

The logo for Steelbird Entertainment, featuring a stylized bird icon above the word "Steelbird" in a bold, sans-serif font, with "Entertainment" in a smaller font below it.

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A close-up, black and white photograph of an elderly man with a full, white beard and mustache. He is wearing a dark, wide-brimmed hat and a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt and a dark tie. He is looking slightly to the right with a gentle smile. The background is blurred, showing some bokeh light effects.

# memoirs of a Spiritual Tycoon



# Memoirs of a Spiritual Tycoon

*"Samoham sarvbhuteshu na me Dwesh o asthi na priyah  
Ye bhajanti tu maam bhaktya mayi te teshu chaapyham."*

I am equally present in all beings; there is none hateful  
or dear to me. They, however, who devoutly worship me,  
abide in me; and I too stand revealed in them.

—The Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 9, verse 29)



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# Memoirs of a Spiritual Tycoon

**I**n this journey called life we keep walking -- striving to find that 'something new', to possess that 'something more'. And for this we wander restlessly, our soul seeking fulfillment, an end to our search. But the journey continues -- as though it were on autopilot. We never really pause and reflect on where we are headed and what our purpose is. In our pursuit to satisfy these cravings we end up nowhere. Instead we spend our precious lives running around in circles.

Sometimes, however, this journey halts for a bit. We pause and step out of the rut.

It happens when we are very happy; it's the moment when we feel a sense of contentment wash over us. Often happiness is short lived. And total contentment? For that one needs to achieve elevation to a higher plane, a higher level of consciousness. It is a state of mind not within the reach of the lesser mortals. What, then, can give us everlasting joy? It must be something that transcends the visible, the tangible and the time-bound. Spirituality? Maybe, up to a point. But it is only God's company, known as *saanidhya* in our ancient Sanskrit text, which can help us find total contentment.

I too was drifting in the journey of my life like any other ordinary person, seeking 'something new', craving for more and more -- of what, I did not know. Since I knew not what my soul sought, I was restless, without any seeming purpose or aim. How could I achieve anything when I did not know what I was supposed to look for? And as I was beginning to lose hope, by sheer coincidence I found myself in the company of a man who would alter my life. You could call it my destiny, as ordained by the stars, divine intervention or pure luck. But this strange and unexpected encounter changed my life. It began one fine day when I happened to meet Subhash Kapur ji.

Kapur Sahib was sitting on a settee: a lush white beard adorned his face. He was dressed in a starched white kurta and a light almond-coloured pyjama. I sat upright and attentive, facing him. Though not much transpired in this first meeting -- not that I had gone with any preconceived notions -- yet I felt an inexplicable power, his all-encompassing aura. That was what made me sit in attention. We sat sipping tea and talking about matters inconsequential. It didn't last long, this first meeting. But later, on my way back home, I thought about the man I had just met. There was something extraordinary about that ordinary meeting. Something exceptional about that face! Slowly, it began to dawn on me that I had been in the presence of a truly special being.

After this first meeting with Kapur Sahib I felt a strange tranquility within me. I felt serene.

That night, I stayed awake and in deep thought for a long time. What was so special about that ordinary meeting with an unassuming man? I tossed and turned on my bed, gripped with a need to solve this puzzle that nudged my mind. I contemplated over that presence. I couldn't explain its magical, almost hypnotic hold on me. The kurta-pyjama, the lush beard, the almond-coloured shawl, his sparkling eyes, the salt-and-pepper hair, the childlike smile and youthful exuberance, those infectious bursts of laughter, that sweet voice....

What was it about his presence that had touched me so deeply? A word had come to my mind -- the realization had struck instantly. He was *tejpurn*, full of divine light. I knew what I had witnessed. I had been in the presence of the 'Divine'. And as my mind came to rest, content in my new found knowledge, the body relaxed and sleep took over.

The next morning when I woke up, I found myself, well, revitalized. In all my life on this earth, I do not recall having slept so soundly. Perhaps I once had, as an infant without a care in the world. This, in my adult years, had been a sleep most empowering; it opened up a million new *avenues* in my mind. What had changed? I asked myself. It was just a glowing, laughing face that came to mind.

My eyes lifted heavenward, my hands folded in gratitude. I thanked God for He had given me this opportunity to meet an extraordinary and multifaceted man. God had brought me face-to face with His own self, His avatar on earth; he had brought me to Shri Subhash Kapur.

Subhash Kapur: an eminent Indian industrialist, a tireless social worker, a proud Hindutva exponent, a quintessential family man, and an entrepreneur par excellence.

I thanked my stars for making that improbable encounter possible. Improbable, since we came from completely different backgrounds, yet our paths had crossed somehow. After that meeting I could not restrain myself. I called him again, fixed an appointment, and there I was, headed to

meet Kapur Sahib with a spring in my step. Perhaps, to find some more peace, some new idea, or that divine feeling... This time round I looked at his face with the eyes of a student, a knowledge-seeker, a soldier on a quest, or like a hermit searching for the meaning of existence. While studying his face, I deliberately pondered over the word divine. What was his persona conveying to me? It was like watching a creator in action. His joyous spirit was infectious. It was already rubbing off on me. I was feeling peace. Not just calmness, but a happy, joyous peace, the kind that makes you want to cry out because you cannot contain it within your mortal heart.

My eyes closed with respect. They closed with a sense of devotion you only feel when you establish the frail thread of connection with the Almighty. When I opened my eyes again, the ocean-like peaceful eyes that seemed to hold the mysteries of the Universe within them the sunny smile spread on his radiant face met me. He seemed an embodiment of Ojaswi. Frequent bursts of tinkling laughter echoed. This time round, I saw more. Could it really be? Could this be what I was seeing? Was I seeing the One? Was I in the presence of Krishna, the beloved Kanhaiya?

Puttar ji kithe kho gaye? (My son, where are you lost?) My spell was broken by Kapur Sahib's sweet voice, which sounded even sweeter to my ears, laced as it was with his typical Sindhi-Punjabi dialect.



Just out of my trance, and quite visibly still in the throes of an inexplicable bliss, a divine ecstasy, I couldn't help but blurt out to him, "I saw something divine... godlike..."

Kapur Sahib laughed aloud, true to the boisterous happy Punjabi blood that flowed in his veins.

'My son, there's nothing unusual about that. People say this to me all the time.'

'All the time?' I whispered, dumbfounded.

With a gentler laugh this time, Kapur Sahib explained.

*'Mere naal aida honda hi rahnda hai.* (This keeps happening with me.)

It has happened so often that, one, I have lost count and, two, I am not surprised by these instances any more. You might find it strange, as did I in the beginning. I noticed when I would go to any function, event or gathering, I would bump into these complete strangers who would hug me and meet me as if they had known me forever. When it hit them that I was in fact a stranger, they would apologize -- but still treat me with immense affection and almost a reverence. They would tell me that they felt deep within that they were in some way connected to me. Random people, whom I have never seen before, would start swearing they had met me before or, at least, seen me somewhere. Another day, somebody introduced me to this young boy and -- it was quite embarrassing -- he told me he wanted to hug me. I gave him a tight hug and told him he was not the first

person who had said that to me. I think I have been blessed with so much love, affection and respect because I meet people without any prejudices, with a lot of warmth. If you are open-hearted and willing to receive and accept people as they are, they will be drawn to you. I have got used to it now. Yet, sometimes, I feel overwhelmed by this love and affection I have received from people all my life.'

Kapur Sahib said it simply.

'Ah yes,' he went on, 'I am now reminded of this strange incident that left me completely dumbfounded. Once I went to Bangalore to attend a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) meeting. The day after the meeting, we were in a bus on our way to the Balaji Temple. An old couple spotted me. To my absolute surprise and mortification, they fell at my feet! Can you imagine my embarrassment? I requested them to get up, but they wouldn't listen. They said they could see the avatar of Kalki in me, an incarnation of Vishnu. Later, they told me, they had just returned from the Kalki Temple. They maintained that I had a striking resemblance to him. I still remember their faces. I was astounded by their devotion and belief!'

I too was listening to him devotedly. Suddenly, he laughed.

'You must listen to this one. It was such an amusing incident. I was gambling at a casino in Las Vegas. Two boys, who must have been in their mid-twenties, came and stood

by the slot machines, right next to the table I was at. They stared at me rather awkwardly and it was getting a little distracting and uncomfortable for me. I tried to ignore their gaze. But they wouldn't stop. So I gave them an enquiring glance. Instead of answering me, they asked, "Are you God?" I didn't understand what they meant by that. I asked my son, Raju. He said they were asking whether I was God. I laughed aloud. "No, no," I said, "God wouldn't gamble, would he?" But their query made me reflect on what I was doing and I left the casino right then. I was indulging in something contrary to my character. I left behind tokens worth between one and a half lakh to two lakh rupees and never I returned to the casino again. Those boys had left by then.'

Kapur Sahib burst out laughing

I agreed with him. God and gambling?

Even as he was relishing narrating these strange encounters, I stared at his mouth. And a strange feeling gripped me. For one moment, I thought I saw Kanhaiya again -- opening his mouth, laughing. Didn't he say in the Bhagavad Gita: in His mouth can be seen the whole universe?

I was startled by this random thought. The vision reappeared. Little Krishna, laughing uproariously, as his mother Yashoda held him. She looked into his mouth to see if he had eaten any dirt, and what did she find? The entire universe contained within.

Unaware of my stupor, Kapur Sahib kept talking, smiling his benevolent smile.

'I have always received this overwhelming love from people. Everywhere.... Be it in the East or the West. Once, during a visit to China, I was staying in this hotel where they were very particular about their rules and regulations. For example, they wouldn't serve breakfast after 10.00 in the morning. So one day I reached the restaurant at 11.00 and I was really hungry. Not many people could speak English in China during those days. Somehow I tried to make the waiters understand that I was hungry, but they kept pointing at this notice showing breakfast timings. Then, out of nowhere, a man came into the restaurant and approached me. He asked me what the matter was. Finally, it was someone who spoke a little English and I could convey to him that I wanted breakfast. Not only did he serve me a lavish breakfast, but he sat with me and actually kept me company through it, all the while looking at me with great curiosity. He said there was something different about me that had captivated him at first sight, something that made him want to do everything for me, make me as comfortable as possible. He was quite distraught that his hospitality had been amiss when I was refused breakfast. I, of course, understood the servers were just following rules, but he insisted he would like to make up to me. He wanted me to move to a special luxury suite, which he kept only for his

most elite guests, all expenses paid! I told him I was leaving the next morning so I didn't require any special suite. Still he persisted and let me go only after I agreed to have a photograph clicked with him. I mulled over this peculiar incident later and concluded it must have been God's grace that made an absolute stranger in a foreign land feel this inexplicable pull towards me.

I have always believed that this world is a beautiful place. And you get as much love as you give unto others.'

Meanwhile, my curiosity to know more about Kapur Sahib's life was growing. I felt like an explorer, discovering a supernatural being.

Kapur Sahib held me thoroughly hypnotized by his astonishing tales and magnetic charm. I was as captivated as that hotel's owner. Did I see a special aura around him too? Yes, I did. In my trance, I had blurted out: "But I too can see God in you."

Smiling, Kapur Sahib said,

My son, it is the goodness of your pure and generous heart that makes you feel this way. It makes you see goodness, the divine, the pure, for you yourself are that, and that is what you seek in others. I am an ordinary man, just like you; a man made of flesh, bones and blood. It is from the same Creator I come. He made us all in His own image and we are all in that sense alike. There is no difference between you and me.'

But I could see the difference clearly. For a long time I debated with myself. He made everything sound so rational, so logical, that you couldn't refute it. But the mind, the heart, the soul –knew there was something different in the man I stood before. There was a force to reckon with. I wanted to ask him right then, "Tell me how there is no difference between us?" But I was afraid of offending him and I surely didn't want that. I had to keep our meetings and conversations going, if I had to understand the enigma he was.

'Dayal puttār... are you wondering why and how you and I are not alike?'

That left me stumped. One, Kapur Sahib had called me 'son', and second, he had articulated exactly what I was thinking at that time. Was he clairvoyant? Shaken, I said, "Yes, exactly."

"First you make tea for both of us," said the grand old man.

And so, in his abode, I made the tea with a devotion I think I have never felt for another. I poured the tea in two cups, handing him one and sipping from the other. Spellbound, across the steam rising from the cups, I saw the smiling face of Kapur Sahib.

"What is your date of birth?" I asked him.

As he looked up and sighed, the steam rising from the tea cup trembled a little, danced in the glowing space



around him... and perhaps... the embers of memories spread over decades, which, with growing years, were beginning to extinguish, were rekindled by my question.

My son, I am about seventy years old now. I was born in 1946,' I think.

"You think...? Do you not know for sure?"

No. I do not. I don't know the exact date. You see, in our parents' times, they didn't keep record of such things. A birth would probably only be remembered by the circumstances or situations around it. Perhaps there was a storm or an independence rally, a festival or some such thing. But exact dates were hardly ever noted.'

The steam rising from the tea cup swirled gently as it escaped to another realm. Kapur Sahib's voice seemed to come from far away, from the depths of a time long past.

'I have lived my life like any other person. I was born in 1946 at Dadan Khan Village in district Jhelum -- which is now in Pakistan -- to Shri Tilak Raj Kapur and his wife Shrimati Leelawanti. My grandfather, Shri Kishan Lal Kapur, was one of the most respected and affluent men there. I am told he was also a very kind person. The tales of his charity and magnanimity are still recounted in our family. He would often return from his morning walks without his shawl, for he would have given it away to some poor beggar he had met on the way. And let me tell you, he was one to wear the most expensive, the finest of shawls. They were

the softest pashminas and toosh shawls; each one of them cost Rs 6,000 or more. And mind you, this was way back in time -- those thousands would be lakhs today. Both my grandfather and great-grandfather owned massive acreage, properties galore. And not just land, the family had thirteen wells of its own. One well could irrigate fifty acres of land. Multiply this figure by thirteen and you will have an idea of how much land we owned. Don't even get me started on the various properties!

Our family set up the first petrol pump of India in Jammu and Kashmir way back in 1903. Apart from this we were making and dealing in utensils (thathihare), cloth (bajaji) and jewellery (saraffa). In all, we were into twenty-six different lines of business -- that's how enterprising we were. It runs in our veins. We were very well-off; so wealthy were we that the then king Ganfar Ali had mortgaged most of his land to us. Ganfar Ali went on to become Pakistan's foreign minister, and in 1963 he visited India in the same capacity to attend an envoys' meeting. He made a special request to the Indian government to be allowed to meet the Kapur family. I remember, two men from the government's intelligence department came to our house that day. Our father had gone out for some work and only my maternal uncle, Keshav Lal, was at home. He went out with those men to meet Raja Ganfar Ali; and they spent forty-five minutes chatting in a closed room.'

Kapur Sahib finished his tea and as he pushed aside the empty cup, he seemed to be secretly chuckling at some memory.

‘Because of that one chance meeting my uncle was kept under strict surveillance for sixteen long years! What did he share with the enemy country’s foreign minister? They wondered. For sixteen years, they kept an eye on his correspondence, his businesses, the people he met, and his money transactions. Eventually, when the CID (Central Intelligence Department) decided to close the file on my uncle, the officials called him and asked what had transpired between him and Raja Ganfar Ali in the 1963 meeting. My uncle didn’t even know he was under surveillance. He told them that before 1947, we were the Shahs in Pakistan and Ali had mortgaged most of their land to us. That’s why he had visited us. And only then was the file finally closed and laid to rest.

You must be wondering why I told you about this particular incident. You will see. I wanted you to get a sense of just how royal and affluent our circumstances were, of what lineage we come from. This, my dear friend, will put into stark contrast the events that were to follow. You had to know how bright the light shone, to realize how dark it later became. My forefathers had fought elections for thirty-nine years there. But this opulence was not to last forever... One day, a pundit visited our house. He read the lines on my father’s palm and announced his destiny: “Tilak Raj, your

good days are over. Your luck has run out. Your family will be forced to sleep without food.”

“Have you gone mad, punditji?” my father had thundered, enraged. “We have so much money that even if we sit idle and do nothing, we can feed another seven generations to come! And I have no bad habit. I don’t drink. I don’t gamble. How can it happen?”

But, indeed, it happened... Punditji was right. His words came true. In 1947, Hindustan and Pakistan were divided...

Kapur Sahib’s voice wavered a bit. Perhaps, he still felt the pain of Partition. He bent his head backwards and stared at the sky, as if searching for something fleeting, something long lost.

The Partition in 1947 wounded lakhs of people; thousands were massacred; those wounds can never heal. Tens of thousands of people lost their homes; their own land became foreign to them, turning hostile. I cannot tell you how much sorrow it brought to my family! I was only one-and-half years old then.”

He became thoughtful, as if trying to imagine what must have happened at that fateful moment in his life.

‘I was only one-and-half or two-years old maybe ... Of course, I was clueless about what my family was going through. My family, along with Jhai ji – my mother -- and brothers, was in Haridwar at the time of Partition. Only my father was in Pakistan.

We waited and waited. Five days, ten days, twenty days ... a month passed. We kept hearing about trains full of dead Hindus arriving from that side of the border. All our relatives had shifted to Hindustan from Pakistan -- all, except for Papaji, my father. Hearing about the carnage going on in Pakistan at that time our family was beginning to lose hope ... God forbid if something happened to Papaji....'

After one and a half months, we received a telegram from our uncle Kundan Lal from Amritsar. Papaji was fine. My father's uncle, Diwan Chaman Lal Kapur, went to bring him to Haridwar. The family found its happiness again. In those uncertain and violent times, finding a missing relative was no less than a miracle. Despite the ongoing havoc on the borders, we celebrated Diwali that year, for Papaji had survived.

In Kapur Sahib's eyes, I could see two contrasting emotions alternating: the pangs of Partition and the joy of finding Papaji again. Clearly, that terrible time, the misery of the circumstances had left an indelible mark on the little boy's psyche – one that brought pain even to this day. Kapur Sahib heaved a sigh, as he turned his eyes towards me and spoke, once again, confirming my thoughts like a mind reader.

'My son, I might have been too young to comprehend fully the pain of that terrible phase, but I can feel it all.'

He closed his eyes and took a long pause. He was going down memory lane. That's difficult in the best of times, but

in a time wrought with such turbulence ... one can only try and comprehend.

'We began a new life in Haridwar. We had nothing except one or may be one-and-half kilos of gold and a few clothes that Jhai had brought along from Pakistan. We survived all our time in Haridwar by selling off that gold.

Some of my earliest memories come from that phase of life. I can remember those incidents faintly. These events took place in Haridwar during the three to four years we spent there. First, my uncle Omprakash, who was only twenty-four, passed away. And later, my eldest brother Charaj Kapur ceased to be. He was only twelve when his body turned silent. I must have been two-and-half years old then. I remember the still body of my brother lying in the house; people moving around with tearful eyes; and amid this commotion around me I happily chewed my barfi. Blissfully unaware of what was happening around me! I used to be an addict of barfi; when I woke up, the first thing I would have was barfi.

How could I know then what was happening around me and what death meant? That's one of my earliest memories.

I also have a faint memory of my mundan ceremony, the first time my hair was cut. When the ceremony began the sky was full of clouds, and the ground was muddy, for it had been drizzling constantly. It was mostly just the members of our own family that were present.



In 1950, when Charaj bhai passed away, people had begun to say that Haridwar was not meant for us. It had already claimed two of our family members. And we had no work. We were sustaining our family by selling off Jhai's gold. Even our elders were reprimanding us for staying on in Haridwar; for some reason, they never wanted us to be in that city.

Having lost two people, we left Haridwar and came to Delhi. Once again, our family started a new life. New city, new people ... But in this new city, we already had some relatives. With renewed hope that this city might welcome us, we began looking for a place to stay.

Kapur Sahib turned his eyes away from my face; he rested his head on the edge of the settee, and said,

"I am not used to sitting on these. I like sitting on divans."

He looked at me first, and then at the azure sky outside the window, smiling.

'We settled at Nawabganj in Delhi in a 'special' relative's house. I will reveal later why I always refer to him as a 'special relative'. In fact, he was my father's brother. They owned a piece of land at Katra Arud Singh, Neemwali Street. They were living in a 14 feet by 9 feet room. A curtain was placed right in the middle of the room. On one side lived their family of four. And on the other side our family of five members settled down: Papaji, Jhai, my brothers Jagdish and Kailash, and I.

Somehow we pulled along. After some days, Papaji decided we must find means to earn a steady income. My uncle suggested to Papaji that he start a hotel. He said they were getting a canteen at South Avenue at Rashtrapati Bhawan for Rs 6,000. "I have no money. Nor will my wife part with her ornaments for me to start a new venture. Why don't you talk to your wife?" he goaded my father.

Jhaiji readily agreed to sell her Gokhru (heavy gold bangles and bracelets). Gold used to cost Rs 90 or Rs 92 per tola (10 gram) in those days. She sold 70 per cent of her gold. We took charge of the canteen and started working. A year later, a man claiming to be the canteen owner came and asked us to vacate it. Papaji said, "Why should I vacate it? I am the owner here!"

The man retorted impudently, "How can you claim to be the owner? Show me the papers! Where is your name? The canteen was taken on a lease for a year..."

That left Papaji stunned. "Such a huge fraud, such brazen cheating!"

Papaji came to know later that while buying the canteen our 'special relative', our own uncle, had decided to con us. He had not mentioned Papaji's name in the deed. But in his haste to become the illegitimate owner of the canteen, our relative had not cared to read the deed papers. The seller thought that since this man was cheating his own brother, why shouldn't he be cheated too? He had made a lease

deed for a year in the name of that relative. Thus, he gave him a taste of his own medicine.

Our unsuspecting family, however, was forced to face the consequences of this fraud. The inflow of money stopped. Slowly, all our resources dried up. We survived a few months by selling off Jhai's remaining ornaments. Then a day came when we had nothing; no cash, no gold. The whole family went to sleep that night without food. I was too young to resist hunger and to understand why we had not had dinner that evening, I started crying. Jhaiji couldn't bear this and she called the relative's wife (aunt) at the other side of the curtain, "Can you give a roti to Bhashi?"

Our special relative's wife pushed a roti from under the curtain. Only one! I ate it and sated my hunger. They were not poor, these relatives of ours. Both my uncle and aunt were employed. Yet ... I don't know how my Papaji, Jhai and brothers slept that night!

After some time even that 'special relative' showed us the door. From bad, our situation became worse. Our first year in Delhi was turning out to be a real disaster.

We rented a house in the Jamir Wali Street at Nawabganj for Rs 10 a month.

When you are down and out only God takes care of you. When Ashok, my younger brother, was about to be born we had nothing. Nothing at all ... no work, no money. That day Papaji's bua, his paternal aunt emerged from somewhere

as a blessing from God surely! She told us that somebody had given her Rs 360, which he had borrowed from Papaji a long time back. Papaji didn't even remember who that person was. He grabbed the money, rushed to the market and returned with a bagful of ration. Two hours later, Ashok was born.

That very day Papaji decided it was time to move and do something again. We had Rs 150 or so left from the unexpected money that bua had brought. Papaji bought two sacks of salt from that money from Jamir Wali Street and we started the work of filling salt containers. We worked really hard.

We used to pack 430 grams of salt in one packet. I used to do the packing work. You wouldn't believe, one day I packed twenty-eight sacks of salt. One sack used to contain about eighty-four packets. That comes to around 2,400 packets a day. And I was only seven then. It's not easy to play with salt at that tender age. We used to fill twelve packets in one big container and then repack those with cardboard. After this packaging, the supply job would begin. The work took off slowly. But there was a major hitch. The cardboard containers used to tear often causing us losses. We couldn't find a solution to this problem, and eventually, decided to quit.'

Kapur Sahib fell silent for a while, probably reliving his childhood memories. He wondered aloud. 'How would the family survive now?

Papaji set up a roadside vendor stall and started selling clothes. Whenever any relative or acquaintance crossed, he would comment, “Oye, Tilka Raj... tu bujka lagaya reya.” (Hey, Tilak Raj, you have been reduced to a vendor).

Hearing these humiliating remarks, Papaji would get up and rush back home with tearful eyes. Meanwhile, some passer-by would pick up the clothes bundle and disappear. We had to stop this business as well. Slowly, poverty started raising its ugly fangs again ... From prince to pauper or riches to rags: that had become our family’s story.

It’s been long since Papaji left his mortal body, but he is still alive for me. I still feel his presence around me. In fact, at times, I actually hold long conversations with him, seek his advice. In that extreme poverty, Papaji’s words are still etched in my memory and still tug at my heartstrings.

“Bhashi mein amiran da puttar aan, te tu gariban da putt hain...” (Bhashi, I am the son of a rich man and you are the son of a poor man.)

Despite those trying times and utter poverty, Papaji believed in complete honesty and hard work. He started working with a banana wholesaler. He used to sit at a banana depot where a wagon would bring the fruit, which was then sent on horse-carts to the market. After selling eighty-six carts of bananas every day, the employees would distribute the remaining (four to five cart-loads) among themselves.

When Papaji brought this to the notice of the owners, they said they were only bothered about the eighty-six carts. Whatever remained unsold was freely available to anybody, and even he could take his share.

One of Papaji’s uncles was furious, “Ullu de patthe Tilak Raj ... tere bachhe bhukhe marde pae hain, jad tainu mauka milya hai, ta kyon na lenda...” (You fool ... your children are starving to death. When you are getting an opportunity, why don’t you grab it?)

Papaji said, “Chacha ji, I cannot do anything wrong. As far as children are concerned, they are a gift of God. He blessed me with them. If He wants wellness for them, they will be fine. Else, they will die. But I will definitely not do anything immoral, even through these trying times.”

Papaji never compromised, he never ever did anything that he thought was unethical. Ordinary men fall apart or succumb to temptations when they have to tread the slippery road of tribulations. Very few people can survive such hardships without compromising. My father was one among such rare people.

While narrating these incidents, Kapur Sahib’s face glowed. I wondered whether this glow came from the pride he felt for his father’s honesty and perseverance or if it was a reflection of the rekindled embers of his childhood memories. Kapur Sahib took a long pause; I looked at his shining eyes and thought he was already transported to a different world.



‘Just when we were getting back on our feet, we faced the most unfortunate jolt yet again. It seemed life just did not want us stabilized.

Papaji had coins worth Rs 360, which weighed around 25 kilograms. One day, he was travelling by a tram carrying those coins in a potli, a cloth sack, which he had kept next to the tram driver. While getting down he forgot all about it! To lose Rs 360 in those times was a big loss to our family. But Papaji didn’t lose courage.

After some time, he had to stop working at the banana depot. We were at crossroads yet again!

He pondered over his earlier salt business where we had suffered losses because the cardboard containers would be ripped apart. He reconsidered that whole situation, looking for possible solutions with a new motivation. Surely and steadily, he hit upon an idea and thought of making cloth pouches instead. Plastic wasn’t a prevalent material in those times. So we innovated and started making cloth pouches to pack salt in. Probably, we were the first ones in the country to hit upon this idea. One hundred pouches used to sell for Rs 4. Our work was to cut and sew the bags, then to straighten those out and imprint either ‘butter salt’ or ‘refined salt’ upon them. The cost came to be about Rs 3.75 per one hundred bags.

After about a year of starting this business, somewhere in 1953, the government gave us the Beri Walla Bagh house

as claim. These claims were given to those families who had left their property behind in Pakistan during Partition. We did not get any cash, only this house. Meanwhile, we had monopolized the business of making salt bags. We were producing ten or twelve thousand bags a day. Yet, we did not increase the rate of the bag from Rs 4 fearing that a higher margin might drive our buyers away.

I learnt a valuable business lesson at that time: “Only he can ask for a better rate who has six months of ration stocked in his house.

These adverse situations turned out to be my best teachers. The ability to negotiate right and wrong in real life situations came at the cost of loss of innocence. As our life unfolded amid these rapidly happening events, mostly bordering upon crisis, my childhood came to an end very early.

Jhai was also toiling day and night for the sake of the family. I liked helping her out. During the day jhai used to help us with the salt bags and in the evenings I used to help her with cooking. My tasks would be cutting vegetables, cooking rice, or fetching tandoori roti from the bazaar. Jhai doted on me. I vividly remember this phase of my life.

One of my key evening duties at that time used to be babysitting Ashok. I would carry him in my lap and play with him, as it would give Jhai time to finish her household chores. Five members of our family would be occupied

with the salt work all day long, sometimes into the night. And so it would often happen that we would order rotis from a dhaba.

One such evening, Jhai asked me to get tandoori rotis from the dhaba. I went out carrying Ashok in my arms. We used to have a brass container for the rotis. I got the rotis packed and put that container on my head while Ashok was cradled in my arms. After a while I started feeling the heat of the container on my head. I kept walking with tears streaming down my face. I could not put down either of them: the hot container or the toddler in my arms. Crying, when I reached home, Jhai showered me with kisses. That day she gave me money to get Nathu's bhalle as a special gift. I went to the Nathu Golgappa Wallah's shop and bought bhallas worth two annas. Those days two annas were good enough for buying a full meal for one person. That day Jhai pampered me no end; she fed me with her own hands with all her motherly love.

While recalling that day with fondness, Kapur Sahib's smile broadened. To me, this appeared like Baal Krishna's smile! I kept looking at him without blinking my eyes. The feeling that he was Krishna never left me.

'Despite all the odds those days, there were times when I would sneak out to play with my friends and find comfort in childish games, which my childhood was otherwise bereft of. I would run to Khoo-Waali Street, for if I played in the

street next to our house I would be goaded back home. I remember vividly whenever I was playing in Khoo-Waali Street, Jagdish bhai would yell at me from the window. "Oye, Bhashi come home fast." I was eleven then. I would pretend I had not heard him. I knew I would be slapped for playing anyway, so I thought why not play to my heart's content and then get slapped! So I would play for a while and receive my share of slaps from Jagdish bhai.

I remember when I was studying in class seven, I would sometimes spend the whole day exploring the surrounding places along with my friends. Once we left early morning and spent the whole day wandering here and there. We reached the Kursia Ghat where there was a graveyard. All of us laid a bet, challenging each other that whoever touched a grave would get a rupee. One rupee used to be a big amount those days. With trembling hands I touched the graves and won a rupee.

PS Dhall, whom we used to call Shori, stayed in our street. Shori's father, Gyan Chand, used to work at the tarazu, or scales as you would know them. Shori and I had studied together since class four. We had been friends since then. Because we had a small house, I used to sleep either in the courtyard or on the roof. Having toiled all day, I fell asleep on the cot. Sometimes my friends would lift the cot, along with me, and chanting 'Ram naam satya hai' (God's name is the only truth), take me out of the neighbourhood

and leave me at the chowk. When the early morning traffic noise woke me up, I would carry the cot on my head and walk back to my house through the bazaar. The sight used to be a great delight for the bazaarwallahs. Whenever that happened, a shopkeeper named Munshi Lal would laugh helplessly at me. “Bhashi, tera phir Ram naam satya ho gaya!” (Bhashi, they performed your last rites again!)

They would play this prank on me almost every fourth day. My friends from the fourth standard -- Shori, Kukdi (Krishan Lal Dhall) and Chaman Lal -- used to be the main instigators and executors of this highly juvenile prank.’

Kapur Sahib was really in a good mood now, reliving the mischief of his childhood.

‘Ah well, I was never one for academics. I had no interest in my books and left the lessons largely ignored. Thinking about those days I am reminded of so many incidents. Let me tell you this particular one. I think I was in class four or may be five then. There used to be this sawmill area at Azad Market. One day those sawmills were burnt down and the path was cordoned off. Now this had been our preferred route to school. We saw there was a commotion all around because of the fire and all the shopkeepers were in a state of despair. You would think I’d be worried too, wondering how to get to school. But no. No such emotion in me at all; I was in fact jumping for joy, celebrating the fact that we had two days off from school!’

I studied at St Columbus School at Bada Hindu Rao. It was a corporation school, but I used to cheekily call it the Tent Columbus School because it was set up inside a tent. During the rainy season the complex was flooded with water, and every other day would be declared a holiday. This was apart from the two-month-long vacation we would get annually during the peak of summers. On the whole, because of the workload at home and these unfavorable conditions, I hardly studied. My English was quite questionable always, for we were introduced to this subject only in the sixth standard. Till then we were only studying ka, kha, ga (Hindi alphabets). We met a, b, c so much later in our school life.

We used to work really hard at home: Jhai, Papaji, sometimes Kailash along with me. Jagdish Bhai was studying in the tenth standard then. In our new house, we had a six feet by nine feet store where we would make the bags. We would get these thirty-six big bundles containing cloth strips. I would cut and open those bundles, and then carry all the clothes to the store, all alone. I was about twelve then. At that early age, Papaji had entrusted me with the salt-packaging task. Yes, I was the total in-charge of that entire tedious and taxing process at the age of twelve.

But then luckily, for my services, Papaji would give me Rs 65 for my expenses. Kailsah Bhai would get Rs 35 while Jagdish Bhai was given Rs 30. I would just spend all my money, every single penny, by the 20th of every month and

then extract Rs 5 or 10 more from Jhai. I was given more money as compared to my brothers because I worked more than them -- almost twelve hours a day.

I used to set deadlines for my work. For example, I would have my breakfast after cutting 1,000 bags, lunch after 2,000 and would go to watch a film only after finishing 4,000 bags. I had kind of evolved this system to be more productive. After a long day at work, I would reward myself with a film, practically every day. Well, there weren't as many movies releasing then as there are now, but, funnily, watching the same movie repeatedly did not deter me a bit. It was my reward and I was going to get it!

I would start working early in the morning, and at about 5.30 pm I would stop my work to get ready for the film. Papaji would ask, "Bhashi, which show are you going to see?"

I would tell him I was going to watch Rs 1.25 show.

He would say, "Okay, you go and buy Rs 1.75 ticket. But work a little longer."

About half-an-hour later I would again stop working, so Papaji would ask, "What happened?"

I would say, "I am leaving because I have to take bath first."

I always took a bath after work because I would be smeared with the dust from the clothes by the end of the day.

Papaji would say, "You take the Rs 2.30 ticket, but you work till 6.30 pm."

I would tell him, "But the film would have started by then."

So Papaji would insist, "Tell your friend Kandu (Sikander Lal Marwah) to buy two tickets and work for fifteen more minutes."

Eventually, after taking bath I would leave by 6.45 pm. I saw the film Rajkumar thirty-two times, but not once could I watch it from the beginning. Years later, when I had bought a VCR, I watched Rajkumar right from the start, for the first time ever. Can you believe that? Sometimes, I would reach the cinema hall only before the interval. But Kandu had got used to it. He would always be there hanging outside the cinema hall, waiting for me with two tickets. Sometimes, if I was too late, Papaji would sanction me an extra five annas to hire an auto-rickshaw. Those days I would buy the Rs 2.30 ticket even if the hall was completely empty or had next to none occupancy.

I had a very special bonding with Papaji; we were more like friends. He clearly adored me and even at that early age, he treated me as his equal when it came to work. The only thing that made us argue with each other was money. If he had five rupees in his pocket, Papaji would tell me, "You keep three, I will keep two."

I would ask him to keep three rupees and settle for two rupees for myself. He would insist, "You have to go to Connaught Place with friends. You must keep more money. I won't need it for anything."

I would turn around and insist, “No Papaji, you have to go to the bazaar. You keep more money with you; you will need to buy things.”

After going around in circles, arguing about every possibility under the sun and having wasted a precious half-an-hour over this triviality, we would keep Rs. 2.50 each.

But it wasn't such a triviality to be honest; it was what had become second nature to the two of us: we could sacrifice the world for each other, no questions asked. We both put the other before ourselves. Papaji always treated me like a friend.

A gentle glow spread on Kapur Sahib's face as he spoke almost reverently about his Papaji and Jhai. You could see the devotion, the affection in his moist eyes.

'In the interim, Jagdish Bhai had also taken up a job. Yet he was actively helping our family in our business. During this phase, one day Punditji visited our house again. He was the same pundit who had predicted that our family would have to go to sleep without food. Papaji had told me about that incident. I got curious and caught punditji right on the stairs. I asked him to read my palm.

After observing my hand, the punditji said, “Subhash, you are destined not to study!”

I was amazed. I said, “Solah aane sach.” (That's 100 per cent true.)

I had always held on to the belief that nobody could predict the future. But punditji had stumped me with his accurate reading or prediction, whatever you may choose to call it. I truly did not have an academic bent of mind; was never the least bit inclined to learn my lessons. I started believing in punditji's predictions wholeheartedly. He also told me that I might join some job soon.

After punditji's prediction, I didn't waste any time. Cashing in on the glorious opportunity, I quickly sold off my class X books. I had just appeared in the class X exam and the result was still awaited.

Since punditji had predicted a job for me, I went around looking for one. I took up a job with Gopal Salt Refinery at Rana Pratap Bagh for a while. I was employed at a salary of Rs 100 per month. It's a different matter that when I quit this job after a year six months' salary was still due. You know what, it was never given; I have still not received it.'

Kapur Sahib laughed uproariously recalling this.

'So I actually ended up getting just Rs 50 per month. Much later, I bought this salt factory for Rs 6,000. After running it for two years I sold it for Rs 8,000. I had to do that because the Gud Mandi Bridge that connected the factory had broken down and it was affecting our business adversely.

At that time, it somehow struck my mind that I must at least acquaint myself with certain practical or, say, vocational

skills such as typing. Shori and I joined the evening typing classes at Kapur Typewriter, Azad Market. Having dropped out from school, it was all work and no time for play for us; and we immersed ourselves in work with complete dedication. Typing classes, job, salt bags ... Yet we looked for more opportunities to make money.

I didn't like the typing classes much, and whenever Shori and I got bored, we would go to our friend Ghai's shop, which was just behind the typing school. Ghai used to make cartons for toys. That creative work interested me more than the boring typing classes. One day, I asked Ghai to teach us his craft.

To learn that trade, we joined his shop at Rs 30 per month. When we became proficient at it, I asked Papaji to lend me Rs 100 because I wanted to do establish my own separate business.

"Why? Is this not your own business?" Papaji asked, surprised at my demand and the reason behind it.

I told him I wanted to test my ability by working independently. Papaji gave me Rs 100 for the new business. I straightaway went to the Bahuwali Street and bought paper strips (patti), cardboard, needle, and mawa (a material which was used to make glue). I knew a toy manufacturer who used to stay next to us. He used to make a toy that would emit a whistling sound when pressed. I went to him and asked whether he was interested in buying cartons for his whistling

toy. He readily agreed. We settled for Rs 8 per goorse (12 dozen items). He ordered five goorse to begin with. We made those cartons with our own hands, and started supplying. He said we would get our payment after fifteen days.

After twenty-odd days I realized that I had supplied that manufacturer packaging cartons worth Rs 250, yet I had not run out of the carton material. Jagdish Bhai, who was employed, was receiving Rs 156.25 salary per month while I had earned Rs 150 in less than twenty days.

Then I told Papaji, "Hun mein naukari ni karanga." (Now I will not do any job.)

After I made this decision, I stopped attending the typing classes. It was not like I was not enjoying them anyway; sheer waste of precious time they had become. This new entrepreneurial venture had instilled in me an unshakable confidence. I busied myself in making bags. Shori and I would carry a sack full of these finished bags on a bicycle. The sack could weigh as much as 50 kg and though it was almost impossible to carry two bags, we would somehow manage it at one go. There was a bridge on the way; it had a small upward slope where invariably one of the sacks would fall to the ground with a thud whatever we tried. Then somehow somebody would help us load the sack back on the bicycle and we would reach our destination. We took all this trouble to earn some extra money. Papaji used to give us 50 paise for one sack and Re 1 for two.

Rab di meharbani si ... kisi de aage hath ni failaya ... par mehnat bahot kitti.'(It was all God's grace. I never sought favours from anyone. But I worked really hard.)

Ever so fleetingly, I would catch a glimpse of the child in Kapur Sahib, in the way his eyes twinkled mischievously or when his mouth stretched into a playful smile. He seemed to be reliving his past scene by scene as he narrated it to me. Meanwhile, he seemed to have drifted down some other memory lane...

My son, I was not superstitious at all. So whenever I spotted some tona-totka (sorcery or witchcraft) at the chowk, I would have a closer look at it from all angles. Then I would just leap over it. One night I had a severe seizure and my hands became stiff.

Jhai said, "This is the consequence of some black magic! You must have walked over some tona-totka."

Jhai went to Shori and asked him what I had drunk and eaten during the day. Shori told her that we had had grape juice during the day. We went to Doctor Krishan Chand. He said he could cure me only if I had a fit in front of him. One day, I was going to the income tax office in a taxi. I felt I was about to have that seizure again. I could sense tit about half an hour before I got the fit.

I asked the taxi driver to take me to the Dariaganj Chark Clinic. When we reached there I was already convulsing. The doctor was shocked to see me, for during these fits,

99 per cent of patients lose consciousness. I was fully conscious. I asked for a pen. The doctor kept asking me what was happening to me and I kept writing about what I was undergoing.

Mein us vele bol ni panda si, meri akhan ch aansu aa jande si. Mein ronda janda si. (During the seizures I could not utter anything; my eyes used to fill with tears and I would keep crying.)

My hands were clasped tightly together and it was impossible to pry them apart. Even that doctor could not cure my disease. Then one day, Jhai took me to a woman named Kamla who was a traditional healer. She would call to her patients aloud, as though taking a a roll-call. For example, she would shout aloud: "Whoever's son had a heart attack, come over ... or whoever's house was burgled, come here!"

I heard her shout, "The boy who is having seizures!"

Jhai stood up and Kamla handed her green cardamoms dipped in ash (bhabhut) and told her, "Ask your son to eat these with devotion."

When Jhai gave me those cardamoms I didn't believe they would help at all. After all, when an educated doctor hadn't been able to help, how would a mere witchdoctor be of any effect? But since Jhai had asked me to eat those cardamoms like medicine and with complete faith, I did. If not in any super powers, my faith stood in the fact that

my mother would only bring the best for me. Look at the miracle! I used to have those fits after every three or four days, but for the next ten years I had none.

Since then I started believing in traditional healers. Ten years later when I had that seizure again, Jhaiji took me straight to Kamla. She hollered my name again. “The boy who is having seizures!”

There was one thing particularly queer about this lady and her manner of healing. One would be cured only when she called aloud the patient’s name. Some patients’ names would never figure in her roll-call. They had to return unattended.

During this very phase, Chaman (my childhood friend) and I once went to the Vaishno Devi temple. On the way back we felt like visiting Simla. En route to Jammu, we made a stopover at Simla. While returning from Simla, one of my uncles (chacha) -- who was employed in the railways -- sent us to Kalka by train. This had been kind of an unplanned detour; we had not come prepared to extend our holiday. By then we had run out of money. “What to do now?” we were wondering. I stared at the sky, hoping that God would somehow show us the way. As I looked down I spotted a five-rupee note lying on the track. I picked up the note in a flash and thanked God. We then boarded the train to Ambala. At Ambala, we chanced upon Jagdish Bhai who was there regarding some work. Imagine our wonderful luck! He

gave us some more money and we reached Delhi without any further trouble.

I still remember that Rs 5 note lying between the rail tracks waiting for me to pick it up. Prabhu ne kadi kisi de age hath ni failan ditta.’ (God has always made sure that I don’t have to ask for anything from anybody.)

Kapur Sahib looked skywards again, thanking the invisible divine being up there. I thought he was about to embark on a different journey now.

‘My son, due to the grace of God, now my family and I were able to make both ends meet.

One day, Kailash Bhai’s friend, Narendra, met us. We got talking and he asked me about our salt business. I told him that we were doing well. We were selling one pouch for Rs 4, and making one anna (25 paise) of profit per pouch. He said he had an idea that could get us eight annas per rupee. Needless to say, we were very curious and greatly interested in something that could make us such a great profit. We were enterprising and we wanted to earn more money. He said, “Start making filters. There is a lot of money in it.”

He helped us make two goorse filters at a bathroom in the Beriwalla Bagh house. Those filters cost us Rs 12 per dozen and we sold them for Rs 18. He was right. We made eight annas for every rupee invested. But he had a condition. He said that the payment would be made after three months. We readily agreed. Even in our bag business, the payments used



to be made after three or four months. It was an accepted business practice. It was something commonplace and we agreed without any apprehensions. We offered partnership to Narendra. He refused, saying that he was dealing in lace and he didn't wish to leave that line of business. But he said that he had the filter-making machinery and he was willing to sell it to us for Rs 3,500. Narendra also suggested to me that I should set up a new firm. I was thrilled with his idea and we opened a new company. "What should be the name of the firm?" I asked Narendra.

He said, name it Steelbird. I agreed. On March 13, 1963 we started a new firm called Steelbird.

We had about Rs 6,000 on us out of which we paid Narendra Rs 3,000 for that machine. He promised to demonstrate the machine the next day. He took the money and disappeared. One month passed and Narendra was still missing. We started worrying because we had blocked such a huge amount of money. We were in a state of panic: what to do with the machinery? I went around the bazaar asking shopkeepers, but they refused to entertain us. There were about 250 shops in the Kashmere Gate area. I went to each and every shop. I would go and ask, "Will you buy my filter?" They would ask, "Which filter is it? Oil, fuel or something else?"

I was clueless about those details. I would answer, "I don't know."

Some shopkeepers even abused us, "Saale ullu de patthe manufacturer... aa jande... saleyan nu pata wi ni hunda ki banaya hai." (You fools; you clueless manufacturers! You don't even know what you have and what you are trying to sell!)

One shopkeeper who ran a small agency called the Hans Auto Regency from a nook under a rickety staircase treated me so harshly that I started crying. He realized he had overreacted, so he made me sit and served me Coca-Cola.

I told him how we had been trapped, how we had been duped into blocking Rs 3,000 in this filter business which we knew nothing about. He asked me not to worry and assured me that he would teach us the intricacies of this business.

We had made two kinds of filters: 30306 and 30347.

He told us these filters were meant for Perkin.

I said, "I have never heard of this vehicle."

He told me that Perkin was not a vehicle. It was an engine, which was used in the Bad Ford Truck and tractors. And the two filters we had made were meant for the fuel and diesel engines. We also came to know that in their jargon a fuel filter was called oil filter, while a diesel filter was known as mobile filter.

I asked him what the number meant.

He brought out a book on Perkin and showed us the filter's picture that we had manufactured. Next to it was written 30306. That day, I also came to know why these

filters were known by numbers and not some alphabetic name: because it was impossible to name each and every nut and bolt in a vehicle. He then showed us the pictures of the two filters we had made along with their numbers.

The initial humiliation that I had been subjected to heralded a new training phase for me. My first on-the-spot training session took place right there, and by the end of it we were all set to storm the filter market. It was all clear to us now. We would ask the shopkeeper, "Do you want filters? Which one? Oil or diesel? 30306 or 30347...?"

We launched 280 types of filters in the market in the next two years. All that I sought was a beam of light at the end of the tunnel, and I knew my path. I was invigorated and embarked upon a rigorous journey. I launched 280 kinds of filters in two years! Can you imagine that? From two to 280!

As Kapur Sahib narrated this story, his chest puffed up with well-deserved pride. I did not find any trace of arrogance or ego in it, only oodles of self-confidence and a genuine pride for a job well done.

'The filters we were making for tractors required an oil-seal, which was made from felt (namda). So we started manufacturing washers for felts as well. One day, I came across this lovely felt at a shop in the market.

I asked the owner, "Kine da e..?" (How much would it cost?)

He said, "Kinna lena...?" (How much do you want?)

I said, "Sara de de." (Give me all of it.)

He said, "Dhai sau dede." (Pay me Rs 250.)

I came home with a bagful of felt and oil-seals for tractors.

My hands on manufacturing tryst led me to manufacturing at its best. The bigger oil-seal's inner ring used to become the outer seal of the second seal -- and the inner ring of the second used to become the outer ring of the third seal. This meant: no wastage at all! I made lots of oil seals.

I took these seals to a dealer named Batra. He looked at those seals carefully and asked, "Are these imported?"

I said, "I don't know. Whatever it is, it is in front of you."

He said, "How much money would you take?"

I said, "I will charge Rs 18,500 for these."

He said, "Okay, I will pay you Rs 18,500. Right now, I can pay you only Rs 15,000. The rest I will pay later. But I have a condition. You will not sell this stuff to anyone else."

I said, "Okay, I won't."

I had bought those felts for Rs 250, dyes for Rs 250 and had paid Rs 250 to my friend Kukdi. I had invested a total of Rs 750 and earned Rs 18,500. I thought, even if he didn't pay me the remaining Rs 3,500, I was earning good money. I was delighted. Rs 15,000: that was a handsome amount those days. You could buy a new Fiat car for Rs 11,000 only.

The next day I told Bijju, who was one of my reliable employees, to deliver the stuff to Batra and get Rs 15,000

cash. I sent Bijju from my factory at 10.30 am. He did not return even by 6.30 pm. I roamed around at Nawabganj, waiting, and worrying about what had happened. Meanwhile, my friend Chaman's father turned up. He asked me what was wrong, why was I looking so hassled. I told him the story. Chaman's father told me not to worry. He said Bijju, who was Munshiram's son (the shopkeeper who used to tease me 'Oye Bhashi, tera phir ram nam satya ho gaya'), could never cheat anybody. That moment I realized what they meant by the saying 'a drowning man catches every straw'. My anxiety evaporated and I felt relaxed at his assurance. After some time Bijju returned. I said, "Bijju, you took such a long time."

He said, "You had asked me to bring the money, hadn't you?"

I said, "Yes, I had."

He said that the Batra fellow made him sit in his shop. "He would take some stuff and sell it and bring back the cash and give it to me. Again he would go out, sell some more stuff, and hand me more cash. I didn't budge from his shop till I had collected Rs 15,000. The moment I had all the money in my pocket I rushed back. Here's your money."

Kapur Sahib's eyes twinkled with joy.

For the first time in my life I was holding such a big amount of money in my hands. And I had earned it on my own! At that moment, I could see clearly the way to riches.

I knew at that moment that everything was possible. A few days later I was visiting the felt seller from whom I had bought the stuff. I took the same felt to him and told him, "Menu hor namda de." (Give me more felt.)

He asked me to visit the very next day. That next day didn't come. He kept making one excuse or another. At last I lost my patience and confronted him. I told him to forget about that felt. I said our business deal was over and I would stop buying felts for other washers as well.

He asked me to take a seat and said, "Bhashi, we don't have those felts, nor are we likely to get any."

I asked him from where he had procured that lovely felt originally. He took a receipt out of his cash box and showed it to me. "Look at this receipt. I bought that felt during an auction by the railways. I bought those felts for only Rs 35 and sold to you for Rs 250."

Of course, he was happy about that deal. I asked him to give me that receipt and took it to Jagdish Bhai. Jagdish Bhai' was by far one of the most resourceful people I had ever known. You just had to tell him to get something and he would somehow manage to find it from anywhere, the very depths of hell even. He is still the same. I handed him that receipt. He went to the railway's office and found out that that felt had been procured from Baroda. He found out that a company based in Baroda used to make filter tubes for a firm called Mico and that felt was a waste product.

I understood the whole situation. I immediately gave Rs 5,000 to Kailash Bhai and asked him to go to Baroda and get those felts. Kailash Bhai went there and came back with a wagon full of felts. He spent Rs 650 for the rail fare and bought felts worth Rs 650. There I was, with a wagon-load of felts bought for Rs 1,300 only!’

While narrating this incident, Kapur Sahib took a pause. A soft smile flickered on his face, but I could see a tinge of sadness lurking behind it.

Kailash Bhai returned with a wagon-full of felts, but he had lost all his feelings, his loyalty on the way. He was not willing to part with the money that was still in his pocket. He said, “I want to go my own way. I will do this felt business and you continue with your filter business.”

Now I could understand the reason behind that sadness in his smile. I took a breath and let out a long sigh. Kapur Sahib looked at me as if he understood what was going on in my mind, and said.

‘Papaji tried to reason with Kailash Bhai. He said, “You are five children in my family. (By that time my younger sister Veena and brother Ramesh were also born.) All of you are still very young and unmarried. We still have a long way to go.”

But Kailash Bhai was adamant. He said he could no longer live with us. He said he had his own personal ambitions and a status to achieve. He had to go his own way.

We tried to convince him but he refused to listen to us. One day, he locked the factory and took the keys with him. Later on, we received the message that he was sitting in some relative’s house in Delhi. He asked us to visit him there to have further discussion.

We met him and he repeated the same thing again saying that he would not be in the filter business any longer and asked me to stop making washers. Papaiji was aghast. He asked me how this could happen.

I said, “Papaji, ik gal kahan ki ... ik aadmi taan daldal te niklega ... inu anand lain deo, asi apna aap dekh lawange.” (Papaji, I will say one thing ... At least one of us will be out of this dirty mire. Let him enjoy himself; we will fend for ourselves.)

We conceded and Kailash Bhai went his way. We went back to manufacturing filters. After some days Kailash Bhai showed my friend Kukdi two lakh rupees in cash and asked him, “Ask Bhashi, does he have even Rs 20?”

What he said was true, for we were finding it hard to collect even Rs 20! I used to struggle to buy even half a ton of iron waste that used to cost Rs 18. Almost everything we had owned was taken away by Kailash.’

Kapur Sahib took a long breath as if trying to take in some more air and said.

All my life, each time I received a setback, it wasn’t a single jolt but a double whammy as they call it. Similarly,

happiness or occasions for celebration have also never come alone, but in pairs. Two for joy!

We persevered and toiled day and night, and soon our filter business was growing by leaps and bounds.

One day, I was visiting the market where I met the Indian Auto Supply owner. He said, “Subhash yaar, you are selling one filter set for Rs 7, while your brother Kailash is selling it for Rs 5.50.”

I thought he was joking and told him as well.

He said he was serious because he knew Kailash very well. He even showed me the samples of his filters, which had been produced by Vicky Industries, a firm floated by Kailash.

I was stunned. I rarely manufactured my filters under the name of Steelbird. I used some random company name for my filters. I thought if Kailash Bhai sold that stuff at the rate of Rs 5.50 only, the clients would block my money in the market.

To add to my woes, our family needed money for my approaching marriage for I had been engaged recently. I went around the market telling everybody that I urgently required my money for the wedding. I collected all my money offering 5 to 10 per cent discount and soon started manufacturing filters under the brand name of the Steelbird.

At that time Elofic used to offer one filter set for Rs 11.70 and they used to give a 10 per cent discount on that. I kept the rate at Rs 4.70 and offered a discount of 10 per cent.

But my filter’s quality was better than theirs. It was hardly any wonder then that the sale of Steelbird filters received a great spurt of growth. The filter started doing so well in the market that I went on increasing its price. From Rs 4.70, I raised it to Rs 5.70 ... then Rs 6.70 ... Rs 7.70 ... soon I was selling it for Rs 11.70. And I had now increased the discount from 10 to 25 per cent. Elofic’s rate was still Rs 11.70. Yet buyers were picking up my filters without any complaint.

Elofic soon felt threatened by the growing competition from Steelbird. It was bound to happen. To counter the competition, their owner invited all the dealers of the market to Ashoka Hotel. Owing to its brand reputation, almost all the dealers attended the meeting. The Elofic owner asked for Rs 10,000 as security from each one of them and made them vow that they would not sell Steelbird’s filters.

Now these traders started cancelling my orders claiming that they were already overstocked. I wondered why everybody was cancelling new orders. No one was willing to tell me the truth, for they had sworn to keep it a secret. Eventually, I came to know what was going on through a firm called Gupta Traders. Since I had helped him buy his shop, he confided in me that the owner of Elofic had made them swear not to sell my stuff. I asked him to pay back my pending money. He paid. One by one, I went to all the traders whose payments were pending and I collected Rs 3.5 lakh. After that I picked up my cash bag and went to Punjab.

I appointed new agents: Gopal Sales Agencies in Nabha (Punjab), Bhalla Tractor in Delhi, Monga Tractors in Muradabad and Handa Sales Company in Bilaspur. Elofic had snatched about fifty agents from me in Delhi; I appointed about 100 new agents. I expanded my business beyond Delhi. My sales jumped from Rs 4.5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. When Elofic also started expanding its operations in Punjab, I went southward. You wouldn't believe what I did: I appointed all my boys who used to pack cartons for me as salesmen. Then I sent them to the south on a sixty-one day long tour. In two months, they flooded me with orders; it was more than what I was selling in an entire year. I had decided that in case Elofic moved to the south, I would run away to the east and set up my business in Calcutta and Assam. My strategy was simple: you (Elofic) squeeze me here, I will expand there.

As a matter of fact, I still feel disappointed that Elofic didn't chase us in the south. I wish they had; I would have taken Steelbird everywhere. I had full faith in my abilities and hard work. I never surrendered.

"Bhai chaa taan bhejo,"(Someone please send us tea.) Kapur Sahib called out to the house help who were all working in another part of the house.

"Puttar chaa vagair maza hini aanda..." (Son, there's no satisfaction of time well spent without tea...)

"You drink a lot of tea, Kapur Sahib," I said.

"Aaho.. fifteen or twenty cup taan pee hi lenda." (Yes, I have fifteen or twenty cups a day.)

I was curious to know what had happened to the felt-washer business that Kailash Kapur, Kapur Sahib's brother had started under the banner of the Vicky Industries. So, I asked him about it.

'Whatever he had earned from selling washers was invested in his new range of filters. He must have run out of money, for his business folded there and then. He never recovered from that loss, and started doing well only after his son Vicky grew up.'

Kapur Sahib revealed this fact as suc. There was not a hint of malice, jealousy or ill-will in his tone. I was truly surprised to see the lack of spite in him. In fact I detected a genuine pity somewhere for his brother. Once again, as if reading my thoughts, Kapur Sahib came up with an explanation.

'I strongly believe in the theory of Karma. It is all that matters at the end of the day. When Judgement Day arrives, we will find our Lord only if we have staunchly adhered to performing what we have been sent here to do. Live for your work and leave the rest. Awards, rewards, good or bad are all up to the Almighty. Karma kar, phal ki iccha mat kar. And always keep one thing in mind: what you sow, you shall reap.

In the meanwhile, I was also managing Hans Auto Agencies and C-Lal & Sons Company along with Kewal,

who was the son of the brother of my grandfather Diwan Chaman Lal Kapur, and so consequently he was my chacha (uncle). Kewal used to work for me. Once I sent him to Bombay for some work. He phoned me from there saying he could get orders worth Rs 30,000. But he would need to stay back for four more days. I asked him to stay back.

The next day we came to know that he had returned. I said, "I had asked you to stay back; why did you return so early?"

He said, "Janda haan kide naal gal kar raya e... mere ch kidda khoon bai raya e?" (Do you know who are you talking to? Whose blood flows in my veins?)

I said, "Chachaji shaami gal karange." (Uncle, we shall talk in the evening.)

In the evening I went to their house. Papaji, Jhai and Jagdish Bhai tried to calm me down and said that any bitter confrontation would sever family ties.

I didn't pay heed. I said, "Meri gal badi clear e. Ine tuhadi bejatti kitti... ene mainu khoon dasya hai, main inu khoon samjha ke ona." (I am absolutely clear about what I am saying. He has disrespected you. He has questioned my blood and I want to show him what that means.)

When I reached my grandfather's house, Kewal was sitting there along with his three brothers. I greeted them and said, "I am here to express my displeasure. Please listen carefully to what I have to say."

In a rage I disrespectfully addressed him as Kewal. After narrating the whole incident, I said, "Kewal asked me whether I knew who I was talking to and whose blood flowed in his veins."

I said, "I want to tell you today that I am Subhash Kapur, son of Tilak Raj Kapur and grandson of Kishan Lal Kapur ... That Kishan Lal who owned 365 achkans (long coats) with gold and silver buttons ... You are still wearing those coats. Tell Kewal to never try and show me his lineage, the blood that flows in his veins; make him understand that if he wants to show his bloodline he should go somewhere else. If he says that again he will have to bear the consequences. For the same blood flows in my veins."

My grandfather agreed with me. He said I was right. Since that day none of these four brothers dared to argue with me.'

Kapur Sahib narrated this heated exchange of words calmly. He didn't seem ruffled recalling this rather unpleasant episode. The incident, or rather the blood remark, had hurt him deeply, for it was an insult to his lineage that he had always taken pride in. It showed his deep affection and respect to his parents. Hearing and watching him narrate this episode I could glimpse Shraavan Kumar's (the ideal son in the Ramayana) image in him.

"Badi der tan bethe ho, thak gaye hone." (You have been sitting for a long time, you must be tired.)

For the first time since we began talking, I heard an extremely sweet female voice.

“Tusi naal ho taan kada thakna.” (As long as you are with me, how can I get tired?) Kapur Sahib replied playfully.

‘She is Lalita Kapur, my life partner. My friend in good and bad times; the lone witness to all the ups and downs of my life. It would have been impossible to reach this far without her support.

The moment I had heard her voice I had understood that she had to be Mrs Kapur. Elegant, gentle and uncomplicated... Kapur Sahib’s voice had turned romantic at the very sight of her. It was another face of the flute-player... I thought. I heard Kapur Sahib’s sweet, flute-like, voice...

‘We were married on May 3, 1971.

Those days my factory was still at Nawabganj from where I had launched Steelbird. In my free time, whenever I stepped out to take a breather from work, I would often see a girl carrying folded sheets of paper for typing. This girl always seemed very special; she would never raise her head or her eyes to see what was going on around her. When someone doesn’t even raise her eyes, what she does is -- raise your curiosity. You feel like talking to such a person. Now, how does one talk to such a girl?

One day I was doing the rounds of Kapur Typewriters, hoping to catch a glimpse of that girl. She came. And as I stood there, looking at her walking past me, secretly wishing

she would raise her downcast eyes, I heard someone call my name.

There used to be a confectioner there. He said, “Subhash, who are you gawking at? Don’t ever look at her again.”

I asked him why. He said, “Her brother Shravan is a tough guy. He pulls out his knife at the drop of a hat.”

I asked him whether he was her only brother. He said she had others.

Another day I was standing with my friends Harish and Sehgal. They used to be my class-fellows. In fact, Sehgal had introduced me to Harish. While we were talking, that typist girl passed by. Harish said, “She is my sister Lalita. She is learning typing here.”

Harish also told us that they were looking for a match for her.

That statement came as a huge relief to me. I forged a stronger friendship with Harish.

I made my sister-in-law (Jagdish Bhai’s wife) and Jhai see her surreptitiously. And I started doing the rounds of the Kapur Typewriters again where she was learning typing. Remember, I had left my typing classes at Kapur’s centre mid-way. I had not known then that the same place would play such an important role in my life. It was as if destiny had sent me there not to learn typing, but to meet my life-partner.



Moreover, Kapur's brother Vilayati had also been my classmate. I would drop in there often hoping to get a chance to speak to her, but this girl wouldn't even look at me. Then one day we managed to reach her house. We spoke to her father Shri Girdhari Lal Taneja and made my intentions clear. He readily accepted my proposal. We were engaged.

Meanwhile, the servant had brought tea. Mrs Kapur served it and flashed a broad smile. After that, Mrs Kapur went back inside, no doubt attending to the many demands of her flourishing household. Kapur Sahib looked at her and then continued his story.

I remember we had only been very recently engaged at the time. Lalita used to call me at 11.30 am every day without fail. One day, my friend Sehgal said that his uncle's son, Kalu, had gone missing. He said we needed to go to Gurgaon to find him. By 9.00 am we left for Gurgaon, thinking we would be back by 11.30 am. The road to Gurgaon was so bad, it was a nightmarish drive. Yes, yes, it is impossible to envision now that Gurgaon has become such a fascinating global city. Anyhow, we reached there with great difficulty but alas, Kalu was nowhere to be found. While returning, Sehgal insisted that he would drive the scooter. I told him that I had to attend the call at 11.30 am and he wouldn't be able to drive fast enough for me to make it on time. But he just wouldn't listen to me. He said he could drive faster, and took off. At one turn

the vehicle skidded, and we flew off the scooter in different directions. The scooter's handle was also damaged. I got up and looked at Sehgal. He said, "I cannot see anything." I said, "I can see properly, but I am feeling pain all over my body."

That incidentally was my thirty-sixth accident. Somehow, we got up and rode the broken scooter back. I kept thinking about Lalita's call. Sadly, when we reached home, she had already hung up. I was late. When Lalita came to know about that accident, she visited our house to see me. That was a really big deal in those times: a girl visiting her in-laws' house before her marriage!

When my family asked me where I wanted my wedding to take place, I said I would like it to be arranged in some hotel, for all my dealers were to attend it.

We were married at the Manohar Hotel in Lajpat Nagar.

Kapur Sahib had a hearty laugh as he recalled his wedding day.

The bridegroom was late for his own marriage, would you believe it? That was my collection day. I went to the bazaar to collect payments. The guests were there, the baraats (marriage procession) was about to leave, the mare was all decked up, but the bridegroom was missing.

When I returned, everyone chorused, "Where on god's earth were you?" Thoroughly embarrassed and a little bit shame-faced, in a whisper I told them I had gone to collect payments.'

Kapur Sahib spread his arms in the air and clapped. He seemed to be transported to a different world, as he recalled that time of his life.

‘Those were the days! What wonderful times. When we got married, we used to own a Lambretta scooter. We would often go out riding and cruising around on that scooter, sometimes to have coffee, other times for lunch or something else. Once, before our marriage, we went out for a ride. I realized I had forgotten to take any cash. I asked Lalita how much money she had on her. She said she never had any money. I said, “Never mind. I have four annas. Let’s go to Roshanara Park.”

We bought chana (gram) and peanuts for one anna each. We sat there eating chana and peanuts for more than half an hour, and chatted to our heart’s content.

There was never any pretention or fakeness in our relationship. We stayed true to our nature, and our love remained steadfast irrespective of our circumstances -- whether we were rich or poor. God’s blessings were always with us.

And it was with the great divine blessings that we had our first child. My son, Raju (Rajeev Kapur), was born on January 2, 1972 filling our hearts and our lives with a complete happiness that binds a couple even closer together. Raju was born in the house we were living in at Subhash Nagar. This small dwelling we had rented for Rs 160

per month. Even before Raju was born, pundits prophesied that the son would bring good luck to the family, and their prediction turned true.’

Kapur Sahib’s eyes were shining with pleasure; surely, for him that was the most momentous event of his life: he had met with himself.

‘With the grace of the Almighty, Lady Fortune started smiling on us from before Raju’s birth. In 1971, when the Indo-Pakistan war was underway -- I don’t remember the date, but that night Indira Gandhi (the then prime minister) addressed the nation on the radio. Those days there used to be frequent blackouts during the nights. The next morning I went to an auction, which was being held by the DDA (Delhi Development Authority). I ended up buying a plot (A3/88) for Rs 18,800 only. The plot’s actual cost was Rs 1.6 lakh. But owing to the ongoing war, the prices of property had slumped drastically. That day during the auction the first plot was sold out for Rs 1.43 lakh. We were all set to bid a higher price, but an old man sitting there interrupted us. He asked us to calm down and take it easy. He said there were only about twenty buyers and about thirty plots were going under the hammer. We took his advice and sat down patiently. Later on, we got the plot for only Rs 18,800. Only four days after that deal, we bought the Kapson Traders’ shop at Kashmere Gate. This shop was also bought for Rs 18,800. And once again, we ended up striking two deals together.

On May 29, 1973, we bought our first car, an Ambassador (UPT-1990). I bought that after paying an extra for Rs 3,000 from the black market.

I felt like God's favoured child, forever indebted to him for showering a life of comforts and happiness on my family and me. Once again, He smiled upon us with His divine benediction and we were blessed with a daughter on April 28, 1974. We named our daughter Anamika, whom I affectionately call Nano.

As Nano came into our life, God started showering even more good luck and blessings upon us. It seems she was destined to a life of great comfort and had made Lady Luck a permanent resident of our household. They say children bring their own luck into the family when they are born. And indeed, Nano brought us immense progress and prosperity. I don't even remember how many vehicles and property we ended up buying after her arrival. Nano was a manifestation of the Goddess Lakshmi for us. When she was only three, we used to eat out sometimes at a hotel called York's. Nano didn't like that hotel for some reason. My little Nano, who had barely started speaking, told me not to bring her to such run-down places. Then we started patronizing upscale, high end and extremely genteel, polished 5 star hotels such as Ashoka or The Oberoi. Those days, there used to be only these two five-star hotels in Delhi.

The first time I ever went to a five-star hotel was when Chaman graduated. We went to Ashoka to celebrate that occasion with Rs 500 in our pocket. That was the first time we had a taste of some exotic food. There were ninety-eight dishes in that buffet including seven types of cold fish. A special variety of sea fish was also served. We ate to our heart's content and paid only Rs 25. Since then, going to five-star hotels became a habit with us. We worked very hard, all of us, and enjoying the fine things this life was something we felt entitled to.

On Jagdish Bhai's marriage anniversary we went to Hotel Ashoka once again: Bhai Sahib, his wife, Lalita and I. We started with soup, followed by snacks and dinner. The bill came to about Rs 68. I tipped Rs 12 to the waiter and Rs 10 each to the saluting doorkeepers. I would receive salutes for the tips I had paid at that time till these people retired or quit their positions. They all recognized me and favoured me with special service because Rs. 10 used to be a big amount then. They also understood my gesture I think, for it was not to show off my status that I tipped them. Having worked hard with my own hands all my life, I knew the value of labour, of service, and I knew the lessons of hardship. I respected them for what they were doing for the patrons, and they gave me immense respect in return.

When we set up the Delhi Scooter Traders Association, we were to organize a meeting. When I was asked about

the venue of the meeting I suggested Hotel Ashoka. The members who came to the meeting were astounded to see the venue, for most of them were visiting a five-star hotel for the first time. After the meeting I paid the bill worth Rs 7,000. About 110 people had attended the meeting. Their accommodation, food and drinks and the rented hall for the meeting came to only Rs 7,000! We all remember and talk about that even now. In this day and age, one cannot even imagine this. A meal for two would cost that much or even more depending on how exotic your tastes are.

In 1976, I started manufacturing helmets.'

Kapur Sahib remembered every date and year by heart as if it had all happened yesterday. This can come only from a personality who has charted the course of his destiny and that of many others. Only a person, who has toiled day after day, bounced back from falls and thrived on the basis of his hard work and faith can remember everything so clearly. Dates, places and times are forever etched on his heart. I expressed how I felt.

He laughed at my observation and said, "Sab kal diyan gallan lag diya ne." (It seems as if it all happened just yesterday.)

A man never forgets his time. If he does, he is yet to evolve fully.

I could feel it keenly in my very being that the embers of his memories were now fully ignited. I was, in fact, living

those bygone moments with him as if they were a part of my present.

'Puttar... jaanda e ki mein safed kapde kyon pahanda?' (Son, do you know why I wear only white clothes?)

I had noticed that every time I met Kapur Sahib, I always found him clad in white kurta-pyjama and a shawl. I expressed my curiosity, for I certainly couldn't guess the reason. Kapur Sahib laughed and said,

'Puttar ... jad helmet banana shuru kitta ... mere kol kul do kamijaan hondiya san, ek nili taan ...duji laal jei.' (Son, when I started making helmets, I used to have only two shirts, one blue and another reddish.)

And I used to change my shirt every other day. Someone visited me one day and saw me in the blue shirt. He came to meet me again two days later and found me wearing the same shirt. He asked me whether I had only one shirt.

I felt so thoroughly embarrassed at his observation that I decided that very day that I would only wear white clothes.

Fir kisi nu ki pata chalega ki mere kol ek kamij haigi... ya do... ya teen... (Then how would one come to know whether I had one shirt, or two, or three.)

Kapur Sahib roared with laughter. As did I. I was amazed at his ingenuity and his very simple solution to make his life simple.

Later on, of course, it became a habit with me. To wear only white! Slowly and steadily, the helmet business started

doing well. In 1976, when we manufactured the Steelbird's first helmet, we started advertizing it on Doordarshan. Those days, there used to be only one TV channel. There were no private channels. Doordarshan used to broadcast only two entertaining programs those days: Chitrahaar on every Wednesday and a Hindi film on every Sunday, unless, of course, one found Krishi Darshan entertaining. That's it! Kids these days cannot even imagine life without the hundreds of channels they surf. And yet we had so many avenues of entertainment. Nowadays, it is just getting harder and harder to please the new generation. Truly, they are spoilt for choice and yet bored. The ironies of life.

You know, people used to follow these programs avidly; they would huddle in front of their TV sets an hour before the shows began. That time there used to be only a few product advertisements on Doordarshan. Vicco Vajradanti, S Kumar, Topaz Blade, Harrison Lock etc. And, of course, there was Steelbird! To this day I am proud of that.

The song used in the advertisement of the Steelbird helmet was on everyone's lips. "Aji O scooter walo ... O motor cycle walo ... Suno tum ik baat jaruri ... Suraksha hogi puri ... Agar tum pahno helmet kaun sa..? Steelbird ... Steelbird ... Steelbird ... Helmet!"

As Kapur Sahib sang these lines for me, he was beaming with pleasure. I could have joined him in singing, for I too remembered those lines. As a child I had seen that

ad on Doordarshan repeatedly just before my favourite programmes.

Whenever I came across children singing these lines, I used to feel elated that my advertisement was clicking well.

In fact, I produced Doordarshan's first private programme by an outsider. It was called 'Zara Sambhal Ke'. The programme used to be telecast from 7.45 to 8.00 every evening. I introduced many budding talents through this programme. Satish Babbar, who was a lookalike of the film star Dharmendra, was one among them. He is still in touch with me.

'That means your business was doing really well?' I asked Kapur Sahib.

Sure, son ... What can I say – God kept his kind, benevolent gaze upon us ... The filter factory at the Gali Jamir Wali in Nawabganj was doing good business. When we required more space for the factory, I looked around and found a mayani (basement) at Jhandewalan. I rented it for Rs 200 per month. I took the mayani but it was like a huge ship: 10 feet deep and about 30 feet long. We wondered what we would do with this huge space. I had paid the rent for six months, yet I did nothing there for almost four months, wondering what to do!

But, God has his ways. He was showering us with such immense good fortune that after some time, even that huge a space was not enough for us. I came across an office in

the upper storey of the same building that belonged to the Swatantra Party. In addition to the Congress, the Swatantra Party had quite an influence those days, for there was no BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) then. They had two rooms in that upper storey they used as their party office, and a peon named Mewa Ram Arya used to look after the place for them. Mewa Ram told me that barring one room for their office, the party wanted to rent out that entire place. That building was owned by a wrestler called Bijali Pahalwan. Now, this strapping hulk of a man was quite a notorious figure of that area. I talked to Bijali's secretary Ram Murthy about the whole situation and they were more than willing to rent that space. It came to light that the Swatantra Party people were neither paying the rent, nor were they vacating the place. The building owner, in spite of all his notoriety, was in no position to take the party people on because of their political influence. Rama Murthy immediately gave us the receipt and we rented that place for Rs 250 per month. God was kind. Our work expanded even more. So much so that even both these places combined together weren't enough for us after a while!

In the same building was Pearl Yamaha's office. Sound Jaffery brought out the first moped in India, while Pearl Yamaha brought out the first motor-cycle in this country. There used to be a Ludhiana-based firm named Pearl Wool, which later collaborated with the Yamaha Company from Japan to bring this motor-cycle to India.

We were a poor country at that time. Very few people could afford the expensive Pearl Yamaha motorcycle, which was priced at about Rs 2,000. That's why the company failed and they wanted to sell out their space. When I spoke to Rama Murthy about it, his response was nothing short of enthusiastic! 'Just buy it, buy it now!' he exclaimed excitedly.

I asked him about the price. He said that they had taken an advance of Rs 75,000 from the Pearl Yamaha group, which would have to be paid back. Apart from that Bijali Pahalwan would ask for about Rs 50,000 more. Murthy told me that if I could shell out about Rs 1.25 lakh, I should go ahead.

I told him I would pay Rs 1.25 lakh.

I hired that 300-gaj (1 gaj = nine square feet) space at a monthly rent of Rs 1,200 per month. Later, when even that space did not serve our purpose, we rented a 300-gaj basement right next to that space.

Rab di meharbani naal sanu e jagah vi kam pai gayi. (By God's grace, even that space didn't suffice for our business purposes.)

Then I bought three plots at Kirtinagar, each 150-gaj, for Rs 1.01 lakh. After some time we realized that we would need more space. I returned these plots to DDA even though I got five per cent less on my investment, and bought two plots (numbers 57 and 58) at Mayapuri. I bought the number 57

plot at an auction for Rs 1.41 lakh. When I had bought this plot my friend Kukdi said that I wouldn't be able to buy the plot number 58, which was going under the hammer next.

Actually, one Sardarji was interested in buying both the plots (58 and 59). I told Kukdi that it would depend on the bidding price. And we would wait and see how the auction unfolded. I know you must be wondering why I am going on about these rents and property buying in such great detail. I am just giving you an idea of how rapidly things took a turn towards the better. It is interesting how one success begets another and how you just surge forward with favourable tides.

Anyway, the auction began.

"One lakh, forty thousand," came Sardarji's first bid.

Prior to the auction, I had told Kukdi that he should only watch my finger and keep raising the bidding price by Rs1000 every time I raised my finger. At each call by Sardarji, Kukdi kept adding Rs 1000. After the first bid, he said, "Rs 1,41,000 thousand."

When the Sardarji bid Rs 1.5 lakh, I raised my finger again, and Kukdi said, "Rs 1.51 lakh."

When it reached Rs 1.60 lakh, I raised my finger, and Kukdi said, "Rs 1.61 lakh."

This way, the auction price reached Rs 200,000. When Sardarji called aloud Rs 2.10 lakh, I raised my finger yet again and Kukdi bid Rs 2.11 lakh.

Sardarji got up and started walking out. The auctioneer said loudly, "What happened Sardarji? You were saying that you had to buy this plot at any cost."

While I bought one plot for Rs 1.41 lakh, I ended up paying Rs 2.11 lakh for the adjacent plot. That tussle cost me Rs 70,000 extra. But it had become a matter of self-respect. Rs 70,000 was not too big a price for self-respect, was it?

After returning home, I told Papaji that I had paid Rs 70,000 extra for the plot due to a tussle during the auction. Papaji laughed. He too was of the same bent of mind as me and said, "It does not matter. You did well." After all, father and son are cut from the same cloth, are they not?

When we took over the land it turned out that the both plots put together measured only 500-gaj. The DDA officials said that they would be willing to return the extra money we had paid for the 300-gaj. But I had made up my mind. I told them we wanted 800-gaj and no less than that would do now.

I thought we would look for some new, bigger place.'

While he was still narrating this incident, suddenly, Kapur Sahib's expression turned pained, he looked crestfallen, as if some terrible news had been delivered to him. But even before I could ask him what he was reminded of, he told me of the tragedy that was clearly still etched as if fresh in his mind.

‘On May 9, 1978, Papaji passed away. Physically, Papaji might have left us, but he has always been with me. I can still feel his presence around me. He is always in my thoughts and in my actions too. I mean, each time I have to take some important decision, I first think what Papaji would have done. Even today if somebody says Papaji is no more, I don’t like it. My head and my heart do not agree this is a fact. I feel like saying he’s always been with me. The day he passed away, I sat next to his body and vowed that I would never smoke again. That was my special tribute to Papaji. I did that because I knew his soul would rest in peace knowing I had quit that killing habit.’

I spotted an extraordinary light (noor) on the face of Kapur Sahib as he narrated this incident. It’s impossible for me to explain that feeling. Kapur Sahib asked for a glass of water and after taking a sip, he was back in his element.

‘Now, Dayal my son, remember that Pear Yamaha space I had told you about? The space at Jhandewalan that I bought from Bijali Pahalwan once the Pearl Yamaha business folded? Well, fortunately, our business was flourishing. One fine day, I received a call from Bijali Pahalwan himself. Preposterously, he asked me to vacate that building. He claimed he wanted to start some kind of export business. The government was offering a 25 per cent incentive on export businesses. That must have inspired Bijali Pahalwan, a man always on the lookout to make more money.

He was a ruthless man and such men don’t quite play fair. However, he said he would offer me the current hiked market rate for the property. But I did not want to sell. How could he just assume I would be ready to pack up and leave?

“I will not vacate that space,” I told him flatly.

“I have never heard the word no.” Nobody had probably ever dared refuse him anything. His attitude was arrogant. I kept my voice calm.

I said, “It’s quite possible that you have never heard the word no from anyone. But here I am, and I am very clearly saying no.”

Bijali Pahalwan was quite an influential person of that area. And his men knew everything about me: when and where I went, and who accompanied me at what time. One day, as I reached my office at around 11.30 am, his men came up to me rather menacingly and told me that Bijali Pahalwan had summoned me.

I was skeptical and alert to the risk involved here. So, I shouted out rather loudly as if rejoicing in the invitation, “Pahalwan Sahib has invited me!”

I was right in having sent the message loud and clear to my office. These men had not even let me enter my office premises. I was whisked away and sat in the car carrying my bag. There were four men already sitting inside the Ambassador. They made me sit on the rear seat between



two men, while two of them took the front seat. On the way, they all were completely quiet.

I said, "I am coming with you. Why are you all so quiet? Can't we have a small talk on the way?"

One of those men used to visit me sometimes to take the rent. He said what I was saying was right, but they were not supposed to laugh. He then went on to tell me a story. Here goes the story...

Once the King Akbar felt like walking. Birbal, one of his advisors, came along with him. On the way, they came across a brinjal plant. Akbar asked, "What is this thing?"

Birbal said, "Maharaj, this is a brinjal."

Akbar said, "This is very beautiful."

Birbal answered, "Yes my lord, such beautiful colour it has, and look at its kalgi (crest) over there. Beautiful."

Birbal sang more praises of the brinjal.

Akbar asked, "Birbal, what is its use?"

Birbal said, "My lord, it is edible."

Akbar decreed that the brinjal should be served every day in the palace. After some days Akbar got sick of eating brinjal. Again, they were out for the morning walk. Akbar again saw the brinjal plant and told Birbal that it was a useless vegetable.

Birbal said, "Yes, my lord, it's a useless thing. It has no quality whatsoever."

Birbal went on to denigrate the brinjal further saying everything about it was wrong, right from its ugly crest to its horrible taste.

Akbar said, "Birbal, but the other day you were singing high praises of this very brinjal."

Birbal replied, "Yes, my lord. But you pay me the money, not this brinjal."

I was laughing helplessly as Kapur Sahib narrated this funny story to me. He had held me enthralled, and like an audience of a suspense thriller, I had waited for his every word with bated breath. Impatiently, I had asked him, what happened next and then? Kapur Sahib was also laughing.

'So having told me this story, that goon said, "I know you, Kapur Sahib, and yet I don't know you. I say this because I will be paid money by Pahalwan Sahib, not you. And this is the very same reason why I just cannot laugh with you, or make some frivolous small talk to pass the time. My paymaster actually asked me to drag you along and I have no choice but to follow his orders."

I reassured him that I understood his predicament, and that whatever he had said made complete sense.

Bijali Pahalwan's office used to be above the famous Rivoli theatre of Connaught Place. Those four goons took me there. I found out there were half a dozen more men inside his office, while Pahalwan Sahib himself was sitting

on a huge golden chair. It was like a throne made of pure gold and he was ensconced in it like a king. Around his neck was dangling a thick chain of gold, at the end of which hung the alphabet B, made of diamond. B for Bijali, I assumed.

He said, "Subhash, you said you would not vacate the Jhandewalan space. Now, tell me, have you changed your mind?"

I said, "My answer is still the same. No. I will not vacate that space."

The moment I uttered those words, all the goons huddled around me, menacingly.

I said, "Pahalwan Sahib ... what can all your goons do to me? At the worst, they will kill me. They can't do anything more than that. I am a Hindu. We don't die; we are reborn to another life. You should understand that. I have four brothers. They know that Bijali Pahalwan's goons have brought me here. It is possible that after my death they take revenge and kill you."

Bijali Pahalwan asked all his goons to leave the room. They left. Pahalwan said to me, "Subhash, nobody has ever dared to speak to me like that. You are the first man who has shown such courage, that too in my own office. I admire your guts."

There were photographs of Pt Jawahar Lal Nehru (India's first Prime Minister) and Bijali Pahalwan's father, Sai Das Bijali in the room. He put his hand on his father's photograph and said, "From now on, you are my brother."

When I heard him, I said, "Since you are my brother, everything of mine belongs to you."

Pahalwan said, "You take as much money as you want, but give me that place."

I said, "Look, if you talk like a trader I will not give you anything. But if you talk like a brother, then what does a place mean? You can even take my house. Okay, being a brother, that place is yours."

I gave that building to Bijali Pahalwan without charging anything. Now, Pahalwan felt that I had done him a favour, for he had earlier offered Rs 5 lakh for that place. That was a huge amount, so huge that I could have bought two shops for that price.

Pahalwan was supposed to be a ruffian, but he turned out to be a man of principles. He always treated me like his brother and helped me out during my difficult times. He was a very lively and good human being. You see, Son, sometimes it is not a matter of money. It is about principles, about correct behaviour and about respect for a fellow human being. Once he showed me respect, and bonded with me as family, I responded in kind.'

Having paid his tribute to this unique friendship, Kapur Sahib took another sip from his glass of water and went on with the engaging narrative of his life and times.

'Let me tell you about another incident related to property. As you would have gathered by now, amassing

property was big on my agenda, and this particular incident taught me a very valuable lesson as far as accumulating wealth through property is concerned. These are golden tips, Dayal, pay close attention. It so happened that we were doing fairly well in business by 1979, and I had already collected about Rs 6.75 lakh. The next obvious step as business expands is to expand your property assets and I thought we should look for a bigger place. There was this plot (A-50) at Mayapuri that was for sale. All of us thought it suitable and wanted to buy it. But the owner of the property was asking for Rs 7.5 lakh. We were short by a lakh and there was no way to raise more funds, so we didn't buy the plot and forgot all about it.

Almost within a year we accumulated that amount. And so once again, we went to the brokers looking for land. They told us that there was only one plot up for sale at Mayapuri. Coincidentally, it was the same A-50 plot, but now they were selling it for Rs 8.5 lakh! It was then that realization struck me like a bolt of lightning. I realized that had we kept Rs 7 lakh in the bank the previous year it would have amounted to that figure. With that thought in my mind, I bought the plot immediately. We bought this plot from the Kohlis who owned the very popular establishments, Host and Marina hotels. During the course of the deal, it came to light that one of their brothers-in-law, their sister's husband, had some problem with this

deal. He claimed that the plot belonged to him; he wrote several letters to the DDA and newspapers saying that he had not transferred the Power of Attorney to his in-laws and hence they had no right to sell off his property without his signatures.

The Urban Land Sealing Act had just been introduced in Delhi. As per this Act, we could not buy a plot bigger than 500-gaj. My case was coming up in the high court for the registry of that one-acre (5,000 gaj) A-50 plot. While buying that plot, I had taken a calculated risk. I thought even if I ended up getting only 500-gaj of land as per the new law, I wouldn't lose much, for the market rate for 500 gaj was about Rs 4 lakh at that time.

I have never been afraid of taking risks. In fact, I enjoy taking risks. It's thrilling. That has become second nature for me. I feel intelligent risk taking backed by a strong sense of intuition is a pivotal entrepreneurial skill.

The land deal was done by a middleman named Diwan Sahib, who later on became a very close friend.

By 1980 we were doing exceptionally well. We were mainly into two business verticals: filters and helmets. Jagdish Bhai was already dealing in glass. We thought the rest of the three brothers, Ashok, Ramesh and I -- must start another business. We started dealing in rubber parts.

An enterprise called A-One Company was the best-known firm in the business during that time. The company

had recently started manufacturing filters, so we thought we too would follow them, and we started making rubber parts. Before launching ourselves into this business I went to A-One Company's owner, Sardari Lal, and sought his blessings. He too blessed me from the depth of his heart.

Sardari Lal, incidentally, was Satish Babbar's father. Babbar, as I told you earlier, was the film star Dharmendra's lookalike. I had not only given him a break in my programme, Zara Sambhal Ke, but he had also featured in Steelbird's advertisement.

In fact, when I had first approached Babbar to work as a model in that ad, his father Sardari Lal was furious. He had raised an objection, saying that his son was actually promoting a competitor's product. Babbar told his father that despite being their competitors, the Steelbird people were very genuine and forthcoming and that they had no qualms in calling him for the advertisement. Despite his family's objection, Babbar did appear in our advertisement and the show.'

Kapur Sahib's magnanimity astonished me. Not only had he roped in one of the family members of his competitor into his advertisement, he had actually gone to their house to seek their blessings before embarking on a new venture.

'Puttar... taan pichhley forty saalan to rubber-parts de king A-One waleyan ne... sade filter banan shuru karte si... taan asi vi rubber-parts shuru kar ditta si... (My son,

when A-One, the kings of rubber-parts for forty years, started making our filters, we too started making their rubber parts.)

The A-One Company used to manufacture 600 items; I started with a select range of fifty-six products only. We manufactured only those items, which were the most sought after in the market. Within three years, I did such brilliant work in rubber parts that The A-One company was almost thrown out of the market. I thought that just in case, we, three brothers, had to separate someday, we would at least have a business each. God gave us enough strength to work to the best of our potential.'

Kapur Sahib took one more sip of water and continued...

'Meanwhile, the court deadline for my Mayapuri land was approaching fast. The high court had given us time till December 13, 1980, which was only one and a half months away. I met Diwan Sahib and asked him to seek an extension. Diwan Sahib told me that it was highly unlikely that the court would grant us any extension in the case. I asked him to find somebody who could settle the matter unofficially. He said that he would try.

Diwan Sahib found some junior official who demanded Rs 25,000 for the work. This person's monthly salary was Rs 200. Probably, he calculated that even if he lost his job, he would end up earning Rs 500 per month interest, which was worth the risk.

That man prepared all the papers and got us one year's time extension.

In the high court, however, the Urban Land Department's men pleaded that they had visited the site and had found nothing except a small shed over there. They argued that the empty land belonged to the government. They said that only 500-gaj land could be given to the owner, as per the Act, and the rest, 4,500 gaj, belonged to the government.

I was not a man to give in easily over the government's unjustified whimsical policies. So, then I approached a property dealer named Gupta at Connaught Place. Every man has his own specialty, his own skill! His was dealing in sick units. Gupta was one of my devotees. In fact, he is one of those people whom I still fondly remember. I asked Gupta to get that work done for me. He instantly said that a man named Jaswant, whom he knew, could do that work.

Gupta told me that Jaswant was the principal of an Architecture college near the ITO (Income Tax Office). He said that Jaswant was also a town planner and he had an eye for detail. Gupta promised me that he would organize a meeting for me with Jaswant.

Gupta fixed a meeting with the principal for Rs 10,000. When I met Jaswant; he assured me that even the Supreme Court could not interfere in my case provided I built some structure over that land. I told him that I would do that.

I hastily built a shed covering 3,400-gaj of that land. Jaswant saw that shed and said the DDA would still seize 1,600 gaj of the empty land in front of the shed. He explained that the court would allot the empty area in front of the shed to the DDA. The market rate of that land had gone up to Rs 2,000 per gaj by then, which meant that I would have ended up losing Rs 32 lakh. I said that I just could not afford to lose that much land.

Jaswant suggested that the only way to save that land was to construct something in the remaining 1,600 gaj. And it had to be done within forty days! I was in a precarious situation. And then, to add to my woes, Ashok threw a bombshell. One fine day, he announced that he was separating from us. As I say, double trouble! My troubles have always come in twos.

Ashok couldn't have chosen a worse moment to take that drastic decision.

Here I was worrying about how to get the construction done and where to arrange the money from, and my own brother was telling me that he was going to split from the family!

I decided to meet Jeet, the owner of Jeet Automobiles, who had become a close friend after I had helped him in his time of crisis. I went to his shop and said, "Jeet, I need some money."

He asked, "How much money?"

I said, "Rs 7 lakh."

He said, "I can't pay you that much money at one go. But I can give you a lakh every alternate day."

The very next day he himself came to my place and gave me a lakh. On the third day, he came again and handed me another lakh.

I called Darshan Singh, who was a contractor, and told him that I needed to build a 1,600-gaj structure in thirty-nine days. Darshan Singh said he would work day and night, and finish the task, but the work should not stop even for an hour. I assured him that we wouldn't let it stop.

When Jeet came with the next one lakh installment, Kapoor, the bank manager, was sitting next to me. He asked me about the matter, and I told him that I needed Rs 7 lakh for the construction work. Kapoor said that that was no big deal and he provided me a loan from the bank.

The building was ready within thirty-nine days. On the last day, when I called Jaswant and showed him the plot, he said, "No court in the world can beat me now."

My lawyer for this case was Mrs Vanita Gupta. I told her that the building was ready and handed her the time extension letter. I told her that I had to apply for the completion certificate now. She asked me to submit the application to the DDA. I sent Diwan to the DDA with the application. He returned saying the DDA officials had not accepted it.

When I asked for the reason, he answered: "The Urban Land Sealing Act."

I asked Jaswant what I should do now. He said, "We should try again. They will accept it."

We went to the DDA office again. We offered them Rs 25,000, but they wouldn't listen. In no time, for a job worth a couple of thousand rupees we had offered them two lakh rupees. When this junior engineer called Bali heard of the huge amount, he stood up from his chair. He said he would try.

After a couple of days, we went to meet Bali, but he didn't even offer us a seat. He told us bluntly that the work could not be done. He showed us three pages on the left side of the file and said there was no such law. He had already roped in two senior officers to get the work done. They had even decided how the amount would be distributed among them. He said they were willing to do that work even at the risk of losing their jobs, but it was not permissible within any law.

While we were talking, my friend Garg landed there. He asked me what I was doing there. I told him that I had come to meet Bali. Bali got scared and said, "No, no, he has not come to see me. And his work cannot be done."

Garg said, "He is Kapur. I don't know who has come to see whom ... What I know is nobody can stop his work. If Kapur is here, something is bound to happen."

During my next visit to the DDA office, Jaswant accompanied me. I stepped out regarding some work, while Jaswant stood outside the room of a senior officer. When

this senior officer Chakrawarty saw Jaswant, he touched his feet and invited him to his room. Jaswant told him that he was waiting for Kapur Sahib and he would come to his room only when he returned. Chakrawarty told him that he could come inside and they would sort out whatever problem we were facing. But Jaswant insisted that he would meet him only when Kapur Sahib returned. Meanwhile, I came back. Chakrawarty told me that Jaswant Sir was his guru (teacher), and he had learnt a lot from him. We went inside and we narrated the whole matter to Chakrawarty. He called Bali along with the file. He checked it and told Bali that he was a moron and didn't know his job. He opened the file, and quickly drew lines across the three pages. I think, he wrote, 'cutting confirm', or something to that effect on the file.

He questioned Bali, "It's surprising. Why did you not bring this file to me?"

Chakrawarty gave Bali some detailed instructions, which Bali quietly noted down. He asked him to get that dictation typed and issue the completion order. I didn't get much of what Chakrawarty told Bali, but I knew our job was done.

Imagine the work for which I was willing to shell out two lakh, didn't cost us a penny. After some time, the completion order was in my hands. When I showed the certificate to my lawyer Vanita, she was utterly impressed.

Four days later, we had to appear in the court. Vanita argued in the court, "Sir, just because my client is not willing

to bribe the government people, he is being subjected to this gross injustice. The land already had a building constructed on it. Yet the officers said that they found the plot empty. How is it possible that in a few days' time a building came up on an acre of land? And on top of it, the DDA itself has given my client the completion certificate."

The judge saw the completion certificate closely. And at that very moment the case was dismissed. The four-year-long struggle was over. The judge even went further and issued a warning and instruction that if somebody else were subjected to such treatment, he wouldn't mind punishing the guilty officials.'

Kapur Sahib sipped water once more and said: "Wasn't it all due to God's grace?"

I had been watching him drinking water, sip by sip, for a long time. I said, "Kapur Sahib, you drink water very leisurely, almost as if it were tea."

He said, 'Puttar ji... pani khana chahida... te roti peeni chahidi...' (My son, one should eat his water and drink his food.)

Seeing my bewilderment, Kapur Sahib said, 'You don't get what I am saying? Okay, let me explain to you what I mean.

The first thing: water should be eaten means we should spend as much time to drink water as we take to eat food. Simply put, we should drink water very slowly. And the

second thing: we should drink food means we must chew our food properly. We should chew it to such an extent that it becomes as soft as water. Understood?’

Kapur Sahib laughed aloud after giving me that valuable lesson. Then he became serious and said,

‘My son I have followed these rules all my life. That’s why I look this fresh and young even at this age.’

He laughed aloud as he said that. I was spellbound by his talk, his wry humour, and kept staring at his face quietly: another face of Mohan. Meanwhile, Kapur Sahib was back to his story.

‘Let’s get back to Ashok. The year was 1980. As I told you earlier, while I was running helter-skelter worrying about arranging money to save the Mayapuri plot, my brother Ashok told me he wanted to go his own way. I told Ashok, “This is no time to get separated. Please don’t say such things at this time of crisis. We are already in so much trouble.”

But Ashok was not listening. When he didn’t budge from his decision, I had to surrender. I said, “Okay, pick any of the three businesses and leave.”

Ashok refused my proposal. He said he didn’t want any one business; he wanted a share in all three. He said he wanted a share in Kapson Traders at Kashmere Gate, as well as in the helmet and rubber parts’ businesses.

He was doing that under his friends’ influence. His friends were not good people. They wanted to ruin our

family. We did our best to make him understand, but he didn’t agree. At last, we decided to give him a house, two shops at Kashmere Gate, one fourth of the Mayapuri plot and some cash. Another chapter was closed.

I tried my best to make Ashok see reason; I begged him to keep the family intact; I told him it was not the right time. But he didn’t listen to me. He didn’t understand my feelings. I felt very bad at that time. I was so heart-broken that I remember having told my youngest brother Ramesh, “The day you ask me for separation, I will not stop you at all.”

I witnessed a range of alternating emotions on his face. But before I could muster enough courage to intervene, he was back to his normal self again. Smiling, like Giridhar, once again. He overrode all tribulations with his triumphant smile.

In 1980 I decided to stop manufacturing filters for four-wheelers. I had no option but to sack 161 workers. When I told them about this decision, they took the matter to the union and put forth fifty demands in front of me. I refused to accept those demands. They retracted and, eventually, asked me to give in writing that they would be given gud (jaggery). The labourers used to eat gud, for it was a good antidote for reducing the side-effects of the polluted air. We used to give them gud regularly, but just to make a point they asked me to give that to them in writing.



I told them that they would be given as much good as they wanted, but I wouldn't promise it in writing.

They said that they wouldn't compromise until and unless I made a written promise.

I stuck to my position.

Then one day they decided to hoist their union's flag at my factory as a mark of protest. I went to my lawyer and sought his opinion on it. Did they have the right to do that? He said that they had no such right.

I said if that were the case I would not allow them to display their flag at my factory. They went to the Paharganj police station and submitted an application seeking permission to hoist their flag. My men told me what they were up to. We too went to the police station with an application demanding they should not be allowed to display the flag. This same scenario was played out repeatedly over close intervals.

The SHO (station head officer) got frustrated with these repeated scenes and told me, "Subhash, you cannot stop them from putting up their flag. Just visit Sylvania Laxman or L&T offices. They too have allowed the union flags on their buildings."

I said, "If as per the Delhi and the national law one could only construct two-and-a-half storey building, was it possible for me to construct four storeys?"

He said that it was not possible.

I said that's why I would not allow them (workers) to display this flag.

The SHO was fed up. He said he was tired of the whole issue and would do nothing about it.

I said, "That's what I wanted to hear. Now you may just please sit, and wait and watch what I do."

He asked me what I would do.

I said, "I am just going to show you."

We came to know that the union members were meeting in a park and they were planning to hoist the flag forcibly.

I went to the SHO and told him that since the law was not able to provide me protection, I was compelled to protect myself. I told him that I had brought 200-litre petrol, which I was planning to pour on the rioters. I would burn them all. In case anybody survived, I would gun him down with my pistol. I had no option but to take this extreme measure in self-defence.

Knowing I was capable of doing what I said, the SHO got alarmed. When the union's insiders told them about my threats they too got scared and abandoned their plan to hoist the flag. They said that they would take the matter to the court.

I did not let them display the flag. They went to court, but nothing came of that, for we were paying PF (provident fund), gratuity, bonus and everything to our workers. We

still follow this rule that even if we have to hire a worker for only one hour, we do it properly.

When I went to court, I took money with me, which I distributed among my labourers on the court premises. They couldn't believe their eyes. They had dragged me to the court and, there I was, paying them their pending dues!

They felt ashamed and some of them started crying, "Papaji, please think about us. We are still willing to work for you," they pleaded.

I said that in case I asked them to work for me, would they say no? They vowed to be there for me whenever I asked them.

I made them understand that there was no longer any profit in making filters for four-wheelers. That's why I was being forced to stop the business. But I paid all their dues. Sometimes, you have to take a tough stance to make people see reason. You have to be bold and fearless. I have always been fearless.'

The good story was indeed a riveting story, I thought. It had all the elements: humour, drama, emotion, conflict and resolution. And Kapur Sahib had an engaging way of sharing his experiences. He got fully involved in the scenes he was narrating. I could see him there, on the court premises, with a bag full of cash, distributing it among the very workers who had filed a case against him. I too was laughing with Kapur Sahib.

A man must be devoid of any fear. That's the way to lead a good life.

'Us wele Indira Gahdhi ne labor nu partner banan te zor ditta si... (Those days, Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister, was advocating partnership rights for workers.)

Doordarshan had started a program related to industry. Someone asked me to represent the owners' viewpoint in this program. The 45-minute episode, basically a debate, was to be telecast live. When I reached the studio, some Doordarshan guy handed me a coloured gown and asked me to wear it. I told him that I only wore white clothes. If it was mandatory I would wear the gown, I said, but I wouldn't be comfortable in it at all. If I was not comfortable, I wouldn't be able to express myself properly and I wouldn't enjoy the talk.

Though the white colour didn't suit their scheme of design (probably, because it shone a lot), they let me wear it. They made me sit between the people wearing those colourful gowns. Some trade union guy called Chatterji or Bannerji was representing their point of view. The anchor gave me a set of questions and tried to suggest probable answers.

I told him bluntly that he was talking to an assertive man with a mind of his own, and that I wouldn't be party to a show so rigged. "Question me and I will reply the way I want to," I said. The telecast time was only two minutes away.

They had to concede to my demand. The program began.

The leader of the union said, “You owners do not give full rights and benefits to labourers. This is absolutely wrong.”

I said, “You must have spoken at fifty different places on these very topics. Tell me about one instance where you advised the workers that they must work for eight hours.”

He was speechless.

I said, “All you do is provoke your workers. Always! You never teach them the right ethics. Just in case, one particular year I make more profit and offer 20 per cent bonus to my workers. The next year even if I end up making losses, you would raise the flag and start agitating, demanding 20 per cent bonus again. That’s how you operate. That’s why I would never give you a 20 per cent bonus. I would rather stick with the 8.3 per cent annual bonus.”

I told him that the unions were mostly snatching the workers’ rights. “Have you even told them that bonus is given on profit?” I asked.

That leader had no answers to my questions.

He countered me saying that workers should get as many rights as the owners.

I asked him what he meant by the ownership rights.

He uttered the word partnership.

I told him that even he didn’t understand the meaning of that word.

The partner doesn’t only have a share in the profit; he has to share the losses as well. In case the company makes losses worth crores, would your workers bear the losses as well? That’s why equal partnership was an absurd and impractical idea.

My interview was appreciated by one and all for its sheer boldness and pragmatism. I have never hesitated to call a spade a spade. The problem with our country is there’s no system. Once, I was applying for a tender in Gujarat. The tender form read the Gujaratis would get extra benefit of 25 per cent. I said, “There are different countries, not states, within our country. How else would you justify giving one state priority over another?”

There are many things wrong in our country. Our tax system, for example, has many loopholes. People who are smart and dishonest get away with robbery, while those who pay their taxes honestly are exploited. This system encourages cheating. This is totally wrong. I have always been a vocal opponent of this faulty system. I know, for I have been at the receiving end of this flawed system. For the first one and a half years of setting up Steelbird, I ran the company as a sole proprietor. At the end of the financial year, we were told to pay as much tax as the Tatas and Birlas were paying. And we had earned only Rs 6,000 profit! Later, however, the matter was resolved in our favour when we floated this company in partnership. That’s when Papaji and

Kailash Bhai became partners in the company. Eventually, that minor partnership clause was to cost me dear as Kailash Bhai walked out of the company.

Our judicial system has also failed to deliver. Justice delayed is justice denied. But in our country, people approach courts just to drag matters on. And the common man is scared of going to court knowing it would take decades to settle a minor case and there would be no end to the monies that would have to be paid out as fee to the court and the lawyers. Look at the ironies of life. Here the caliber of a lawyer is judged on the basis of how much he can prolong a case rather than how quickly he can bring it to its justifiable end.

When people don't get justice for years and years, they give up, and end up taking the help of thugs and middle-men and influential people who provide them quick relief. Due to this faulty system, our country is headed in a completely wrong direction. As I told you I have seen this system closely. At one time, I was so distressed with all this that I decided to make a film named *Samvidhan* (The Constitution).

There used to be these two brothers named SD Narang and BD Narang who had made 103 films together. They were very dear to me. I showed the script to Tabassum, who was a famous child actor and later hosted the first talk show of Doordarshan called *Phool Khile Hain Gulshan Gulshan*. After seeing the script, she said, "I think it's the

first time ever when somebody is making a film for his peace of mind, not money... Gandhiji liberated the country from the physical slavery, but your film will liberate the nation from mental slavery."

Tabassum really appreciated the script and was looking forward to it. Sadly, in the interim, SD Narang passed away, and my dream film project was nipped in the bud.

Anyway, I was talking about our system. In our society, things have come to such a pass that one who gives gets suppressed and one who exploits gets rewarded. But I have stood staunchly; I have never succumbed to any pressure.

Once Dhawan, who worked for the tax department, came to me, and said, "The Bombay Scooter House owners say that the Steelbird people don't pay the bills. And their filters are being made by Taneja Industries which is illegal."

I told Dhawan that the Premier Company had collaborated with Fiat. I cited ten different companies which were working in collaboration. I said, "You act against them, and I will stop working with the Tanejas." I told him that we were not committing any crime as we were paying royalty to the Tanejas and we were following all due procedures.

Dayal puttar ... Ye duniya hai rang birangi duniya, aithe har tarah de bande ne, har bande naal vartan da hisab ude bartav te depend karda e... (My son, it's a world of many colours. There are all kinds of people here. So we have to treat people as they treat us.)

Talking of people, I am reminded of this particular incident. I had applied for a tender for a rate contract floated by the Delhi government. Whenever you bid for a tender, you have to submit your income tax clearance certificate along with it. I asked my friend Katyal, whom I had freshly appointed as my income tax consultant, to get my IT clearance certificate. My friendship with Katyal began when I hired him in place of a really well-known Delhi lawyer who used to handle my tax cases. This renowned expert in the tax matters felt offended. He called me and expressed his resentment rather bluntly. He said, "I thought I was supposed to be the best lawyer in this city. Who is this completely unknown and unheard of lawyer you have hired in my place?"

His impudence didn't go down well with me. I told him that Katyal was not a well-known lawyer, but a good friend. I was not fibbing or exaggerating; I was merely stating the truth. In my very first meeting with Katyal, I had liked him. You know, it's like you meet some people for the first time, and you feel as if you have known them forever. Katyal was one such person. Since then he has been with me. Our connection, our bond has stood the test of time and grown stronger.

Anyway, about six months passed, and I had not yet received the clearance certificate. In fact, we had also missed the deadline for the tender. Coincidentally, another tender was advertised by the Delhi government in the

meanwhile. I asked Katyal why he had not done anything about the clearance certificate.

He said, "The new income tax officer is a good-for-nothing fellow. He doesn't do any work."

I told him to take me to the new officer.

I don't know what was wrong with Katyal's mood that day; he readily agreed.

The next day we went to the ITO. Instead of writing my name on a piece of paper, which was the customary practice there, I sent in my card. The officer called. I went inside his room.

I said, "I am Subhash Kapur."

He said, "Come after two minutes."

After two minutes, I walked in.

The income tax officer said, "Yes?"

I said, "Two minutes are over."

He said, "What do you want?"

I said, "My income tax clearance certificate."

He said, "For that we would need to do a proper assessment."

I said, "Okay, I will give you in writing that I need the certificate. And you give me in writing that you need to do the assessment first. You just give me this written order, and I will make sure you are out of this seat."

Scared, he almost jumped up from his seat. There used to be this inspector called Gupta in that office who was an

intelligent man. He was also sitting there. He asked me what had happened.

I told him the whole story.

Gupta asked, "How can you threaten to remove him from his post?"

I said, "As per law, he ought to serve me a notice at least days prior to the assessment exercise. Have you people served me any notice? What you are saying is illegal."

Now, both Gupta and the ITO understood that I knew what I was talking about, and wouldn't give in without a fight.

Gupta said, "Okay, come back in an hour."

We went out, had coffee, and returned after one hour. Outside the ITO's room, an elderly man came and touched my feet. He said, "I have been making rounds of this office for a long time -- this is my 39th visit, to be precise -- to get my assessment done. After talking to you, the ITO got so scared, he saw my face and immediately completed my assessment. I am very thankful to you."

When we went inside, Gupta handed me the clearance certificate. '

Kapur Sahib said, "Sometimes, even unwillingly, you have to be rude and harsh with people."

The officer gave me the clearance certificate, but he was offended by my straight talk. His ego was hurt. He secured all the cases of my income tax assessment of the previous

two years. On the date of the case I reached there with a tempo full of papers.

The income tax officer asked, "What is this?"

I said, "You have gathered the assessment cases of two years. I have brought the corresponding papers spanning two years."

Seeing those piles of papers, the officer gave us another date. He kept postponing the date till the month of March came.

Now, the assessment procedure is supposed to be over by the March-end, failing which the ITO is legally liable.

March-end was approaching and we refused to get assessed.

Several lawyers called me saying they would get it done. They said that they would not trouble me to make the trip to their offices; they would in fact come to me in person, to my office and take my signatures.

I told them, "Why should you? Katyal will do it."

Katyal was exasperated. He said, "Please, get the papers assessed. I have to deal with these people every day."

I got the assessment done just an hour before the deadline. The officer by then had realized who he was pitted against.

Kapur Sahib shuffled around in the sofa delightfully, his arms danced, his whole body swayed as he narrated these encounters from a life fully lived. He savoured those

situations, the people, and those memories. I thought I was seeing a life unfold right in front of me: in the twinkling eyes of Kapur Sahib. Meanwhile, he was taking me along down some other memory lane.

'I didn't know how to swim. One day, I felt like learning how to swim. So I went to the Talkatora Stadium. The trainer asked me to go to the springboard meant for divers. When I reached there, he said, "Go further up, to the higher board." When I reached there, he said, "Now, jump!"

I jumped the moment I heard "jump". My feet hit the floor of the pool and I found myself floating back to the surface. The trainer held my arm and pulled me out. He said, "Subhashji, your courage is admirable. You didn't blink an eye before jumping from that height. Even good swimmers hesitate to jump from that springboard."

But that courage cost me dear. I will always regret the fact that I could not learn swimming. After jumping from that height, my ears developed a problem due to, maybe, the water pressure. Talking of pressures, all my life I have never submitted to any social pressure. To yield to any pressure was not in my nature. When Papaji passed away on May 9, 1978, my youngest brother Ramesh's marriage was due after four months. Some relatives tried to convince me that I should either postpone the wedding or keep it a simple and quiet affair.

I said if I organized a simple ceremony for him, people would say that since his father is no more, I didn't spend

a penny on my younger brother's marriage. The relatives said, "That is true."

And if I organized it with pomp and show, the very same people would say, "Look at him. He lost his father only yesterday, and today he's putting up this grand show."

The relatives said, "That too is true."

I told them since the people were not going to spare me either way, why shouldn't I organize Ramesh's wedding the way I wanted to?

The fact was I wanted to celebrate Ramesh's wedding in style. That had been a long-cherished desire.

I wanted to hire a chartered plane for his *baraat* (marriage procession). I had even made enquiries in Hong Kong about chartered flights, as there were no planes available in Delhi and Bombay at the time.

Our talks ran into a stalemate because they asked us to pay for the return flight (Jammu to Delhi to Hong Kong) as well, which was not acceptable to me. That's why we decided to abandon the idea. Yet, Ramesh's wedding ceremony was a grand affair. It was organized in the biggest park in the A-3 block. I fulfilled my long-cherished dream.

When Kailash Bhai (our brother) separated from us, my Nawab Ganj's 'special relative' -- whose room we had shared after coming from Haridwar -- went all out to help him. Perhaps, they were happy to see our family breaking apart.'

Kapur Sahib took a long pause; probably, he was remembering that awful night when as a little boy he had wept and wept, for the family had nothing to eat.

‘I understood at a very young age that all our kith and kin were selfish. Relatives are only meant for attending weddings and for weeping during your last rites. They just watch the tamasha (spectacle) and look for occasions when they can laugh at your failures, when they can run you down.’

Then all of a sudden Kapur Sahib burst out laughing. Like I said before, he would wipe away the bitterest of sorrows with his hearty laughter.

‘Puttar ji, zindagi de utaar chadhav ne eh... (My son, these are ups and downs of life.)

I have always been very innovative by nature. I like to invent new things. I had invented a safety kit for drivers, but I did it much ahead of its time. People couldn’t understand it. I knew by my own experience how difficult it was to drive a scooter in the harsh winters of Delhi. When our hands turn cold, our knee-jerk reaction is to start driving with one hand so that the other hand gets some warmth in the pockets. This, however, is risky and can cause accidents. To tackle this peculiar, yet very common problem, I made hand protectors.

Similarly, both Fiat and Ambassador, the only cars seen on the Delhi roads those days, used to be a major source of

irritation for two-wheeler drivers. The cars used to flash this blinding glare at the two-wheeler drivers. That too caused many accidents. To deal with this problem, my elder brother started making anti-glare mirrors.

Mera dimag chalda rehanda si. Pher mein vekhya ki motorcycle da tyre jado pancher ho janda si taan badi pareshani hondi si. (I had a lively and inquisitive mind. I was always thinking of things that could be useful in some way. I would research and develop those. For example, the biggest nightmare a two-wheeler driver experiences is when he is stranded all alone on some deserted road with a punctured tyre.

To rescue him from this predicament, I created a purja (nut) that could be fitted in place of the plug. This nut helped let in some air even after a tyre puncture. That helped one drive the vehicle to a certain distance and hence opened up the possibility of finding a repair shop rather than fixing the puncture on one’s own.

Those days women mostly wore sarees or suits and dupattas. While riding on a two-wheeler, this dupatta or the saree pallav would often get caught in the wheel, which was extremely dangerous. To tackle the dupatta problem, I made an engine guard. Similarly, I invented a saree guard, which was useful for the saree-clad women riding two-wheelers.

But, I guess, all these innovative devices came too ahead of their time in a market that didn’t yet understand their



importance. By the way, I invented many more things. In fact, one of my gadgets -- a safety kit for vehicles -- caused me great losses. To promote this kit, I spent Rs 39 lakh on its advertising alone. And the sales came to be about Rs 40 lakh. When the losses continued to mount, I stopped making those kits.

I was compelled to bury forty trucks of fibreglass component, which had been painted with a colour made of 176 different dyes. I had no option but to bury this huge materiel, for it wouldn't burn, nor would it melt. But one lives and learns. So no regrets!

Kapur Sahib laughed like a child as he related the details of this particular venture. He had lost big money in it, yet, decades later, he was amused by that enterprise. He had no regrets about it. I was watched and listened to him in amazement.

In the year 1992-93, I got into dish antenna manufacturing. We were just making inroads into this field when I was forced to abandon that business due to a moral dilemma.

I was associated with the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh) and was also the city president of the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad). During one meeting, somebody spoke very passionately and logically about how the latest invasion of the country was happening through the skies. He proved that our cultural values were being assaulted by the western

ideas and programs, which were being shown by television via the latest modes of communication.

I pondered over this issue a lot and found myself caught in this dharma sankat (moral dilemma). I thought either I should leave these institutions (VHP and RSS) or I must get out of the dish antenna business, which, indeed, was helping erode our traditional and cultural values. I opted for the latter, tougher, option and quit that business altogether. I ended up making losses worth crores. Morals maketh the man. Money could be earned again.'

Kapur Sahib said it simply, without any remorse or disappointment; a faint smile flickered on his glowing face.

I blurted out, 'Losses worth crores! Just because of your ideological conflict...'

'Puttar ji, paisa to haath di mel hai... (My son, money is only the dirt on your hands.)

This time round I found myself compelled to drink some water. While I sipped it, slowly, deliberating over Kapur Sahib's daring, action-packed life, he roared with laughter.

'You are a fast learner, my son. Now, you are eating your water...'

A bit flustered even now, I asked him, 'Kapur Sahib, when did you join politics?'

'I told you, I must have been only five or six-years old when I strutted around wearing the Jansangh's badge. The sanskaras (values) that my Papaji and Jhai inculcated in me

made me lean towards Hindutva from an early age. During the Emergency, I coined three slogans.

1. Garv se kaho ham Hindu hain. (Say with pride that we are Hindus.)
2. Pahle desh, phir dharam. (Country first, then religion.)
3. Hindu hona gaurav ki baat hai. (It's an honour to be a Hindu.)

During the days of the Emergency, people used to feel scared mouthing these slogans publicly. They were particularly afraid of Indira Gandhi in Delhi.

But how could I relent! I used to gather children and give them one rupee each for pasting the stickers on random vehicles. I would tell them to note the vehicle number as well. They loved this rewarding game and happily went around putting up the stickers. But my elder brother refused to put that sticker on his vehicle fearing persecution. I, however, remained a staunch and open adherent of the Hindutva even during those fearful times.

My formal entry into politics happened much later. One early morning, Nand Lal Asija, who was from the same market, came along with Premji, who was a VHP secretary, and said they were looking for some good people to join their organization.

Asija had told Premji that he would introduce him to the most fearless and good human being. So he brought Premji to meet me. We started talking and exchanged ideas. That

dialogue ended only after I became a member of the VHP. I was the president of the Delhi VHP from 1990 to 1999. In fact, in the year 1993, many VHP members tried to get me a Rajya Sabha seat. I refused their offer, for I never wanted to join active politics. Even now I find politics a very dirty game. I will tell you this instance to make you understand what politics does to you.

There was this man called Mukhi who often used to play Sweep (a card game) with us. We helped him contest an assembly election. He won and became a member of the legislative assembly (MLA). After winning the election, he begged me to help him become a minister. I was very close to Acharya Giriraj Kishore, who was a senior VHP leader. I called him. He asked me whether I knew this person (Mukhi) well. Not knowing what to say, I said yes. Acharyaji asked about Mukhi's biodata. I told him about his educational qualifications and the fact that he was a professor. Acharyaji assured me that he would become a minister. After that call, I told Mukhi at around 11.00 am that he had become a minister. Mukhi started arguing with me that the interview was to take place at 4.00 pm, and what became of him would be known by 8.00 pm. He said that I was making fun of him. Anyway, I tried to reason with him that all that was paper work. Later, in the evening, when his name was announced as a minister, I was also accompanying him. He touched my feet and expressed his gratitude. The next

morning he took me along for the oath-taking ceremony. The venue was very crowded and people were literally fighting to make their way. Mukhi went in without even informing me. I stood there alone, in that crowded space, and thought that even before taking the oath; Mukhi had forgotten that I was also with him. Politicians are mostly opportunists and politics is mostly a filthy field.

When I first became president of the Delhi unit of the VHP, Manohar Lal used to be the head of Sadar Bazar Association. During one public meeting, he was not given an opportunity to speak. He got upset and left the venue in a huff, saying: “Mainu mic ni ditta...” (I was not given the mic.)

At that very moment I vowed that I would never touch a mic again. I have seen politicians from close quarters. And, as they say, familiarity breeds contempt. That’s why I decided that I would never join active politics.

I have stayed with the Parishad because I have been attached to this organization for so long, and I believe in its ideology. I was the president of the Delhi unit of the VHP from 1991 to 2001. From 2007 to 2011, I was the national president of the Bharatiya Jansewa Sansthan. Even now, I am the national vice-president of the VHP. In fact, I was once appointed the national vice-president of the VHP in my absence. I had not attended the meeting at Amritsar, for I was not keen at all on taking any post. Yet,

somebody proposed my name, and I was instantaneously and unanimously elected. I have always maintained that one doesn’t need any posts or medals to do social work.’

From his multiple business ventures to politics to social work to a complete family man... Kapur Sahib had lived a rich life and he had a vast repertoire of experiences. His eyes had a strange gleam as he recollected and doled out these fascinating stories. He seemed to be travelling backwards in time. One random thought and he would be pushed down a particular memory lane, while another flash would take him elsewhere. Enraptured, I heard his voice, as if coming from afar, and soon found myself in the lush, green valley of Kashmir.

‘I have been to the highest point in Kashmir, visited every nook and cranny of the place. Once we organized a rally in Kashmir in which all the state presidents, vice-presidents and secretaries took part. We hired six buses as we were 240 people in all. Apart from that, forty vehicles, including a couple of ambulances, were part of the rally.

We had to cross the Ramban Bridge on the way. It was a dangerous mission since the terror in the valley was at its peak; anything could have happened to us.

That evening I was told that I could not go ahead, for my name was not mentioned in the list of the people who had been given permission to cross that bridge. I spoke to the local RSS president Indreshji and registered my

protest. Seeing my agitation, Indreshji took me aside and told me that there was a genuine reason and intention behind my omission.

We held an emergency meeting, there and then, the three of us: Indreshji, Premji and I.

Indreshji divulged that the separatists had given an open threat saying whoever crossed the Ramban Bridge would be shot dead. They had even claimed that anybody who survived their onslaught would be rewarded with Rs 1 lakh. Indreshji confided in me that while making that list his hands were shaking with fear. Fearing for my life, he had deliberately omitted my name from the list. He had instead put BL Verma's name on the list, who was the vice president of the Parishad. His logic was that Verma, who was seventy-two then, had at least lived his life.

I told Indreshji that there was no relation between age and life. Anybody could die any time irrespective of his age. I also told him that the Hindus never die; they are just reborn and resurrected in another life. I told him, come what might, I had to go. And I would go.

Indreshji said they would need to speak to the people in the Intelligence Department to get the clearance for me. He was not too confident about my prospects. He said he would try his level best and would let me know by the next morning.

The next morning Indreshji called to inform that I could go ahead. I was delighted to hear that news. I have always

believed that if you want to do something, nobody can stop you. Not even death.'

I was amazed at Kapur Sahib's will power and his sheer patriotic fervor. I thought only if each and every child of this country possessed this level of passion.

'Assi othe gaye... naal sahi salamat wapas aaye. (We went there, and we came back safe and sound.)

It's being proven now that both the Hindu religion and the Hindutva are ancient and everlasting concepts. Sanatan dharma, as we call it.

Just look at the Ramsetu and the Sri Lankan raid. These things have been written about in our shastras (sacred ancient texts) thousands of years ago. But people kept thinking that this was all fiction. They would have still considered it a work of imagination, had not NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) provided proof of it. The NASA scientists saw it from the space: this bridge connecting India to Sri Lanka. Look at the irony: most of us refused to believe our own sacred books; the NASA scientists had to bring the satellite images of the Ramsetu to make us believe.

The Ramsetu is so long and broad that we have no idea about its dimensions. At certain places the bridge is as broad as four kilometers. At certain points, it is two feet below the ocean. The government should take pride in this heritage. But most of our governments have been anti-Hindutva.

These governments have flaunted the Taj Mahal, which is only a 400 year old monument, but they have turned a blind eye to the Ramsetu, which is an ancient architectural wonder. We must preserve this heritage from the past. The Ramsetu is a symbol of our ancient Hindu civilization. But all these issues have been politicized now and politics mostly suppresses the truth.

When the RSS was banned, I organized a meeting in my house without any hesitation or fear. The meeting was attended by several bigwigs like Rajmata Scindia (late senior BJP leader), Atal Bihari Vajpayee (former prime minister) and Ashok Singhal (VHP leader).'

The mention of his house seemed to have triggered some old memory trail. I thought about his childhood and the early displacements he was subjected to: from Pakistan to Haridwar to Delhi. Those experiences, mostly bitter, had left deep impressions on his psyche. That explained his special attachment to the lands he had bought and sold; the houses he had acquired and lived in; and the factories he had rented and built. The places, I thought, also meant a lot to him. They too reminded him of the journey he had undertaken.

'This is about the time when our factory at A-50, Mayapuri, had started doing well. Right in front of this factory was Somnathji's shop. He was the president of our association and had a business of chappals (footwear). One

day, he came to our house to deliver an invitation card. His son was getting married. When I opened the door, he asked, "You live in this house? You own a factory spread over one acre of land and you live in a pigeonhole!"

I felt embarrassed. The very next day, I bought this 800-gaj house at the A-3/28 plot. I consider it my paternal house because my mother passed away in it on 31 December 1992. She went to sleep that night and never woke up again. Jhai's departure from this world jolted me. When I sat in front of her still body I saw all her life in a flash. I remembered how Jhai had spent all her life praying for the family's wellbeing. Every third day she would be observing some fast or other for our sake; every second day she would be visiting some temple; she would perform those elaborate pujas and would follow all the religious rites devotedly; she was always praying, kneeling before God to bless our family with health and wealth.

I sat in front of her lifeless body and vowed not to eat non-vegetarian food ever again. Jhai was a pure vegetarian. She didn't resent my eating non-vegetarian food, but she was not very comfortable with it. That was my special tribute to Jhai.'

Kapur Sahib's eyes moistened and he almost whispered to himself, 'Meri jhai...' (My mother...)

Overcoming this momentary outburst of emotion, he flashed his beatific smile again, and continued his recollections.

‘I used to be very naughty as a child; I used to harass the poor Jhai with my endless pranks. I still miss her love and affection. As a child I had this fondness for playing different roles in different guises.

I used to impersonate people. Once I became a sardar (Sikh) and went to the house. I knocked the door. Jhai opened it, but she couldn’t recognize me. She slammed the door at my face. I knocked at the door again. She stepped out, and was about to ask me what I wanted, when I said, “Jhai, what’s wrong with you; you don’t recognize me? This is me... Bhashi.”

Jhai chided me affectionately, “Fitte muh... Bhashi... Moya... tu.”(You little rascal, Bhashi, you are absolutely incorrigible...)

I was laughing helplessly. Seeing me laugh, Jhai also joined the laughter.

Every other day, I would keep changing my looks. Sometimes I kept long hair, sometimes short. I changed the length of my moustache, and hair locks too. I would try different dresses. I would wear a pagdi (turban) and become a sardar (Sikh). Sometimes I would wear the Muslim skull cap, at other times I would wear a cross beaded with rosemary and become a Christian.’

Kapur Sahib stared at the sky. In one moment he had relived his whole life. I did not feel like interrupting him. He stepped out of this trance-like state and continued.

‘I was telling you about our paternal house ... When my brother Ashok passed away we performed his last rites in this very house. He left us too early; he was too young. November 29, 2002...’

Kapur Sahib paused a bit as if he were searching for words...

‘That day, I was sitting in the puja (prayer) room offering my prayers. That is one routine I have always followed. Every day, I spend some time doing puja. Somebody told me that our factory had caught fire. I was so engrossed in saying prayers that I did not feel like leaving the divine company. I finished my puja and then ran towards the factory to find out what had happened. From a distance, all I could see was a thick cloud of smoke. Hundreds of people were standing, watching this debacle. It was a fierce fire; the flames were touching the skies. And I watched ... my lifetime’s earnings turn into ashes...

I felt utterly helpless ... helpless, as I could do nothing except stare at my factory going up in the flames ... like a mute spectator... I kept thinking ... All my lifetime’s earnings ... For a little while, I was devastated. Then I stirred and rushed inside the burning factory. I stayed there for about fifteen minutes. Right in the middle of that raging fire, I stood still. Stunned, watching everything that I had earned turn into ashes. As I stood there, dazed by what had happened, I thought that I must control myself, hold

myself together, not get flustered, else I would end up in some mental asylum. I told myself either I had to forget this tragedy then and there, or get burnt to death.

Those fifteen minutes in that inferno changed me forever. That was like my trial by fire and I came out of it cleansed, like pure gold. That fire trial was like a tapasya (religious sacrament) to me. I had realized and understood my real self. Beyond that thickening cloud of smoke, I had seen a new horizon. I could see a new sky emerging, and I thought that somehow I had to reach out to that new, widening horizon.

I stepped out of that fire and stood outside. I saw the building of my factory turn into ruins. As I watched it, I could feel the pain of each and every burning brick that I had put together. I had always designed my buildings myself. I never hired an architect.

I could feel each and every stone of that factory crying. When I composed myself, I thought it was only brick and stone, after all. I thanked God for keeping my family safe. Thankfully, that deadly fire had not claimed any life.'

As he narrated this extraordinary occurrence and his personal feelings, I too was overcome with emotion. He had recited the entire episode to me with great passion and blazing eloquence. Feeling overwhelmed by the rising tides of emotions in my heart, I thought how great people had this unique gift to experience things differently. Kapur Sahib

could have seen his life turn into ashes and coal in that fire, but he said he had emerged cleansed, like pure gold.

I thought I was witnessing Lord Krishna's virat roop (infinite form), standing in Kurukshetra, and delivering the sermon of the Gita to Arjuna. While I struggled to hold back my tears, Kapur Sahib was all smiles ... I felt as if I could hear his smile: it was like listening to the sweet music of Krishna's flute.

I felt like telling him what I was feeling, but all I could utter was: 'Kapur Sahib, I feel like having tea.'

Kapur Sahib said: 'Haan, haan puttar, hune lo...' (Yes, my son, sure.)

He called for the tea, and affectionately, as if he were speaking to a child, said,

'My son, this is what life is all about: we must take all the trials and tribulations head on. That fire consumed all my life's earnings. I didn't get much from the insurance department. Those people were right in their own way. I will explain the way these insurance people work. Suppose I bought a machine for Rs 10,000. But after depreciation, they will tell you, the same machine has a value of only Rs 600. And you will end up getting about Rs 400 from them. I got hardly anything. All the papers were burnt. I ended up losing crores.

Zindagi zindadili da hi dooja naam hai. (Life is just another name for liveliness.)

Anyway, I have always told my children that the first name in my life's book belongs to my dear friend Harbans Lal Bareja.

When Harbans heard about the fire, he rushed to the factory immediately. He took me to one side and said: "Papaji mere kol is wele 7 lakh paya hai ... o tuhada ... tuhanu meri kasam e, naa mat karna. (Papaji, I have Rs 7 lakh on me right now. That belongs to you." You will see me dead if you say no.)

I told him, "Since you have said it, that money is mine. That money is lying with you; please keep it as my amaanat (security). Just pray to God that I don't need that money. But just in case I do, I will take it from you. That's a promise."

The second name should be of Tilak Vij who came the very next day with Rs 15 lakh. I told him the same thing -- that if and when I needed it I would take it.

After thinking the whole situation through thoroughly for a couple of days, I even considered selling off the factory. It was getting us Rs 6 crore at that time. But how would we put our lives back on track?

When we spoke to the bank people, they asked how much money we wanted. I told them I needed to settle my pending payments and start working again. I required at least Rs 1.5 crores. The bank gave us the rights to encash Rs 1.5 crore that day itself, and we began afresh.'

Kapur Sahib heaved a long sigh, as if he could feel the relief afresh.

'At that time of crisis, I didn't lose my mental balance and with God's grace emerged victorious against all odds.

These are the ups and downs of life. These are inevitable. I never begged in front of anybody for anything even during the gravest of crises. As I keep repeating: relatives are good only for attending weddings and last rites.

That reminds me of a funny story somebody told me. Once, somebody's buffalo fell sick. One of his relatives came to him and asked, "Is your buffalo all right?"

The man said, "Yes, she is fine."

The relative returned again in the afternoon and asked, "Is she fine?"

The man said again, "Yes, she is fine."

The same dialogue was repeated all over again in the evening.

When the relative was about to leave, the man said: "Why are you taking so much trouble? Sit at home, relax. When the buffalo dies we will invite you."

Kapur Sahib burst out laughing.

This is what rishtedari (relationships) is all about. I lost my confidence in relatives very early on in my childhood.

All my life, time and again, after each fall, I tried to grab that elusive thread of life, to somehow hold onto its one end.... After some time, I entered the iron waste business.



This business involved transacting ship-loads of iron waste. I opened the letters of credit worth Rs 140 crore for this trade. But I was unaware of the fact that a huge mafia was involved in this business. They used to make up to Rs 10 crore in unloading one ship alone. When I came to know the dirty reality of that business, I left it altogether. I have earned all my money honestly.

While I was in the iron waste business, I could not pay enough attention to my helmet business. Due to that negligence, the turnover from the helmet business came down to Rs 5 crore from a whopping Rs 25.5 crore in just four or five years. But by that time I had become so strong mentally that these minor hiccups didn't affect me.

I remember having said this once: Baadhaon ki lambi kataar dekh kar bhi jiska man na ghabraye, badhaon ko bhi uske paas aane mein baadha hoti hai. (One who does not get frightened by a long line of obstacles, is feared even by those very obstacles that find it difficult to come near such a person.)

I have dealt with all kinds of obstacles right from my childhood. What can these minor hurdles do to me now?

Talking of childhood, I remember one more thing. I consider myself very lucky because my children have imbibed the same samskaras (values), which I had inherited from my father and Jhaiji.

Apne ullu de patthe di gal sunanda. (I will tell you something about my dear son.)

I told this story to my son when he was a child. The story was about the martyr Bhagat Singh and his patriotic fervor. Bhagat Singh's uncle, who used to do a job with the British, once told him: "Stop indulging in these wayward activities, for you are giving me a bad name." Sardar Bhagat Singh told him, "Uncle, don't worry, very soon the world will know you by my name only."

After some time Bhagat Singh's words turned true! The world still knows his next and previous generations by his name. After listening to the story, my son Raju (Rajeev Kapur) said, "Father, one day the world will know you by my name."

Now, my dear son, whom I endearingly like to call ullu da pattha, works so hard that all my clients have always a word of praise for him. I feel extremely happy hearing others heap praises on him. I will tell you another story about Raju. He is not only hard-working and intelligent; he is a sensitive boy as well. Our factory was based at Ganesh Nagar those days.

I used to visit it on the 7th of every month to pay salaries. That particular day was a Sunday. Raju, who was only seven years old then, came with me to the factory. The kid saw that day how the workers toiled in the factory. I showed him around. He saw the kiln and the thick plumes of smoke emitting out of it. He also witnessed the material being grinded in ice-cold water. He was astonished to see all

that. He asked me later, "Dad, they work so hard. Do we pay them every day for this work?"

I said, "We don't pay them every day. They get paid for a month's work. About Rs 250 to 300..."

During his visit to the factory Raju also saw the piles of helmets kept in the office. He asked, "Daddy, how much do we sell this helmet for?"

I said, "Rs 70."

Raju asked, "How much do we earn?"

I said, "We earn about Rs 15."

About a week after this factory visit, we went out shopping. Raju took a fancy to two coats at the Jain Sons' shop, one blue and another red. After he had tried those coats, he asked the shopkeeper. "Sir, how much are these priced at?"

The shopkeeper said, "Rs 250 only."

He said, "Daddy, get me one coat."

I said, "Why not both?"

He had liked the coats so I insisted that he buy both. But Raju was determined. He bought only one coat. With that one visit to the factory, Raju had understood very well how difficult it was to earn Rs 250. My son had become wiser at that young age!

It must have been the influence of some good deeds earned by my ancestors during their previous births that my daadi (grandmother), my guru (mentor), my Nano -- all

rolled into one as my daughter Anamika Kapur -- was born to me.'

Kapur Sahib's face glowed with pride and love as he started talking about his daughter.

'My son, I will only talk about Anamika Kapur because after marriage she has become Anamika Malhotra. That Anamika who was once the beloved child of her grandparents! I don't have enough words to describe how ecstatic Papaji used to feel with her. Papaji remained ill for twelve long years. His face used to brighten up at the mere sight of my lovely Nano. I would feel ecstatic seeing how my little angel's very presence gave so much joy to my ailing Papaji.

My daadi (Anamika) has always been a completely and unfailingly fair person right from her childhood. I might have erred a bit, here and there, but my daughter, never. If she finds anything wrong in anybody's conduct she has to point it out. She never cared about whom she found fault with. Right from her childhood, she questioned us all: be it Lalita, Papaji, Jhai or anybody else. And she would always explain our mistakes or error of judgment so well that we had to concede to her opinion. She would make sure we realized our mistake and corrected ourselves. That's why I have called Anamika my grandmother right from her childhood.'

Kapur Sahib's heart brimmed with love for his daughter as he talked about her.

It was Anamika only who taught my family the art of shopping. Before she was born, Lalita used to have at the most six suits and I would keep hardly four pairs of kurta-pyjama. But since Anamika Kapur went for shopping every week, she would always buy something or the other for us. Whenever I accompanied her on her shopping excursions, she would make sure I also bought something for myself. Whoever went out with her would never return empty-handed.

The best thing about my children has been that they never had this feeling of competition or jealousy with one another. Even if I bought fifty-two pairs of something for Anamika and twenty-six for Raju, the latter wouldn't give a damn. And if I got more for Raju, Anamika wouldn't care two hoots about it. There has never been an iota of jealousy between them. I am not saying all this just because they are my children. I am not being biased. I have been an ardent admirer of these virtues in my children.

My problem is I cannot stop talking when I it is about my children. I feel joyous. Anamika and Raju have given me so much happiness. They have always shared a special bond.

Raju started helping in the family business when he was only sixteen. He was always number one when it came to work. I can say it with pride that my son turned out to be as hard-working as I have been. Raju doesn't mind working for sixteen to eighteen hours a day. He can really slog. Very

few people have this quality. And he was always so bright that the job that nobody else could do, would be assigned to Raju. And he would do it. He had this penchant for cracking hard nuts ... Since he took over; I have frequently heard these conversations around me: *The production has stopped ... Call Raju... Can't find vendors...? Find Raju. The client is not clearing the pending bills ... Send Raju.*

Raju made his own special mark in the family business very quickly. But that did not, in any way, affect the importance of my right hand man's (my younger brother Ramesh) place in the business. Ramesh was born on April 14, 1957. After completing his studies, Ramesh also joined the family business and stayed put.

Puttar asi saare bhra ik hi thali ch khana khande si. (Son, all of us brothers used to eat meals from one plate.)

Ashok, Ramesh and I, and our respective wives -- Kanchan, Nisha and Lalita, all six of us -- always sat together for dinner. Never would we start our meals until all of us were at the table together. Ramesh and I have shared a special relationship, almost like that of Ram and Lakshman. We have shared this strong bonding right from childhood. When we built a new house, so many people would tell me, "Bhashi, think ahead, and make at least two doorways to the house."

But I didn't pay any heed to those 'well-wishers'. I told them I didn't want to lay the foundation of my house based on wrong premises.

I used to rebuke such well-wishers. But nobody can fight with destiny. What will be, will be. Due to certain peculiar circumstances, we separated. Our business was divided, but our paths have remained the same ... We didn't go our own ways. Our love has remained intact. Like Ram and Lakshman, our brotherhood has survived all the odds.

Puttarji, jahan chaar bartan hote hain, thoda bahot to khadkate hi rahte hain. (Son, where there are four utensils, they will keep making some noise.)

Sothi naal kade paani alag ho sakda hai? (But who can take apart water by beating it with a stick?)

Ramesh had always known my mind well. He understood everything about me. If somebody would come to meet me, Ramesh could tell exactly what was going on in my mind about that person. He knew me like the back of his hand. He had been very obedient to me. There used to be a close friend of his named Surinder. When I had some problems with Surinder, Ramesh felt so upset he never spoke to that close friend of his again. That is the kind of respect he had for me! And Ramesh has really served me a lot. He has always been at my beck and call. If I go to some party, he is always there with the vehicle to drop me and pick me up. In any gathering, if I have to eat, Ramesh is always around me, to bring me food. He would never do anything he knew I wouldn't like. And he knows exactly what I like and what I don't like. We think alike. Ramesh's children too are very fond of me.

Whenever I ask Sonu (Pankaj Kapur) for anything, he does it with a lot of eagerness; he's never careless about what is told to him. Pankaj is Ramesh's elder son. Ramesh's younger son, Manav, is also following in his brother's footsteps. He too is an obedient child. He talks in such a hasty manner, and so fast that I can't make out half of what he says. But I already know he will go places. They say those who speak fast have a sharp brain.

Even though Kailash Bhai went on his way against my wishes, his son, Vicky Kapur, has always taken my advice. He adores me. I am telling you, he can go to any length for my sake. He can even kill. He will go to jail, laughing, for my sake.'

During all my conversations with him, I had seen how devoted Kapur Sahib was to his family. While remembering all the people who had shaped his life in one way or the other, his ruddy face showcased a range of intense and poignant emotions. He seemed overwhelmed with nostalgia. Even against those who had moved away from him, he held no grudge.

'What can I say about my elder brother Jagidsh Bhai Sahib! We spent all our lives together. Whenever I asked him to do anything for me, he left his work, and helped me out first. He was with me always, during my good and bad times.'

Kapur Sahib's face beamed with pride, and his eyes welled up, as he fondly recalled a lifetime of close

relationships he had shared with his Jhai, Papaji, brothers and the next two generations.

‘I remember one more thing about Raju. He is a grown-up man now, yet he is like a child. He still finds umpteen ways to express his love. He is a very expressive person and likes to show his emotions. He keeps kissing his mother like a little kid. Her mother too dotes on him.

And what to say of Raju’s mother! Had Lalita been not in my life, I would have been nothing. Her thought, her generosity, her work culture, her compassion and love ... her intelligence really helped. It’s difficult to find a woman like her! I sometimes feel I would have been zilch without Lalita, and I strongly believe there never ever will be a woman like her!

This Subhash Kapur sitting in front of you, you are talking to, wouldn’t have been the same Subhash Kapur, had she not been my life partner.

Lalita has always been devoid of any feelings of discrimination against our children. She has always treated them as equals. She gave as much love to her daughter-in-law Sweety, as she gave to her daughter. Only the lucky ones get a good daughter-in-law in these times. I was fortunate to get such a competent daughter-in-law.

The real test of a person is when one faces adversity. When you are confronted with a crisis, and someone helps you out, that’s the litmus test. When my brother Ashok died,

we received so many people at our house; they had all come to pay their condolences. My daughter-in-law took care of the house very efficiently. Any average girl would not have been able to handle that pressure. It was beyond belief and expectation, the way Sweety took care of everything. She proved me wrong. She really took me by surprise, my Sweety. I always had this impression, rather prejudice, against modern girls. I used to think that they could not work too hard. When Sweety took us to America, she took great care of us there.

Forget about taking care, in present times, it’s not easy to find daughters-in-law who would like to do touristy things with their ageing in-laws in a foreign country. And it was not as if she took us there just because she was obliged to. It was not as if she was pretending to be happy with us. I have never heard her say no to anything we ask for; she never makes any excuses, never dithers. She is always there for us. We are blessed to have a daughter-in-law like her.

Somehow, as I talk about my near and dear ones, I miss my dear sister, Veena, today.’

Kapur Sahib smiled with affection as he spoke about his relationship with his sister.

She was very fond of me, my sister. Mein bhi jhalli nu bada payar karda si.Athah. (I too loved my gawky sister immensely.)

When I got my sister married, her father-in-law said: “My daughter, never create a distance between yourself

and the Kapurs. They are your true friends. I may not be around tomorrow, but they will always be there for you.”

Veena’s father-in-law too had been very close to me. He always had a high regard for us. In fact, Veena’s father-in-law prepared his will right in front of me. I made him amend the will, which helped Veena a lot later on. When she was not married, our house used to be really lively.

Nisha, my brother Ramesh’s wife, ties rakhi on my wrist. She has always treated me like a brother. I cannot describe what I feel about my bharjai (sister-in-law), my brother Jagdish’s wife. I have never seen them fighting. And I have never heard her talk in a loud voice to anyone. In our family, women never caused any rift. Whenever we drifted apart, it was because of the men. That’s a remarkable thing about my family, because most of the time, it is the other way round: generally, women are supposed to cause petty troubles and squabbles within families. I have never seen the women in my house indulge in any petty arguments.

That reminds me of an amusing incident. Once my sisters-in-law, Kanchan, Nisha, and Lalita went out to buy gold from Ramlal Kundan Lal’s jewellery shop. You wouldn’t believe it: all three women kept arguing in the shop. “You take this first; no, you take it; it will suit you better.”

Ramlal, the owner of the shop, who was quietly watching them, was surprised to see this rare spectacle. He said, “This is the first time I see a family where women

are fighting among themselves saying ‘you take it, this suits you’. Otherwise, all the women ask, ‘how do I look? It suits me, right?’”

Kapur Sahib laughed heartily.

They have extremely sacrificing nature, all of them. As I said earlier, the women never caused any problem in our family.

I have seen many ups and downs in my life, but with God’s grace I have been blessed with great friends. I hope everyone finds as many and as great friends as I have had.’

Kapur Sahib rubbed his hands gleefully, as if in anticipation of a warm and special friendly session ahead, while he went down memory lane dotted with his lifelong friends.

‘Mere yaran vagair meri zindagi hi adhuri hai. (Without my friends, my life would have been empty.)

My friends have played a very special role in my life. They have always been around, and have kept my life fresh and lively. Friendship during our times used to be handled very differently. It was not like, one day you become friends and the next day you don’t recognize each other. Would you believe this? Shori has been with me for the last sixty-one years. He is still walking next to me. We have been friends for six decades. Chaman Lal Sehgal and Kukdi (Krishan Lal) too have been my childhood friends.

We held so many functions: so many marriages, birthdays, anniversaries, celebrations and death rites took

place at our house, and I have no clue when, how and who made that all possible.

Where did the ration come from? Who were the caterers? Who arranged for the tent? Which function was held where? I had no clue about these things. Kukdi took care of all the details. Only because of Kukdi could I execute all those big events. About 7,000 people turned up at my Nano's wedding. Had Kukdi been not around I would have found it impossible to manage all those grand affairs. Katyal has been a friend of mine for forty-nine years, while Malhtoraji (Ankur waale) and I have been together since 1973. My friendship with Harish has lasted forty-three years and Gandhi Sahib has also been a friend to me for more than forty years. I miss one very close friend who's no more: Diwan Sahib, who was the broker in the Mayapuri land deal. Diwan Sahib was very dear to me. His wife often used to tease me: "Bhashi you are my sautan. Had you been a woman I would have been very jealous of you."

You can imagine the kind of close relationship we must have shared. One night Diwan's wife phoned. She said Diwan Sahib was remembering me and wanted to see me. I told her that I would drop in the next morning. Early morning, when I went to meet him he was really unwell. He refused to have a glass of juice from me. He said, "Bhashi, my time is over. I am through with food and drink. I was only waiting for you."

I urged him to drink the juice and stop lamenting. I told him he was losing the battle of life by talking like a defeatist. Diwan Sahib answered me: "Bhashi, I am not losing, I am leaving."

Those were his last words to me as he passed away a moment later. Indeed, Diwan Sahib was only waiting to see me before departing from this world.

Later on, bharjai (Diwan's wife) told me he had not eaten anything the previous night. I still miss him the most.

There was never this feeling of yours and mine among us. Money never played any role in our friendship. When we went out travelling, it didn't matter who paid. If I had money, I would pay, if I hadn't, I wouldn't. It was that simple. We were all like that: Shori, Kukdi, whoever would carry money, would pay. No issues, no fights. I remember when I bought my first car in 1973. Four families rode together in that car; we were fourteen people in all inside the vehicle including three children and the driver Sarju.

We used to travel a lot. Whenever we would find time, we, friends and all, would go out together. Sometimes we would drive all the way to Simla; another time we would be in Dharamshala. Manali, Mussoorie, Dehradun ... you name it and we would be there. We used to have a lot of fun together. Once we were visiting Simla. We went to see the king of Faridkot there who used to live on the outskirts of Simla. He really entertained us well. We had a great time with him. While seeing us off, they gifted us cartons

of apple; and, the king himself came out to drop us where the vehicle was parked. I kept telling him he should not be formal with us, but he wouldn't listen.

Son, do you know why he came to drop us to my car?'

Kapur Sahib asked me in a quizzical manner and then burst out laughing. I wanted to tell him he must have come out because he was courteous. But Kapur Sahib answered.

'The king came to drop us to see how in the world fourteen people would fit inside a Fiat!

We travelled a lot. I have always followed this particular rule in my life. It's been a kind of principle with me; to take one day off every week from work apart from Sunday. And twice a year I go out with my family. When I am on vacation, I keep my phone switched off. That's the way to enjoy life.

My friendship with Prabha, Shukla and Chanchal started even before our marriages. They too have been a part of my close friends' circle. Despite marriage, we have not stopped meeting. Marriages have not dented our relationship; in fact, our love has blossomed over the years. Friends like Prabha are hard to find. I have been an ardent admirer of her. The way she talks; the way she understands what is being said; she is a delight to be with. I must say this here, anyone who got attached to me once has remained that way forever: attached.

My daughter Anamika's wedding was a living testimony of my social life. About 7,000 people came to her wedding.

That was also a proof of the fact how connected people are in our society. We have always walked together, all friends, like this.'

Kapur Sahib's expressive face echoed the sweet memories of his friendship, but apart from that there was a mysterious quality about his face that I couldn't fathom. I was wondering what he was going to talk about next. I could have guessed vaguely, but he seemed to be lost in some deep thoughts of his own. He looked at me with a naughty, childlike smile again.

'My son, I have some little friends as well.

I couldn't understand what he was referring to.

Yes, I am friends with some real angels. However down and out I am, troubled with life's complexities, the moment I see these friends' faces, my anxieties evaporate.'

I was still clueless about what he was hinting at.

Kapur Sahib flashed an impish smile as if at that very moment he wanted to grab all the memories of his childhood.

'My son, I am talking about my grandsons and granddaughters. The next generation...

First of all, I would like to talk about Ankit, my grandson, my daughter Anamika's son. I don't find any difference between kinship names. I have observed Ankit a number of times doing some work or making someone else do some work. Whatever he does, he completes. And he does it



really well. When I was building a plant at Baddi in Himachal Pradesh, he pointed out certain things; he took me by surprise. I had to listen and follow his advice because he was so right. While building a temple at the plant (we have built a temple in every factory we own), he again surprised me by his intelligent suggestions. I told people working over there: you better do what he says. The workers followed his orders after that without any interference from my side at all. Whatever task he takes on, he finishes it with total involvement and dedication. Not only is Ankit amicable, he is full of love and is compassionate towards everyone.'

Talking about his little angels, Kapur Sahib's face glowed with pleasure and his voice acquired a naughty, playful tone. He seemed to have blossomed like a flower.

'I wish my grandson Kashish all the prosperity in his life. He too is very sociable though he seems a bit careless in his studies. But I have noticed a special quality in him: he is very brave. We had gone out for an outing recently when I saw him swimming in the sea. It's not easy to play with those high tides without any safety jacket on. I see an amazing passion in him, and astonishing confidence. And I am absolutely sure that this eagerness and passion would soon reflect in his business and take him places.

Then there is my lovely daughter, my little queen, Alisha, Anamika's daughter. Whenever I travel from Baddi to Simla I keep receiving her countless calls asking me where I am

and how long I would take. She loves my company as much as I love hers. Whenever I take Alisha's phone call, Shori, my friend, jokes: "The call must have been from Chamkili (the shining one) or chhipkali (the lizard)." Shori used to call Alisha by three or four different funny names. Alisha never gets tired of playing with me. She is always keen on spending more time with me. I think when she grows up she should join politics; she can really go far in politics, for she is a great orator.

I must talk about my other little friend. Her name is Srishti and she is my son Raju's daughter. When she was a kid, I adored talking to her on phone. Every time she heard my voice, she would start screaming: "my grandpa, my grandpa." Shrishti was born sometime around when our factory was burnt. During those desperate times we used to forget all our worries just hearing Srishti's cackles.

Srishti used to sleep in the room with me and Lalita every Saturday and Sunday. She used to delight us with her small talk. She was supposed to be our boss. When she was around, Srishti would have the last word on anything and everything. You couldn't dare to take the TV remote from her. She had to watch her preferred channels like Discovery or POGO. Her word prevailed. There was no way I could watch a news channel or Lalita her serials on Star Plus or Sony. But we loved getting orders from her. She ruled us. The sofas in our house have mostly been used for playing

‘up and down’ games with the children. It’s a joy to play with them.’

As he talked about the games he had played with his children and grandchildren, I thought about Kapur Sahib’s own childhood. As an eight or ten year old boy, Kapur Sahib had had no time to play. He had mentioned earlier how he used to pine for games. I imagined him jumping up and down on the sofa, playing hide and seek with his grandchildren, and I was filled with admiration for his vivacity and hunger for life. I thought, may be, he was catching up on lost time, which he had robbed of in childhood. That loss had not made him bitter; it had, on the contrary, kept the child in him alive. Kapur Sahib’s guffaws were getting louder. I too was laughing along with him. Like a child. I was again reminded of Krishna as a child, who would steal butter and milk, and play endless pranks with his mother and the gopis.

‘I have played a lot with my Nano as well. My daughter Anamika, who is grown up now and become such a graceful and understanding woman ... She has always been very intelligent. Now she has become wise too. Since she became Anamika Malhotra from Anamika Kapur, she has matured beyond her years. She is also fortunate to have found a husband like Cheeku (Mukesh Malhotra). I like calling him my son. Calling him jamai (son-in-law) doesn’t sound good; it’s as if we don’t share any bond. Cheeku too has a lot of confidence in us. Once

I, somehow, ended up spoiling one of his deals, but he has never even mentioned it. That’s his greatness. He has taken good care of my kaleje ke tukde (sweetheart) Nano. When Nano says she’s happy I feel absolutely delighted. What more can a father desire?

I always say, to have Nano around is like having a fort near me. In her presence, I always feel safe and secure. In the year 2011, this thought occurred to me suddenly that I should take sanyaas (renunciation) from this world. I wasn’t sure, so I met many spiritual people --some of them were renowned gurus -- for guidance. But somehow I was not convinced.

Whenever I am unsure about anything, be it spiritual or practical matter, I always turn to my Nano. I called her.

She said: “Renouncing the world will not mean that you will be wholly unburdened or free. Wherever you go you will need certain things, fewer may be, but you will still need stuff to fulfill your basic needs. You will have to make new friends, forge new relationships ... You will have to start all over again. Then why are you even thinking of leaving this family?”

I grasped her point immediately and decided against sanyaas. So intelligent and wise my Anamika is! I doubt if any great scholars’ sermons would have convinced me on this issue. But my daughter made me see reason in a few words.

Kapur Sahib’s face had acquired a divine glow.

I am feeling great telling you that my son Raju surpasses me in everything. Not just in business, he is way ahead of me in pitra bhakti (fatherly devotion) as well.

Long back, I embarked on this journey, not for my sake, but to regain esteem for my parents. It pleases me no end that with God's blessings I have come this far: the journey that began from the mere 100-gaj Nawabganj house has now reached a factory spread over several acres of land. I had not even dreamt that I would reach this far. And the journey has not stopped yet. My son Raju is taking it further. This is all due to the blessings of my elders and the almighty.'

Kapur Sahib got up from the diwan and said, 'I shall perform puja (worship) now.'

I was surprised, for it was four in the evening. 'Puja? At this hour?' I asked.

'My son, there is no fixed time for remembering God.'

Jab dil kare taar jod lavo apne prabhu de naal. (Whenever you feel like you can attune the strings.)

Whenever I feel like it I set up this connection with my God and I keep trying to talk to Lord Krishna. I keep talking to Papaji as well.'

Kapur Sahib laughed heartily; it was a pure and divine laughter. I got up and touched his feet. Kapur Sahib put his hand on my head, and said: 'Ziunda rah, puttara sada chiranjivi raho.' (Long live my son.) He went inside to talk to his Lord Krishna, and I stepped out, wondering.

Walking down the road, as if in a trance, I realized for the first time why during these meetings with Kapur Sahib I always felt Krishnamayi (full of Krishna's thoughts). All this while I had not known that he was an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna! That's why I kept seeing different faces of Krishna in him. I also came to learn that after Krishna and his father, Kapur Sahib considered his daughter as his spiritual guru. That was an astonishing and beautiful thought.

His endless tales, his vast experiences, all the people who had touched and transformed his life, his happy-go-lucky attitude, his touching simplicity... everything I had received during those sittings I mulled over. A fraction of that infectious and boundless energy his persona exuded had rubbed off on me and soon it started finding expression. The words became sentences, and I didn't even know when and how this book was born.

But this is not fiction, it's all real. Yes, it's a story, but it's a story of a life lived fully. It's a story of a life that inspires us, touches us, gives us a new meaning and a new way to live life; it's a story that illuminates our lives and fills it with brightness. Which lesson is not there in the book of Kapur Sahib's life? What cannot we learn from his rich life?

Time and again he fell; and, yet, each time he fell, he rose back to touch new heights. He teaches us how one should never give up; his life is a message to the young generation, that one should not get disappointed over

small failures. How many youngsters have lost their way and become drug addicts or drunkards or losers after failing in one small battle? How many people end their life when confronted with failures?

Kapur Sahib's life teaches us many things: hard-work, passion, compassion, boldness and this rare genius to never say no to life. He started his remarkable journey from a room partitioned by a curtain, and today he owns huge factories at NOIDA and Baddi. The building of Baddi factory alone is spread over two lakh-square feet. Kapur Sahib's life teaches us simply that sheer hard work and grit can take us anywhere.

His life has taught me that behind the dark clouds of failures are hidden more horizons, and beyond that is a vast, open sky filled with bright light. How to fly through the walls of failures and obstacles to spot that limitless sky: that's what his life is all about.

His life had already transformed my way of thinking. But I was yet to know that it was to play an even greater role in my own life.

The book was written. One month before its publication in January 2014, my shop in Simla caught fire. I lost everything in that fire, all my life's earnings. And I thought had I not met Kapur Sahib, the fire would have devastated me completely. Mentally, I would not have been prepared to take that lethal blow.

In the interim, I had not only met him, but I was privileged enough to hear his remarkable story, which, coincidentally, or maybe, providentially, too had a fire incident in it. Kapur Sahib emerged unscathed out of that inferno. He emerged refined, purified. He took only fifteen minutes to recover from that monumental shock. What was my loss in front of his? I had lost only a few lakhs. His story not only comforted me, it inspired me to face the adversity that had struck me. The only difference was: it had taken Kapur Sahib only fifteen minutes to overcome his grief, while I took about fifteen days.

Not only had he given me strength to face the odds, Kapur Sahib had given me new eyes; a new way to look at life. His compassion and love towards everyone; his generosity and charity; his frankness and boldness; his sensitivity and childlike simplicity; his gregarious and friendly charm; his habit of treating people at par, without discrimination, be they rich or poor, young or old, foes or friends. All these qualities had made me a different person. I knew the book I had written on Kapur Sahib's life was too short to accommodate all his qualities. I was sure though that his life could inspire millions of people.

Thinking about his life and the inspiration I drew from it I could only thank my stars and a few people who had helped bring me closer to him. I express my deep gratitude to Anamikaji and Rajeev Kapur who decided to write about

his life. Not only because this is her father's life story, but also because their father is a living legend. Because his life story will be a source of inspiration to the society! Thank you, Anamikaji and thank you Rajeev.

That Kapur Sahib's magical persona can do miracles was proven in my case too. Just look at it this way. By just listening to his life and times, I have presented this book to you. Isn't that a miracle? I have become a writer! This is like a dream come true. An unbelievable dream...

Why wouldn't it be unbelievable? Could a renowned industrialist of India be such a simple, divine, pure, and religious person? Before meeting him I would have said no. This indeed has been like a dream to me. I thank God for those moments when he first made me meet Shubhash Kapur ji.

Kapur Sahib was absolutely right.

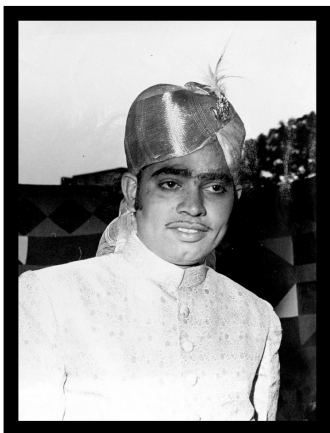
"Once a person meets me, he becomes mine," he had said.

How true was that! I know for sure I will keep meeting him all my life to seek his Krishanmayi (Krishna-like) company.

I could not see Dwapar's Krishna, but in this Kaliyuga after meeting Subhash Kapurji I feel my Lord Krishna, Giridhar, Gopal, Kanha must have been the same.

That's why my desire to seek his divine company would never cease to be.

It's a journey from this Kanhaiya to that Kanhaiya.



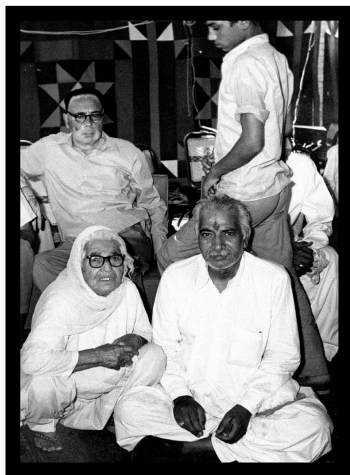
*Subhash Kapurji on the 3rd of May, 1971  
the wedding day.*



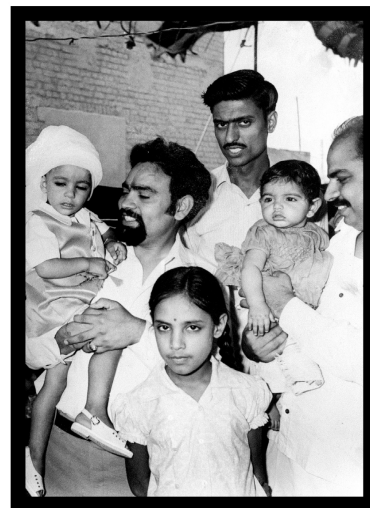
*Subhash Kapurji with Swami Avdesanand ji Maharaj*



*With Family and Friends*



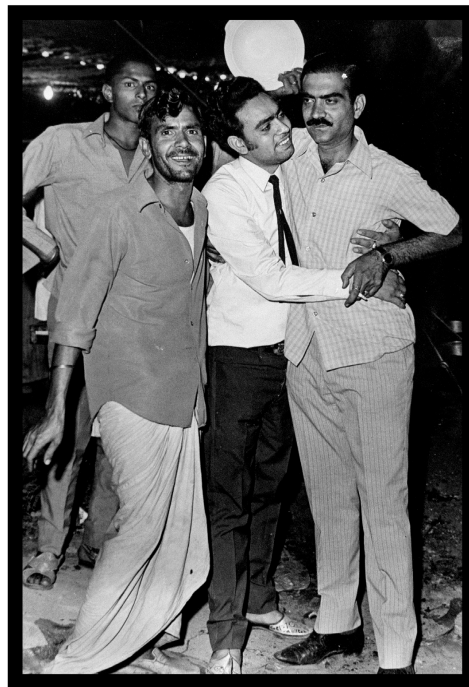
*With father Tilak Raj Kapur, Grandmother Jiwan devi and sister's father in law (1976).*



*At the Mundan ceremony of Rajeev Kapur in 1974 in Janak Puri.*



*At Kufri, Shimla in 1980-82.*

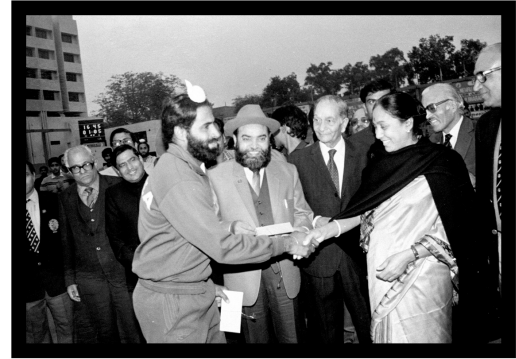


*With Chacha ji Mr. Keval Kapur at the reception on 5th of May, 1971.*





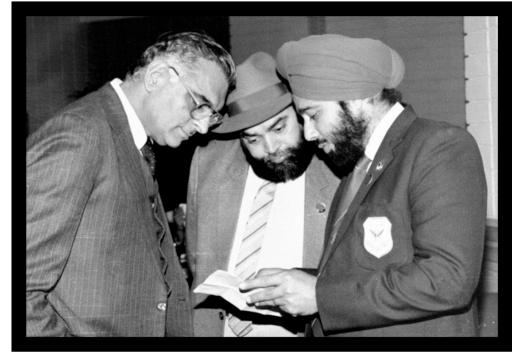
*With President of India Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed at Nehru Hockey Tournament.*



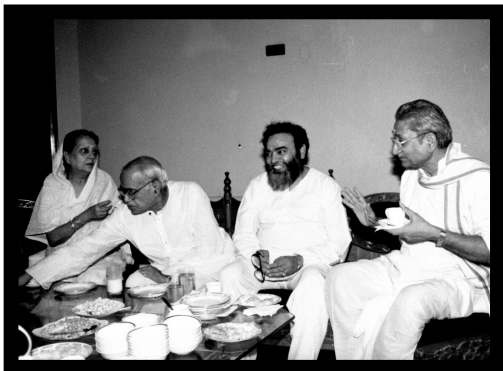
*At Nehru Hockey Tournament with Ms. Margaret Alwa. Steelbird has been sponsoring the Nehru Hockey Tournament for more than 40 years now.*



*Subhash Kapurji with Praveen Togadia ji*



*With Dharamvir Aneja and Cukoo Walia.*



*With Sh. Ashok Singhal (Founder of Vishwa Hindu Parishad) and Smt. Maharani of Gwalior Raj Mata Scindia at home in Janak Puri.*



*With Sh. Ashok Singhal at home in Janak Puri.*



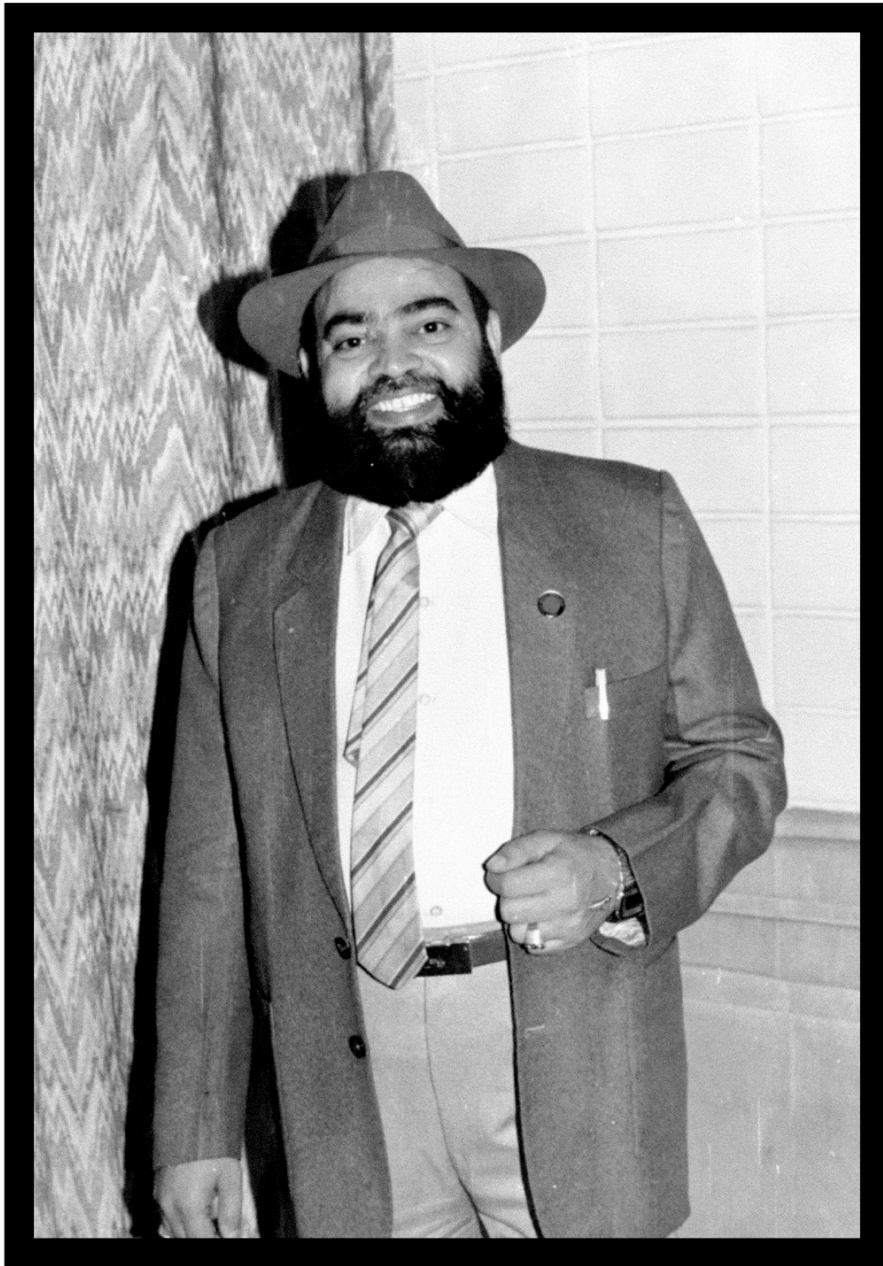
*In Switzerland, 1996.*



*With Rajeev Kapur in Uzen city of Switzerland, 1996.*



*At the waterfall of Vadd Bagh singh ke Dera with friends. (1978)*



*At home in Janak Puri in his perfect style.*

# Memoirs of a Spiritual Tycoon

These are the memoirs of Mr Subhash Kapur, well-known industrialist and entrepreneur, presented in the form of a conversation between him and the narrator. The narrator meets Mr Kapur for the first time and is drawn to the divine glow on his face, to the extent that he begins to see him as an avatar of the Indian god, Krishna. Over several sessions where he sits enraptured in front of one he has accepted as his spiritual guru and mentor, he hears Mr Kapur's rags to riches story with its vicissitudes and learns important, life-changing lessons from them which he later applies in his own life.

  
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