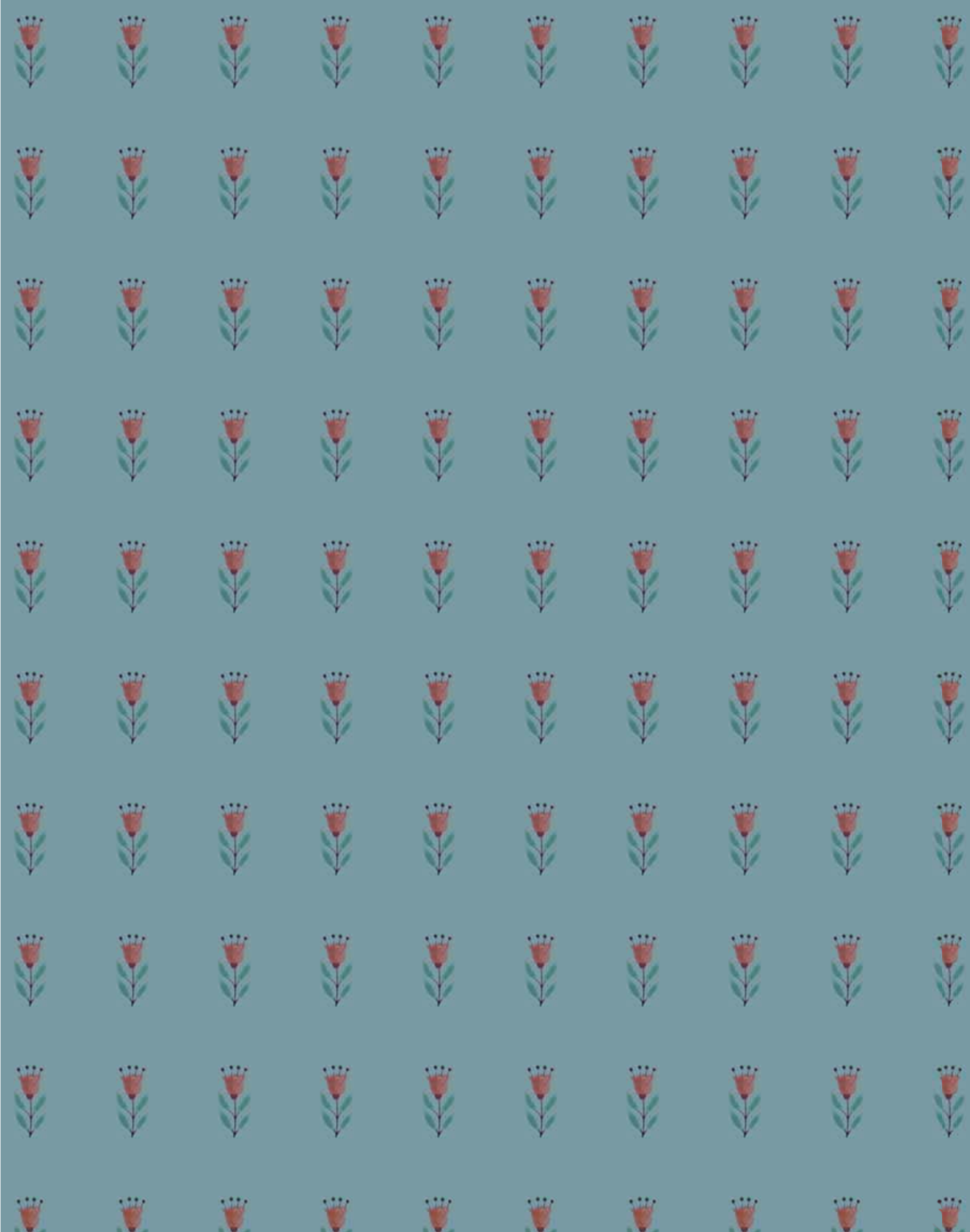


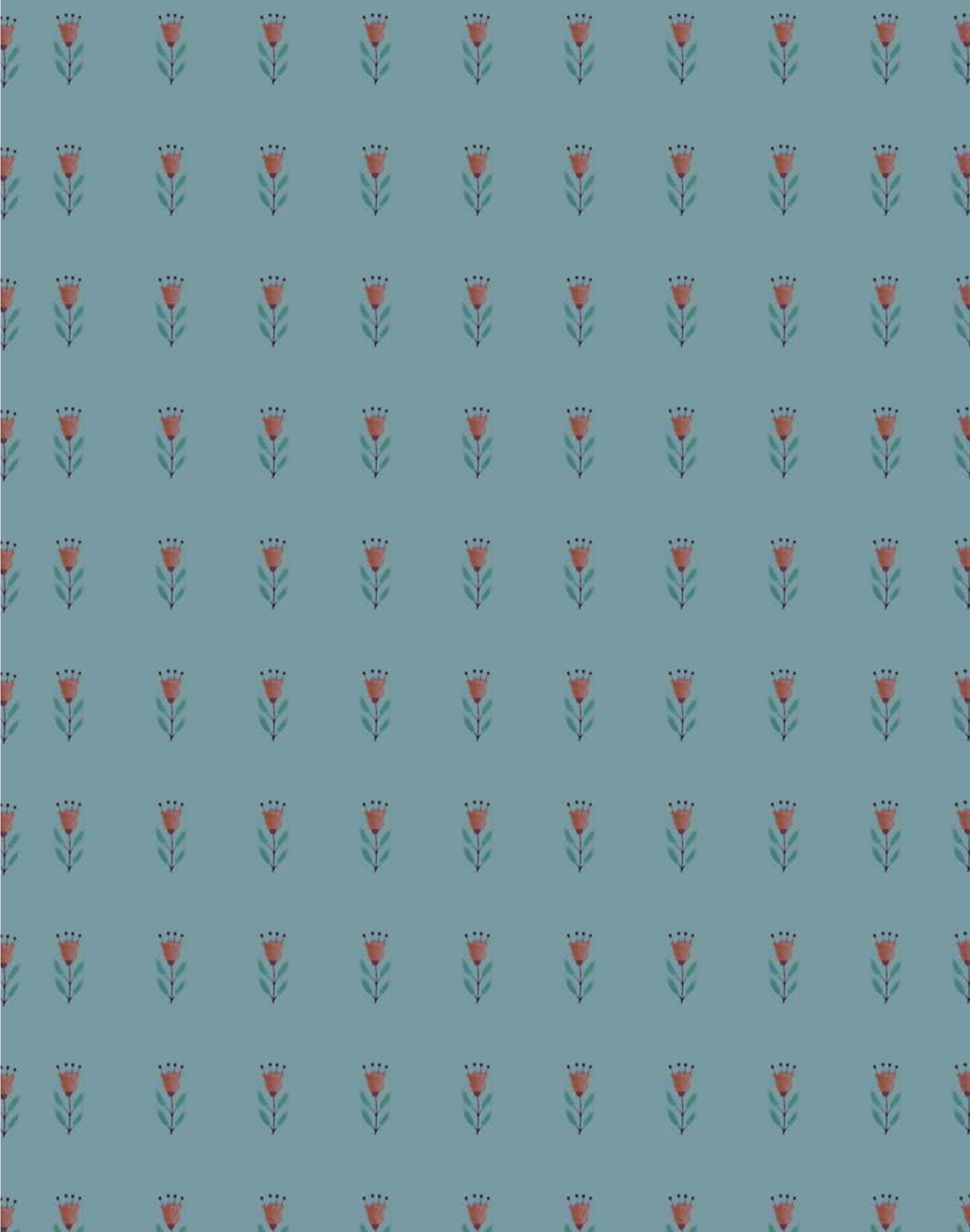


THE HEART  
HAS  
ITS  
REASONS

*A tribute to Vinod Kumar Neotia*











THE HEART  
HAS ITS  
REASONS







KISI KI MUSKURAAHATON PE HO NISAAR  
KISI KA DARD MIL SAKEY TO LE UDHAAR  
KISI KE WAASTEY HO TEREY DIL MEIN PYAAR

*Tina isi ka naam hai*



*There are souls in this world  
which have the gift of finding joy everywhere  
and of leaving it behind  
them when they go*

Jean Paul





## FOREWORD

*‘When someone leaves this world, ask not how he passed away, but how he lived.’*

Born on 1st October 1939 to Babulal Neotia and Bhagirathi Devi, Vinod Kumar Neotia was the youngest of four brothers. Bimal, Aditya and Suresh, his elder siblings, indulged Vinod for his loving and friendly nature, and Krishna Neotia, his wife, remembers her mother-in-law, Bhagirathi Neotia telling her, ‘From childhood, Vinod’s nature was calm. He would be happy with whatever was given to him to eat or wear. He gave me no trouble and would play happily by himself.’

The Neotia family has been an integral part of the business scene in Kolkata. Originating from Rajasthan, their forefathers settled in the city some 120 year ago. Since then, Kolkata has been their home and subsequent generations have been born and brought up here.

Educated at Hindi High School and St Xavier’s College in Kolkata, Vinod Kumar Neotia began his entrepreneurial career in the mid-1950s. Their eldest brother, Bimal, was adopted by their maternal grandfather, Shri Janki Prasad Poddar, a partner of the celebrated firm, Tarachand Ghanshyamdas, which was probably one of the first wholly Indian registered partnership firms during the time of the British Raj. A trading company, with its activities stretching from Karachi in the west to Shanghai in the east, it began with interests in banking and insurance, and later diversified into distribution of petroleum products as a franchisee of Burma Shell.

Along with Suresh Neotia and Narotam Sekhsaria, Vinod Neotia was a co-promoter of Ambuja Cements founded in 1983. He endeared himself to all employees with his big-heartedness, social service and philanthropy. His demise on 1st December 2009 left a huge void in the hearts of all those who knew and cherished him.

This book is a bouquet gathered from several glimpses of Vinod Kumar Neotia’s life. Known as the ‘gentle giant’, he touched all those whom he had encountered with his compassion and generosity. And made the rendezvous forever perfumed with his unconditional love and benevolence.





What can I say about Papa that would do him justice? It is, indeed, a difficult task. He was not just a very loving and caring father but living with him I experienced the joy of living with a very noble soul whose heart was so full of love that it would weep or laugh with everyone's sorrows and joys. Papa epitomized compassion in its truest sense. A wonderful way to look at his life would be to recollect a story that I had once read about the Ramayana. Here it is: "When Valmiki completed his Ramayana, Narada wasn't impressed. 'It is good, but Hanuman's is better,' he said. 'That monkey has written the Ramayana too!' Valmiki didn't like this at all, and wondered whose version was worthier. So he set out to find Hanuman and located his account of the Ramayana inscribed on seven broad banana leaves in Kadali Vana, the grove of plantains. It was perfect! Embellished with the most exquisite choice of grammar and vocabulary, metre and melody. Valmiki couldn't help but weep. 'Is it so bad?' asked Hanuman. 'No, it is that good,' said Valmiki. 'Then why are you crying?' asked Hanuman. 'Because no one will read my Ramayana after reading yours,' replied Valmiki. Hearing this, Hanuman simply tore up the seven banana leaves and said, 'You need your Ramayana more than I need mine. You wrote your Ramayana so that the world remembers Valmiki; I wrote my Ramayana so that I remember Ram.' At that moment Valmiki realized how he had been consumed by the desire for validation through his work. He had not used the work to liberate himself or appreciate the essence of Ram; his Ramayana was a product of ambition. But, on the other hand, Hanuman's Ramayana was a product of affection and complete devotion. There are people like Hanuman who don't want to be famous. They just do their job and fulfill their purpose. There are many unsung Hanumans in our life. They could be your spouse, mother, father or friends. Let us remember them and be grateful for their selfless contribution to our lives, knowing that we are complete and perfect with all our imperfections!" Clearly, Papa lived a life where he sought no validation for what he did or any acknowledgement for the many activities that he undertook. For him, the purpose of his life was a life of purpose. And it is in this that he obtained joy and fulfillment. He has left behind for us a most cherished legacy and I only hope we are able to live up to his high ideals.



*When I started counting my blessings,  
my whole life turned around*

Willie Nelson



Those happy childhood days! Little Vinod (right) with a relative



All capped up! Little Vinod sits with brother Bimal. Standing (L to R) are a cousin, young Suresh and Aditya



At home: Bimal Poddar (second from left) stands with some of the staff at home. Sitting (L to R) are Bhagirathi Neotia, Janki Prasad Poddar and his wife Ginni Bai. Seated on the floor (L to R) are young Suresh and Vinod



Family portrait: Bimal Poddar standing tall at the back, with (L to R) third brother Suresh, mother Bhagirathi Bai, baby brother Vinod, father Babulalji and second brother Aditya



When the bahuraanis arrived! Standing (L to R) Bimal, Vinod, Babulalji, Suresh. Sitting (L to R) Bimla, Krishna, Janki Prasadji, Bhagirathi Bai and Gayatri



Bai, VKN's mother, would say, 'From childhood, his nature was calm. He would be happy with whatever was given to him to eat or wear. He gave me no trouble and would play happily by himself.'

VKN was overweight in spite of being very good at outdoor games like tennis, cricket and horse riding. And his heart was larger than him. He was able to make friends very easily and had a charming personality, always laughing and joking. Respectful to his elders, he listened to them without arguing or getting into confrontations. VKN was the youngest of four brothers. Though they did fight, like all brothers do, their relationship was wonderful and he always let them have the upper hand, even if he was in the right, because that was his nature.

VKN was always a great sport. We were engaged when he was eighteen years old and in college, and I remember him telling me about an incident that still makes me smile. The lead in their college play, unfortunately, fell ill the day before the final performance. Nobody else agreed to enact the role of Phul Kumari, so he stepped in. At home, he asked Bimla Bhabi to help him with his costume. She gave him a sari, a lipstick and a handbag and told him to wear a plain T-shirt instead of a blouse and create a petticoat out of his pajamas by cutting it and joining the edges together.

It was a charity show and the auditorium was packed. The St Xavier's Fathers were sitting in the front row. The moment he stepped onto the stage and before he could even utter his dialogue, he had the audience in splits, with even the Fathers roaring with laughter. So loud was their mirth that a chair in which one of them sat broke and almost toppled the occupant. He later told me that without any effort of acting on his part, there was resounding applause and the play was a grand success. All it took was his singular presence on the stage!

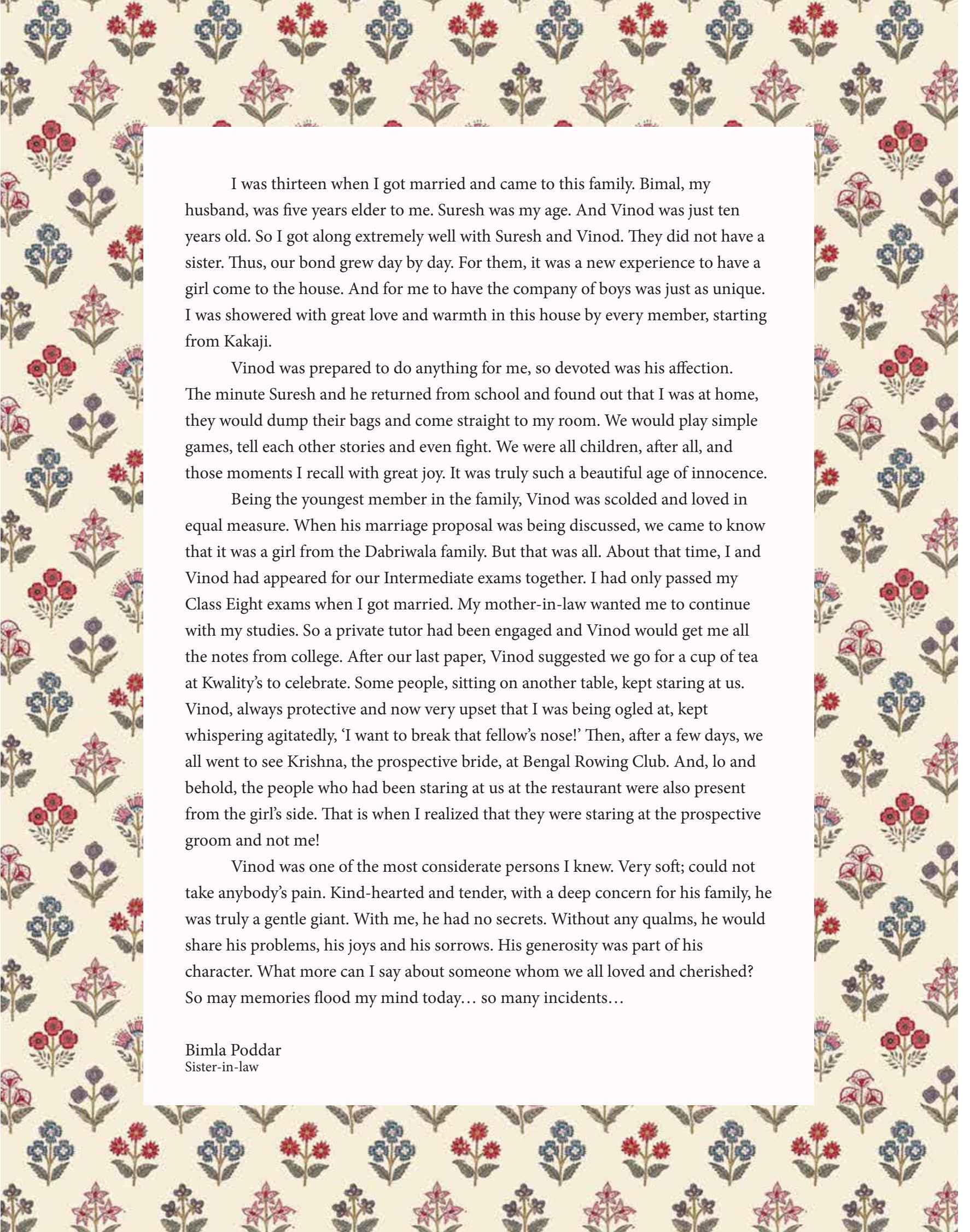
VKN and I never kept any secrets despite the ups and downs in our lives. I remember him telling me, 'If you or I don't like something, we must resolve it before the day is over.' And we always did that. We did not hold onto any fault but learnt from our mistakes. Sharing a mutual and implicit trust, we ensured that we always enjoyed whatever time we got to spend together. We did not waste it on useless protests. He gave me complete freedom to bring up our children whom he loved dearly.

Tears often rolled down VKN's eyes when he spoke about how much love he was getting from people. I asked him to dress smartly when he went to work and he did so, without complaints. Every day, while leaving for office, he would give me a hug. His eyes would ask and my smile would say 'OK.'

I pray to God that every married couple may have the kind of life VKN and I shared.

*'We did not hold  
onto any fault but  
learnt from our  
mistakes...'*





I was thirteen when I got married and came to this family. Bimal, my husband, was five years elder to me. Suresh was my age. And Vinod was just ten years old. So I got along extremely well with Suresh and Vinod. They did not have a sister. Thus, our bond grew day by day. For them, it was a new experience to have a girl come to the house. And for me to have the company of boys was just as unique. I was showered with great love and warmth in this house by every member, starting from Kakaji.

Vinod was prepared to do anything for me, so devoted was his affection. The minute Suresh and he returned from school and found out that I was at home, they would dump their bags and come straight to my room. We would play simple games, tell each other stories and even fight. We were all children, after all, and those moments I recall with great joy. It was truly such a beautiful age of innocence.

Being the youngest member in the family, Vinod was scolded and loved in equal measure. When his marriage proposal was being discussed, we came to know that it was a girl from the Dabriwala family. But that was all. About that time, I and Vinod had appeared for our Intermediate exams together. I had only passed my Class Eight exams when I got married. My mother-in-law wanted me to continue with my studies. So a private tutor had been engaged and Vinod would get me all the notes from college. After our last paper, Vinod suggested we go for a cup of tea at Kwality's to celebrate. Some people, sitting on another table, kept staring at us. Vinod, always protective and now very upset that I was being ogled at, kept whispering agitatedly, 'I want to break that fellow's nose!' Then, after a few days, we all went to see Krishna, the prospective bride, at Bengal Rowing Club. And, lo and behold, the people who had been staring at us at the restaurant were also present from the girl's side. That is when I realized that they were staring at the prospective groom and not me!

Vinod was one of the most considerate persons I knew. Very soft; could not take anybody's pain. Kind-hearted and tender, with a deep concern for his family, he was truly a gentle giant. With me, he had no secrets. Without any qualms, he would share his problems, his joys and his sorrows. His generosity was part of his character. What more can I say about someone whom we all loved and cherished? So many memories flood my mind today... so many incidents...

Bimla Poddar  
Sister-in-law



With father Babulaji, sons Suresh, standing on the left, and Vinod on the extreme right



Family ties: seated on chairs (L to R) are young Aditya, Bhagirathi Bai, Babulaji, also known as Bhaiji, Ginni Bai, lovingly known as Maiya, and Bimal. Sitting on the floor (L to R) are Suresh and Vinod



A slice of history: family photograph with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in Wardha, Maharashtra, an important city of the Gandhian era



When I got married and came to this family, I was showered with love, especially by Vinod. I can never forget the respect and affection he had for me. He was always by my side in my hours of sorrow and joy. He would explain difficult situations to me with deep concern and love. Whenever I went to Rishikesh, he would call me every day, giving me all the news of our family members in Kolkata. Then, having chatted for a while, he would turn the tables and playfully accuse, 'You should also call me once in a while, shouldn't you?' Even when I was in Queen's Park and went out for a while, he would tell me in jest, 'Don't you know I am your real mother-in-law? You must tell me where you go!'

Vinod was truly a rare human being difficult to come across in today's world. I miss him every day. He had a special gift to make friends with children, playing with them and becoming a child himself. His patience and his lavish heart accommodated everyone, no matter to which stature they belonged in society. His capacity to give of not just his wealth but also his time and his heart was remarkable. He loved Suresh Babu unconditionally. He would drop all his appointments when he found out that his elder brother would be in town and say, 'Arrey baba, Tiger is coming! We better be prepared!'

For me, Vinod will always be special. Whatever I may say about him will never be enough.

Gayatri Neotia  
Sister-in-law




Time to indulge and relax over snacks! Bimla Poddar with Bhagirathi Bai and young Vinod



Holiday in Singapore: (L to R) Bimla, Vinod, Paroma, Madhu, Parthiv and Krishna



All in the family! Sadhna, Bimla, Harsh, Krishna, Madhu, Smriti (partially hidden), Parthiv, Vinod, Suresh, Paroma, Gayatri and Gita



Papa's greatest quality and biggest asset was that he was never judgmental. That is why he was able to carry the family along. He always saw the larger picture through all the highs and lows. Papa made everybody feel special in his life. I always felt that I was closest to him as I could talk to him about anything under the sun, without any barriers. He would praise me for little gestures and correct me if he thought I was wrong. He protected me unconditionally and helped me to handle difficult situations. He gave me so much strength and the ability to endure.

I remember his final days and my last conversation with him when we spoke for almost an hour about our family. His compassionate observation of each member was such an eye-opener for me. He was so sensitive to everyone's circumstances and emotions, putting everything into perspective with his remarks and his appreciation. It was the greatest lesson I got from him.

That conversation helped me to observe and see things in their right perspective. He gave me the gift of acceptance – again one of his greatest merits – for which I will remain ever grateful to him. I never thought Papa would leave us so early. For me, he was immortal. There are some people who you think will be with us forever. They are our protectors! They can never go away!

Today, I wish I had done more for Papa. That is my only regret.

Madhu Neotia  
Daughter-in-law

*'I felt like a princess because I was born to a King!'*



Smriti with her parents



Young Smriti and Vinod



Ah Kashmir! Holiday time with family and friends



I have, for long, been observing fathers with their little girls. And there are some incredible stories and beautiful moments that I have seen before me in each of these observations.

Like this very simple looking girl with teeth that made her look funny... and hair that hadn't been trained to fall right... with thick glasses that sat awkwardly on her face, walking with her father who held her hand as if it belonged to a little angel...

Like this father, with a lollipop-licking munchkin sitting astride on his shoulders, drooling unto his forehead, as he looked up with pride at the apple of his eye...

Like this amazing father who scooped up his podgy little bundle trailing in at the end of a sporting day event, as if she were his pride...

In each one of these dads, I saw a glimpse of my father... Papa was each one of these and more...

He made me feel complete and beautiful, competent and lovable. He treated me like a princess, not because he surrounded me with insurmountable luxury and riches, but because he encompassed me in the wealth of such a complete and endearing relationship.

I felt like a princess because I was born to a king!

Smriti Morarka  
Daughter



Sharing happy moments with (L to R) Ashrafbhai, Smriti, Vinod and Krishna

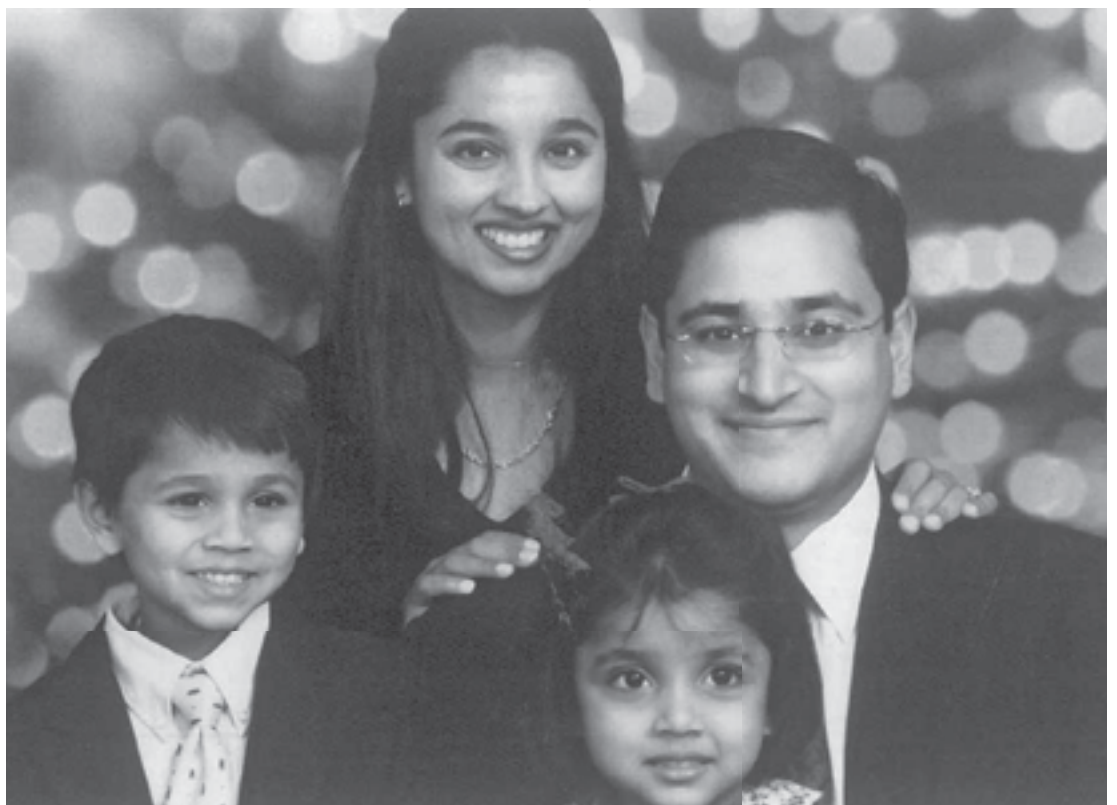


*Mangalam Bhagavaan Vishnu  
Mangalam Garudadhwaajaah  
Mangalam Pundareekaaksha  
Mangalaaya Tano Hari*

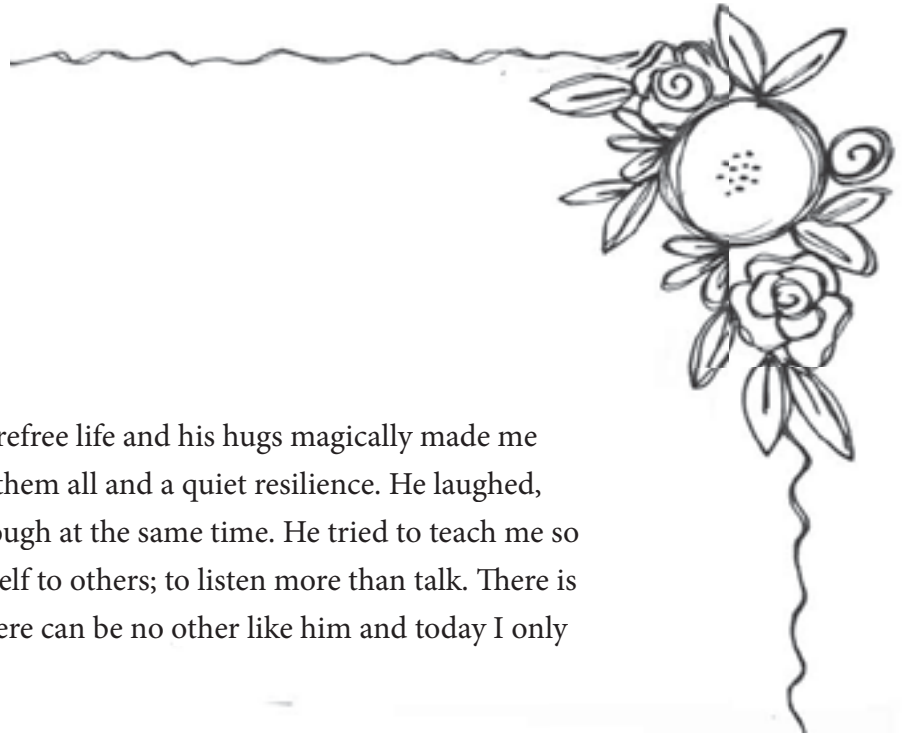
Garuda Puraana



Krishna and Vinod on a holiday with Shraddha in Kulu



The most beautiful thing we keep inside our hearts! Little Kaartikeya and Ishani with parents Shraddha and Manish



My dad was my magic. Magically I led a carefree life and his hugs magically made me complete and secure. He had the biggest heart of them all and a quiet resilience. He laughed, and cried with even more ease. He was soft and tough at the same time. He tried to teach me so many things; to love all, feel for others, give yourself to others; to listen more than talk. There is so much one can say but I will end by stating, ‘There can be no other like him and today I only wish I had stopped to learn more from him.’

Shraddha Gupta  
Daughter



Vinod on his way to the holy shrine of Badrinath

While growing up, I always saw my Nana as an example of compassion. I learned from him that kindness is always the best route, and he will always be someone I strive to be like. Nana went to great lengths to support me in my endeavours and I hope that I am able to embody his honesty, wisdom and compassion as I grow older.

Ishani Gupta  
Granddaughter

My grandfather was a caring and gentle man who was always looking out for others. He constantly strived to help those less fortunate and better the world around him, leaving it worthier than he found it. The extent of his compassion truly knew no bounds and because of this he impacted change on a national scale and inspired hundreds to act towards this noble goal. The world may have lost a great man but his memory will live on forever.

Kaartikeya Gupta  
Grandson



Sharing and caring: Vinod and Krishna with their children Harsh, Smriti and baby Shraddha



*Look at everything as though you were seeing it  
either for the first or the last time*

Betty Smith



What can I say about someone who was at times my 'advisor' and at other times my 'sounding board'? Who was my 'confidant' at times and my 'conscience keeper' at other moments... Who was my 'go-to' person by day and by night... to whom my silence spoke a thousand words... to whom my heart and mind opened up more easily than it did to myself... to my parent who knew me better than I did...

What can I say about my Rock of Gibraltar?

Gautam Morarka  
Son-in-law

*You may forget with whom you laughed  
but you will never forget with whom you wept*

Khalil Gibran

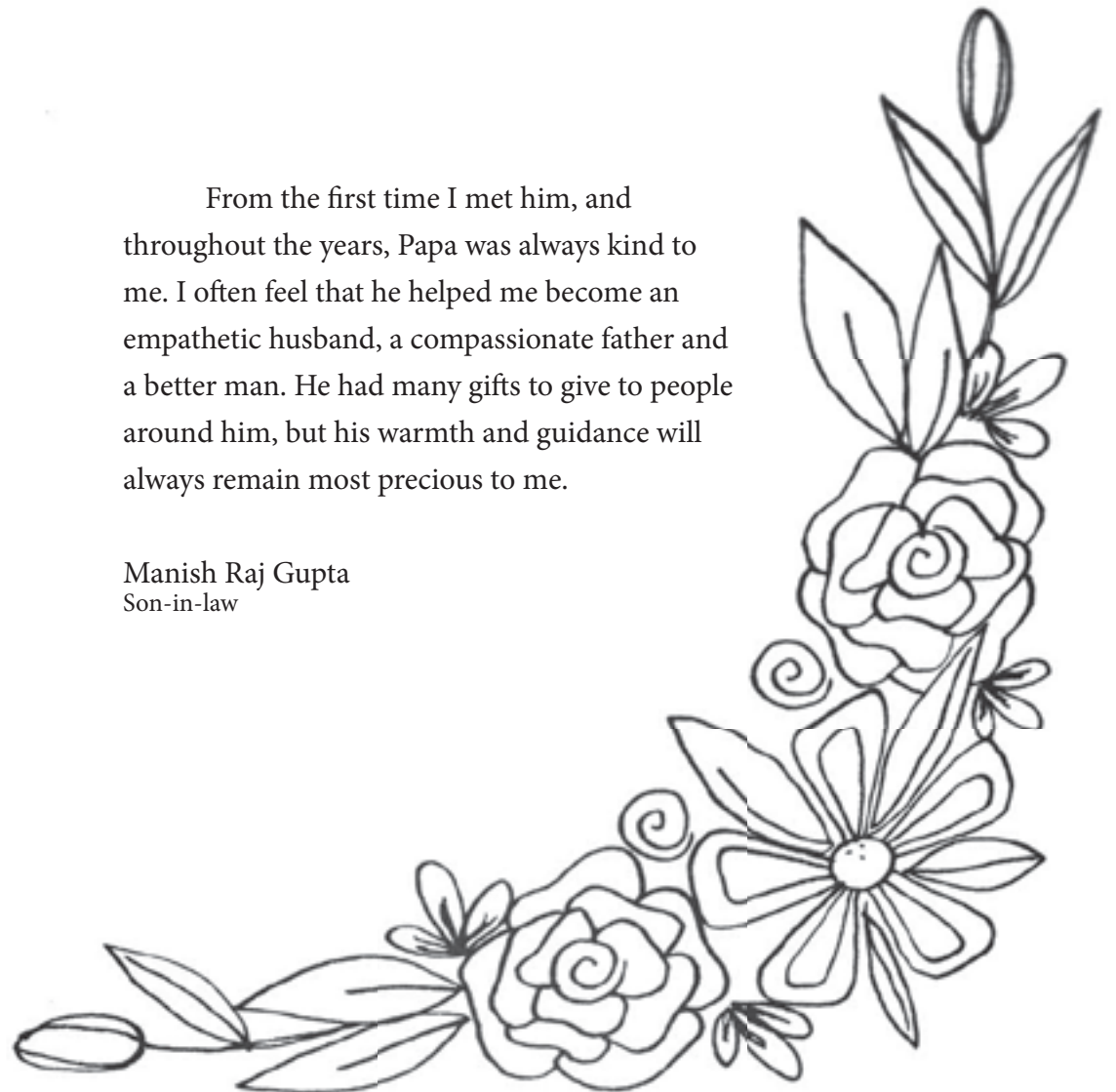



*Slow down and enjoy life. It's not only the scenery you miss by going too fast - you also miss the sense of where you are going and why*

Eddie Cantor

From the first time I met him, and throughout the years, Papa was always kind to me. I often feel that he helped me become an empathetic husband, a compassionate father and a better man. He had many gifts to give to people around him, but his warmth and guidance will always remain most precious to me.

Manish Raj Gupta  
Son-in-law





I remember Chhota Dada sitting comfortably next to the grandfather clock, with a restful smile on his face and teardrops in his eyes; a figure that represented our family; a figure that was adored, respected and loved by all, someone who kept the family together. Today, I realize the important role he played. He understood emotions, absorbed anger, comforted the sad, polished the ego, spread joy and cherished time-tested values.

Today, a world driven by someone's win or loss lacks a man who thought and lived beyond it all; who only thought that, above all, family should win. Today I miss that figure who dedicated his life for all. Yet the strongest image in my memory is of his smile as he sat with tear-drenched eyes right next to the grandfather clock on the wall.

Parthiv Neotia  
Grandson

Every time I cry and look at myself in the mirror, I think of Dada. He looked most adorable when he cried, which was quite often. He was an extremely sensitive person. I guess we all are sensitive when it comes to ourselves, but to be able to connect to another human being's pain more strongly than your own requires a huge amount of compassion which only Dada had.

I was a teenager when he passed away but even the random glimpses that I remember of him remain dearer to me than anything. He always exuded so much warmth and love, and I think it was that energy that always pulled me to him. I remember going and sitting with him every evening while he made his phone calls and sat grumpily (but cutely) on his chair. I loved to see him eat dinner, fascinated by the big bites he used to take and the passion with which he enjoyed his meals. That's the same passion he had towards people. It's only after his death that I've heard so many stories about him, his sensitivity, his love for people and his mischievousness too! But what always surprises me is how he had the ability to make everyone who remembered him teary-eyed.

While growing up, I was always told that being a good human was most important. And I think the one person in the family who fully lived up to this ideology was Dada. He didn't care about anything else and somehow couldn't stop the emotional storm within him. While the world constantly teaches me to learn how to hold back emotions and behave more practically, Dada always taught me how to let go. And let go completely. Maybe I do suffer a little bit because of that. Some stories of people affect me more than they should. I feel I'm able to connect with them at a human level rather than just at a formal relationship level. I feel blessed to have learnt this from him because my emotions and my inability to manage them sometimes is the only thing that makes me feel alive. I don't have a lot of friends or people I'm close to, but I'm happy that no matter how distant I am from my relationship with them, I am able to connect to them as human beings. I value them for who they are instead of what they mean to me.

I miss Dada a lot and I think that if he saw me cry he would embrace me and tell me it's okay to feel the way I do. It's very difficult to find someone like that. I'm already tearing up as I write this, and I can only think of his rosy red cheeks and twinkling eyes full of love.

Paroma Neotia  
Granddaughter



*Aagey bhi jaaney na tu  
Peechhey bhi jaaney na tu  
Jo bhi hai  
Bas yahi ek pal hai*

Sahir Ludhianvi

Affectionate. . . Protective. . . Dependable. . .

This list can be endless. . . Nana for me was the complete man who was a living example of the fact that life is ten percent of what happens to you and ninety percent of how you respond to it.

When I was with him, I felt safe and protected and loved and understood. I wish you had stayed a little longer Nana . . .

Pranay Morarka  
Grandson

‘Set your heart on doing good. Do it over and over again, and you will be filled with joy,’ said Gautam Buddha.

I cannot think of a human who lived this wisdom more earnestly than Nana! As all of us around him watched and learned, he effortlessly showered endless joy in all our lives. Sometimes in our know, but mostly silently, in a manner we least expected. He had a knack of touching lives in the most delicate, and yet, unforgettable ways! If I can be a fraction of the human he was, I know it would be only because of the endless blessings he continues to shower on me from wherever he is.

If I had to pen down my most precious memories of him, it would be entirely impossible, for memories are rarely meant to be translated into words. They are meant to be lived and relived a million times in the quiet of your heart. And that I do, each day, every day!

Priyanka Morarka  
Granddaughter



*‘He had a kind  
word to say to  
anyone he met,  
regardless of their  
position in the  
company’*

My first memories of Vinod Bhaiya go back to the time when I was seven or eight years old, in the late 1950s. Ma and Bauji had planned a holiday in Nainital with Bimlabai, and Vinod Jijaji, who was in his late teens, had also joined us. I remember him being full of humour and fun, playful all the time, keeping all of us thoroughly entertained.

An incident from that holiday is still vividly etched in my mind. We were paddling in two boats in the town’s famous lake; Vinod Bhaiya and I were in one boat and Bauji and Ma in another, both floating close to each other. He and Bauji were playing around, throwing and catching a football. Suddenly, Vinod dropped the ball and, instead, picked me up and pretended to throw me to Bauji in the other boat. A chill ran up my spine and the two boats were momentarily gripped with panic, which turned into laughter and mirth when he lovingly put me back on my feet. This infectious fun and playfulness remained a part of his character all through his life. My memory is filled with the wonderful times our families had spent with each other at his 7/2 Queen’s Park home in Kolkata.

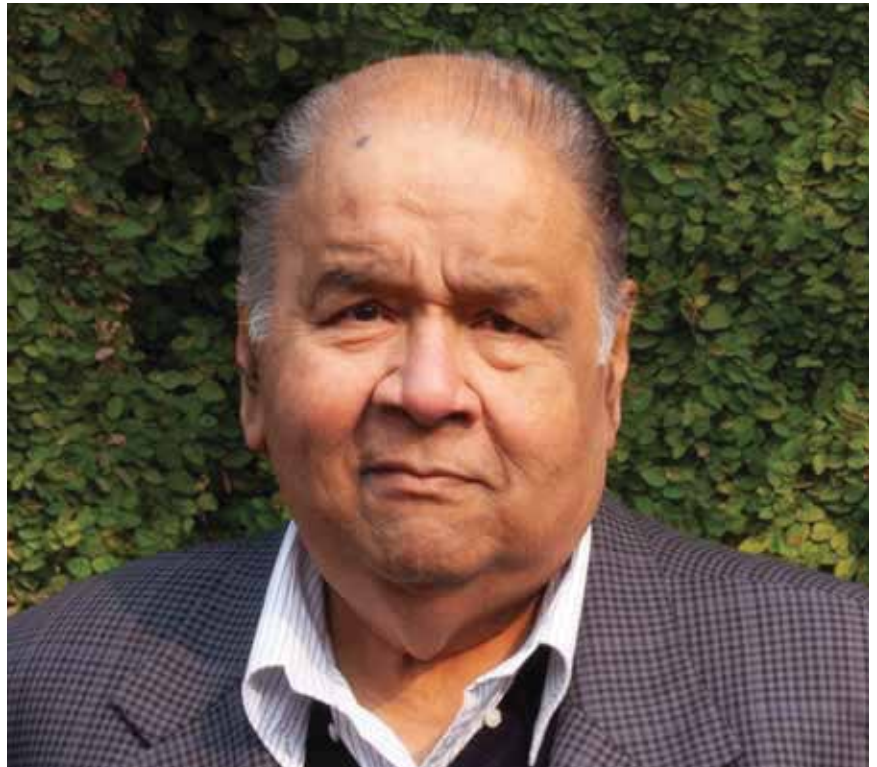
Vinod Bhaiya always stayed with us whenever he came to Bombay for work. I got to know him intimately at a very young age and he was my guide and mentor when I first joined the family business. I would frequently consult him for things small and big, and he was always indulgent and generous with his help and advice. So it was only natural that when I initially thought of setting up a cement company, he and his brother Suresh were the first people that I consulted. I persuaded both of them to be my partners in Ambuja Cement which they gracefully accepted. They were the anchors around which I built the company, their presence always reassuring whenever I embarked on my many impetuous adventures of large expansions and acquisitions.

I was particularly close to Vinod and used him as a regular sounding board during our frequent phone calls and his fortnightly visits to Bombay when we would spend long hours discussing company issues. Beyond the expertise that he provided, he endeared himself to almost everyone in our office with his humility, charm, humour, eager-to-listen and down-to-earth manner. He had a kind word to say to anyone he met, regardless of their position in the company.

His informality and discreetness came very handy for the senior members of our team whenever they were upset with me, or wanted to convey their contrary opinion about some of my actions but were afraid to tell me directly. They knew they could talk to him openly and he would spend hours listening to them with great empathy. He would first mollify them and then carry the message back to me packaged in his singular charming style that would get the work done without offending me. So it wasn’t surprising that his visits to our office were greatly valued by everyone.

He was the pillar that I leaned against during the dark days when I was first detected with cancer in the early 1990s. He accompanied me and my family to America for the treatment and his personal care, warmth and constant reassurance played a big role in my convalescence and recovery. He was constantly by my side through all my subsequent battles with the disease. It is something that I am eternally grateful for. Vinod Bhaiya for me was like an elder brother, always caring, loving; always available and selfless without ever wishing for anything in return. In my life I have not come across any person who could be as humane, as generous and as giving of himself, with no expectation whatsoever. Vinod Bhaiya's void can never be filled!

Narotam Sekhsaria  
Family member



Vinod Neotia with Narotam Sekhsaria (centre) and Y K Modi (left)





Vinod Tauji was the first person I met from my ‘to be in-laws’ at his residence on Pedder Road. I was a middle-class Parsee girl going to be married into this huge and prestigious family. I was truly daunted. However, once I met Tauji, all my trepidation melted. He respected me for who I was, advised us on what we should do, and packed us off to a life full of hope. That’s when I discovered the man called Vinod Neotia.

A few years later, when Tauji was in town again to attend a katha of Amma’s, we struggled to steal some time to see him – a man who ran empires, who had so much to do and so little time – and he just met Priyavrat and me in his signature grey safari suit, beaming his signature smile, at a roadside local ice-cream joint on Chowpatti! Nothing mattered to him but the moment and the people therein. That’s when I discovered the generosity of Vinod Neotia.

When our daughter, Antara, was barely two years old, toddling and a handful, Tauji was in Mumbai yet again, and we went to his guest house where he was with Amma. Antara was enthralled seeing the birds outside a huge window. Tauji went and sat on the window sill next to her, engaging her in an animated conversation and doing crazy things! We had done all we could so that she addressed him as ‘Dadaji’ but she being the creative thing she is, decided to suddenly call him ‘Elephant Dadaji!’ I froze in embarrassment. But, unconcerned, he asked her why did she want to call him by that name. Prompt came her reply, ‘Because you are so big and so sweet, and you are wearing grey colour!’ How can I forget that afternoon as they gurgled and laughed together? That’s when I discovered the magnanimity of Vinod Neotia.

I also recall the time when I wanted to go to Tirupati to pray for Priyavrat’s unstable health. I spoke to Babuji who promptly connected me to Tauji. And I travelled with him to Balaji’s sanctum not once, not twice but six times for darshan! Tauji understood my sentiment and why I kept harassing the Lord for Priyavrat’s health. The long waits outside the temple early in the morning were so precious and pure. Now I always think Balaji was teaching me through Tauji. And that’s when I discovered the mission of Vinod Neotia – forever for others; forever fragrant!

Anaheeta & Priyavrat Goenka  
Niece and nephew



Diwali Puja at office



'Love is when the soul starts to sing and the flowers of your life bloom on their own'

VKN and I went to Hindi High School in Kolkata from 1951 to 1956 and since our school encouraged all games, including hockey, I always remember a huge goal-keeper, fully padded and defending a goalpost, where the ball seldom went past his bulk. In St Xavier's College, again in Kolkata, we got emotionally attached due to an odd incident. I think the English professor had scolded Vinod for reasons unknown to me and I found him weeping in a secluded part of the college campus, whereupon I too sat down and wept along with him, sharing his agony. The bond had begun.

Vinod's business workplace in 1960 at 18 N S Road was barely 100 yards away from my own modest office space and we met briefly. To put it mildly, the financial gulf between us could not have been wider; then and even now. Yet, even during those immature days, his soft and caring attitude used to surprise me, causing intense emotional reactions in me.

From 1975 to the last day of his life, Vinod gave himself unconditionally to our friendship and became my family's well-wisher, advisor, supporter and a pillar of guidance. Anecdotes of his magnanimous behaviour could fill a whole book, but then who doesn't know about this quality of his? The silent War Horse, his deep sense of respect towards his elder brother and his unflappable temperament were his hallmarks. I was witness to countless episodes of this great behind-the-scenes warrior, as I used to work in his organisation from 1980.

One would say he was a man of charity, but no! 'Charity' is an incomplete, unsatisfactory word to describe Vinod's manner of helping others. To me, for what it is worth, he gave with his money, his heart, mind and the most precious part of our lives – his invaluable time. To me, Vinod was a unique human being with Godlike qualities. His absence is felt even today, by me and by everyone we knew. And the verdict is hugely unanimous: 'What a human being!'

Pradumn Chowbey  
School and college friend





A day out in Kashmir



Those were the days! (L to R) Vinod, Bimla, Jamnalal Goenka, Krishna, Rajeev Goenka and Bimal

*Stop and take in the beauty of an ordinary day*

Jennifer Garner



Vinod and Krishna: the gift of love never dies



Vinod in a lighthearted Bollywood mood on the lake in Nainital

Vinod Chacha was a man of very few words. But he was my ‘Mini Papa.’ I had lost my father early in life. Yet I had seen in Vinod Chacha’s eyes a concern that a father has for his daughter. He had this wonderful quality of concern and kindness for others. A man who spoke little but whose honest energy drew people to him. Just to feel his presence was enough. His wit was most endearing. He had the ability to lighten up any atmosphere with his humour that was so amazing and intelligent. He had seen life at very close quarters and understood both pain and joy. To call someone your father is a rare occurrence. And I gave him that respect.

I remember one Diwali when I had gone to see him and seek his blessings. He was sitting by himself. Chachi was not around. I told him that my life lacked a mentor. Ever since my father died, I had been looking for a mentor. Would he, therefore, kindly deem to be my mentor? He sat silently for a while. His eyes welled up. Then he said, ‘I am your admirer, how can I be your mentor?’

In great humility I touched his feet and asked in jest, ‘Chacha, you are my admirer? Why are you making excuses?’ Who knew then that this would be our last meeting? He is no more with us. But he occupies a very quiet and a very big place in my heart.

Anupama Sureka  
Family friend





Vinod as a carefree teenager



Bhagirathi Bai with Bimal Poddar



If I jog my memory as far back as I am able, I find Vinod Mausaji appearing there. Always...

It is difficult to remember a Sunday morning without breakfast together at Queen's Park, his hearty laughter, his larger-than-life presence and his being a constant presence in our lives – our vacations together, the family gatherings, trips to Delhi or Badrinath, Manali or even Mayapur.

Mum and Dad always looked up to him and quite naturally so did we kids. He was the 'go-to' person, be it when it was my decision to go to school at Doon or to college, or collect art or where to work when I was not ready to join the family business. He was even my proposer for my club memberships. From telling me how to deal with my uncles at home to being the first elder to offer me my first drink, to using slang unheard of at home. By making me comfortable, he played the role of both a guide and a friend, switching seamlessly between the two as demanded by the situation. The funniest anecdote I vividly remember is that of a Gulabari celebration at Queen's Park, when Birju Maharaj was performing and I kept mimicking him and dancing for a smaller audience, without realizing that I was being watched by several people. Mausaji, all serious, came to warn me. I was sure I was going to get scolded. But very soon he cracked up and joined us in our mirth.

I can never forget his laughter or his tears – for he cried fearlessly – either when he was very happy or when he became emotionally moved and empathized with another's pain. No wonder everyone went to him for his generosity – of time, patience, heart and purse.

Abhishek Poddar  
Nephew



'Jeevan ki bagiya mehkegi': just before Vinod's arrival, (L to R) Bimal, Bai, Suresh, Bhauji, Maiya and Aditya



'The greatest gift of life is friendship': Vinod and Krishna with Purnima and Lalit Toolsidass

My earliest memories of Vinod Chacha are linked with those of Papa. Vinod Chacha and Krishna Chachi were Papa and Mummy's closest friends. As a child, that black pouch of his would fascinate me. And in it, the silver dabbis – the one with Paan Masaala getting tossed around across the room. Those lazy Sunday afternoons where the four of them would listen to Talat Aziz or Jagjit Singh. Nobody was in a hurry. Their togetherness was permanent. I don't recall even a day when Papa and Vinod Chacha didn't talk or meet. Vinod Chacha was so naughty, but it was hidden in the twinkle in his eyes. I recall a few incidents....

We were out on one of those long drives – the four of them and us kids. We drove past a policeman who was sleeping on the job. Vinod Chacha told Papa, 'Vasu, reverse karo aur uskey paas ruko.' Much to everyone's surprise, he took out his fresh white hanky, twirled it around and whacked the sleeping cop. Immediately the policeman stood up straight and gave him a crisp salute as we drove off – everyone in splits.

Another time, he came home to meet Mom. Pongo, our boxer, was being sent to Bangalore. A special cage had been made for him, which was huge. When Vinod Chacha walked in, I just pointed to Mom's den. He went inside and his entire body shook with laughter as he saw Mom sitting inside the cage with Pongo, as she wanted to make our beloved dog feel secure! When Vinod Chacha laughed, every single person would follow – for his laughter was straight from the heart and so infectious.

Before Pongo, we had another dog – Imran. He was a Labrador who loved shoes. Everyone would get stressed and Papa was most concerned that someone's shoes would get chewed up. Only Vinod Chacha would walk in calmly, take off his shoes and put them on top of the pelmet from where the curtains were hung, as if it were the most normal thing to do!

One of the things I loved about Vinod Chacha, was his 'apnaapan.' I never felt any kind of formality or distance from him. He would walk into our home any time, sit where he wanted, talk to whom he wanted, eat whatever he liked and love us unconditionally.

As I grew up, I realized that Vinod Chacha has an amazing blend of seemingly opposite qualities – he was one of the most intelligent, brave, strong, completely reliable persons I knew. No matter what the problem, he was there to help, unruffled and calm. At the same time, he was one of the most sensitive, soft, caring, gentle, humble, true, approachable, mischievous, lovable and generous persons in my life.

He would take great interest in the photography and graphic designing that was Aparna's and my professional work. One day he said, 'Tumko hamaarey liye kuch karna hai. Teen budda-buddi ka photo lena hai.' It was so much fun shooting the three school friends – Vinod Chacha, Papa and Chandar Chacha, and Krishna Chachi, Mom and Kiran Chachi. As I was shooting, I realized that time hadn't been able to touch their love and friendship.

I miss Vinod Chacha. I know, without any doubt, that Papa and he are sitting together, looking down at us and smiling. Perhaps my favorite memory of Vinod Chacha is his hug. It enfolded me in the softest embrace that was so complete that I still feel his love and his presence with me each day.

*You are already free.  
Only you have to know and  
realize this truth*

Sivananda



At the Annual Day function of Hindi High School, Vinod's alma mater

What always attracted people to Vinod Chacha was his loving nature. He made it a point to spend time with me and my family whenever he was in Hyderabad. What a pleasure it was to host him! To share rare moments when we spent time together! He never said 'no' to me, whatever my demands to him for advice on my work. That was the kind of ownership I had on him.

I also saw his spiritual nature firsthand when I accompanied him to see Prema Pandurangji. His generosity extended to people of all ranks and whatever he could do for anyone gave him enormous joy. He never thought about himself. For me he was the silent backbone of the Neotia family, though Suresh Chachaji fronted it – a shining example of a karmayogi; an incredible Lakshman to Suresh Chachaji's Ram.

Arun Sureka  
Family friend



Family ties: (L to R) Shraddha, Madhu and Vinod at Harsh and Madhu's engagement



'The heart of a father is the masterpiece of nature': Shraddha and Vinod in a playful stance

My first meeting with Vinod Neotiaji (fondly called VKN or Vinod Babu) was sometime in August/September of 1983. I was called by Narotam Sekhsariaji and Vinod Babu for the final interview for my appointment in Ambuja Cements Ltd in Mumbai. I joined the company in November 1983; served as its Whole-time Director from 1999 to 2009; continued as an Exco member till I superannuated in July 2012. Thereupon, I was appointed as a Director and served on the Board of Ambuja from July 2012 till March 2019.

I had the privilege of working closely with Vinod Babu in areas of great significance, most important being taxation, commercial issues, government incentives and legal matters. Before Ambuja became a part of Holcim, my interaction with him in the last ten to fifteen years was quite intense and intimate. Vinod Babu's contributions to Ambuja cannot be measured. He was very focused and committed and kept the team fully engaged and motivated.

He was very humble and humorous – a quality not commonly seen in founders. His respect for everyone, irrespective of the level at which they worked, was amazing. He was an embodiment of humility and had great tolerance, giving a patient hearing to anyone who wished to express his mind and concerns. With Narotamji – though he too was humane – we would confine our talk to work-related issues. Our minds would instantaneously start working on the subjects discussed when we were out of his room. But with Vinod Babu there was always something beyond work. He would add fun and joy by quoting witty incidents, making the atmosphere light and friendly. I used to spend as much time as possible with him beyond work and never came out of his room without a hearty laugh. This was true in the case of my colleagues as well. He was a great stress-buster. There were many occasions when I had work-related anxiety. If Vinod Babu was around in our Mumbai office, I would at once take the liberty to meet him. Just being in his presence was enough. A natural smile would surface on my face and I would feel rejuvenated soon. Such was his endearing persona.

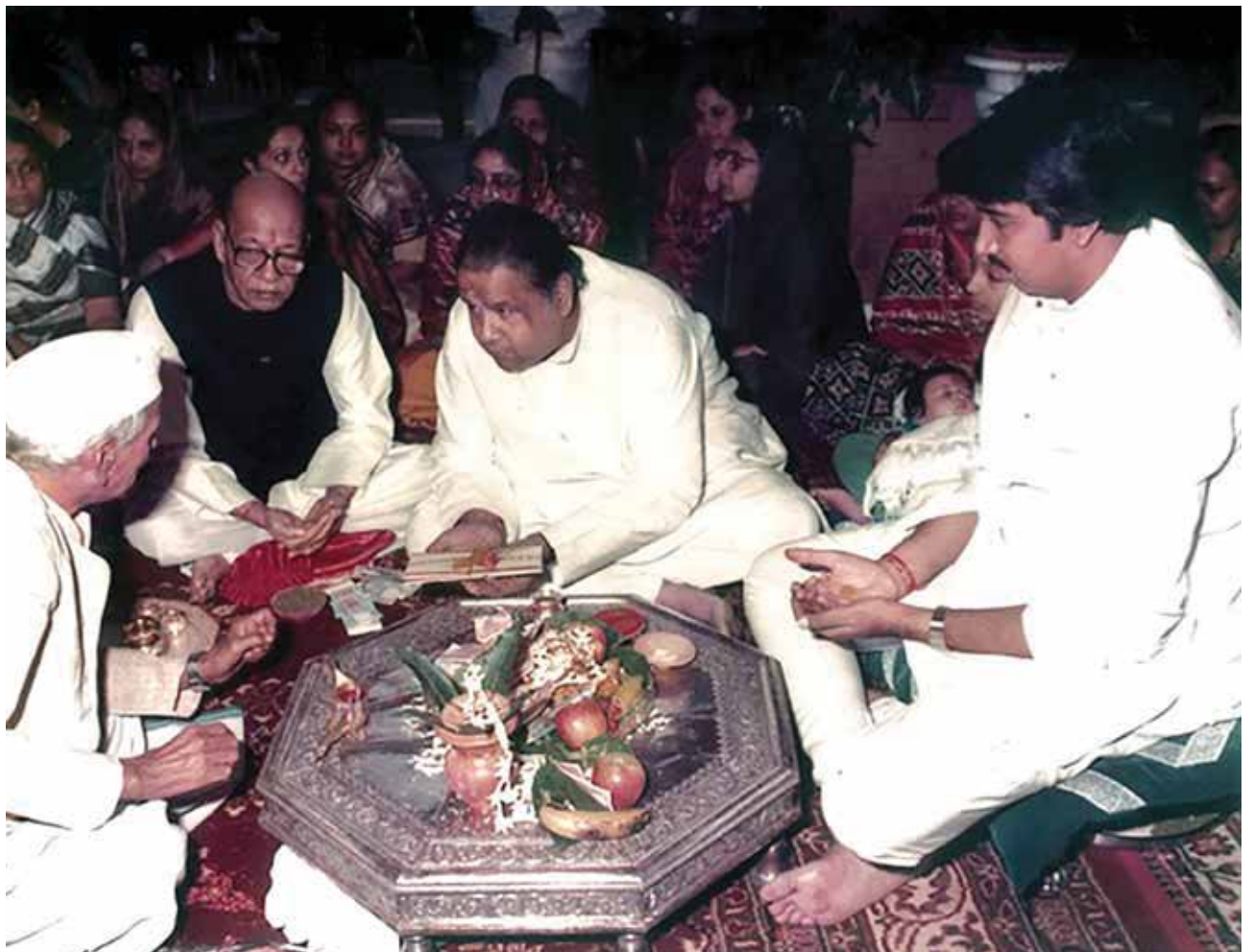
Vinod Babu was very loving and caring, with an unhesitating eagerness to help any individual who was in difficulties, no matter what his or her position was in the organisation. To me, personally, he was a great mentor. One had to learn the art of communication from him. Whenever he disagreed with my views or my approach or conduct in any matter, he would convey it gracefully, without remotely hurting my sentiments. He helped me avoid very embarrassing situations with colleagues. He gave so much of comfort and ease that I could open up my heart to him and discuss any concern, anguish or discomfort. He always guided me to succeed. One very interesting thing I experienced in Ambuja was that while settling controversies and disagreements between seniors, neither Vinod Babu or Narotamji nor Suresh Babu were critical about the role or conduct of any colleague. I believe that this approach by the promoters was probably the best source of inspiration for Team Ambuja to excel.

Besides learning the true virtues of life, it was my good fortune to have been personally associated with Vinod Babu. I will cherish for the rest of my life the fond memories I have of his sagacity and kindness.

B L Taparia  
Ambuja Cement colleague

*Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures*

Albert Einstein



Time to tie the knot! Vinod at the Ganesh Puja being performed during Harsh's wedding

I have known Vinod since 1965. We were all young then and carefree, and did not really recognize what life held out for us. But youth has its own reasons to be happy! I was senior to him in college and had met him and Suresh in their Canning Street office. That's how we became friends. We were a gang of four: there was Vinod, Lalit Toolsidass, Chandar Kanoria and me. Vinod had a very kind heart and a great ability to mix with everyone. We used to go for coffee at seven in the morning and spend a lot of our time in animated 'adda' sessions. He knew I was a polo player. So we spoke a lot about sports and polo. He always invited me to celebrations happening in his home, be it weddings or parties that marked the birth of his children or musical soirées that were hosted by his family. Krishna Bhabi was extremely hospitable. Those were such wonderful days when I look back. I miss Vinod greatly.

Bapi (Avijit) Mukherjea  
College friend



Vinod in London with a friend



A grandchild arrives! Gayatri, Gautam, Harsh, Madhu, Suresh, Janki Prasadji holding baby Priyanka, Smriti, Bhagirathi Bai, Vinod, Krishna, Shraddha and Bimla



I have known Vinod since 1948. We got admitted together in Class Three at Hindi High School and since then it has been a journey of friendship and togetherness. In my life I have yet to see a greater human being. His generosity and empathy for all those who came in touch with him are qualities that cannot be expressed in mere words. He was a godfather to countless individuals from all walks of life. His capacity to give was admirable but he was also an astute judge of people. However, if he found that the person was truly needy, he would go out of his way to help him and his family.

I had an opportunity to work with him in Ambuja Cement and I remember that he had great foresight about the affairs of the company, especially about taxation matters. His ability to take everyone's opinion through in-depth discussions before arriving at any decision was exemplary. He could predict what was going to happen and take necessary precautions. If Vinod said that something had to be done, it was the last word; nobody in office could dare to oppose it. He was completely devoted to his work – an unequivocal workaholic!

Generous and jovial by nature, everybody respected him. Vinod was fifteen days younger to me. We were both born in 1939. But it was his destiny to go before me. I miss him all the time. Even today, when I have a problem, he comes into my dreams and continues to live in my heart.

C K Kanoria  
School friend and colleague






I knew Vinod Neotia, whom I called Bhaiji, extremely well and words cannot express the depth of our association. He was a gem of a human being, both loving and caring. He worked hard for the good of the family and remained jovial and generous in all situations. Despite his health issues, he persisted on being strong, with an iron will, till the very end. He always called me Dipu with great affection. I will miss him greatly and cherish the moments we shared together.

Dipak Poddar  
Cousin

*Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is  
still dark*

Rabindranath Tagore





*Every heart sings a song, incomplete,  
until another heart whispers back.*

*Those who wish to sing always  
find a song. At the touch of a lover  
everyone becomes a poet*

Plato



As two families become one: at the wedding reception of Smriti and Gautam



Shraddha's wedding reception in Delhi

*That's what I consider true generosity:*

Shraddha and Manish get hitched! 'The highest happiness on earth is the happiness of marriage.'



*You give your all and yet you always feel as if it cost you nothing*

Simone De Beauvoir

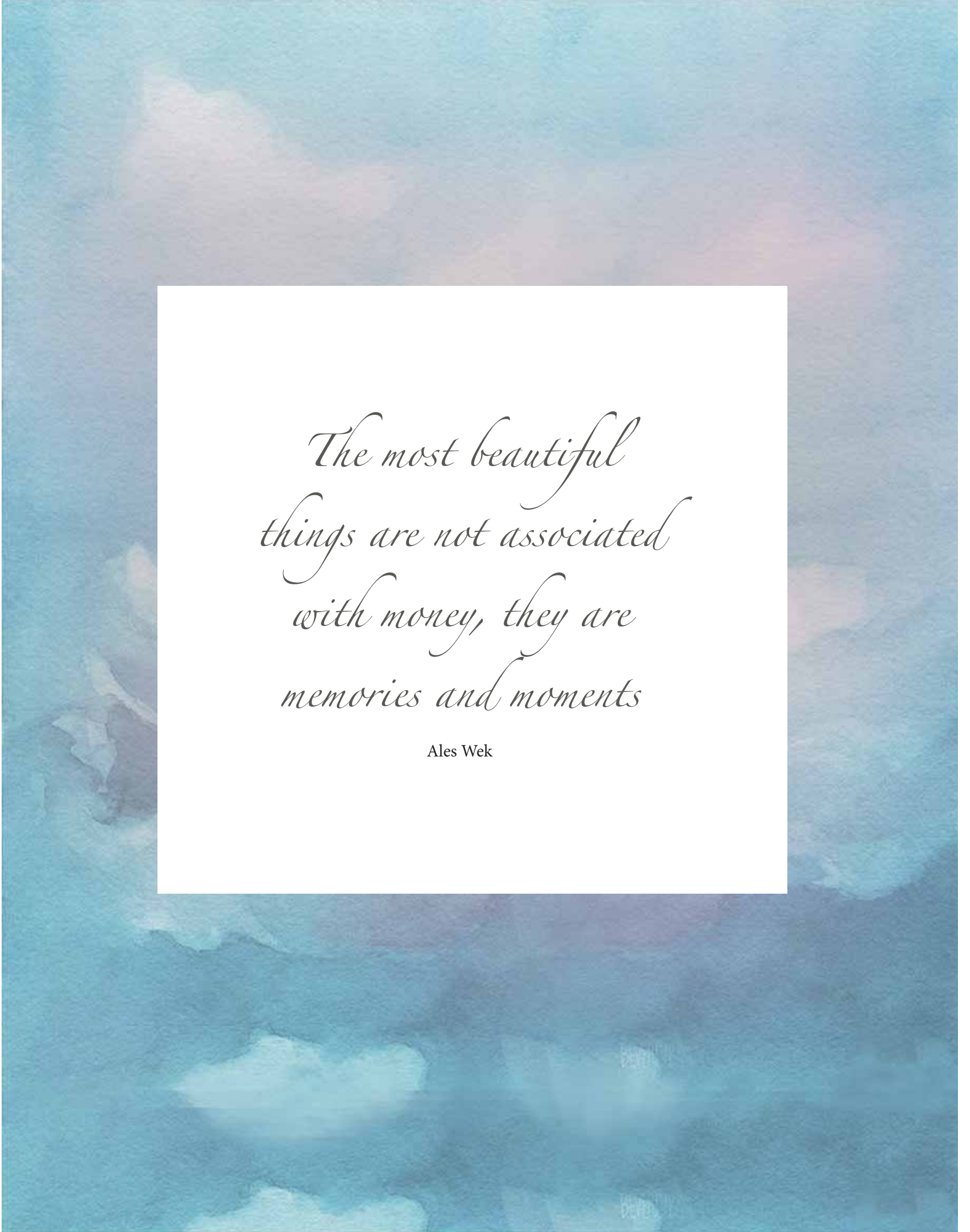


Badhaai ho! Bimla and Vinod



Forever-waala love: some candid moments from Shradha and Manish's wedding





*The most beautiful  
things are not associated  
with money, they are  
memories and moments*

Ales Wek



Vinodbhai was larger than life in every way and could walk into a room and own it. I looked up to and felt inspired by him. When he spoke to you, he made you feel incredibly important, as if you were the only person in that room he was talking to. He was superb company, with the most remarkable sense of humour. His laughter was infectious and he would have everyone laugh with him. And that special sparkle in his eyes went far deeper than mere surface attention. He was a father, raising his wonderful children; a grandfather, head over heels in love with his grandchildren; a husband, sharing a wonderful life with his wife.

Vinodbhai was a leader of Indian industry, and yet he had time for anyone seeking his advice and helping those who needed his assistance, without ever mentioning it to anyone. Even on some occasions when he visited the US, he made time to get in touch with me and shared his thoughts and wisdom that gave me a different perspective on several issues.

From Vinodbhai I learnt that the strongest people are those who do not display their strength in front of others but win battles we know nothing about. He taught me that the only way to stay sane in this world was by being true to oneself, without an iota of sugar-coating. His quiet spirituality inspired many to seek him out. He taught me the lost values of loyalty and tradition – things scarcely found in our day-to-day life today. I have aspired higher only because he inspired me, as I am sure he has done to several others. Though we may miss his immediate presence, he is always with us. Thank you for being such an exemplary role model and for motivating me to set the bar higher!

Harsha Toolsidass  
Family friend



To grow and succeed in life, healthy relationships are of utmost importance. Relationships that enrich our lives; whose moments and memories we cherish forever. We all have a bunch of people who are our ‘constants,’ people who have been with us through thick and thin. One such relationship, and perhaps the most important, is the one we share with our father. Whether through their presence or absence, they always hold a special place in our hearts. Like everyone else, I too had a deep emotional connection with my father. He was fondly called ‘Barot Saheb’ by everyone, including me. He was not very educated and neither was he rich, but he had a tremendous amount of experience culled from life. He gave me strong principles to live by and a broader perspective and practical way to lead my life. I had read somewhere, ‘Sometimes the poorest man leaves his children with the richest inheritance.’ It couldn’t be truer for me. During the darkest hours of my life after my father passed away, I only had one person who supported me and gave me a shoulder to lean on. He simply put his arms around me and said, ‘Don’t worry. I’m still here for you.’ That person was Vinod Babu, my foster father!

After my father, Vinod Babu has been the guiding light in my life. He was the father-figure who made me what I am today. Our relationship transcended the limitations of just ‘employee’ and ‘employer’ and I give all credit to his virtues and values that enabled us to share such a special connection. It was his love, care, empathy, compassion, kindness, warmth, honesty, a unique sense of humour, his ability to give himself completely and a million other things that made our bond strong. I was merely a seeker and this ‘master-protégé’ association has been the most enriching and valuable relationship that I cherish. Now when I contemplate, I realize why this connection was special – he believed in me. No matter what the odds, he trusted me. That was his greatest gift. And, perhaps, that is the reason why so many people continue to love him and hold him in reverence. He didn’t tell me how to live; he lived his life in an exemplary manner and let me watch and learn. You’ll easily find his photograph on my desk and every time I see him behind the frame, I feel the phone will soon ring and he’ll be on the other end of the line asking me his usual question, ‘Harshad, kaisey ho?’

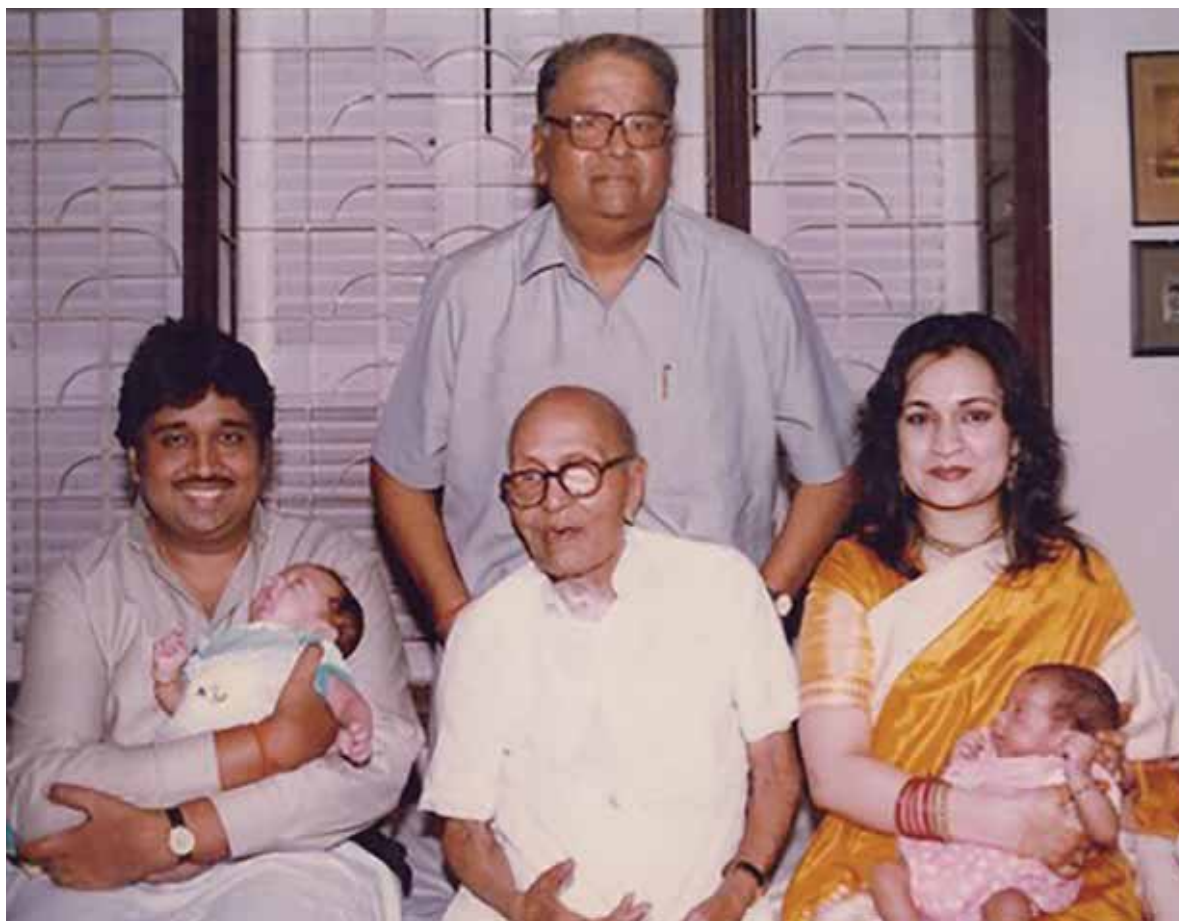
We had this telepathic way of understanding one another. He was the promoter-director – my boss – but he took a genuine interest in me and my family. Whenever he was in Gujarat for business, we used to travel together. We both liked chatting about life and people and relationships. He shared his stories, I shared mine and we often found each other misty-eyed, followed by moments of utter silence. Even in our quietness, we were on the same page! I learned a great deal from Vinod Babu. Knowingly or unknowingly, he taught me all the important and useful lessons of life. In the world of business obsessed with sales, targets, performances and numbers, very few organizations are capable of looking beyond. Where businesses are often performance-centric, Vinod Babu created a culture that was people-centric. Ask anyone from our former Ambuja Cement team and they will all confirm that the years they spent with Vinod Babu were the most amazing in their lives.

When I got to know that he was no more, I was devastated yet again. I felt as if I was exposed; as if my armour had come off; as if I was helpless and in an unknown territory. Not a day has gone by without my remembering him. It is fascinating how your relationship with a single person can transform your life.

As it is said in *Tuesdays With Morrie*, the memoirs of Mitch Albom, ‘Death ends a life, not a relationship.’ I’ll continue to have Vinod Babu with me in spirit, etched in fond memories. I know his blessings are always with me. I also had the privilege of knowing his family, and I have nothing but immense love and affection for Krishnaji and Harsh Babu, who embodies his father’s values. Vinod Babu would have been very proud of him today.

*Zindagi, kaisee hai paheli haaye!  
Kabhi to hansaaye, kabhi ye rulaaye...*

Yogesh



Bundles of joy! (L to R) Harsh with baby Parthiv, Vinod (standing), Janki Prasadji and Madhu with baby Paroma





*Children are the  
rainbow of life.  
Grandchildren are  
the pot of gold*

An Irish Blessing



I first met Vinodbhai when I visited Kolkata soon after my sister's marriage to Lalit Toolsidass, Vinodbhai's best friend. To me, then eleven years old and standing not even five feet tall, he, with his imposing height of six feet one inch, seemed impossibly larger than life! I was soon to discover, having been thoroughly spoilt by him and Krishna-bhabi, that his heart was even bigger. How it could be contained in his frame, large though it was, seemed a mystery.

Vinodbhai was a man of few words. He didn't need words to express himself; his twinkling eyes did all the talking. It is said that a picture paints a thousand words. Vinodbhai's eyes painted a million! That, combined with a tiny, mischievous smile and his delightful wit, said enough to convey his thoughts.

I started my career as an officer at ICICI, which was then a development finance institution. Vinodbhai graciously asked me what I thought about the cement industry. He was planning an investment in Gujarat Ambuja, later to become a profitable and large company. With my limited knowledge, I told him that it was difficult to brand cement or derive a large benefit from it. What I had not realized, which I did later, was that cement was an industry which was not technologically disruptive. Therefore, a well-managed cement company could survive whilst other industries had to continually keep pace with technology. It was a valuable lesson given to me by Vinodbhai.

Once I had gone to thank him for a favour, and his response remains etched in my mind for the wisdom it contained. He said, 'Don't thank me, there is no need. Do someone a favour – it's a circle of life!' That was a valuable lesson I learnt at a young age.

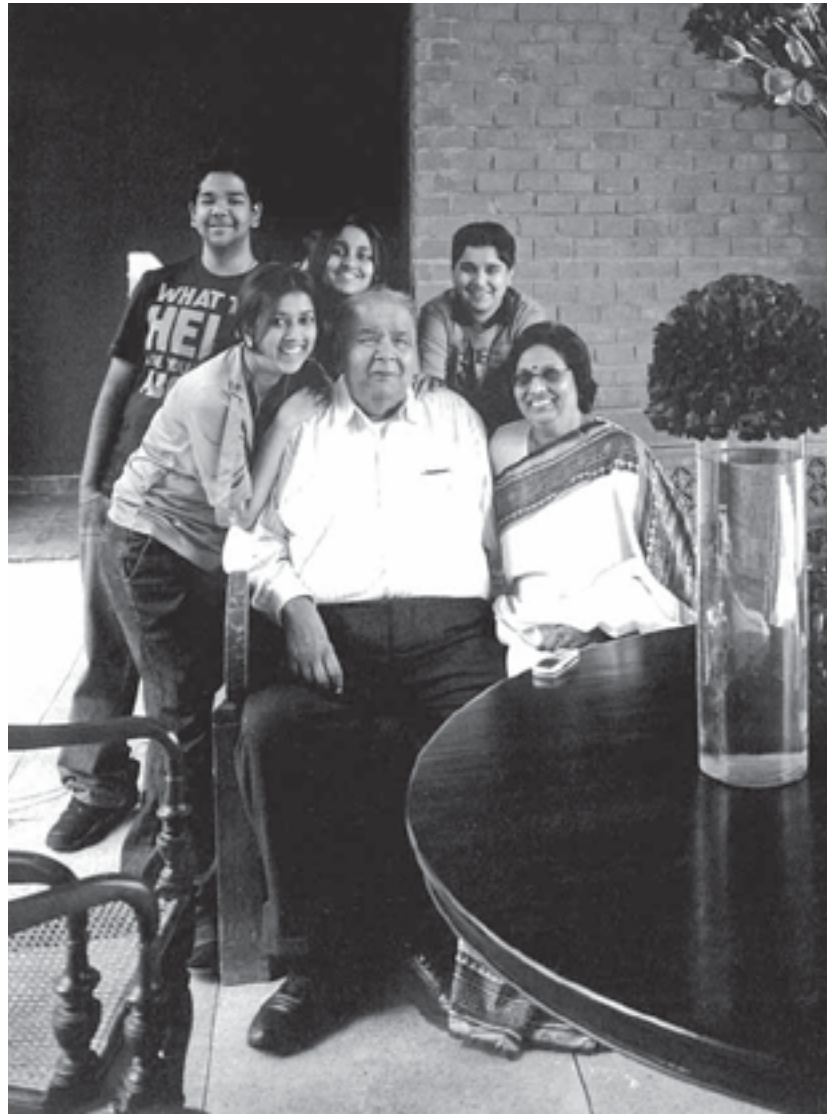
Vinodbhai had a lovely sense of humour. Fond of Paan Paraag, which my sister called 'gunpowder', he had a box in his hand at a transit halt at the Beirut airport. At the time, Beirut was plagued by civil war and security was tight. A guard with a machine gun asked Vinodbhai what the box contained, and he said 'gunpowder!' without a thought. The situation suddenly became tense as machine guns were swiftly raised, when Vinodbhai calmly opened the box and scooped some Paan Paraag into his mouth! I doubt if anyone else would have had his wits around him at such a volatile moment.

With his patent smile and the ever-present twinkle in the eye, Vinodbhai also had a wonderful way of presenting an alternative viewpoint. My sister, Purnima Toolsidass, was religious and once commented that it was wrong for a person to smoke when he was praying. Vinodbhai was quick to lay the trap! He asked, 'But is it okay for a person to pray when he is smoking?' 'Yes, of course,' said my sister. 'Then what's the difference?' asked Vinodbhai. For me, it was a lesson taught through an amusing story – of how to look at things from different perspectives.

I have learnt a lot from Vinodbhai through the simplest of communications, using just a few words. A large man, with a large heart and larger wisdom is how I remember Vinodbhai.

A gem of a person. They don't make them like that any more.

Jawahir Mulraj  
Family friend



*An hour with  
your grandchildren  
can make you feel  
young again*

Gene Perret



My first memory of Vinod Uncle goes back during the late eighties when we were invited to the family home in Queen's Park for Diwali celebrations. I remember being in awe of the size of the house and garden. Vinod Uncle, to me, came across as very approachable, well-loved and respected by all who knew him. He had an excellent sense of humour and kept everyone in splits of laughter.

As the years went by, the friendship between our families grew closer and we would meet quite often, especially during Diwali and the annual Gulabaris that were hosted by the Neotia family. My father and Vinod Uncle would meet frequently to discuss business and finance – subjects that they were experts at, and also engage in friendly conversation. One could not help notice the chemistry between them and how well they got along with one another.

Vinod Uncle had a way with people and this was evident during one of his visits to London at a time when my sister and I were there for our higher studies. He very graciously took us out for a lunch and a movie to Oxford Street and Leicester Square. And everywhere we went – be it a restaurant or a shop – he always used his wit to get along with people.

I will never forget the support and care he gave us at the time my father passed away. Vinod Uncle was our pillar of strength and with us through those difficult times. During my sister's wedding, which took place a few months after my father's demise, he stood in as a father figure and gave us boundless support in the wedding preparations.

My memories of Vinod Uncle are filled with admiration, respect and gratefulness for all that he did for me and my family. The support and understanding which he showed will live on in our hearts and minds.

Kaizad Rabadi  
Family friend's son



Moments to cherish! (L to R) Madhu, Vinod, Shraddha and Krishna



Vinod and Krishna with Sarla and Basant Kumar Birla at Queen's Park

Vinod Bhaiya, as we knew him, was warm, gentle and extremely affectionate. On one occasion we were all in London at the same time. The world then was simpler, without mobile phones. We had an appointment to meet him at Harrods. Somehow, we could not find each other. So we returned to our apartment and after 15 minutes got a call on our land line. Vinod Bhaiya was on the other end, enquiring when would we be reaching Harrods where he had been waiting for us all this while. We mentioned that we had already been there and were unable to find him. He asked us to come back if we could, as he was trying to buy some dresses for Shraddha and needed help!

We will always remember him as a person who was so delightfully down to earth and had a perennial smile.

Lekha & Ranjan Poddar  
Cousins

From one generation to another: Janki Prasadji and Vinod at Queen's Park



*There are those who give little of the much which they  
have — and they give it for recognition and their hidden  
desire makes their gifts unwholesome.*

*And there are those who have little and give it all.  
These are the believers in life and the bounty of life,  
and their coffer is never empty*

Khalil Gibran



I remember the great love and affection our fathers had for each other and knew that my mother would recollect it in the best possible manner. So I forwarded your email to her and here is what she wrote so eloquently, summing up your Papa and what he meant to our family:

‘For Vinod Neotia, the most valuable assets were his friends. He told your father, “Nandu, I am giving my son a most precious item as his dowry – a list of my friends which is the most costly piece in my life.” He truly lived up to this asset in every way. When the Company accepted your father’s resignation, Vinod promptly offered him a job. But your father wanted to move to Delhi although he didn’t know what he would do to keep himself busy. On Vinod’s first visit to our home he arrived with a computer and said, “Nandu, this is for you to work on and start a job as a headhunter.”

During both yours and Sonia’s wedding, he arranged for the caterers for the mehndi and chura ceremonies. It is difficult to spell out all the occasions when Vinod and Krishna were by our side. That is what he was for all his friends – ever loyal and ever smiling.’

Nandita Parshad  
Family friend’s daughter



*Life is beautiful. It's about giving. It's about family*

Walt Disney



The home and the world:  
Vinod at  
Queen's Park  
and at an office  
function



Ever since I joined Ambuja Neotia Group way back in 1994, if there's one person who could be aptly described as the 'soul' of the organization, it would be none other than Late Shri Vinod Neotia. Penning down my thoughts on Vinod Babu now gives me both sorrow and joy in equal measure. Vinod Babu's organizational skills, professionalism and kindness created an environment that was enjoyable to work in. He emanated warmth and affection in his words and deeds and made each member feel valued and important. He was also witty, with a great sense of humour. An adorable man whom you could respect and love easily.

Vinod Babu was modest and unpretentious, putting passion to work above else. I still remember his tutelage whenever we had to discuss about financial figures. He used to ask me to close the files and then talk to him. This was his way of teaching me the importance of remembering crucial statistics, including the various nuances. He was very sharp at costing and his knowledge on taxation was also phenomenal. He would always consult with experts and took a lot of people into confidence, seeking their opinion, before arriving at his decision. I also remember he was aware that I played golf on Sundays and would tee off at 6.30 in the morning. Thus, I always found him calling me at 9 O'clock and reconfirmed that I had finished with my game before getting down to talking about work.

I am forever indebted to him for his mentoring and loving guidance, ever more since I joined the healthcare wing in 2003. I am doubtless in saying that the culture inducted by Vinod Babu in Bhagirathi Neotia Woman and Child Care Centre was unimaginable! His motto: 'Take care of the Nursing team and it will do a world of good to you' has been a commandment for us to follow and actually helped to turn the hospital around. A humanitarian by heart and soul, he never thought of commercials while helping the economically disadvantaged patients in the hospital. His advice to us was to give back in full measure to the society. No wonder till this day, all my senior nurses and doctors keep alive his memory like a guardian angel and follow his ideals of love, compassion, commitment towards work and service to people.

Vinod Babu was generous to a fault. He loved feeding people and would frequently call us home for elaborate breakfasts, playing the perfect host one can imagine. He taught me to approach life with a lot of zest. In office, his door was always open. Because of him the organization felt like a community. We felt a sense of protection and comfort when we were with him. His personality reflected that of a father, a mother as well as that of a boss. He redefined my ideas about leadership and power.

I feel blessed to have worked with Shri Vinod Neotia, our leader, mentor and, above all, a human being sans pareil.

P L Mehta  
BNWCCC colleague

My first recollection of Vinod Uncle is of him having a serious discussion with my father at home way back in 1979. That year we were invited to Queen's Park where we saw this most gorgeous Irish Setter puppy. My sister and I spent all our time playing with him. A few days later Vinod Uncle gifted us the Irish Setter. This was Vinod Uncle – spontaneously generous.

Uncle was instrumental in convincing my father that I should become a Chartered Accountant and get a post-graduate degree in Business Management. When the CA final results were announced, I met with Dad who was with Uncle discussing office work. I touched Uncle's feet to get his blessings. He gave me a very warm hug, congratulated me and spoke with me about my future plans. This was Vinod Uncle – a person who had genuine interest in the good of the people close to him.

Almost as a ritual, I would meet Uncle thrice a week to apprise him of what was happening at work. Every meeting would be part business and the rest about personal matters and anecdotes. He would keep reminding me about his five golden rules of doing business: (1) Your most valuable possession is your reputation (2) Ethics is everything in business (3) Try and be the best in whatever you do (4) Be generous, both in personal and business decisions you take (5) Lead by example. I was associated with Uncle for twenty-two years. His rules continue to guide me in what I do at work and I cannot thank him enough. This was Vinod Uncle – my mentor, my guide.

In the early 90's Macmet was over-stretched for money and we desperately needed a substantial amount to implement a project. The only person I could go to was Uncle. I thought he would be very upset that we had over-stretched ourselves. After hearing me patiently for a couple of minutes, he asked me only one question: 'If I lend you this money, will you be able to pay it back to me in a year's time?' More out of need than belief, I said 'Yes'. His reply: 'Then I will expect a cheque one year from today. So ensure that this happens.' A year later I took the cheque to him. The only thing he said was, 'I knew you would return the cheque and that's why I gave you the money.' This was Vinod Uncle – he had deep trust in people.

On the personal front, he was a close confidant. I could speak out my heart to him. In 1993, Vidya and I decided to get married. He asked for Vidya to meet with him. He had a long chat with her about our family, my involvement in work and the close relationship our families had. In November 1994 Vidya and I married. For all the love and affection Uncle had for us, we wanted him, along with my father, to be a witness at our wedding. This was Vinod Uncle – a man with a golden heart.

During my meetings with him he never failed to enquire about Vidya and our children. He took special interest in what they did. He called Vidya one day, wanting to visit us at home. He and Krishna Aunty spent an entire afternoon with us. Our son, Viraj, was playing golf at the national level. He went through all his news clippings and certificates with pride. He showed equal interest in our daughter Bhavna's swimming and basketball achievements. This was Vinod Uncle – a person who genuinely cared.

We miss his visits to our home where his standard food request would be a masala omelette and coffee. When Uncle passed away, Dad and I were heartbroken. As a family, we miss Uncle dearly and cherish all the wonderful moments we spent together. My lasting memory of him is of the most benevolent and soft hearted giant, sitting in his ground floor bedroom, eating paan masaala and regaling me with his stories. This was Vinod Uncle – someone who touched our hearts and lives forever.



'Life is the flower for which love is the honey'



RKBK

32, CHOWRINGHEE ROAD,  
CALCUTTA-71.

सो तरे <sup>गुजरे</sup> २३६ स विवाग हार  
बुजरे ।

वान्धों मे <sup>अपने</sup> २५००० के अपना  
मजार गुजरे ।

सो हें ११ २१२ में विलवा  
२० २५६२ मजाकेकल ।

२॥३६ इमी नरूपसे,  
२०० दिग अहार गुजरे ।

अहली हुई घेनदिपा बुजरे हुपे  
विजरे ।

वो ई तो पार उतरे,

वो २ तो पार गुजरे ।



*I will love the light for it shows me the way,  
yet I will endure the darkness  
because it shows me the stars*

O G Mandino



I have a strong feeling that Vinod Babu had worked out how life unfolds. Most of us try, but more often than not, fail to understand life's vagaries. We use our reasoning to think things out or resort to prayers or philosophic homilies. Several times in our daily lives we even attempt to manipulate and be clever. But in the long run, none of these work. However, Vinod Babu had figured it all out. He was clever in a very different way – entirely devoid of manipulations and never, ever petty. He was a rare combination of wisdom and intelligence. I have a feeling that he could have been, if he set his mind to it, a great spiritual teacher or a celebrated life coach. He knew how to turn every single disadvantage into an advantage. He had figured out that in giving, one ends up receiving far more than what one has bequeathed. He was generous; he helped people in all sorts of ways – materially, emotionally or by providing appropriate advice if needed. And most of them acknowledged and remembered the favour.

Vinod Babu was truly a rich man – rich in all respects. For only a rich and generous man with a heart as large as his could give so unstintingly with both hands, knowing that life always offers back much more.

Pawan Gupta  
Nephew





*A single rose  
can be my  
garden... a  
single friend,  
my world*

Leo Buscaglia

When Harsh asked me to write my reminiscences about Vinodbhai, I told Krishna-bhabi that people will think I am guilty of gross exaggeration. A close friendship spanning over forty-nine years has enriched me beyond words. The close association with this childhood friend of my husband, who also became my friend, enabled me to see aspects of his integral nature. Vinodbhai got married before I did, so when I came to Calcutta in early 1961, I was befriended by Krishna-bhabi as well. To convince the reader that I am not guilty of hyperbole, I take recourse to the confirmation of the Gita. No one who knew Vinodbhai even a little will dispute the comparisons I make.

The Gita starts with ‘Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre...’, ‘Dharmakshetra’ meaning the field of righteousness and ‘Kurukshetra,’ denoting the field of action. According to the *Jabala Upanishad*, ‘That which is known as Kurukshetra is a place of sacrifice to the gods by people of divine disposition, and it is an abode of Brahman to all creatures.’ Vinodbhai’s life was a ‘dharma kshetra’ that unfolded in a modern-day Kurukshetra where his whole mindset subsisted to make others happy, to extend help, to spread cheer and give comfort.

That does not mean that Vinodbhai was a saint! Far from it; he had as many failings as any other human being. He was certainly not a saint but he did have some very saintly qualities. His intelligence, wisdom, non-delusional and forgiving personality, his remaining non-injurious by thought, word or deed, and his calm, content and charitable disposition are, indeed, the different states of living beings that spring from Sri Krishna. ‘Whichever entity is endowed with majesty and prosperity, and is energetic, know them as being born from a part of My power’, says the Lord in the Bhagvad Gita. Yet, ironically, Vinodbhai never took the trouble to study the Gita or any other spiritual philosophy. Nevertheless, a complete absence of fear, a heart free of worldly considerations and ever charitable, having reverence for Bhagwan, the Devtas and elders, enduring discomfort in the course of doing one’s duty – these were prominent traits in Vinodbhai’s life. He was the most dependable person anyone could find, especially in times of trouble. I don’t think anyone ever saw even a flicker of arrogance or vanity in him. He was quick to turn the topic whenever anyone tried to thank or praise him. His inherent qualities would, no doubt, have been nurtured by the influence of his grandfather, Janaki Babu, of whom he was extremely fond. He was also sentimental about the memory of his mother – who he called Bai – reading Tulsidas’s *Ramayana* aloud when he was a child. However helpful these factors may have been, they would never suffice in making Vinodbhai the extraordinary person he was.

It was my good fortune that my husband and Vinodbhai had been good friends since their schooldays. Luck (a pseudonym for God) was with me, because Krishna-bhabi and I became close friends as well. The four of us were practically inseparable from 1961 until about 1980, when Vinodbhai began to travel extensively as business expanded. So close was the bond that a well-known astrologer once told Vinodbhai and my husband, ‘You are husband and wife!’ This bond between us remained unbroken until he left us in December 2009. It was as though a vital part of my life was over.

I have never seen a brother as devoted as Vinodbhai was to Sureshbhai. Vinodbhai’s total devotion to his brother cannot be explained by mere logic. In fact, I believe that I am the only one to actually quarrel with him because he had no compunction in sacrificing not only his own, but also the wishes of his wife and children to honour Sureshbhai’s slightest whim. Being a hot-headed idealistic fool, I took up the cudgels on their behalf. Krishna-bhabi was too giving a wife in my opinion and I felt that as a friend I should speak up. All to no avail. When it came to what pleased Sureshbhai, nothing else was given priority. I could just as well have quarreled with Shri Rama for sacrificing Sitaji at the words of a dhobi!

Vinodbhai’s uncanny empathy with whoever he encountered is something many people will confirm.

He instinctively knew when a person was troubled. I don’t know what power he had, but he was always able to help, both practically and emotionally. His inimitable style and humour will be well remembered by one and all. I

recall my husband telling me how he used to control bullies at school by threatening to sit on them! Even as a young boy, Vinodbhai was big built and overweight. He was a large man, in every sense of the word, and his heart was as enormous as that of any Mahatma.

On one visit to Queen's Park I found Vinodbhai unusually sad. 'I did something very bad today,' he said, as I went to sit next to him.

'What?'

'I had gone to my school where I am on the board. The darwan spoke very rudely for no reason. I got angry and told him who I was. The poor man started shaking in his shoes, thinking he would be sacked. I shouldn't have done that.'

I wondered if even one person in a crowd of thousands would have felt such remorse for an incident so trivial. But that was the humane quality so typical of Vinodbhai. And then, of course, there was the irrepressible, eternal naughty boy!

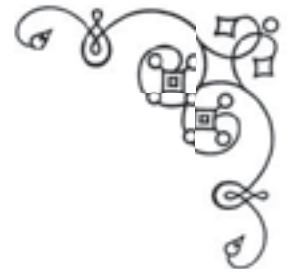
We'd gone to a favourite restaurant once. My hair was tied in a bun covered with a net, as was the style in those days. Vinodbhai sat on the extreme left, a friend in the middle, with me on the extreme right of the sofa along the wall, while the others were seated on the opposite side. As I walked out feeling content and replete, I heard the people behind me giggle. Vinodbhai's face held an expression of great innocence – misleading to the extreme. Something tickled my neck. I put up my hand and found it was a toothpick. Everyone had a good laugh at my expression, Vinodbhai most of all, when I found that he had decorated my hairnet with toothpicks as we ate, unaware of his long arm and deft fingers busy behind my back.

I cannot even begin to narrate Vinodbhai's solid support during my involvement in animal welfare activities. I went to Queen's Park one day, feeling very depressed. I had read Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* that described the process in the slaughter houses in the USA and other advanced countries. With his magical manner of drawing people out Vinodbhai asked me what was troubling me, and tearfully I told him. He did not say a word. But I was comforted by his silent empathy. That very day he gave up the use of leather. And then there was his unstinting reverence for Premaji Pandurang. Her slightest wish was his command. I wouldn't be surprised if she were to say that she has never had a devotee who could compare with Vinodbhai. The authenticity of his love for her was such that he never hesitated to point out anything he felt was detrimental to her interest, even at the risk of her displeasure.

Vinodbhai's magnanimity led him to knowingly allow people to take advantage of his generosity. I confess that this also made me very indignant. 'Let it be,' he'd say. 'I know what's happening and I don't mind. Why should you?' To which I had no answer.

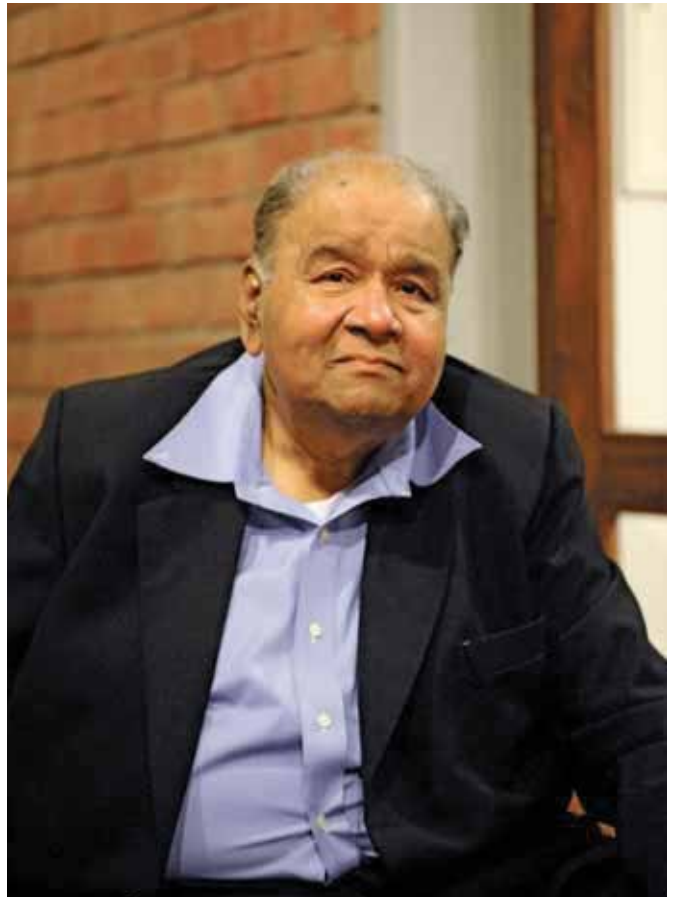
For those who understood this amazing human being, Vinodbhai stands forever tall as an ideal model. Among his numerous wonderful traits was the ability to truly listen. He listened with sympathy, understanding and great patience when anyone had a problem. Many are the lessons I've learnt by watching his skillful handling of difficult people. He was fully aware of their hypocrisy; he was no fool, but he was immensely tolerant of human flaws. And the respect he showed to womenfolk was exemplary. Singularly devoid of ego, he would chat with equal friendliness with a servant, peon, businessman, a celebrity or a religious preacher. He had a brilliant brain concealed behind a modest demeanour. There have been several occasions when I took up some issue with him, and I never failed to admire his easy acceptance in admitting his fault.

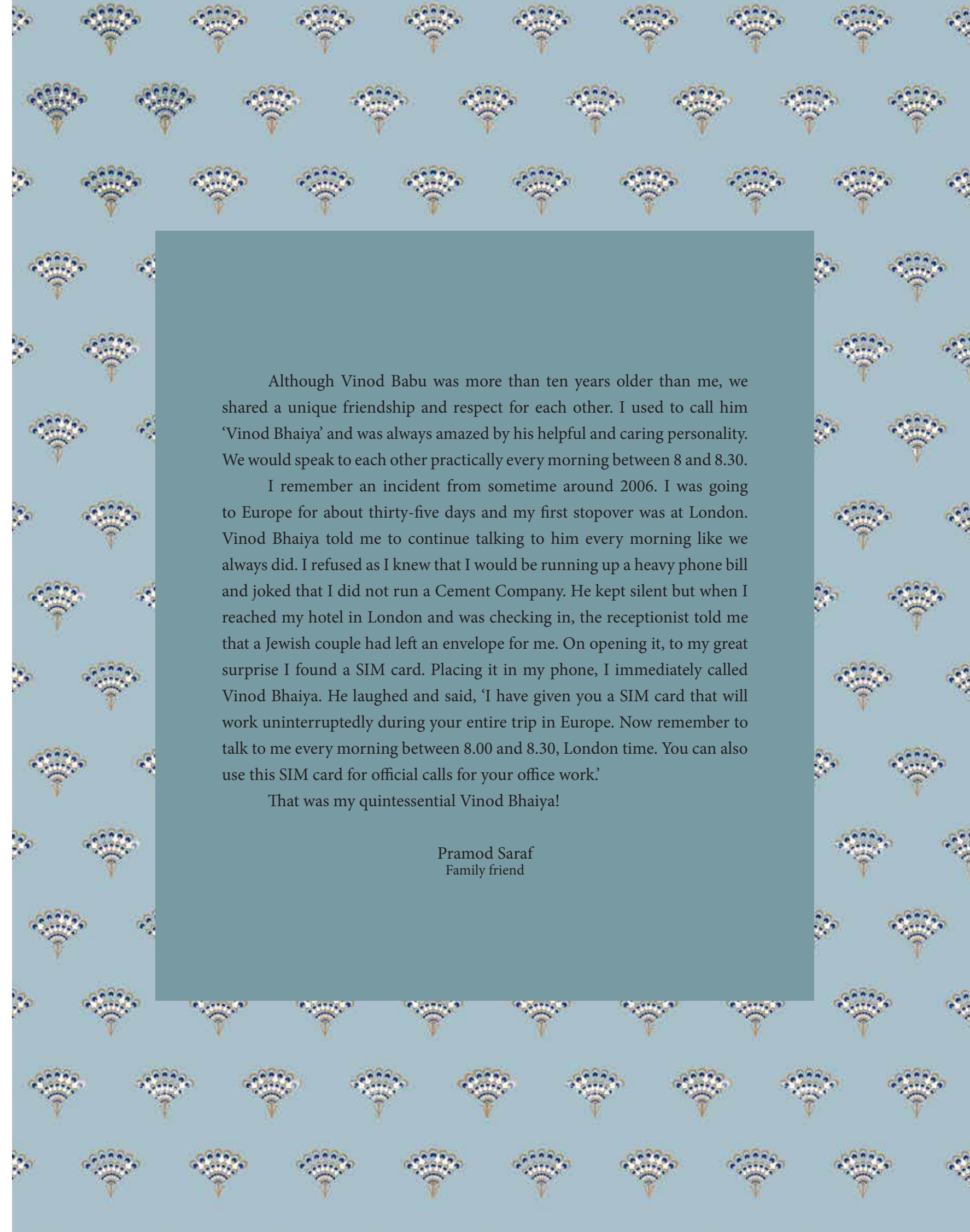




*Zindagi ek safar hai suhaana  
Yahaan kal kya ho kisney jaana...  
Chaand taaron se chalna hai aagey  
Asmaanon se badna hai aagey  
Pichhey reh jaayega yeh zamaana  
Yahaan kal kya ho kisney jaana...*

Hasrat Jaipuri





Although Vinod Babu was more than ten years older than me, we shared a unique friendship and respect for each other. I used to call him 'Vinod Bhaiya' and was always amazed by his helpful and caring personality. We would speak to each other practically every morning between 8 and 8.30.

I remember an incident from sometime around 2006. I was going to Europe for about thirty-five days and my first stopover was at London. Vinod Bhaiya told me to continue talking to him every morning like we always did. I refused as I knew that I would be running up a heavy phone bill and joked that I did not run a Cement Company. He kept silent but when I reached my hotel in London and was checking in, the receptionist told me that a Jewish couple had left an envelope for me. On opening it, to my great surprise I found a SIM card. Placing it in my phone, I immediately called Vinod Bhaiya. He laughed and said, 'I have given you a SIM card that will work uninterruptedly during your entire trip in Europe. Now remember to talk to me every morning between 8.00 and 8.30, London time. You can also use this SIM card for official calls for your office work.'

That was my quintessential Vinod Bhaiya!

Pramod Saraf  
Family friend

My first introduction to Vinod Bhaisaab was through his dear wife, Krishna Bhabi. He would bring her to my Satsangs and take her back home. I scarcely had a glimpse of him in the crowd – he was inevitably in the last row. Then how did I know he was there? When the Gurudakshina arti thaali was brought to me, there would be a 500 rupee note – the highest denomination in currency those days – which you could not miss. Ramu, my manager, and I would exchange looks, reaffirming that our ‘donor bhaisaab’ was here! His altruism always remained unobtrusive.

After a few years I was asked to offer a Bhagavatam discourse at the Neotia residence in Queen’s Park in Kolkata. That also became an occasion to get to know Bhaisaab at closer quarters. We knew he was interested in helping our charitable trust. When I asked him to become a Trustee in Kshetropasna, he was shy to say ‘yes’ but not unwilling at heart. As a Trustee, all of us in our ashram know that he became a pillar of strength. There was not a single charitable project that he would not initiate or encourage. His benevolent instinct was inspired by his nobility. Among several miracles in my life, here is one I wish to share. It is, as we all know, very hot in summer, both in Andhra and Chennai. I had once told one of my maids that we will offer an air-conditioner to the Tirupati temple to save the Lord’s flowers from fading. The following week took me to Tirupati and strangely enough, the Garden Superintendent met me with a request out of the blue. ‘Madam, please make a cold room for the Lord’s flowers,’ he pleaded. I could not say ‘yes’ and nor did I dare to say ‘no.’ I walked away from the temple after darshan, took out my phone from the car and called Vinod Bhaisaab. His words still ring in my ears: ‘Didi, life is short; lot of good things to do; say yes.’ That is how in the history of Tirumala, Kshetropasna offered the first ‘cold room’ for the Lord’s flowers.

I have a number of incidents etched in my memory. We were in Detroit once when it was pretty cold, particularly for a Madrasi like me! Dear Vinod Bhaisaab and Bhabi were also with us. We were staying in two adjacent apartments. He liked the way I made my morning coffee. So I asked Ramu to give a cup to Bhaisaab and Bhabi. And that is where the whole drama began! He finished a large cup in a trice and demanded a second. Ramu and I were running to and fro, apartment to apartment, like animated cartoon characters to fill his cup with fresh coffee and after downing nearly six to seven, he was only partially satisfied! Bhabiji had to finally cry halt!

From Vinod Bhaisaab I learnt the true definition of a Trustee. His commitment to the ashram was total. He sincerely believed that we should help the poor and the needy. He never threw his weight around on any trustee and was more a humble worker. He felt that I should never stop our good work for society for want of funds. Every month he wanted to know how the ashram was doing. He knew how difficult it was to run an NGO. When I lost him, I also lost a pillar of strength. However, whenever I think of him, several unknown hands from Kolkata help me and the work I do.

I remember the last time I talked to him and enquired about his health. He said he was not well and asked me to come to Kolkata. I told him I would the following morning. But within an hour I got a call to inform me that Bhaisaab was no more. The world suddenly turned dark for me. Sri Krishna had given me a Bada Bhaisaab and taken him away. What cruel lesson was the Lord teaching me? But when I went for the obsequies, the Neotia family asked me to continue to love them as they loved me. This love is unconditional; this love is blessed. It is hard to believe that all these years have passed since Vinod Bhaisaab left us. But he is always in my prayers, in my Katha and in every social project I undertake to serve God and Man.

A sloka comes to my mind:

*Among a hundred, a brave man is born*

*Among a thousand, a scholar is born*

*Among a hundred thousand a speaker is born*

*Whereas whether a giver is born or not remains a question...*

My dearest Vinod Bhai was forever a giver. Of that I am irrefutably certain.

Prema Pandurang  
Spiritual guru



All about  
devotion:  
Krishna and  
Vinod with  
their spiritual  
guru, Prema  
Pandurang

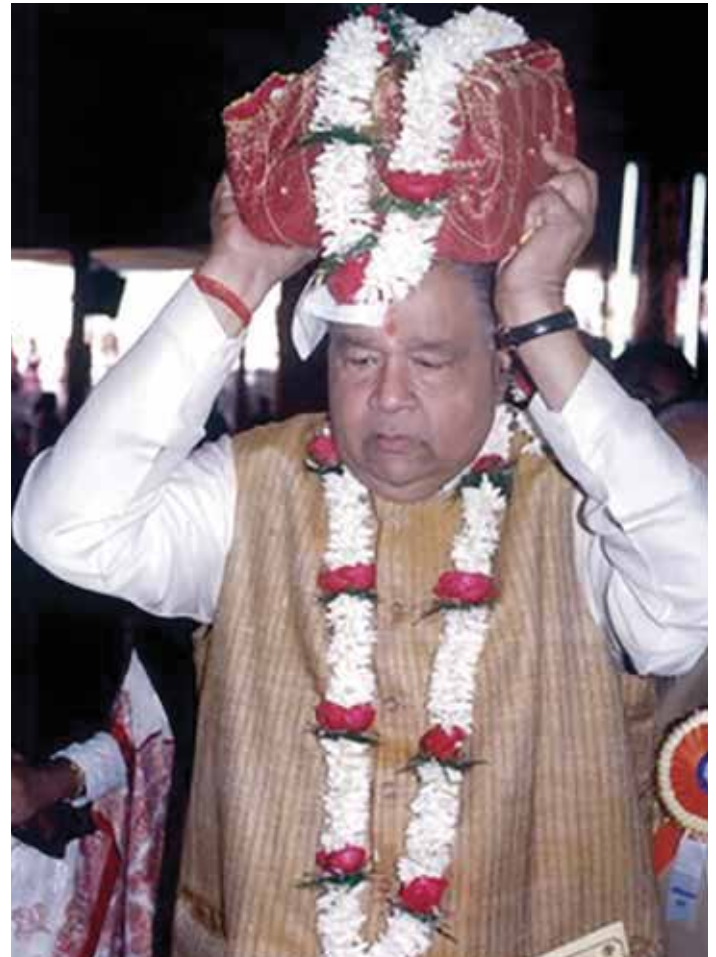




Seeking divine blessings on a visit to Kshetropasna Ashram at Sriperumbudur

*A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service  
and compassion are the things which renew humanity*

Buddha



Vinod and Krishna perform the auspicious Godaan ritual at the Kshetropasna Ashram



*Satha hastha  
samaahara  
sahasra hastha  
samkira*

Atharva Veda



Vinod Babu, will always remain my friend, philosopher and guide. He was senior to me in school but I remember him coming first in discus, shot-put and javelin throw despite his heavy weight. His zeal and positivity was infectious. He was also a good badminton player. But as he found it difficult to render the backhand shot, he turned around and made it into a forehand volley.

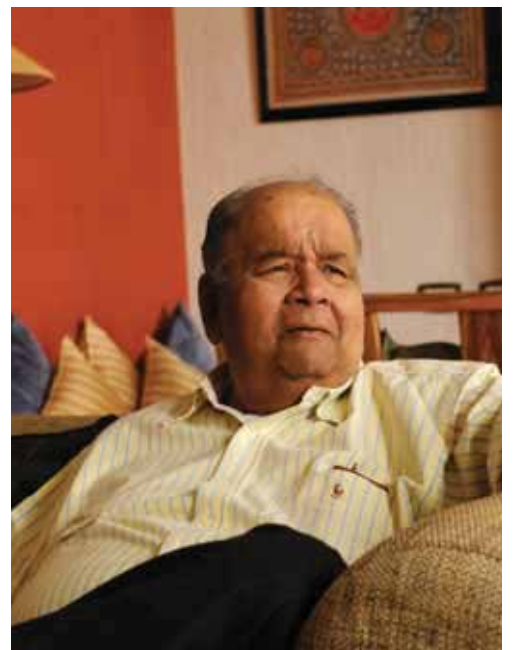
Vinod Babu revived the Hindi High School Old Boys' Association and brought it to a sound financial status. Every year, he would make at least fifty odd calls to remind us to attend the Home-coming meeting, making it a point to stand at the gate to welcome all the old students.

Another episode that comes to mind is about his spirituality. He had no ardent affinity. One day my mother gave him a locket from Tirupati. Years later, Vinod Babu shared with me that the locket had changed his disposition. His commitment to Kshetropasna and Premaji, starting with building the Kolkata chapter, bears testimony to his commitment. Once he took up something, he sincerely worked and achieved what he had set out to do.

I now come to the last day of his life. He was hospitalized but kept working from his hospital bed. He had committed himself to an assignment my son was working on. At around 2 pm, he telephoned Arvind in Singapore and asked whether the work was done. 'Get it done, I don't have much time,' he said. That evening he passed away. That was Vinod Babu's humanity, commitment and love.

Rajeev Goenka  
Nephew





Vinod Babu and I were associated with each other for almost twenty-five years. What struck me most about him was his humility and his complete empathy for others, no matter who they were. I have, over time, seen people accept him as their leader not because of his position but by virtue of his kind and generous heart. He always gave credit to others for their work. His spiritual bent of mind led him to support several charitable and religious institutions and his personal involvement with their growth was remarkable. He gave me the responsibility to help with one such institution. He called me to Kolkata and requested me to take charge of a school that had been close for a couple of years. He gave me complete freedom and resources to rebuild it. The confidence that he put on all those who worked for him was marvelous. He was full of love and kindness for my family, right down to my grandchildren. I miss him and the conversations we often had over the phone at least five times a week, even if it was only for a few minutes.

Ramesh Gupta  
Family friend



दिल दूबे है पा दूजे  
पा वाराण मिर किस्की  
साहित पे <sup>ममर</sup> को है उमराव नही रोवा।

अपने आप कोइ इस कसमे  
आया होगा  
वरना दिभो को मिसमे  
जवापा होगा।

मैं, हमको देखा  
हमको भी तुमको देखा।  
नू जिन ही डार गुजरे  
हम जान डार गुजरे।



*Ek pyaar ka nagma hai, maujo ki rawaani hai  
Zindagi aur kuch bhi nahin, teri-meri kahaani hai*

Santosh Anand





Vinod with Naresh Arya

Why do I cry?  
Why do I mourn?  
I cry not for you  
For me  
I know you have moved on this (our meeting) was  
only a transient stop in your journey  
And mine  
But I miss you my dear  
I miss the stories you told me  
I miss your gentle touch  
I miss your laughter  
I miss your advice  
I miss your hugs  
I miss your unconditional love  
I miss you  
I miss you

Meeta Arya  
Niece

याद आती है तुम्हारी  
बहुत  
कसिसे कहूँ? क्या कहूँ? कैसे कहूँ?  
कौन समझेगा मेरी कशशि?  
क्या रश्मिता था हमारा  
बाप-बेटी का?  
गुरु-शिष्य का?  
या केवल दलि का  
कौन समझेगा?  
तुम्हारी याद .... सर्फ़ आँसुओं से व्यक्त करती हूँ मैं

My wife Meeta and I fondly remember attending Vinod Babu's 50th wedding anniversary celebrations at Raichak, Kolkata in 2009. He and Krishna Mausi had been amongst the fortunate to enjoy fifty glorious years of togetherness filled with a basket of emotions and surprises and had weathered many challenging occasions during their innings with sheer grit, patience, tolerance and love.

Vinod Babu was one person in particular who regularly guided us both on how to live outside one's own echo chambers in a way that few people have the strength or courage to do. He had a very special corner in his heart for Meeta and made no bones about it.

All of us, in some ways, are prisoners in life – stemming from myopic thinking, others by physical and or emotional challenges. But he was able to demonstrate a wonderful ability to face limitation, and then step beyond into a world of realism that was never bogged down by illusionary handicaps and mind created boundaries.

Both of us learned a lot from him and felt privileged to have been able to have enjoyed such a special relationship spanning over nearly three decades. For us, his advice and encouragement at regular intervals made the road less travelled seem like a pleasant walk in the journey of life. His memories remain with us etched in our souls.

Naresh Arya  
Family member



Smriti with  
Vinod and  
Krishna at  
her parents'  
fiftieth wedding  
anniversary  
celebration at  
Raichak



The celebrations continue! Vinod and Krishna with Madhu

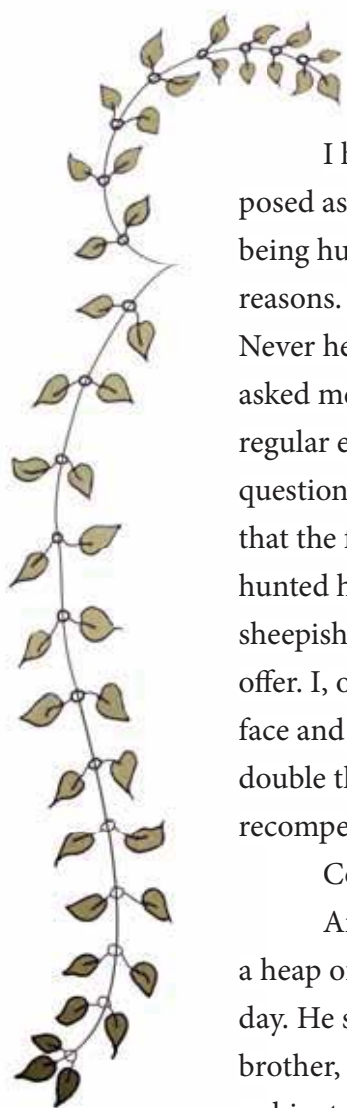
Custodian of a hoary family legacy yet unafraid to chart new courses...  
He received tradition so gently that  
the voice was a whisper – a lesson in the lightness of being...  
Philosophical in approach but brushed with gravity and  
couched in humour that one almost missed,  
if one were not paying attention...  
Humanist but never preaching...  
Giving but embarrassed by any praise for his generosity...  
Gentle, sunny, content, benevolent –  
these virtues were to his manner born...

Rashmi Poddar  
Cousin

I feel very blessed to have got his love like a daughter. Chachji's advice and affection has taught me a lot and brought a profound positive change in my life. The loving nature and warm smile will be missed by all. Chachaji is shining bright in all the people like me whose life he has touched.

Sunita Agarwal  
Family friend





I have profound memories of my association with Vinod Chachaji. Outwardly he posed as a tough man but deep inside he was a very kind-hearted soul, his biggest virtues being humour and patience. He was always helpful to those who approached him with valid reasons. Witty as always, I am reminded of an incident out of the numerous we shared. Never hesitating to sportingly take a joke on his own heavy weight, on one occasion he asked me how I had managed to remain so slim and trim. I mentioned that my recipe was regular exercise and a rigorous massage. He confessed that exercise for him was out of question, but a massage could be worth trying. So I sent my masseur to him, not knowing that the fellow, without batting an eye, would vanish from my life thereafter! Somehow I hunted him down and asked him the reason for his disappearance. He answered rather sheepishly that he had been booked by Vinod Chachaji on a much higher and rewarding offer. I, of course, grumbled to Chachaji about this highjack but he made an innocent face and said that he had only increased the masseur's remuneration as he had to massage double the amount of body surface compared to my size, and therefore it was only fair to recompense the fellow for his extra labour!

Could anybody have any grievances thereafter?

Another incident I recall was when I found him working quite late in his office with a heap of letters to attend. I asked him why he couldn't postpone the work for the following day. He simply said that 'Tiger' (our code name for Suresh Babu, Vinod Chachaji's elder brother, who was a stickler for discipline) was returning to Kolkata the next morning and as his steno was on leave, he had to rush and complete the work.

Both the brothers were shining examples of mutual respect for each other but posed a permanent difference of opinion on all issues without exception! The situation would worsen and erupt when Vinod Chachaji attempted to give an opinion on the subject of art to SKN!

My association with the Neotia family helped me to change my outlook on life and how to work to the best of my ability and seek happiness. I miss Vinod Chachaji's guidance both as a friend and as a guardian. He was a pillar of strength to me with that special, mischievous twinkle in his eye!

S P Saharia  
Family friend



*When we give  
cheerfully and  
accept gratefully,  
everyone is blessed*

Maya Angelou



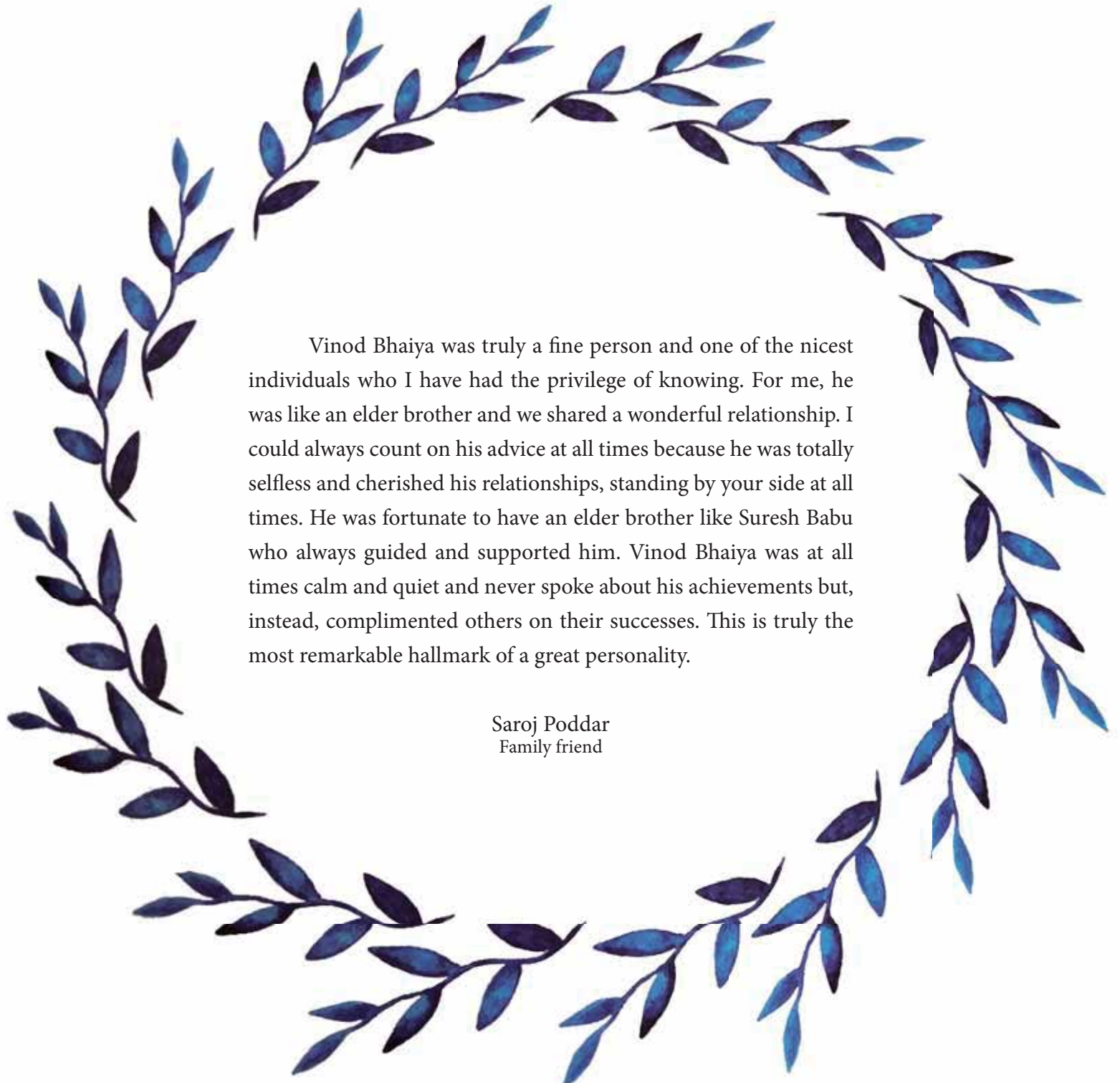
Vinod and Krishna in Cleveland, USA, with Shradha and grandchildren Ishani and Kaartikeya



Vinod Neotiaji was truly a divine person who always spoke the truth. He was simple, benevolent and a human being par excellence. He was a very good brother, an excellent father and husband, and an extremely dear friend. His wit was always underplayed but sharp and he always cracked jokes to lighten the atmosphere and put people at ease. He would pretend to be helpless but was actually very strong and his will always prevailed. His commitment to his elder brother, Suresh Babu, was exemplary. He never ventured into anything without taking Suresh Babu into confidence. That was the beauty of their relationship and he always remained the bridge between outsiders and his brother.

I have to yet meet a person who was as simple as Vinod Babu and yet so kind-hearted and generous. Most approachable, he allowed everybody to reach him without hesitation. I must point out that the Neotia family has always had certain values and ethics that believed in the welfare of society, which has been passed down to the younger generation. They never did business for just profit-making but with a sensitive, human touch. I came to know this family in 1984. Since then, the relationship has grown from strength to strength. I remember a wedding that I had attended in Patna when I first met Suresh Babu and then Vinod Babu. Subsequently, during the course of our work together, I found him with the unique quality of placing unconditional trust in our relationship, both at a professional and personal level. For me, he is still very much alive. I can have a conversation with him any time. That, perhaps, gives the time that we shared such intensity and bonhomie.

Sajjan Kumar Tulsiyan  
Professional colleague



Vinod Bhaiya was truly a fine person and one of the nicest individuals who I have had the privilege of knowing. For me, he was like an elder brother and we shared a wonderful relationship. I could always count on his advice at all times because he was totally selfless and cherished his relationships, standing by your side at all times. He was fortunate to have an elder brother like Suresh Babu who always guided and supported him. Vinod Bhaiya was at all times calm and quiet and never spoke about his achievements but, instead, complimented others on their successes. This is truly the most remarkable hallmark of a great personality.

Saroj Poddar  
Family friend

My Chacha is not amongst us any longer but most of us can still feel his presence. He was like a father to me; my Tree of Life that gave shelter to all in need – in despair, distress, unhappiness and joy. His presence provided an all-embracing shade to numerous passersby and the sweet fragrance of his gentle and kind nature solved the problems of several people. His open-mindedness, deep pockets and a large heart made him an awesome personality. His heart was so tender that he could not bear to see the suffering of others and was always ready to lend a helping hand.

After I shifted to Calcutta in 1997, I became closer to him and met him almost daily. Many a times he would give me a packet and ask me to deliver it to someone in need. He just could not see tears in anyone's eyes. Umpteen times Chacha used to cry like a child and I would be sitting at his feet, also sobbing. When I asked him how he could give so generously, he would simply say that God had given him wealth not to hoard but to share with those who were less fortunate.

Once, when I was chatting with him at his office, I spilled a glass of water on the table and to my horror, saw all his important papers get inevitably soaked. Ashamed, I began wiping the table with my tunic but he gently remonstrated, 'It could have happened anyhow; please do not feel bad!' Holding me close, he hugged me. What a gesture! I was deeply touched and completely taken aback.

Chacha always told me to keep the atmosphere at home light and positive, so that each one of us could grow and blossom. He constantly directed me not to worry about Anu and Ari, as he was always there to guide them. He wanted them to be independent and work hard. Chacha's dream has come true. Both of them have settled in Mumbai and are doing well for themselves. A big 'Thank You', Chacha! I can never forget how he sent Anu to read for her MBA at the University of Queensland in Australia. His advice was that I should not tell Mummy and Papa until everything was finalized. He felt that as they did not have the requisite exposure, they would never agree to send a twenty-two year old girl abroad to study alone. They would in all probability insist on getting her married instead. It was a difficult period for me to hold on to this secret. But I had complete faith in him and he stood like a pillar beside me.

I became an event manager because of Chacha and Papa. And both Chacha and I shared a spiritual guru – Premaji Pandurang, whom I called Amma and Chacha called Didi. Once, on the last day of a spiritual sermon by Amma being held at Vidya Mandir in Calcutta, there was no one to give the vote of thanks. Chacha called me and commanded me to do the honours. I was reluctant, as I had never been on a public platform. But he pacified me and made me overcome my stage fright. After that, Kshetropasna Trust organised a number of discourses under my leadership.

Chacha and I shared a special chemistry. He was my most priceless possession and I am certain that he is the brightest star in the sky, looking at us and showering his blessings, love, care and good wishes.



Family celebrations at Queen's Park



Vinod and Krishna with dear friends, Kiran and Chandar Kanoria and Purnima and Lalit Toolsidass





*I ask you to pass through life at my side – to be my second self,  
and best earthly companion*

Charlotte Bronte

Vinodbhai would arrive in Mumbai from Kolkata and call me over for a cup of tea at his office in Maker Chamber III in Nariman Point. And that cup of tea was always memorable as he shared his insights about Ambuja Cements, its acquisitions and the several innovations that this great company was always undertaking.

Reciprocally, he would want an update on my views on taxation, regulatory changes and best practices from all over corporate Mumbai. One of the keenest listeners I have ever met, he would connect the dots from our many conversations and suddenly come up with a project he wanted me to give my time and attention to. He always had fresh and 'out-of-the-box' perspectives on every issue we discussed. I respected him immensely for his challenging and inquisitive disposition. Not only was he a patient teacher, but also a deeply loving friend to whom I could ask any question and expect an insightful and practical answer.

I miss him immensely. He was one of the most important influences in my life.

Shailesh Haribhakti  
Professional colleague

I knew Vinod as an unusual person – witty, intelligent, helpful and jovial. All these qualities endeared him to the people he came across in his life.

When my parents shifted to Kolkata in 1945, they did not have many contacts. Bhaji Babulalji Neotia was one of the few people they knew and he was among my dad's regular friends. Gradually this friendship percolated into the next generation and over the years Vinod used to drop in at our place on a scooter he had acquired. He was a few years older than me, yet we got along well. Being senior in age can be a hindrance as far as camaraderie between relatives is concerned. But Vinod never let that come in the way.

I had acquired a Standard Triumph, one of the first cars of that make, in Kolkata. Vinod wanted to drive it and with some difficulty, managed to squeeze into the driver's seat. Till then all was fine and we went out for a spin. But what happened when we got back was hilarious – he could not get out of the car! Neither of us had a solution. I was feeling bad for him, but the struggle was so funny that it became impossible not to resist laughing even as Vinod kept fuming! God helped at last, and after about five minutes, he managed to escape, took out his hanky and wiped his sweat-ridden face in agitation. Oh, and how can I forget the big tin of Paan Paraag in his car, from which he used to constantly fill a smaller container that he carried with him? The excuse was that this helped him make business friends – such was his simplicity and sense of humour. I need not elucidate on his worthy qualities as everyone who came across Vinod knew about his large and generous heart.

He was, indeed, a very good soul.

Arun Nevatia  
Cousin



Vinod and Suresh Neotia with Sudhir Diwan at a Gulabari recital in Queen's Park

Once upon a time there was a man named Vinod Neotia whom I had the good fortune of meeting way back in 1975 when I was transferred to Calcutta to head Lufthansa's eastern India sales and marketing operations. After settling down, a few months later I received a call from VKN, asking me out for lunch at the Grand hotel – this being our first contact. Having never seen him before, he mentioned I should look out for a slightly oversized man, which turned out to be nearly correct except the word 'slightly'! My experience had always shown oversized people as generally friendly, humorous and kind. And all these three qualities were also clearly visible in him.

VKN's business group partly owned a travel agency, Tradewings, and in the course of a sales promotional exercise, Lufthansa had planned a study tour to South East Asia for Calcutta's top ten travel agents. During our meeting (since he was picking up the lunch bill) I extended the invitation to him to join this tour, which I too was going to personally escort. He smiled and said that we were quits for the time being!

I had a glimpse of VKN's generosity when, a few days later he asked me to invite the Managing Director of Tradewings, A B Mohanty, who oversaw the travel business instead of him. This left a great impression on me and I made that extra effort to get to know VKN and eventually his family better. Ashima, our daughter and Shraddha, VKN's daughter, coincidentally happened to be not only in the same school, but also in the same class and section. Their growing friendship helped increase our interaction. VKN was extremely sensitive, emotional and humane – always ready to give you an ear with a very balanced approach.

Here's a story I want to share. Searching for a suitable, affordable flat for ourselves, I and my wife, Asha, went to meet VKN to talk to him and get his opinion. He spent quite some time, explaining to us the various aspects, financial and otherwise, of such an important purchase and finally directed us to go to Lovelock Place to see an upcoming apartment in an unfinished building. After speaking to him for almost an hour, I came to know that he was leaving for Europe that same evening. Here was a man who had time to help others, showed no pressure and gave you all his attention when you needed it.

The story doesn't end there, of course, but continues with our acquiring the flat and, most importantly, VKN's timely assistance with the last one lakh of rupees that remained payable – his words still ring in my ears: 'Our account should never close; will settle this upstairs.' That is when I not only appreciated his kind gesture but also learnt a lesson for a lifetime – a completely different value system for holding onto relationships.

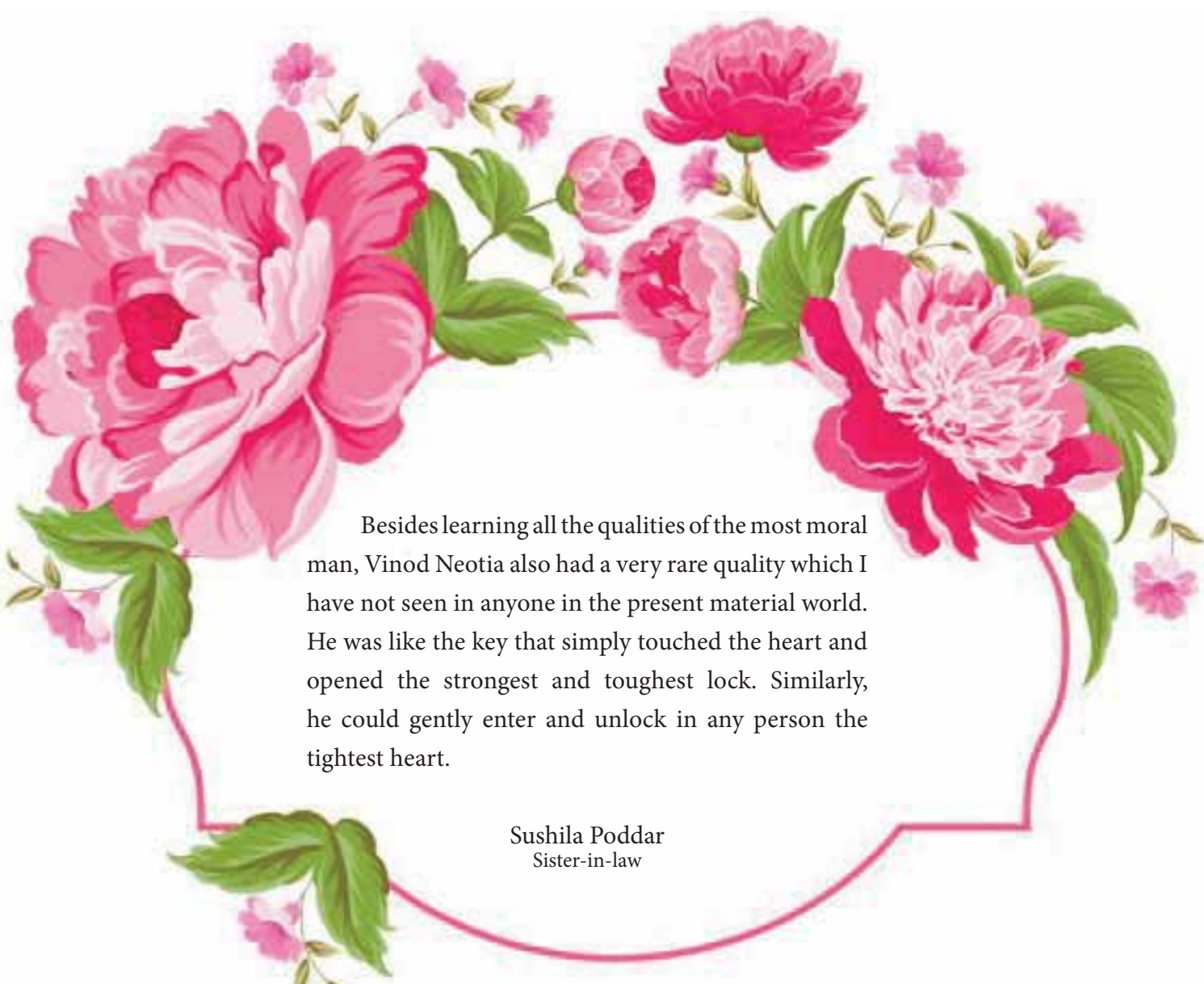
VKN's heart was always a million times larger than his oversized body.





*Life is a journey, and if you fall in love with the journey,  
you will be in love forever*

Peter Hagerty



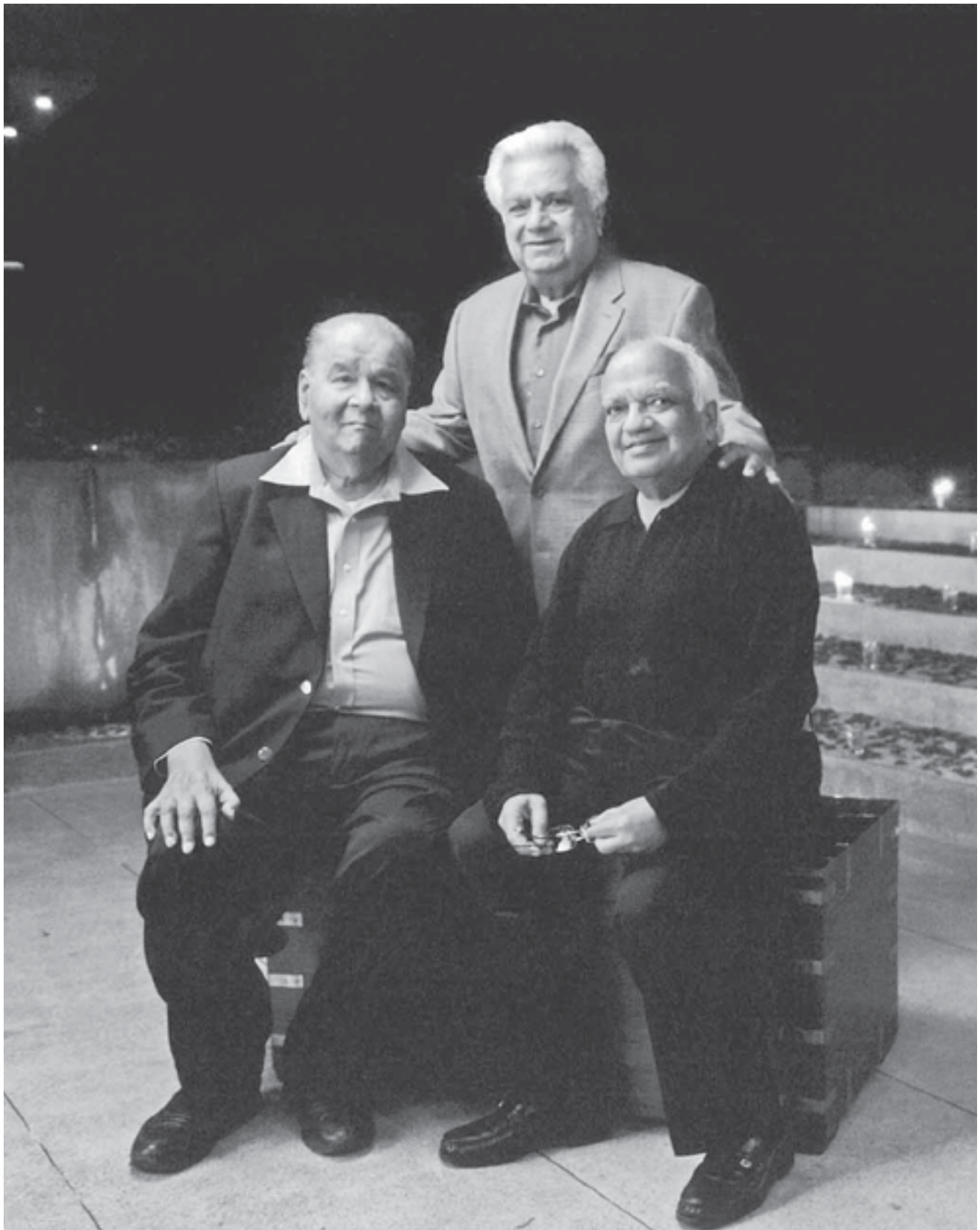
Besides learning all the qualities of the most moral man, Vinod Neotia also had a very rare quality which I have not seen in anyone in the present material world. He was like the key that simply touched the heart and opened the strongest and toughest lock. Similarly, he could gently enter and unlock in any person the tightest heart.

Sushila Poddar  
Sister-in-law

*Diye jaltey hein, phool khiltey hein  
Badi mushkil se magar, duniya mein dost miltey hein...*

Anand Bakshi





The Three Musketeers! Vinod Neotia, Lalit Toolsidass and Chandar Kanoria

## *Have ten years passed? Why, it feels like yesterday!*

Memories gathered over more than twenty years come rushing forth. He still guides me in spirit and though I miss his physical presence, he is never far from my mind – the gleam in the corner of his eyes, the gently crooked smile, the head tilted to one side, the tall frame that sits and observes every detail happening around him – all these recollections flash past.

We were introduced through a common friend so that he could visit L V Prasad Eye Institute for an eye appointment. Slowly but steadily I came to rely so much on Babu that he became an integral part of most decision-making in my life. My father was getting on in years and Babu became my foster father, a privilege I will cherish as long as I live. I must be echoing the sentiments of so many whose lives he touched, but I would like to believe that he was special to me.

Of the many things that I remember of Babu, hard to write down in this short space, is his immense generosity. Yes, he was generous to a fault. If I ever pointed out that someone was taking advantage of him, his answer would be that it was that person's lookout and that they would have to finally face the consequence. Babu was, indeed, larger than life; a super hero. His hearty laughter and famous one-liners could never be missed. His large-heartedness, the ability to adapt and never lose his temper was admirable. He expressed his displeasure subtly. He accommodated people based on their need. And his ability to train and mentor others in an unobtrusive way was remarkable. He supported thousands of people who came in contact with him quietly, like a gentle whisper.

Several individuals and institutions have benefited from his munificence. The two that I have personal knowledge of are the L V Prasad Eye Institute and the Sadhana School for the Mentally Handicapped where my daughter boards. He supported the L V Prasad Eye Institute as he felt that in India such organizations were rare to find. But he never wanted his name to appear anywhere; no one was any the wiser for his largesse. When I received a small plot of land for Sadhana School for the Mentally Challenged from the Chief Minister, his advice to me was that I should immediately start building as there could be other claimants to the property. This guidance came from Babu's immense experience of dealing with both governments and civil societies. When I expressed the difficulties faced by the institution for raising money for capital expenditure, he said that would come if the cause was good. And so it did – with his blessings and the seed money given by his kind generosity. The project saw its share of struggles when we were building. But it did not stop from funds coming from donors. Babu never forgot to enquire how the children were and how the school was doing. Today, the building is ten years old and the children partake of their meals every day at the dining hall named posthumously after him. Babu blesses us every day.



## THE TEACHER

When I was moving from a career in the not-for-profit sector where I had worked for fifteen years to running a business in Medical Diagnostics, I had my initiation from Babu, a doyen of Indian industry. No high-end MBA could cover the syllabus like he did, and the lessons taught are still fresh in my mind. Painstakingly, Babu would understand what I was doing and show me a better way of tackling the issues in the ancient guru-shishya tradition of our country. These lessons were often imparted as early as five in the morning, while we sipped our first cup of tea. The major lessons on procurement of materials, marketing and reach to the end consumer are etched in my memory and have been used several times in the last two decades.

## PUTTING OTHERS BEFORE HIMSELF

The quiet thoughtfulness that Babu displayed always left me amazed. My father was undergoing a major surgery for an Abdominal Aorta Aneurysm. Babu was in Chennai at the time with Krishna-ma for other reasons – I often thought later that it may well have been divinely willed to support me during my difficult spell. Babu made time to visit and meet my father. I was delighted that both my fathers had met at last and, of course, amongst other subjects, also discussed me. The humour and the one-liners that Babu was famous for were all a part of that very important evening in my life.

## THE INDULGENT FATHER

My trips to Calcutta would often be en route to Jamshedpur, where my natural parents lived. The flight would come in late but freshly cooked food would be waiting for me in my room. I would spend the next day at the Bhagirathi Neotia Hospital that Babu and his family had initiated for the welfare of women and children before leaving the following morning for Jamshedpur. The train departed at six in the morning from Howrah. On numerous occasions, being an early riser, he would drop me at the station, as if he were sending a daughter home.

## MAJOR ARGUMENTS

Our arguments often centered round Babu's health, the one thing he was touchy about and did not like discussing. To him, everyone else's predicaments were more important than his own. He saw the difficulties he faced but was unwilling to share them. He would rather witness the enthusiasm and liveliness around him, with never a dull moment, than discuss his own problems. When I think of him, I always see that mirthful look on his face, a mischievous smile and a gleam in his eyes.

Babu remains with me at all times, so I refuse to miss him.

Uma Aysola  
Family friend



Ek din bik jaayega maatee ke mol  
Jag me reh jayengey pyaarey terey bol  
Dujey ke hothon ko dekar apney geet  
Koyee nishaanee chhod phir duniya se dol

Majrooh Sultanuri

I cannot measure Vinod Jija in words; he was as unfathomable as the depth and vastness of the ocean. The ocean encompasses all rivers, small and large, dirty and clean, as its very own. It is a refuge to innumerable creatures, tiny and huge. He too was an epitome of love, strength, dignity, grace and unconditional support to all who crossed his path.

A man of extraordinary substance, care was perhaps his inner calling. With deep perception of each one's unique circumstances and understanding of the inner world, he was always available and gave everyone the freedom to be themselves. Mistakes were accepted, but not lies. Lending a compassionate ear, he gave solutions for life because he had sorted them out at an emotional and mental level.

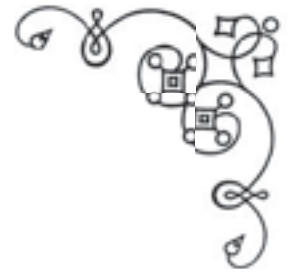
Because of the likes of him, I never missed a biological brother.

Usha Rajgarhia  
Sister-in-law



*The most important thing in the*





*world is family and love*

John Wooden



*Be happy for this moment. This moment is your life*

Omar Khayyam



Vinod Neotia was my revered catalyst who helped me to understand the presence of God! He entered most gracefully into my life to fill me with confidence and zest.

Vinodji was invariably the centre of attraction, exuding an aura of calm. He advised me to identify what I could do best and assisted me to gradually lift my days to greater challenges. He was able to perceive that I needed a guide and, over time, became the master of my destiny. I continue to follow his optimistic and positive approach to several demanding situations and remember him today with gratitude for whatever little success I have achieved in life.

Vijay Lohia  
Family friend





Vinod Neotia was a jovial, humble, courteous and affectionate person. He stayed away from publicity and recognition but carried out several social campaigns. His humour, patience, empathy and silent work for charity will always be remembered. His shoulders were broad enough for everyone to lean on. His company was always pleasurable and I still marvel at his largesse and magnitude.

He helped to lay a concrete foundation for Gujarat Ambuja Cement and became an inspiration to all employees. It was the result of his competence, knowhow and hard work that contributed handsomely in the reconstruction of Gujarat after the massive earthquake in 2001. He believed that ‘the past is to be forgotten; it is the future on which we need to concentrate.’

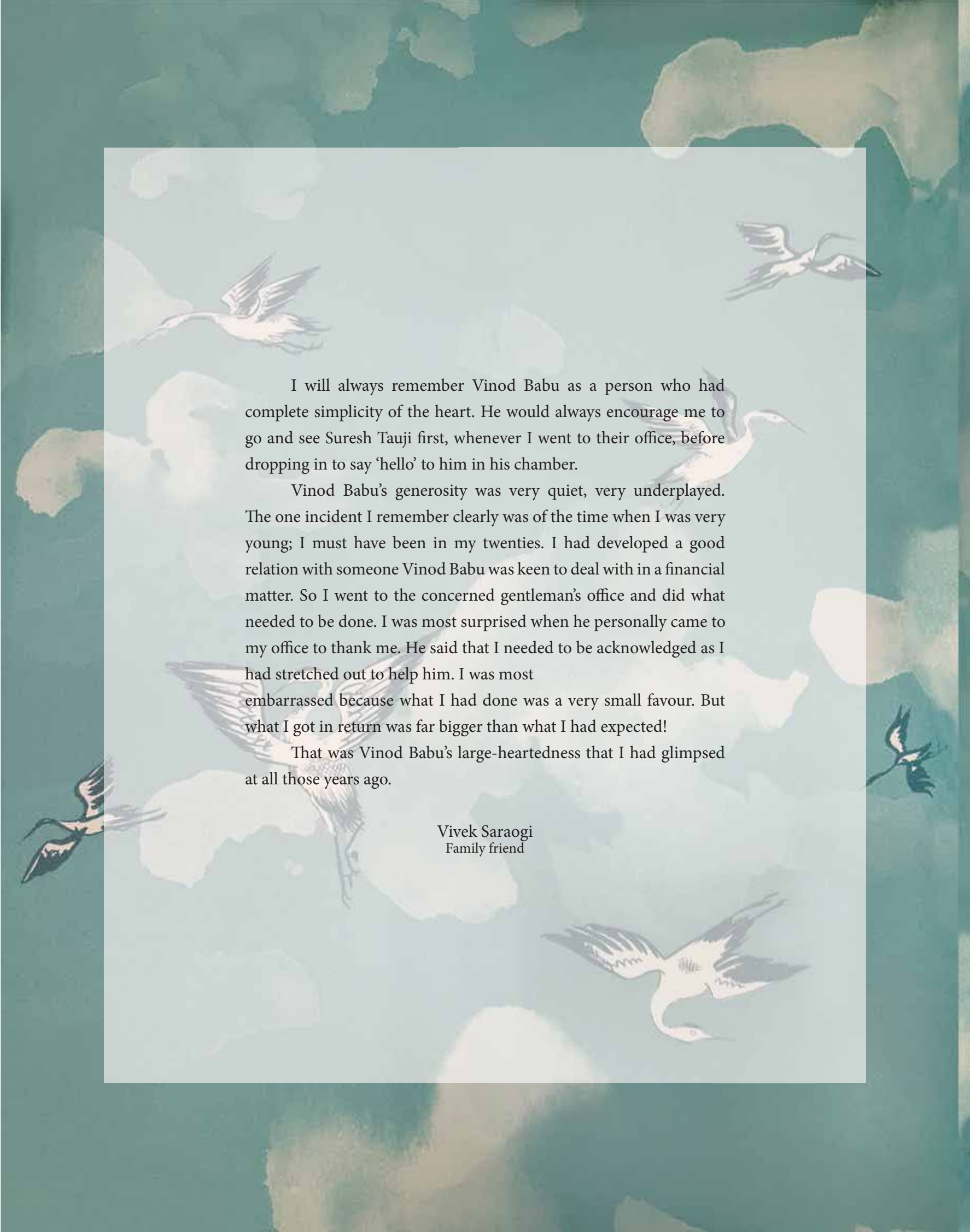
I was married in 1955. I remember seeing him come to meet Sarla and me on a scooter, in a pair of shorts! He always used to visit our home on Gurusaday Road in the 1960s and 70s and spend at least an hour over tea and snacks. He continued this practice even after we shifted to Loudon Street.

Vinod was a wonderful father to his two daughters and his son. He always respected his elder brother, Suresh Neotia, and his Nana, Janaki Prasadji Poddar. He built up his family’s oil business, as well as the cement factory in Gujarat. A deeply religious person, he remained a true devotee of Prema Pandurang. He visited the Somnath Temple several times during his Gujarat visits and even helped the State in cleaning up Somnath and looking after the needy. He was a Trustee of the Somnath Temple and of Prema Pandurang’s ashram. His death in 2009 created a vacuum in the family, which can never be fulfilled.

I personally had great regard for Vinod though he was younger than me. His humility, compassion and kindness were his special qualities that endeared him to all those who had a chance to interact with him.

Vinay Nivatia  
Uncle



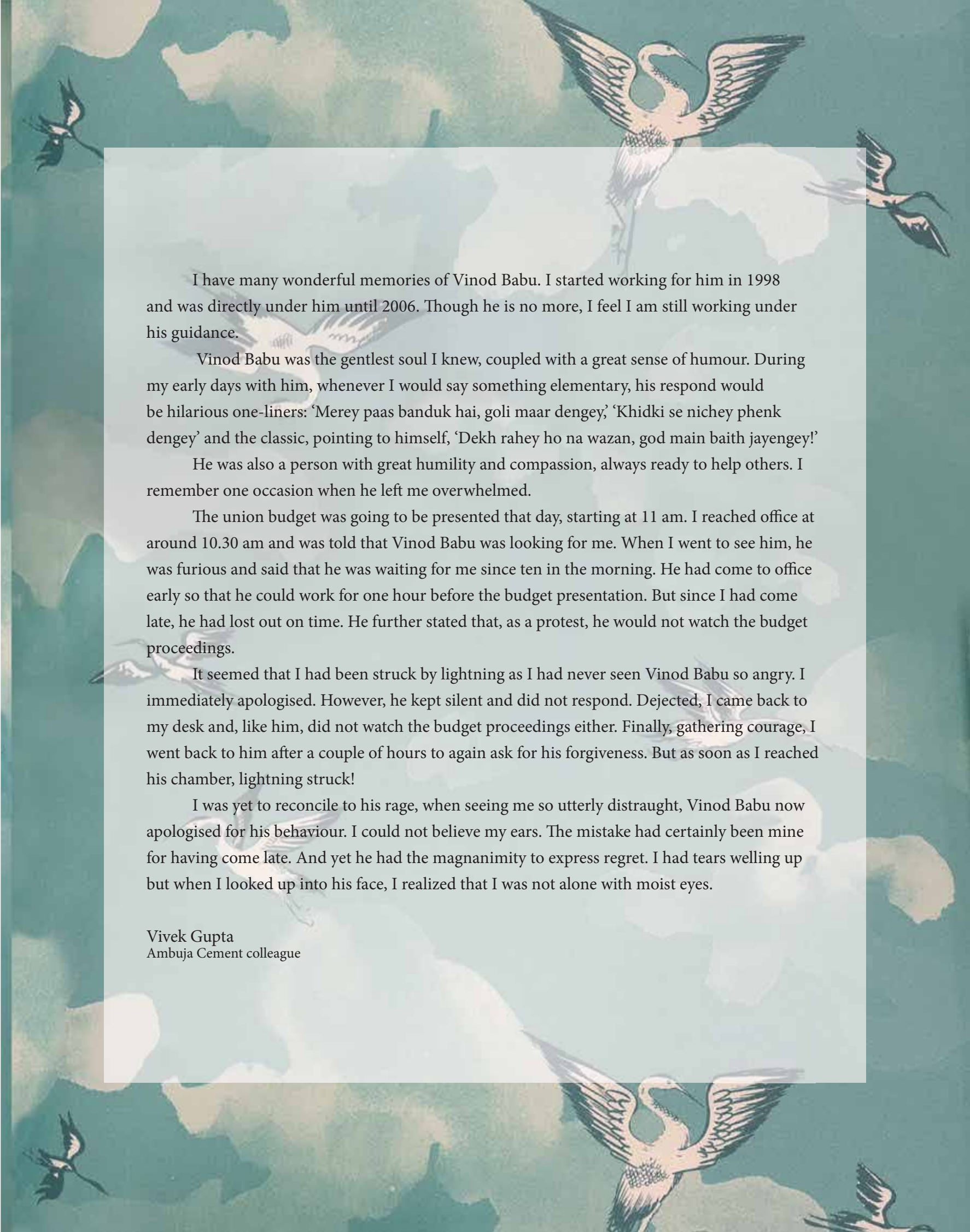


I will always remember Vinod Babu as a person who had complete simplicity of the heart. He would always encourage me to go and see Suresh Tauji first, whenever I went to their office, before dropping in to say 'hello' to him in his chamber.

Vinod Babu's generosity was very quiet, very underplayed. The one incident I remember clearly was of the time when I was very young; I must have been in my twenties. I had developed a good relation with someone Vinod Babu was keen to deal with in a financial matter. So I went to the concerned gentleman's office and did what needed to be done. I was most surprised when he personally came to my office to thank me. He said that I needed to be acknowledged as I had stretched out to help him. I was most embarrassed because what I had done was a very small favour. But what I got in return was far bigger than what I had expected!

That was Vinod Babu's large-heartedness that I had glimpsed at all those years ago.

Vivek Saraogi  
Family friend



I have many wonderful memories of Vinod Babu. I started working for him in 1998 and was directly under him until 2006. Though he is no more, I feel I am still working under his guidance.

Vinod Babu was the gentlest soul I knew, coupled with a great sense of humour. During my early days with him, whenever I would say something elementary, his response would be hilarious one-liners: 'Meray paas banduk hai, goli maar dengey,' 'Khidki se nichey phenk dengey' and the classic, pointing to himself, 'Dekh rahey ho na wazan, god main baith jayengey!'

He was also a person with great humility and compassion, always ready to help others. I remember one occasion when he left me overwhelmed.

The union budget was going to be presented that day, starting at 11 am. I reached office at around 10.30 am and was told that Vinod Babu was looking for me. When I went to see him, he was furious and said that he was waiting for me since ten in the morning. He had come to office early so that he could work for one hour before the budget presentation. But since I had come late, he had lost out on time. He further stated that, as a protest, he would not watch the budget proceedings.

It seemed that I had been struck by lightning as I had never seen Vinod Babu so angry. I immediately apologised. However, he kept silent and did not respond. Dejected, I came back to my desk and, like him, did not watch the budget proceedings either. Finally, gathering courage, I went back to him after a couple of hours to again ask for his forgiveness. But as soon as I reached his chamber, lightning struck!

I was yet to reconcile to his rage, when seeing me so utterly distraught, Vinod Babu now apologised for his behaviour. I could not believe my ears. The mistake had certainly been mine for having come late. And yet he had the magnanimity to express regret. I had tears welling up but when I looked up into his face, I realized that I was not alone with moist eyes.

Vivek Gupta  
Ambuja Cement colleague

*The memories  
we make with  
our family is  
everything...*

Candace Cameron Bure







With niece Shruti at Krishna and Vinod's fiftieth wedding anniversary celebrations



A wedding anniversary is the celebration of love, trust, partnership, tolerance and tenacity

# *Remembering You, Dear Mause*

Dear Mause, you were round and fun  
To us when we were small  
With car drives, chuckles, laughter, sun  
Your caring did it all  
    An infinite ocean was your heart  
    Which held us all within  
    Your life and time was there for us  
    For every possible kin  
You had a deep and probing mind  
That fathomed all our souls  
You knew our needs and all our dreams  
You made us win our goals  
    You struggled with your health within  
    You were so much in pain  
    Yet lighted hearts at every step  
    To ease the world of pain  
At every faltering step in life  
Mentor - you were the one  
With very few words, you always knew  
Just what had to be done!  
    Mause, You helped resolve my knots  
    And wiped my every tear  
    Established my foundations  
    Assured I had no fear  
Mause, you were a Light Divine  
Yet suffered on this earth  
You healed uncountable hearts and lives  
And made your journey worth  
    Today my eyes well up with tears  
    Your smiling face I see  
    My Mause, can I ever say  
    Just what you meant to me?

With love from one of your infinite daughters,

Shruti Poddar  
Niece



*The living moment  
is everything*

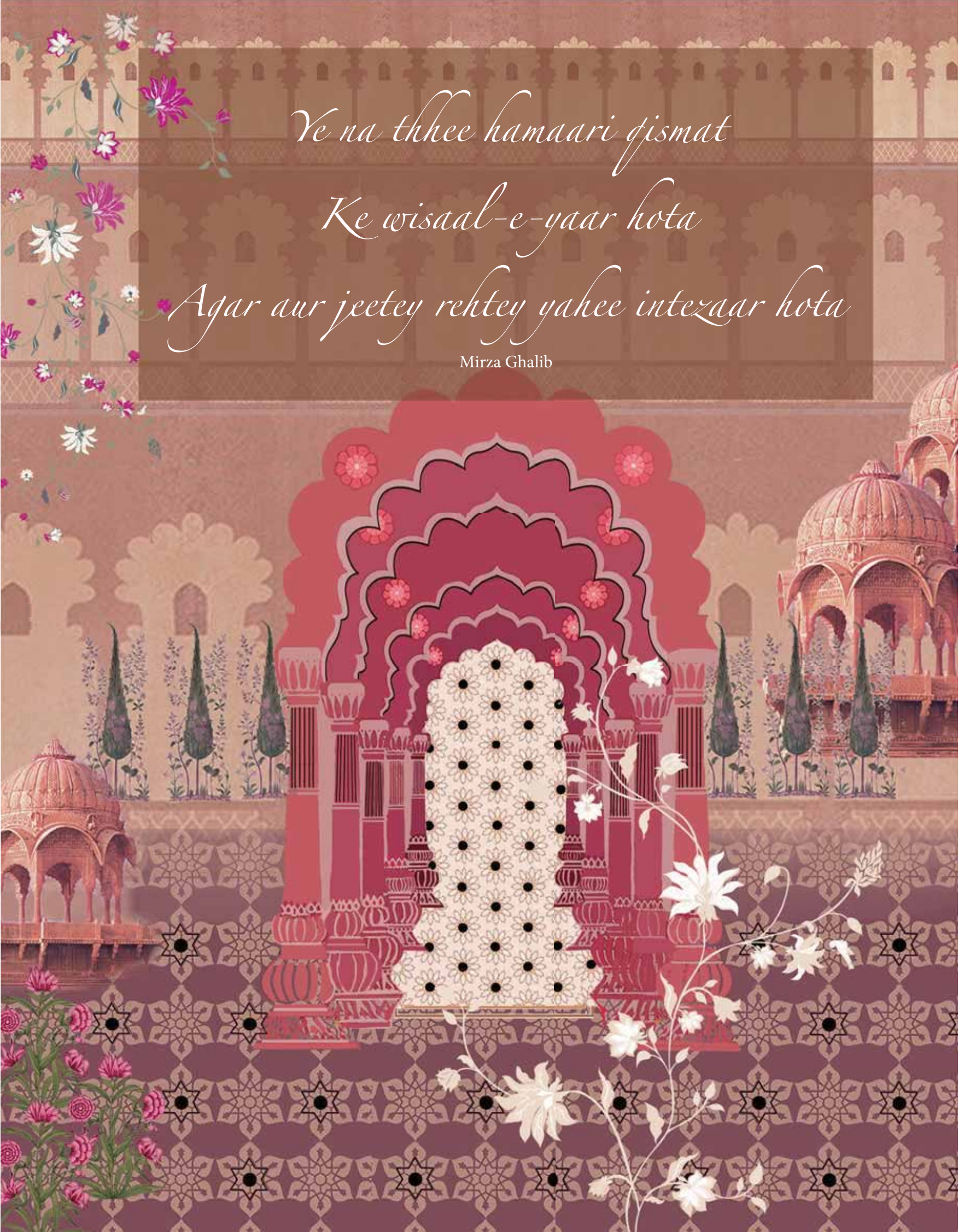
D H Lawrence





*Ye na thhee hamaari jismat  
Ke wisaal-e-yaar hota  
Agar aur jeetey rehtey yahee intezaar hota*

Mirza Ghalib



Vinod Babu arrived in the family as the most welcomed member. Even before one realized that he was there, he had won over everybody's heart. His opinion always held great weightage; it was impartial, just and balanced.

Besides being intelligent, Vinod Babu had a fantastic sense of humour. One can easily recall that some of the most wonderful moments of one's life were always those spent with him. For me, after Ma and Babu, I don't think anybody understood me better than him. He made me reflect on my shortcomings, not by words but simply with a look and a smile. He felt happy if I was happy and perhaps also shared my pain even more intensely than I did – his tears would roll down instantaneously. Always encouraging me to be good in spite of circumstances, he taught me: 'kisi ko khushi dekar dekho, tumhey kitni khushi milti hai.'

Ma looked upon Vinod Babu as her son, waited for him to breathe her last and entrusted him with the final decisions of her life.

Our Jain Guru, Acharya Tulsi, told my sisters and me that Ma and Babu were incarnations of the Divine and that we should try to become like them. I don't think any of us have achieved that goal.

However, as Yogendra, my husband says, 'Vinod Babu was Ma-Babu's true child. He may not have been their biological son, but he embodied all that was good in them. He was always there for me in times of trouble and went out of his way to help. I will always be indebted to him.'

I remember his last call to me before his final day. He said he just wanted to say 'hello.' Or was it 'goodbye'? I often wonder as to the significance of that call. The only answer I get is that he wanted me to 'keep my soul alive' and to remember that 'there is no substitute for goodness.'

Asha Modi  
Sister-in-law



*Love one another, but make not a  
bond of love: let it rather be a moving sea  
between the shores of your souls*

Khalil Gibran



I am fortunate to be born in Calcutta where, as a family, we got to meet the Neotias and that association and friendship shaped our lives. To me, this bonding was very special. As a child, I visited 7/2 Queen's Park on numerous occasions but only when I moved to London did my unique connection with Vinod Uncle bloom and flourish.

I was still at University, doing a summer placement at Ford Motor Company in London. My father phoned me and told me that Vinod Uncle was visiting London. I was unsure about how our meeting was going to work, now that I was to see him alone, without my parents. However, I called on him at his hotel. He was dressed casually in a pair of shorts, relaxing and watching cricket. He told me to buzz room service and order my favourite food. As a university student, one is always craving for good meals and could never miss such a generous offer! We chatted about what I was doing and I told him how I was learning more and more on computers and wanted to save up to buy a laptop. He had a really cute and unforgettable pose of putting his left index finger on his cheek. At the end of the evening, I hugged him and took his blessings. He reached out for his black pouch that I loved as it always contained Paan Paraag. But on this occasion, he pulled out a thousand pounds and handing it to me, asked me to buy a laptop the following day. I can still remember my expression that night, walking back home! I was so excited! That was Vinod Uncle's magic!

Then I got my first job in London and my work permit came through. Vinod Uncle was visiting London again. And I told him that he was my buddy as he always brought me luck. It was quite late in the evening when I actually found out about my job. I called Vinod Uncle immediately to share the good news. There was silence on the other end of the phone and I could sense that it was a very emotional moment for him, with tears rolling down his cheeks. He wanted me to come by at once and share a bottle of champagne to celebrate.

These are only some of the wonderful memories I have of a great man who shaped my life. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to know him and receive his blessings.

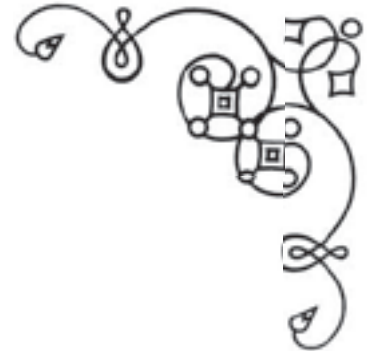
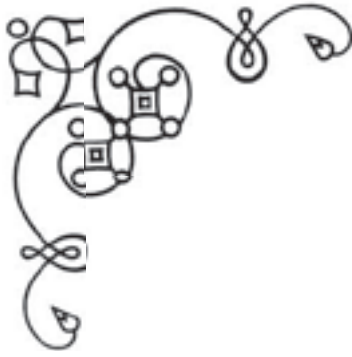
I miss you buddy!

Khounish Diwan  
Family friend's son









The most distinct quality that Vinod Bhaiya had was to make others laugh at his cost! There are several stories about his ability to make fun of himself and baffle strangers with his candor at home and abroad. The Neotias, for me, have been like my family. Vinod Bhaiya was always laughing and joking and in the forty-five years or so that I have known him, I don't remember seeing him ever losing his temper. He was always advising people with his gentle and jovial manners, making them comfortable in his presence. He was certainly the conscious-keeper of the Neotia family. When he passed away, Suresh Bhaiya's only comment to me was that he did not know how he would conduct himself without Vinod as they, as brothers, complemented each other. They worked very well as a team and Suresh Bhaiya seemed quite lost at Vinod Bhaiya's demise. Today, I remember both of them in my prayers.

Saloo Choudhury  
Family friend



It is difficult to encapsulate all that Vinod Babu meant to me in mere words. For me, he was a Titan of a man. All his qualities were deep within him in reservoirs without a bottom, those that could not be plumbed by mere mortals. He was not the kind of person who would do anything to garner recognition or applause, for he was quiet and self-effacing, yet a giant of a man in every respect. Amongst his many qualities the ones that stood out – besides his business acumen, of course, that you would associate with a person of his stature – are his immense compassion not only for those who were in need but for every fellow human being he came across. He was genuinely compassionate to each and every person who crossed his path.

A man of immense generosity in every which way – Vinod Babu could equate with you without there being any difference as to where he was and where you stood. It was always a meeting of equals – he was that generous, giving you the time and respect you deserved as a fellow human being. It takes a remarkable person not to let success get in the way of relationships.

Vinod Babu was also very spiritual and deeply religious. His compassion, generosity and spirituality all combined to make him the person that he was. He went way beyond his call of duty. He would always walk that extra mile. He would always do more than what was required. There was never any paucity to his innate kindness and to his benevolent nature. He had told me once that ‘the pleasure of giving is far greater than that of receiving.’ That was one of his mottos.

Another remarkable quality was Vinod Babu’s huge reservoir of wit. A very ‘wet’ sense of humour, coupled with his twinkling eyes – it became an extraordinary sledgehammer! The fun used to come across so much more, once the spoken word became coupled with the sheer visual of watching him – the way he was and who he was; those sparkling eyes; the sheer merriment; his face breaking out not in a loud laugh but with that typical, delightful smile of his – the mouth a little open, the lips pursed and the eyes gleaming. I can never forget that look in my entire life!

I don’t know how many people know that he was a very good cook. He used to rustle up the best breakfast that a man can serve in town. Superb cheese omelettes that were absolute killers, served with toast and coffee or tea. He also took the honour of laying out the table. I happened to spend some time with him travelling abroad and that’s how I got to know about his culinary skills.

All in all, when I think of Vinod Babu, for a life such as his cannot be spoken of in the past tense, I cannot help but wonder how truly privileged I and countless others were to bask in his munificence and the glory of his compassion.

Umang V Jain  
Family friend





It is with a great sense of joy, respect and reverence that I recall our family's long and happy association with Shri Vinod Neotia. As I think back, the first thought that comes to mind is that the Almighty does not make people like him any more.

As part of the larger extended family, I recall Vinod Bhaiya's frequent visits to our house when he would drop in casually on a Sunday morning to meet my mother, who was his aunt. His visits were always very entertaining. His wry sense of humour was so refreshing and all of us would have a great time. I loved his attitude of brushing aside all minor problems or inconveniences in our lives. He would break into a hilarious mimicry of weeping if any of us began on a supposedly sorrowful story and we would end up in fits of laughter. But we could be sure that in times of genuine problems he would be like a rock by our side, extending all possible help.

In later years, I would frequent his office at RKBK because, somehow, he had given me the license to visit him any time for a chat. Thinking back, it is obvious that many others must have also had that privilege – it was Vinod Bhaiya's magnanimity that made so many people around him feel special.

It is only after his passing away that I realized that there was this great personality at whose feet one could learn the glorious wisdom of Karma Yoga imparted by Sri Krishna in the Third Chapter of the Bhagvad Gita. It is, perhaps, no exaggeration to say that one need not have undergone the rigours of studying of this subtle art of Karma Yoga had one only observed the attitude with which Vinod Neotia led his life. He had the power to set an example and transform others through his own actions.

My salutations to him!

Vivek Dalmiya  
Nephew

*Remember this,  
that very little is  
needed to make  
a happy life*

Marcus Aurelius



Enjoying a meal with Arvind Agarwal



With Sangeeta Agarwal, daughter of family friends



Vinod and Harsh with Vinay and Sarla Nevatia at Queen's Park



A heart to heart chat with Vivek Saraogi



Vinod and I met for the first time at St Xavier's College in June 1956. All three of us – Vinod, Shripat Singhania and I – were standing in a queue to get admission. Unbelievable! But it is true that this meeting was the beginning of our everlasting friendship. I have met many people since then in my life, yet my friendship with Vinod was quite different. His love, ability to win hearts and his unique style of closing one eye and listening to you was simply marvellous. He started pulling me towards him like magnet and I humbly submitted.

Vinod and Shripat had all the comforts of life and there was nothing I could offer. But it was divine destiny that created such a strong bond between us. Our friendship has spanned over 50 years and we never had any difference of opinion.

It is said in our historical documents that Raja Vir Vikram or Hatimtai used to live for others. Vinod too was a Yogi Purush. I have seen him work tirelessly during the earthquake in Kutch. For almost a week he slept in a tent in severely harsh conditions in Gujarat, uncaring for the hardships. All he was interested in was to look after the need of the affected victims. What a noble heart he had!

Whenever he visited Mumbai, he would come to my home and spent time with my children and Rajni. He was very fond of Mangroli khaakhra, which he ate with relish, even as we indulged in some 'mouj' and 'masti.'

If I have to sum up Vinod's personality, I would simply say: 'Samajdaari or wisdom is most important in life as exemplified by Vinod; otherwise both Arjun and Duryodhan had the same guru. Yet how different was their personal outcome at the Great War of Kurukshetra!'

R J Kampani  
College friend

A disproportionate number of the most joyous moments in my life have been experienced with Uncle Vinod. For two people who lived with multiple oceans and decades of life between them, we managed to regularly find our way to each other, make the world stop and bask in the beauty of simple moments together. Having Uncle Vinod in my life gave me a feeling of absolute protection. Near or far, he was always there for me. Over the course of my thirty-five years with him I experienced this without exception. I have since learned that I wasn't alone in this type of a relationship with him. He represented the gift of friendship, deep affection and security to many. He truly made everyone feel special!

From my childhood I remember playful moments, calling him 'Auntie Vinod' because he smelled like perfume (which I later learned was Paan Paraag) and then, as I got older, he took great pleasure in exposing me to several firsts – my first cup of coffee in his Calcutta office, my first glass of wine at Bukhara when I was seventeen, my first American Express travelers' cheques gifted for 'safety and fun' according to him, my first experience of dancing at the disco at The Conclave, my first taste of French cuisine at the Oberoi in Bombay, my first spa pedicure (which he, of course, also joined). Oh, I have so many fond memories of him!

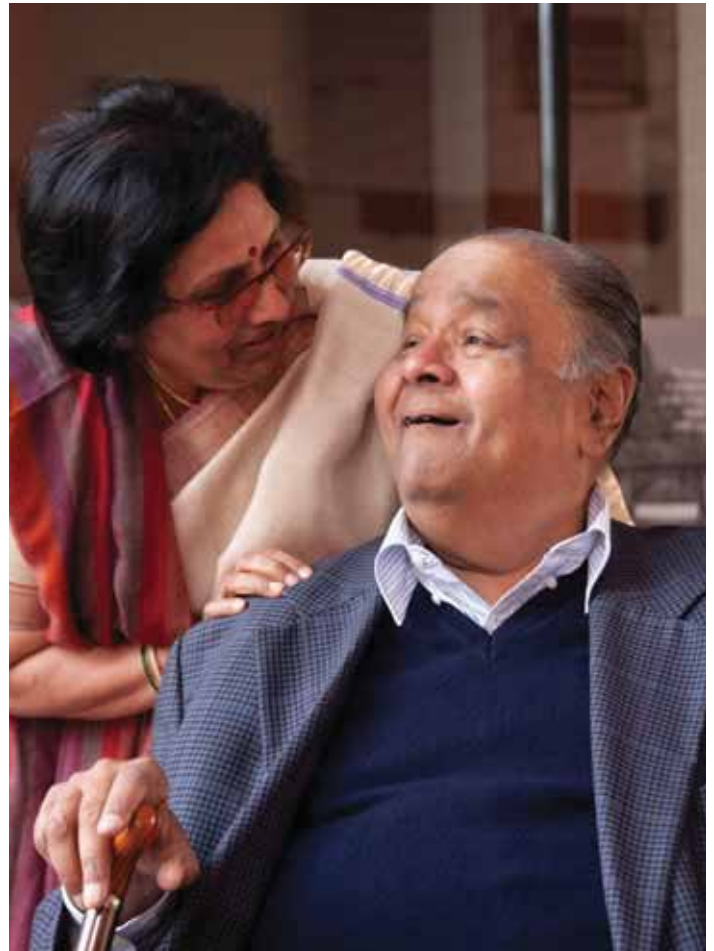
Uncle Vinod taught me how to simplify complex feelings as well as recognize the depths of guileless joys. The lessons of life that he shared with me over early morning conversations at Queen's Park impacted me deeply. Through him I learned about achievement; about being generous with people and how incredibly good it felt to lose oneself in belly-rolling laughter that erupts into tears.

He was the first person I called when I lost my father in 2009. I yearned to connect with Uncle Vinod after my father passed away. His was the deepest form of comfort I knew and to grieve together was a moment that brought us even closer. My very last conversation with Uncle Vinod came too quickly. Both he and Auntie Krishna were on the phone together. I had just left their home in Calcutta and was in Delhi, packing to return to the US. They giggled in a way that only I knew them to do, and for some reason they kept calling me 'Cinderella'. At first I couldn't understand their joke. Finally, they both laughed and said that in my hurry at leaving their house, I had left behind a single high heel slipper! When their servant brought it to them they gleefully thought of Cinderella. They told me I was their Cinderella and I was sure to have a better future. I smiled at that really sweet thought and shook my head at their ability to always come up with witty references.

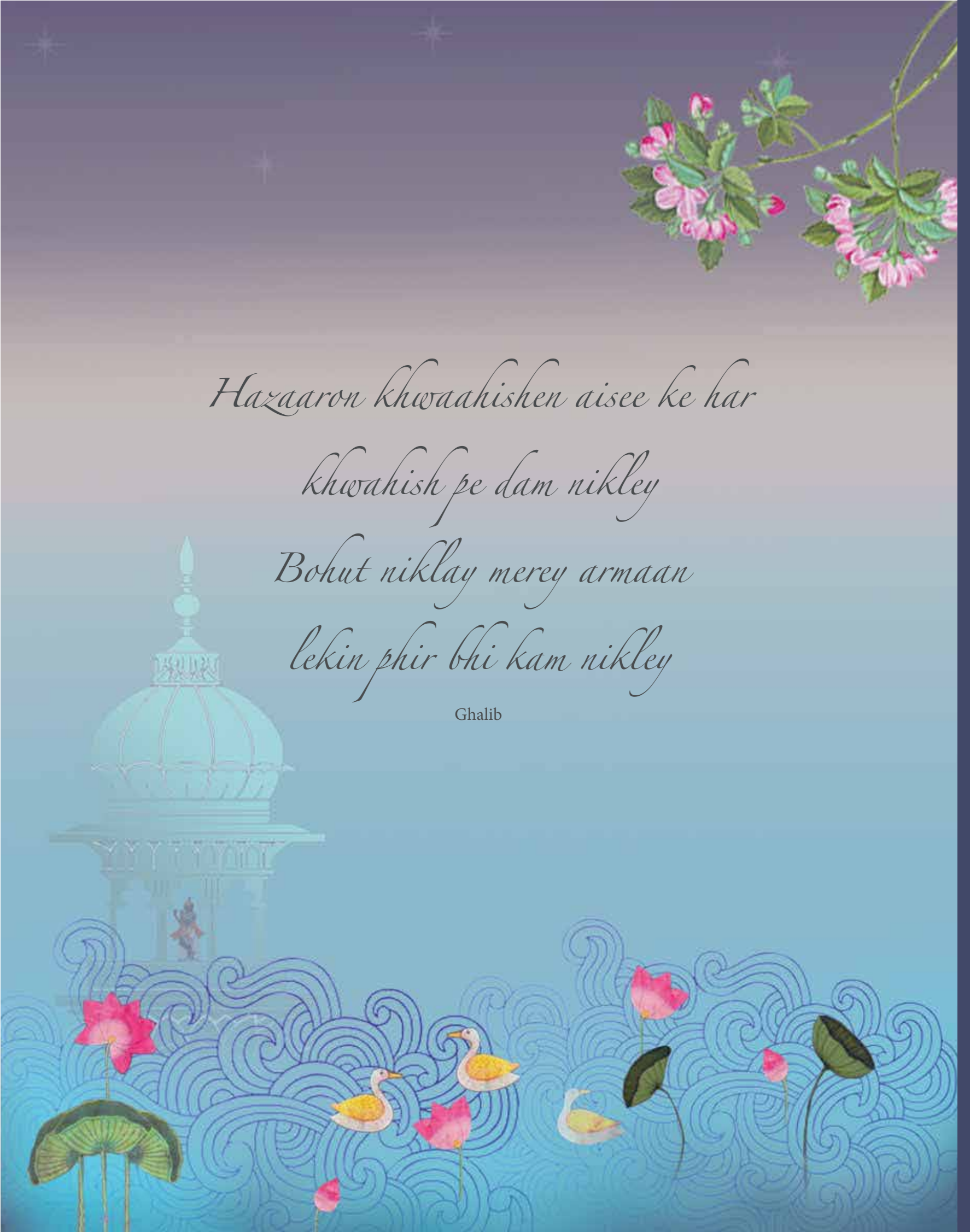
The world hasn't been the same without Prince Charming. He is missed every single day. Uncle Vinod made the world an infinitely better place and the effect of his ripples continue to improve the lives of many. The light that sparkled behind those twinkling eyes and his contagious joy still fuels me, even after ten years since our last moments together. I'm so grateful that our final conversation ended in his signature burst of unalloyed laughter. And I will forever feel those vibrations deep inside my heart.

*Jaltey hein jiskey liye teri aankhon ke diye  
Dhoond laaya hoon wahi geet mein terey liye...*

Majrooh Sultanpuri







*Hazaaron khwaahishen aisee ke har  
khwahish pe dam nikley  
Bohut niklay merey armaan  
lekin phir bhi kam nikley*

Ghalib



Editor's Note:

It has been an honour and a pleasure to edit this book and come across tributes that exalt the compassion and generosity of Vinod Uncle. He remains unforgettable in the hearts of all those who were fortunate to meet him and I too count myself blessed. His business acumen blended seamlessly with his humanity. And his fabulous sense of humour was always that special icing on the cake. But most of all, Vinod Uncle was a man of tremendous honour.

Thank you Krishna Aunty and Harsh for giving me the privilege to edit this book.

Thank you Aparna and Hitesh for designing it with so much love. And a big 'thank you' to all those who have contributed to make it such a casket of precious memories. Vinod Uncle epitomized what Antoine de Saint-Exupery has said in *The Little Prince*, 'And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: it is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.'

Jayabrato Chatterjee

Photography and Editing:

Hitesh Toolsidass

+91 9831034514 toolsidass@gmail.com


hiteshtoolsidass.com

Book Designing:

Aparna Toolsidass

+91 9903973457 aparna.dube1@gmail.com

whispersofindia.com

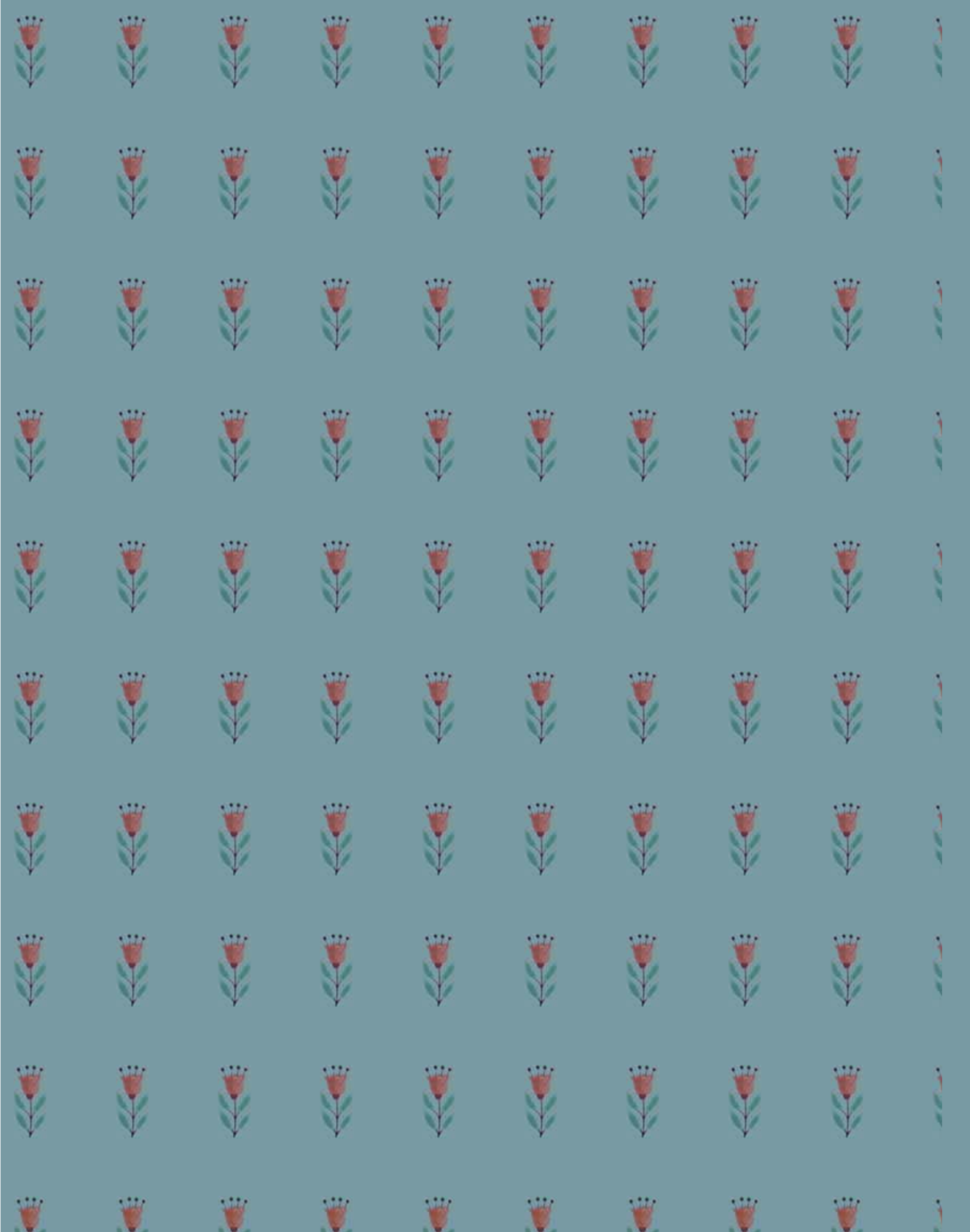


*You have everything needed  
for the extravagant journey  
that is your life!*

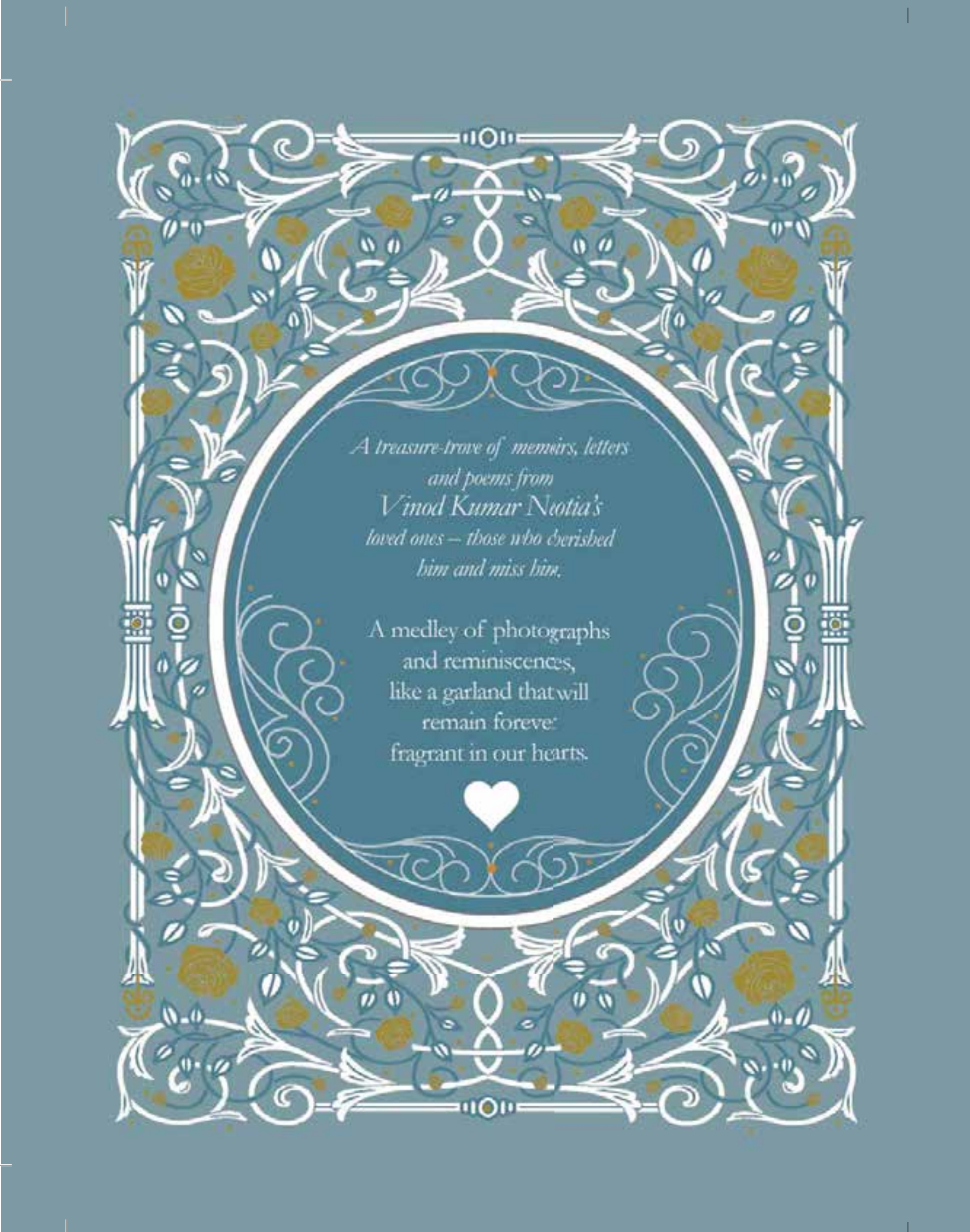
Carlos Castaneda











*A treasure-trove of memoirs, letters  
and poems from  
Vinod Kumar Neotia's  
loved ones – those who cherished  
him and miss him.*

A medley of photographs  
and reminiscences,  
like a garland that will  
remain forever  
fragrant in our hearts.

