

My Family

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Whatever I have been able to achieve in my life is because of my supportive family. In fact, without a happy family life one cannot achieve one's goals.

Though my father Jagdish Prasad Rajvanshi was in politics he never had any formal position and hence income. Only briefly (for two years) in 1974 he was a member of [Mr. H. N. Bahuguna's](#) cabinet in Uttar Pradesh (UP). Thus my mother Hemlata Rajvanshi who was a school teacher in a local Lucknow school was the only breadwinner 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 made sure that both I and my brother went to the best schools. She also managed to get our school fees reduced (since in those days fee concession was given to school teachers) 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.

My parent's financial situation improved in late 1970s when my father started getting central government freedom- fighter pension. Thus my mother's school teacher pension (she retired in early 1980s) together with his, gave them financial security and made their life much better. In fact they never asked me for any money. They were very independent minded and lived alone in Lucknow flat. I had to bring them forcibly to Phaltan in 2004 when my father lost his eyesight.

Even later on in life my parents never made any demands on me. Thus I was very lucky to have parents who never pressurized me into anything and respected my choices and decisions. Too often I have seen very promising careers spoiled and ruined by parents who run and control the lives of their children. Thus, I was very lucky to have accommodating and understanding parents who allowed me to chart the course that I wanted.

There were very few instances where my father, because of his insecurities, did not like some of my decisions. For example he felt that I was making a foolish choice of coming back from the U.S. to rural India. He felt that after such a promising career in US, I would ruin myself by working in a nondescript place like Phaltan. Similarly, he wanted me to take up a job after my B.Tech instead of my decision to go for higher studies. But he never forced his decisions on me. Part of the reason he did not insist that I follow his wish was also my stubbornness. However, my mother was much more open-minded and always agreed with my decisions and supported them. Nevertheless, towards the end of his life, my father felt that I made the right decision of coming to Phaltan

Similarly I also found a wife who had similar views in life as mine and was indifferent to material goods. I have written in some details about my wife Nandini in the book [“1970s America – An Indian Student’s Journey”](#). In fact her role has been the most important contribution in whatever I have done.

In 1981 when we were deciding to come back to India from the U.S. we visited quite a number of our IIT Kanpur friends around the U.S. They all liked the idea of us going back and some of them also expressed their desire to do so themselves but in most cases their wives refused to go back to India. Even today there have been many cases where the husbands have come back to India, but the reluctance of their wives has made their life not very enjoyable and comfortable in India.

Thus our joint decision to come to India was only possible with the whole-hearted support of Nandini.

It was a tough decision to start living in Phaltan but the support of Nandini smoothed the impact greatly. I have written about our initial challenges of living in Phaltan in my book [“Romance of Innovation”](#). Besides Nandini’s management of the Institute ([she is the President](#) and hence my boss) has freed me to pursue my research and writings. This has been the biggest and the most important factor in allowing me to carry out the activities that I have enjoyed. In spite of her work in managing the Institute, Nandini has continued to do excellent research in [sweet sorghum](#), [opuntia](#) and now in fodder grasses. She has many papers to her credit.

The contribution of Nandini's parents also cannot be overlooked. Nandini's father [Bon Nimbkar](#) had set up the small Institute called [Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute](#) in 1968 where we started our working life in late 1981 and have continued until today. This small place allowed me to do some interesting, meaningful and innovative work, which has been detailed in my book ["Romance of Innovation"](#).

They also helped establish [Kamala Nimbkar Bal Bhavan \(KNB\)](#) a Marathi medium high school where our daughters went to school. In fact, the school was started in 1994 for our daughters and the land and building has been donated by our Institute, NARI. Both these things – the Institute and a hassle-free school helped us live a simple and smooth life in rural setting.

Our daughters Noorie and Madhura were born after we came back to India. Noorie was born in 1982 and Madhura in 1985. They both went to school in KNB.

[Noorie](#) did her Bachelor's in Mechanical Engineering from Maharashtra Institute of Technology, Pune; worked for one year in Cummins India Ltd., Pune and then went to University of Florida (UF), Gainesville, U.S.A. to do her Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering. She was a brilliant student and won the prestigious [Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship \(IGERT\)](#) for her graduate studies at UF. After her Ph.D. she did her postdoc from Columbia University in 2010. Since then she has been working as an [engineer in Siemens in Princeton](#), New Jersey.

She met a fellow Puneite, Navin Goyal who was doing his Ph.D. in the College of Pharmacy in University of Florida. They were married in 2012 and now live in Lawrenceville, N.J. Navin is doing very well in his profession and is a [Director in Glaxo Smith Kline \(GSK\)](#) in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Our younger daughter Madhura has been a brilliant student throughout her career. She was a rank holder in Maharashtra Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education. Initially she wanted to follow her mother's footsteps by studying botany and later on getting into agriculture. She was doing her Masters in botany from Pune University and had offer of four fellowships for Ph.D. from U.S. universities. But then

decided that botany was not her cup of tea and instead became a teacher in her school KNB.

She therefore did her Masters in Primary Education from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai and now teaches in KNB. She really enjoys her work, [makes excellent videos](#) about her teaching methods and [runs the school in the cloud](#). KNB is one of the few rural schools in the world which is a part of the “school in the cloud” – an idea mooted by first Ted Prize winner Sugato Mitra.

When our daughters were growing up we inculcated in them the habit of reading. So the best presents for their birthday were books. Both Noorie and Madhura are voracious readers. We also spent a lot of time with them, discussing various things. Being in a small place and running a small Institute gave us the luxury of [spending quality time](#) with them. I think as parents this continuous dialogue with children is the best gift one can give to them. Noorie and Madhura’s friends were often jealous of them because they felt that we were more as friends rather than parents to them. Thus they could discuss any subject under the sun with us.

I also think that our spartan life and values rubbed onto them because they both live a simple life and have rarely asked us for any expensive gifts or presents.

Thus I feel that I have been very lucky to have such a family and whatever little I have been able to achieve in my life is because I did not have to worry on the family front.

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Photos

L-R: My brother Alok, AKR, Mummy and Papa, 1972. Place Nainital



L-R: My mother, Noorie, AKR, Nandini, Madhura, my father. Place Phaltan, October 1998



Nandini's parents. Jai and Bon Nimbkar. 2008



Nandini and Madhura. 2012



Anil and Noorie. 2012



Navin and Noorie, NJ



Three generations. Nandini, Madhura and Mummy. Phaltan, 2009

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