

My mother

[Anil K. Rajvanshi](#)

anilrajvanshi@gmail.com



All mothers are special but my mother was more than special for me. In fact whatever I am today has a lot to do with sacrifices that my mother made for me and my brother Alok.

My mother Smt. Hemlata Rajvanshi died on 12 September 2020 in Phaltan, Maharashtra at the ripe old age of 96 years. She had been ailing for couple of years and

was bedridden after she fell and broke her pelvis but the end was peaceful and she passed away around 5:30 a.m.

My mother Hemlata came from a middle class family. Her father Bhagwat Prasad Garg was a small-time jeweler and Hon. Magistrate in Mawana tehsil (District Meerut). She did all her education in Meerut staying with her uncle who was an advocate in the local district court. She was a brilliant student and passed with flying colors her Master of Arts; law exam (LLB); and Diploma in Foreign Affairs.

In those days (1940s) it was very rare and remarkable for girls to be so educated but she wanted to do well in her life and so studied hard for all these degrees. In fact she wanted to appear for Indian Administrative Services (IAS) exam but in those times women in India were not allowed to appear for it after marriage. So instead in 1948 after her marriage she wanted to practice law and was admitted as pleader in Meerut District Court, but my father's male sensibilities did not allow her to do so. However to make ends meet she became a teacher in 1954 in Bharatiya Balika

Vidyalaya – a local girls degree college in Lucknow. She was perhaps the most qualified teacher that the college ever had.

My father who was a freedom fighter never held any steady job. Though he dabbled in many things he never had a steady source of income. Thus my mother was the only bread winner of the family. With very meager pay from her teacher's salary she ran the household and yet never made us feel that we lacked anything.

She always felt that because of her education in Hindi medium school and not being fluent in English she suffered somewhat in her studies. In pre-independence days knowing good English was a passport to lots of opportunities and opened many doors. Thus she made sure that [both I and my brother went to the best English medium schools in Lucknow](#). She also managed to get our school fees reduced (in those days fee concession was given to school teacher's children) and saw to it that we got regularly all our school supplies and uniforms. I found out only later on how precarious our household finances were and yet she made sure that it never entered my vision field.

It is this freedom from financial woes that my mother gave me during the early impressionable years is her greatest gift since these conditions never created psychological knots in my mind about money.

She was very ambitious and since she was not allowed to do lots of things professionally, she channeled all her ambitions through me. I guess I inherited my ambitious nature from her.

She was a very determined and smart woman and always tried to help me and my brother in our careers with whatever means she had. For example she helped me in mathematics in my school days and when I was [preparing for IIT entrance exams she found a good teacher in Lucknow](#) who tutored me for 2 months and really helped me in preparing for them.

She was much more open-minded than my father and always agreed with my decisions and supported them. Anytime I made a decision she always backed it whether it was for going to IITK for engineering; going for higher studies to the U.S.; and even returning from there to rural India in 1981.

She was also more outgoing than my father. In late 1980s my father received a 2nd A.C. railway pass as a part of his freedom fighter pension. My mother used to make all the necessary plans of visiting different parts of the country. My father wasn't very enthusiastic about her plans but she wanted to travel and that is the way both of them saw India.

In 1978 when [I was a student in U.S.](#) I had arranged for them to come and see America. I thought the best way for them to see U.S. would be by road so I purchased a one month Greyhound Bus pass for them in which they could travel anywhere in U.S. and requested my IITK friends who were staying all over U.S.A. to host them. My mother loved this travel though my father would have been content with just staying with us in Gainesville.

She always felt constrained by my father's outlook. So after his death in 2006 she immediately got a knee replacement done. At the age of 82 she was the oldest patient of Dr. Wakankar - one of the best known orthopedic surgeons of Pune. After the surgery she was a different person and found new springiness in her steps! She followed the physiotherapy regime very well after the operation and when fully recovered decided to go to Australia to be with my younger brother! When we visited her there she travelled with us all over Australia.

She was very stoic, very independent minded but adjusted to varying circumstances very well. Very rarely she complained about anything. Because of cheerful nature she retained her youthful facial expression even late in life. Thus when she was bedridden for the last 3 years it was really painful and sad to see such a vivacious person become listless.

She had a sixth sense and was sensitive to her surroundings. There were many instances when she would sense if I was under stress and till her last days always asked me if I was O.K. In 1963 when American President John Kennedy was shot dead the first thing she said after hearing the news; “Johnson got him murdered”. For a person who had never met an American in her life till then nor had any input from any other news source except local Lucknow newspaper National Herald, this was a very prescient observation.

She lived a full life and died peacefully in her sleep. I pray that God gives her a great body and a very happy new home.

HOME

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