

In Fond Memories of My Father...

Prabhakar Sharma

I think it is highly ordinary of me in not having covered in great details the personality of my father late Shri Prabhakar Sharma. I try to make amends as I recall some aspects of his magnetic personality on his fourteenth death anniversary today.

(Born 29 Jan 1917 Died 1st July 1994).

A father of not one, two or three but eleven children could be a negative from the India's point of view. Yet he was indeed a very successful father who had helped develop some very good qualities in all of us. I have to say that I have met a fewer men of his caliber, composure, discipline and a great willingness to help.

We were not born into a family of great riches. We were neither born into traditionally illustrious nor a family that could fulfill all the desires at all the times. Yet I consider being born as a son of Prabhakar Sharma (and Shakuntala Sharma) is a matter of great honor and privilege. Here was a father who was great in his own right and illustrious in his own unique ways as he brought up three daughters and eight sons.

My distinct association with our father started when we moved from Bijnor to Agra. That was the last time that I really got to spend in Bijnor. Our maternal grandfather was supporting the family with his Baidyanath Agency. Many of my elder brothers got their formal education at Bijnor and I was myself born there.

Except the eldest sister Late Shashi di everyone got good education, she was the only non-graduate in the family. I was born so much towards the end of the family tree that I am almost in no position as to make much of the impressions that my elder siblings would have had about our father. Yet I

am sure each one of them would have had great experiences of their life with him.

Our father was a tall and handsome man. He had an impressive personality with his stylish almost trademark moustache. He did command a lot of respect from all those who knew him or had a chance to know him. He definitely had some sort of aura or some magnanimity built around him. In Agra, I clearly remember our visits to the famous Mankameshwar temple, Tajmahal and Fatehpur Sikri.

He had rare abilities in palmistry and was highly successful. He would rather speak only when required and I never saw anyone disturbing him unless really urgent. My father had traveled a lot during his job in CDA like Lucknow, Secunderabad, Meerut, Agra, Patna, Port Blair and Finally New Delhi. After retirement he served Rural Electrification Board at Guwahati and also served Toshniwal Brothers for a brief period. He had also been to NEFA during China's intrusion, he had stories from those days and his life there that he often narrated to friends, family and acquaintances. He was a regular at morning exercise and was very active many years after his retirement from service. I have vivid memories of him being busy with his hukka and his pensive thoughtful mood. He would just read newspaper and astrological magazines of which he had a huge collection.

Agra Days : I remember that he had urged us to fast on the day of the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri in Tashkent in 1966. That probably means he admired him a lot. He was apolitical though he did probably like Vajpayee and a couple of other leaders from the present generation.

In other times I have seen him playing Single handed bridge and other solo card games. His one important friend in Agra days was our Jagdish Bhaisahab, who was in Airforce. I later discovered that in fact he was a distant nephew, no wonder, he used to call father Mamaji!

I also remember Shanti Swaroop Pathak of Raja Ki Mandi who was the editor of the then very famous Amar Ujala. We used to call him Mamaji and I was never knowing the exact relationship. In fact he was Mamaji to our father since his two daughters Beena and Sushma were Buajis to us. I really remember those days spent with them at Raja Ki Mandi. We used to go there to collect kites and spend time with them. It was later that I learned that Munni Buaji in Delhi were more closely related to them and also to Brijendra Swaroop Kaushik (Birjan tauji)– the man with a photographer studio in Bijnor also had a big black dog ! They were all related to our father.

The reason I mention all these people is that they had great respect for our father. The Bhardwaj's (Munni Buaji) family in Delhi gave me one of the greatest friend in Raju, Anil Bhardwaj, we do not get to meet often now that I am in Mumbai but we share a good frequency. Phuphaji retired as an editor in Lok Sabha and also had a daughter- Dr. Ila.

I did not get to live in Bareilly anytime, so my association with our paternal family was restricted to the family of Shri Kamlakar Sharma who was the youngest brother of my Father. Chachaji had a daughter called Neerja or Neeru to sound more familiar who was born a month and half after me and a son Pankaj who was one year younger to us. We, (Neeru, Pankaj, myself and Ajju my younger brother) were the best of buddies all being part of the Kendriya Vidyalaya culture in the family. Their third child Rajeev was much younger to us. Chachaji was in Air Force before he came to settle down in Bareilly.

There is often a story about how I got my first class in higher secondary which was obtained just to please the dearest friend Neeru, (yeah, she was more of a friend than a sister), who had missed her first division by just one mark. She never failed in life after that and I missed any opportunities to impress the world with any big achievements! (Joking!)

The story would be incomplete if I do not mention about the four brothers and three sisters that was my father's immediate family - three younger brothers were stationed at Bareilly. They all held their elder brother in very high esteem. The first of them Pandit Diwakar Sharma was a renowned man and was prime minister of Bareilly Brahman Sabha for many years. Shri Sudhakar Sharma the middle one I remember was getting a lot of his good clothes as gift that would not fit my father. His daughter's marriage (Manju didi) was also performed from Agra. The youngest Kamalakar Sharma was described a little earlier. Of the three sisters, that is our Buajis, the eldest was in Bareilly, the middle one in Bijnor and the youngest settled in Sonapat. They all looked upto him for support and consultation on various matters. All my cousins in Bareilly Bijnor and elsewhere had great liking for their Tauji (and Mamaji) and had great respect and regard for him. I think he liked Yogendra bhaisahab (Bijnor) the most. Our father was considered highly knowledgeable and vastly experienced. Probably someone who had solution for everything!

Our father was a man of few words and a highly successful palmist. He was well read on the subject and had years of experience! I think he had seen the palms of Maneckshaw (not sure!), Maneka Gandhi and Vinod Khanna among the luminaries and predicted unbelievable things very accurately for many in the family and friends. In a nutshell he was much sought after for his palmistry prediction capabilities. He was specific and to the point and never used it as a profession to make money!

On the personal front I remember I had refused to marry a relative of his life time great friend Machalla ji as I was not considering marriage at that time. Later Ajay, my younger brother married Jyoti and they have two wonderful sons.

He was indeed pleased with my marriage to Savita. He praised her to one and all after his only visit to us at Nilgiri after my marriage. He probably wanted to come to Mumbai in winters during his last few years but since we were staying in

one room flat at Nilgiri and Savita was also in job he changed his mind. When we met him in Delhi much after the birth of a still born child he looked concerned and I think tears almost flowed into his eyes. I had never seen him so helpless! I think the other time would have been the death of Alok da!

He was an avid traveller. Every time he came to Bombay he went to visit some important places besides the famous Babulnath and Mahalakshmi temple. He had been to Pandharpur, Bhimashankar and Trayambakeshwar, Nashik. I remember I had taken him to Girgaum Chowpatty for Ganapati Visarjan during one of his visits. We were forced to walk back to Anand Bhavan as no taxis or transport was available. I realized it later that it was a bit too much on my part to make him walk so much, he was aging and had complains of joint pains.

He had been to Amarnath and many other Hindu pilgrim centres. He used to often write about his travels in letters to us. I am afraid I do not have those collections now. He used to visit Ayodhya at the time of Ram Navami but discontinued after my mother's death in 1982. She had asked him not to go to Ayodhya that year saying he would be required to be at Delhi. My father thought she was referring to the expected birth of my niece Meesha. He said - Why should he be required for that!

She insisted him to not to go for a different reason. She probably knew she was on the verge of leaving this world for her heavenly abode. It was only a few days later on the early morning of 27th March that she was no longer with us. My father realized of her prophecy! He only asked me to read Geeta to her for the last time. I was trying to read my favorite ode to Durga – Na mantram no yantram and was deliberately reading it wrong that she would hear me and correct me as she often used to! But she did not!

I am indeed very proud to have been born to such parents. Our father commanded lot of respect for his great personality and mother was a highly religious lady. She used to read

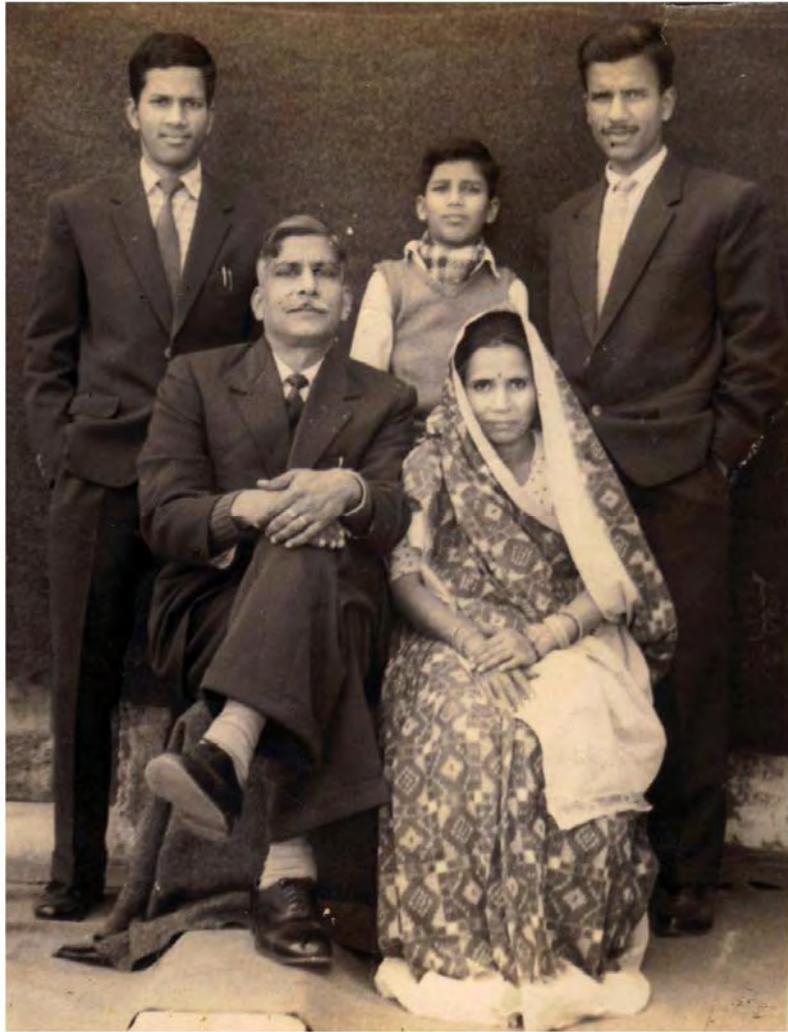
Ramcharit Manas and Mahabharat and often told us stories from these and other epics. She was a great reader. Probably she liked the great Sharatchandra the most! She died of heart attack and I felt as if it was an answer to my prayers on the day of Holi. I had prayed to Goddess Durga to emancipate her from the sufferings (a long time mental disorder of some sort).

I have got some rare pictures of my parents and grand parents from the rare photo collections of Chachaji (Shri Kamlakar Sharma) which are included in the rare pictures on this site.

The best time we had spent together was in Port Blair, I was with my parents as the eldest son on his posting there. I would need a separate chapter to cover that story on some other day! He had also taken us to Patna, Kolkata - 10 to 15 days before sailing to Port Blair were great as we almost saw everything in Kolkata of that time, including the only movie in theatre with our father! We also went to Varanasi and Sanchi on the insistence of my mother sometime during our Delhi days!

I am sure every member of our family would always remember them as true great parents. I could not meet my father when he breathed his last is something I resent but a fact that I can not change! I pray to the almighty that his or rather their souls rest in peace!

Abhaya Sharma, 1st July 2008.



Here are few replies! I have added them with few editings !)

dear chachaji,

it was nice talking to you, as always. very good observation by you that i have been more like correcting rather than contributing. i am going to make an effort to set that right.

one example i have of babaji talking less and to the point is as follows: when i got admission for MSc biotech in Pondicherry, he was more keen and confident that i should be going for the course than mummy-papa, who were very apprehensive abt sending me so far away. i think babaji had a role is convincing papa to allow me to go to pondicherry. anyway, after it was decided that i was going everybody was giving me gyaan (several times over) about how i should concentrate on studies and behave myself and "hostel mei

huri aadatein nahi seekhna, ladkon ke chakkar mei nahi padna" etc etc.and i know everybody's lectures were well-meant and out of genuine concern for my well-being. but they were getting annoying beyond a point. and honestly, at that time and age i also thought why is everyone so non-trusting of me.

and here is what babaji he told me - ghar se door ja rahi ho, yeh nahi bhoolna ki tum kaun ho. aisa kuchh nahi karna jise maa-baap ko bataane mei tumhe sharmindagi ho. thats it. just once. no more. measured sentences, and big impact. and that 'yeh nahi bhoolna ki tum kaun ho' -- it meant a lot to me. without saying in so many words he had expressed his confidence in me, it was like an acknowledgment that i know you are a good girl and i want you to stay that way. just out of teens (i had just turned 20 then) that trust was a big thing. 😊

His story-telling, narrating incidents of his life was also like that. pretty succinct - the right amount of description about the characters, and the surroundings - not so much that one loses the main story and not so little that the story would become a bland narration of events. and for a man who otherwise spoke very fast, just the right pace too! 😊 towards the last 3-4 years of his life, i had the opportunity to hear some of those stories although unfortunately i cant recall even one.

oh well... enough (and more) said. i shall retire to bed now. you know, i may not write as often but doesnt mean that i dont think of you and other family members...

with warmest regards to you and chachiji and love to chikloo sharma.

kukkie
(she also wrote earlier in short!)

no mention of his amazing story-telling capabilities, which unfortunately none of his children seem to have got, nor the mention of jaadu in his hands regarding plants!!?! his roses

and jasmines used to be so awesome. he could grow vegetables in pots on the terrace in GI- 922. he was just too good with plants!

Resp Bhaiya,

I totally agree with you that we are proud and very lucky to be born to such great parents.

Also, I would say that one understand their parents in the best sense when they become parents as well. Despite great respect and love for them, I used to analyse both of them and compare them until Ishitha was born to me. Within their means they gave us the best of everything and thats how we achieved all this.

There are few corrections i would like to make. It was 1994 not 1995, I'll always remember it coz it was exactly 10 days before my exams. Mummyji used to read ramacharitmanas and bhagwad geeta not mahabharat but she used to tell stories of that.

I don't know if u know this but our mummyji was very intelligent so much so that she taught papa the meaning of some difficult Sanskrit from 'kadambari' at the time of his graduation. It was supposed to be very tough book. Papa told me that instance. It was his exam next day and he was very worried coz of that, when mummyji asked the reason and solved his problem. While mummyji was so learned and intelligent, pitaji was very disciplined, social and practical person. He was so organised that much before any festival he would made sure that all necessary things should be in home. I bet if one can get one of his diaries used during wedding, anyone can make the arrangements for a marriage. They had such greater details for each occasions.

I am not entirely sure how compatible were they as a couple (i think they must be, otherwise good parenthood doesn't come i feel) but together they made perfect parents, teacher and guide.

Well, perhaps I'll never end this email coz lots of thoughts want to pour out but its midnight and I've to be practical like him. Remember he used to say, sona nahi kya kal office bhi jana hai'.:-)

With a good thought that HE was proud of all of us and we are all proud of HIM, G'nite

B2

Chachaji,

Very nicely written! A joy to read. Thank you for sharing it with the entire family.

-n

btw, i think babaji's dob was jan 29. and the year of death was 1994.

-n

