

Gift of Love



by Roshan Lalkaka

To our youngest & smartest
Hootakshi & Robert,
To remind of the good times we
have had

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by
Roshan Lalkaka

Mama

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Published by :

Rear Admiral (Retd.) Sarosh J. Lalkaka, PVSM
3/A, Dolphin Apartments,
Pilot Bunder Road, Colaba,
Mumbai - 400 005.

Printed at :

Nitesh Enterprises
221, Bora Bazar,
4th Floor,
Fort,
Mumbai - 400 001.

*For in the dew of little things
the heart finds its morning
and is refreshed.*

– Khalil Gibran

Introduction

When my beloved wife Roshan passed away on June 4, 2005, I found myself alone after 61 years of togetherness. One day, while clearing her writing table, I chanced upon two large books written by her – one on her life as a naval officer's wife covering a period of three decades, and the other one, dedicated to our children and grand-children, containing charming vignettes from her childhood.

As I looked through the neatly hand-written pages, I was amazed. I showed the books to my cousin Sherene Neville Vakil, and we felt that this wealth of material was worth preserving for posterity. Those who knew her well will feel that she is actually speaking to them.

This book, a selection from her extensive notings, has been compiled and produced with the help of Sherene and Neville, and I am sure our children and grand-children who knew her most intimately will love reading it and passing on Roshan's life experiences to their little ones.

June 30, 2006

Sarosh J. Lalkaka

Letter to my children

My dearest children and grandchildren,

In this book are little events from my childhood and before marriage. Some of these you already know, as I have often talked to you about them. I thought I would put them down on paper so that in years to come, you would get an idea of the life we led and our times.

I am able to draw on the feelings I have had from the time I was five or six. So many things I was exposed to, so many every day experiences minutely observed, intensely lived with heightened senses. A familiar scene, a familiar sound, a familiar time of day, immediately brings back to my mind beautiful moments I have enjoyed. I have also put down my experiences of 35 years of married life in the Navy in different places.

I have loved the birds, trees, fields, sounds and scents of our vast country. Nature has always brought me intense happiness - taken me sometimes to the realm where I have experienced pure joy. With me, writing is a compulsion, to be brought out for pleasure.

I have enjoyed life to the fullest with my family, husband, children and friends, enjoyed my work creating things I love to do. I am satisfied and happy that I will be in the hearts of those I love and know me well.

God bless you all. With all my love,

Yours for ever,

Mummy

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Oleanders and Ixoras

I close my eyes – before me stretch vistas of sleepy gardens sheathed in the bluish grey of morning, lawns soaked with dew, pink bunches of oleanders (we used to call them pink tagars then) and white ixora clusters drooping over low walls and garden gates. A row of these trees lined the shrubbery behind the walls, making the air fragrant with a woody sweet scent. Scenes from a bygone era of early morning outings with my ayah. A quiet road, the only people in sight were little children or ayahs pushing perambulators down the wide footpath. We would pass bungalow after bungalow with vast front lawns, where now stand saree shops and the Income-Tax Office buildings – The Queens Road.

The railway lines across the road with fewer trains hardly ever disturbed us. In fact the train whistle echoing in the silence of the night was pleasing.

On the other side of the railway lines, starting from Marine Lines, was a narrow untarred sandy road with benches at intervals, leading almost up to the Churchgate Station, from where it broke – curved and opened out into a sandy beach – the Churchgate beach. A few yards away further west of this sandy road, was a scrubby bit of reclaimed land with a barbed wire fence and beyond that the sea. No Marine Drive. No tall buildings. The sea was so close, hardly 40 yards from Queens Road. We could hear the swishing of the waters from our houses.

The small Churchgate Station had sloping red roofs like a chalet. From Churchgate, then on to Backbay was a long stretch of low built up stony plinth facing the Oval. No Eros or Backbay houses. This low wall went almost up to the P.V.M. Gymkhana's tennis courts (which no longer exist) where it suddenly ended with a little revolving gate. There was a railway crossing opposite the Bandstand. The man in charge of the crossing blew his whistle when it was all clear. Through

this gate, crossing the railway lines, we went across to the famous Golwalla and European Swimming Baths where now we have the Sachivalaya Gymkhana and a few other buildings. Then on to the Foreshore Road where there was nothing, except a small beach next to the Golwalla Baths.

On the other side of the Backbay wall were the railway lines, going to Colaba. Adjoining the railway lines was a bit of vacant land and then a sandy riding track almost near the sea, on the partially reclaimed land. This track started at the Wellington Mews adjoining the famous Wodehouse Bridge under which the train wended its way to the Colaba Station, via the back of P.V.M. Gymkhana. The riding track almost followed the railway lines at a little distance and ended at the Churchgate beach.

The small beach on Foreshore Road was popular with the Colaba residents. It also had a rocky embankment right up to the beginning of Cuffe Parade to keep the sea out. In the night no one dared to go to the Foreshore Road as it was dimly lit with old fashioned square glass lamps on a pole with little kerosene chimney holders burning in them. I still remember, before dark, the lamp-lighter going from post to post, climbing up monkey fashion, opening the lamp door and lighting it and at times pouring oil with a thin spouted can. All along from Marine Lines to Churchgate to Foreshore Road on these narrow untarred roads near the sea were these dim lampposts, on the westward side of the railway lines.

Now I must go back to oleanders and ixoras, my old favourite flowers. A whiff of their exhilarating scent transports me straight to those enchanting days of childhood – to Bomay the Beautiful, as it was.

The Old Fakir

What a beautiful thing waking up in the morning could be for a small girl. I remember the far away times when early in the morning, almost before dawn, when nearly half asleep a sonorous voice was heard on our road to the accompaniment of a tiny hand-drum (*dug-dug*) which had a mellow subdued sound. To me almost as synonymous with dawn, as the crowing of the cock in the next bungalow.

With this tiny *dug-dug* in one hand and a small square lantern with alternate panels of red and clear glass hanging from his other hand, a tall stately Fakir passed by, showering blessings and collecting alms. He wore a high black Muslim fur cap, a white long robe of muslin with a checked lungi and a triangular scarf round his neck, his flowing beard constantly moving. In the utter silence of the dawn his melodious voice, as he chanted his *kalam* always got me out of bed.

Mother would keep a big two pice coin (a *dhubboo*) ready for me to give him daily. Once that was given, a thousand blessings followed in a sing-song fashion in his low bass voice. What interested me was his *dug-dug* which he kept on twirling all the while.

I loved to watch him with my head resting on the window sill, tip-toeing to follow his red light till the end of the road, till he became a tiny speck and disappeared from my sight. By then, dawn was over and morning light had faintly spread. Gone are these enchanting characters from Bombay and gone are the quiet sleepy roads.

In one of the nearby houses was an aviary. Many Muslims of those days were bird-fanciers. They also had a perch for their cockatoos, hanging from their terrace. I loved to watch the brightly coloured cockatoos. Such big birds, red, green, yellow and pure white, holding on to the large round tray-like perch; shoving each other when peanuts were strewn, screeching and fluttering, the whole thing looked like a colourful merry-go-round as the tray which hung from chains twirled around with their scrambling activity.

Wodehouse Bridge

The old Colaba bridge had a special corner in my heart. Years after the railway station was demolished it remained there as a relic of the trains which used to pass beneath it on to the Colaba Station, the present site of the Naval Transport and Badhwar Park Depot. Although the Wodehouse Bridge was the main thoroughfare leading to Wodehouse Road and Cuffe Parade, there was not much traffic, as this side of Colaba was sparsely populated. Then in 1935 the narrow Foreshore Road was tarred and expanded and finally made open to all traffic. The unsafe bridge became out of bounds to all vehicular traffic and to the delight of Colabaites it became another promenade.

The bridge was lined on both sides with gulmohur and karanj trees. When the new baby karanj leaves came out in March, pale green and glossy, it was a joyous sight to slowly come up the bridge from the Gymkhanas and behold a grand view of the sea from the hump of the bridge (near the present Lalit Building), especially at sunset. There was a row of benches near the bridge railing facing the sea and Foreshore Road below. The regulars who came out in the evenings sat admiring the view, and children played hopscotch in the centre of the bridge, while teenagers took a stroll on the opposite footpath going up and down the bridge doing their rounds. Wellington Mews (where they are just building a hotel) was there, at the foot of the bridge, but no Cusrow Baug or Badhwar Park. These were all vast open stretches with overgrown grass and big trees, with the old railway tracks still rotting under the grass.

No fisherman or his boats. A small sandy beach below the bridge across the Foreshore Road. There was a rocky wall, an embankment which started just below the Cuffe Parade Promenade and went right up to the Golwalla Baths. People who came to the beach sat on this wall and some even swam in the sea.

Gulmohurs and Cassia

My sister Amy, who was in the last year at school doing her matriculation, had to go early in the morning for her private tuition twice a week. Hence I had to go with her even though no juniors came before 9.30 am. I was in the prep or perhaps first standard and had to spend my time all by myself in the garden.

I vividly recall one such day – a hot summer day. There must have been a shower in the night as the ground was still damp, giving off the fragrance of dry earth stirring from its parched state with the first sprinkling of water, wafting its intoxicating scent. It was warm, but under the shade of the spreading gulmohur and pink cassia trees in one corner of the garden, there was a fairy carpet waiting for me, where I loved to romp under the heavily laden branches of pink blossoms which stretched out gracefully.

During these months there would be a carpet of red and pink petals along with yellow crunchy crescents, the stamens of cassia. I loved collecting the red petals to make tiny posies. I specially enjoyed crunching on the sweet sour centres of the crescents, savouring their scent and taste. It was a bit scary to be alone with the offices and schools closed all around us. However, in the distance I could see the malis watering the plants with a hose.

This was a popular corner as our big hopscotch square was marked right there. Later, the older girls would crowd around spoiling the beauty of this rain dampened colourful magic spread.

This was my first and most intimate introduction to these trees. They were Bombay's pride and glory, growing all over in gardens and along roads. Lined on either side of the maidans, the Esplanade and Cross, there was a big stretch of red. In some places a double row of gulmohurs shaded the wide footpaths for people to walk to and from offices in the Fort area.

Impressions of a girl of seven or eight are very strong; at least in my case I recollect every detail, every moment so stimulating.

In those days we went to school in our horse-drawn carriage or *gari* to be replaced within a couple of years by a car. From the high seats of our carriage we could leisurely survey the lush green grass on either side of the maidans with a little white tent here and there where cricket was being played. The white and dark pink trams went passing by, slowly moving on their silvery rails in the centre of the road. Occasionally we would stop to give lifts to a couple of school friends, packing ourselves tightly in the two seats. The lacey red topped trees all along the road were interspersed at long intervals with yellow laburnums, their delicate bunches hanging like gold chandeliers. No hurry, no scurry, no noise, shops or squatters but a clean clear road, wide footpaths with a canopy of red, gold and green.

Fairy Toadstool

I must have been five or six years old going with my little first *Bal Pothi* (book) to learn Gujarati from a Parsi lady who stayed in a terrace flat. The entrance to her place was through an open corridor with iron railings and outside the wrought iron grating jutting out was the red tiled sloping roof of the floor below.

Rainwater had collected between the railing and the roof and the distant view was fresh after the rain, dotted with towering palm trees and sloping rooftops. Green grass shoots appeared from here and there on the tiled roof below. It was here that I first saw a little toadstool (wild mushroom) just outside on the edge of the railing. Ayah said it was *zehar* (poison) and not to touch it, but I was spellbound. I sat on my heels watching it, transfixed. For me only the water puddle and toadstool mattered, imagining that a fairy might be sitting there every night, so deeply entrenched were the fairies in my life then. We lived on fairy stories and other children's stories at that age. My childlike imagination wove exquisite pictures.

There were stories and tales as varied as can be. My brother read aloud to me tales from Anderson and Grimm. My father loved relating episodes from the *Shahnama* and *Mahabharata*. We had lots of books with beautiful illustrations. One of my most favourite ones was *Shakuntala*, illustrated with exquisite lithographs. There was an old Parsi lady, Navazbai, who came to work in our house from time to time, cooking specialities for special days when religious ceremonies were performed. She had a fund of old traditional Indian fairy tales handed down orally from generation to generation. My brother and I would gather round her in the evenings and listen to those well loved folk tales.

Having an older sister and brother and parents who were fond of reading, there were always stories read aloud in the night before we

went to bed. We looked forward to that reading hour. This practice went on for years, till I left school and got married. Fairy stories progressing into classical fiction, read serially. Autobiographies, philosophy, Vivekananda volumes and a wide range of books which were published. Usually my brother or I read them aloud or my mother, when there were books from the *Shahnama*.

Happy childhood memories keep the past alive. What a wealth of refinement and culture shared, ideas exchanged. Things we remember never die. The rich quality of life lived then continues to influence one's entire life.

Shopping

Like most ladies, Mamma and Masoo* were passionately fond of sarees and jewellery. Many Saturday mornings we went on shopping excursions. Being the youngest, I was always included, as Amy had either her homework to finish or one of her activity classes to attend. Earlier we went in our horse-drawn carriage, being driven through busy streets. The open carriage afforded a grand view of all that went on around us in shops and streets. A little later, when I was about nine, the carriage was replaced by a saloon box-like car in which at first I felt hemmed in.

The shop I looked forward to most was at Zaveri Bazar, the old Narotamdas Bhau (much before they moved to Opera House), who were our family jewellers. As soon as we entered two senior men in immaculate white dhotis and silk shirts came forward with cheery smiles to greet us like old friends. What attracted me to that place was the gorgeous display in their showcases. On the bottom shelf, which came up to my height, were intricately carved huge models of ships, elephants with a howdah, houses, camels and caskets, all made from silver, inlaid in parts with gold, minutely covered with filigree designs. Whilst the two ladies got busy examining and discussing their orders, I stood transfixed at the showcase observing each and every article. I could never understand why we never bought them. I was told they were made for the Maharajas or Viceroy as presentation articles.

**Masoo was my mother's elder sister almost 15 to 18 years older than her and they were inseparable. She was almost like a mother to my Mamma and as she had no children, she and my uncle, whom we called Dad, were like our own parents. We loved Masoo and Daddy as much as we loved our Mamma and Papa. All of us were attached to each other. One can say they became like our grand-parents.*

Near the jewellers was the famous Amichand Halwai shop, which was our next halt. Amichand was famous for his Karachi *halwas* and *burfis* which were ordered by *thalas* (trayfuls) on Daddy's birthday or big festivals, to be sent to various relations and friends. During our fleeting visit we would usually buy freshly made hot *doodhy halwa* or small *jalebies* straight out of the *karhai*. The pure ingredients gave off a rich aroma.

Then there were two or three favourite saree shops we regularly visited. One of them was Hassarams, importers of Chinese brocade, French broches and Swiss embroidered georgettes. Here we got the most effusive welcome. A chair was specially brought for Masoo, whilst Mamma and I sat on the long white mattress covered with white sheets with bolsters to lean on.

One after the other *thans* were opened and spread on the *takhat*, for us to admire and select. Swiss hand embroidered georgettes heavily skirted in beautiful designs of flowers, vines and leaves, edged with Swiss Guipure lace in beautiful colours. French broches in gorgeous shades of orange, pink and gold. Chinese embroidered silks with figures and pagoda scenes. It certainly was a difficult choice.

Every time we went the proprietor said in a very confidential voice that he had something very special and new kept aside just for us. It was then produced with due solemnity, his men holding out the saree for us to admire at different angles.

At last the final selection was made. Not just one – but one from this *than* and from that and this went on till seven or eight were packed for each one of us, including myself who had till then never worn a saree! They said it was good to start a collection at a young age and already several were kept away carefully for me.

The visit came to an end, pleasantries were exchanged, cold drinks were served. It was past lunch time when we came home satiated, with a carload of most heavenly things.

My School - and the Pigeons

Grey rough stone building, the entire frontage covered with an ivy-like creeper of small dark thick leaves. Wide open verandas, circular pillars, Gothic windows with decorative arches, that was my school building. I had a great attachment to it – I knew its each and every corner. The single slender coconut palm tree which was taller than our three storeys. Shrubs and trees, neat little borders of coleus edging the colourful croton shrubs and flower beds. Near the red iron railing there was a shrubbery of white tagar, pink oleander and duranta with its bunches of tiny orange balls, all trees once so popular in Bombay.

During lunch recess we ran to corner for ourselves the pinkish stone veranda seat facing the road or walked up and down the garden path, sharing secrets, discussing homework.

Going up the enormous winding staircase via the equally enormous school bell hanging in its wooden stand, we passed the elongated arched windows and sometimes sat in pairs on their deep window sills, chattering in whispers.

We had a very dedicated set of teachers headed by our most wonderful principal Miss Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya (sister of Sarojini Naidu). I was lucky to come under her influence since she was a friend of the family, particularly fond of Masoo, my aunt who was like a second mother to us. Miss Chatto, as we girls used to refer to her, took me under her wing and encouraged my latent talent for dramatics, poetry and things Indian. She used to come to our house and I spent many, many holidays with her. Her fiery, patriotic conversation inspired me.

The most interesting and forbidding part of our school was the small staircase at the back, the entrance of which was behind the washrooms at the end of the building. We girls felt both curious and

creepy to go anywhere near it, as it was supposed to be haunted. From the open entrance we got a musty stale whiff of pigeons' droppings. On the small arched windows, which lighted the dark staircase, we perpetually saw pigeons flapping their wings, building nests in-between the bannisters. One day feeling adventurous my friend and I ventured a little further, went up the steps to the first floor and saw ghostly storerooms full of cobwebs. The ever present monotonous moaning of the pigeons softly complaining made it both eerie and over-powering. On the staircase wall, above the slit windows were many little decorative open circles where the pigeons had made their permanent homes. We rushed down in fright when we heard some rustling from the room. That was the only attempt to explore the hidden side. We never went anywhere near it again.

Then there was the fairy like story Papa had spun, when I was small. If I brushed my teeth sparkling clean every morning, the pigeon which sat on the ledge of my bathroom window would lay an anna for me to put in my piggy-bank. He would stretch and bend and bring out the coin so convincingly that for a long time I believed the magical tale. Even now when I hear pigeons cooing on our veranda ledge, scenes from my school days flash before my eyes as from a film reel.

Sounds

Sounds from the past, some of them so evocative, bring back moments I have enjoyed.

Where has the flute player gone, who used to sit at the end of the road on a garden wall, playing a plaintive air on his *basuri*? I used to love listening to his liquid smooth notes in the quiet of the grey dusk. It seemed a whole tale was being unfolded.

We used to often come across these players all over Bombay. Generally they came from Gujarat's villages, working as domestics and when entertainment was not so commercial as it is today, they kept up their old traditional folk music as a pastime.

So also the minstrel – we seldom see him now. With an old *aki-tara* poised on his shoulder, he sang in his native tongue of *vir bahadurs*, floods and droughts. The twang of the string and beat of the castanets (*chipya*) accompanied his ditty. The old people in our house could follow the words and told us what the ballad was all about. This music seemed like echoes from history – a lovely plaintive tune, so lyrical.

Construction workers building houses no longer sing as they used to. They had some special chants as they passed bricks or sand baskets. They sang in unison, a throaty sing-song. To a child it was interesting to watch them swaying rhythmically as they beat the gravel to smoothen the ground, holding on to a long rod attached to a metal disc.

Early in the morning when I was waiting near the window for my friend Tara to join me for a walk on Marine Drive, I used to love listening to the clang, clang clinking clatter of the milkmen's cans as they passed on their cycles, singing merrily in the grey hush of the morning. The

street lights were still on. The beauty of the daybreak was enhanced with their *bhajan*-like songs.

Whenever I hear temple bells at sunset, in my mind I see the slopes of Hanging Gardens, people rushing down the many winding roads to be out before closing time. The temple bells of Babulnath just ring and ring non-stop with urgency. It's a sweet memory of my visit to Hanging Gardens as a little girl accompanied by Maneck, our elder cousin.

On my birthday sitting with my mother in the fire temple for *machi* before sunrise, I used to love listening to the mellow big bell in the sanctum, resounding as the priest prayed our *machi* aloud. At that silent hour when it was neither bright outside nor too dark, it created an awe-inspiring feeling. A prayer seemed to ascend with each strike of the vibrating silver bell.

Another very special memory in this connection is of numerous sparrows chirping in the bushes in the garden of an agiary in Andheri. During a certain month, Masoo and Daddy visited almost all fire temples in Bombay. When they went to Andheri, they always took me as I loved the long drive and the setting of the agiary in the interior of a wooded road. This most quiet noiseless agiary was filled with some delightful sounds. Outside on the veranda, the slight clank of silver utensil as water was taken out to wash hands, the quick splash of water as hands were washed, the little cheep, cheep chirpings echoing in the empty halls, along with the echoing chant of the Dastoorji and the measured strike of the high pitched little bell. It was like a sanctuary for birds.

I had a tremendous allure for the hand winding music-box, or organs as they were commonly known. Whenever we went to my mother's aunt's house, I would remain glued to that little box listening to the tinkling notes of many old folk tunes. It was placed on a jutting out

enclosed veranda over the portico, overlooking the garden, a place where I could never be disturbed.

My thoughts go back to Masoo's bunch of silver keys and the jingling of her gold bangles. The slightest shifting of the keys and I knew Masoo was in her room. From the jingling of her bangles we could guess if she was in the dining room or in her bedroom. It was a silvery note so cheery and welcome.

Oh there are so many other sounds I have enjoyed. The koel's beckoning call in summer, lapping of the water at low tide, the gurgling stream when we went to the hills, the mellow cow bells of Ooty and a host of others which are still with us as of old.

Masterji

During my school days many families engaged a private tutor for a couple of hours every evening to supervise the children's homework. Generally they were timid looking young men with funny mannerisms and could not control their young students.

We had one Parsi Master who started coming to our house to coach Amy in Maths during her Matriculation class. In the last half hour he went over my brother's homework and side by side on the table gave me writing work although I hardly had any homework as I was in the first standard.

God had not endowed him with good looks. He was short, almost a midget, with a flat ridge on his nose and when he laughed (mostly at silly jokes) he could not control himself. He went on and on in his neighing fashion which in turn provoked us to more laughter. One terrible habit he had was to rock his chair on its hind legs, much to our annoyance. When he came too close to examine our work, he reeked of stale perspiration which I just could not bear.

One day I told my brother that we must somehow stop the Master from coming too close to us or rocking the chair. I had an idea. I gave T. a piece of string and told him that when the Master was attending to Amy, he should tie the leg of Master's chair with the table. My brother readily agreed. At the appropriate time my brother bent down and started fumbling with the string. I was standing some distance away watching all the fun. When Master turned left inquiring "What are you doing my boy?" T. blurted out how he had been instructed by me and for what reasons!!

I burst out laughing. So did my sister. The old man looked at me sternly shaking his forefinger and said, "Don't do it again. I forgive you because you are still a child." Anyway, this incident did have an effect. He stopped rocking or coming too close to us. We changed his chair, replacing it with an old heavy wooden one.

Woodyard

It was already dusk when we returned from our evening outing. Masoo and Mamma were discussing the next day's menu with the cook when he mentioned that there was hardly any wood left for the stove. A load of wood had to be quickly ordered for the week.

The woodyard was in a lonely area quite far from our house and Ayah was going there to place an order for the next day. She gave me a mischievous glance almost as if to say that I was being left out. I knew I was not allowed to go there. Somehow, just this once, with sheer persistence, I succeeded with my entreaties and clutching Ayah's hand stepped out with great excitement, half scared, heart beating rapidly.

In those days many houses in Bombay used wood or steam coke in the large iron "Clubwalla" cooking ranges. A man used to come home to deliver a *bhara* of evenly chopped wood pieces which were stored in a small coal-room in the corner of the huge kitchen. Reddish pink or pale yellow, some with rugged brown bark, they emitted a faint woody scent.

Clinging close to Ayah in the glowing twilight we went past our main road and then turned sharply into a very quiet narrow winding road. Though the light was gradually fading the street lights were yet to be lit. Soon it was dark and one by one the gas lights came on. It was an isolated area with small old houses with tiny Indian style overhanging wooden balconies. Through every small window the faint light of *diyas* flickered. Ayah carried on conversation, saying that our bearer's family was staying in one of the houses. In the hushed dimness it produced an uneasy feeling. I shuddered and clasped her hand tighter.

We walked a little further and at the end of the road was the yard with a half open gate. Large peepal trees were sheltering the pile of

wood stacked high, making a thick wall all along the wire fence. I loved the smell of wood and the steady chop chop sound the woodcutter's axe made as it hit the wood with a "swishh". In the calm of the evening it resounded. There was a weak crescent moon seen through the peepal leaves, shedding a feeble light on the yard.

On the opposite side of the stacks was the woodcutter's shack where his family lived. A small brick house with a tiny window through which a small oil lamp cast a muted rosy glow on that part of the yard. Inside the room I could see a shelf with a row of brass utensils and his wife stretching to pick up something.

What worried me most was the big pi-dog with his big curling tail, sitting like a sentinel at the gate, his front paws crossed impudently. The moment we entered he gave a frightening long whining bark, so typical of village dogs, but one shout from his master sent him running in.

Yesterday, as I sat in the car waiting for Sarosh near the ancient rusty gate of Sassoon Dock, a dim light in the shed nearby faintly lighted the area. A whiff of damp wood from somewhere brought on a flashback of scenes from the remote past. The Bombay of 50 years ago.

Cuffe Parade

Cuffe Parade road with its row of old Colonial style rococo bungalows, little towers and turrets jutting out from the stone buildings, mostly one-storied bungalows, fringed with little gardens and flowering trees was delightfully distinctive. For that matter almost every house in Colaba had a little compound lined on either side with crotons or flower beds. Compound railings covered thickly with creepers like antigonon, jasmine, Rangoon or Queen of the Night. I remember it well. Passing all the houses with my friends in the evening whilst going to the promenade, we could get whiffs of the fragrant air. All residents took pride in and care of their little gardens.

Crowds gathered on Sundays at Cuffe Parade opposite the old bungalows. It was a broad raised built-up path running from one end of Foreshore Road right up to opposite Panday Sanitorium. Nine or ten big stone steps which ran along the whole length of the raised path took us to the top of the promenade, where a row of benches laid at intervals faced the sea which was just a few yards away. Actually it also served as a wall to keep the sea out.

Cuffe Parade promenade was clean, lined on one side with the Royal Decorative Palm trees. In the evenings a few cars were parked alongside the steps, but on Sundays the whole length was a motorcade. People came here for their evening constitutional. On Sundays a long line of cars was parked alongside the full length steps; truly it was a parade as friends passed by.

At 4.30 pm Ayahs in white sarees or nannies in white uniforms came wheeling perambulators or with toddlers holding on to their hands. Come 6 o'clock and wheels would roll down the special sloped ramps, all the prams wending their way home. No cycles were allowed. Then at 6.30 pm came the grown-ups on week days – the Colaba residents. One knew each and every one, if not personally, then by sight. Certain

benches became almost earmarked. Like the old men's club, where a few folding chairs were brought out from the cars to make room for the large group on the bench, or the three women who came with their knitting or the Jewish family who stayed next to us. Gossip was exchanged, elderly gentlemen greeted everyone with their felt hats raised, the ladies responded with a dignified nod. Very elite and very *pucca raj* style. Actually there were many English families of government officials staying in Colaba, enjoying special privileges like spacious bungalows and a retinue of servants.

On Sundays crowds walked up and down the length of the promenade. Ladies viewing fashions, teenagers walking in a long row with arms entwined around each other's waists.

My school friends and I would gather at a fixed point, then stroll arm-in-arm from one end to the other. No vacant bench could be found. Many sat on the thick aluminium pipe railings between benches. One knew almost everyone by sight. The whole place had a festive atmosphere. So different from the overcrowded, noisy, dirty roads we have now. All vestiges of greenery and space are now gone and the whole place has turned into a fishing village.

On some Sundays or other holidays we went for full day or evening picnics as many other families did then. These used to be referred to as long drives. Jampacked in our car, six of us, plus the driver, would head for places like Ghodbunder, Mahaul, Powai, Trombay, Parsik, Andheri, Vihar and many other places, where now we see concrete jungles everywhere. Gone are the green fields, rugged hills and cliffs with wild growth under thickly canopied trees. Ghodbunder especially was like a mini hill station. We would park under a nice shady tree with open ground, spread our mats and table cloth, open the tiffin basket and spread out all the goodies. Vihar lake too was a picturesque place till it became a public playground. Gone is the charm and elegance of those days.

Aromas

On occasions when our cook makes some sweet delicacy for tea or dinner, a delectable aroma fills the whole house. Memory harks back to our young days when, returning from school, as soon as the front door was opened, a strong whiff of freshly made goodies welcomed us home.

From the appetising flavours I could tell what we would have for tea. Whether it was coconut *lavras*, their freshly steamed rice flour covering filled with coconut *khaman* giving off a very earthy scent, or *dal-ni-poli* flavoured with rose water and elaichi. *Sirog*, an Iranian speciality of our Khorshed (the Parsi cook), gave out a piquant yeasty aroma mixed with haldi, jeera and toddy. Tartlets were most tempting with the smell of slightly burnt raspberry jam, which John, our resourceful Goan cook could whip up in an hour. A host of others. Tiny puffed up *bhakras* or *kumas*, both my mother's specialities, fermented with toddy, Masoo's great speciality *sandras*, snowy white, round with little holes all over, spongy in the centre and slightly frilled at the edges. Each one had its distinctive aroma, making the home so inviting, savoured with fun, filled with chatter and laughter. We could hardly wait to sit around the dining table to get our share of the piping hot eats.

On everyone's birthday, mingled with the scent of jasmine and rose *torans*, there would be a cake from Cornelia or Taj, filling the dining room with the scent of vanilla or chocolate flavour – that particular special scent of these Italian confectioneries.

Sometimes on Daddy's birthday there would be trays filled with sticky Multani Amichand *halwa* or *sootarfenis* from Parsi Dairy. These too had a scent of their own as everything was freshly made to order using the purest ingredients, to be distributed amongst close friends and relatives.

When the sun set and lights came on, in the twilight hour, there was another fragrance which filled every room with the lightly scented

smoke of incense and sandalwood. Sakaram was taking the silver urn around the house, sprinkling incense over the cinders which then hung as a small diffused grey cloud of smoke. This was almost a ritual in most Parsi homes.

During the mango season the baskets of mangoes gave off a strong tempting smell as they ripened in their straw. Oh and a host of other aromas transport me back to the past.

Sights, smells, sounds of nature or otherwise can have a telling effect on the senses, even homely everyday sounds heighten the sense of enjoyment and are long remembered. I find the calls of certain hawkers (though there were very few then) who visited Colaba very haunting.

In the afternoon around 3 pm came the musical call of "Guava Cheese" with a certain vocal inflection going up and down the scale with the cry of "Guava Cheese, chutney, pickle, jam Memsahib". In the quiet of the afternoon this call was stylish, penetrating and unique.

Then around 5 pm whilst we were getting dressed to go out, a sudden loud volley of words reached our ears. The Bori samosawala with his basket raised in one hand supported by the other would announce his wares: "Bori Samosa man – mutton, chicken, vegetable samosas, all very, very good. Bori Samosa, Memsahab" – without a halt he would say his piece, stopping at every building.

Next was the inevitable Chinaman on his bicycle, with a cloth bundle tied on his pillion. In his round felt hat, greyish or khaki Chinese suit, black slippers and white sandals. Families would spend hours bargaining with him as he opened his bundle and displayed his wares on his ground sheet near the entrance. Beautiful embroidered table cloths, napkins, nighties and every sort of linen. It was an era of leisurely life – everything savoured and appreciated. Craft and art was valued for its beauty and workmanship.

LIFE IN THE NAVY

Our Madras Stay (1944)

A fortnight's honeymoon in Kodiakanal and we arrive in Madras where Sarosh has been transferred for the last one year. It is the tail end of the long drawn Second World War and the railway stations are crowded with the movement of the white and khaki clad servicemen. Heels chicking, hands saluting, jeeps and trucks moving along in long files on the roads. Canteens, cinema houses, ENSA entertainment, everything special for the services.

My first impression of Madras is of open places, solid bungalows surrounded by gardens in residential areas with very few tall buildings. It's somehow more wide, more spacious than Bombay.

We stay for three or four days with our friends the Gazdars, a most lovable family, and on the fifth day Sarosh takes me to see Gilchrist Gardens, another friend's house where we are going to stay. As we enter through a long driveway flanked on either side with a thick hedge, we get our first glimpse of the stately red brick house. I am surprised and thrilled and ask Sarosh if we will have to stay all by ourselves in this huge palatial place. Thoughts quickly pass through my mind. How am I going to look after such a big place with just one or two servants? It would need a huge staff. Fortunately some of the caretaker staff is there, like the malis, a clerk and sweeper to keep it clean.

Sarosh's friend Govind Swaminathan has very kindly given us the use of this house as his mother Ammu is in jail for taking active part in our Independence movement.

Anyway, we quickly settle down with the few household things we have brought with us to run a temporary house. We have engaged a good old-time "English" cook and an Ayah and now I find I have hardly anything to do. Newly married, in a new place all by myself, time hangs my hands. I spend my time strolling in the garden or reading

under the spreading rain trees near the tennis court. This place has some lovely old trees and tall coconut palms. There is an enormous one near the lawn facing the terrace. Its crown is dark and dense and in the night I sometimes see fireflies flitting through it.

Architecturally this house is a combination of two styles – Eastern and Western colonial. Wide arches stand out prominently encircling the veranda which goes around the entire house. Downstairs is a huge dining room; two big arched windows connect it to the drawing room. Actually the entrance to the latter is from the veranda. A wide staircase leads to the bedrooms upstairs. High rococo ceilings and tall wooden windows open out onto the veranda. At the back of the house are small passages leading to some of the bedrooms. One of them is supposed to be haunted and always gives me an eerie feeling when I pass it. I love to go around the entire veranda looking at the view from different angles.

We have by now made many friends. The Belgaumwalas, Swaminadhans and Gazdars in particular are very helpful and we are with them most of the time. Almost every evening we go over to Minoo's where friends drop in for exercises. Saturdays we generally go to the Gymkhana for a dinner and dance and meet some more people. Then there are a number of Naval officers and their families with whom we go out. The Jesudians are much older than us but we get along well with them. Sarosh's boss Capt. Inigo Jones stays across the road from us and often invites us for drinks.

After six months of our stay in Gilchrist Gardens, Ammu is released and has come to stay in her house. She is a wonderful person and we immediately take to each other. The whole house is agog with activity, hustle and bustle. She has got so fond of us that she has asked us to stay on and we move to the smaller wing. So sweet of her. She is a staunch Gandhian and wears nothing but khadi and stands for everything Indian.

For me it is not at all difficult to fit into this environment. They are cultured and intellectual and ever so sociable. I am instinctively drawn to them, coming from a similar Parsi family and a background which was always open to all cultures and traditions. Spending my holidays with our family friends the Chattopadhyays whilst still at school, I came in close contact with similar type of people. Those were the days of inspiring Sarojini Naidu and Jawaharlal Nehru. No wonder I am able to adjust so quickly. Ammu's nieces have become my friends and we go out for long walks every morning to Poonamalli High Road with Kutty Maloo who is another great freedom fighter and has been to jail for long periods.

I am expecting my baby. Sulochana, Govind's wife, comes over often and takes me out shopping. She is great fun and we have some lovely times together. Especially as she too is expecting her second baby. I love the Malayali type of food they cook and take interest in everything around. Sarojini and Gopinath drop in to see their Chariama most evenings and as Gopinath knows a lot about Carnatic music he brings some classical records which Amu loves to listen to and I too enjoy the beat.

Our Ayah takes great delight in bringing her South Indian delicacies for me, now that I am expecting. Especially her *tanga apams* are superb! She brings them neatly covered with a crochet tray cloth. Munni, the cleaning woman who works for us, is sweet. I practise my Tamil on her, since I have now started taking Tamil lessons from a Pandit, and she comes in handy. I make her my target without feeling embarrassed.

Though I am expecting my baby, I keep fit and go about everywhere, but I am careful. Life is pleasant and gay with shopping, parties and friends all around. Ammu's old friends the Ranganadhans have come to stay for a fortnight with their daughter Sushila, who is my ago. There is a lot of excitement in the house as we discuss and show

Sushila the proper way to wear a sari. Andiya and her mother are also in Madras and staying with Sulochana. We all get together and have terrific discussions on every subject under the sun. Sushila's father was the High Commissioner in the U.K. and she has just finished her studies at Oxford, so she is most eager to know everything about India.

My mother has come from Bombay for my delivery next month and she has brought a good Goan cook for me, by the name of Carlos Lobo. He is related to Mamma's John and Cecil, so I am relieved. Everyone here is looking forward to tasting his food as to them a Goan cook is tops. He is a tremendous help at throwing parties and dinners.

We have named our baby Cyrus. He is seven months old now and everyone's pet. The old clerk Venketashan downstairs doubles over him as he gives him big smiles and readily goes to him. All he can say is "Ta Ta" and Venkat thinks he is calling him grandpa as *Tha Tha* in Tamil means grandfather.

Mary Clubwalla is also very good to us, inviting us often to her dinners and entertainment at the Hope Club. She does a lot of social work for the armed forces. Siloo and Dhun Batiwala who are Keki's (my Amy's husband) cousins stay somewhere near Royapuram which is very far from us but occasionally we spend a Sunday with her. She generally calls a lot of people for lunch and we stay over. She is a real beauty.

The war is over and we wonder where we will be going next. Sarosh's orders are out for a transfer to Bombay. I am really going to miss this place. How happy we have been here and made such good friends. Well, I suppose in the services one has to get used to parting from friends and move on. It seems as if I am going to leave a part of myself behind but Sarosh is with me and that means everything.

Note in 1978 : If there was any single most important influence in my life soon after marriage it was our stay with Chariamma. In my entire married life this was the first greatest impact on my personality. An influence which further moulded my life quite differently from the average young Parsi girls of those days. In those days comparatively very few Bombayites knew anything much about the South or its culture. I came to be in the midst of a most charming family and through them imbibed the best of the South.

Snatches From My Diary

There are so many things I loved in Madras, many happy moments which gave me pleasure.

I shut my eyes and I see in the distance from the back veranda a silvery electric train swiftly speeding past. The track is quite far from the back of the house, beyond the furthest limit of the vast estate, so the sound is not at all disturbing. Now and then I hear a pleasing musical sort of horn, which is a distinctive feature of these local trains. It is very quiet and peaceful. From the cook-house down below, I get a whiff of wood smoke mingled with fried sambhar masala. The hot sun envelopes in yellow the bushy trees and other dotted red roof tops.

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I am expecting Cyrus and I have taken a tremendous liking for scents and perfumes. I use scented bath salts, refreshing perfumes and after my bath feel great. However there is one scent that has eluded, bewitched me. It comes suddenly in gusts faintly tinged with lemon. I go in search of it downstairs in the garden. Then one evening just under my balcony, near the bathroom, I spy a small bush laden with white blossoms, its perfume drenching the air heavily at sunset. It makes me feel drowsy and I love to fill myself up, so to say, with this aromatic air. This is intoxicating happiness.

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It is a hot afternoon and I am all alone in this huge house, resting on the four poster colourfully painted Rajasthan-style bed, placed on the veranda. There is a mid-day hush, except for a plaintive, repetitive sing song which comes from a corner of the side garden. That's Charia the muscular mali - he sings a little ditty as he goes up and down with a wooden plank attached to the well, to draw water for the lawns. His song resounds as he halts, now and again, and the gentle sound of the gushing of the water along with the creaking of the wooden board is a perfect accompaniment to his lilting song. It is reminiscent of the *kisan* singing in the fields as he furrows his field

with his plough. Any folk music is alluring. This is most rapturous happiness.

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It is hot summer. The sun comes pouring into the side veranda. It beats there the whole morning making everything we touch real hot. Inside the room the fan whirls at full speed but the air it churns is also warm. Occasionally in the afternoons Sarosh brings a curry from a shop on the way to his office. Ooof it's delicious! Some sort of brinjal mixture, very hot but it's sheer delight to sit on the steaming veranda and eat this hot, hot vegetable. My whole face perspires. It's steamy outside but I am unmindful of the Madras heat. I like the warm breeze which now and then blows and cools me down. Years have passed and in vain have I tried to capture the flavour of this curry. It never tastes the same.

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I love to accompany Ammu to the saree and jewellers' shops in Mylapore. There is hustle and bustle and I love to watch the brightly coloured sarees, gleaming heavy silks with contrasting borders. Red and yellow, green with red, checks, stripes, black and orange.

What I love most is the row of flower sellers. The scent of the mogra and champas makes me intoxicatingly joyous. The heavy, heady aroma lies all over the place and it's a beautiful sight to see thickly plaited *mogra venis*, nice fat buds interspersed with the famous *kadam* flowers. It goes so well with their bright coloured sarees and dark shining faces. Lovely, smiling people.

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There is going to be a wedding in the house across our road. It wears a festive look, with arched banana tree saplings at the entrance and marigold garlands. For days now I hear the plaintive notes of the Nadaswaran along with the staccato beat of the Mridangam. It started one fine morning when I got up to the strains of this typical South Indian wedding music. It sounds pleasing coming as it does from a distance. The music goes on the whole day - day after day. Whilst I am waking or bathing or reading, it is there in the background to remind me of the approaching big day.

Dhanraj Mahal

We were offered a flat in Dhanraj Mahal in Bombay. I took it over with great enthusiasm and with great excitement set about furnishing it before the Destroyer Flotilla was to return. It was a time of terrific activity, rushing about from shop to shop buying and purchasing with the highest spirits. At that time the biggest departmental store, the Army and Navy, was closing down in India and had a bargain sale so most of our furnishings were got from there. Furniture was quickly hired and the house was ready in no time.

Then Sarosh came – wasn't he pleasantly surprised! What a wonderful four months we had in that house. Unpacking all the lovely things he had bought, setting them up, finding just the right place or corner to put them in. The Stuart cut glass complete set, Mappin and Webb table service, even a refrigerator, along with a host of other things.

At last my own new oven was there and my hands were itching to try out all the lovely cakes and pastries we had only read of most of the time. Hastily new recipe books were bought and late in the night, when Sarosh was on the ship, I would lie on my bed and study these books over and over again. The next day something new would be attempted with the beginner's success.

That was a period of great activity, domestic as well as going out and meeting old and new friends. The other Destroyer wives were my neighbours, Mukat and Vimla Kaul, Vimal Lele, Sumi Kholi. We all got together for coffee in the mornings or for a game of Mah-jong which I had just started. All the juicy gossip of the Naval network was exchanged at these sessions.

I would go out almost every morning to bring a bunch of flowers from the Apollo Florist, arrange them in our sitting room downstairs and on the landing of the little staircase which led to our bedrooms

upstairs. That flat had two storeys, like a mezzanine. Drawing and dining rooms downstairs with a tiny pantry and the rest of the rooms being on the first floor. I used to get mostly tuberose or roses (the few flowers in season). Every time I would attempt new arrangements on the bookcase, coffee table or a large jar on the landing. Tall white sprays against the dark curtain background sending out pleasant scents. Perfume reminiscent of childhood days! (Happy memories of birthday celebrations with festooned doorways, where for each and every door in the house Masoo ordered a *toran*, Sakaram climbing a stool and hanging them up early in the morning, new clothes, shining silverware and presents). Returning home after a whole day out, we would open the downstairs door and be welcomed by the strong impregnated scent of tuberose and the ding-dong of the new chiming clock Sarosh had bought and placed in the dining room. What a charming homecoming.

Then there would be other flowers brought to my doorstep by an old tottering mali from the Museum garden, quietly at the time of dusk. Pressing me to buy, even if they were not suitable, then finally leaving the whole lot for a few annas. He was a regular feature almost every evening, his mouth reeking of alcohol, hands shaking and speech ceaseless. Cyrus and Ayah used to have a great time talking to him.

Cyrus was in the kindergarten at the Cathedral & John Connon School and Kamla Mary was on leave for two months. She had some pressing domestic problems in Hyderabad. During that time I had a sweet old Muslim woman to look after him. A jolly old soul who knew Bombay in and out, always cracking jokes with her protruding upper teeth. Cyrus rightly called her old witch. She had a fund of stories to relate about her former 'Babalok'. She would venture out on marketing expeditions, bringing vegetables and fruits always much cheaper than our cook. Trying to prove her point against our young *mistri*, Constancio. She would join the boys in shaking the mango tree near the garage, bringing the largest booty for Cyrus.

At that time Cyrus had painful pus-filled boils and I used to take him to Dr. Daruwalla for treatment. Each boil had to be carefully cleaned, the ointment rubbed in and then dressed. After his bath I would make him lie down on my bed and dress his boils. Patiently he would go through the whole treatment.

There was the headache of teaching him number work for the first time. We would both sit at the table near the window and I would make him repeat the sums with counters, till he knew that $4+3=7$. What a terrible time. I wish I had known then that children will take their own time and one should not hurry them up. In reading and writing he was excellent, always getting top marks.

It was in Dhanraj Mahal that Cyrus first learnt to cycle on his red new two wheeler, which Sarosh had brought for him from U.K. With his friends Mukund, Satish and Meena Lele, he learnt how to cycle after a few falls. There was our bearer Jeevan pushing him round in the compound downstairs and all the children excited with their new toys.

In the short time we were there, we entertained all our friends and relatives to celebrate Sarosh's homecoming. There were ship parties galore, everyone keen to see the new Destroyers. We would arrange small private cocktails for our close relations and then bring them over for dinner or go to their place.

NOWA meetings were held once a week on Fridays at the Vasant Sagar Mess, where we spent many interesting mornings. One particular one was a flower arrangement demonstration (Western style) by Pearl Davidson which appealed to me the most. From childhood I used to arrange flowers on my own, later following a few books here and there. This demonstration definitely inspired me and I realised the importance of following some rules. For hours I would practise on my own to create either a Hogarth's line, a triangle or crescent. It was all so engrossing as a deep love for flowers and trees was there ever since I can remember, always wanting to create a little

beauty in tiny jars and baskets. Masoo and I used to spend hours doing little vases with flowers which the mali brought us. I used to enjoy it so much that she would leave this work entirely to me later.

Only four months in Dhanraj Mahal, but they were packed with activity and excitement. It was wonderful to have Sarosh back again by my side, lifting up such a load off my mind, after having to do everything on my own for over a year. Very soon we got marching orders. This time to the Staff College at Wellington where they were holding the first Naval course of a year's duration.

Staff College, Wellington (1951)

We were going to the Nilgiris – the great Staff College at Wellington. Preparations well in hand, we arrived there with Kamla Mary and our sickly looking *mistri* Constancio Dias. As the little Blue Mountain train went up winding its way through the green hills covered with blue gums the air became cooler, bracing, bringing back the nostalgic mood of our first visit to Ooty from Madras. It was wonderful to be back in the South, everything was so familiar.

We were first put up at the Circle Quarters, one of the first to arrive. It was quite peaceful, although the flatlets were not so good. Tiny little rooms with a veranda in front. All around us there were barren hills, which we climbed after a few days with our friends the Mahindrus and Inder Singhs, both of the Naval Course. I was enchanted with the wild flowers and brought them home in bunches. Those yellow paper like *Duchicennes* which lasted for months. Our new bearer John filled every corner of the house with them.

Within a month we were offered our house – Windermere – right on top of a hill, a solitary rambling house overlooking the Circle Quarters. A huge place for five families and ours was the oddest division of all with a sitting room detached from the main rooms. We set about doing it up till it was really lovely with pale lime green walls, a red brick fireplace, pictures and all the familiar objects. In one corner was Sarosh's enormous office table where he studied, locked up in the room for hours undisturbed by any one, save when our neighbour Jaswant Singh's son Dhamanjit came to play rocking horse on our new leather pouffe with Cyrus, the boys pushing each other roughly.

All round us the hill slopes were dotted with blue gum trees, the eucalyptus smell of which lingered in the house. Almost every morning I would go with a book and sit on one of the rocks near the tennis courts facing our rooms. Within a couple of months of our stay, I was expecting our second baby, which somehow I was sure would be a

girl as I was longing to have a little girl I could dress up and chat with when she grew up. It was blissful to lie there and I forgot my morning sickness, listening to the faint sound of bugles echoing, resounding on the hillside. That was the army school at the foot of the hills practising their drums and bugles. The air crisp, the sky bright blue and sunshine suddenly turning cloudy. Lovely days of dreaming, contemplating, sheer relaxation giving in to natural surroundings. Sometimes my neighbours Noel D'Souza or Shanta Shastri or friends from the Circle Quarters would join me. We would be knitting or exchanging news of various divisions in which the whole course was divided. Every thing was preplanned by the Directing Staff from hours of riding, tennis, entertainment, mixing the three services. Being the first staff course we had two Britishers from the Royal Navy, the Naval Commandant, Capt. Jenks, and Commodore Davies. The Captain and his wife Molly were full of life and the Navy used to meet often at their house in the evenings.

The morning and evening walks had a magical charmed quality. Through the tall eucalyptus woods, I would go down our private road, then up the tiny hill road taking us through a small village past farms with patches of green fields growing cabbages, turnips, cauliflowers, up the main Ooty bus road. That was a lovely spot, just before reaching the main road. I used to go there to receive Cyrus back from school in his school bus.

Down the valley I could see a church with tall spires, a little pond, red gulmohur trees, a little higher up houses with sloping red roofs, huts with a thin line of curling smoke. I would wait there, in the bracing cold air, listening to the church bells and drinking in the view. The village folks, so colourful in their attire. Tamilians with bright coloured sarees, Bhargavas fair with chiselled features.

Cyrus and I would go down singing, plucking leaves and flowers, till at the narrow precarious bend, near the peach orchard, we would come across a herd of buffaloes being driven home. The wooden bells

around their necks made a hollow, mellow sound which sounded lovely in the quiet evening air. The last rays of the setting sun, burnishing the tops of the trees and leaving a rosy glow on the distant hills.

All these were my special endless little pleasures. Hours of experimenting, arranging flowers, specially my favourite poinsettias and arum lillies which we picked up from the roadside on our trips to Ooty. The resinous fragrance of pine-wood when broken. The tall vase near the fireplace filled with white lillies and pine greenery, ideal setting against pale green walls.

Days of picnics, drives, parties and dinners! To come home late after a Saturday night dance at the Gymkhana, in the light of the pale moon, feeling terribly cold, yet enthralled by the scene around us. Majestic, dark pine trees, against the faintly silvery sky.

Near Cyrus's window used to be a beautiful jacaranda tree, its graceful branches thickly covered with purple flowers. A black jungle crow had a nest in it. In the afternoons I would lie on my son's bed and trace the familiar landmarks across the valley on the distant hills, the church, the cinema hall, Madras Regimental Centre, red patches of gulmohur covering parts of the slopes.

Once a month or sometimes once a fortnight we drove to Ooty for a check up with our gynaecologist Dr. Willoughby Grant who was considered the best in the Nilgiris and had a very exclusive nursing home, Kempstove. He was rather an old man at that time but everyone spoke highly of him and his matron, Sister Potts, a burly Australian. The military hospital had very poor aftercare facilities and as it was not possible for my mother to come, we decided on Kempstove.

Our old Ayah had to suddenly leave for domestic troubles in Hyderabad, just when I needed her the most. I decided to remain

calm, have faith in God and with Sarosh by my side made up my mind to do everything myself, taking things in my stride.

I had engaged a sweet old village woman, too old to do any work, yet a clever companion for me at that time, when I was expecting Anahit. Ever anxious to help Cyrus, though he would have none of her, she was a trustworthy servant to look after the house when we went out. There was John our boy who played with Cyrus and was always getting on our nerves.

Cyrus was at his sweetest at that time, six years old. A trim plump body, fair with red apple cheeks, full of mischief and playing rough games with our neighbours' children. Every evening after school, before his dinner-time, I would give him a bath and make him stand on a little chair to dry him with a warm towel and quickly put on a woolen vest. He was most exuberant at that time, jumping on his chair, hugging me and ever so excited to have a baby sister or brother. His favourite game was to send messages to the baby through my tummy. I had gradually prepared him to receive the baby happily as there was a big gap of seven years and I wanted to include him in everything. Even after the baby was born he would help me do little things and the three of us would share all our things. Of course Sarosh, whenever he had time, took him out or played hockey with him.

From our window and the bathroom back door we could get a magnificent view of the far away winding road and in the nights the lights of the distant houses, shimmering through the mists. Apart from our services friends we had made some very good friends amongst the permanent residents there, like the Masters, my brother-in-law's brother and his wife, the Sakhidas's of the Cecil Hotel and the Patels.

At last our course was getting nearer to completion and on April 1, a little baby girl was born. We were all thrilled to see the little bundle all wrapped up and sleeping in her most gorgeous pink crib, all done

up with frills and bows. I had chosen the pink room and sure enough a girl was born. Even as a few days old baby, her features were clear and sharp. A perfect nose, pointed little chin and long tapering fingers. She was an absolute little doll, giving us no trouble at all. She hardly ever cried.

Earlier in the year, before the baby was born, Cavas, Roshan, Keikoo and Ma came over from Bangalore and gave us a pleasant surprise. They were delighted to see Cyrus looking so sturdy in his corduroy trousers and loose sweater. They just wouldn't believe that his rosy red cheeks were natural. We had an exciting time for two days, took them to Ooty and other places round about. A little later Bapu came and stayed with us for a fortnight.

The year at the Staff College just flew by. It was time to leave behind the bracing cold mountain air, bright sunny days suddenly giving way to dark clouds. The depressing overcast skies for days and days in the rainy season. Heavy mountain mists in the winter, the village women at the roadside tap with their gleaming brass pots, hillsides covered with soft ferns giving out a scent, the beautiful green downs.

Sarosh's next transfer was at the Naval Headquarters, New Delhi. As Sarosh had not worked at the N.H.Q. before and the accommodation situation there was extremely difficult, it was decided that we should spend our leave in Bombay and I stay back with the children till some place was found. Now that Sarosh's parents had settled in Bangalore, we stayed with my people, for the first time since our marriage. My mother, Papa and Daddy (Kekoo Papa) were longing to see the little Ooty baby and had made all arrangements for our comfort. As Kamla Mary was still away in Hyderabad, I engaged an excellent Malayali Ayah, whilst still in Kempstove Nursing home, who accompanied us to Bombay. Constancio our cook went with Sarosh to Delhi as his bearer and John stayed with us.

After having stayed in the quiet for so long I found Bombay noisy and hot. Anyway Anahit was doing well and Cyrus rejoined John Connon's as we did not know how long we would have to stay behind. We were at the bottom of a long waiting list for accommodation in Delhi and that too in one of the married officers' messes. God knows what that was.

We were happy. I was meeting my old friends and attending NOWA weekly meetings at Vasant Sagar. Soon, within six months, we were offered a suite in the Princes' Park Mess, which was supposed to be the best mess for married officers. The name sounded good, conjuring up visions of a mess laid out in a shady park. Most of our luggage was stored in the Angre godown, keeping back just our clothing and a few everyday items with us. So when we moved we had to cart everything with us.

New Delhi

Our first transfer to Delhi! At the NHQ!! We arrived at the station in the midst of the hot summer with tons of baggage; crates, boxes, pram, play-pen all lying in heaps around us. Anahit in Kamla Mary's arms (as by then she was back), John and Cyrus. When the Munsiffs and Nanavatis came to receive us at the station they wondered how on earth we were going to fit all this in the Delhi mess. Little did I know what living in a mess meant.

It was a different experience altogether. As I entered 31 Princes' Park I knew what I was in for. Hot air seemed to emit from the four rooms in a row. Constancio, who was waiting to receive us, gave a knowing smile. I doubted if I would be able to survive in this pokey little place. But there was the little one to be settled, the morale had to be kept up with the servants and I did not want Sarosh to feel bad at our disappointment. I decided I was not to be floored. Cheerfully, I made the best of what there was, opening up first things first.

I went about in full swing, unpacking as much as we could accommodate. Within a week a home was ready to take us in. The familiar objects and a few pieces of our furniture were back in their places, the sitting-cum-dining room resembled a ship's cabin. It was sweet but oh so jammed with furniture! I painted a panel of nursery rhyme pictures in the children's room, unpacked all our things in our largish bedroom. The garden, handkerchief size, was planned.

Most of our time was spent in this little patch of lawn. Winter was round the corner and soon the flower beds bloomed with colourful flowers. In the cold months we would sit out after lunch, enjoying the hot sun on our backs, cracking walnuts, almonds and chilgozas.

Anahit was doing well and soon took her first steps. Ayah would dress her up beautifully in her red leggings and coat suit and take both the children for an outing to India Gate every evening. Anahit in her pram



Roshan and Sarosh on their wedding day, January 9, 1944, with his parents and family. From left, mother Tehmina (seated), Noshir Pundole, sister Roshan, Sarosh, Roshan, father Jehangirji, sister-in-law Roshan (seated) and brother Cavas



Roshan and Sarosh in their drawing room in Dolphin, Mumbai

Accomplished Hostess

Roshan was an enthusiastic and accomplished hostess who loved to entertain. Her guests were assured a memorable time in her tastefully decorated home. The flower arrangements, works of art, were naturally done by her, the company was congenial, the table exquisite, the cuisine superb and the desserts made by her simply unforgettable.

Extremely well turned out, warmly welcoming and mingling easily with her guests, she showed no signs of how much homework she had done to make each party a success.

Using the backs of old invitation cards, she planned each party meticulously—listing the date, occasion, names and numbers of guests, as well as the menu. Step by step, she would write down what needed to be done in advance. After the party, she would put down her comments on the different dishes, to serve as a guide for the future.

Roshan left behind several dozen such cards. Reproduced here are two of them.

Dinner Party for 16th August 1984
 1 Roshan Wadhwa & Hostess 2
 2 Bachoo & Aadi 2
 3 Neil & Shweta (Could not come - sick)
 4 Nisha & Boney Bofa 2
 5 Ar J (Could not come)
 6 Alor & Resi Cama 2
 R & S 2

1 Cyrus Lalkaka - Shweta had gone to America
 most enjoyable party 12 people

1. Chicken Sweet & Sour in thick Tomato with pine apple, capsicum & onion gravy
 2. Pea Patta & Green Khurma Curry with meat balls & side
 3. Chicken Liver - slight masala
 4. Spinach Florentine - 1 Big round dish
 5. Pear & Panir Raiti Moulded
 6. Black Forest with Cheese Jule & cherries enthr (Superb)
 Monday
 make Chocolate cake & Tomato Raiti
 Tuesday
 make Spinach raiti & dahi Fudge
 make Pear & Panir Mould

Wednesday
 1. make Chicken Dish completely ready keep in Fridge
 2. make mince Mince & st. with ground
 3. Assemble Cake
 Thursday
 1. make masala
 2. make balls & Curry
 3. make Cheese Sauce for Spinach
 4. Fry onion & capsicum
 5. make Rice
 6. make Diver



Sarosh and Roshan celebrating their Diamond Wedding Anniversary

Ladies Club Friday 12th October 1979
 Meeting at our house - Tea party

15 Ladies came & was highly successful
 3 made

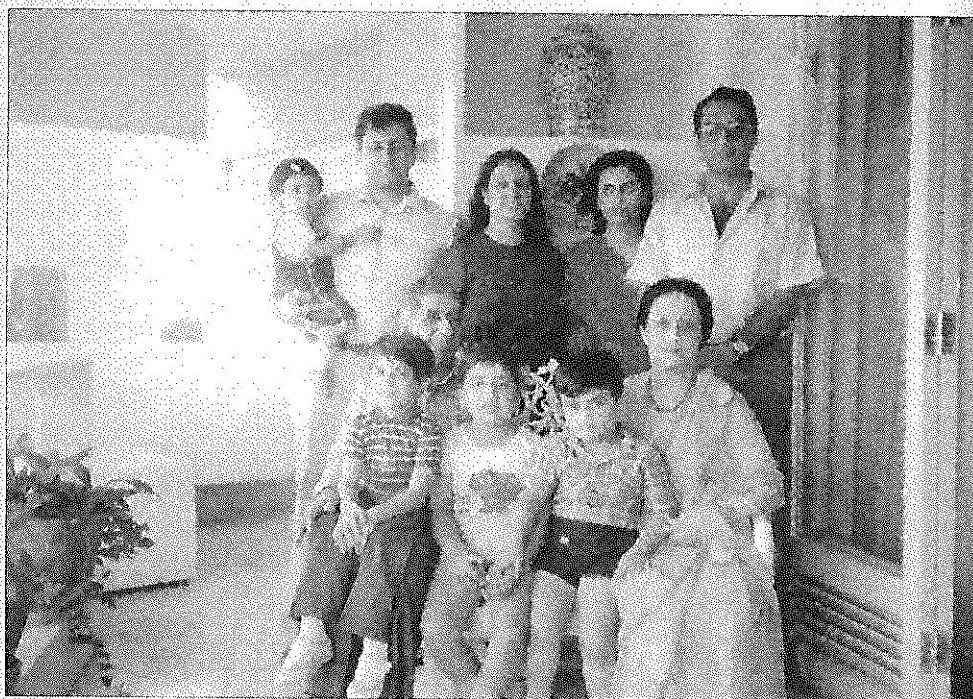
- 1) Chocolate Cake with chocolate icing
- 2) Lemon Curd Roll
- 3) Sandwiches - Chutney & Brown Bread
 Kheer Chutney cut in slices
- 4) Vegetable small Kababs
- 5) Pizza.

Grated 2 Tofu Breads - 1 Brown, 1 white
 each costing 1/- cut off each bread about 2 inches
 1/2 packet Mincel Butter - should not use
 Mustard for chutney
 2 Rolls Lemon Curd with 18 Curd Curd
 3 eggs each for 1 Roll
 Chocolate Cake of approx. 18 x 18 box

To dear
 Roshan who
 is always
 impeccably
 dressed, with
 such lovely
 Jewellery too.
 Good Taste
 always.

Love,
 Phiroza

A note of appreciation from loving
 cousin Phiroza Taleyarkhan



Sarosh and Roshan, with their children and grandchildren, on the veranda of their home, when the grandchildren were small. From left (seated) Adil, Sarosh, Nitash, Darius and Roshan, (standing) Sheroo, Jehangir, Anahit, Mahrook and Cyrus

and Cyloo making faces to amuse her holding on to the pram. She was dainty and pretty and ever so carefully handled anything given to her. She soon started uttering many words, clearly and distinctly. We also took care to speak to both our children clearly and normally as we wanted them to develop good speech.

Cyrus joined the Columbas School and made many good friends who used to come to our house or he would go to theirs on Saturdays. In the mess too the boys had their gang and sometimes in the evenings they came to our place to play "motor-cade" (which was a craze at that time) with Cyrus's collection of mini jeeps and automobiles. His two special chums were Pervez and Lalit who stayed in the mess and were fond of cricket.

We had engaged a Hindi Masterji for Cyrus, a typical pandit of the old Mehtaji type. He would sit with Cyrus on the veranda for the Hindi tuition and every few minutes give a loud call for "*Jan' pani lao*". He would sip a little, go out in the garden, wash his hands and gargle! John got fed up of his calls and Cyrus refused to sit with him.

Just as Wellington was the place for relaxation and enjoyment of nature for me, Delhi became a round of social activities. There were cocktail parties galore, official and non-official, and the still remaining senior Royal Navy officers' wives ruled the roost in NOWA. There were some who were friendly and genuinely interested in India and still others who tried to live in the 30s, believing that Indian ladies could be led like children. Nobody bothered about the latter who to their own dismay were isolated. I plunged myself fully in NOWA activities and was elected as needlework member. With that came back the old love for embroidery. Shopping expeditions to Panchkua and Greenways, buying piles and piles of needlework magazines, patterns and materials. Late in the night after all had gone to bed I would sit in our little dressing room-cum-study, going through magazines, tracing patterns under the reading lamp. How I enjoyed those moments!

In Princes' Park I developed a passion for creating beautiful table-centres. I used to spend hours creating each piece on our dining table which we could barely open out in the limited space. I particularly remember the little white Muraya blossoms which John brought from the shrubbery. Their lemony scent at winter time spelled both the festive season and bracing cold.

Constancio was a good cook, the dinners we gave being very popular. The Munsiffs, Nanavatis, Patels and us used to meet every Sunday in rotation. Cards followed lunch at times, Minoo and Meheroo Shroff were our great friends and on Saturday nights we went out together for a dinner-dance at the D.G. Club.

Winter meant lots of picnics – our favourite place nearby on a chance evening or morning was Humayun's Tomb. We loved the quiet and the old shady trees there, the wide expanse of sky and the river in the distance. Especially at twilight the sky took on the most gorgeous colours, blending smoothly into one another.

Even though we were living in a mess, we were fortunate in our block location. It was right at the end, so we had an open compound at the back with no houses. Our neighbours were quiet, keeping their little patch of lawn well tended. Each little garden was fenced high with a mehendi hedge.

Soon Sarosh became the C-in-C's secretary and that meant long hours, returning home late. On evenings when we were not going out, I would sit out on the lawn with a book, the children having gone to India Gate for their outing. It used to be very, very quiet at that hour, our neighbours being out too; the evening hush was almost sanctified. Overhead in the clear blue sky, here and there tinged with the red of the setting sun, a flock of parakeets would go chattering homewards, renting the sky with their shrill calls. Then, there were the black crows, always so striking against the pale sky, their cawing at eventide so plaintive. Then came the sparrows fluttering and chirping as they

dotted the sky. The ducks with their raucous nasal call, the pigeons, flock after flock flew overhead and I would watch till the last one was out of sight, making mental notes. There was a small tree in one of our hedges, where the bulbuls had made a nest. It was always so delightful to watch the pair hopping from branch to branch answering each other's call.

Along with these happy times, there were some notes of sadness too. Within three months of our arrival our good old Kamla Mary lost her mind and with great difficulty we had to send her to Hyderabad to her home. She had already had some pressing domestic troubles for which she had gone on leave for a year. It was the final goodbye to her, but God has always been so kind to me in this. In her place I got another sweet old Bangalore Ayah who is with us till today. After two years Constancio developed his old appendicitis trouble and he too was sent to Goa. In his place we got an old Khansama, a typical old timer, a good cook too, who was with us till we left Delhi. John misbehaved and he too had to be sacked. In his place we got a Garhwali bearer, Kamal Singh, a real clown.

At last after much waiting and praying for two-and-a-half years, we moved into a bungalow – 21 Aurangzeb Road. Before we were to move in, when it was still occupied by the previous tenants, we would pass that house in the car, often taking in different details each time, excitedly planning our move. It was a small part bungalow but what a stretch of garden! On our side of the house was a huge long lawn with decorative rounds of cypress running along the whole length, so typical of the old time Delhi bungalows.

It was here that we had Cyrus's Navjote under the spreading canopy of two gulmohurs. Ma and Bapu came to stay with us along with Shehernavaz; Cavas also gave us a pleasant surprise. We had invited all our Navy friends plus a long list of Parsis whom we had got to know by then. Coomi Lal and Piroja Kaki were a great help in arranging the Navjote ceremony. They had about that time formed a

small Sunday Social of a few Parsi families and we used to meet in each others' houses. There were the Lals, Sethnas, Shroffs, Gaes, Meher and Darabsha Wadia, us and Nergish and Pesi Mehta. Every winter we would arrange a couple of picnics. The catering for the Navjote dinner was entrusted to famous Goolbai Mehta and a good job she did. The Navy had done the electric light decoration and fortunately we had the Navy Band too.

After the Navjote, Ma, Bapu, I and the children along with my Ayah Tanjamna went to Simla for a fortnight's holiday. Sarosh had booked a double suite for us at the Grand Hotel which was at that time one of the good ones.

What I loved most about the Aurangzeb Road house was the old trees. The kamrak tree with its beautiful leaves spreading out in one corner, providing vast shade, under which was an old stone seat. The scarlet bauhinia with orchid like flowers of deep mauvish pink which flowered in the cold season, the jacaranda over-hanging our old white gate, along with some Lagerstromia with their white and pink branches.

In summer I would wake up early and go the lawn to hear the koel's lingering call as it flew from tree to tree. It was seldom seen except in flight. From four in the morning we could hear this herald of the morn. Somehow that seems to stand for Delhi, particularly in my mind.

Then there would be a thick carpet of tiny white red-stalked flowers under the Parvati tree with a heavy jasmine like perfume. We had planted some Nicotina flowers which I used to gather with their long stems and arrange in my tall jar at one corner of the drawing room. In the evening the whole room would be filled with a delicate perfume tinged with tobacco. I used to love doing this tall vase with different flowers. The drawing room was the old fashioned circular type known as *Gol-Kamrah* in the north.

On one side of the front veranda was a detached guest room which we had made into a study room as well. I used to sit with Cyrus for his homework over here. The gabled window near our table was covered with honeysuckle on the outside frame, where a host of tiny sunbirds had made a home. It was a delight to watch these tiny birds, busy at the flower centres, hanging backs downward, ever so gracefully pecking at the flowers. It was a dark room but I loved to work here.

At the back of the house was a built-in courtyard and the kitchen opened out on to it, as also the dining room. This was the playground of the children in the late evenings, after dinner. The neighbours' children joining them, pestering *khansama* for stories.

By then "Kamana", as Anahit used to call him when she started talking, and Kamal Singh had become old hands in the house. The former went into drinking bouts once a month and took a fortnight to get out of it. During that period from the servants quarters right at the back of the house we could hear Kamana from his *charpoi*, on hot summer nights, regaling his old cronies with stories of fairies, mermaids and devils. In spite of that we all liked him and kept on threatening him without taking any action.

The walnut incident stands out prominently in my mind. Kamana was going to Simla on short leave for a relative's wedding. He offered to buy for us "first class walnuts". Sarosh readily gave him the money in spite of my doubts and we waited for his arrival. After 10 days when he came back Kamal Singh brought us the early news that Kamana had returned empty-handed as he did not see the bag which we had given for the walnuts in his *Kothi*. The next day when Kamana reported back for work, Sarosh enquired about the walnuts. Quick came the answer, "Sahab everything is bought and ready but as I came by train, I could not carry it with the other luggage. My Aunt, who is coming by car tomorrow, will be bringing it with her". From that day on little Cyrus questioned him daily whether his aunt had

arrived, but there was no sign of her. Finally, at the end of the month he asked us to cut the money from his pay. He had the most amusing and clever excuses for drawing advances.

Every evening Cyrus's friend Vijay Kumar Jain would come on his cycle and both of them would cycle round and round the vast lawn, discussing homework or incidents at school. Anahit lived outdoors most of the time, flitting about the garden like a butterfly. About that time she started talking most sweetly, her favourite sentences being "Danda Shab ka motar kabat ho gaya" (our neighbour's car which was perennially out of order) or "Cyloo ham ko shepin dow".

As usual we entertained at least one big party a month where my greatest craze was to think out a new centre piece for the dining table.

As Sarosh could hardly take any leave we made short visits of five or six days each to Agra, Chakrata, Dehra Doon for the passing out of cadets and Simla. All these trips were done by car and were most enjoyable except that our Ayah Tanjamma always felt sick and we had to halt now and then. I will never forget our climb to Devband from Chakrata. It is the highest point there, a pass leading to the China border, an old caravan route. Sarosh, Cyrus and myself took two ponies, riding in turns, and climbed the broken cobbled path. The view was fantastic but when we were returning, we were drenched with pouring rain, there being no form of shelter anywhere on the way. To keep warm we sang loudly but there was fear in our hearts as it was getting dark and the ponies' hooves kept slipping over the cobbles. Anyway, it was a most memorable climb.

The charm of Aurangzeb Road lay in its sleepy quiet quality. The thick avenue of tall neem trees kept the narrow road shady throughout the day and, during the rains, the neem berries gave out a peculiar oniony smell which I didn't like at all.

Delhi of the early 50s was quiet, still with the old-worldly Moghul grace, Safdarjung Road being the end of New Delhi. Life was filled with parties, picnics and calling on each other, sitting out in the garden during summer evenings, sitting in the sun during winter time. Sleeping out in the open under the sky in the hot summer was also a unique experience. One could hear the crickets in the night or keep on looking at the jewelled sky, trying to trace the different constellations. We woke up very early as it became bright too soon and the birds were calling out even before sunrise. I found I got interested in all this so much that I never could get undisturbed sleep.

When the time came to leave Delhi, we were all very sorry to leave behind all this charm of a garden city and the many good friends we had made. Sarosh was transferred to INS Hamla near Bombay at Marve Beach and was appointed its Commanding Officer.

INS Hamla

Before Sarosh actually took over as CO Hamla, he was attached to Angre for a couple of months and we had to stay with my mother. This was the most exciting time when we knew that soon we would be moving to Hamla. Those were the months of dreaming, planning, mentally arranging the bungalow to be - the new pieces I would add - the garden that I would plan, having brought seeds from our Delhi garden. I could see it all in my mind's eye. Sarosh and I would talk about it often as we strolled about on Cuffe Parade after dinner. Cuffe Parade was so different then, with a clear promenade, the sea coming right up to the parapet, old colonial type bungalows and an uncluttered sea line. What I planned had a magical quality in it. Soon the few months flew away.

Then came the time we actually, in reality, moved there. The busy fortnight of colour washing, arranging and in no time the house was ready, turned into a home.

Hamla with its soft caressing breezes in summer, the swaying of the palms, the whispering through the casuarinas, the never-ending organ-grinding roar of the waves, the sea-side scent - a combination of dried casuarina needles and sun-baked seaweeds. Blue sea and clear blue sky and oh the openness of it all. The sheer expanse of open spaces wherever one went.

Whilst in Hamla we were most lucky as usual to have the services of good domestic staff. My old trusted Ayah, Menin our prosperous looking bearer and Madioos Pereira our cook, who fitted in well for our everyday meals but did not object to the chief cooks when we entertained.

On most evenings we went for a stroll on the beach, near our house. From here I loved to watch the sun setting, slowly, majestically, an inverted rosy *matka* disappearing into the sea. The stirring notes of

the sunset bugle in the distance announced the departure of light. The silvery resounding notes, with their hymn like quality reached the far corners of the island and broke into a thousand pieces. Then crept in the darkness, slowly, stealthily, the sky changing gradually to a deeper blue. The Manori hills were enveloped in dark grey, their outlines barely distinguishable. The first big blue star - and then - the full sky lighted with myriads of sparkling twinklers. The warm sand turning cool, palm trees standing silhouetted against the deep sky. Not a sound on the beach as we lay - only aware of the gentle swishing of the waves. I don't know what the sentry in his box on the mound must have thought of me as I lay on the sand. As we lay there I told myself: "This I shall remember - long, long past our stay in Hamla - This changing of light into darkness. The period of exquisite peace and beauty."

Returning from the beach in the late evening, there would be lights glowing in the drawing room. Anahit in her high chair, just finishing her supper. We would go in and first wash off the sand from our feet. Then dinner and settle down to work in the study. Sarosh with his files and I with my week's planning, the work to get done for the next day. For just as Hamla meant living with nature, it also meant many active and busy hours of work for both of us.

At night when the main door was shut and the blue night lamp was lit in the dining room the house really seemed to breathe - end of a perfect day. Peace reigned in all the rooms. I would be at my prayer corner pouring out my soul to God. A constant prayer in my heart. A prayer that all we did go well. I sought the guiding spirit of God to show us the path of righteousness and abide with His decisions as they came.

Though Hamla meant many, many spare hours to step out and join nature, it also meant many hours of active work. Sarosh of course was kept busy in a lot of spheres - NOWA work occupied my time. I had plunged in wholeheartedly and wanted to make it a success and

a tremendous success it was. Leadership as a president to the few members we had, arranging and thinking out new meetings, fixing up big shows to raise funds, daily letters, reports, meetings, phone calls. I had started a new activity of soft toy making at the Welfare Centre for the sailors' wives so that meant teaching them how to make dachshunds, kangaroos and cats! Most wives were new to all this so that meant guiding the secretary in writing minutes, cutting out patterns etc. But oh how I enjoyed it all.

My heart's delight was entertaining. Every week a big dinner party to be planned, executed, culminating in a successful end. Not an officer or a trainee cadet who came to Hamla went without being invited by us. After dinner we had games for the young crowd, always thinking out something new. Planning the menu was still more interesting. Every time I thought out a new dish, with Madioos to do the donkey work and me giving finishing touches, we turned out delicacies galore. For VIP parties we had chef Cardoza, a master chef par excellence.

The number of VIPs we had in those two years! C-in-C to ministers, foreign Ambassadors, Naval Chiefs, I catered for every type and taste. It became a hobby with me, to make my guests as much at home as possible. There was the challenge of planning and achieving.

Unbounded energy was there. The facilities too, what more could one ask? Menin, our Goan bearer so calm and collected in the most crucial situation. Having his family with him in our quarters, he was happy. The most lovable character was old Bela Singh our driver. Ready to do any light domestic errand, chuckling and playing with the children. A true villager from Punjab, so simple and loyal. Home would not have been so nice without these two.

Early evenings when Sarosh was still in the office or playing tennis, I would stroll in our garden with its winding tiled path, attending to any plant that was out of shape. Clipping or pruning or loosening the earth. During the cooler months our garden gave back in abundance

to whatever care it received. It was a riot of colours. Tall stately red and yellow cannas of which I used to take special personal care, getting bed upon bed dug to fill the empty big half of the garden. Jerking out old flowered stems daily. Yellow calendula, multicoloured centeranimes, phlox and double black pansies the seeds of which we had brought from Delhi. It was everyone's wonder how these could grow so near the sea.

Petunias growing wild in the unattended bed, which I had left only for this purpose, gave out a sticky sweet scent at eventide. I would purposely walk up and down this path filling my soul with overflowing happiness, breathing deep of the perfumed air. There was always a prayer in my heart, a communication with God for nature was my God so to say.

The road at the back of our house leading up to the mess was my favourite haunt. Here, I would walk up and down, taking in the view of the sea from different angles, looking at some of the old trees which grew in the side walks. Listening to the bird calls, whistling to the bulbuls, waiting to hear their return call. This was my very own road, so unspoilt - I knew each blade and bush.

We had discovered a very unique picnic spot on Madh Island, which we called One Tree Hill. Our picnics there were spontaneous and frequent. On Sundays when our relations came, we would suddenly decide "Let's have tea outdoors". Quickly the thermos would be filled, the basket packed and we would be off to our haunt. A cliff overlooking the sea, where waves came lapping, splashing up against the big jutting out rocks. After parking the car near the old fort ruins, we had to climb quite a steep cliff full of boulders with just a solitary tree on top. From here we could see the shoreline of Versova, right up to Bombay. Near the car side was a picturesque ruin of the old fort which Cyrus ran to explore and Bapu, when he came with us, started sketching. To have tea there was real refreshing, watching the fishing boats coming right below our cliff, so much so we could see

the man cooking on his stove or busy with his net. The boat creaking as it swayed, a thin line of curling smoke coming out of the charcoal brazier. The children just loved this place, romping about on the boulders.

Sitting on the big swing at night with Sarosh and Anahit was another lovely moment. Especially when the garden was flooded with silvery moonlight. The water sparkled, the breeze was gentle as we went up and down, Anahit asking little questions about Mr. Moon.

In the afternoons I would sit on the veranda with a book or needle work keeping an eye on the horizon. For that was the time the fishing fleet returned with the day's catch. It was a beautiful sight. The boats all in a single line, moving gracefully, their white sails fluttering when there was a strong breeze. The green hills of Manori with the sandy yellow shore looking like the fabled green hills of far away.

From my favourite seat, I loved to watch the big gulmohur trees growing on the side of Satyandra's garden, against his kitchen wall. Their delicate almost Japanese tree shapes forming such a picturesque outline against the stone wall. In bloom it was aflame with bright orange and deep red colour. At the time of the new leaves it looked lush with baby green feathery leaves. I would sit there with Anahit sometimes in the night and make her play a guessing game, to keep her quiet or cajole her to eat her dinner. Satyandra's sons Choosy and Goodoo who were much older than her always talked to her. So I would say: "Let's see, what is Choosy eating today. Is it kheema or cauliflower?"

The rainy season was just gorgeous! It was a time when all the dust laden trees suddenly turned clean, revealing their fresh colours. The flowers too came in abundance. Zinnias, gampherinas, sunflowers, marigolds. The more I cut and sent to people who had no gardens, the more they grew. Vegetables too, Sarosh's pride, came by the bushelful. We used to send them to all officers' families and bring

some for Mamma in Bombay. As soon as the rain stopped I used to rush to the garden for it looked so inviting and oh so fresh. The raindrops still shivering on the petals, the tiled path clean and white, the scent of the wet earth intoxicating. I drank deep, deep of it. The birds came out shaking their wings, the bulbuls, sparrows and green bee-eaters. Even the monsoon matting on the house front did not cramp my enjoyment of nature. For when it rained, it could rain fierce and hard, but there was the cosy feeling of warmth and safety in the house.

In front of our house stood tall palm and casuarina trees, in which a family of pheasants had made their nest. Their call at dawn and in the quiet of the afternoon awakened me. It was a call in the true sense - a beckoning, come-hither call - echoing in the quiet air. Two big pheasants with greenish blue wings and russet backs sauntered about with their four little ones following them. A very common sight near the crotons in front of our house. Sunbirds so chirpily flitting from one canna leaf to the other as if enjoying a game of their own. Kingfishers and a pair of bulbuls nesting somewhere in the large crotons sent forth their sharp calls.

Another favourite spot of mine was the back door of our bathroom which opened out into the rear garden. Standing there early in the morning, one could see the house tops of the village beyond, hear the cock-a-doodle-doo in the far distance, a reminder that there were other inhabited places not very far off. Our cock too heralded the dawn from this spot where we had built a little hen-house. This was the first time Sarosh tried his hand at this hobby. In summer the koel made its appearance from this side of the shrubbery. Summer meant bowers of mogra - the air heavily laden with mogra and jasmine scent. Ayah would gather the buds and make *venis* for my hair. There were always flowers and flowers and flowers. Inside the house - outside the house. I could choose any beautiful branch or twig for my flower arrangements.

It was in Hamla that my love for flower arrangement reached its first peak. There was not a day when I did not plan a vase. I would spend hours, serenely absorbed. Matching various hues, experimenting with different branches, twigs, mixing them with odd leaves, oh anything that appealed to my aesthetic sense. There was no formal training as yet, except one or two small books I read as a guide to balance. My most favourite one was a huge canna arrangement in a tall china jar - a real eye catcher. The day before a party, I would be excitedly planning my vases. Strolling in the open my eye caught any interesting detail of trees or gnarled wood, the shape of a bunch of leaves - it was like second nature, a habit I have had all my life, as long as I can remember.

The spare room was our guest room-cum-office room when there were no house guests. There was my big writing table where I chalked out various programmes, wrote letters, reports etc; from its window could be seen the tennis court and the gulmohur against the blue sky.

A day before the arrival of an overnight VIP guest there would be a scramble in the house, shifting of furniture, rearranging the guest room. Servants getting everything spick and span. Last minute details thoroughly worked out.

When Sarosh went on duty trips to Bombay, I generally accompanied him, getting down at Mamma's with the car loaded with bunches of flowers, packets of vegetables to be sent to various relations and friends in Bombay. Wishing Anahit bye and promising to come back early we would leave in our staff car, returning late at night after a show or party - the car seat scattered with the shopping done in Bombay. Whenever we returned, whether after a weekend or early in the evening, it was always wonderfully refreshing to be back home. That experience is unforgettable. I would stand in the middle of the sitting room, watch the sea, breathe in deeply and say: "Ah, it's good to be back". The peace, the cool fresh air, greenery all around us and oh the openness, the vast expanse of nature to live in!

Anahit was the little princess of Hamla. With her sweet ways, she charmed everyone. Flitting about in the garden, playing on the beach she spent many happy hours with her Ayah and friends. When Cyrus came on holidays he romped on the beach, learnt swimming, did a little gardening, played badminton and table tennis.

This chapter wouldn't be complete without mention of our weekend visitors. Mostly our relations, Cavas and Roshan, Noshir and Roshan with their children spent their weekends with us. Each weekend brought carloads of friends. That was the happiest time for the whole family. Hours on the beach, evenings in the garden, picnic lunches, teas on the lawn. Even Mamma and Daddy came once to spend a week. So charmed was Daddy that he would roll up his trousers, adjust his spectacles and stroll on the beach, halting here and there to take a good look at the houses or chat with people who passed by. Dear old Daddy, always so gregarious.

Two years just rolled by and six months more - a period of exquisite peace and beauty in the midst of tricky day to day working problems for Sarosh. For the first time we became aware of the evil type of people - persons with intrigues and jealousy who would do things behind our backs and not till quite late did we realize that a person could do such a thing out of sheer jealousy. Anyway we quickly learnt how to handle that type. With diplomacy and goodness we changed an enemy into a friend.

New Delhi III

Back again in Delhi, for our third stay. Accommodation was always a problem. As in other years we had to change three houses, quickly set up a home in three different localities from a tiny modern flat in Jangpura to a huge old fashioned one at Raksha Bhavan till we finally settled in Lodi Estate, our longest stay in New Delhi.

Cyrus had to remain behind in Bombay as he was in his B.Sc. first year and because of these frequent changes in Cyrus's education we decided to send Anahit to a top class public school which would be not very far from Delhi. Welham's the Doon's girl school was considered the best, so the first thing we did was to go and see it, as her name was registered whilst we were in Bombay. For me it was a difficult parting but we had lovingly made her used to the idea as it was for her own good. Luckily it was a marvellous school with a homely atmosphere and the best possible Principal, Miss Linell, who took interest in each and every child.

We stayed for four months in Jangpura Extension in a tiny house facing a park. All our neighbours were typical Punjabis, ever so hospitable - old timers from Lahore.

Anahit did not take long to settle in her new school and made many new friends. We returned with a happy heart but I was not too happy to be away from my Naval friends and our old Ayah Tanjamma missed her baby terribly.

It was then that Sarosh read in the newspaper about Mrs. Mitsu Stein a Japanese lady who had given an Ikebana demonstration and was planning to start classes. Sarosh urged me to join them, as I was feeling lonely and said that for years you have been doing flower arrangements on your own, so why don't you give it a try. That's how I started my Ikebana involvement for many years to come.

Twice a week I would attend her classes, come home and diligently practise, but in the beginning I did not like it at all. By this time we had moved to Raksha Bhavan and we stayed there for a year. Ikebana had other attractions too, the good company of ladies with similar interests, mostly Delhiwallas. As months passed we became good friends doing things together. There was Uma Sharma, Sushila Mehra, Mrs. Iyengar, Kamla Chopra, Uma Rao and many others who were there for a short time.

Cyrus had his ups and downs when in Bombay and, thinking back, I am glad he took the difficult decision of leaving Science. I am also thankful to God that He guided us to stand by him and help him to start college in Delhi taking Arts, B.A. English Honours as his subject. With love and understanding we helped him to start Delhi college and it was wonderful to have him with us again. He did well in college and matured into a fine young man. No education is ever wasted, we believe it will always come of use.

By this time we moved to Raksha Bhavan flats which were allocated to NDC students but we got it out of turn and enjoyed our year's stay with the company of friends all around. Ikebana kept me more and more busy. Rushing to the nurseries, florist, experimenting with whatever little floral material I could get hold of.

Very soon I was doing well and a year had passed when my teacher asked me one day if I would like to become a teacher of Ikebana. She said this would mean hard work, giving up all social activities like the NOWA vice-presidentship and I was holding DCWA secretariship, and devote myself completely to the study of this art. At that time I did not know there were diplomas to be passed and it took years of study to become a teacher. Anyway it was a challenge and I plunged myself whole-heartedly into it. I took four lessons a week, went every day to help my teacher Mrs. Stein with her beginner's classes. These three years of assistant teachership gave me a tremendous grounding in this art. Every little instruction, every

little fine point I would jot down in a small notebook, come home and contemplate on it, practising, arranging flowers all the time. All my energy, every move, every muscle and all the talent I had, I put into use day after day, and the years rolled on.

Though along with that I never neglected my family. I took everything in my stride. Things came more easily to me than ever before. For this I have to thank my family too. They always encouraged me. When my teacher was hard and harsh I felt like giving it up, but they said not to worry. In anything one does seriously one has to face many difficulties Sarosh said, giving up would be the easy way out. So I carried on.

Once again we joined our Parsi Social and at that time there were many children of the same age group as ours. We went to Dehra Doon once a year and spent our first year's leave in Mussoorie. Life went on as usual, busy with Ikebana during the day, entertaining and going out in the evenings. Our Raksha Bhavan flat was spacious with a long veranda running around it. As usual I had my favourite corner looking out on Ashoka Road.

After a year's stay in Raksha Bhavan we were offered 37 Lodi Estate Bungalow, which was to become almost our permanent house in Delhi. We spent seven happy years there, years of more and more involvement in Ikebana. When my teacher was about to leave India, I was asked by the Tokyo Sogetsu School to start its very first chapter in India and was appointed its first Director. Mrs. Stein soon left and I had my classes three times a week. We had a committee of ladies who had also by then become Fourth Grade Teachers. We organised two exhibitions every year and from then on I thought mostly of Ikebana. Ate, worked and slept with it.

The most frustrating part was to immediately bring harmony between the Sogetsu Chapter and the Ikebana International ladies. Unfortunately, wonderful teacher as Mrs. Stein was, she had peculiar

ways of hurting and doing things. She had created a lot of infighting, misunderstandings for which I, as the person who took over from her, had to suffer. Even with me she behaved peculiarly at times, always suspicious and this used to baffle me. Anyway I went about with a stout heart only concentrating on learning as long as she was there. I tried my best to keep aloof from her politics and this she did not like, becoming suspicious and in turn harsh with me. So when she left, the first task I set before me was to bring about harmony.

Sarosh and Cyrus were for ever encouraging me, helping me in many other ways. Accounts, entertainment tax, Registration of Society etc. We were always a very close knit family, talking and discussing everything freely.

When Anahit came on holidays twice a year she had her own set of school friends who used to get together at different houses. She was turning into a pretty girl and with her *churidar* and *khameez* looked fresh and radiant.

Quite a lot of our time was spent in doing up our garden which had nothing except thick shrubbery all round. That is where Aziz, our mali, entered our lives and worked for us for 11 years with a break of one year in between, when we were posted to Bombay. We made a beautiful rose garden on part of our front lawn, buying the choicest plants and grafting some ourselves to increase their numbers. Cyrus had also become good at it and by the time we left Lodi Estate we had 60 rose plants of different varieties.

In one corner of the lawn we made a lotus pool and embedded beautiful stones which we used to bring in car loads from our travels to the hills. On the side I made a rock garden and during Divali I would put little *diyas* here and there which looked beautiful. Every annual plant was put down during winter and chrysanthemums grew galore during their short season. Sarosh concentrated on the vegetable garden and the poultry which we kept in one of the

outhouses. For the first time he tried the deep litter system and was most successful with Leghorns.

We had five servants' quarters so we were lucky that way. I had a good staff, our old Ayah and cook, a driver, a carpenter who was most useful during exhibitions to create large structures and one we made for storage. Aziz and the sweeper stayed out. Ayah's daughter Philomena and her family were also most useful and with all the help available we used to have large parties on the lawn.

Every year we used to spend our leave at different hill stations during summer, doing the journey all the way by car. First was Kashmir via Chandigarh. Dalhousie, Dharamsala, Kulu and Manali we did on our way back from Pahalgam. This was the the largest trip we took, for 66 days. It was great fun and at most places we met friends. At Manali the Kohlis were there so we had a super time. At Gulmarg and Srinagar Katy and Phiroze Mody and their children were there. All along we stayed in good MES Bungalows which Sarosh used to reserve in advance.

Another time we went to Nainital, Ranikhet and Almora. These places were delightful but Cyrus couldn't come as he had finished college and had gone on a hitch-hike to England, Europe via the Middle East.

The following year we went to Simla, spending 10 days at Wild Flower Valley. By then Cyrus had returned and joined a tea estate in the Nilgiris. So the year after we went to Bangalore by car, took Ma with us and spent an holiday at Sea Forth near Ooty. This was also a very long journey from north to south. From all these places I collected beautiful driftwood pieces, rocks and plants.

At that time Cyrus had a fox-terrier named Toby who came with us on most journeys. As Ayah was looking after the house we had no worry on that account. Aziz was also the most trustworthy servant, sleeping on the veranda in our absence.

With the teaching and Directorship activities I got little time to enjoy my favourite pastime - being one with nature. Many a times, through that, I used to touch the very core of true happiness - ecstasy! Those moments of communion with nature used to take me to realms of intense happiness and peace. I love reading and writing for my own pleasure but ever since we have come to Delhi for the past six years, I have rarely found time for that. Yet I know it is still with me and once again some day I will have time for it. There have to be different phases in everyone's lives, human beings must undergo many different experiences. That alone builds a mature character.

There are many things I wanted to do when we have our own settled home in one place. Since it was not possible in our service type of life, I have devoted myself over the years to other essential things. Bringing up children, maintaining a happy home, helping Sarosh tactfully in his naval life, cultivating good friends, doing my bit for NOWA and thereby enjoying the things I like to do. Organising big balls, premiers, fashion shows, needlework stalls, games and dances. All this has given me immense experience in various ways.

Now I can say with confidence that I am doing a piece of work which carries much responsibility, in which to maintain the highest aims and objectives many tactful decisions and actions have to be taken for the good of my Ikebana Chapter, so that the main purpose is benefitted and not individuals. Many a times this poses a dilemma to me. How true it is that when you are at the top in anything you are always alone. When you achieve any little bit and find you are at the top, you suddenly realise how weak human beings are. You know who your sincere friends are and who the flatterers are, wanting to get something out of you, like a Diploma Certificate. But through all this I carry on with a single-minded purpose of learning and teaching and staying away as best as I can from things that are harmful to anyone.

When I started learning Ikebana at first, I thought I was going further away from my intense love of nature. But after years of study I now

arrange as I like. Yet the basic principles come naturally, as second nature. Balance perspective, form.

Sometimes I do feel that too much of this planning for an arrangement for a demonstration or exhibition spoils my zest and my enjoyment of nature. That is why in years to come I would like to deal with it differently.

Be completely independent. Teach in a small quiet way, where it can give me enjoyment to see others improving and benefitting. Have small students' functions and exhibitions where all enjoy the good results and there is no rivalry between students or seeking publicity, yet at the same time aim higher and higher at maintaining standards. What I have done so far in public life has given me marvellous experience and recognition in the whole of India. Hundreds of ladies must have over the years learnt from me. But too much of this can become jarring for a person like me. One comes across a lot of pettiness and unpleasant politics which is distasteful to my temperament.

As the first Indian lady to be appointed the Director of Sogetsu School Chapter in India I have had to overcome many hurdles. Sometimes I almost feel like an onlooker standing in one place and observing the passing panorama of human behaviour. One has to take things philosophically to keep happy. Yet in so many little ways each individual has something so nice in her and this is what I first try to see.

Ikebana has taught me life itself at close quarters. Coming into contact as a teacher with adults, one begins to learn a lot about human relationships and how to handle them with tact. I have young college girls, mostly married women, mothers and grandmothers too. All sorts and all types from all parts of India. I observe their actions and reactions to various things. How people change with a little knowledge and power. How jealousy can raise its ugly head (especially during

our big exhibitions). How really sweet young people are easily influenced. One must be understanding, keep great control over what one speaks and make allowances for their weaknesses. After all that is how we all learn and get wise. I carry on my work but at every step I become wiser myself and my eyes are opened to many things I never knew or experienced before. Ikebana has also taught me immense patience and humility for my work. I know there is yet a lot to learn - one never studies enough in any art.

Towards the end of our stay in Lodi Estate, Anahit finished her Senior Cambridge and joined college in Delhi. As most of her Welham school friends were joining Lady Sriram, she also started her college life there and took the Arts course.

During our stay in Lodi Estate quite a few of our relations from Bombay came and stayed with us for a few days. Amy, Keki, Meher and Jehan, Spencers especially Dicky, Gitanjali and Hootoksi, Rita and Keikoo, Roshani, and many other friends. Chariamamma Ammu spent a fortnight with us and we had a terrific time.

Life was exciting, hectic and the years rolled by. Ayah's illness was getting worse, she could hardly stand so after her daughter and Xavier were transferred, I had to keep another woman to look after her. We had her cataracts removed at Shroff's Hospital but still her vision was hazy. Very sadly we had to let her go when it was time for us to leave Delhi and go to Bombay for a year. Philomena came to fetch her and after a few months she passed away in Bangalore. House without her was no longer the same, I missed her presence all the time. After 20 years of being with us she was like one of the family. Nobody could ever replace her. As a person she was kind, educated, intelligent and even though in the last few years she could hardly work, having her around gave me a sense of security.

By now Anahit too had entrenched herself in Delhi college life with all her old friends. As we had been told we would be back in a year's

time and as she had only one last year in college we decided to leave her in the college hostel so as not to disturb her education.

During all our stays in Delhi we were very close to Meheroo and Minoo Shroff and their children and ours were also good friends. We met often at each other's houses and at Parsi Sunday Socials.

When the time came for us to leave Lodi Estate, it was a sad parting but there was hope that next year we would be back. I got most of my good rose plants transplanted into big pots and along with other precious plants I had collected over the years, I left these at good friends' homes. It was very good of them to look after them during our absence. Also, Aziz used to tend them once a week. Classroom tables and chairs along with a few household boxes we stored in the INS India godown and we went to Bombay with just a few things.

Another sad event during our stay in Lodi Estate was the passing away of dear Bapu in Bombay. He was such a kind, wise and knowledgeable person with a good sense of humour but during the last few years he was not keeping well and was mostly confined to the wheelchair. Every year when we went to Bangalore we gradually found a change in him and that was worrying Ma as she too had her physical troubles. Sarosh used to insist and take her for a check-up to the Military Hospital. Some medications were prescribed but being a courageous person she carried on with her slowly growing aches and vertigo. For a change of environment we always took her with us for a holiday to Ooty or Anamalis but with Papa's illness there were so many tax and other papers lying unattended. Sarosh would help her out and twice or thrice a year when he went to Cochin or Coimbatore, he made it a point to spend a few days in Bangalore. This made Bapu very happy and Ma also had his help to sort out any normal household and official problems.

Cavas, Roshan and Keikoo had already left for Zug and Sarosh's frequent visiting was a great source of comfort to Ma. She relied more

and more on her Davies Road friends who were also of help to her and whenever Sarosh went to Bangalore they would tell him how Ma's health was giving her trouble but she would refuse to go to a doctor or admit there was anything wrong. When the Bankers told us that several times she could not get up from her bed and felt like fainting spells, Sarosh insisted that she should let Estha sleep in the drawing room or let her stand near by when she had her bath. Over the years she came to depend a great deal on Sarosh and came more and more close to us. We had shared so many happy holidays together in Bangalore as well as taking her to hill stations with us. Now it was worrying to see the situation in Bangalore.

Anyway we were going to Bombay and had lots of plans on our minds for our children and ourselves. My work was to be carried on by my two Assistant Directors, Uma Sharma and Veena Dass.

Bombay: Pallonji Mansion (1970)

After staying so long in Delhi a transfer to Bombay was a bit unsettling. Anyway there was one consolation as we were told it would be for a short period of one year.

Having left most of our household things behind, I felt I was leaving Delhi temporarily and perhaps a change would be good in some ways.

Very soon we were back again for the third time in Pallonji Mansion, 4th Floor. It took just a few days to settle down, having very little to unpack, just the items that were essential to run a home. Rest of the things we stored in boxes and crates in the ample storerooms of this flat.

Within a month or two of our coming, I had to go back to Delhi for my annual Sogetsu Exhibition. Thus a month went by. Then Anahit came for her holidays with her friend Surinder (Mel) and they had a terrific time.

I kept fairly busy with the NOWA activities and gave lots of Ikebana demonstrations. We went out a lot and entertained as usual, meeting all our old friends and relations.

Then suddenly Sarosh and I decided that this was the right time for me to make a trip to Japan and attend some advanced classes at my Sogetsu School. To start with I joined the TCI tour from Bombay as this was the first time I was going abroad on my own. I had an interesting group of people and had a most enjoyable time visiting Bangkok, Manila, Hong Kong, Osaka for the Expo and on to Tokyo with a sea voyage thrown in on S.S. President Wilson from Manila to Hong Kong to Yokohama. Quite an experience that sea voyage was with the typhoon season in the China Sea.

At Tokyo I left the tour and was on my own staying at Asia House which was close, almost a good walking distance from my school which was my main mission for going to Japan. It was a thrilling experience to meet the Grand Master, the great Mr. Sofu Teshigahara. His personality was truly that of a great artist. I attended some of his advanced classes and received my first Teachers Degree.

When I was not attending classes, I would take sight seeing trips in Tokyo and outside, visiting Hakone, Kyoto and Nara. Japan was exactly as I had visualised it and read in books. Neat and precise. On my way back I again spent some time in Hong Kong before flying to Bombay. All in all it was a great trip and I met so many interesting people everywhere.

Back in Bombay there were lots of things to do. Christmas and New Year functions to organise from NOWA. Luckily for us Admiral Krishnan was the C-in-C Western Naval Command and with his wife Sita, we did many things together.

The year just flew and we heard that Sarosh was appointed as Chief of Logistics, as Rear Admiral. Great was our rejoicing as at that time one could count Rear Admirals on five fingers; especially for a supply officer it was a rare thing. So back we went to Delhi with open arms, inviting all our relations to come and stay with us. There was Anahit too, getting ready for her B.A. exams and I longed to be with her at that time.

Some Jottings and Rambling Thoughts (1970)

It is two hours before sunset, I am looking out from Anahit's room balcony at the placid sea and delighting in the pure cool sea breeze ruffling my hair and playing against my face. How tranquil it is! The near heatless sun has bathed in orange the brushwood on the reclaimed land touching the sea. The tops of soft grassy bushes stand out wave upon orange gold wave, like lighted bushy orange torches, their slender long stems standing in shade and producing a burnished gold effect.

The sea behind it is calm and faded like a painting of bygone days. Not a stir, not a wave - a misty blue glass sheet. The sky near the horizon too is hazy and the end of Malabar Hill is swathed in mist. A flock of sea-gulls hover just above the sea line looking like white fluff stuck on bluish white opaque glass. I stand breathing in deeply of the whole atmosphere.

The soft colours and the caressing cool air does something to me. Creates a feeling of intense happiness and contentment. The sea the sky, the breeze - I want to encircle them in my arms - to caress - to whisper - for everything around me is sacred. It is akin to a prayer. I am always at peace with myself and the world. Somewhere inside me, I know that oneness with nature for me is sheer joy.

Sarosh understands this - my attachment to nature, though he enjoys it in his own way. I have shared this joy with my family. The children enjoy nature too in their own individual way. This individuality I have always respected, encouraged, for that makes individuals so lovable in their own special way. Each one of us has his own way of expressing and doing things. Sarosh and I always understand that fact. In life it is so much easier to get on with others if we remember and appreciate this fact. This we have taught our children.

Delhi: 27, Tughlak Road

So here we are back in Delhi - it seems we had hardly been away - everything is so familiar, like returning home. At the airport quite a lot of people came to receive us and gave us a warm welcome and from there we drove to the Circuit House in the Cantonment waiting for our allotted house.

The first 25 days we stayed in the cantonment and then in the NDC mess. So I had nothing to do but stroll in the garden, read and visit friends. Finally, after a month and a half, we moved into 27, Tughlak Road. There was so much to do as it was a huge house with four large bedrooms, drawing, dining, pantry, kitchen and 10 servants quarters and outhouses. Two bedrooms were huge with two bathrooms in each, one for *sahab* and the other for *memsahib*. Also dressing rooms as big as a small bedroom in a flat. One of the suites was separated from the main building by a portico, to be used as a guest house. There were large verandas both in front and at the back. All these old houses are of the good old Empire days to be used with a large retinue of servants but we have to manage with our staff of five to six. For nearly a month we were surrounded with plumbers, painters, distemperwallas, carpenters and electricians whilst we took refuge in one room as the house was slowly being touched up to our requirements.

The main person to welcome us was our old faithful Aziz, the mali. His joy knew no bounds when he saw us and when we moved to our proper house he came with huge rolls of garlands and decorated the entire length of the veranda, criss-cross fashion like a wedding house.

Then Anahit moved back with us from the hostel. Her exams were approaching and she was trying to concentrate as best as she could under these exciting circumstances. We managed to get her room ready first so she settled down quickly.

Our Naval staff of four which we got as a Rear Admiral was entirely

new except our ever smiling Charan whom we had in Bombay, Fernandes our cook and Prashad the steward we also got from Bombay. We managed to get a really *dosi* old Ayah who was our Ayah's relative and then of course Mali Aziz took charge of the garden. Later Madanlal joined us as our driver and so all the quarters got filled up with their respective families, the six of them, some using two rooms each.

This house had a rambling big garden of four acres. As it was a corner house we faced two roads but with Aziz's help I got my rose-plants back and started a rose garden on the front lawn and made lots of flower beds on the sides and on the vast back lawn. Also a vegetable garden on one side sheltered in one corner.

The annex guest house I made into my Ikebana classroom which I earnestly started after a couple of months and from there on once again got thoroughly involved with my Ikebana Chapter, its meetings, exhibitions, demonstrations and classes thrice a week.

In Tughlak Road, the house was spacious, the domestic staff large and efficient, the garden immense and we did a lot to it. Rose garden, rockery under the beautiful ficus tree with my lovely stones and rocks got from our travels and stored. The huge new trellis on the back lawn filled with my velvet creeper, yellow jasmine, *rincus pernem* and *clorendendron* creepers trailing on the outside of the front verandas, beautiful foliage pots grouped on the steps and in winters long rows of sweet-peas in front and back and colourful flower beds. Yet this garden did not inspire me. There was no privacy. It was too big, too open. However, I had my happy moments - I can't say there were none at all.

Sitting on the back lawn in April, at the end of winter and before the beginning of the hot summer, there were cool breezes and the sky gradually turning dark in the evenings. Scented breezes wafted from the flowering trees, especially when the neem blossoms first bloomed only for a few days, after which the berries appeared and give off a peculiar odour.

The fantastic poppy beds I grew in winter, what large blooms and so profuse. They overcrowded the bed. The yellow jasmine Mrs. Sherwood had given me in Lodi Estate was now firmly in the ground and growing by leaps and bounds, its long dark green leaves and stems were now shooting out all over the outer courtyard wall and in season the delicate yellow jasmine bunches all over its stem. All my plants were there, but nothing brought that ecstatic joy.

I loved sleeping out on the divan on the veranda during winter afternoons, getting deliciously toasted under a light quilt. That was one of the things I used to look forward to when I was alone. The whole house quiet and me with my books. Sometimes when Anahit returned early, she joined me.

My favourite garden walk was from the Prithviraj gate to the side of my room, back and forth. I took in all the beauty around me - it was a time of communication with nature - a time of silent thanksgiving, solving problems, making decisions.

Anahit finished college, graduated and then joined the Kindergarten Diploma Course for two years and then taught at the Playhouse School next to our house in Tughlak Lane. All this was half day so she joined Triveni Kala to study drawing and painting. All of which she thoroughly enjoyed and with good results. Her activities were numerous - modelling, teaching, painting, singing over the AIR with her guitar which she had studied for a short time at the Delhi School of Music when we were in Lodi Estate. Now she became fond of American folk music and strummed on her guitar. I would spend hours over her, making her sing the right way. There my training in singing came of use. Voice production, modulation and breathing. She suddenly seemed to blossom in arts. All the latent talent came out with a little coaching in these five years.

Our children, God bless them, are truly wonderful and so mature and I am so glad Cyrus finally found such a good wife. When it was destined to happen, it happened so suddenly. How strange that he never really liked anyone till he met Mahrook. He kept on saying that he was not keen till the right time and right girl came along.

His wedding on our vast back lawn was truly memorable. The stage decorated with a canopy of flowers so also the three sides. It was like a North Indian wedding with the Shehnai playing in the beginning. Nariman Kaka, Tehmi Kaki, Roshan, Hilla and Keki from London had all come down for the wedding. Also Hootoksi, Robert and Freny Sharad were there. Of course the Shroffs also were in our family circle and during all the four day ceremonies my close Ikebana group was also there. We had two day functions. A reception for all our N.H.Q. friends a day before and on the wedding day, a large crowd of friends for dinner. With so many relations staying with us the house was lively and full of fun. Even Amy came for two days.

Anahit was a charmer - with her sweet friendly ways she drew lots of friends around her. I derived great pleasure from her friends. We were so centrally situated that ever so often Mini, Kumkum, Honey or Mel dropped in for lunch or spent a night with her if they had some function to attend. They always went as a group together. There were many boys after her, but she kept a pleasing distance as she did not find any one to her liking. She had refused so many eligible Parsi boys - at least five of them we liked, yet she was not so keen. That worried us, as all parents like to see their children settled. We prayed for the right man to come along.

Sarosh frequently went on tours and at that time our house was surrounded on all sides by our trusted domestic staff. Mali sleeping on the front veranda, Fernandez on the back and Ayah curled up on the carpet in the drawing room. The TV was in our bedroom, so we could watch sitting in bed as the best programmes came after dinner. That was the time Mali made his entrance, came and sat near the door making wisecracks with the staff children who sat on the duree along with the Ayah and Charan. Those were happy moments in so much as good sincere human relations were concerned. A pleasant time to remember.

As usual we had lots of house-guests from time to time. In fact the maximum in this house. We thoroughly enjoyed their stay, taking them out and spending hours together in the garden. First came Phiroza and Jimmy, Mehli and Perin Jeejeebhoy altogether for nearly a month.

We had a fantastic time as all six of us were together. Then came Bachoo and Dady when Sarosh received his PVSM award from President Giri. Then we had Neville and Sherene, Tehmi Kaki and Nariman Kaka who spent a month with us during Cyrus's wedding. Hilla and Keki were there at the same time so it was fun. Sooni and Jeroo Patuck with her son Karan, Nergish and Sylla and oh a host of other Naval guests who spent a few days with us.

Life at Tughlak Road was always crowded, busy, hectic. Our friendship with our old Sunday Parsi Social had now deepened. We had known most of them intimately for so many years that we looked forward to getting together - Shroffs, Gaes, Markers, Grants, Vaghaiwalas, Rustomjis, Dhun and Pesi Mehta, Jhaveris, Perin and Jehangir Parakh, Meher and Darabsha Wadia and from time to time a couple of new ones joined. We arranged picnics, new year functions and Khordadsal dinners besides our regular socials on Sundays.

Sarosh was always a good Samaritan - always besieged by a horde of people in need of jobs or passed over for promotions. God alone knows how many he got into the Navy, CPWD or Police and with what difficulty and trouble. Either they were knock-kneed, undernourished or a little too old with not enough education. Anyhow, after a year when they came to see us, there was a heartening change. From scrawny dim youths they were transformed into strapping smart sailors or peons. Good food and training did wonders. Especially our Mali's son and Samji, Kalidas's son who were rejected three times and after years of trouble Sarosh succeeded in pushing them in somehow.

Quite often Anahit and I used to go for late evening walks around the Tughlak area. From Prithviraj Road to Aurangzeb Lane and then to Tughlak Road. Sunset near Tughlak Crescent was the most beautiful to watch. The scent of newly cut grass and the open sky streaked with soft pinks and greens. We used to linger and walk slowly when we approached the Crescent, to savour the evening as long as we could. The bottlebrush trees overhanging the gates looked lovely with their red tassels swaying in the breeze. The sleepy old bungalows hidden behind thick creepers and old trees looked mysterious.

My friendship with my Sogetsu group was now very close. It sort of cemented and we understood each others' weaknesses and good points. I realised I was deeply entrenched in Delhi civil life. I had made many friends over the years and though I met some occasionally, I liked their company. I felt a part of them and completely at home.

I realised now (when in our last year in Delhi), that the few years when we returned to Bombay on transfers my life was mostly with the Navy. That strong fraternity kept me involved in all their activities. Not that I neglected my old childhood friends and relations. Of school friends there were only a handful left. So many close ones had gone out of Bombay or died young.

When I stayed for long periods in Delhi and was so involved in its cultural life, it brought me closer to those like-minded people. We worked together, went out together, ate together, studied Ikebana together. Got entangled in arguments and normal intricacies of day to day life as one can with old friends only. And that made me belong to them more than the Bombay I left behind 35 years back as a girl of 23.

There was attachment to the environs of Bombay, quite strong, being a happy part of one's childhood, but something else seemed lacking as the time came to leave. I would miss my wide circle of friends. Friends one makes at the peak of one's life, when one is quite young. What I may make in future will take a long time to become tried and trusty friends.

During the last year of our stay, our own bungalow in Vasant Vihar came up. Lovingly we planned the garden, planted some beautiful trees and a variety of bougainvilleas all around the railing. I wondered if we would ever stay there. Anyway I was happy that I was leaving behind a part of us, whenever we wanted to come, in "SAROSHAN".

RETIREMENT YEARS

Koel and Summer

After having many months of delightful cool weather, summer was approaching fast. I had heard the first call of the koel at the end of March.

Suddenly it was warm, quite hot. The sun made its appearance much earlier - when I woke up at 6 it was above the hills. The days started to get longer.

The 100 year old tamarind tree in front of my bedroom window, which was scraggly looking a few days ago, started filling up in no time with its feathery tender leaves. It looked furry and green with all its branches now covered up. The crown a soft great big ball standing on a straight tall trunk. All the trees round about became bushy and green, a very pleasing sight indeed. The red gulmohurs and yellow rusty shield bearers which Sarosh and I had planted six years back, were now in bloom.

Every morning at 4 am the koel gave a subdued first waking up call from the tamarind tree. Lying in bed, I looked across the window from where the first notes drifted. I heard it stirring slowly and then for some time there was no sound. Both koel and I went back to sleep. At 5.30 am it started again - then at 6 am it grew louder and louder rising to a crescendo, calling out to its mate. For some time the exchange of calls continued, as it flew from tree to tree, the direction of the sound changing. Coo-oo Coo-oo, now louder, now fainter. It tells a plaintive tale of earth and its beauties. Of colourful Indian summer, extolling its charms with the exotically scented mogra and opening of gulmohur buds. I lie in my bed enjoying this to the fullest, till it is really bright.

The whole day, as I work or read, I hear the koel's call. Now from a distance, now near our tree. The elusive little bird. Lingered, the notes rise and fall.

Lines Written End of September 1985

When the cock crows in the early morning its clarion call, repeated at intervals, breaks the silence of the dawn. A new day gently unfolds.

I love to listen to his call from a distance – so sharp and lilting, getting fainter as he moves away majestically from the vicinity. He is a big fat fellow with bright russet body touched with blues and browns, his tail feathers a blend of colours.

I also love to watch the intense dark green of the trees, looking brighter, shining in parts as the sun highlights them from the western sky. Under the ancient tamarind tree there are patches of light and shade. So many attractive bright spaces in the tree standing out in patterns against the soft shady uneven parts of the leaves.

I love to watch the smooth glistening black of the crow as he flies here and there around the trees. His back like polished ebony. The bulbul calls, its sweet musical notes following in quick succession. When the tide is low a great hush envelopes everything. Sparrows chirp as usual. The sea-gulls give out a shrill cry. End of September they have arrived. They will be with us for six to seven months now, dotting with white the huge rocks jutting out into the sea. Flying after fishing boats in little flocks. Always in flocks wherever they go.

The delicate fragrance of jasmine which Sarosh brought in the morning from his walk fills the whole room. It is so light and ethereal. One never tires of nature. Its eternal joys go on and on. Month after month, year after year.

Dolphin

At last after so many days of feverish activity I have time to enjoy the beautiful, peaceful quiet afternoon. The air so cool, really cold for Bombay in January. It's a delicious feeling to snuggle under my soft blanket and doze off a bit; open my eyes, listen to my favourite BBC programme - then again a few winks - then open my eyes to see the yellow sunlight reflecting on the ceiling. They are in such interesting shapes and forms depending on how much of the curtain I open of the westerly window. There are sounds of children playing somewhere on the road, under our trees. The 120 trees Sarosh and I had planted nine years ago are now bearing flowers. The gulmohur and the rusty shield bearer spread out their foliage and the Ashokas have become mighty tall; whistles, chirpings, crows' caws, and the breadman's call near the Raina House.

So many thoughts crowd my mind. The very successful Navjote celebrations of our grandsons Nitash and Darius. So many phones came to say they enjoyed every bit of it. The food, the flower decorations, new arrangement of the dining tables in a horse-shoe pattern, so nobody stands at the back and clashes. What's more, we enjoyed it too with all our close friends and relations. All our efforts, Sarosh and mine for so many months, it was worth every bit - now is the time I look forward to.

Cyrus and family have gone to Bandra for a couple of days. The house is so quiet but I have enough things to keep me happy. Contented. Enjoy the sounds from a distance, the chimes from our two clocks, the lovely piece of music over the air from BBC, I need ask for no more.

POEMS

Prologue

My heart is full of reflection
Deeper than that of water
When I look back over the years
And think of the years beyond,
Life seems to have just flowed on.
Now winding, now straight
Life's cycle within cycle,
Days and nights, births and deaths
Joys and sorrows, child to man.
How insignificant my part
In His eternal scheme of things
So little to show, so little to account
Yet some landmarks stand out fast.

If

If I have brought sunshine to my own,
If I have lighted a torch inside one heart,
If I have brought tears of joy and parting,
If I have helped to strengthen thy moral ego,
Thy high sense of right and wrong.
If I have fed thy soul with silent love
And made life worth living,
If I have brought thee courage
To face life's many battles,
Stood by thy side with open arms,
Then, I have done my wee bit, to uplift
My soul and thine.

(1967-Lodi Estate)

Coming of Cold Season

Crisp air
The first nip
Intoxicating, perfumed
From the mountains,
Streaming over the plains
Faint subtle
Gliding
Bearing tidings
From the first snowfall
On the Himalayan range.

Stealthily colours burst
More green buds swell
Gentle swaying of the bough
Oft repeated promise
The season of flowers, is here.
(1973-New Delhi)

How Do I Remember?

How best do I remember
The years so lived?
The ecstasy, the abandonment
The happy leaping of the heart
Every time I beheld nature's boundless beauties,
The field of jasmine I saw at dawn
The grey whorlings of smoke,
The curls of your hair
The rhythmic beat of the wood-chopper
In the crystal mountain air
The perfumed evening

In the moonlit garden
These and so many more.
The deep gratitude to Thee
For giving us this magic
Of sight and sound.

How else do I remember
The years so spent?
For child-like heart,
For vision clear and truth unclouded,
For joy awakened and happiness shared.
Moulding of little minds,
For their trials and tribulations,
Patience rewarded, faith restored.
For sincere friends, their give and take
For parents' so loving
Instilling and passing
The secret magic of Thy unfathomed art.

Besides all these
How do I remember
The years so spent?
For the gracious example I saw
In his noble soul,
So unawares, so instinctive
In unselfishness and purity,
For handsome gesture of his youthful hands.
For her swanlike neck and gentle smile
Which oft broke into peals of merriment,
Her charming ways and uncluttered mind.
The grand lady I admired and loved,
Little things which mattered so much.
In these I remember the years so spent.
In these I look for the years beyond.