, according to his own conception, the highest order of intellectual education. ... he first attempted by questions to make me think on the subject, and frame some conception ... and when I had failed in this, to make me understand it by explanations. The explanations did not make the matter at all clear to me at the time; but they were not therefore useless; they remained as a nucleus for my observations and reflections to crystallize upon; ... ”. Of course, Mills were in London and we were in a village; James Mill was a great scholar and my father could not have been so; James Mill was writing a scholarly book on history while side by side he also instructed John, but my father was busy in attending his patients that was necessary for earning and our subsistence and in the midst of that he spared time to teach us; James Mill was a friend of many great scholars (Ball, 2014) and interacted with them, but my father had been in association of some scholars, mostly political activists, during his stay at Banaras and was influenced by their thoughts. Above all, none of us, the young students of my father, were as gifted as John. My father encouraged us to ask questions to which we were taught to think on together with him. In that process, we argued and he encouraged arguments. That habit of questioning and arguments became a part of my nature which was very inconvenient to my teachers in the college and University and which habit they did not like. Only two teachers of mine in my later life supported my habit of questioning; they were Professor Naresh Jha in Marwari College and Prof. Kameshwar Jha who taught me economics, statistics, mathematics etc. That questioning habit was very inconvenient to my colleagues as well. I often asked questions like a child who wanted to know more, but my colleagues almost always took them otherwise. It is notable. The education system presently in vogue in the schools and colleges in India discourages questioning. Mass teaching in the class cannot cope up with the questioning by the students. Teachers are mere professionals, doing their duties in the colleges and the universities; they are not academic and true lovers of knowledge by nature. Now, when I have gained a lot of experience in studying, researching and teaching various subjects, I would say that in addition to other advantages (Mishra, 2014) that Sanskrit teaching by my father gave me, it also granted an additional facility – an access to Sanskrit literature – which is uncommon, but greatly empowering that helped me throughout my life. I am of the opinion that the practice of teaching Latin (sometimes Greek as well) to children that prevailed in the 19th Century (and earlier) in Europe had great merits. In India, the role of Sanskrit could be similar.

My father had found out an ingenious method to informally make his children familiar with the Sanskrit texts. He used to ask us, me for one, to sit by his side and read a chapter of some Sanskrit book aloud to him and explain to him its meaning. I do not remember him ever sleeping on a cot. His bed was on ground, made up of a mat and a coarse woollen blanket covered with a sheet of cotton-made cloth. In the winters some paddy straw was used underneath the bed to make it warmer. He never used a pillow under his head. He always had a few books scattered on his bed, mostly in the head side thereof. He could pick up any book and ask me to read a chapter (sometimes two chapters) aloud to him. Sometimes, the book could be an Upanishad and at others it could be a Purana or even an Ayurveda book. Reading the texts used to be much simpler than explaining them. The reasons were many, but primarily that while the language of (most of) the Puranas was simple and normal Sanskrit, the language of the Upanishads (save a few) is not a normal (Laukik) Sanskrit. Moreover, while the Puranas were mostly in shlokas, the Upanishads had a lot of running prosaic texts, quite long and structurally different from those of the Puranas. The Puranas were mostly descriptive but the Upanishads were mostly dealing with abstruse thoughts. Ayurveda books were dealing with the subject matter which I was not much familiar with. He often reinterpreted the text

after our part used to be finished. Those sessions almost never exceeded an hour or two. In such hundreds of sessions I became familiar with a lot of Sanskrit texts, some that I could understand and enjoy and the others that simply passed over my head.

He also taught his children how to argue, live in two different worlds and move from the one to the other effortlessly. The first world was the world of ideas and thoughts. The second world was the real world of material objects in which all of us and all of our material belongings were there. Arguments were the objects of the first world that must not be carried over to the second world. Relationships, person to person and person to material objects were in the second world and they must be left behind while entering into the first world. This was normal for us in the family. But that kind of discrimination was too unpractical in the social world that later on we entered into. Our friends and colleagues, even the people in our larger family and the village, lived in a single whole of world. Especially my colleagues, who were supposedly highly educated and with whom I spent the larger part of my life, could not often make a distinction between the two worlds. Academic disagreements could profusely overflow and even soak or drown personal relationships. In the same manner, supporting the idea of someone may mean supporting the one personally. So, you must not agree with any idea coming with the one you do not have amicable personal relationship and you cannot object to any idea of the one who is your friend. That was funny or inconvenient to me, but normal for the others. I am sorry to say that many in the academic world who claim to be highly educated cannot make distinction among categorical, hypothetical and imperative statements, often misunderstanding the speaker or writer. Not many people have a literary sense. Literature, which is often a fiction or a simulated scenario, a thought experiment, is taken for a real life scenario experienced by the author in the second world, which is often untrue.

In the world of his thoughts my father had little dogmatism and possibly he was very pragmatic in dealing with the intellectual issues. Pragmatists hold that in order to attain clarity in our thoughts of an object, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve. In real life, especially when we do not have facilities, resources and time to investigate deeper into the issue, pragmatism is a useful attitude that is also justifiable from an evolutionary point of view, in spite of all intellectual shortcomings that Russell would like to hint at (Russell, 1945). After doing my MA I was searching for a teaching job in Bihar and for a couple of years lived in Tarar, visiting Bhagalpur very often. In those days of despair, he wanted me to learn homoeopathy. I was a little surprised at that suggestion because he was a man of Ayurveda. The principles of Ayurveda and homoeopathy are quite different. So, I asked him as to how could he suggest me to learn homoeopathy. He quickly replied that those were only the different approaches to diagnose and heal the diseases. They also chose medicines on different principles and their posologies were different. Even in the broad system of Ayurveda, there were different approaches: some very conservative insisting to use medicines from the plant kingdom only and some using materials from the animal kingdom as well; some others using rasas (having a base of mercury) and minerals preferentially, still others lean to naturopathy and yet others limit themselves to different colours of light and fanning by the twigs of different medicinal trees. How does it matter if homoeopathy uses yet another system! The medicine that heals is appropriate and the doctor that cures a patient is an honourable good doctor. तदैव युक्तं भैषज्यं यदारोग्याय कल्पते | स चैव भिषजां श्रेष्ठो रोगेभ्यो यः प्रमोचयेत् || (Agnivesha: Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthanam, Ch-1:134). In our library there were many books that dealt with homoeopathy from the Organon and the Materia Medica Pura of Hahnemann to Indian Materia Medica, including Hering, Kent, Tyler, etc. Some books were also related to pharmacy and posology. Medicines in the Indian Material Medica (many of them having no proving experiments) were very close to those used by Ayurvedic physicians and often prescribed in the gross doses of the mother tincture. My father had only a rudimentary knowledge of English and, therefore, he could not have been able to read those books well. With me working with him, he could overcome that disadvantage. We together could pick up homoeopathy well. We treated many patients successfully

with homoeopathic medicines. Once, when my mother was suffering from insomnia, it could not be treated by my father, and her condition was pitiable, I suggested *Passiflora Incarnata* that worked immediately and cured her. Since then, I have retained my interest in homoeopathy and I have experienced its usefulness. Only this much I would say of homoeopathy. In general, open-mindedness of my father has had a lasting impact on my own academic temperament. I am not a sectarian. I do not think that if I am in the profession of teaching economics, I should keep my involvement limited to that. I love to read history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc. and do not hesitate to interact with engineers, life scientists, physical scientists, statisticians and mathematicians. Wrongly or rightly, I hold that Shrilal Shukla's 'Rāg Darbāri' (1968) is the best book on the rural economy of India. This opinion would not, however, be entertained by my scholarly colleagues. They would say: I am joking.

My father was a strict disciplinarian. It is interesting that almost all in our extended family obeyed him, when he was there around as well as when he was not around to watch. He was the eldest among his brothers. Ours was not a joint family hence my uncles' families were headed by our respective uncles. However, regarding discipline among us the children, my father was a patriarch. Even his (younger) brothers, my mother and my aunts did not support us if we were doing something contrary to my father's command and guidelines. Everybody was as if saying: Yes, His Will Be Done. My own siblings also never cooperated among themselves or with me to do something that was contrary to his commands. He always wanted that we should spend most of our time in studies and keep our contact outside our family to the minimum. Hence, we developed a habit of entertaining ourselves by reading books that were available in our library in plenty. We often entertained ourselves by reading Hindi books – poems, stories and novels. My father was a good chess player. My elder brother was taught chess playing by my father. My (elder) brother is very good at that. He also played carom very well and won several prizes for his collage in chess and carom competitions.

Once, when I was a little grown up, I requested him to tell me about the essence of Gita. In reply he narrated the story in Brihadāranyaka Upanishad in which Brahma taught only one and the same syllable to Devas, Daityas and men who interpreted the syllable in their own ways according to their own temperament.

त्रयाः प्राजापत्याः प्रजापतौ पितरि ब्रह्मचर्यमूषुदेवा मनुष्या असुरा उषित्वा
 ब्रह्मचर्यं देवा ऊचुर्ब्रवीतु नो भवानिति तेभ्यो हैतदक्षरमुवाच द इति
 व्यज्ञासिष्टा ३ इति व्यज्ञासिष्मेति होचुर्दाम्यतेति न आत्थेत्योमिति होवाच
 व्यज्ञासिष्टेति १ अथ हैनं मनुष्या ऊचुर्ब्रवीतु नो भवानिति तेभ्यो हैत-
 देवाक्षरमुवाच द इति व्यज्ञासिष्टा ३ इति व्यज्ञासिष्मेति होचुर्दत्तेति न
 आत्थेत्योमिति होवाच व्यज्ञासिष्टेति २ अथ हैनमसुरा ऊचुर्ब्रवीतु नो
 भवानिति तेभ्यो हैतदेवाक्षरमुवाच द इति व्यज्ञासिष्टा ३ इति व्यज्ञासिष्मेति
 होचुर्दयध्वमिति न आत्थेत्योमिति होवाच व्यज्ञासिष्टेति तदेतदेवैषादैवी
 वागनुवदति स्तनयिर्दुर्द द इति दाम्यत दत्त दयध्वमिति तदेतत्त्रयं शिञ्चेद्दमं
 दानं दयामिति ३ (Brihadāranyaka Upanishada, Adhyāya 5, Brāhmana 2.)

Only later on I came to know that the said story influenced Eliot so much to compose his *What the Thunder Said* (Eliot, 1922). Then, my father opined that Gita also would be interpreted according to one's temperament. He said that his interpretation of Gita was according to his own understanding which might not fit to my understanding, temperament and need. It is said that when the War of Mahabharata was over, Arjuna requested Krishna to deliver Gita once again because, Arjuna argued, when it was delivered to him in the battlefield he was in a state of mind that could not have been tranquil and he might not have received it to the fullest and in true spirit. Krishna refused to deliver

Gita once again because he possibly could not have done so. Gita was delivered under charge and it was spontaneous suiting to the circumstances. Once the circumstances were different and the charge was absent, Gita would not be the same as before. He asked me to bring the last one of the six volumes of Mahabharata from our library. It was not difficult to find out what he was referring to.

"श्रावितस्त्वं मया गुह्यं ज्ञापितश्च सनातनम् | धर्मस्वरूपिणं पार्थ सर्वलोकाश्च शाश्वतान् ||
 अबुद्ध्या नाग्रहीर्यस्त्वं तन्मे सुमहदप्रियम् | न च साद्य पुनर्भूयः स्मृतिर्मे संभविष्यति ||
 नूनम् अश्रद्धदानोसि दुर्मेधाह्यसि पाण्डव | न च शक्यं पुनर्वक्तुमशेषेण धनञ्जय ||
 स हि धर्मः सुपर्याप्तो ब्रह्मणः पदवेदने | न शक्यं तन्मया भूयस्तथा वक्तुमशेषतः ||
 परं हि ब्रह्मकथितम् योगयुक्तेन तन्मया | " (Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata: Anugita
 Parva in Ashwamedhika Parva, Adhyaya: 16, Shlokas: 9-12: p. 6134)

In short, Gita has to suit to the occasion, circumstances, reflection, charge, and the force that brings forth the cream of unconscious to the conscious for deciding on or working out the befitting actions. My father suggested, therefore, that I should read Gita regularly and it will suggest me its own meaning in time that would be best for me. I would say now that my father was right.

My younger brother also was initially trained in Sanskrit but he joined the high school in Class VIII. He was very much interested in the ancient history of India and pursued that interest throughout his (short) life. He did his Honours in Statistics and was doing MA in Statistics. He had also completed his GAMS because our father wanted him to do that. However, he got a banking job while doing his MA in statistics and preferred to join the bank service and not to appear in the final examination of MA in statistics. In my opinion, it was a wrong decision. He was good at statistics and I wanted him to join academics. He died premature at the age of 34 years. Personally, it was a great loss to me. After his death I was a man who had no younger brother. I should add that all my sisters were informally educated. Sandhya, in particular, was good at (Hindi) literature and used to write a lot – poems, stories and novels. However, there was none to appreciate and promote her. She remained a housewife, but her contributions to teaching her children were considerably valuable.

Socio-political views of my father were greatly influenced by the people with whom he was associated in Banaras. People such as Kripalani, Masani, Patwardhan, Narendra Dev and Narayan (JP) were clearly socialistic in their thoughts (Shah, 2016). After Indian Independence, most of the freedom fighters socialistic in their attitude (possibly except Lohia) gradually distanced themselves from active politics or they were sidetracked. The Congress Party of India, under the leadership of Nehru, came to the front line. My father also lost interest in an active participation in politics, although he had intermittent interactions with JP and Vinoba Ji regarding Sarvodaya movement. He did not aspire for any political benefits from his political activities. Much later, the Govt. of India started giving some sort of regular financial help to those who participated in the Struggle for Independence and were alive at that time (*Swatantratā Senāni*). An aspirant beneficiary had to provide a proof of having participated in the Struggle. Politically influential people in the village advised my father to join the beneficiaries, which required obtaining a certificate from a political leader attesting the person's participation in the Struggle. My father was advised to obtain such a certificate from Shri Bhagwat Jha Azad. However, my father refused such benefits firstly because he (and his allies) did not join the Struggle for personal benefits and secondly because he felt that obtaining a certificate from Azad was an insult to him since Azad was a mere child before him, having not seen the struggle that my father was involved in and, therefore, himself did not qualify to attest it. The matter closed. However, he devoted himself to serving the society by the skill that he had with him (Ayurveda). Yet, he continued to be against the exploitation of the poor people by the big landholders. He did not believe much in ritualism in religious practices. He always spoke against it. He had a very good understanding of the socio-economic mechanism that caused the exploitation of the poorer section of the society by the richer ones. He remembered in fine details, plot by plot,

how the land owned by the poorer section of the society went into the ownership of the richer ones. I would say that he was a very good institutional economist, although not academic. His political ideas were inherited most by my elder brother who was a Communist (Marxist) and was booked in MISA under emergency rule declared by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Although very late, but my elder brother could at last realize what 'Bismil' wanted to convey when he wrote: "किन्तु बाहर से कोई सहायता न मिल सकी। एक नवयुवक भी सहायता को न आ सका ... ! अन्त में फांसी पा रहा हूँ। फांसी पाने का मुझे कोई शोक नहीं, क्योंकि मैं इस नतीजे पर पहुँचा हूँ कि परमात्मा को यही मंजूर था। मगर मैं नवयुवकों से फिर भी नम्र निवेदन करता हूँ कि जब तक भारतवासियों की अधिक संख्या सुशिक्षित न हो जाए, जब तक उन्हें कर्तव्यकर्तव्य का ज्ञान न हो - जाए, तब तक वे भूलकर भी किसी प्रकार के क्रान्तिकारी षड्यन्त्रों में भाग न लें। यदि देश सेवा की इच्छा हो तो खुले आन्दोलनों द्वारा यथाशक्ति कार्य करें, अन्यथा उनका बलिदान उपयोगी न होगा। दूसरे प्रकार से इससे अधिक देश सेवा हो सकती है, जो ज्यादा उपयोगी सिद्ध होगी। परिस्थिति अनुकूल न होने से ऐसे आन्दोलनों में परिश्रम प्रायः व्यर्थ जाता है। जिसकी भलाई के लिए करो, वही बुरे बुरे नाम धरते हैं और अन्त में मन ही मन कुढ़ कर प्राण त्यागने पड़ते हैं।" (quoted from the Autobiography of Ram Prasad 'Bismil').

Personally, I have had no interest in politics. Yet, my ideas have remained influenced by socialism and akin to heterodox economics. I have always believed in the priority of the social welfare over personal or individual's welfare. I shun ritualism in religious practices and believe only in their ethical and philosophical implications such that religion does not work as opium. I also understand that such ideas are politically inappropriate in the society that I am a part of. Social good at the cost of personal good must be done with an understanding that one is paying off one's debts (देवऋणं-, पितृऋणं, आचार्यऋणं-) only. Once paid off, it belongs to the society and the payer should not be concerned of what happened to the contribution he made – according to what is suggested in 'फले नेर्षु' or in the expressions such as 'इदमग्रये, इदं न मम'. Social goods are destined to meet the tragedy of the commons.

Now I will turn to speak of my mother. I am academically built my father but my emotional constitution is almost wholly shaped by my mother. Only the fortunate ones have mothers like her.

My father returned back from Banaras about the year 1927. He decided to enter into a family life and hence to marry. However, he was not in favour of selling his land to meet the expenses of marrying in the style of others in my kin families who wanted to be closely associated with the Brahmin families inhabiting in the north of the Ganges. He well understood the economic implications of the institution of the cultural hegemony of the Maithil Brahmins of the north. Moreover, his father had left behind him only a little of land that was the only support to his family. My father did not want to enter into his caste profession (jajmani) also. He virtually looked down upon it. He was quite progressive in his outlook and well modernised in comparison to other Brahmins in the village. He also had many friends in Rajput families in Tarar as well as other Rajput villages in Saharsa, Purnia, Katihar, etc. In the initial days of his involvement in the politics emanating from the Struggle for Independence he had roamed in the area, visited different villages and developed relationship with the people there who sympathised with or were involved in the struggle. His being a Brahmin and from Tarar also helped him in nurturing that relationship. The Rajputs in those villages were forward looking, more practical and courageous, ready to change themselves for adopting non-traditional practices that helped development. My father decided to marry my mother, who was the eldest daughter of my (maternal) grandparents, Mrs. Rajarajeshwari Devi and Shri Baijanath Jha living in Jaganathpur near Sajour by the side of Bhagalpur-Nathnagar-Amarpur Road. My maternal grandparents had only two daughters at that time, but later my lone maternal uncle, Shri Bachchan Jha, was born. My maternal grandfather owned about 15 acres of land and a number of cows. Additionally, he had a good income from Jajmani. In that locality only a handful of Brahmin families were there and hence income from Jajmani was substantial. Due to all those factors together, my (maternal) grandfather was well-to-do in the rural setting.

However, the proposal of my father to marry a daughter of Shri Baijanath Jha inhabiting Jaganathpur, a village in the south of the Ganges that had only a few Brahman families was not well-taken by others among our kin families who considered such an incidence against Sanskritization. My father had, nevertheless, a different interpretation. He thought that others were losing an opportunity to buy the land with my (paternal) grandmother that could make his family marginalized and, therefore, my father's proposal did not suit them. My father took a drastic step in which the Rajputs supported him. Taking the Rajputs with him and disregarding his own kin, he went in for marrying my mother to Jaganathpur. Of course, this step was highly revolutionary during those times which infuriated his kin families. After marrying my mother he stayed for many years in Jaganthpur, managing the farm of his father-in-law. He also started Ayurvedic practice there and earned a good reputation. He stayed in Jaganathpur for over 15 years, only intermittently coming to Tarar, until my maternal uncle was capable of managing the things himself. Finally, he came to Tarar and settled there. In Tarar also, he practiced Ayurveda for his livelihood.

My mother, Smt. Tara Devi, was almost illiterate when she was married to my father. The reasons could be many, but for the first that there was no school, as we have today, in the locality and secondly that female education, especially among the Brahmins was untraditional. One need not go far to find out the reasons. Those days the schools, as we have today, were not there in every village. Of course, there were Sanskrit tols (an informal school headed by a Pandit who taught Sanskrit grammar and gave training in performing Hindu rituals), but they were meant only for males, since women could not have gone into the *Paurohitya* (Jajmani) profession. As a result, women in general were illiterate. It was also believed that the Shudras and the women should not learn the Vedas. Since performing rituals involved reading/reciting the *mantras* in the Vedas, women were disqualified for that. And since tols were mainly for training in performing rituals, women/girls had no place there. Maithil Brahmins usually are very proud of Ubhaya Bharati (the illustrious wife of Mandan Mishra who gave a match to Adi Shankaracharya), Gargi Vachaknavi, and a score of other women scholars in ancient India, mentioned by Pāṇini in his *Ashtādhyāyī* (Agrawal, 1953), who were well-known for their expertise in the Vedas. In Sanskrit, moreover, there are two words: *Āchāryāni* (आचार्यानी तु पुंयोगे - the wife of a scholar teacher, but who, herself is not a teacher) and *Āchāryā* (a lady scholar and teacher). That shows that many women in the ancient India were educated and also taught their students. However, in the times of my parents, they shunned their daughters' education and kept them ignorant and illiterate only to affect their progeny. Fortunately, my father was not a very traditional man and my mother cooperated with him.

My mother proved herself not only an obedient and cooperative wife but also a good, intelligent student of my father. She proved herself a forward-looking woman generally not to be found among the economically modest Brahmin families at her times. She started reading and writing very soon. Later, she was a habitual reader of Ram Charita Manas of Tulsidas and Shiva Purana after taking her morning bath. She read many other Puranas as well and often told us the inspiring and character-building stories from those Puranas. I leaned from her the lines:

“श्वानों को मिलते दूध-वस्त्र, भूखे बालक अकुलाते हैं,
माँ की हड्डी से चिपक, ठिठुर जाड़ों की रात बिताते हैं,
युवती के लज्जा वसन बेच जब ब्याज चुकाए जाते हैं,
मालिक जब तेल-फुलेलों पर पानी सा द्रव्य बहाते हैं,
पापी महलों का अहंकार देता मुझको तब आमंत्रण !
झन-झन-झन-झन-झन झनन-झनन !”

At that time, when I first heard those lines from her, I did not know what the poem conveyed and I had no reason to ask as to who wrote that, etc. It was simply an inspiring song-like thing that I liked. I suppose, my mother had learned it from my father. Only later on, when I grew up, I came to know

that those lines were from a large poem “Vipathaga” written by Shri Ramdahari Singh ‘Dinkar’. For unknown reasons I have been a fan of Ramdhari Singh ‘Dinkar’. May be, those were the lines that entered into my unconscious and made a ground for love to the poems/books written by ‘Dinkar’. Similarly, I had heard the Bhihpuri poem ‘Bideshiya’ from her. In her days this song was considered highly patriotic and inspiring and I suppose that she learned it from my father. Later on I retrieved the entire poem and I love to reproduce it here.

बटोहिया

सुंदर सुभूमि भैया भारत के देसवा से मोरा प्रान बसे हिमखोह रे बटोहिया ।
 एक द्वार घेरे रामा, हिम कोतवालवा से तीन द्वारे सिंधु घहरावे रे बटोहिया ।
 जाहु-जाहु भैया रे बटोही हिंद देखी आऊं जहवां कुहकी कोइली गावे रे बटोहिया ।
 पवन सुगंध मंद अमर गगनवां से कामिनी बिरह राग गावे रे बटोहिया ।
 बिपिन अगम धन, सघन बगन बीच चम्पक कुसुम रंग देवे रे बटोहिया ।
 द्रम बट पीपल, कदम्ब नीम आम वृक्ष केतकी गुलाब फूल फूले रे बटोहिया ।
 तोता तूती बोले रामा, बोले भैगरजवा से पपिहा के पी-पी जिया साले रे बटोहिया ।
 सुंदर सुभूमि भैया भारत के देसवा से मोरे प्रान बसे गंगाधार रे बटोहिया ।
 गंगा रे जमुनवां के झगमग पनियां से सरजू झमकि लहरावे रे बटोहिया ।
 ब्रह्मपुत्र पंचनद घहरत निसि दिन सोनभद्र मीठे स्वर गावे रे बटोहिया ।
 उपर अनेक नदी उमड़ी-घुमड़ी नाचे जूगन के जदुआ जगावे रे बटोहिया ।
 आगरा-प्रयाग-काशी, दिल्ली कलकतवा से मोरे प्रान बसे सरजू तीर रे बटोहिया ।
 जाऊ-जाऊ भैया रे बटोही हिंद देखी आऊ जहां ऋषि चारो वेद गावे रे बटोहिया ।
 सीता के बिमल जस, राम जस, कृष्ण जस मोरे बाप-दादा के कहानी रे बटोहिया ।
 ब्यास, बाल्मिक ऋषि गौतम कपिलदेव सूतल अमर के जगावे रे बटोहिया ।
 रामानुज रामानंद न्यारी-प्यारी रूपकला ब्रह्म सुख बन के भंवर रे बटोहिया ।
 नानक कबीर गौर संकर श्री रामकृष्ण अलख के गतिया बतावे रे बटोहिया ।
 विद्यापति कबीदास सूर जयदेव कवि तुलसी के सरल कहानी रे बटोहिया ।
 जाऊ-जाऊ भैया रे बटोही हिंद देखी आऊ जहां सुख झूले धान खेत रे बटोहिया ।
 बुद्धदेव पृथु बिक्रमार्जुन शिवाजी के फिरी-फिरी हिय सुध आवे रे बटोहिया ।
 अपर प्रदेश-देस सुभग सुघर बेस मोरे हिंद जग के निचोड़ रे बटोहिया ।
 सुंदर सुभूमि भैया भारत के भूमि जेहि जन रघुबीर सिर नावे रे बटोहिया ॥

I also love to mention that after taking bath on the well in the rear corner of our courtyard, she used to pray gods and goddesses. Among those prayers, one was really interesting:

मुखे ते ताम्बूलं नयनयुगळे कज्जलकला ललाटे काश्मीरं त्रिलसति गळे मौक्तिकलता ।
 स्फुरत्काञ्ची शाटी पृथुकटितटे हाटकमयी भजामि त्वां गौरीं नगपतिकिशोरीमविरतम् ॥

I had been hearing this one and many more from my early childhood. Later, when I picked up Sanskrit, I was often amused at the pronunciation of my mother, which clearly indicated that she did not have training in Sanskrit; she had only got it by heart by hearing and perhaps did not clearly know the meaning of the prayer. Indeed, my mother did not have any training in Sanskrit language. The prayer is excellently poetic and in due course I learned that it was written by Ādi Shankarāchārya (in the poetic prayer to Durgā titled आनन्दलहरी).

I vaguely remember that stories from the life of Swami Vivekananda were told to me by my mother. An incident, in particular, I clearly remember. It was winter season and a beggar, covering himself in rags, was seen at the door of my house. He begged for something to eat (obviously, from my mother). My mother was busy elsewhere doing some household work. I acted on behalf of her. I took out rice, dāl and some curry in a plate from the kitchen and went ahead to feed the beggar. The beggar had just gone away after eating and blessing me that my mother came to know of it. She asked me as to what prompted me to do that without seeking her permission. I replied to her that if Swami Vivekananda gave his clothes to a beggar, couldn't I feed a beggar? My mother replied back - first, that I was not Swami Vivekananda, and secondly that I should not do anything like that because the beggar asked for food from her, not from me, and hence I had no business to do something on her behalf, without her permission. But I was not much convinced. I felt satisfied by feeding the beggar and receiving blessings from him. I should mention that to me Swami Vivekananda has been

the most beloved preacher and intellectual. I am fortunate to have read almost all the works authored by him (his letters, his lectures, etc.). I consider him a great patriot, a great rationalist, a great preacher, a great social reformer and above all a great soul (without involving myself in his non-dualistic philosophy at the moment). And I should also mention that this love for Swami Ji was sown in my heart by my mother, early in my childhood days.

My mother was also interested in reading books on Ayurveda. She could not learn Sanskrit, but in our home library there were many books on Ayurveda that had Sanskrit text as well as its Hindi translation. My mother read them all. My father used to prepare many medicines at home and my mother helped him immensely. In that process, she learned a lot about various herbs, their use, various diseases, their symptoms, their treatment, appropriate medicines, etc. She was particularly very useful when my father had to deal with the female patients. Those days, women were very shy to describe or explain their problems to a male physician. Those women were quite free to my mother. Thus, initially, my mother helped my father to treat the female patients. In due course, women stopped coming to my father and instead they wanted to be treated by my mother. My mother could deal with many diseases, but for some complicated cases she used to consult my father. The maintenance of our family almost fully depended on the earning by practicing Ayurveda. Our parents earned just a little more than what was needed to sustain ourselves. I should also mention that my mother (*vis-à-vis* my father) was more generous to poor patients. In many cases she charged very little – well affordable – to her patients, occasionally charging nothing. My father, sometimes, was critical of her over-generosity, because, after all, their earnings (together) were not much. My father, too, had sympathy for the poor and he charged very little for their treatment, but my mother was conspicuously over-generous. So, my father occasionally commented: *इसने तो दातव्य औषधालय बना रक्खा है* (she has made it a centre for free medical treatment) and my mother often replied in something like *ये चार फूल फेंके मैंने ऊपर की राह सजाने को* (I have offered those four flowers to decorate my path above earth - or in the sky).

My father was not very happy with my insistence in choosing the general line of education and joining the Tarar High School for doing matriculation. He was afraid that such an education would make me worthless. So, after I had done my matriculation, he suggested me to go in for teachers training that would surely make me a primary school teacher. However, my mother did not agree to that and wanted me to join the college. I joined Marwari college and did my BA (Honours in Economics). My mother also encouraged me to do my MA. I did. But after that, my father's prediction started showing up and I did not get any job for long nine years (during which I did my MRP and research work for my PhD in IIT, Kharagpur). The Ayurvedic practice of my father had dwindled down to become non-remunerative. However, female patients were coming to my mother and the family depended on her meagre earning. My education appeared to be fruitless and my younger brother was in college who started seeking some job premature. I was already married and had two sons. My wife and my children lived in Tarar with my parents since I had no job. All in our family lived a hard life, not starving but surely not at ease. Yet my mother remained calm and hardworking, never complaining against my ill luck and unemployment. She often said: *भगवान के घर में देर है, पर अंधेर नहीं* (God's judgment may be delayed, but injustice wouldn't be done). She consistently advised me to have patience, stick to my objectives and fight against the adversities.

“कंकड़ियां जिनकी सेज सुघड़, छाया देता केवल अम्बर,
विपदाएँ दूध पिलाती हैं, लोरी आँधियाँ सुनाती हैं,
जो लाक्षागृह में जलते हैं, वे ही शूरमा निकलते हैं।” (from Rashmirathi, by Dinkar).

My younger brother, Himanshu, joined a bank job before I got any job. I became lecturer in IIT, Kharagpur in 1981 and soon moved to North-Eastern Hill University as a reader. My parents were

very happy; all their responsibilities were over; all their daughters were married off, all their sons stood on their own feet; all of them were earning their own living.

My mother passed away in 1989; no ailments, but while she was coming back home from a neighbour's house she collapsed on the way and within half an hour she was no more. After her death, my father went to Rishra to live with my elder brother. Himanshu died in 1991. My father passed away in 1993.

My father was my first teacher; academically I am built by him. He taught me how to learn. He taught me self-learning. He taught me: आत्मदीपो भव (be a candle unto yourself). Yes, a candle burns itself; yes, a candle generates and emits light by burning itself; yes, a candle burns its wick or the core string, liquefies hard wax, its body, into an inflammable fluid that supports its flame, and hence supports light. Be a candle unto yourself. Thus spoke my father. On the other hand, my mother was the maker of my emotional build; she was the architect of my character; she made me a man with compassion. She smiles in my smiles and she weeps in my tears. I told you before; fortunate are those who have or have had a mother like mine.

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