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MY ANCESTORS

*Unrecorded, unrenown'd,
Men from whom my ways begin,
Here I know you by your ground
But I know you not within -
There is silence, there survives
Not a moment of your lives.*

Edmund Blunden, *'Forefathers'*

I

Sir W.S. Gilbert (1836-1911) said: "I can trace my ancestry back to a proto-plasmal primordial atomic globule. Consequently, my family pride is something inconceivable". I trace my ancestry not out of desire to assert my family pride, but in order to discover my own identity. I had read the insightful comments by Daniel Webster:

'Next to the sense of religious duty and moral feeling, I hardly know what should bear with stronger obligation on a liberal and enlightened mind, than a consciousness of an alliance with excellence which is departed; and a consciousness, too that in its acts and conduct, and even in its sentiments and thoughts, it may be actively operating on the happiness of those that come after it.'

I knew that Sri Kirtinath Jha (popularly known as Kirtu Babu 'Panjikara') of Koilakh had a rich library of old records of the important families of Mithila. He was a genealogist of great eminence. He assisted me to draw up my detailed genealogy, an abstract wherefrom is appended at the end of this Chapter. I could gather from him detailed information pertaining to the system of *panjis* (registers) maintained so meticulously by the *panjikars* (the recorders of the family history). I must record my gratefulness for Maharaja Harisimhadeva who "ordered detailed genealogies to be scientifically recorded for the first time on *panjis* (registers) in c. 1310 so that marriages, within forbidden degrees of relationship, might not take place. Under this system it became obligatory for every person to get a certificate of non-relationship between the two contracting parties from the genealogists". Kirtu Babu told me that it was often customary for the *panjikars* to laconically describe with suggestive expressions and epithets the distinctions and achievements of the persons figuring in a genealogy. You would find such

epithets in my family-tree, as 'Dinbandhu' (a friend of the poor) and 'Tarkpanchanan' (a logician of great eminence)..

II

It is conventional to refer to the earliest ancestors in our traditional *samkalpa mantra* which is recited while resolving to undertake some sacred duty. This *mantra* requires the mentioning of one's *gotra*. *Myadi purasha* (the earliest person known) was Kashyapa. Kashyapa *gotra* is the most ancient and is the most comprehensive amongst all the *gotras*. The tradition tells us that he was greatly religious and learned. He figured even in the *Rigveda*. A lot of mysteries got associated with his personality. There is a strange story about him in the *Mahabharata* and the *Srimad Bhagvata Purana*. His father was Marichi, one of the six mental sons of Lord Bhrahma. What better example of the art of begetting a son through psychic primal power can there be than this! It is said that Kashyapa married seventeen daughters of Daksha Prajapati from whom were born gods, demons, monsters, horses, nymphs, trees, heavenly damsels, snakes, cows, buffaloes, dangerous animals, birds including vultures, marine creatures, butterflies and insects. Because of the comprehensiveness of his countless progenies it is generally believed that the entire animate world descended from Kashyapa. This *gotra* is so widely inclusive that whosoever is not sure about his *gotra* is taken to be of the Kashyapa *gotra*; be he a man, a bird, a beast, or a tree: in short, creatures of all sorts. It is also believed that persons having a common *gotra* were the students of the same Rishi or teacher. Under our tradition guru (teacher) has the same status which father has. From this ancient consanguinity or affinity, that existed between the descendants or the disciples (or the herdsmen) of Rishi Kashyapa, a practice in later times grew preventing marital relationship amongst the members of the same *gotra*. There was a time when marriage between persons of the same *gotra* was considered invalid. Now it is no longer so. Yet this sort of marriage is not appreciated in our society battered as it is now under the Western impact. What is more important is that his story makes me conscious of the umbilical bond that unites us not only with the humans of all colours and all lands, but even with birds and beasts, in fact, even with trees and flies. This sense of fraternity ensues from the consciousness of being just part of the whole :

The story of Kashyap clarifies certain basic issues pertaining to ontology. How could Evil originate in God's World? The Holy Bible, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* assert the triumph of the Good over Evil. Some forces exist, it seems, merely to wager on us! But Kashyapa's story is a metaphoric way of saying that all the forces for good and bad grow from God's Majesty, and they exist in His province and provenance, and, at the end, they become one with Him.

A lot of thinking has been done in the West on the interrelationship between the forces of Good and Evil. I recall my teacher Professor Mahendra Pratap's lectures on this topic. Concluding his lectures he told us that nowhere in the world literature the fundamental cosmic principles have been explained better than in the simple *chaupais* (a form of verse) of Tulsidas in his *Ramacharitmanasa*:

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भलेउ पोच सब बिधि उपजाए, गनि गुन दोष बेद बिलगाए
कहहि बेद इतिहास पुराना, बिधि प्रपंच गुन अवगुन साना

[Good and Evil are God's husbandry, the *Shastras* have discriminated them as good or evil. All the Vedas and the Puranas are one in saying: It is God's craft (*maya*) to knead all the traits together.]

Our *Shastras* formulated prescriptive norms for conduct and maintenance of our individual and social interactions so that a society remains peaceful, co-operative and collaborative.

III

The genealogical tree of my family shows that we had our roots at Sakradih, now a small desolate village not very far off from my present village Kurson. I have not visited the place though I have heard a lot about it. But one becomes nostalgic when one thinks about one's roots. I wish some day to visit Sakradih wherefrom strides were made by my family in the recorded times. In fact, I wish some day to visit the valley of the river Omo in Ethiopia near Lake Rudolf where man is believed to have evolved first: from where odyssey of the humans might have begun to become a Sisyphus or a Prometheus, a Gandhi or a Hitler, or just a fragile beach-ball kicked hither and thither by the torrents of circumstances !

Reflections on my Family-tree (*Vamsavriksha*) take my mind to the Cosmic tree (*Samsara Vriksha*) about which the *Bhagavad-Gita* says in the first three *Slokas* in its Chapter 15. When we reflect over the roots of the *Sansarvriksha*, spreading with branches and leaves luxuriating down below, we are amazed at the sublime creativity of God. Mind goes to the stimulating idea of Prof. Gould who said: "Homo sapiens as a tiny, effectively accidental, late-arising twig on an enormously arborescent bush of life". Persons come, spend sometime in the *Sansarvriksh* and then leave for some unknown abode. The birds come, create their nests, and then they desert them, or see them wither, without qualms. The idea underlying the process is beautifully stated in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (II.28)

avyaktadini bhutani
vyaktamadhyani bharata
avyaktanidhanany eva
tatra ka paridevand

[Being are unmanifest in their beginnings, manifest in the middles and unmanifest again in their ends, O Bharata (Arjuna), What is there in this for lamentation?]

It is interesting to note that whilst writing his *Ecclesiastical History*, the Venerable Bede (672-735) expressed similar ideas thus:

" Such O king, seems to me the present life on earth, as if on a winter's night a sparrow should fly swiftly into the hall and, coming in one door, instantly fly out through another Somewhat like this appears the life of man. But of what follows or what went before we are utterly ignorant."

IV

My ancestor at the apex of my genealogy was Hardutta Jha, who, on all probability, lived during the time of Ala-ud-din Khalji (early 14th Century). In the eleventh generation after him came Rudra Jha whose daughter's son was Mahamahopadhyaya Mahesh Thakur of Kharore Bhour lineage. Akbar the Great appreciated his scholarship and wisdom; and granted him vast property with which began the history of the illustrious family of Raj Darbhanga, an impartible estate of which the last holder was the celebrated Maharajadhiraja Dr. Sir Kameshwar Singh. Akbar, who had a wide exposure to Sufism and Islam, was in search of the universal values which later on he epitomized in his *Din-e-Ilahi*. The Jesuit author Bartoli mentions how close he had come to Brahminic religion in evolving his norms of *Din-e-Ilahi*. This quest must have led him to hold himself under debt to the wisdom of that Maithil Pandit. What better evidence of the Emperor's catholicity and love for what was the best in our country's tradition could there be than that act of his gratefulness to that Maithil Pandit. The idea that I am distantly related to the person of that calibre is itself deeply delighting.

Many of my ancestors were great Pandits. Their writings, perhaps, do not survive. Possibly for two reasons. First, the frequent occurrence of fire in their houses, made of wattle and daub having thatched roof, might have burnt their old records. Leaking rain water and prolific colonies of white ants too must have destroyed their work. Secondly, it was unfortunate that the Maithil Pandits did not believe much in disseminating their ideas by circulating the copies of their writings. An illustration to drive my point home: Gangash Upadhyaya, a great Maithil Pandit of the 13th century, wrote the *Tattvachintamani*. It is said that the Pandit did not allow Pandit Pakshadhar of Nawadip of the West Bengal to copy it. But the work was so valuable that the great Pandit took it by heart on mere listening to the work when being recited! He taught this magnum opus of 'Navyanyaya' (an Indian system of epistemology and logic) to the scholars at Nawadip. The persons who were taught this included Jagadish Tarkalankar and Mathuranath Bhattacharji. They developed a synthetic logic by integrating ideas from the Vedic, Buddhist, and Jaina sources. Only a few years back Pandit N.S Ramanuja Tatacharya wrote a commentary on it which fetched him high appreciation and reward from the Government of India. I recall, when as the Director-General of Income-tax (Exemptions) at Kolkata exercising all India jurisdiction, I exempted the reward from the incidence of income-tax law. When I was signing the permission order at the 10 Middleton Row, adjacent to Kolkata's Park Street, I felt overjoyed remembering one of my forefathers, Tunni Jha, who, as the *tarkapanchanan*, must have done something for advancing the branch of knowledge one of whose fruit or flower, I felt, I found in the work of Pandit Tatacharya.

I cannot cast much focus beyond Deenbandhu Dukhni Jha. He was the great grandfather of my grandfather Grihinandan Jha. His adjective 'Deenbandhu' suggests that he must have been an acknowledged benefactor of the suffering souls of his locality. My deeper research brought out materials to support this inference. The *Pangikars* add some adjectives only in rare cases to reveal the life and work of persons whose records they keep. Dukhni Jha's financial resources

were meagre. If the family tradition is to be believed, he helped even the lowliest with whatever he had. In appreciation of his work he was called by people as 'Deenbandhu' Dukhni Jha (the friend of the poor). His son was Jayadutta. His mother was a great devotee of Kali. In the village Koilakh (in the district of Madhubani) there is an ancient temple of the Goddess; it is a *sidhapeatha*. *Jayais* the name of the Goddess. She believed that her son was on account of the divine grace she had got from the Goddess.

Those days in Mithila, there was a social system under which certain Brahamins were accorded high social status because of their learning and purity of life style. No worldly pleasures or persuasions could make them depart from the sacred paths of life prescribed in the *Shastras*. Even amongst the select few further classifications were made keeping in view the steadfastness of the persons in such noble pursuits. The persons of the highest grade were called the Sotreyas. After them there was a segment of the distinguished persons (*Bhalmanush*) who in turn were further divided into sub-sets named after the most illustrious persons in their families (they were called *Panjibaddha*). Besides, there were some distinguished persons called the "Kulins". During the Sen Dynasty, Kaulinism was greatly prevalent in Bengal. But in Mithila this elitist system continued without degeneration which had set in Bengal to make Kaulinism a hateful social institution. As a mode of social climbing, rich people established marital relations with the high class Brahamins.

My great grandfather Bhaiyee Jha was a man of great social distinction in his village. He had an interesting personality. During his youth he was under the spell of the love songs of Vidyapati. He had a mellifluous voice and had an astute mastery over the rhythm of Maithili language. He had a rich repertoire of romantic anecdotes. In the closing years of his life he lived on a different wavelength. He continued his interest in Vidyapati but it was the Vidyapati dear to Chaitanya and Chandidas. Vidyapati's poetry is capable of being enjoyed at different levels even by persons who are temperamentally poles apart. This is quite a unique quality of Vidyapati's poetry that persons as dissimilar as Mahaprabhu Chaitanya and the rabid pleasure-seekers develop intense appreciation for the same poetic text. Towards end of his life, Bhaiyee Jha spent all his time reciting with rhythmic variations the names of God: "Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare".

Their World

When I read novels by Jane Austen, I often wondered how she wrote wonderful novels without looking anything beyond her restricted circle. Even the French Revolution and the rise and fall of Napoleon did not matter for her. In her domestic world she was the supreme artist. My study of the events in the lives of my forefathers leads me to the view that they were not concerned with the great events taking place in the political realm of our country that time. They followed a distinct life-style which our Maithil culture fostered. They lived not as the calculators but as the ordinary humans taking life philosophically. They lived in the period when events of momentous importance were occurring in our country: like the emergence of Shivaji (1664), invasion of Nadir Shah (1739), the Battle of Plassey (1757), the Third Battle of Panipat (1761), the Treaty of Allahabad (1765), the Sepoy Mutiny (1857-1858), or the coronation of Queen Victoria as the

Empress of India. They did not feel disturbed even by the imperial march of Akbar (in 1574) to Bengal, via Patna, Hajipur and the other adjoining regions to subdue the rebellious rulers. On the five inches of ivory they wrought their life aesthetically delighting. They were devoted to learning and public welfare. Jane Austen's world was her domestic world of close relations; whereas the world of my forefathers was the world of learning, and efforts at the attainments of spiritual heights in the great Vedic tradition.

V

My grandfather was Grihinandan Jha, the youngest amongst his father's several sons. When he died in 1943, I was almost six. I have his vivid memory. He was tall and lanky. His bones were so prominent through ebony-coloured skin that as a student of physiology, in later years, I had no difficulty in understanding the bony system. Had he not been my dear grandfather I would have gone into trance just on observing him during such hours of day or night when we believed the ghosts trod in the groves assuming human shapes. The ugliness of his exterior was wholly offset by the richness of his heart which was by all standards of 24 carat gold. He was the best friend of children. With a remarkable sense of empathy he could get involved in our world of myriad delights and pretty pranks. He helped us in building castles out of mud and sand, and also manufacture from paper and cardboard tiny canoes about which I would tell you more in Chapter 6 'On my Childhood'. When I was of five, he inducted me into his school to train me in some useful arts. What I liked most was his managing of the bullocks geared to a common rope, and moving round and round a bamboo pole trampling down the stalks to separate paddy from hay. It was usual for us to start our work in early hours. Amidst the chiming of the bells of the bullocks, I had to recite the Sanskrit *Shlokas* which my grandfather had taught me. He would often show his toothy grin as a mark of appreciation; and that was a delight which I treasured as one of my greatest moments.

We looked up to him for guidance in all arts and in all crafts. But the fact of the matter was that by the present-day standards he was illiterate. Like Kabirdas, he had not even touched paper or ink. But like Kabir, my grandfather had practical prudence. Now I feel that he was just one of the so many of the humans who learn wisdom from traditional lores, and from healthy interactions in the village society. He could narrate the stories of the *Mahabharata* and of the *Ramayana* in charming style. For us he was a colossus of learning. When someone asked him whether he felt embarrassed on account of his illiteracy he said: "I am illiterate but not without wisdom."

As was the practice those days, my grandfather was married early. The only ostensible wealth that he had was his status as a high class Brahmin. He was sore that his father had caused a social comedown by marrying him into the family of persons somewhat lower on the social scale though Brahmin by *varna*. He was married early with a daughter of Govind Narayan Coudhary, a scion of a very distinguished feudal family of village Kurson. The Choudharys were very sophisticated people, had plenty of wealth, and commanded a vast aura of social prestige. My grandmother (Adya Devi) was one of the most beautiful women that God ever created. I can recall her when she was in her eighties. Her face was

exquisitely sculptured and immensely vivacious. She was tall and had a wheatish complexion. She had glossy silver hair making her seen as a white cloud in the autumn sky. Her facial wrinkles brought to mind the way the moon looked in the water with the wrinkles caused by tiny waves begotten by wind. Often I remembered her on seeing the images of Durga. In my assessment she was a masterpiece in God's oeuvre. She had a measured gait; and she spoke chaste Maithili in tone low and mellifluous. She was a past master in the art of storytelling. She used her words with extreme parsimony. Her majestic demeanour could outshine that of the ladies immortalized by the Renaissance artists. We flocked to her whenever it was possible to do so to hear the yarn of the never-never land. She brought up seven children, five sons and two daughters. She managed well her four daughters-in-laws. Really a remarkable feat! Everybody felt that the marriage of a beautiful damsel of blue blood with my grandfather was an act of extreme indiscretion on the part of her parents. But the way they spent six decades and odd years of their wedded life convinced everyone around that they were really made for each other. The economic management of a poor man's household is always difficult. With very scarce resources of the family she discharged her obligations with a finesse which amazed all who knew us and our plight.

I have already mentioned that those days the rich Brahmins had strong desires to give their daughters in marriage into the families of high distinction amongst the Brahmins. This led to, as an inevitable consequence, the operation of the Laws of Demand and Supply. As such bridegrooms were in short supply; many of them had several wives. In Bengal there were persons having more than hundred wives. In our society persons were perhaps not so enterprising. The line was drawn generally at twelve so that one could spend a month in each of the families of the in-laws. My grandfather's brother showed moderation by having only four wives. The Choudharies wanted to go up on the social scale but did not wish to allow their son-in-law to roam about as a gentleman at large. In order to ward off this risk, they persuaded my grandfather to establish his household in the village to which his in-laws belonged, called Kurson.

But the *causa proxima* (the proximate cause) of my grandfather's migration from Koilakh to Kurson was something grotesque. My father, who was his third son, wetted the soil in the family courtyard in village Koilakh. This non-event was blown out of proportion. Many elderly ladies had a bee in their bonnet. They raised an uncouth wordy warfare which was painful to my grandmother with refined taste and sophisticated sensibility. With her dominant feudal mentality, she could not put up with things of that sort. She knew the enormous love that her brother had for her. She sent him a message. And Krishna Narayan Choudhary, her brother, came on an elephant to take her and her children to Kurson. She went to Kurson never to return to Koilakh to which her husband belonged.

My grandfather remained in close touch with members of his father's family in Koilakh where he had a petty share in the heriditament which to my grandfather's shock was sold by my third uncle. As my grandfather's family grew, the Choudharies provided them with a permanent habitation in the garden of Karmalli in the eastern side of the village Kurson surrounded by lush green trees quite adjacent to a water pond, one of the loveliest spots I have ever seen. But a story went around that once upon a time the area was a crematorium, and never

ceased to be the rendezvous of the ghosts! Yet for us it was almost Eden. My grandfather did not escape the fate of those who abandon their roots for better pastures. When self-confidence is lost, creativity is always at a discount. This is a constant in human affairs as much as in the affairs of nations. My grandfather simply existed for six decades and odd. He never had to bother for his creature comforts. My grandmother managed the household with wisdom. In the waning years of his life he was often gnawed by the idea that his life was not well spent. The anguish of his innermost heart tinged his devotional songs, mostly by Vidyapati. But he was always at his natural ease. He accepted things as they came to him. I felt that he was always ready to accept divine dispensation without grudge and grumble. He had attained a state of mind of *sarvaswaswikar* (a frame of mind that accepts everything that happens) with gratitude towards God (*ahobhava*).

My grandfather had two prime pursuits: (i) singing *Kirtans* and (ii) enjoying *bhang*. The *Kirtans* were quite popular those days in our villages. The illustrious ancestors of the Choudharies had built the temples of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Goddess Durga and Mahadeva. The worship of the different deities gave a variety to the content and style of the *Kirtans*. For the *Kirtans* at the Sri Rama temple, I felt, Tulsidas was the guiding force whereas the *Kirtans* in the Radha Krishan temple were under the impact of Vidyapati and Chaitanya. The *Kirtans* in the Durga Mandir illustrated the best in the Sakta traditions. And the Bhajans of Mahadeva had a wide variety; from supplications for wealth to the heart-felt solicitations for mercy to *grantmukti* (salvation) in Shivadhaam. My grandfather had a rich stock of *Kirtans* of all types which he sang to everyone's delight. The rhythm of his body indicated the intensity of his feeling. He belonged to the Chaitanya tradition. Even now, in some blessed moments, I can hear him singing inside my mind: his rhythm delights though I seldom catch his words. It is strange to think that at times sound itself becomes meaning!

My grandfather's second pursuit was not his secondary pursuit. In fact, he lived on the co-ordinates of *bhakti* and *bhang*. During my adolescence I had only once taken *bhang*, the herb said to be so dear to God Mahadeva. It was a strange experience which left an indelible mark on my mind. One ball of *bhang* transported me to swim through the waves of all colours for two days. I swam through various patterns of pure colours in their horizontal and vertical rectangles in their strange interplay. My grandfather was a connoisseur par excellence of *bhang*. He took almost two hours every day to prepare it. In a bowl of stone, he put a fistful of the leaves to soak in water for softening. Much skill preceded in selecting the appropriate leaves and in subjecting them to a delicate process of drying under the sun and shade. With the stroke of a thick guava-stick, he would carefully crush the *bhang* leaves. He often sang songs while crushing the leaves to turn them into fine paste. Everybody in the village felt that his *bhang* had acquired some special properties on account of the music that he strove to mix with it. He would gulp the big ball in one go. And then he drank plenty of water from his shining copper pot. After some time he was a blessed soul with a valid permit to move from the world of ordinary existence to the world of shifting colours and limitless joys.

His end came after a long and lingering illness. All his sons were around except my father who was in the Darbhanga jail undergoing rigorous imprisonment for his participation in the Quit India Movement. My grandfather called

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my mother and asked her that she should send me to the cremation ground to represent my father. It was the first time that I saw a man dying. I was the youngest among the participants in the funeral procession. I saw how the funeral-pyre was made, how my grand-father was placed thereon under sandalwood logs, how it was set on fire. Besides, I had seen how he was bidden goodbye: the ladies of the family only at the door-steps, friends and relations in the cremation ground, his sons when his pyre was set to flame, I was sure he went away with "Harinam" (God's name) resonating inside him. We planted a *peepal* sapling to mark the place where he was cremated. It was our custom to plant a *peepal* sapling on the grave. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* (X.26), Krishna says that amongst trees He is manifest in the *peepal* (*asvatthah sarvavrksanam*). For days such saplings were watered to grow into trees. We believed that the *peepal* tree carried the elements of the dead up and up to sing through the rustle of the leaves prayers to God Vishnu. Whenever in later years I went near the *peepal* tree, I heard its leaves singing 'Harinam'! This experience deepened in my mind the pathos of those lines which Shah Jahan had written to Aurangzeb when the ungrateful son had imprisoned him and stopped supply of water from the Yamuna:

*" Praised be the Hindus in all cases,
As they ever offer water to their dead
And thou, my son, art a marvellous Mussalman,
As thou causest me in life to lament for (lack of) water. "*

My uncle, Ramakant, had many things in common with a Shakespearean tragic hero. He had infinite potentialities but had some tragic traits too. He fought for the freedom of the country, and went to jail but never made politics his vocation. He was an excellent teacher who could bring to track even those students who had been written off even by their parents. He earned the name of being the Vishnu Sharma, the famous author of the *Panchtantra*, who had taught the king's wayward sons. When he sang patriotic songs he could set aflame even sunken souls. One could hear the resonance of the *Panchjanya* (the conch that Krishna blew in the battle-field of the Mahabharata) in his voice. Such persons are not seen now. My wife aptly said that God has now permanently retired the mould and frame in which such patriotic persons were once made by Him.

My third uncle, Laxmikant Jha, was an expert in agrarian matters. He looked after his maternal uncle's property and acquired, in the process, a good understanding of the complex agrarian laws. His sense of justice was so perfect that persons of all social strata used to come to him for solving their disputes. He had acquired a wonderful skill for proper hearing (*samyaka shravana*). He divided listeners into three categories (i) those who could catch suggestions as did Janaka when communicating with Ashtavakra (because both were most enlightened); (ii) those who could learn after waging a battle of wits as Arjuna did in the *Bhagvadgita*, and (iii) those who could never learn even if Lord Brahma descended to teach them. He himself was surely in the top class.

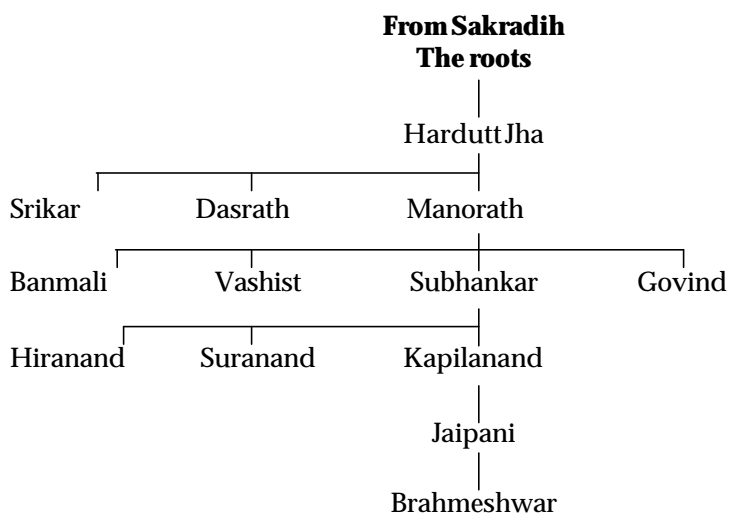
My youngest uncle, Shrikant, lived a life in its many colours. He had an affluent boyhood in the family of his maternal uncle. He had a comfortable manhood but a difficult old age. He was named Shrikant but Shri (wealth) never smiled on him. I held him in high admiration, and am indebted to him in more than one ways. Without him birds would have been mere birds, and flowers mere

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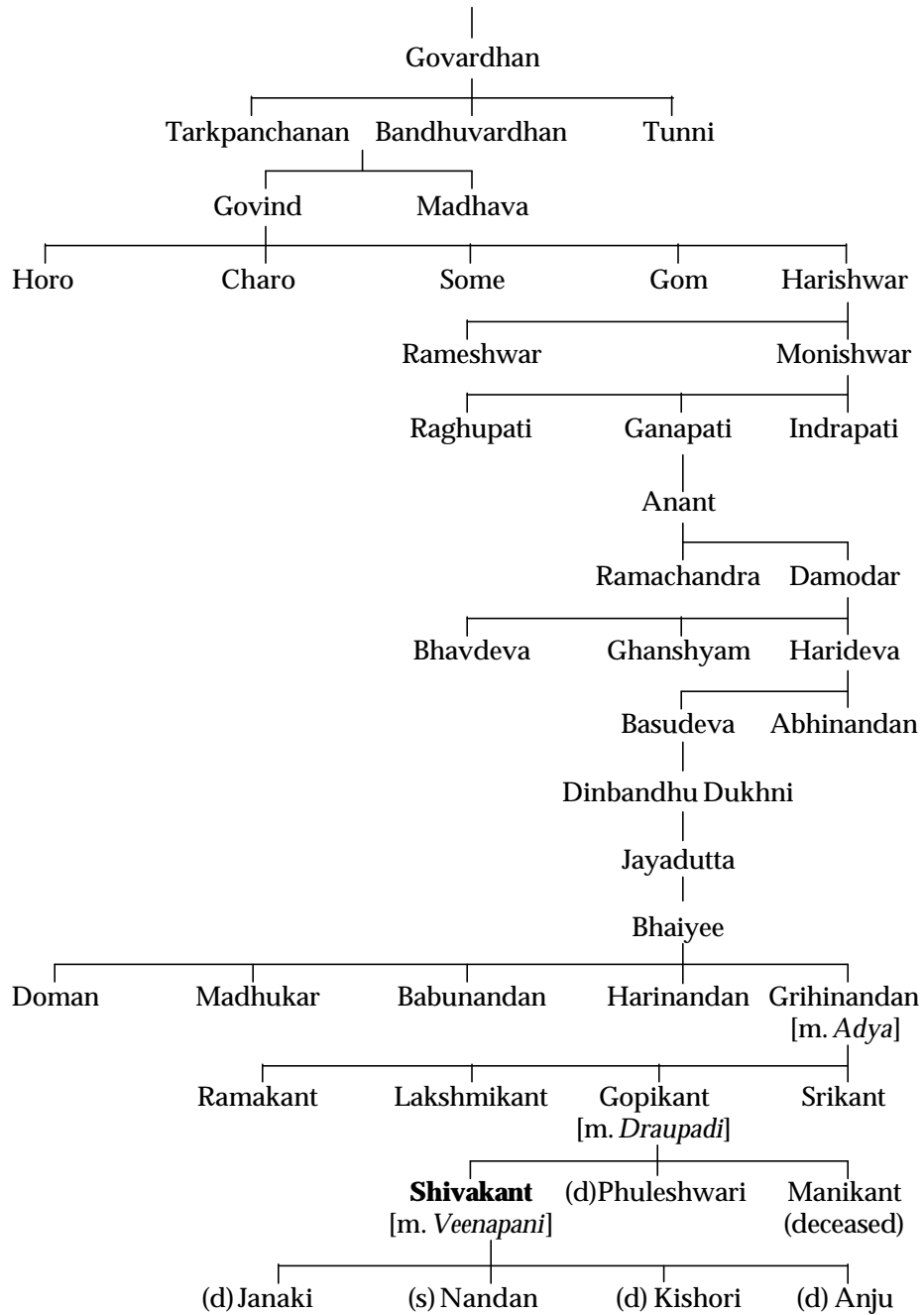
flowers. He knew their names and had observed their notes and habits. Dan Lehrman worked on the behaviour of the mating of the ring dove. If my uncle would have recorded his observations on how the birds behaved in moments of distress, or of elation, or of romance, he would have got a magnum opus to his credit.

My father's maternal uncle was Krishna Narayan Chaudhary, the eldest grandson of Mohan Singh Chaudhary. He had a colourful personality and varied interests in arts, especially music. He was a patron for artists. He allowed his mundane matters to slip out of his control. He became an easy victim to the chicanery of his courtiers who multiplied in his declining years to siphon off his wealth. During his life he travelled from affluence to abject poverty! As he lived beyond his means, he soon ran short of his resources. His courtiers arranged finance for their spendthrift master. Off and on the creditors came ostensibly to pay homage to him, but, in fact to procure some written evidence for the money advanced to him by way of loan. My father's uncle had no time for such mundane and pedestrian matters. He spent days worshipping in the temples and listening to the devotional songs, or playing chess with his select courtiers; or feeding the fishes in the three big ponds his ancestors had got dug up. Whenever his Chief Courtier requested him to sign papers, he signed them without reading them because he knew no English. The crooks and the knaves had the best of times. So a day came when he had to sell his immovable property. He used to sign whatever documents were placed before him, almost the way the Mughal Emperors signed treaties and documents presented to them by the East India Company Bahadur. The situation then and now is no different. It is said that in 1681, an official dispatch went to Aurangzeb telling him: "Every one who eats salt destroys the salt cellar" My father used to say that the creditors used to come to his maternal uncle almost that way: to practice honeyed deception to ruin him with the skill at stealth with which Hawkins and Sir Thomas Roe had gone to the Court of Emperor Jahangir to procure concessions for the East India Company.

GENEALOGICAL TREE OF MY FAMILY*



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['m' = married to; 'd' = daughter; 's' = son]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

* Abstracted from the comprehensive family tree drawn up by Pandit Kritinath Jha Panjkar of Koilakh (District: Madhubani) after conducting research in the ancient records of the Panjis system maintained for over about seven centuries. For detailed genealogical tree see at :
<http://shivakantjha.org/>; <http://shivakantjha.wordpress.com/2011/07/07/my-family-tree/>