

My Dream vs. Reality

An Autobiography

agenda

Hasmukh Bhat

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Translation by Simone Schroth



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Dedicated to
Jutta and Sunita-Nicole

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Translator's Note

It is the fascinating internationality and interculturality of this text that make some of its elements difficult to translate.

First of all, the decision was made to translate the German original into British English.

Another issue is that very often, there is no direct equivalent of medical institutions, exams or other professional terms, as the systems and hierarchies are different.

With regard to hospital hierarchy, the translation 'Head of Department,' 'medical director,' or 'chief physician' has been used for 'Chefarzt'; 'senior physician' for 'Oberarzt,' 'ward physician' for 'Stationsarzt,' and 'medical assistant' or 'assistant physician' for 'Assistenzarzt.' Wherever possible, medical institutions are represented by the name to be found on the English versions of their website.

Footnotes were kept to a minimum.

The translator would like to thank Jeremy David Rigby who helped with proof-reading and valuable suggestions.

September 2011, Simone Schroth

Introductory Thoughts

It was never my intention to write a book. Even though I am convinced that my life is not an ordinary one, I would never in my wildest dreams have considered myself capable of such a project. Only now that I am 68 years old has it occurred to me that my autobiography might be interesting for others, too.

However, it is primarily for myself that I am writing this. Pictures and scenes reappear from a past long gone. I look back and take stock.

This compendium might be of some significance for my daughter as it may enable her to take some steps into my past once I have left this world. It will give her the opportunity to understand better in retrospect why I behaved the way I did in certain situations.

When writing, I did not restrain myself in any way, nor did I follow any particular plan. I merely tried to imagine in greater detail what came back to me spontaneously.

Keeping a diary or journal on a regular basis is a well-known form of autobiographical documentation.

In a study published in 1985, developmental psychologist Inge Seiffge-Krenke lists five main functions of journal writing:

Remembering, emotional relief, self-integration, self-reflection as well as the use of the diary as a confidant.

These criteria form part of the description of my life, but there is one difference: I am not addressing an intimate journal but the potential readers of this book.

When I was young, I would hardly ever reflect on the situations and conflicts in my life. This new urge to do so may be an aspect of getting older and ending my professional career. An empty space that needs to be filled is opening up.

It is my intention to integrate individual memories to form a whole and to give them structure. By doing so, I wish to create the overall picture of a life – my life, that is – and to make it permanently visible (i.e. readable) for myself as well as for others. Also, I am influenced by the impertinent notion that it is not only the lives of stars and famous people that deserve being written about and read, but mine, too.

While I was working on my book and discussing its content with my wife, I could feel to what extent a ‘self-revelation’ of this kind resembles a balancing act. What is it I am bringing to light? What should I conceal from those I have lived with and still live with? Are people going to be hurt, and am I being judgmental? Is what I write overly revealing? In which particular cases will my honesty fail to be understood or be misunderstood? There can be no doubt that I am making myself more vulnerable with this publication, exposing myself to a potential lack of respect.

Readers of this book will notice the details I go into when describing the various steps and successes that formed part of my career. German readers might interpret this as an embarrassing element of my vanity. Germans tend to be modest rather than boisterous. They prefer understatement to exaggeration: ‘I did not do too badly there.’ In contrast, an Indian would say: ‘I was great. Everybody thought I did sensationally well.’ Taking a look at Indian business cards or name plates will give you an idea of the value Indians generally attach to titles and achievements – each passed exam, each classification, specialisation and further training will be listed meticulously. Those who obtained these qualifications will present themselves in the glory of their successes without further thought and will demand respect as well as better payment on its basis. This cultivation of professional achievements has

its origin in the hierarchical structure of Indian society. It is proof of how high a person made it up the career ladder and what degree of respect they can expect from others in return. Modesty would be the wrong approach here as it would gain them less esteem and respect.

It does not seem to be an exaggeration to speak of a naïve narcissism in this context that is only surpassed by the Austrians and their obsession with titles.

Going beyond that aspect, the focus on my professional life shows how important my work is to me. It is especially medical work that has two functions: an intellectual and a social one. Linking the two has given my work meaning and made it fulfilling.

Readers of my biography will see an image of India develop in their mind's eye. This image is a strongly individual one. I do not claim objectivity – if there *is* such a thing as objectivity. If I want to make something clear, I sometimes have to present it in black and white or to generalise. This is why I do not differentiate. At the same time, there are realities and tendencies that can be found in the many works of literature on this country.

Moreover, there are the differences between town and countryside, which are even more extreme these days than they were fifty years ago. It is especially cities such as Mumbai that change rapidly. Western influences – negative ones as well as positive ones – have a far greater impact there than on villages in the countryside. The Mumbai of today is not the city I used to know as a child.

I left India long ago. During visits, all I can do is observe changes sporadically and evaluate them carefully. Most of what I get to know comes from the media or from what friends tell me.

In my book, I intend to present things as they are, neither

better nor worse. It would be a great achievement if I could make my readers understand the Indian way of life a little better.

My biography will of course appear as a jigsaw consisting of 'pieces' – experiences, encounters, failures, successes, separations, farewells, losses, illnesses and highlights. However, it is more than a simple account, an assembling of events. The many details produce something new with a quality of its own which is more than its mere sum. The whole is more than the sum of the parts.

Dr Hasmukh Bhate
Simmerath 2010

Chapter 1

An Indian Childhood

During the war, in the early hours of April 25, 1942, at half past midnight, I was born in Barsi, India in my grandparents' house. At that time, my father was in Mumbai. He could not be present at my birth. This is why it was one of his younger brothers, my uncle Sunderji Bhate, who went to the town hall the next day to report that a son had been born to Mr and Mrs Dayalal and Rambha Bhate.



Illustration No. 1: Map of Barsi, India



Illustration No. 2: The house I was born in

In India, a child's birth horoscope is made directly after its birth. This is done using the date, time and place of the child's

birth. Due to the configuration, a name beginning with either H or D was recommended. As I was a quiet baby and smiled a lot, my parents chose the name ‘Hasmukh’, meaning ‘smiling face.’

Up to the present day, I have not been told much about the content of the horoscope. My parents did not want my decisions to be manipulated or negatively influenced by predictions. It was only after I had moved to Germany that they told me what the priest had said: ‘Your son is going to study abroad and will become either a doctor or a lawyer. As a doctor, he will not become rich but well respected, whereas if he becomes a lawyer he will become wealthy.’

My parents had got married on 7 May 1938 according to Hindu rite. He was nineteen years old and she fourteen. The marriage had been arranged by their parents.



Illustration No. 3: My father, Dayalal Virji



Illustration No. 4: My mother, Rambha Dayalal

My mother came from Karad in the district of Satara. With her parents, she lived in a new development popular among aspiring businesspeople. When she was ten years old, her mother died after the birth of her second child as it was impossible to stem her bleeding.

The child had been delivered at home and with the assistance of a midwife. Giving birth at home was normal in India; you only went to hospitals in an emergency. A gynaecologist would only come to see a woman in case of severe complications, and it would often take him long to get to her. That time, too, he would have needed a bike or a horse and cart. Thus it can be said that my grandmother died due to a medical health care system inadequate by today's standards.

Her death marked the beginning of extremely hard times for my mother, the end of her childhood. She could not go to school anymore as she now had to take on the role of a housewife and mother. It was she who had to do the washing and the cleaning and to look after her little sister. First of all, though, she had to overcome the grief that came with the emotional loss of her mother.

Some years later, my grandfather got married a second time. Nine children were born within this marriage.

My father was born in Barsi. After getting married, my mother lived there, too, together with her in-laws and five brothers-in-law. In India, it is the sons who must take care of the parents when they need help or get old. Together with their wives, they are responsible for the economic support their old, sick and weak parents need. They live with them, sometimes in one single household consisting of several brothers and their own families. If there is enough space in the house or flat, each couple will have their own kitchen. Bedrooms are less common. In the evening, mattresses are spread out in the biggest room; during the day, they are piled up in a corner. Many Indian men will not leave their parents for as long as they are alive. The daughters, on the other hand, belong to their husbands' family once they are married. After the wedding ceremony, the bride will bid farewell to her parents and siblings.

Thus my mother lived in Barsi while my father worked as a member of the Mumbai police force. He would not come home often.

Their first child died when my mother suffered a miscarriage while seven months pregnant. At that time, she was sixteen years old and did not know the facts of life. Later, she would tell me: 'It is possible I lost the child due to the hard physical work I had to do. The bleeding started, but I did not understand what was happening to me. After I had lost the child, I would often cry in secret. My loss was hardly ever mentioned in the family.'

My mother was eighteen years old when I was born. Two brothers (Dilip and Hemant) and a sister (Usha) would follow. Until 1944, I lived in Barsi with my mother and my father's family.

My grandfather owned a restaurant which was located below our living area and which had space for about thirty

guests. Every day, he would sit at the till and control what was going on. Often, he would take me with him. I would be allowed to sit on his lap for hours. Filled with pride because of this privilege, I would look at everything that was going on around me. Sometimes, my grandfather would even let me accept money or hand back change.



Illustration No. 5: Hasmukh in 1944

Barsi is situated approximately 430 kilometres southeast of Mumbai, 250 kilometres from Poona, in the state of Maharashtra. In winter as well as in summer, the climate will produce temperatures between 20 and 40 degrees, and there is a dry heat. As the majority of the population live from agriculture, which in turn depends on the rain, many people live in poverty. Today, Barsi has almost one million inhabitants, but 53% of them are illiterate.

The city's infrastructure was improved over the years, including traffic links, a public transport system using buses and trains and mains electricity. Hospitals and schools, colleges, post offices, banks and houses were rebuilt.

In 1944, my father moved us to Mumbai. He worked as a junior inspector under English rule and was given company housing. By that time's standards, the flat was fairly big, between 80 and 100 square meters. It had a big living room,