CHILDREN WHO MADE IT BIG

Thangamani

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PREFACE

The great achievers who feature in this book were all once normal young people, who had dreams and aspirations, joys and sorrows, doubts and questions — like every young reader of this book. Every one of them has had a turning point in his or her life which set them towards their respective careers or influenced their personalities. They learnt from their experiences and grew up into individuals who have made a mark in their respective field, be it science, industry, arts, social work, judiciary or films. These are some of the Achievers of the post-Independence era.

The aim of this book is to bring out the fact, that greatness, for the most part, is achieved through determination and perseverance and that it is possible for anyone to scale great heights provided one has these two qualities.

The stories in this collection are all based on personal interviews, during which the personalities let me have a glimpse of their childhood. The incidents are all true. However, with their due permission dialogues and situations were created to make the stories more lively. I thank them all for kindly going through their respective stories and giving their comments which has added to the worth of the book.

A HANDFUL OF ALMONDS

(NANI PALKHIWALA)

"All those who want to participate in the elocution competition, may please raise their hands," the teacher announced.

Several hands shot up, among them, Nani's. The teacher began taking down their names and when he came to Nani, he stopped.

"Are you sure, you want to do it, Nani?" he asked. He sounded doubtful.

"Y..y..es, sir. I...I... do w..want to t.try," replied Nani. There were sniggers from behind. He coloured, but stuck to his decision.

Eleven-year-old Nani stammered badly and often had to repeat a word many times before he could get it right. It was definitely brave of him to take part in an elocution competition, no less!

The teacher asked again, "Nani, you have to speak for about five minutes extempore.

Would you be able to?"

This time, he nodded his head. The fact that it was going to be extempore excited him more than anything else. He could come up with the best ideas and arguments on any subject at a moment's notice. His brain worked fast and collated every bit of information into a perfect presentation. He looked steadily at his teacher. He had decided he would take part in the competition and he would, no matter what. He stuck his chin out as he stared straight ahead. He was as proud as he was stubborn.

The boys knew better than to tease Nani. He was a brilliant student and beat everyone hollow in studies and moreover, he was a very kind and helpful boy. Everyone liked him. They also knew that if Nani decided to do something, he would do it, no matter what the odds, even if it was a stammer.

The stammer had always been a cause of irritation to him. Just when he was about to make a point, he would begin stammering dreadfully. He tried tongue twisters and recited difficult passages from books to improve his speech. Often he would be able to speak several sentences without the trace of the stammer, but it would suddenly start and once it began, it went on, much to his frustration. Very often, he couldn't express what he wanted to say.

"Papa, I.I h..have given my name for the elo...lo..cution competition," he announced to his father that evening at dinner.

"Hm..mm..that's good. What are you going to speak on?" asked his father.

"I don't know. It's going to be extempore." Nani spoke without any stammer this time.

“Oh, I completely forgot! One of our customers, the old Mrs. Dastur had come to the shop today. She said that by rolling several marbles in one’s mouth as one talked, one could get over a stammer. Why not try that, Nani?”

“Ye...s, Papa. I ....will. Maybe, tonight itself. Who knows, it would help me tomorrow?”

“Do you want me to sit with you while you try out some speeches? I could time you,” offered his elder sister Amy. No one in the Palkhivala family discouraged Nani or other children in their endeavours. They were a close family and stood by each other.

Nani practised with Amy that night and was able to speak with just a little bit of stuttering. “You will do well,” she said encouragingly. Nani was grateful for her encouragement.

The next day in school, the hall was full. There was a choice of subjects and Nani chose, “Try and Try and you will succeed.” He spoke very well, stressing that if a person tried hard enough, he could do anything. It was symbolic because that was what he was doing. He stammered a bit in the beginning, but as he spoke, he became more confident. There was a moment of frustration for him when he got stuck on the word ‘perseverance’. But he didn’t give up and concluded his speech to resounding applause. Nani had just given his first public speech!

His speech that day didn’t win him a prize but got him special mention from the Principal, who had presided over the competition. “I am sure Nani will do very well if he followed what he talked about, today,” he said, while commenting on his performance. To the 10-year-old boy, this was highly encouraging.

That evening he hurried home happily. He went to his father’s laundry on the way to give him the news. “That’s very good Nani. You must keep trying and one day, God willing, you will become a great speaker,” he patted him on the shoulder. He was a great believer in God, just as much as he believed that hard work always bore fruit.

He then took out a couple of books from the shelf and gave them to Nani. “One of our customers, Mrs. Irani lent them to me. I am sure you will like them,” he said. Nani took them happily. He had learnt the value of books from his father. “The more you read the better a person you will become,” he told him. Not that Nani needed any persuasion to read books. He had always loved books ever since he had been old enough to turn the pages of one. He read Gujarati books till he turned seven and thereafter began reading English books. Once he began reading, he forgot everything around him and even skipped games.

“Will you come to play today?” asked his friend Hafiz, who had accompanied Nani to the laundry. But Nani was not too keen. “I want to finish these books,” he told him.

“All of them?” asked his friend, unable to believe that he could.

“Yes, all of them,” he replied. Nani was a fast reader.

“You hardly come out to play,” complained Hafiz. “If you continue staying indoors like this, you will turn out to be a weakling!”

“Who says I am staying idle indoors? My mind is getting all the exercise it needs and that is equally good!”

“What good is your mind if you become weak in the body?”

“Oh, Hafiz! The brain uses up a lot of energy and burning of energy means exercise, doesn’t it? Don’t you see that they are one and the same thing, whether I expend energy by playing games or by reading a book?”

“Hafiz, you can’t argue with Nani. He has an answer for everything. I am sure, he will grow up and become a lawyer one day!” laughed his father, who had been hearing the friend’s talk. He told his family and friend the same thing. “Nani can argue most logically. That is the first quality of a good lawyer.”

Apart from reading at home, Nani also liked to visit Popular Book Depot in Grant Road. The owner, Mr. Bhatkal allowed him to browse through the books whenever he wanted. He knew that though the boy was passionate about books, he couldn’t afford to buy them. One day, when he had gone there as usual, Mr. Bhatkal said, “Nani, these books have just arrived. One of the copies is slightly damaged. You could borrow it for a day because I will be returning it to the distributor only the day after tomorrow. But please take care not to spoil it!”

Nani couldn’t believe his ears. “Oh, could I? Thank you so much! I will take good care of it.”

On his way back he stopped at a couple of shops that sold second hand books. He couldn’t afford new ones and saved up every paisa to buy old ones. He didn’t find any book of his choice that day and went home clutching the book Mr. Bhatkal had given him to his heart. The book was on self help. Though he liked to read the classics which he did at school, he preferred serious books like these from which he could learn a lot. He also read a lot of poetry, which he could recite from memory, much to the amazement of his classmates.

When he reached home, his mother was serving food to a beggar. She gave as old shirt of Mr. Palkhivala after he finished his food. The old man blessed her as he left. This was nothing new to Nani. Both his parents were very religious and cared deeply for the poor and deprived. “God has given us so much so that we share it with those who don’t have anything,” Mr. Palkhivala often said.

Nani wrote the accounts of his father’s laundry and kept the account books up-to-date. Often, while writing the accounts, he found his father charging less than the usual amount as laundry charges from people who were not well to do. “Papa, you have charged just one *anna* for dry-cleaning this sari. You normally charge two, don’t you?” Nani asked his father one day.

“Yes, Nani. That’s Mrs. Doctor’s only good sari and she needs it for wearing at her niece’s marriage. She can’t afford the usual rates.” Nani nodded. Over the years he also imbibed such sentiments from his parents.

“What do you want to become when you grow up?” asked one of their neighbours of Nani one day.

“Oh, I want to become someone of eminence sir,” he replied. “And what would you after becoming a person of eminence?”

“I will do something for this country of mine, for the poor,” replied Nani with conviction. Though at that time he had no idea of how he would do it, he felt deeply for the underprivileged, nevertheless.

There was an orphan named Jahangir in their building who was constantly ill treated by his relatives. Nani often found the little boy weeping after a scolding or beating. He took him small presents and played with him whenever he could. For his part, the little boy adored Nani.

One day, Mrs. Palkhivala bought some apricots. She used to take out their kernels which are like almonds, and give it to the children. That day too she kept aside the almonds. Nani got a handful too when he came back from school. He liked to pop them into his mouth one by one, as he read his favourite books. That day, just as he settled down to read, he heard Jahangir sobbing. But he was so intent on finishing the book, that he ignored the sound and continued reading. He picked up the first almond and just as he popped it into his mouth, his father called to him.

“Nani, don’t you think you should give those almonds to Jahangir?”

Nani was in a hurry to begin the new book. ‘Why should I? Mama gave them to me, didn’t she? I like them so much and there are so few of them,” he said. It was rather uncharacteristic of him to speak like that, considering that he liked and pitied Jahangir.

His father didn’t reply. He simply said, “Nani, come here!” in a quiet voice. He made the boy sit next to him and took his hand in his. “Son, God has given you so much in life. You have a mother and father, your father earns a regular income, we live in a good house, we are educated. Do you know why He has given us all these? So that we may share them with those who are less fortunate than us. God didn’t mean us to keep things for ourselves, to be selfish!

“Now, Jahangir is an orphan. He has no one in the world; he has nothing. Compared to him, you have everything. Do you think God would be happy if you didn’t share at least the almonds with him?”

Nani looked at the seeds in his hand. They were turning clammy with sweat. His father never raised his voice or forced him to do anything. But his soft voice, his loving tone and his reasoning made Nani listen to everything he said.

He got up after carefully wrapping the seeds in a clean handkerchief. “I will be right back, Papa.” “Are they for me?” asked the little boy when Nani extended his hand with the almonds in them. His eyes, still wet from the tears, shone and he looked at them hungrily. Nani felt a pang of guilt for having refused to share them with him earlier.

“Yes, Jahangir. Take them.”

“What about you? Don’t you want any?” he asked doubtfully.

“No, Jahangir. I have already eaten plenty. These are for you.”

Jahangir began crying again. Nani was alarmed. “Why are you crying, Jahangir?” he asked.

In reply, Jahangir, just hugged Nani, crying harder. After he calmed down a bit Nani went home, thoughtfully.

“Papa, why did Jahangir cry when I gave him the almonds?”

“Just as cruelty can make a child cry, so can kindness and love. The only difference is that, the tears of one is out of sorrow and the other is out of joy. Now, do you see why it is important to share?”

‘If so little can make another person happy, I must find more ways to do it,’ Nani resolved at that moment. ‘The world is full of people like Jahangir who are helpless and who cannot fight for themselves; may be I could fight for them,’ thought the young boy.

WHO IS NANI

Born on 16 January 1920, Nani Palkhivala was an eminent lawyer and a champion of human rights. He fought several historic law suits, where he defended the rights of individuals against the oppression of the state, stood for free speech and the rights of the minorities. He fought most of these cases free of charge as a matter of service to the downtrodden and oppressed.

Mr. Palkhivala also served as the Ambassador to the US from 1977-79. He had honorary degrees of Doctor of Laws from several US universities.

He has written several books on various subjects including law, taxation, the Constitution of India and our cultural heritage.

He was well known for his incisive speeches on budgetary and tax matters which are so simple and interesting, as to be appreciated even by the lay person. His budget speeches, where he analysed the Union Budget every year, drew thousands of people and earned him a place in the record books for addressing the largest crowd at a public meeting. For someone who stammered till the age of 15, this was indeed a wonderful achievement.

Before he passed away in December 2002, he was the Chairman of Associated Cement Companies Ltd., and director of several Indian and overseas companies. He was also a trustee of several charity trusts and the President of the Forum of Free Enterprise among others.

THE BUS STOP

(MEDHA PATKAR)

Medha was in high spirits. She had played the role of the principal in the play at the annual function of her school, and had won a lot of applause. Moreover, there were several prizes to look forward to. She had won prizes in two debates, an elocution and an essay competition. In addition, there was also a prize for the best contribution to the school magazine. Several articles and poems written by Medha were in the magazine.

The prize giving ceremony began and a beaming Medha went to receive her prizes. Then the name of the best magazine article was being announced. One of her pieces, ‘Santra ani Limbu’ (Orange and Lemon) had won the first prize. Medha stood up to go forward and receive the prize. But the announcer was not calling out her name; she was calling out the name of her sixth standard classmate, Sunita! Medha was shocked.

Sunita was equally shocked. “But Medha, it was you who had written that poem! How can I take the prize?” asked the poor girl.

“It is not your fault,” she managed to croak through dry lips.

By then, the name was announced again and Sunita had to run and take her prize, which actually belonged to Medha. She was too scared and excited to report the matter to the school authorities.

It had all been the fault of one of the teachers. Medha was a prolific writer and had filled her notebook with poems and stories — about the birds, the sky, a poor boy and his family, monsoon in a village and so on. The teacher was quite impressed.

“These are all very good and I would like to take some of them for the magazine. But since so many pieces can’t be published under your name, shall we put it under different students’ names?” she had asked.

Medha who was quite happy about so many of her creations being taken for publication, readily agreed. That was how ‘Santra ani Limbu’ had ended up under Sunita’s name and had now won the prize.

Still in her Principal’s dress after the play, Medha was silently sobbing. The sheer injustice of it all hurt her. If at least the teacher had told the gathering who the rightful winner was, it would have been fine. But she had kept quiet too. Medha herself was feeling too embarrassed and upset to stand up and claim the prize as hers. Back at home, she broke down. “It is not fair! I had written that poem! I don’t mind not getting the prize, but now everyone thinks that Sunita has written it!’ sobbed Medha. “The teacher didn’t say anything and nor did Sunita!”

Her mother, Mrs. Khanolkar, was furious. “That is a very bad thing! I will have a word with the Principal tomorrow!” she said.

The day after, the Principal made the announcement at the assembly that Medha and not Sunita was the winner of the prize for the best magazine article. Medha’s sense of justice was vindicated.

‘A cheerful, talkative and energetic girl, Medha was highly sensitive with an awareness of justice and fairness. She would fight for what was right till justice was done. Having a mother, who combined social service with her work at the post office, and a father who was an active trade union leader, she learnt early in life to be sensitive to other people’s needs and was ever ready to lend a helping hand to anyone who needed it. This made her one of the most popular girls in her middle class colony in Chembur, Bombay. Unlike other children of her age, she was always busy, preparing for one of her numerous debate or declamation competition or making *mehndi* patterns on the palms of the neighbourhood children. Her designs were very popular. She was-also much in demand to perform in the cultural programmes organised in her colony. She sang and acted very well.

When she was about 12, she had the bright idea of starting a library. Of course, there was no money to buy books. So she began collecting old magazines and cutting out the cartoons and picture stories from them, pasting them in plain notebooks. Columns and articles that children would be interested were also thus pasted. She circulated these

‘books’ among the children of the colony and also among the children of the slum adjoining the colony.

There was so much to do, that sometimes she felt that she didn’t have enough time to do it all!

Medha had a particular way of preparing for competitions. She stood in front of the mirror and took a deep breath before delivering her piece to her reflection in the mirror, which she pretended was her audience. She looked into the eyes of the girl in the mirror as she spoke.

“Always look into the eye of a person while speaking to her or him. An honest and sincere person always does that. Only those who have something to hide or be ashamed about avoid the other person’s eyes,” her mother always told Medha. She kept encouraging her daughter too, correcting her pronunciation and expression. “This is not your best, Medha. You can do much better,” she told her daughter. Medha’s parents never told her to win prizes or medals, but always exhorted to do her best. It never failed to amaze her how the prizes came automatically to her if only she did her best!

She did her share of housework too. That day, as she was finishing some chore, she heard her friend Alka calling her to play. Looking down from her balcony Medha shook her head. “No, Alka. Not now. I have a lot of work to do.”

‘We are going to see *Amar Prem* in the evening. Will you come along?” asked Alka. “No. I have promised to help Bhandarkar aunty with her new curtains. Surekha didi wanted me to make *mehndi* for her. Then I have my homework.” She was not too keen on movies nor did she have any pocket money to spend on one. Even though she didn’t go to play that day, she often joined the children. So sporting and cheerful was she mat they all liked to have her in their own team.

That being a holiday, many vendors came into the colony, hawking their wares. Sometimes they came to meet her mother who took a great deal of interest in their problems and helped them. That day too the woman who exchanged old clothes for steel vessels had come to see Mrs. Khanolkar.

“Ask her to come a little later, I’m busy right now,” she said. Medha shouted out to the woman from the kitchen itself.

“Medha! How can you be so rude, shouting to her like that? Couldn’t I have shouted the reply myself? Why did I ask you to give her the message? So that you would go and tell her, face to face. That’s not the way to speak to anyone, least of all, dignified working people like her. Don’t ever do that again, you understand? Let this be the last time I hear you talk to someone in such a disrespectful tone!” She never raised her voice, but Medha could feel the anger.

She had done what she had done without thinking and had never meant to be rude. Respect to others was the first lesson that Medha and her younger brother were taught by their parents. They themselves practised what they taught their children which was why both of them were often consulted by the workers of the area to solve their problems.

Mr. Khanolkar often held important meetings in his house. Medha loved to be present at these, for she got to see how her father handled all kinds of problems with ease. She felt proud of his popularity.

By evening, several men began coming to their house. Soon, the room was full. The men greeted each other genially, but when the meeting began, it turned quite stormy. Medha was sitting in one corner of the room with her brother. She was observing the proceedings from behind the science book, which she was holding in front of her face. Her brother was happily drawing a picture. He was too young to understand the speeches which were indeed fiery that day. Apparently there had been some trouble in one of the mills.

"You should have seen the fine print before agreeing to the conditions put by the management," Mr. Khanolkar was thundering at a stocky man in a faded kurta pyjama. "Do you realise how this is going to harm the negotiations with the management?" Behind her book, Medha cowered. Her father could be really forceful and scary when he spoke in that tone. The poor man tried to explain why he had done it. Mr. Khanolkar waited till he finished and then explained his errors one by one. Before long, the man could understand and asked for advice to solve the mess he had unwittingly created.

Much later, after everyone had left, Medha approached her father. "Baba, why did you scold that man so much? He had only done what he must have thought best."

"What do you know of Trade Union matters, girl? Go back to your studies, now!" he told her, but not unkindly. But looking at her crestfallen face, he continued, "It is important to take the right decisions, when you are doing this kind of work because the lives of thousands of others will be otherwise affected."

"How can that be?" Medha had to know. "As union leaders, our duty is not towards ourselves but towards the workers who are looking to us to solve their problems and get them the best deal. Therefore you have a tremendous responsibility. You have to have the highest degree of honesty and commitment to the people whom you are representing. How can you be careless, then?" Before she could ask him any more questions, he said, "Now, where is the speech you are going to deliver in the elocution competition?"

He always corrected her speeches, teaching her how to phrase her words to make them effective and hard-hitting. Often he scolded her for her mistakes. Medha certainly preferred her mother's gentler methods of teaching, but wouldn't dream of delivering any speech without getting it corrected by her father!

Medha loved to go out occasionally, especially to Dadar with her mother. She liked this bustling suburb of Mumbai. The shopkeepers knew her mother and greeted her warmly. Diwali was approaching and she accompanied her mother to Dadar for shopping. Mrs. Khanolkar bought her a pink frock with lace and embroidery work on it.

While waiting for their bus, Medha looked around. The people in the queue always fascinated her and she tried to make up stories about them. For instance the fat man chewing pan just ahead of them in the queue could be a trader who was out to make some collections — his face looked quite grim! The matronly woman who stood behind them, reading a Marathi newspaper was perhaps a school teacher—she had a severe look about her. Medha imagined her tweaking the ear of a naughty boy in class.

Then her eyes fell upon the young woman behind the matron. She looked harassed, with a baby on her hips and a child holding on to her sari. Medha loved children. She smiled at the little boy, who hid behind his mother. She bent and peeked at him. He peeked too and gave her a wide smile.

The young mother was quite happy for the diversion because the little boy had been whining till then. She smiled at Medha and asked her name. Soon Medha was chatting to her as if she had known her for years.

"Mother, I am hungry. Give me ten paise," said a voice at her elbow. Medha turned. It was an old man, his hand stretched out shaking badly. His head shook involuntarily too. There was stubble on his face and his eyes looked as if he were weeping. His clothes were in tatters and hung about him in a sorry mess and there was a foul smell from his unwashed body.

The matron held her nose with her sari and the young mother turned her face away. Even the sweet little boy peeked at the old man with fear. Medha was pained. Why did everyone react like they did? The old man looked very kind and harmless to her. 'The poor man!' she thought, 'perhaps there is no water in his house to wash himself or his clothes, otherwise why should he be wearing such dirty clothes?'

Thereafter, no one else paid him any attention. Medha's imagination was working again. The poor man probably also had no family, because if he did, he wouldn't be wandering the streets like this, she thought. If he had had a family, maybe his grandchildren would have made him tell them stories. He would have been a well loved grandfather. Instead, here he was, a pathetic figure, scorned by everyone.

Just then, someone threw a coin at him. His hand shook so badly that he couldn't hold it and it fell down on the pavement. He bent down unsteadily and groped for it. Medha couldn't bear it any longer. She bent down to search for the coin, angry at the man who had thrown it so carelessly. She would have given him her piece of mind, but since her mother was there with her, she kept quiet.

But before she could find it, their bus came. "Come on, Medha, quick!" called her mother. Medha hadn't found the coin yet, but was pulled on by her mother.

"Ai, wait!" she said urgently, but had to move as the people in the queue behind her were getting impatient and were pushing her. Everyone was intent on only getting into the bus. No one had time to watch out for an old beggar, who still had not found the coin.

Once inside the bus Medha looked at her mother who was quietly taking out the money for their fare. This upset Medha no end. Even her mother, who repeatedly told her to respect every human being, didn't seem to be concerned! She swallowed the lump in her throat. She was close to tears.

She tried to crane her neck out of the window of the moving bus and see if the beggar had found his coin. The people sitting near the window gave her irritated looks and she had to get back. She worried about the old man never finding the coin and going without his dinner. For her, the pleasant outing had turned sour.

'How can people be so insensitive to the misery of another human being?' she wondered. 'Does being poor mean that everyone hated them? She felt angry, helpless and curiously determined to change it all some day. And she decided that she would never ever wear the pink frock with the embroidery because it would always remind her of the old beggar.

After making up her mind to do something for the poor, she also carried it out. When she was about 14 years old, she began going to the slum colonies, spreading awareness

about cleanliness and teaching the children to read and write. Medha also organised a group of youngsters for story telling sessions for the children there. Service to the poor came naturally to her and in this she was encouraged by her parents.

About a year after she started these activities, she went to a blood donation camp in her colony, as she was very keen to donate blood. However, the doctors couldn't find a vein prominent enough to draw blood, try as they might. "Go home now child; come later," said the doctor kindly. But Medha wouldn't leave till they succeeded!

Her work became more organised. After her post graduate degree in social work she began fighting for the causes of the people and their right to live in peace and harmony with the environment.

A CHAMPION OF THE DOWNTRODDEN

Born on 1 December 1954, Medha Patkar worked with several voluntary organisations in the slums of Bombay and was in charge of slum development projects in the 70s and 80s, before migrating to the tribal areas of Northeast Gujarat and forming action groups of the people for their development and to fight for social justice.

She set up the Narmada Bachao Andolan in 1985 to protest against the construction of the Narmada Dam across the river Narmada. This dam, if completed, threatens to inundate hundreds of villages, displacing tribal and peasant populations of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, living in the vicinity of the dam. The Narmada Bachao Andolan has support groups all over the country and abroad—in more than ten countries — called Narmada Action Committee.

She is also the co-ordinator of the National Alliance of People's Movement which raises developmental issues through mass struggle.

She has been a winner all along, starting with prizes in school and college for debates, elocution and dramatics before going on to win awards at the national level *for* her social work. Among the international awards is the Right to Livelihood Award also called the Alternative Nobel Prize (Sweden, 1992), Goldman Environment Prize, (USA, 1993), Green Ribbon Award for best International Political Campaigner by BBC, (1995).

THE COLOURS OF SILENCE

(SATISH GUJRAL)

"Satish! Why didn't you come to school today?"

Surender had to repeat the question three times before Satish heard him. He was lying on the bed, his eyes closed. Sweat glistened on his brows.

"No. I am not feeling so well," replied Satish. Of late, he had been more and more unwell.

"Why, what[1] s the matter with you, Satish?" his friend asked with concern. He put his hand on his forehead to feel it.

"I don't know Surender. If s been pretty bad since the last operation on my leg. I get these terrible headaches and then feel as if everything is going dark and silent. I feel miserable. But why are you speaking so softly? I can barely hear you."

Surender gave him a strange look. He had certainly not been speaking softly! 'Has he lost his hearing?' wondered Surender.

Poor Satish! He had been ill ever since he had come back from the holiday in Kashmir the previous year. There had been an accident when he had gone hiking with his father and brother Inder. They were crossing a rickety bridge over some rapids. The boys stood and looked down at the swirling water below them. "Look, how the water is rushing at that spot!" Satish pointed out to his brother. Just then his foot slipped and losing his balance, he fell into the rapids. His screams were lost in the rushing sound of the water. When he regained consciousness again, his legs were in a plaster cast and his head hurt badly. He was bruised and ached all over.

Though his legs healed, they remained weak, requiring several operations on them. Worse, he suffered frequently from bouts of fever and infections, especially of the ear.

Seeing that Satish was in pain, Surender now got up to go. "Will you come to school tomorrow?" he asked. Satish shook his head. A slow tear trickled down his cheek after Surender left. It felt as if some huge weight was pressing upon his head making everything seem far away and silent. He felt helpless and upset at being confined to the bed as he was. The silence was the worst. There were times when he couldn't hear a thing. Everything seemed like scenes from some pantomime show. He wanted to scream, to break the silence. But didn't. For the eight-year-old boy, this was terrible. The doctors didn't know the cause, except that it was caused by some medicines given to treat his legs.

Due to his frequent absences and his hearing problem, the school he was attending till then, informed his father Mr. Avtar Narain, that they couldn't keep Satish. "We will have to look for a new school," his father said.

Satish shook his head, 'no'. He didn't want to go to a school where he couldn't talk to the other children, where everyone made fun of his deafness.

"Beta, you have to go to school and learn. What will you do in life if you don't get an education, eh?" he asked his son. Satish heard snatches of his words but knew what he was saying. After a lot of persuasion, he finally agreed to go along to the new school.

But this school didn't want him for the same reason. "This is a school for normal boys. Why don't you take your son to the school for deaf and dumb children?" asked the headmaster of the school bluntly. Avtar Narain was angry to hear him say that.

"My son is not dumb, sir! His hearing is a little bad. He is under treatment and will soon be fine!" he argued, but in vain. Other schools had the same to say. In despair, father and son returned home. That evening a friend of his father called on them. After talking shop for a while, he asked what they were planning to do about Satish's schooling.

“You could send him to the vocational school for handicapped boys. He could at least learn a trade and become capable of earning his living,” he suggested. Avtar Narain knew what that meant. Deaf, dumb and blind children were taught basket weaving and cane chair making. They were not given any academic training whatsoever, making them just skilled labourers. He wouldn’t even think about sending his son to such a school.

Though Avtar Narain was shattered, he wouldn’t give up hope. After the unsuccessful expedition to the schools, Satish became very moody. He couldn’t talk freely with anyone because he was unable to hear a single word. His brother Inder sat for hours with him and talked to him, teaching him words and pronunciation. Unable to bear the taunts and teasing of the children in the neighbourhood, Satish even avoided going out to play. His father and elder brother Inder spent time with him everyday, talking to him, trying to teach him things. “If you want to get on in life, you have to read a lot. You can learn a great deal of things just by reading,” ‘his father told Satish, giving him an armful of books. Satish leafed through them — The life of Garibaldi’, translated into Urdu by Lala Lajpat Rai, the works of Munshi Premchand, Sarat Chandra and several others.

It was as if a whole world opened out for him. Satish became a voracious reader. The books however, were all serious works meant for older children and sometimes even for adults. They made him feel depressed and left a deep impression upon his sensitive mind. He came to know of another world through them, a world of suffering and anguish. He brooded long and hard about why there was so much suffering in the world while his own world looked comfortable in comparison.

Another bout of fever struck and Satish was confined to bed. All he could do was sit and stare out of the window or read. He felt lonely and full of despair at his plight.

One day, when he was looking gloomily into the far corner of the garden, he saw a bird that was unlike any he had ever seen before. It had a longish tail and a black crest. But the most interesting thing about the bird was its restless energy. Its eyes kept darting here and there, its whole body ready for flight any moment. For a long moment he stared at the beautiful bird. When it flew away after a glance in his direction, Satish jumped down from his bed and took out his notebook and pencil. He sketched the bird from memory with a few deft strokes. He liked the picture and set it against the stack of books on his bedside table.

He had discovered another pastime which he could indulge in, sitting on his bed. He began filling pages and pages with doodles.

His strokes varied with his moods — angry, soothing and humorous. He had always been good at Urdu calligraphy and so sketching came naturally to him.

However, his father was not amused. He took away all the notebooks he had drawn on. “This is an idle pastime. You would do better to read and get some knowledge,” he said to his son.

Satish sulked, but refused to stop drawing. “Why do you take away his source of entertainment?” asked his mother one day.

“Oh, that! I don’t want him to start thinking that he can make a living out of drawing. Artists make a pittance and live in poverty. It is no career for a bright boy. He has to study if he has to make something out of his life. Besides, his hearing may return any time. When it does, he must be prepared to go back to school, mustn’t he?” he asked.

“It has been more than three years since he became ill, how you possibly think that he can recover his hearing?” asked his mother. She felt hopeless about her son’s condition. But Satish’s father wasn’t about to lose hope.

“Why decide that he is going to remain deaf all his life? We must always be optimistic about his chances of recovering,” he gently chided his wife.

Several visits to the doctors followed with nothing improving for Satish. He remained in his silent world, the only solace for him being painting. He managed to paint and draw in spite of his father’s opposition. One day, when he was busy mixing the colours on his palette, he became aware of his father standing at the door. He looked up to find him staring at the painting intently. Satish reddened, but continued with his mixing. Slowly his father came into the room and sat next to his son.

“You want to do this very badly, don’t you?” he asked. Had Satish had the power of hearing, he would have heard the tremor in his father’s voice. As it was, he only read his lips. He didn’t reply. Avtar Narain put his hand on Satish’s shoulder. Satish was unable to believe that his father was not angry with him for painting.

Moments later, his father left the room. When he returned a couple of hours later, his arms were full of paints, brushes of all shapes and sizes and several rolls of drawing sheets. He carefully set them down on Satish’s table.

“Pitaji....” began Satish slowly. His father nodded his head, a smile breaking at the corners of his mouth. His eyes remained sad, though.

“They are for you Satish. I will find out the best school of arts for you. You will learn the arts and make your life in your chosen field.” Satish’s eyes filled with tears and he did an uncharacteristic thing — he hugged his father tightly, his heart full of love for his stern father who had at last accepted that his destiny lay in canvas and paint. Thereafter, Satish was sent to the famous

Mayo School of Art in Lahore where he within a short time learnt more than just painting. He learnt about life. He also learnt how cruel people can be to someone disadvantaged. His classmates were boys from vastly different backgrounds than his own cultured one.

“Look, the *laat sahab* (gentleman) is reading big books!” someone would shout and before Satish knew it, the book would be snatched away. Most of the boys were jealous of his knowledge. Some even resented the fact that he came from a well-to-do family and wore good clothes. It was nothing unusual because many boys were completely illiterate.

Satish was often desolate and depressed. His only solace was his elder brother Inder who was in college at Lahore. He took his brother away from the gloomy atmosphere of the art school and introduced him to his own friends who were all socially committed young men and women. Satish learned a lot from interacting with them. But back in the school, despair descended upon his young shoulders.

Were it not for a few friends that he made there, his school days would have been most miserable.

One day, when the teacher was away from the class, Satish wandered to the table where he, with his classmate Chamanlal, began flipping through the pages of the attendance register. As he read the names, the name ‘Bhola’ jumped at him.

“Who is this new boy, Bhola?” asked Satish, articulating each syllable slowly and painstakingly.

His friend didn’t answer immediately. Satish repeated the question once again. Slowly Chamanlal took his pen and wrote, “It is you.”

Satish became silent. So this was how the boys called him did they? And even the teacher had written his name as ‘Bhola’ in the register! His friend put his arm round Satish, but the hurt remained.

‘If there is one thing that will make everyone accept me as an equal, it is my work. When someone looks at a painting, they won’t ask whether the painter was deaf, dumb or lame. I am going to be good, maybe better than them and then no one can call me ‘Bhola’ or make fun of my deafness,’ decided Satish at that instant.

WHAT IS SATISH DOING NOW?

Satish Gujral is among the foremost artists of India. He is one of the few artists who is accomplished in several art forms like painting, sculpture and architecture. Satish Gujral is also a writer.

Exhibitions of his works have been held all over the world and displayed in prestigious museums like the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Hiroshima Collection, Washington and the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. He has published four books of his works in the various arts.

He was awarded the Order of the Crown for the best architectural design of the 20th century for his design of the Belgian Embassy in New Delhi. He has also been honoured with the Padma Vibhushan.

His life of achievement is ample proof that a physical disability is no barrier to success.

OH, TO BE THE BEST!

(LEILA SETH)

“Gulu, stand up! What is this that you have written? I can’t understand a word of it!” said the maths teacher, holding up a copy filled with an untidy scribble.

The whole class sniggered. Gulu was sitting with her head bowed. She hardly ever passed an exam and was always being scolded by the teachers for her shoddy class work, for not doing her homework or doing it all wrong. “Poor Gulu!” thought Leila. But she didn’t spend much time worrying about her unfortunate classmate, because she was very excited that day. It was Friday and her brothers were coming home for the weekend.

“Leila! What are you dreaming of?” The teacher, clearly, was in a bad mood that day.

Hearing her name being called out, Leila shook herself from her daydream. But soon, she began planning about what she would play with them.

Their father, Mr. Seth, worked for the railways and was always being posted to different places and Mrs. Seth accompanied him. So, they had to leave their children behind. While the boys, Rajkumar and Shashi, who were both elder to Leila, studied in boarding school, Leila stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Dutt, who were family friends. The Dutts' were kind and affectionate, but Leila often got lonely, being the only child in the house. This was why Leila looked forward to weekends and holidays, when her brothers came home.

Her brothers, however, didn't reciprocate Leila's enthusiasm for their company. Both were elder to her — Rajkumar by three years and Shashi, by a year-and-half. They considered her a nuisance if she insisted on tagging along while they played boisterous games like climbing trees and chasing each other all over the garden. For her part, Leila was annoyed that they wouldn't let her join them.

"Look Leila, we are going to play boy-games. What's more, our friends would be coming over," said Rajkumar, who was the oldest of the Seth children and liked to boss the others around. "Whoever heard of a girl climbing trees?" he sneered.

"Why ever not? I can climb any old tree as well as you or your friends. In fact, I bet I could climb faster because I'm smaller.

Whether you want me or not, I'm going to come along. So there!" Leila could be quite determined and they knew it. So they simply shrugged.

"She's a regular tomboy isn't she?" asked Shashi. He called her Thrilly', because of her love of excitement. If he thought she would get angry at his remark and leave them alone, he was mistaken. Leila was quite used to their bullying and wouldn't let that put her off. The boys tried to slip out without her knowledge. But before they could step out of the house, she shot past them and began climbing the nearest tree in the garden!

Sitting atop a high branch she called out, "I beat you to it, didn't I? I told you I would, I did!"

The boys sighed. She really was too much even for both of them together, to handle! It was not just climbing the trees, Leila insisted on being part of all their activities, much to their annoyance.

"Will you stop being a pest?" asked Rajkumar. Leila cheerfully shook her head 'no'. They had to laugh at that, for they also loved their younger sister, for all her impish-ness.

Mrs. Seth sometimes came down to Darjeeling to be with the children. She rented a house then. Even Mr. Seth came down at times. During holidays the children went to live with their parents wherever they were. Mrs. Seth wanted Leila to be trained in the arts—music and dance. Leila was lively, beautiful and graceful. She would make a good dancer, decided her mother. She appointed, first a dance teacher and then a music teacher to teach her. But Leila's mind was not in it. She would much rather read books, play games, compete with her brothers and prove herself able in their eyes—in no way inferior because she was a girl.

"Oh, I wish you would spend half as much time in studies as you do in such rough games," her mother often told her in exasperation. But Leila was a happy-go-lucky girl, thinking that doing the homework was all that mattered. She considered herself a good student. After all, her teachers never scolded her like they did some of the girls like Gulu.

She was very happy. Her parents had come down to Darjeeling for a few weeks and they were all together. Leila continued with her games merrily, even though the quarterly exams were to begin the next week. She also got into fights with her brothers. Smiling to herself now, she began climbing the big tree in the far corner of the garden.

“Leila, you have been playing ever since you came back from school. When are you going to study?” her mother asked her.

“I have finished studying, mummy,” she called out, swinging from a branch.

“In that case, I’ll give you a small test,” said her mother. Leila panicked.

“No, no! I still have a few lessons left to study. I will finish them today. You can ask the questions tomorrow,” she said. But she couldn’t sit down to finish her lessons. She was so restless that she kept getting up to get up for a glass of water or to find out what her brothers were doing or to simply glance out of the window. Every time she returned to her lessons, she felt she knew them and could easily pass in her exams.

Soon, she got tired even of her disturbed studying and picked up a storybook instead. She read it till she was too sleepy to read.

So busy was she with her other activities that Leila was surprised to find that the days had flown by and the exams were to begin the next day. When she left home on the day of the exam, she was pretty confident, but as she approached school and heard her classmates discussing the lessons, she realised that she didn’t know half of them! The questions could have been in Greek for all she understood of them.

Soon she forgot about her fears and quickly wrote the answers. So quickly had she written that she was the first to finish her paper. She sat back and looked at her classmates who were still writing. Even Gulu was bent over her paper. ‘What are they writing?’ she thought uneasily. Perhaps she had left out half the answers? The same thing happened during the other exams.

And then, it was time for the report cards to be given. The teacher began calling out names in the order of merit. Leila sat back and waited for hers. She was sure to have scored well and got a good rank too.

“This term, Belinda has stood first,” announced the teacher. Everyone dapped as she went to collect her report card. Suman Das had come second and Jasmine was third. More clapping followed. Leila wasn’t unduly worried. But when the teacher had called out more than 20 names, Leila began to get worried. Surely, the teacher had missed out her name?

“That was the list of students who have passed. Now for those who didn’t make it...” Leila’s heart stopped beating for a second. Had she failed? It couldn’t be! She swallowed the bitter taste in her mouth; it stuck in her throat. The teacher went on calling the names of the remaining students. Leila’s still hadn’t come. Finally only she and Gulu were left. Leila sat motionless. Did it mean that she was no better than the girl who was considered the stupidest in the class?

She couldn’t believe it. She began wishing she had listened to her mother and studied harder. She wished she had not wasted so much time fooling around, or fighting with her brothers.

Her steps dragged as she went home that evening. What would she tell her parents? Especially her father, who would be going away on tour again? Would he be angry? Would her mother scold her? She could have died of the disgrace of the whole thing. Were Gulu and she in the same category? Oh no! How could she have got herself into such a mess?

But she had to give them the bad news. On reaching home, she went straight to her father and extended the report card. 'I have failed the exam," she said, her eyes downcast, her voice barely above a whisper. Her father took the card from her and glanced at it before giving it to her mother. She too put it down after giving it a look.

"Go and have a wash before drinking your milk," she said as if that was more important than the report card. Leila knew that she was not going to get any scolding from either of them. It only made things worse. Silently, she drank her milk, went to her room and lay down on the bed.

All kinds of horrible thoughts flitted through her mind. Would the other girls be laughing at her just as she used to laugh at Gulu? "What a dumb girl Leila is!" she imagined her classmates saying, just as they said about Gulu. She shuddered. Nothing could have been more shattering for the seven-year-old. For the first time she began to understand how Gulu must be feeling. How her face used to redden when the others laughed at her! 'Serves me right for making fun of her!' she told herself ruefully.. The poor girl couldn't help being dumb, perhaps. But what about her? Surely, she could easily have done better, maybe even stood first!

Just then, the door opened and her father came in. Leila couldn't pretend to be sleeping and so had to sit up when he called out to her.

"I will be leaving in a week, Leila. But that's not what I want to talk to you about I won't even ask you why you got such bad marks. Because I know — it is because of your attitude. You are not concentrating enough, nor are you taking your studies seriously. Everyone has a duty to perform. A student's duty is to study well,

"There is another thing I want to tell you. Every one of us has to try and do our best, no matter what it is that we do. Remember, it is not a disgrace to be a shoemaker, but it is a disgrace for the shoemaker, to make bad shoes." Leila just nodded. She couldn't speak through the lump in her throat. She loved her father so much at that moment! She had thought he would scold her, and here he was, sounding so sad and disappointed because she had not done her best. .

She now felt the weight of guilt — of having failed him in some way. Her mother said the same things later, in different words. That day, the little girl underwent a change, for the better.

The next day at school, Leila gave Gulu a smile — perhaps for the first time that year. And in the class, when she gave a silly reply, everyone laughed. Leila didn't. After all, she had come pretty near to be laughed at, herself. Moreover she had better things to do — like listening to the teacher who was explaining a lesson. 'No one will ever laugh at me, if I can help it,' she decided. 'Nor, will I ever fail,' she added silently to herself, setting her chin firmly. Once had been enough!

And she never did. The next term, Leila came out at the top of the class and stayed there. She couldn't dream of letting her place in the class slip to even the second place. In

fact, she kept trying to do better every time, trying to score more in every subject. In short, she pushed herself to excel in her studies.

Years later, when coming first had become a habit; she came to know Swatantra Vir Singh Juneja, a friend of her brothers. Though she and he were in different schools, they studied in the same standard. He was an equally good student as she. Whenever he came home, they got to discussing about studies and the marks each had got. If Leila's were less than his, he would give her a smug smile. This bothered Leila no end. She took it as a challenge and tried to do one better than him. The next time, she managed to get more marks than him, but this time, he tried to outdo her. This went on, and between them, they kept raising their standard of performance to keep one step ahead of the other.

Leila thrived on the competition and strove to be one better all through her student life. It was this spirit of competition that helped her later to stand first among all the candidates at the Bar Final Examination of the United Kingdom. For her achievement, she was awarded the Langdon Medal, the first woman to have got it! Leila certainly never settled for anything but the best and her career in law is ample proof of her determination.

SECOND TO NONE

Born on 20 October 1930, Justice Leila Seth's ascendance to her present status of eminence has been mercurial. She completed her degree in law from the UK, and when she returned to India, she began practising, first at the Patna High Court and later at the Calcutta High Court.

She was the first woman to be appointed a Judge of the Delhi High Court in 1978. She also became the first ever woman Chief Justice of a High Court, when she was appointed Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court in August 1991.

Now retired, Justice Leila Seth is involved in social work. A champion of the cause of women, and children, especially those in bonded labour. She is also interested in education, conservation of the environment and issues related to human rights. She is the founder trustee of the Justice Sunanda Bhandare Foundation set up in 1995, to further the cause of women and children.

A JOURNEY TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

(RAHUL BAJAJ)

"Where did this country bumpkin come from? He can't speak a word of English. Wonder how he got into our school," said Henry, pointing to Rahul. Rahul looked at him angrily.

"Don't annoy him, or else he will start abusing you in chaste Hindi," warned Ashok, his friend, looking at his expression. The others burst out laughing.

Rahul didn't understand the exact meaning of what they were saying, but could guess that they were poking fun at him. He smarted from the insult but didn't retaliate. First he

had to figure out how he could answer them back in their own language, only then would he speak, he decided. It was difficult for a six-year-old to hold back the tears of anger, but he did.

'If ever there is a Sanskrit recitation competition I could beat those guys hollow/ he told himself on his way back home. 'I am good at so many things they are not.' He was still wondering how he could make those boys leave him alone, when he reached home.

The Bajaj family had just come to Bombay from Wardha. Rahul's grandfather Jamnalal Bajaj had been a dose associate of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. While there, Rahul had been taught Ramayan, Mahabharat, Bhagavad Gita and Hindi literature by a Pandit from Mathura. He had never learnt English. St. Xavier's was the first English school he had attended. Little wonder then, that he couldn't understand the language-

Rahul sighed. Life had been so serene and simple back in Wardha, when all he had to worry about, were his fights with his sister Suman. Now, there were too many things to worry about. The memory of the humiliation he had suffered just then, stung the little boy.

At home, his father Mr. Kamalnayan Bajaj took one look at his face and knew something was wrong. "What is the matter, Rahul?" He was too upset to talk about his day at school, so he kept quiet. But Mr. Bajaj persisted.

"Kakaji, the boys are making fun of me because I don't know English," he admitted finally, feeling ashamed of the fact.

"That's quite normal," his father said.

"And there is nothing to be ashamed about." Rahul looked up in surprise. Didn't his father realise how bad it was for him? How could he say it was all very normal?

Before he could say anything, however, his father was speaking again. "Isn't it a fact that you don't know English? However it does not mean that you are incapable of learning the language. It is just that you never had a chance to do it." Rahul agreed heartily. His father understood after all!

"Let me give you a small example. Suppose there are two boys, one capable of scoring 90% and the other, a boy of average intelligence, capable of scoring about 60-70%. The first boy could try and score even more than 100%, but doesn't apply his mind to his work and scores just 70%. But the latter, puts in extra effort and manages to score 90%. Whom do you think anyone would select amongst the two?"

"The second boy!" cried Rahul. "Exactly! Because, he has the application and determination to do better than his best. You are already in' the 90% category and I know that you have the capability of achieving even more than 100%. So, prove me right! If you make up your mind to learn English in, say, four months, then you will!"

Rahul was elated. When his father spoke like that, it all sounded so simple and easy! As he listened, Rahul slowly went from helplessness to the conviction that it was all up to him to learn English and be better than any of those boys in school. And that was what he did. Within a year he had learnt enough English to be able to get admission into Cathedral Boys School in Bombay, one of the most prestigious schools in the country then.

Rahul began enjoying school. Having proved to himself more than the others that he was as good as any of them, he got down to being an excellent all round student, making his mark in every field, be it sports, studies or extra curricular activities like debates. He was elected the class prefect for his performance.

Mr. Bajaj toured a lot on business, but he always found time to talk to his children. He spoke to them about the country and how it had suffered under British rule; about honesty in everything one did; about trying, to do one's best under all circumstances and about a lot of other things. Both his parents were involved with the Freedom Struggle and often went to jail; Rahul was nine years old when India got freedom.

Rahul had been elected House Captain by the time he was in his Senior Cambridge class. Cathedral Boys school, was modelled on British schools, and even followed their traditions. They had regular functions, which were called the 'school socials.' This event included ballroom dancing. Traditionally the four House Captains commenced the proceedings by leading his partners onto the dance floor. The others joined them afterwards. Rahul, as Captain performed this duty also. That day, he had had a wonderful time.

"Rahul, I want to have a word with you," his father told him the next day.

"Yes, Kakaji," said the 15-year-old Rahul, scarcely expecting the storm that was to follow. He was relaxed as it was a holiday. Moreover the school 'social' had just concluded the previous evening and he had had an excellent time.

"I hear that you had taken part in the school dance yesterday?"

"Yes, Kakaji. I had to begin the proceedings as the House Captain," he sounded quite satisfied with himself. But if he had expected his father to appreciate the fact, he was mistaken.

"Yesterday was the last time you did that is that dear?" Unfortunately for him, Mr. Bajaj had found out and was pulling him up for it. But Rahul was not about to give in so easily. "But Kakaji, it is the school tradition!" he protested, a trifle too loudly.

"Speak softly, Rahul. And if it is the school tradition, then you will have to find a way out of it. Because it is not the tradition of the Bajaj family." he spoke very firmly, articulating each word with precision.

"But. What is wrong with some harmless dancing once in a while? Why make such a big deal out of it?" Rahul wasn't about to give up.

"It is not our culture, Rahul. Just like the British who ruled us, their culture is also alien to us. We have to uphold our own culture, which is so rich, the dignity and heritage of our distinguished family, the family of the likes of Shri Jamnalal Bajaj." Mr.Bajaj's voice was very soft. Rahul failed to notice the edge of steel in it.

"But..."

"There are no ifs and buts. You are going to school to get an education, not to imbibe alien customs. They may be good for others, but not for us. I hope I have made myself clear."

"There is no way I can refuse to do it! I have' to carry on with the school tradition," Rahul blurted.

“In that case, Rahul, you can leave this house. Of course, everyone is free to do what one wants to do in life, and so are you, but you will not do it under this roof!” He picked up his newspaper signalling an end to the conversation.

Rahul looked at his mother for support. After all she came from a very modern family which had even lived in England. Such customs were not alien to her. Maybe she would speak up for him. But she resolutely bent over her book and didn’t say one word. Rahul knew he had to comply.

Curiously, this incident, instead of making him resentful, made him respect his father even more. Discipline was never enforced in the house. Only guidelines were set and the children were expected to adhere to them. But there were times when his father laid the rules which couldn’t be broken by the children. Moreover, his father was never unreasonable or overbearing. ‘If he is so firm, he must have a good reason for it/ he decided.

Perhaps it was then that the full import of being a Bajaj hit Rahul. As a member of the

Bajaj family, he had to conduct himself in a certain way and uphold the heritage bestowed to it by Jamnalal Bajaj, his grandfather. He also began to take more interest in Indian things. This interest gradually turned into pride for his country. He began appreciating the fact that his father was an Indian at heart to the who implicitly followed the simple lifestyle advocated by Gandhiji.

The entire family, even the children, wore khadi. Despite being the son of a big industrialist, Rahul often commuted to school by bus, unlike many of his classmates who came by car. “Haunting your wealth is not necessary to prove your worth in the world. Moreover it is not in good taste. It is what you *are* that matters, not what you have,” Mr. Bajaj often told Rahul.

Indeed, the Bajaj children were never made to feel that they were something special, except to be told that they had to live up to the Bajaj name in terms of excellence. “Every Indian has a responsibility to make India a great country. No matter what we are, we can all contribute towards this goal,” Mr. Bajaj used to tell the children. Though he had heard it often, it had not made as much impression on him as it did after the dancing incident. He began thinking as to how he too, could do something for India.

As he grew up, Rahul began enjoying his discussions with his father more and more and which sometimes went on into the wee hours of the morning. They discussed everything, including serious subjects like philosophy and ethics. During these ‘discussions they talked as equals and Rahul freely disagreed with his father on many matters. But the discussions were also the time for the teenager to clarify doubts.

“Don’t we have to be strong to stand up to the Western powers, Kakaji?” he asked during one such father-son discussion. He had never forgotten his father’s words about making India a great world power.

“Yes, of course. And strength can come from various sources. We can be strong economically, by growing enough food grains to feed our people, by building our industry, by creating employment and giving the people a better standard of life. These will make us strong too,” he said. “We could not do all this till we were under British rule. But now that we are free, we can achieve a lot. All we need to do is to work hard to reach our goals!”

As always, Rahul couldn't but admire the way his father made everything look so easy! All through such discussions even as he grew up, his father never once suggested mat Rahul should join the family business. In fact, he often told Rahul that he would have to make up his own mind as to what career he would like.

"Rahul, whatever you want to be in life, you are free to be. But make sure you are the best at it. If you want to be a sportsman go ahead, but be a world champion. To be the best in your chosen field requires a lot of hard work and application. Just remember the 90% and 70% boys." Rahul nodded assent.

When an acquaintance had once suggested that he should enter family business, Rahul's father said, 'It is entirely up to Rahul to decide what he wants to do with his life. There is no compulsion on him to do anything that he doesn't want to do."

Compulsion or not, Rahul had already decided what he wanted to be—an industrialist. But not any old industrialist. He would try to be the best, just as his father had asked him to be. 'I will go to Harvard after I graduate in economics and law,' he decided.

His destiny had already been charted and all he had to do was to go towards it to make his mark in the Indian industry. He had embarked on a journey in which excellence was the goal.

'One day, I am going to be part of this country's growth. I know I can do it, by giving it all I have,' he resolved.

He did too and continues doing so. He put the nation on the move, with his scooters and motorbikes, autos and vans, among dozens of other things that the Bajaj companies manufacture and export all over the world.

HAMARA BAJAJ

Today, thanks to his efforts, 'Hamara Bajaj' is a household name in millions of homes in India and abroad. His grandfather and father would have been proud of him.

Rahul Bajaj, heir to the Bajaj Empire, has indeed done a lot for his country. Having to live up to the high standards of his grandfather Shri Jamnalal Bajaj and his father Shri Kamalnayan Bajaj, he has proved himself worthy of the family name.

Born on 10 June 1938, he did his schooling from Bombay and later graduated in Economics and Law. After his MBA from Harvard Business School, he joined the family business, working his way up the corporate ladder, till in 1968, he took over as the Chief Executive Officer of Bajaj Auto Ltd.

He increased the annual turnover of the company from around Rs.72 million in 196S to about Rs.29 billion in 1996-97. In the process, he created 'Hamara Bajaj' and made every Indian proud of it. The Bajaj Group of which Bajaj Auto is a part, employs over 33,000 people.

He has received numerous awards and certificates of excellence, in addition to holding prestigious posts both in the Indian government and private organisations both here and abroad.

THE LIGHTNING KID

(VISWANATHAN ANAND)

"Come and see what I have got for you!" called Anand's mother. She had just returned from the market. Like any other six-year-old, Anand rushed to see the surprise that she had brought for him. She pulled out a square box. "Let me see it. Let me...!" cried Anand.

Laughing, she slowly set the box down on the table. He watched impatiently as she opened the box. "Oh, I know! It is a chess board! Please let me set the board, please!" he begged.

"Okay, okay, but first have a look at the board. Let's see you count how many squares there are on the board!"

"One, two, three.....sixty three, sixty four!

Thirty-two each of black and white! There! Shall I also count the coins?"

"No Baba, they are not coins," laughed his mother. "They are called chess men. "See, there are two sets of them, one black and one white," she explained.

"These small men are all alike!" exclaimed Anand. No toy or game had ever excited him as much.

"Yes. They are called the pawns and each player will have eight of those. The other eight chess men are called pieces. Each one of the chessmen move in a certain pattern...." As she explained the game, she set the board, the two rooks to the corners, the knights next to them and the bishops beside them. The king and queen in the centre. He was an excellent pupil and learnt the basics of the game in no time.

"Shall we play Amma?"

That day, Anand forgot his dinner and his bedtime. "Amma, suppose I move the horse here, I can capture your king, can't I?" He wouldn't be satisfied till he got it all right.

"Why, yes, Baba! But you call it 'checkmate', not 'capture'. And now, come to eat your dinner. I have made tamarind rice and fried papadams!" The announcement would have normally been greeted by joyous yells, but that day, he wouldn't get up from the table, lost in yet another game which he decided to play against himself.

Anand loved other games too. In fact he liked playing tennis and badminton with his mother. She never treated him like a kid, always giving him the importance of an equal. Nor did she pretend to lose and make him feel happy about having beaten her, an adult. They played as equals and she quietly taught him the rules of the game. Unlike other children his age, he somehow didn't like playing children's games like hide-and-seek and police-thief. "They are not proper games!" he would say when asked why he didn't join the neighbourhood children in their games.

But now that he had discovered the wonderful game of chess, he wasn't interested in any other. There was a chess club near the Vishwanathans' house in Madras. Anand's mother took him there one day and introduced him to the organisers. There were several tables where men and women were playing. The little boy's eyes shone. He would come there as often as he could!

The next day he was there right after breakfast. “Whom do I play against?” he asked one of the officials. The tables were slowly filling up. However at one table, a gentleman sat brooding over the chess board. When he heard Anand speak, he looked up and beckoned to him.

“Would you like to play against me?” he asked.

Anand nodded eagerly. The two got down to playing, the little boy intently gazing at the board and the older man looking solemn. “Check!” said the gentleman after a while. The seven year old boy’s face fell but he smiled bravely, stood up and extended his hand to the older man. “Thank you, for playing with me sir,” he said gravely. He then went to watch another couple playing at a nearby table before going home.

School was out for the summer and Anand had found a place where he could spend hours enjoyably. Every morning after that, he quickly finished his breakfast and presented himself at the dub. Visitors to the club got used to the sight of the solemn young boy looking for partners to play against. There were days when he lost all the games he played. It was a touching sight to see him shake hands gamely with the winners every time.

Back at home, he gave way to his disappointment “Oh, Amma, I lost both the games today,” he would say unhappily, his voice wobbling with tears.

“It doesn’t matter, Baba. You will do better tomorrow, I’m sure. Didn’t you learn something more today — about chess, about the mistakes you made? The next time you will play a little better- We have to keep learning from our mistakes and improve. Don’t ever lose heart,” she said. Anand nodded.

“Who is that little boy who comes here every morning promptly at 9 A.M.?” asked a visitor one day.

“Oh, that is Anand. He is very keen on the game. So far he has only won a few games, but he is so dignified when he loses. It sometimes breaks my heart to see him lose. But his spirit is amazing.” said the secretary of the club.

“I played a game with him yesterday and found him quite good. All he needs is practice and perseverance. He is sure to go places one day,” said another person who had joined them. “Hm..m..Perseverance. Why, boys his age lose interest so easily and yet he keeps coming back. That certainly deserves an award, doesn’t it?” asked the visitor.

That was how Anand had won his first award, at the age of seven, though it was not for winning. It was a book on chess.

So single-mindedly did he pursue chess that his mother had a difficult time keeping him interested in other games. Whenever she called him for a game of tennis or badminton, he would instead ask, “Shall we play just one game of chess, before going to the court?” At school, he was popularly referred to as the chess kid. “Hey Anand! What are you dreaming of? Are you wondering how to protect your king?” his classmates would tease him if they found him sitting quietly. Good-natured and friendly, Anand laughed. He didn’t mind such ribbing from his friends.

At the club, Anand had begun winning some games. He also found some of the players quite helpful and who offered hints to the eager boy. News of chess championships never failed to excite him. It wouldn’t be wrong to say that he lived, breathed and even

dreamt of chess. He was about nine when his father, a senior official in die Indian Railways was posted to Manila on an assignment In a new place, he had no friends in the beginning, so he spent a lot of time reading and watching television and video movies after completing his school work. And of course, he played chess. His mother invariably had to play against him..

“Amma, please come and play one game, just one!” he would often plead with her. Seeing his eagerness, she would leave her work for later and played with him.

“Oh, you do take so long to make your moves,” he complained when she took time to think her next move. His own movements were swift, made in a split second, sometimes as soon as she had moved her piece!

Soon he was not only beating his mother, but also any family friends who dropped by at the Vishwanathans’ place, whom Anand cajoled into a game!

One day his mother saw a game show on television, which was based on chess. First a game was telecast and at the end of it, there was a quiz. The winner was to be selected by lots from amongst those who had solved it correctly and would be invited to the show for a prize. It sounded just ideal for Anand! Quickly she taped the show on the video re-corder for him since he was away at school. It was telecast every week day.

Anand was delighted. He watched the game carefully. It was one of the most exciting hours of his young life. “Oh, I am going to try that move next time!” he cried as he watched. The puzzle at the end of the show was very simple for the earnest nine-year-old. “Amma, will you check my answers? I want to post it.” he asked his mother.

“Not now. First, you change your clothes and have something to ea,’’ she said firmly. And then added kindly, “Hurry up and you can catch today’s post. Who knows, we will see you on the show next time?” Anand laughed- He was not even thinking about being on the show. All that mattered was that he had solved the puzzle and his mother had said it was correct. This became a routine with him every day. It was not surprising for someone who had won the award for perseverance, a few years ago.

Sure enough, the perseverance paid off. “Amma, look, I have got a letter from the television company!” cried Anand waving the letter happily. “I think I have won!” true enough, he had been declared winner by the draw of lots. “Please be present on the 3rd of August at the office of Manila Television Centre, for the prize giving ceremony,” the letter stated.

“Oh, wowie! I’m going to be on the show!” Anand was thrilled- On the appointed day, he went to the television centre with his mother. The programme host introduced him and presented him with a book on chess.

Anand was an instant celebrity at school the next day. After all it isn’t everyday that one of the students was featured on a television show! Anand however took it in his stride. He won two more contests, though his answers were right every time. The only reason he didn’t win more times was because the winner was selected by draw of lots.

After that, Anand began to take part in local tournaments too. One such competition featured some of the big names of Philippines in chess. Anand was to meet the previous year’s winner the next day. He was quite keyed up the whole day.

"Amma, I wonder if I can beat that player!" said Anand doubtfully. For a little boy, he sounded pretty worried.

"You must learn to relax and enjoy the game. Don't get nervous thinking about an opponent's name and fame. Anyone can win if he plays intelligently, just as any big player can have a bad day. All you can do is to prepare well to tackle any situation," she assured him, while arranging the chessmen on the board.

The next day, though, all his doubts came back. But only till he sat before the board. As he hunched over the table, his tension fell away like a cloak. He forgot that his opponent was a champion and that he had been apprehensive about meeting him only the previous day. All that mattered was the board in front of him.

Anand was quick, as usual. He gazed at the board intently. 'If only he were to place his knight there, I would have a chance to checkmate him!' thought Anand excitedly, his mind calculating his opponent's moves furiously. But instantly thought, 'Of course, he won't make such a stupid move! After all he is the holding champion/ he told himself.

But that was exactly the move that he made! Anand couldn't believe his eyes! He quickly moved his queen and said 'check'. His opponent's king was well and truly surrounded. His opponent looked at the board disbelievingly shaking his head. He glanced at the boy who sat across him and who hardly came up to his shoulder. He stood up and shook Anand's hand- "Well done, boy," he said, patting him on the shoulder, Anand beamed. His mother had been right after all! Even champions can make mistakes just as underdogs can make the right moves. That day, he became confident of himself and his game. He had beaten the title holder and done it in record time too.

"Amma, I did it!" he exulted. "I don't know how, but I did it!"

"You played with a level head and intelligently. And you won," she replied practically. She didn't believe in making him over confident and complacent by praising him too much.

Slowly he improved his game and it was not long before he played and won every game at school and in local tournaments. It was a far cry from someone who had lost every game he played not many years ago.

"Doesn't that boy Anand play fast! I wish I had half his talent!" cried his friends in school.

"Are you planning to become a professional chess player?" asked his school friend Nemo.

"I don't know. I have a lot to learn yet before I can think of any such thing," he replied thoughtfully. But the seeds had been sown in his tender mind. On his return to India, he began participating in local tournaments.

"There is no use playing today. Anand is there. He will be winning all the games till evening," commented players in despair when they saw him at the table, his shoulders hunched and his eyes unwavering on the board.

He used to go to the Tal Club at Madras to take part in the Sunday tournaments. There were no prizes for the winner and the matches were played on the knock-out basis. Anand literally knocked them all out! From there it was just a step away to the national and

international circuits, where he blazed new trails and etched his name in the annals of chess.

The ‘Lightning kid’ from Chennai had arrived!

THE TIGER FROM CHENNAI

India hasn’t had many world champions in Individual sports, but Vishwanathan Anand is one of them and by far, the best in his field. Born on 11 December 1969, he got interested in chess at a very early age and became the youngest National champion at the age of 16. He was also the first Grandmaster from India. Currently, he is ranked No:2 in the world. He has beaten all the top players in the world and even computers in tournaments. Recently he played and won against six computers in Amsterdam.

Though he has been taking part in chess tournaments ever since he was a child, he has not neglected his studies. He is a B.Com graduate and plans to study further when he can take time out from his numerous matches and tournaments.

Thanks to Anand’s contribution to international chess, more and more children are taking an interest in the game. In a country where children are familiar only with cricket, this is indeed an achievement. Little wonder then, he is known as the ‘One Man Chess Revolution’.

He is the youngest person to be awarded the Padma Shri. Other awards include the Arjuna Award and the first Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award.

THE BOY WHO ASKED QUESTIONS

(PROF. YASHPAL)

“Pal, where are you?” called Mr. Ram Pyare Lal as he looked for his son in the railway station at Quetta.

Mr. Lal had come to see off a friend who was leaving for Lahore and while he was talking to him, the four-year-old boy had wandered off. His attention had been attracted by the train that was entering the platform. For a while there was panic as everyone searched for Yash Pal.

“Sir, he’s here,” called out one of the men looking for him. Yash Pal, hidden behind a big load of merchandise was intently looking at the bogies.

“Oh, why did you wander off?” asked a relieved Mr. Lal, trying not to show his annoyance.

But the little boy was unaware of the panic he had caused. “Bauji, why are these things sticking out? Why can’t the compartments be attached to each other?” he asked curiously.

“What?” began Mr. Lal angry at his son for causing a scare, but looking at his serious face, decided to leave the scolding for later. “You tell me why they are there,” he answered with a smile.

It was an intriguing question for the little boy. He thought and thought till his face brightened.

“I know! Because, if they are not there, the coaches will dash against each other and break!” he said triumphantly. His father laughed. “Well, they would not exactly break, but it will be pretty uncomfortable for those sitting in them with the coaches bumping into each other and throwing everything about.

That was how Yash Pal was, always full of questions about things around him. He loved to find out why things were so and if he could get an answer, he would try to work them out for himself. “Yash Pal will do great things one day,” said neighbours and friends.

Quetta was earthquake prone and whenever tremors were felt, families slept outside to minimise the danger of being buried. This was an exciting thing for the children. It was more like a picnic for them when they could sleep under the stars and call out to their friends in other tents.

Earthquakes were not always fun, though. When he was about eight years old, a severe earthquake hit Quetta. Many families were trapped inside their homes including Yash Pal and his family. For several hours they lay under the rubble till they were dug out by rescue workers. His sister had become unconscious and it took their mother some time to revive her.

What had only been a game became a grim reality for the children. Many people had died. Yash Pal and his family sat on the rubble of what had been once their home. Mr. Lal had left to help in the rescue work, leaving Mrs. Lal in charge of the children. Yash Pal was devastated by the destruction. Roads had caved in, buildings had been razed to the ground. There were fires caused by the earthquake.

“Pal, do you think the shop round the corner would have collapsed too?” asked his friend Kundan. It was a shop that sold candies and toffees among other things. Yash Pal instantly knew what his friend was thinking.

“I think so,” he replied presently.

“Why don’t we go and see?” The two boys ran, stumbling over the rubble. When they reached the shop, they found the glass jars smashed, their contents scattered all over the place. They stuffed their pockets with the candies, toffees and other things they could salvage. For the next few minutes the children, some of them crying in fright were given a treat by Yash Pal and Kundan. They all forgot the earthquake for a while.

Yash Pal’s mother was sitting with his sister in her arms. She was worried. “We can’t stay here; we have to go to the relief camp,” she said. Their father had not yet returned from his rescue work. She managed to salvage a few things from under the rubble and put them into a big tin. Placing the tin on her head and holding the younger children by their hand and the little girl on her hips, she started towards the camp.

Yash Pal felt very proud of his mother. ‘She is so strong and is not weeping like so many other ladies!’ he thought, following her. Seeing the destruction around them, he wanted to ask a hundred questions.

“Mataji, how do earthquakes occur?” he asked her now.

“I don’t know exactly, but only that huge rocks under the earth’s surface keep moving and squeezing each other. Sometimes they crash against each other with great force, and then earthquakes occur. You will learn more about it in school,” she replied patiently as she picked her way among the rubble.

After that day, for several weeks Yash Pal kept his ear to the ground and tried to listen to the rocks moving and crushing each other! Following the earthquake, Quetta was evacuated. Yash Pal’s father, who worked as a clerk in the Ordinance Factory had to stay, but he went to leave his family in his native village of Jhang in Punjab.

A few weeks later, after Mr. Lal returned to Quetta, Mrs. Lal took her children to her father’s house in Kot Isashah, a tiny village in Punjab. Yash Pal’s grandfather ran a flour mill which was attached to the house.

The flour mill was an exciting place for children. The machinery was a source of awe to them It was a huge contraption with a single cylinder, gigantic grinding stones and enormous fly-wheels which were about 5 feet across. When it was switched on, gusts of gas escaped through the chimney. Yash Pal’s uncle, one Bheri Mama, who took care of the mill, had devised his own whistle by placing a pot at the top of the chimney, which made a lot of noise, vibrating with each gust of gas and informed the villagers that the mill was open for the day.

“Mamaji, please start the engine,” Yash Pal and his brothers would pester his uncle early in the morning, just to listen to the whistle!

“Not now. Once the mill starts, we have to keep feeding the grains because stopping and restarting it would be difficult,” he told them.

Yash Pal also liked watching him service the machine. This was an elaborate affair and took at least three days. The whole machinery was taken down part by part, the stones were chipped to roughen them up for better grinding and then reassembled. Yash Pal often helped him by handing out tools and helping in oiling the parts. He found it most interesting that Mamaji did all the work, without even learning at any school how to do it!

“I learnt it all by taking the whole machine apart and putting it back again to understand how it worked,” he explained to the amazed little boy, becoming an instant hero in his eyes. All one had to do with these machines, no matter how huge, was to figure out how they worked! Now, wasn’t that simple? He lost some of the awe of the mill after that.

Yash Pal was only too glad when they returned to Quetta. Despite the mill and its attraction, he missed his old school and friends back there. One of them was Lali. Yash and he had many adventures together.

One such adventure was to go and watch the plane that came to Quetta once every month or so. Lali lived in the cantonment area and the tiny airstrip was near his house. So it was he who brought news of any plane that had flown in. The day one did, the two boys would go to the airfield in their bikes after school.

The airfield was just a small strip of runway with not even a proper building. The most fascinating fact for them was that such a small bi-plane had come all the way from far off Calcutta! It was covered with dust and to the boys it looked wonderful.

“Hello boys! Came to see the plane?” asked the pilot, a friendly man named Mr. Bose. They nodded eagerly.

“Come tomorrow morning at eight. I will let you see inside and also watch while I service the plane for its flight back to Calcutta.”

The next day, they were there exactly at the time he had said. “Did you fly non-stop all the way?” asked the boys. At 12, they had a fair idea about these things.

“No. I had to stop twice for refuelling. But I made the flight in 10 hours,” replied Mr. Bose, as he checked the controls and did a bit of adjustments. That sounded pretty fast to the boys. By trains it would have taken several days!

The friends did a lot of other things too. With many people actively involved with the Arya Samaj at that time, the children were drawn into social service too. He, along with his friends went from house to house every weekend to collect grains and flour to feed the poor. This desire to do something for the less fortunate which he imbibed from his parents stayed with him all his life.

At school, Yash Pal not only did well in his own studies, but also helped others who weren’t so good. Even at school he was always asking questions. But he also had the answers to most of the questions the teachers put in class. One of his Pathan friends called him ‘Mota sar’ (big head), because he was short and his head seemed oversized in comparison to his body.

Every time the teacher asked a question, the others couldn’t answer, he would say, “Mota sar would know the answer!” and sure enough, Yash Pal would give the correct reply.

School was okay, but there were no labs where they could conduct experiments or even observe them being conducted. One day, Yash Pal’s cousin, Jagdish, had come from Lyallpur, where he was studying. He was two years older than Yash Pal. He kept talking about the fantastic chemistry and physics labs and the experiments they conducted there which made Yash Pal long to go and study there. His parents even agreed to send him.

Fortunately for him, his father got transferred to Jabalpur. This was a welcome turn of events for Yash Pal, even though he knew he would miss his friends.

But things were not so easy for him in Jabalpur. The Principal of Maharashtra High School told his father that Yash Pal should join the eighth standard, but Mr. Lal insisted that he should study in the ninth as he had already passed his eighth standard in Quetta. “He will catch up with the rest in no time,” he assured the Principal who agreed after much persuasion.

Though he had expected things to be different, he had not been prepared for the sea change in the syllabus. For one, many subjects were new to him. For the other the medium of instruction was English. He plunged into the routine and began enjoying the studies. The teachers were all excellent.

One of his favourite teachers was Mr. Pawar who taught them a few of the subjects. Whichever subject he taught, he managed to make it easy and enchanting. For instance, as he taught geography, he kept his class up-to-date with the happenings in the War by pointing out the places and talking about them — their location, their climate, their natural resources, etc.

He also taught them geometry. This was a new subject for Yash Pal and his favourite one. He was spellbound by the angles, curves and planes. Best of all was the logic behind the laws of geometry. To the boy who had come to Jabalpur without any idea of the subject and whose curiosity was never satiated unless he was provided with the reason behind every theory, here was a treat.

He poured over theorems and laws and worked out the sums till he had understood the subject perfectly. What he liked best about the subject was that it was a perfectly logical subject. Given a premise which, taken as being true, the conclusion followed in logical steps. It was like seeing a jigsaw puzzle fall into place and no less exciting to him.

Mr. Pawar made it all the more interesting, by taking special interest in his bright pupil. He enjoyed the knowledgeable questions of Yash Pal, let him work out the answers for himself and only providing him with hints. Teacher and pupil enjoyed this game because Yash Pal didn't want pat answers to his doubts. Of course, there were times when Yash Pal had to struggle with a problem for hours before approaching his teacher for help, but it was worth the time because he would understand the problem from various angles.

Things were by no means a cakewalk for him. He set himself tougher and tougher goals and satisfied himself and his teachers by reaching them through sheer hard work and struggle.

It was not all work and no play for Yash Pal and his brothers. They rode their bikes, and played with other children in the neighbourhood. He had an artistic bent of mind and learnt to play the harmonium and drawing. He made good pencil sketches of great personalities like Tagore and Swami Dayanand. One of his father's friends was a draughtsman and Yash Pal loved to visit his place to learn more about scale drawing.

Everyone was interested in learning about the war and wanted to listen to European stations to get the latest war news. Mr. Lal had managed to get an old radio but there was no electricity to run it. It was Yash Pal who found the solution to the problem.

"Jaggo, your house has electricity. If I stretch a wire from your house to mine, will you switch the power on for an hour every evening?" he asked his playmate and the landlord's daughter.

She considered the request and agreed. Things worked fine except on the days her team was defeated in a game of 'pittu' by Yash Pal's team! Then off she would rush and pull out the plug that supplied power to Yash Pal's radio. It would take all his powers of cajoling to make her switch it back on!

Having always been interested in discovering the reasons behind why things worked so, Yash Pal was most excited about the labs in school and the experiments they conducted in chemistry and physics.

"Today we are going to find the specific heat of copper," said Mr. Pawar. Yash Pal was all ears. The experiment would measure how much heat it takes to raise the temperature of the substance by one degree.

The students were each given a piece of copper wire and told how to conduct the experiment. It sounded rather exciting to think that one could actually measure the properties of things like heat. If one could do that, surely one could also measure other things,

things like the time taken to cool it back to its original temperature; the force of the earthquakes, the velocity of wind, the distance to the stars — it was the most exciting day for Yash Pal, because a simple experiment had given him the idea that the Universe, like the huge mill in his grandfather's house was just another giant mechanism and one could easily understand by conducting specific scientific experiments. But to do all this he would have to first learn more about the tools — physics and its laws. Once he did, and he was able to understand at least some of the workings of the universe, he could do something to make life better for everyone. What a wonderful thing to be able to do!

In the next few years Yash Pal became a star student of the school and a favourite of Mr. Pawar. His interest in physics remained and he was constantly encouraged by Mr. Pawar.

As expected, Yash Pal grew up into a great scientist. With his immense knowledge of astrophysics, he helped set up satellite education, whereby a student sitting in any corner of the country could attend 'classrooms' and listen to the lectures by eminent teachers and see the experiments and field trips. This was just one of his many contributions to the world of science, thanks to his natural curiosity as a young boy and his unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

SATELLITE CLASSROOMS

Born on 26 November 1926, Prof. Yash Pal is one of the most distinguished physicists of this century. He did his Ph.D. in Physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and contributed significantly to the study of cosmic rays, high energy physics, astrophysics, science education, space technology, communication and development and education.

He is one of the architects of the satellite education programme of India, because of which millions of Indian viewers in the remotest corners of the country are getting the benefit of specialised education by just switching on the television. He is one of the few scientists who has dedicated his life's work to the betterment of the country by constantly striving to apply modern communication technology to benefit the common man. He believes that science is not all facts, but a subject that can do much to influence human values like ethics and compassion.

He has served the country in many capacities including the Chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), Secretary, Department Of Science and Technology, Secretary General of the United National Conference on Outer Space, and Chairman, National Institute of Design. He is currently the National Research Professor.

Among his numerous national and international awards, are the Padma Bhushan awarded in 1976, the Marconi International Fellowship Award (1980), the Fifth Annual Award of the Association of Space Explorers, the Shiromani Award (1989), the First Lord Perry Award for Excellence in Distance Education (1992), the Arthur C.Clarke Award for Communication and Space Technology (1994).

He is also involved with television and is advisor for the popular science programme, "Turning Point".

THE LEGACY

(USTAD AMJAD ALI KHAN)

Amjad sat in front of his father, in the large music room of their house in Gwalior. Amjad, not yet eight years old, was trying to get a particular note right on his sarod.

"That's not correct. Play it again!" said his father. He looked pretty stern. Amjad tried once more, with fingers that were turning clammy with sweat. When he saw his father's brows shooting up, he knew that he had made the same mistake.

"Play with concentration, not with a wandering mind!" his father scolded. Amjad nodded meekly and tried once more. Again a false note crept in. This time his father didn't say a word. He simply got up and left the room.

Amjad was unhappy at having angered and upset his father. He decided that he would play the correct note, right then. A determined look came into the boy's eyes as he kept at it, unmindful of the pain in his fingers and the ache in his arms. Slowly, the note came right and melody flowed from his sarod. Amjad was elated, not only because he had played it right, but also because his father had come back into the room, with a smile on his face!

His father, the renowned sarod player, Ustad Hafiz All Khan, was also his guru, his teacher. This made it rather difficult for Amjad, because he never sat down and gave him regular lessons. Amjad picked up tips here and there as he listened when he played or sang, or when he taught his students, many of whom lived in their house.

In the evenings well known musicians and artists assembled in the hall of their house for musical discussions. Sometimes his father invited him to play for the distinguished guests and Amjad regaled them with his sarod or sang in his sweet young voice. At times when the eminent guests sang or played an instrument, Amjad accompanied them on the tabla.

Though Amjad loved music, he missed the games and activities of the children in his neighbourhood, because he hardly had any free time after his school and music lessons. He was also afraid of getting hurt while playing. 'What if the ball hits my fingers?' he would think and shudder. How could he then strum the sarod?

He was often lonely. All the boys in the neighbourhood had such different interests and pastimes. But Amjad couldn't discuss music or analyse a [1] particular composition with anyone of the boys his age, not even Karunesh, his best friend, who was into body building and physical activities most of the time. He also fancied himself to be the neighbourhood 'dada' with a body to match his image. It was he who sometimes forced Amjad to take time off for a game of football or cricket.

On one such occasion, Amjad was playing football. His team was on the verge of scoring the winning goal. When Amjad passed the ball to his team-mate, a burly fellow from the other side came in the way and Amjad collided with him. Several boys from the other side were immediately upon him, crying 'Foul!', 'Foul!' The game came to an

abrupt halt and fisticuffs took over, with boys from both the sides giving as good as they got.

All were participating in the free-for-all fight, except Amjad. He stood still, as two boys pummelled him, before Karunesh came to his rescue. By then, Amjad had a cut lip and a black eye. Karunesh was very annoyed with Amjad.

"Why were you taking it all quietly?

They weren't much bigger than you!

You could have easily beaten them or at least pretended to fight! You are such a coward." Amjad was quiet for a while. His whole body hurt and he felt angry too, at no one and nothing in particular. But he thought that Karunesh was being rather unfair, calling him a coward.

"You know very well why I didn't hit back," he replied after a while. "The moment I hit anyone, Abba Sahab would get to know; and would be hurt to find that one of his sons had behaved like a ruffian. You know that I can't ever dream of bringing a bad name to the family or hurt Abba in any way," continued Amjad, wiping the blood from his mouth.

Karunesh was quiet He felt sorry for having been so hasty while blaming Amjad. He knew that his friend was being groomed to carry forward the family name in the field of music. "I am sorry," he said presently, patting Amjad's shoulder.

When they reached home, Amjad's father asked, "Were you in a fight? How many times have I told you to keep away from those ruffians?"

It was Karunesh who answered him. "Ustadji, Amjad didn't lift a finger. There were some new boys from another locality and they just picked upon him." Amjad's father wasn't convinced, and finally Amjad pleaded, "Abba Sahab, I won't play with those boys in future."

Later, his- mother cleaned his wounds and applied medicine to them. Her touch was soothing. "Now go and practice music," she told him, giving him a sweet. Being the youngest of the family has its advantages too. Amjad happily went to the music room.

He sat there with the portraits of his forefathers looking down benignly upon him. His mother had told him that he had been born in that very room, "you were born into music," she often told him. Looking around, his eyes fell on the tiny sarod he used to play as a child. It had been specially made for him when he had been barely three years old.

When he held it in his hand, he felt the weight of his heritage and the enormous responsibility he carried on his small shoulders. His brothers and many of his cousins were also trained musicians. But his father pinned all his hopes only on Amjad. The boy also knew that one day soon, he would have to help his father earn for the family by the strength of his music. 'I will make Abba proud of me. I will never let him down/ he vowed.

He took a deep breath, put aside the tiny sarod and picked up his regular one. Soon, he was lost in his *riyaz* (practice), trying out new variations. There was a particular note he wanted to play, but try as he would, he couldn't get it right. Finally he lost patience and cried, "I can't do what I want to do with this instrument!" His father who heard his cry came in and sat next to him.

"Here, let me show you. You need patience and love and not anger, to make the sarod do what you want, *beta,"* he told him gently. Amjad looked on in awe as melody poured forth from the sarod while his father caressed the strings. "You can make the sarod do whatever you want—sing, laugh and cry." It was a poignant moment for Amjad and there were tears in his eyes.

He loved his father at such tender moments, but he was never certain about his feelings towards him. He was scared, respectful and affectionate, all at the same time. His father's was a towering personality, who was a giant of his times. To Amjad, he was the Ustad and the father and he never knew which relationship took priority. Moreover, his father was very old in comparison to the fathers of his friends. It was almost like having a grandfather for a father! Yet for all that, he loved and respected him.

One day, while playing a *bandish* in raag *Bhairav,* he got so involved that he didn't notice his father come in. *"Wah, Bete Sahab"* he said with genuine pleasure, when Amjad concluded. The boy beamed. His father generally used the form of address when he was very pleased with his son. And for Amjad, getting praise from his father was almost like a blessing. But that day, there was more to come. His father hugged him.

"Your excellent performance today deserves a reward," he said and pulling out some coins, he pressed them into Amjad's palm. "Go and watch a movie with your friend!" he said with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Shukriya (thank you), *Abba Sahab"* said Amjad happily. He went straight to Karunesh's house.

"Shall we go and see 'Baiju Bawra'?" he asked his friend, who readily agreed. The two boys had a great time at the movies, listening to the wonderful music of Baiju's soulful songs while munching on spicy *chana* (roasted gram).

Amjad lived in Gwalior till he was 12 and then his family shifted to Delhi. There, they lived in a colony of artists—where, the likes of the Dagar Brothers, the Dhrupad singers, Siddheshwari Devi.who sang Thumris, Shambhu Maharaj the Kathak maestro and Wahid Khan the renowned sitarist, lived. He grew up surrounded by music and dance, among like-minded men and women who respected each other.

But Modern School in Delhi, where he was admitted, was a different world altogether for Amjad, who had grown up in the small town of Gwalior.

"The boys speak so differently from us!" he told his mother. For someone like him, used to the respectful forms of address and the civil tongue of a cultured family, the rough language of a big city was shocking. But soon, he got over his initial hesitancy and began making friends, thanks to his sarod.

When played at a school function, he became the centre of attraction. "What is this instrument? We haven't seen anything like this," said the boys to him backstage.

Music being Amjad's favourite topic, all his shyness left him as he held forth. "This is the sarod and it was invented by my forefathers," he told the boys proudly. "It has been adapted from the *rabab,* a musical instrument which is used with folk music. One of my Pathan ancestors from Afghanistan brought it to India. Since *rabab* has a staccato sound it is unsuitable for classical music. To overcome this problem, Ghularn Bandegi Khan, the Pathan's son, who was interested in classical music, modified it into the present form

of sarod. Of course there have been several changes in the original instrument since then."

The story of the sarod made Amjad quite popular among the boys. But there were some who thought that he was getting too much importance.

"I am sure you can only play the *alaps* and *raags* in it! You can't play any other kind of music!" challenged one boy, trying to pull Amjad down.

This was an open invitation to Amjad. "Of course, one can play any kind of. music on sarod! It is a wonderful instrument," he said, stung to the quick. He then played a film tune, much to the delight of the boys. Whatever reservations any boy had about Amjad, was dispelled with that demonstration and finally, he was part of the group. He continued to be different from them, and yet was one of them.

One day, the principal called Amjad. "I want you to represent our school in the inter-school music competition," he told the boy. And thus began a succession of performances which fetched trophies and awards for his school. His music teachers at school also encouraged him in every way.

Outside school, he played with his father on concerts. He was still in high school, when he got the opportunity to go abroad. He was to be a member of a group of musicians, dancers and singers, which was being sponsored by Asia Music Society for a series of concerts in the USA.

When he heard about it, his father was worried. "I can't allow you to go!" he cried. He was terrified of flying and for that reason, had passed up several opportunities to go abroad. Now he wouldn't let his beloved son to take the risk of flying!

"Abba Sahab! I will be fine! There is nothing to worry about. So many others are going. Please say 'yes'/' pleaded Amjad. It took all of his persuasive powers to make his father agree. He blessed his youngest child with tears in his eyes.

Amjad, on his own for the first time, gave a good account of himself and completed a successful tour.

Back home, he continued accompanying his father regularly during his concerts and also gave solo recitals. Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan was losing his hearing and therefore gave more and more chance to young Amjad to play on stage.

About a year or so, after Amjad's US trip, his father was invited to play for some distinguished guests at Delhi.

Amjad routinely prepared to accompany his father. There was nothing to indicate this concert was going to be any different from numerous others that had preceded it.

Just before the programme was to begin, Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan went up on stage, "It gives me great pleasure to present my son Amjad Ali Khan as the artist of this evening!" he said, motioning to a confused Amjad to come and take his place on the stage.

This was so unexpected! There was a moment of panic for Amjad. 'How can I fill in for Abba Sahab? Will the knowledgeable audience accept me in his place?' he thought worriedly. But his father had already made the announcement and there was no way he could back out. Nervous, but proud because his father had thought him capable enough to stand in for him, he ascended the stage and touched his father's feet.

But a while later, sitting before the audience, he pushed all misgivings aside. With a silent prayer to the Almighty, he began strumming. A new energy coursed through his veins and tingled in his fingers. They danced; caressed and coaxed melody out of his instrument till divine music soared and filled the auditorium.

The thundering ovation that greeted the end of his recital was ample proof of the fact that the son had indeed justified the faith of his father in him. The legacy had been passed on from one generation to yet another of master sarod players.

From Amjad to Ustad Amjad Ali Khan

Ustad Amjad Ali Khan is one of the leading musicians of our times. Born in 1945, he comes from a family of distinguished musicians who adorned the courts of Mughal Emperors. He has more than held his own in this august lineage which includes the renowned sarod wizard Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan — his father and guru.

During the course of his musical career, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan has composed many new *Raags* and made significant innovations to an ancient form of Indian music, even while adhering to its classical tradition. He has improvised and adapted the sarod to suit the purely classical musical form. He appreciates every musical form including the Karnataka style of music of South India, Western classical and even pop music.

Ustad Amjad Ali Khan is especially involved with children and wants them to give place to music in their lives. He has composed an album 'Ekta se Shanti' on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the UNICEF in 1986. He has also performed for charity organisations like Spastics Society of India, Indian Cancer Society, Blind Relief Fund and UNICEF. He founded the Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan Memorial Society to propagate and popularise Indian classical music.

Ustad Amjad Ali Khan has been honoured with numerous awards among which are the Padma Shri (1975), and Padma Bhushan (1991), the Tansen Award (1989), the International Music Forum Award, UNESCO (1970) and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, (1989). He has also been appointed National Ambassador of UNICEF. He is at present promoting Indian classical music in India and abroad.

TWINKLE TOES

(MRINALINI SARABHAI)

Mrinalini sat near her grandmother, gazing at her face with adoration. She told the most fantastic stories' ever and Mrinalini loved stories. Every summer during the holidays Mrinalini's family came down to their ancestral home, Vadakath, in Anakkara, a village in Kerala, which was run by her grandmother with a firm but kind hand.

Mrinalini was fascinated by her grandmother. She had long ears that came down almost to her shoulders. The only ornament she wore was a necklace made of rudraksha. She dressed in the traditional Kerala style, with a white *dhoti* called '*mundu*' wrapped round her waist and another piece of doth over her shoulder.

"*Ammamma*, (grandmother) why don't you wear a blouse?" asked Mrinalini.

“Blouses!” snorted her grandmother. “Those are meant only for prostitutes and not for respectable women like us!” Mrinalini didn’t understand what the word meant, but didn’t pursue the matter because her grandmother’s tone didn’t encourage any question.

Mrinalini’s hair was wet from the swim she had had in the huge tank near the house along with her many cousins. They had all woken up early to be able to finish their baths and attend the elaborate puja, which Mrinalini found quite beautiful. She loved the tinkle of the bells, the fragrance of incense, camphor and flowers. The room was lined from floor upwards with pictures of gods and goddesses. Mrinalini’s gaze searched for and then rested on the picture of Krishna. This was her favourite picture where the Lord was shown with his leg crossed and playing the flute. If she closed her eyes, she could almost hear the music from the flute. He was also her favourite deity.

The breakfast that followed the puja, was delicious with hot crisp *dosa* eaten with a dry chutney of chillies and dal, mixed with a little oil. Once that was over, the kids were free to play all over the house. They raced round the rooms, shouting to each other and chattering in Malayalam. The elders in the house looked on indulgently.

“Children! Come and eat something,” called their aunt Kunhilakshmi Ammayi from time to time during the day, as she plied them with banana and jackfruit chips or some other delicious sweet. All that running gave them a healthy appetite and they devoured everything she gave them. Mrinalini loved her holidays.

There was one more reason for her to like her grandmother’s house. An endless stream of people came to their house throughout the day. There was the astrologer who made them all sit and read their fortunes; the *moosad* or local doctor with his medicines who came when someone fell ill; vendors of all kinds of ware; the best of all, though, was the *kathakali* troupe that came and performed for the whole night. Mrinalini sat through, watching their every movement, trying to imitate their movements and dancing along with them in her mind.

It was indeed a wonderful background for a child and seemed like another world for her.

Her grandmother’s house was so different from their home in Madras where a lot of Western customs prevailed. She was called Baby May and her mother was ‘Mummy’ and their home was called ‘Gilchrist Gardens’. Not that she didn’t like her Madras home. She did. She collected her friends and cousins and often staged plays there. Her mother was a good hostess and she had a stream of visitors who stayed for tea and a game of tennis afterwards. Mrinalini often played with the marker (coach) because she was too young to play with the visitors, but she didn’t mind this.

Playful and lively, she was also a highly sensitive girl and was aware of the harmony of nature around her. The sky, the trees, the earth — they all looked like the parts of a whole cosmic dance.

One night when she was six, she had a dream. In it, she was walking along a seemingly endless trail. The path was lined with trees on either side, their tops forming a canopy above. Even as she walked, she suddenly began running, not knowing why. She had no idea of where she was going or what she was going to find once she reached there.

Then, in the distance she saw a small temple. When she arrived there, she found the resplendent image of Nataraja, the God of Dance, looking as though He were waiting for her.

Mrinalini threw herself at the feet of the Deity and she heard a voice say, “You must dance, child, forever!”

It had all been so real that she couldn’t be sure if it was a dream or reality when she woke up in the morning to a bright day. But of one thing she was sure: she would dance. Nothing else mattered. The Lord Nataraja himself had blessed her, hadn’t he?

“Mummy, I want to learn to dance!” she informed her mother over breakfast that morning.

“Dance? But whoever heard of a child dancing? Just forget it and get on with your school,” she told Mrinalini.

Mrinalini wouldn’t give up. And then something terrible happened. Her father died suddenly. Her mother’s heart was heavy and she knew how Mrinalini grieved for her beloved father.

His death made her more determined than ever to pursue her quest. Somehow, she didn’t feel like talking about her dream to anyone. If they couldn’t understand her passion for dance, they wouldn’t be able to understand her dream either, she decided. But in her mind, she knew what she wanted and she set about looking for it. She also knew that she would have to find a teacher for herself.

“Come Bhatatayya, let’s go for a drive,” she called out to her ayah. She went looking for her driver George.

The three of them roamed the streets of Madras. Only Mrinalini knew why they were going all over the place. She would suddenly call out to the driver to stop and get out of the car. “Do you know of someone who can teach me to dance?” she would ask a passer-by, whom she thought likely to help her. He would give her a strange look but the determination in her eyes would turn it into one of wonder. Then the person would shake his head regretfully before moving away, turning back to look at the little girl, looking so forlorn and disappointed that he almost wished he had been able to help her out. Dancing was not as popular in those days as it is today and not many people knew of any dance gurus.

Sometimes she walked for miles with her ayah in tow, literally scanning every street, as if by looking hard enough she would be able to find a teacher by some miracle. The search continued for days and weeks. Mrinalini never gave up hope nor did she tell her family about her quest. Even her faithful ayah didn’t have any idea about her secret search. She faithfully went along with her little mistress who had such a strange light in her eyes. If only the poor woman knew that Mrinalini was thinking of and dreaming about dancing.

Apparently word had got around that a little girl was looking for a dance guru, because one day a kind old man came towards her on the street. Mrinalini stopped when he came to her.

“Chinnamma (little one), what is this ‘natyam’ you are asking people about?” he asked her in Tamil.

“I don’t know,” she replied, “except that when the trees, the flowers and the stars in the sky move in beauty I feel one with them and I know that it is dance. I know that in this big city there are people who know dancing. But I don’t know where to find a teacher. Oh, *Thatha* (grandfather), do you know of someone?”

The old man smiled at her explanation and subsequent question. ‘For a little girl of six or seven, she does have a wonderful perception,’ he thought. Aloud he said, “does your mother know you want to dance? Are you allowed to dance?”

“Oh, she doesn’t mind what I do,” replied Mrinalini quickly. “She thinks that I am being childish and like to wander about. That is why she sends me to the beach every day to play in the sand and water.”

“Alone?” he asked.

“No. Look there! My ayah always accompanies me. But she is my friend and doesn’t tell my mother where I go. Now please tell me, do you know of a teacher?”

“Come,” he beckoned to her, “and bring your ayah with you. The good woman surely loves you or she wouldn’t wander about like this after you.”

And so, the three of them walked to the end of the road where there was a small whitewashed house. There was nothing to distinguish it from the others on the road. Mrinalini was excited, as if she realised that she had come to the end of her search. As they entered the house, she saw that it was clean and cool, with well polished tiles that shone.

An old woman came out and looked curiously at the little girl and the old woman accompanying her. She spread a mat on the floor, still gazing at the girl and bade her sit down. When Mrinalini sat down cross-legged on the mat and smoothed down her frock, the old man also sat down opposite her on the floor.

At first he didn’t say a word. But his deep-set eyes looked at Mrinalini steadily, as if he were looking directly into her very soul. But she wasn’t afraid/ for it was a gentle look, full of kindness. She waited patiently for the old man to speak.

“I am a dance teacher,” he said presently. Her heart skipped a beat. “If you are so interested in dancing, you could become my pupil. But before you do, you must get permission from your mother to learn dancing.” “But, *Thatha....*” began Mrinalini. He motioned her to listen and continued, “Tell her I am Thanjavur Pillai and the name of the dance I teach is *Bharatam.* But only girls belonging to the temple are allowed to dance and that too not in Madras. Since you came to me as a gift from God. I will make you my pupil. I think you are destined to dance. I will be in Madras for a while and will teach you as long as I stay. God will decide about the future.”

Mrinalini only half understood what he was saying, that he was a teacher and that he would teach her. That was all she needed to know! She prostrated herself at his feet, instantly accepting him as her *guru.*

Then holding her ayah’s hand and literally dragging her behind her, she danced all the way home. She didn’t know that her ayah was also dancing in her heart. For the little girl whom she loved so much was happy and her happiness made her happy too.

The dream that had set off the search had come true. In fact, the dream was just about to begin to be true. Mrinalini was going to learn dancing! She would be a dancer, just as Lord Nataraja had commanded her to, in her dream.

Mrinalini suddenly stopped within sight of her house. “Bhatatayya, this is going to be our secret. Please don’t tell mummy. She wouldn’t let me learn. She knows we go for walks and when we go by car, we can request George not to tell where we are going,” she told her ayah, who nodded her head. Though she was afraid to keep any secret from her mistress, she would do it for Mrinalini.

And so, for three years, Mrinalini learnt to dance secretly off and on from Thanjavur Pillai. By then of course, her mother came to know of her passion for dance and resigned herself to her lessons. She even enjoyed watching her dance and felt proud of her accomplishments. But she was worried about her health.

Later, the teachers came home to teach and Mrinalini revelled in her art. Even when she was sent to Switzerland to build her strength, following frequent bouts of fever she continued dancing. She joined the ballet and Greek dance classes there.

“Why, we have a dancer here!” exclaimed the teacher when she saw her sway and move gracefully like a swan.

The climate of Switzerland agreed with her and she regained her health. Always interested in sports, she was soon in every team—tennis, netball (now called basketball), lacrosse and in the winter, skating, skiing and ice hockey — taking part in competitions against nearby schools!

The last day of school was a happy-sad day for Mrinalini. Happy because she danced three solos in the Grecian style and was the star of the gym. Sad because she was leaving school and her new friends of whom there were many and one in particular — Pamela Margetson. They swore eternal friendship and parted.

Back in Madras, Mrinalini slipped just as easily into the traditional Indian life. Her mother had joined the freedom movement and the visitors were all the great women of those days like Sarojini Naidu, Mrs. Vijayalakshnii Pandit and Mrs. Cousins.

But for Mrinalini life meant dance and dance meant life. She continued to learn and dance and continued dancing.....continues dancing, passing on the art down to successive generations.

A LIFETIME OF DANCING

Mrinalini Sarabhai is an internationally reputed classical dancer and choreographer, who had choreographed more than 300 dance dramas and has managed to combine pure classical dance with modern techniques with great effect. Being interested in various forms of dance including the Western ballet and the male oriented Kathakali of Kerala, she is the first and only woman to have received the *Veer Shrinkala* award for her contribution to Kathakali.

Mrinalini Sarabhai also writes for children and keenly promotes Indian arts and culture among the younger generation through lecture-demonstrations. A widely travelled dancer, she has popularised Indian dance abroad.

Called the 'High priestess of Indian dance', by critics, she is the founder-director of the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts in Ahmedabad. It came into being in 1949. She is the first Indian to receive the medal and diploma of the *French Archives Internationales de la danse*. She has won the Padma Shri (1968) and Padma Bhushan (1992) from the President of India. She was awarded the Desikottama (D.Litt. Honoris Causa) degree, the highest honour of the Viswa Bharati University, Shantiniketan, in 1987. She is a fellow of the Sangeet Natak Academy and has also won the Kalidas Samman awarded by the Madhya Pradesh Government among other honours and recognition awarded by national and international bodies.

THE LONELY MUSE

(RUSKIN BOND)

"Daddy, shall we look at your stamp collection?" asked Ruskin. He was sitting on a steel trunk inside the "RAF tent which he shared with his father. He loved all those exotic and beautiful stamps. But better than even looking at them, he loved the stories his father told about them — about the picture in the stamp or about the country to which it belonged. Sometimes he told him about how he had managed to get a rare stamp. It all sounded like a great adventure to the ten-year-old.

That day, Mr. Bond was busy. "Not just now, Ruskin. Let me complete this poem and then we will organise them, shall we?"

"Oh, Daddy! Will you read your poem to me after you finish writing it?" asked Ruskin. His father nodded. Ruskin got up and wandered in the grounds of the camp. His father worked for the RAF and had got special permission to keep his son with him. As a result, Ruskin wasn't able to attend school. Not that he minded it. Being with his Daddy was better than the excitement of school any day. 'Why, he is the best Daddy any boy could wish for!' thought Ruskin with pride. Of course, there were times when he missed his mother and wished she were staying with them. She had separated from her husband when Ruskin had been about eight. His father more than made up for her absence.

He was still wandering on the grounds when Mr. Bond came out. "Shall we go out?" he asked Ruskin. The boy gladly agreed because he loved these outings with his father when they walked through the market, looked into the shop windows and sometimes went for a movie. That day though, Mr. Bond took Ruskin to a book shop.

"Daddy! Could you buy me a book, please?" he asked. His father smiled.

"Of course, Ruskin! But today, I'm going to buy you something else too," he picked up a bound notebook. "This is a diary. I want you to start recording the day's events at the end of each day, so that you would know how you have spent your time and what you have done. Maybe, you could write how you feel about events that happened during that day It would be like a journal." Then he bought Ruskin a couple of books, one of which was *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens.

At night, after dinner, Ruskin made the very first entry in his journal. It was about the outing, the diary and the book his father had bought for him. "I will start reading *David*

Copperfield the first thing tomorrow," he wrote in his well rounded handwriting, which looked just like his father's.

Not long after that day, Mr. Bond fell ill. He had not been keeping well for sometime. Ruskin was scared and worried. But worse was yet to come. One day his father, who was just recovering from a severe bout of fever, called him.

"Ruskin, you will be going to a fine school in Shimla," he said.

"But I don't want to go!" protested Ruskin. His father shook his head. "It is for the best, son," he replied, with a tinge of sadness in his voice.

It was a reluctant Ruskin who left for his new school sometime later. In Shimla, he missed his father terribly and felt homesick and lonely. He waited eagerly for the weekly letters he got from his father. Every night, he took them all out and read and re-read them. He also kept his journal, which chronicled his daily activities.

One night, soon after he joined school, the boys in the dormitory were preparing for bed. Ruskin was sitting on his bed, his diary open in front of him.

"Look, our new friend is being very scholarly," said Scott, one of the older boys. He was a burly boy and looked quite intimidating. He was usually left alone by the others. Ruskin ignored him and continued writing.

"The 'horse' is acting very snooty, isn't he?" asked Rana, trying to snatch the diary away. Ruskin had earned the nickname 'horse' — probably because of his healthy appetite. A quiet boy as a rule, he only got into fights if he was provoked too much. "Just keep off or else..." said Ruskin in a calm voice, tightening his hold over his diary. But this was an open challenge to Scott which he wouldn't let pass and be humiliated in front of the boys. He laughed loudly. "So, the 'horse' can also threaten, can he?" he asked. This was enough to set Ruskin off.

He closed the diary, got down from the bed and gave him a terrific push. Taken by surprise, Scott fell down. Ruskin just jumped upon the prone figure and began punching him till he was begging for mercy. Actually Scott was pretty weak; he only appeared strong. Once Ruskin decided that the punishment was enough, he picked himself up and continued writing as if there had been no interruption. The other boys looked at him with a new respect.

Later, when all the boys were asleep, Ruskin lay awake, the tears pricking his eyelids. Slowly, he got up, opened his trunk and took out his father's letters. Then thrusting them under his pillow, he lay down.

Tentatively, they tried to make friends with him. But though Ruskin was friendly, he could not bring himself to get close to anyone, not yet. He felt his loneliness was something his own, not to be shared. Slowly his innate boyishness emerged. He began participating in sports. He was one of the best forwards in football. And in class, he joined the others in tormenting poor Mr. Bennett, their maths teacher. Gifted with a good writing style he turned in excellent essays which were often read out to the class. Still he kept mostly to himself, preferring his own company and those of his books.

It had been over a fortnight since he had got a letter from his father. It was very unusual for Mr. Bond to skip his weekly letter to Ruskin. The boy worried about his father's health. What if he was very ill and had no one to take care of him? Ruskin sat with a

book under his favourite tree in the garden, unable to read anything. He stared at the distant hills and wished he were back with his father. Just then, one of his form masters came to him.

"How about coming for a stroll with me?" he asked Ruskin.

"Well, all right," he replied, closing his book half-heartedly. He was annoyed at being interrupted during his reverie and wondered why the master suddenly needed his company for a stroll.

The master was decidedly uncomfortable and they walked silently for a while. "Ruskin, there is something I have to tell you," he began in a rush. Ruskin had the most horrible premonition. Daddy! Something had happened to Daddy...."God needed your father more than you do, and so...." his master continued in a monotone, but Ruskin didn't wait to hear any more.

His Daddy had died, died....He was furious with God. What could He possibly need his father for, except maybe for his stamp collection? How could God do this to him, taking away his only friend in the world? He ran blindly, sobbing his heart out. Back in his dormitory, he pulled out his father's letters and read them over and over. He touched them and imagined that he was touching his dear Daddy....His grief was so intense that he couldn't bring himself to talk about it to anyone, not even when the boys diffidently offered solace.

Scott was among the first to offer condolence. "Ruskin, I'm so sorry," he said. Ever since the incident in the dormitory the previous year, Scott had kept clear of Ruskin and treated him with healthy respect.

"That's all right, Scott. What had to happen had to happen," said Ruskin in a brittle voice.

His teachers decided that it would be better for him to remain in the school infirmary for a few days till he got over the shock. Ruskin took his precious letters with him. When the Headmaster Mr. Priestly came to visit him there he said, "Ruskin, God only takes away good people. You have to be brave now." At the mention of God, Ruskin began hating Him all over again. Then Mr. Priestly looked at the stack of letters on the bed. "Are they your father's letters? You should keep them in a safe place. Here, let me keep them for you. You can take them back when you go home." Too grief stricken to protest, he handed them over.

Thereafter his diary became his friend and confidante. What had begun as a journal of events, slowly turned into a record of his feelings towards them, just as his father had said. But for that, Ruskin had become quite listless during the remaining months before the vacation.

There was nothing to look forward to during the vacations, but he had to go home. The letters he had left in the safekeeping of his headmaster had always been on his mind and on the last day of school, he went to collect them.

"Sir, I have come to take my letters." He had to repeat his words twice before the Headmaster looked up from his papers.

"Letters? What letters? I don't have any of your letters," he said before bending down to his work. Ruskin was aghast.

“Sir, they are the ones you took from me when I was in the infirmary after my.....father’s....death,” the words were torn out of him, but the headmaster was not listening.

"Sir,” began Ruskin again. “Look here, boy. I am busy, so run along.”

Ruskin slowly left the room. At that moment he hated the Headmaster as he had never hated anyone before. It was almost as if his only link with his father had been severed for ever. Totally devastated, he ran out, kicking the stones in his path violently. He had no time to brood as he had to leave for home where he would be with his mother and step-father, a home without his Daddy.

In Dehradun, his step father Mr. Hari ignored him completely. Unwanted and lonelier than ever, Ruskin went for long walks in the countryside. Nature with her bounty offered him solace. If he passed the *dhobi-ghat*, Ruskin joined the washer men’s children in their games. Those were moments when Ruskin came closest to being happy.

By now, writing had become an abiding interest and he wrote about the sights he saw during his solitary walks. The birds, the trees, the sky — all found their way into his poems. He didn’t stop writing his diary either. He had found the notebook where his father had written his poems. He picked up the copy of Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, which his father had given him. He had read the book and found an echo of his own life in that of David. As he held the book a faraway look came into his eyes, ‘Writing is going to be my life’, he told himself silently.

When he returned to school, Ruskin began writing. He filled his diary with funny anecdotes about his masters. His witty phrases and word pictures brought then to life. One day during the study period, Ruskin was busy writing when he sensed someone standing by him. He closed the diary and looked up at the unsmiling face of Mr. Wilson, their dormitory master who had been featured in the pages that day.

Without a word, he went to the head of the room. “Ruskin, come here! And bring your copy along.” Fearing the worst, Ruskin took it to the master, who then proceeded to tear it up, page by page in front of the whole class. Ruskin was helpless, but he neither begged nor pleaded to be returned his diary. This incident made him more determined than ever to write.

It was the year 1947 and there was great turmoil all over the country. The echoes of Partition were felt even in Bishop Cotton High School. One day while Ruskin was sitting in the garden with a book, Azar Khan came and sat by him. “Ruskin, we are leaving,” he said. There were traces of tears in his voice. Ruskin’s head jerked up. “I think even Omar and Hanif are leaving. We will be going to Pakistan and to a new school.” He was openly crying now. Ruskin knew the pain of leaving familiar people and surroundings and he felt helplessly angry. He just sat by his friend and tried to console him, while he himself sat hurt inside. Azar was one of the close friends Ruskin had made during his stay in school. “The people I love keep leaving me,” he told himself unhappily.

The despondency didn’t show in his writings, however. They were full of humour. It was during one his creative moments that he wrote his very first story, ‘Nine Months’. It was all about one of his masters. Since Ruskin was in the habit of writing whenever he found the time or was in the mood, he had just shoved the ‘manuscript” in one of his cop-

ies. Unfortunately for him, he had submitted it for checking with the 'manuscript' still in it.

The master naturally found it and tore it up. By now, it was a familiar occurrence for Ruskin to find his creations being thus destroyed. He watched without expression as his first story found its way into the dustbin.

Ruskin now began sending his stories to various magazines. 'Illustrated Weekly' published his story while he was still in school. It was his first published story. 'My Magazine of India', a periodical published from Madras published his stories regularly. He wrote mysteries and detective stories for which he got paid the princely sum of Rs.5 each!

In the meanwhile, he wrote an incredibly funny story titled, 'My Calling'. It was about Mr. Bennett, his maths teacher who had a tough time coping with the boys. Ruskin was pretty careless about the 'manuscripts' and this one was also found, by the maths teacher himself. This time Ruskin was reported to the headmaster.

"You are warned hereby not to indulge in such activities," said the Headmaster in a severe voice. Ruskin nodded solemnly, even though he had no intentions of stopping his creative efforts. More such stories followed and perhaps as a consequence the school held back his graduation certificate.

This didn't faze Ruskin. What was a mere school leaving certificate for someone who had found his vocation?

WRITING IS HIS LIFE

Ruskin Bond was born in Kasauli in Himachal Pradesh on 19 May 1934. An Indian to the core, he has made the hills of Uttar Pradesh his home and lives in Mussoorie. He has written 30 books for children which include poems, novels and short stories. He writes for children of all ages, including teenagers. He evokes concern for the environment in his young readers. Though most of his works are autobiographical, they strike a chord in the readers' heart. His characters are the simple hill folk with whom he has made his home and struck a lifelong friendship.

His books have been translated into several European and Indian languages. His very first book, *Room on the Roof* which he wrote at the age of 17, won him the John Rhys Memorial Award in 1957. He also won the Indian Council for Child Education Award in 1987 and the Sahitya Akademi Award for Indian Literature in English in 1992.

THE GREEN GURU

(M. S. SWAMINATHAN)

Swaminathan was excited. There was going to be a big campaign to eradicate mosquitoes in Kumbakonam, a small town in Tamil Nadu, where he lived. His school

was taking part in the campaign too. Kumbakonam in those days was well known for these pests.

He went to his father. “Appa, how can we kill all the mosquitoes in this big town? It is going to be difficult!”

Dr. Sambasivan laughed at his concern. “You just wait and see, Ambi. It is going to be a great success. We are not going to do this alone. And no job is big enough if people were to join hands. The people are going to turn out in great numbers. You are going to see what the power of the people can do!” replied his father.

He was a well known surgeon of Kumbakonam and had been recently elected as the Chairman of the Municipal Corporation of the town. A socially committed citizen, he had promised the people to rid the town of mosquitoes if he were elected the Chairman. And now he was putting his promise to action. He had enlisted the help of all the schools in identifying breeding grounds of mosquitoes in their area. The Municipal Corporation would supply the disinfectant; the rest would be done by the citizens.

“Are mosquitoes such a menace to the people?” asked Swaminathan.

“Do you see that man there? See, how large his legs are! That is called elephantiasis and is caused by mosquito bites. Kumbakonam is known as the capital of elephantiasis. Shouldn’t we do something to remove that tag?” he asked Swaminathan.

“Of course, Appa.” He then got excited about the campaign again. “Our school is taking part in the campaign too! Our teacher had taken us round the area to see where these insects were breeding. He taught us about their life cycle, their breeding habits and we even saw their eggs!” he told him, eyes large with wonder.

On the day of the campaign it looked as if the entire town was out on the streets, as groups of men, women and children filled up the stagnant pools of dirty water with sand and cleaned the garbage dumps. Crude oil emulsion supplied by the Municipal Corporation was sprinkled in the sewers and open drains to prevent the in-.sects from breeding there.

Late in the evening Swaminathan came home, tired and dirty. “I bet our area is the cleanest!” he told his brothers.

The whole thing had turned into a competition between the teams of adjoining streets to see whose street was the cleanest. In the process, the filth was all cleaned up and neatly carted away to dumps outside the city. Kumbakonam had never looked or smelt so clean before! Swaminathan and his brothers were most impressed and were very proud of their father, who had organised the whole thing.

He had been right about the power of the people too! That day Swaminathan was convinced that all that was required for any programme to succeed was to make people participate in it. This lesson was to remain etched in his memory all his life.

Every year, Swaminathan and his brothers went to their native village, Monkombu in Kerala. The family owned rubber and coffee plantations there as also fields of paddy and groves of coconut. The ancestral house was filled with cousins, uncles and aunts and it was like one large fair. Swaminathan liked these annual visits very much.

There was a lot the children could do there. They played games, climbed trees and staged plays like Ramayana and Mahabharata. Though there were fights between the

cousins, there was also a lot of love — with the house overflowing with indulgent uncles and aunts and grandparents. What more could a bunch of kids ask for?

Swaminathan liked these visits for another reason too. He loved to go up to the terraced coffee plantations with his uncle and see the farming activities. He also liked the wet paddy fields and watching the women busily planting the saplings. The sight of the rhythmic movement of the hands of the women was fascinating to him. He never ceased to marvel at the straight line in which the saplings were placed. It all looked very simple to him, though.

“Uncle, could I plant some, please?” he pleaded and his uncle laughingly agreed.

“It is back breaking work, mind you!” he warned. The ten-year-old boy laughed at his words and enthusiastically began planting the seedlings but within a few minutes his back began aching. He had to quit, much to the amusement of the women who continued with their job without breaking rhythm.

“How can you work continuously like that?” he asked them with admiration.

“Oh, we have to. We get paid by the amount of work we do,” replied one old woman.

“Uncle isn’t there an easy way to plant the saplings, maybe a machine?” he asked.

“No, Ambi. If we had machines to do all work, what would happen to these workers?

How would they earn their living? In our country we have too many mouths to feed and jobs are needed to give them the food,” explained his uncle.

That set Swaminathan thinking. Things were certainly not as simple as they looked!

One day while Swaminathan and his cousins were running around the place, he heard his uncle discussing business matters with some important looking persons. He would have continued on his way, but something stopped him. They were talking about some plants dying!

“This new variety of seed we had imported was no good. The saplings have all withered away,” he heard his uncle say. Then followed a lengthy discussion which he didn’t follow.

‘Why would a seedling whither away?’ he wondered. He remembered the green patches of paddy and thought and thought, till he got the answer.

‘Of course! The poor things would have been homesick for their own country! They wouldn’t have got used to living so far away from wherever they came from/ he thought with compassion. Didn’t he himself miss his mother if she went away? This image stayed with him for a long time.

Back in Kumbakonam, Swaminathan got interested in the newspapers. They were full of news of the World War which had broken out in Europe. The reports of the war were quite exciting, almost like the Ramayana and Mahabharata wars that he and his brothers heard from their mother. Only the weapons seemed to be different. While Arjuna and Bhima used bows and arrows, maces and javelins, the modern soldiers used guns, tanks, rockets and submarines. „ But what disturbed him were the reports of deaths. There was nothing mythical about this War! It was one thing to hear about the army of Kauravas being killed and gloat over it, and totally another thing to hear of real persons dying in the battlefields of Europe and Africa.

By the time he was 15, he had completed his matriculation in 1940. It was decided that he would join the B.Sc. (Bachelor of Science) course in Travancore. These four years of his life proved to be a turning point in his life.

The war was spreading all over the globe. Swaminathan poured over *The Hindu, a* popular paper in those days. He not only read the news but also editorials and articles written by eminent persons. Heated discussions followed among the students about various matters, mostly about the state of the country. The Freedom Movement was at its peak at that time. Their current hero was Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

The college had a strong students' union and they organised a protest rally against British -high-handedness. "We need to use force to throw out the oppressed," thundered one of the orators. Everyone cheered him lustily. The nation was in the grip of the Quit India Movement and the speeches were incendiary and reactionary. But India was in the grip of another catastrophe — the Bengal famine, which was claiming thousands of lives.

One day Swaminathan met George Kurien, a member of the student union. "We are having a debate in the auditorium tomorrow about the impact of the War on the Indian economy," he informed. "Be sure to be present."

Swaminathan didn't need a second invitation. He liked these debates and discussions. The arguments were stimulating and energising. He got a new perspective of various matters at these debates. Though he generally attended the meetings as a spectator, this time he decided to participate in the debate. He would speak about the effect the war was having on the food grain production. Bengal was already in the grip of the famine and the war was compounding the misery of the people.

There was another reason for his decision. He had read an article in *The Hindu* that very morning and had been shaken by it.

"Thousands of people are dying outside the gates of the Great Eastern Hotel while a privileged few wine and dine inside its portals!" said a news story. It went on to describe the grinding poverty of the people of Bengal and how they foraged for scraps to beat hunger. The article said how food was wasted by the wealthy patrons and thrown in the garbage. The story conjured up such horrible vision in his mind's eye that he was moved to tears.

The 17-year-old began to seriously contemplate the plight of his poor countrymen. 'When there is a calamity like famine or war, it is not the rich who die. It is the poor masses,' he thought.

So emotionally charged was he that day that he held centre-stage during the debate. He argued that the only way to counter calamities like war was to build a stockpile of food grains, for which it was necessary to first increase production of the same, ".....it is not as if we don't have sufficient natural resources. If only we worked hard, we could not only feed ourselves but also other countries. So why are we not doing it? Man-made problems like these have to have man-made solutions," he quoted his father. "Why don't we get on with the job of producing food for our people?" he asked in deep anguish. The audience cheered his passionate speech. But something had changed for Swaminathan that day.

"Why don't you take up agriculture? After all, your family is into farming, isn't it? You could experiment on your ideas then," said one of his classmates when he saw how keen his friend was about the subject.

“No, Kesavan. If I became a farmer, it would only make me worry about the crops and about the fate of my granaries. I want to find out how to increase the yield per acre of land without discarding our traditional methods of farming. I need to do a lot of research but that would not be limited to the laboratory. The research findings would be used on the farms by every farmer....But first of all, I have to study agriculture once I complete my B.Sc.”

‘I must concentrate on genetics. This science can be used on plants too, to develop better strains of crops,’ he thought. Once his mind was made up, he began working towards finding the answers. He felt certain that he could duplicate the results achieved by Western countries in increasing agricultural yields dramatically through better farming methods and improved seed varieties.

He talked incessantly about his ideas to his close friends.

“Do you know that the average Indian farmer has just a tiny bit of land? Just imagine how easy life would be for him if he could double, maybe treble the yield on his small patch of land! To do this, he needs better seeds, which have to be developed here or at least adapted to suit the conditions of this country....” He remembered the scene from his uncles’ farm, years ago — the image of the withered foreign seedlings which he had thought then to have been ‘homesick’. He shook his head. That would never happen, not if he could help it.

“.....otherwise they will whither away in the new soil and climate. Oh, it is all so challenging and exciting! Kesavan, there need never be famines once we have a surfeit of food grains and people need never die on the roads for lack of food...” he said with feeling.

“How do you hope to achieve all this, Swaminathan? Ours is a big country,” said Kesavan with concern. “I have seen the power of the people, at work...” again, he was remembering that day from his childhood when an entire town had come forward to eradicate mosquitoes and disease. “...All one has to do is to create an awareness among the masses. Once the movement is on, it won’t be possible to stop the progress. Won’t India then be called the granary of the world?”

His eyes sparkled as he spoke on, little realising that he would one day be the architect of a revolution, a revolution of the green kind.

SON OF THE SOIL

Born on 7 August 1925, Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, a leading agricultural scientist of India, is a very respected name throughout the world and especially in developing countries for his pioneering work in the field of agricultural genetics.

Among his many contributions to Indian agriculture, are his work on the high yielding varieties of wheat, the development of strategies to manage natural disasters (famine and drought), the collection and conservation of plant genetic resources, particularly of rice and wheat, and the promotion of job-oriented economic growth which helps the poor, especially the women, and which lays stress upon the conservation of nature. He was mainly responsible for the Green Revolution between 1960-82 which brought self sufficiency in food to India.

He served as Director General of the International Rice Research Institute, Philippines from 1982-88. He has been honoured with at least 34 doctorates from various Universities in India and abroad. Among his innumerable awards, both national and international, are the Padma Shri (1967), the Padma Bhushan (1972), and the Padma Vibhushan (1989), the Ramon Magsasay Award "(1971), the Albert Einstein World Science Award (1986), the first World Food Prize (1987), which is considered the equivalent of the Nobel Prize in Agriculture. He is currently heading, in an honorary capacity, the Dr. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in Chennai, which is dedicated to rural and agricultural development based on traditional and frontier technology.

ALL THE WORLD HER STAGE

(SAI PARANJPYE)

It was a familiar sight to the residents of Pune — a plump little girl of about six or seven, skipping along with a distinguished looking elderly gentleman who sported a flourishing, bushy moustache. They laughed, talked and had a great time. It was a daily sight.

The little girl was Sai and the gentleman was the famous educationist and mathematician, Sir R. P. Paranjpye — India's first *Senior Wrangler* and Sai's grandfather — Appa.

As they walked, Appa put simple mathematical riddles to Sai and also related endless fables to her, including tales from Hans Christian Anderson, Grimm's fairy tales, Arabian Nights, Birbal's stories, and so on. Sai naturally preferred the fairy tales to the sums!

A Wrangler was one who passed the mathematics exam from Cambridge University. The one who lopped in the exam was 'Senior Wrangler'.

"Tell me a story, Appa," Sai said, one day, as they set out.

"No," said Appa grimly, "today, you tell me one."

And she did. It was a fairy tale, replete with dragons and princes, talking parrots and hidden gold. Sai completed her tale with ".....and they lived happily ever after!"

"Hmph!" said Appa. "Quite interesting! Where did you read it?"

"I didn't! I made it up!" cried Sai. Her grandfather was suitably impressed. That was perhaps her first flight of fancy, and it was the beginning of a wonderful world of creativity. By the time she was just eight, she had published her first book of fairy tales, called 'Mulancha Meva'.

Books and Sai were inextricably bound together. The Paranjpye house had a whole room devoted to books. It was a wonderful library. There were books in many languages including, Greek, Latin, German and French, along with stacks of novels and literary works in English and Marathi. Sai didn't understand the foreign languages and most of even the English and Marathi ones were too difficult for her to understand. But she loved the smell of the books and stood gazing at them with awe. She knew that her grandfather

kept the very rare and special books right at the top and one had to climb a ladder to reach them. They held a special fascination for her, even if she could only gape at them.

There was another reason for her interest in the library. She had her own little corner, where she had put her collection — the Dr. Doolittle series, all Enid Blyton adventures and mysteries, the Twins' series and many more. The collection kept growing, because whenever anyone asked her what she wanted for a present, she would immediately say, "A book!" She was not a spoilt child and never indulged by either her parents or grandfather, but when it came to books, she got whichever one she asked for.

Appa was an important person in her little life and they spent many interesting hours together. Apart from the daily walk, they shared another ritual — Sai read to him when he shaved. He used an old fashioned safety razor to shave and used a different one each day of the week. As he lathered his face, he would say, "Now, let's see! Today is Tuesday, so it-is the red one."

And then as he shaved, he would say, "Today, you read *Ivanhoe."* She had to read aloud from some literary work of authors like Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott or Jane Austen. She found this an ordeal, because he would keep interrupting her to correct her diction.

"You have to pronounce 'perseverance' like, so," and he would make her repeat it the right way.

Sometimes she had to read the same line twenty times in order to get the correct pronunciation. And when she did, he would say,

"Very good! Now read the paragraph again!"

"All these interruptions make me lose the thread of the story!" she complained, but to no avail.

Sai's love for books grew with her. Books were revered objects in the Paranjpye household. One day Sai stepped on a book by mistake as she rushed into the library. It had been knocked from its place in the shelf and had been lying there unnoticed by anyone.

"Stop right there!" ordered her grandfather. Sai froze. "Do you know what you just did? You kicked knowledge, that's what you did! Now ask forgiveness of the book!"

Sai bent meekly and did *namaskar* to the book. The same punishment was in order when he discovered any dog-eared book. She knew that she had broken the rules and had to bear the consequences. Sai learnt to respect this sentiment early in life.

It was not all fun for her. There were times when she was quite lonely. Being an only child, she missed having a brother or sister of her own. So she had to depend upon her playmates, who were usually not as enthusiastic about including her in their games. The reason was Sai's plumpness.

"You can't run with us, Sai," Chandu would explain.

"You slow down the game," said Meera, not unkindly.

"You never keep up; you are too fat!" added Devyani.

Sai's face crumpled and she sat glumly by the sidelines, watching her friends laugh and play happily. A little frown creased her brows, as she thought furiously about how

she could not only be accepted by her peers, but also be the centre of activity, where her slowness or size did not matter. And soon, her face brightened.

"Ha! I know of a lovely game," she shouted, ".....of hidden treasure on a magic island....."

By then, the others had stopped their game and were listening intently. Sai didn't miss it because she was watching them from the corner of her eyes! Hiding a smile, she continued, "...now, let me see.....We could have two teams — the goodies and the baddies."

In no time, the others had crept back to where she was sitting. Sai, meanwhile, was thinking up a fascinating scenario for an adventure. They were to enact the whole thing. Sai took over the direction. Soon, the children were wrapping stones in aluminium foil to resemble treasures which were to be hidden and maps with dues were quickly drawn. Sai took care of the smallest detail-So exciting was the game that it turned out to be something like a play enactment. It got intricate and the children played it for more than a week. All through the week, Sai bossed over the others because only she knew how the game would turn out! The children couldn't do without her, nor could they complain about her being fat or slow! Sai was the centre of the action finally! However, after a week or so, the others got tired of the game. "Let's play something else!" said someone and again they took off, without Sai. She had a task in hand! The next game had to be even more interesting. She invented another one and sure enough, the kids were all back. This went on, without the other children being aware of her ruse and all had a great time! Needless to say, she was the little director orchestrating all the action.

Sai's mother, Shakuntala Paranjpye was the other influence in her young life. She was a rather strict disciplinarian, but did it with loving firmness. She had great plans for her daughter and arranged for her to learn all kinds of things — to play tennis, classical music, recite Sanskrit *shlokas* and write. Sai was not always too enthusiastic about the activities chalked up for her by her mother.

"You have to climb that hill today. How else will you lose your weight?" she asked her.

"Oh, Ai, do I have to?" Sai said, but obeyed her, nevertheless. Though her mother indulged her in the matter of books, Sai couldn't get her way in everything. One of them was having a dolls' wedding.

She was always being invited to the doll's wedding of her young friends. This is a traditional game played by Maharashtrian girls, with the' children conducting the 'marriage' of a bride doll and a groom doll, complete with 'mantras'. Eatables, which usually included *gud* (jaggery) and *poha* (beaten rice), was provided by the mothers, happy to see the kids occupied and out of mischief. Sai loved these mock marriages enormously and pined to have a 'wedding' of her own. After attending every dolls' wedding, she came home and pestered her mother to be allowed to conduct one of her own.

Her mother, however, thought it a very silly activity and refused her permission.

"Oh, you NEVER let me have any fun!" she pouted. "Oh, please, do let me have my own to do! I will be good! I promise! Honest!"

She kept pestering her mother, till one day, unable to put her off any longer, she finally relented. “Oh, all right! You want a wedding, you will get a wedding — one you will never forget!”

And, she set out planning the details of the dolls’ wedding herself. She brought out bits of silks and brocades for making the dresses of the ‘bride’ and ‘groom’. Sai and her friends had a great time making the dresses and jewellery, down to the pink turban of the ‘groom’ and the anklets of the ‘bride’. This went on for about a month.

Then one day, when she came back from school, she found a band master talking to her mother. “Mummy, who is getting married?” she asked.

“Your doll, that’s who!” replied her mother with a smile.

“Oh, you mean we are going to have a real band for the wedding? My dolls’ wedding?” she couldn’t believe what her mother said.

“Yes. Didn’t I say you’d have a proper dolls’ wedding? Now run along!”

On D-day, the whole house looked like a real marriage hall. Sweets and savories were prepared for the ‘guests’ and Say dressed in the traditional Maharashtrian style as befitting the bride’s ‘mother.’ Then the band arrived and the groom, resplendent in a pink turban and silk and brocade dress was set upon a real white steed! All the children of the locality took part in the procession which was being led by a grand bandmaster and his troupe. The dolls’ wedding conducted by Say was truly memorable.

The little girl so fond of drama and adventure and fantasy grew up to become one of India’s leading filmmakers and theatre personalities.

FROM PLAY FANTASIES TO FILM DIRECTION

National Awards, inducing the one for Best Hindi Film.

She is currently the Chairperson of the National Centre of Films for Children and Young People.

Sai Paranjpye was born in Lucknow and grew up in Pune. Having been born into a family of intellectuals, she naturally took to reading and writing at a very early age, getting her first book of fairy tales published when she was just eight! As she grew up, she got involved with the Children’s Theatre in Pune.

She began making documentary films and children’s films in the early 70s, which won her many awards. Her first film *‘Jadooka Shankh’* (1971) was made for the Children’s Film Society. Her other films for children are *‘Sikander’* (1973) and *‘Drakhi’* (1989). She has also made several documentaries and short films. Among them, *‘Angootha Chhap’*, was on adult literacy which has been widely circulated in villages by the Government of India. *‘Chadian’*, another short film won her the National Award for the Best Documentary with a social purpose. Her films are all socially relevant with sensitive themes.

She has also directed several television serials and feature films. *‘Sparsh’* (1979), her first full-length feature film won her three National Awards, including the one for the best Hindi Film.

She is currently the Chairperson of the National Centre for Films for Children and Young People.