

Daddy's Life - Excerpt From Inclinations And Reality

Following writing about my father is from my autobiography, Inclinations and Reality, published in 2010:

My father and uncle Papaji emerged as the towering personalities and gurus of our family after the untimely passing away of my grandfather. A pair of siblings could not have been more dissimilar. My father, called Babuji by family members younger than him, was a straight-from-the-gut person; he had little need for social hypocrisy, but at the same time he was warm, friendly, and gregarious. He was incorruptible but forgiving. He amassed a wide circle of friends as friendship was his lifeblood. He was self-conscious, as almost all Kashmiri Pandits were those days, but had a wide empathy for people. He was serious and responsible but did not have any large-scale ambitions or goals in his life.

From his job with All India Radio, New Delhi, where he was a newscaster among other things, he moved to Information Services of India in New Delhi. On behalf of the organization, he went on diplomatic assignments to many countries of the world. This experience enriched his life, enlarging his perspective on world and life. He could work hard only to the limits of its need but did not like programmatic hard work. That is one of the reasons why he did not often top as a student though he did well in exams. He maintained very good relationships with people, especially with his friends and relatives. People adored him for his simplicity, his easy straightforwardness, his generous warmth, his ample generosity, and his spontaneous humor and wit. When with his friends, he would be at the peak of his jollity and agreeability; but when with his core-family he would generally be serious and silent.

Money did not inspire him, it was only a survival tool for him. He did not aspire for property or other material possessions. One way he looked at life was to treat

it as a duty that one must strive to perform well. He was against over-intellectualization of human life. He thought its basic elements were quite apparent; all that was needed was to respond to them adequately. He generally lived in forward direction and on short-time basis. He conducted himself very well at his job. He was quick in his work and extremely good with his colleagues, especially his subordinates. He spent some of his spare time in reading books on history, literature, public life, and in other fields. He also wrote many articles on politics. He was well-versed in Urdu poetry. He was a colorful man, full of fun. He was a very good talker and the spark of his conversation stayed on people's mind for quite a while. His education prevented him to be religious, but he did not dismiss it as absurd, especially in his later years. He tried to live everyday as best as he could. He did not have metaphors for the marvel or mystery of life, neither did he condemn its painfulness and absurdity. Such detached and stoic approach to life, to some extent, could be traced to Hinduism, which surrounded him; though he did not practice it consciously. He could become nervous when confronted with an important but a difficult situation or in an emergency or at the start of a long travel.

My father provided reliable and effective intellectual and emotional support to his relatives and friends, when he was asked to do so, or the situation warranted so. He was always willing to go to any length to help and comfort his family. He would not have liked to think that his life had a message, but if we were to look for it, it was to maintain the dignity of one's life at all the times, keep good relationships with people, follow the rules, and have fun. He passed away prematurely, at 65, on 16 August 1982, under unusual circumstances. That day in the morning he underwent a benign prostate surgery and passed away at midnight in the hospital. Circumstantial evidence strongly suggests he suffered pulmonary embolism, due to the mistakes in his surgery. His going away hurt his relatives and friends deeply, as they thought he was yet young and capable of a lot of goodness. No other person in our family, since and before his passing away, has equaled his perceived high human stature or his popularity, even though he had left Kashmir for good in 1948.

While bravely fighting his heartbreak over his younger son's accident, Daddy

passed away on 16 August 1982, at an unripe age of 65, after a benign prostate surgery. I was traveling in Europe when the news of his passing away reached me. Hurriedly, I reached India the following day, only to be able to see his ashes. A man who liked to laugh and joke had now passed on to eternity. Below is the response I sent to people's condolence letters:

"It was quite some time ago that I received your letter about my father's passing away. The reverberations of that event in the last August are still strong and I have been unable to bring myself to replying you.

The invisible forces that tie us all seem very visible when calamities strike us. A man's life depends upon the sympathies and the smiles of other human beings.

Death is as final as anything can be. To understand and cope with it is challenging.

For your understanding and sympathy, I cannot find good enough thoughts to express my appreciation in. But this much I can say: by your letter you have reached out for the human heart and added to our bonds."

My father, whose happiest moments were spent when he was in the company of people, would have been touched by such a moving response to his passing away, as has been generated by the people who knew him."

His death seemed to mark the end of an era for me. He was like a big Chinar tree over me, whose presence sometimes I did not feel, but now by its absence, it has come to full life. All my life, during which Daddy was alive, he maintained, it appeared, a studied distance from me. Part of it was due to the cultural lag of Kashmiri fathers in relationship with their children and part of it was due to his

innate shyness, well-hidden by his outwardly gregarious personality. But there were two more elements to it. My birth being the first in the family, when he was struggling to find a footing in the world, was reminiscent to him of his struggles. This experiential association, perhaps, made him cool toward me. Later, when I grew up, Daddy did not like my artistic disposition, as almost all his life he had wanted to be a practical man. Although he admired artists but living like one was too irresponsible and risky in his view. He wanted to take the world as it appears and man's role in it to be like that of a captain in a ship. But I had forgiven his aloofness toward me a long time ago. I wrote a book about our relationship, *Life With Father*, whose introductory verse is:

He remained an aloof tower in my life,

When I was looking for a father.

But the flow of time has washed my wounds

And now I miss his unalloyed love, his fulsome compassion,

Sharpness of his wit, his unaffected manner.

His presence is imprinted in the recesses of my consciousness,

His incorruptible nobility a light forever shining in my firmament.

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