

The Story of Balasinor

***Growing Up in a
Small Town in India***

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(Vasanji)

The Story of Balasinor

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Edited by Retesh Shah

The Story of Balasinor

Dedicated to my parents Maniben
and Mohanlal Vasanji



(Artist's rendering of photo from early 1950s)

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GEOGRAPHY



Figure 1: Location of Gujarat State in India

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Figure 2: State of Gujarat

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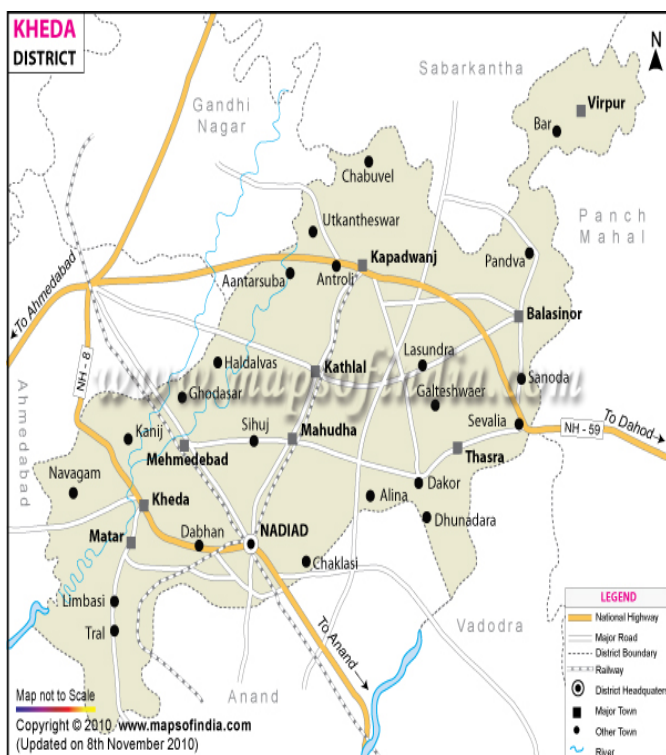


Figure 3: Kheda District in Gujarat

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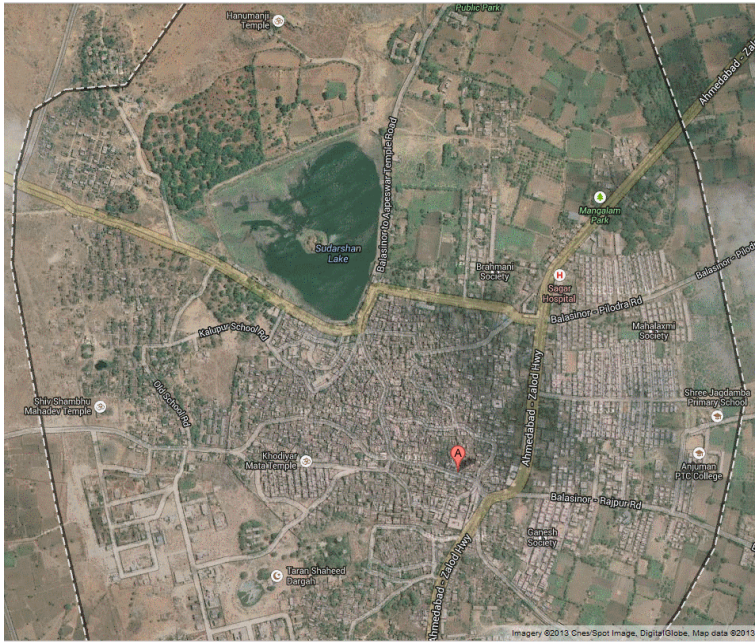


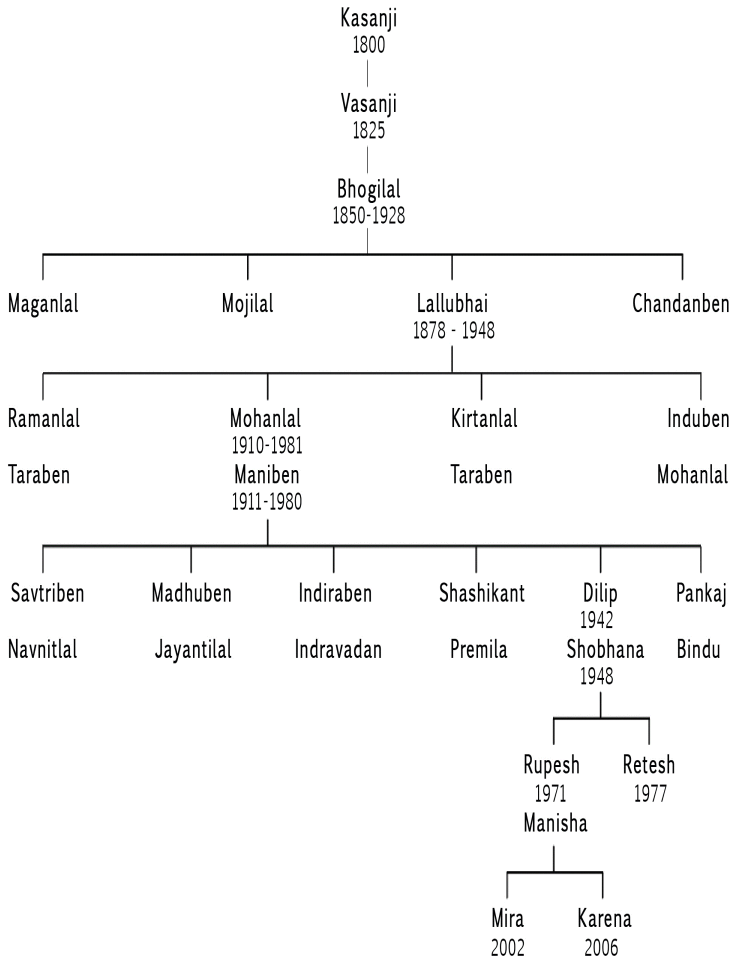
Figure 4: Satellite View of Balasinor

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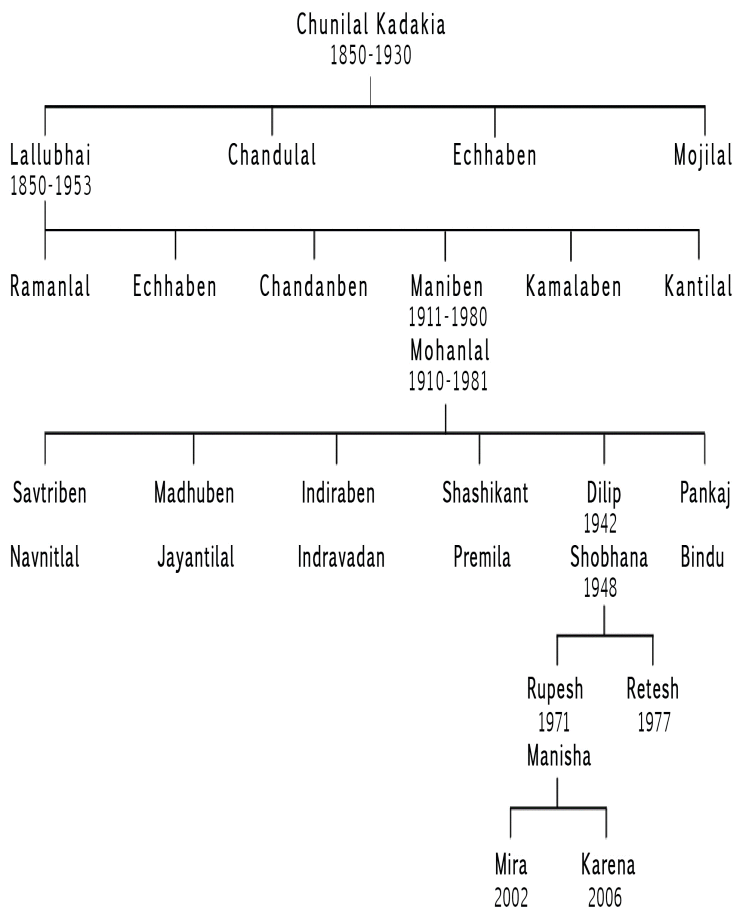
FAMILY TREE

My Father Side Family Tree



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My Mother Side Family Tree



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INTRODUCTION

On my last visit to the Shreenathaji temple in Rajasthan, India in 2007, I was fortunate to obtain a volume of books of *Subodhiniji* written by Mahaprabhuji Vallabhacharya¹ in the 15th century. This volume described Krishna's childhood in Gokul as detailed in the Shreemad Bhagavad Gita which had been recited by many generations earlier. In the first three books, I was drawn to the Mahaprabhuji's description of the village of Gokul and the town of Mathura. I was struck by the simple writings in the book, especially with the colorful descriptions of Lord Krishna's upbringing in Gokul and Mathura. The words described the beauty of many things in the town such as the layout, the simple life the townspeople enjoyed, and the roles neighbors and the townspeople played in each other's lives. There was joy each and every person showed towards the young Krishna whom they knew was different from any other child in the town and they all wondered about his divine power. It was a magical time for them and they would not trade this for anything else. Reading these books from afar in a different country and in a different time period almost fifty years after I left my hometown of Balasinor where I grew up, I fell in love with the memories of my time growing up

¹ Vallabhacharya (1479-1531 CE) was one of the four acharyas (spiritual teacher) who revived the Hindu religion from the 8th century onwards. The first acharya was Shankarcharya (788-820 CE), the second was Ramanuja (1017-1137 CE), the third was Madhvacharya (1199-1278 CE) and the last was Vallabhacharya.

there. My mind wandered and retraced my steps through each and every street of that town. I fondly remembered my travels to many beautiful places inside and outside of the town and the games I played with friends and the festivals we enjoyed.

However, when I recently visited Gokul and Mathura, what I had read in those books did not match what I was looking at now. The degradation of the town and the places where Krishna walked and performed the *lila*² was shocking and tragic. It was difficult to visualize the life in those days while looking at this now destitute legendary town. This again brought back memories of my own upbringing in Balasinor so I paused my reading of the *Subodhini* and decided that this was the time to start writing my own recollections of my life in my hometown of Balasinor. I had attempted this a few times before but did not follow through. My children insisted that I capture as many details as possible from my memories as they have always wondered about Balasinor and have asked me many questions about my childhood life growing up there. For my grandchildren and great-grandchildren, these writings of my time in Balasinor between the 1942 (the year of my birth) and 1958 (the year I left the town), will be a vehicle for them to connect to their own past in a personal way for which I was unable to obtain from my own parents and grandparents.

Life has changed a lot for me throughout the years so I have saved the accounts of the major events that have shaped my life. My family, friends, and the community in Balasinor played a very

² *lila* - play

important role in my coming to the United States and settling here. Growing up in Balasinor, I had learned that people there will judge you based on the character of your parents and grandparents. I have moved on from Balasinor, India and eventually established my home in Fremont, California. I have resided in many places along the way: Baroda and Bombay in India, Chicago, Illinois, Muncie, Indiana, Belmont, Mountain View, and Newark, California. My parents and grandparents spent their entire lives in Balasinor. I met Shobhana in Bombay and we were married in 1969. My oldest son was born in Muncie, Indiana and 3 months later, we moved to the Bay Area. My youngest son was born in Fremont, California.

Since my retirement at the age of 60, I have traveled extensively for business as a transformer consultant and as a tourist. I have traveled and collected knowledge of the ancient worlds which has inspired me to think about the past generations, specifically how they lived and how they made the progress for which we are benefiting from today. My generation has seen great strides made in today's society including food production, commerce, communication, etc. In fact, the trend of consuming organic food in California and other parts of the developed world these days made me realize that in my childhood, we had not even heard of the word "organic". All the food we consumed, in fact, was already grown using natural fertilizer and no pesticides. The credit goes to the generations before us who did the hard work, however there are no accounts of this in my personal life that I can adequately impart to my children and grandchildren.

On that visit 50 years after I had left Balasinor for good, I had an empty feeling while visiting the landmarks that I had visited many times in my childhood. These landmarks were no longer familiar to me. I had to go down the memory lane of my childhood years to really enjoy my visit. This book contains those memories, a brief history of the town, and a walkthrough of all the streets of Balasinor, and reminiscing about those buildings where the families lived. I do not know or remember all of the families who lived in every house on these streets. I did write down the name of my friends and my relatives who lived in those houses and of some of the other folks in the town.

Whenever there is a gathering of Balasinor families anywhere in the U.S. or in India, the topic of conversation always turns toward the tracing the roots of the families and the whereabouts of their sons and daughters and who married whom etc. As of today, the members are known by their family name, which is different from their last name. This family name goes back many generations; tracing their names is like tracing the DNA of that person. Occasionally someone will encounter a distant cousin in the same room and recognize their family name and this will start a conversation that will continue into the night.

There are of course many families like mine who have also moved out of the town of Balasinor and into the major cities of the world. There is now a Balasinor association in many of these cities. There is a listing with the names and addresses of the families who reside in the U.S. and whose parents or grandparents are of Balasinor origin. The

association, established in 1973, is called Balasinor Association of America. The community directory that lists the names and addresses of all the families is currently in its 7th edition and it contains a brief history of the origin of the town and about the arrival of the first settlers to the town. There are a total of 639 families listed in the directory. There is also a directory called Balasinor Association of Bombay that lists 1600 families. Just as my family migrated from Balasinor to the U.S., similarly there are many towns like Balasinor in the Kheda district and in the rest of the state of Gujarat whose families also migrated in the same time period as well. I have heard similar stories from many friends about their journeys from Gujarat to the U.S. The above observation applies to the rest of India because I have heard that from my senior class in the engineering college of M.S. University of Baroda in 1964, 95% of the graduating engineers came to the U.S. for advanced degrees in engineering and stayed after the completion of their education. My story may differ from many of my classmates as they may have come from larger towns than Balasinor, but their journeys parallel mine from the college years onwards.

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HISTORY OF BALASINOR

There are two theories as to the origin of the name of Balasinor. One is that its name was originally *Vadasinor*, a name created by the combination of the two adjacent villages Vada and Sinor. The second theory is that its name was *Vadsol*, derived from *Vad* (fence) and *Sol* (stone). Then Vadsol or Vadasinor became Balasinor in the times of the British Raj.

About 1,000 years ago, the *Chavdas* and the *Solankis* dynasties of Gujarat ruled the area. These dynasties were of the *Rajput* caste. In fact, until 1605, Rajput kings ruled Vadasinor. In the beginning of the 17th century, the Mogul emperor, *Akbar*, invaded and conquered Gujarat. King Akbar appointed an administrator named *Suba* to oversee Vadasinor. It was during the rule of the Mogul king, *Shahjahan*, grandson of King Akbar, a warrior from Afghanistan named *Bahadurkhan Babi* came to Gujarat. At that time, Shahjahan's son, *Aurangjeb*, was a religious fanatic who persecuted Hindus and converted many to the Moslem religion. Many Hindu temples were destroyed during this time. As the country came under British rule in the beginning of the nineteenth century, Aurangjeb's grandson became a prisoner of the British. At the demise of the Mogul empire, the Marathas conquered the area and *Babi Nawabs* of Balasinor became the sub-rulers under the Maratha Peshwa *King Gayakwad* who ruled from Baroda. Gayakwad was under British Raj rule. *Jafarkhan Babi* was appointed as the Nawab or ruler of Balasinor in 1674 and then his

heir, *Salabat Mohamadkhan Babi*, built a fort wall around Balasinor with five gates for protection against thieves and robbers. The Nawab collected the taxes that went to Gayakwad in Baroda and then to the British Raj. Taxes were high to fund the building of the fortress and the fury of the Babi Nawab was oppressive. Balasinor Nawab Shri Muhammad 'Abid Khan Naver Khan Babi', Nawab Sahib of Balasinor 1820-1822, was deposed in 1822. Many in our community left Balasinor at this time for the villages of Baria, Dahod, Jhalod and the Mahad district of Maharashtra.

Upon independence in 1947 from the British, Balasinor became the main town in the Kheda district of Gujarat and a local government, *Nagar Panchayat*, was established for local administration.

other provided the remaining groceries to the ashram. Since these two Vanik (also referred to as *Vanias*) created this as a custom known as *Niyam*, they were called 'Nima'. The second belief is that businessmen who came from the district of *Nemad* in the region of *Malva* in *Madhya Pradesh* were known as 'Nema' or 'Nima' Vanik. Both theories explain the term Nima Vanik. Later, due to a dispute in customs, the two Nima Vanik castes were divided. One became Dasa and the other Visa. Most of our Balasinor Vanias belong to the Dasa Nima Vanik caste. Visa Nima is another sub caste within the Nima Vanik caste.

Our Religious Belief

Originally our ancestors believed in the Goddess Amba Maa. Under the influence of Oudumbur Rishi of Shamadaji, our ancestors began to worship the God Vishnu. Then the Guru Vallabhacharya Mahapraphu's teachings became widely followed by our caste. His teachings were known as Pusti and thus we are known as Pusti Margiya Vaishnavas. Shree Vallabhacharya's son Gusanji had seven sons. These seven sons created seven houses of worship. The fourth son of Gusanji was Gokulnathji. Shree Gokulnathji's descendant, Shree Laxmanji Maharaj established the Gokulnathji Haveli temple in the town of Balasinor about 135 years ago.

Rajasauras Dinosaurs

Rajasaurus Narmadensis – India’s own dinosaur emerges from oblivion

Rajasaurus dinosaurs were living in the Indian Peninsula around 67 million years ago. This was a period when the Gondwana land had broken and the Indian landmass, broken away from Africa and South America, was drifting northwards in isolation in the form of a big island. The great Himalayan mountain chain was yet still to be born about 1.5 million years later. This indicated a strong possibility of indigenous features in the precise form and structure of the *Rajasaurus*, restricted to the Indian Peninsula.

The history of research pertaining to the *Rajasaurus* began with a significant event in 1981 when two geologists from the mapping duo of Geological Survey of India, G.N. Dwivedi and D.M. Mohabey, came across the workers of ACC Cement quarry at Rahioli in the Kheda district of Gujarat. The workers were curious to know from the geologists what the smooth, rounded, ball-like structures of limestone that came out of the quarry-face at a certain level of the limestone bed were. The “balls” were in fact dinosaur eggs. Interestingly, the geologists also found that the fossil-egg containing limestone bed was underlain by a coarse sandstone-conglomerate horizon yielding a bountiful of an assortment of bone fossils that could be assigned to dinosaurs.ⁱ

Recently there was a listing on a website advertising a tour of Balasinor. The town of Rahioli near Balasinor, around 90 km from *Ahmedabad*, is being developed into a dinosaur fossil park and is believed to have been one of the biggest hatcheries of

dinosaurs in the world during the Jurassic era. “Rahioli is developed into a dinosaur fossil park with an ample amount of help from the central government.”ⁱⁱ First on the list is a tour of fossils at the site at Rahioli where they were found. The tour also lists excursions to *Dakor*, *Tuwa-Timba* hot springs, *Vanakbori Dam*, and numerous picnic spots along the *Mahi* River. The tour includes the hotel, which is the garden mansion of the Nawab of Balasinor, which is set in multi-acre orchards; air conditioned rooms with modern amenities, home cooked Mughlai and Afghani food also in a garden restaurant. It is recommended for holidays, family get together, etc.

Balasinor Today

After the industrial revolution, business in Balasinor ceased to grow as many of our caste started to move to the industrial cities. It was about 130 years ago that the first family from our caste moved to Bombay. By 1900, about 50 families had emigrated to Bombay. It was 45 years ago when the first family immigrated to the U.S. From our caste currently there are about 1,700 families in Bombay, 500 families in the U.S., and only 100 families remaining in Balasinor.

Balasinor is located in northeast India and is the largest and main town in the *taluka*³ of Balasinor in the Kheda district of Gujarat. “Balasinor is located in east Gujarat which is geographically and culturally diverse compared to the other parts of Gujarat, i.e.

³ *taluka* – county or district

Kutch and *Saurashtra*. Its influences were absorbed from Saurashtra and mainland India. Geography and trade played a major role in shaping the settlement pattern and relative urbanization.”ⁱⁱⁱ On the east side of the Kheda district is *Panchamahall* district and the Mahi River borders both districts. On the north side is mountain terrain and there is no road going through except to *Virpur* fifteen miles away. The road connecting Balasinor to the rest of the state is through *Sevalia*, a railway station connecting the Anand to the Godhara line, ten miles to the south. Within the radius of ten miles of Balasinor, there are more than a hundred villages and people from these villages come to Balasinor for commerce. The direct road link to *Ahmedabad*, the capital of Gujarat, was built after I left Balasinor and now the city is easily reachable 35 miles away. Before, to go to Ahmedabad, you had to go through Sevalia via the Anand to Ahmedabad line; the trip was approximately 100 miles travel by railway.

Flowing within ten miles southwest of Balasinor is the Mahi River that rises from the northern slope of the Vindhya Range in Madhya Pradesh, at an elevation of 500 meters. Before entering the Banswara District of Rajasthan, the river flows in a southward direction for about 120 km in Madhya Pradesh. It makes a 'U' shaped loop in Rajasthan before entering Gujarat. The dam at Vanakbori was built in the 1950s and today it has a thermal power station of 1,470 megawatts. The water is used for cooling purpose. The river finally discharges into the Gulf of Cambay. Eru, Nori, Chap, Som, Jakham, Moran, Anas and Bhadar are the main tributaries of this river. It has a total catchment area

of 16,985 sq km. The river band is lower than the catchment area and is of little use for irrigation.

This county has a size of around 258 square miles and has a current population of approximately 200,000 of which 35,000 reside in the town of Balasinor. Balasinor now has utilities such as electricity, a water supply, a sewage system, telephone, and cable TV. There is an art and commerce college, hospitals, a public library, two movie theaters, and many schools and institutions. The most beautiful sites in the town are the *Sudarashan Lake* with a small island in the middle and the hills of *Kedareshwar*, *Devdunger* and *Bhim Bhamardo*. It is one of the prettiest towns I have ever seen.

On my recent visit to Dakor, I found a book describing the history of the temple and its surroundings. According to the book, the history of Dakor dates back 5,000 years B.C. Its roots led back in history to the times of *Ram* and *Sita*, *Shiva*, *Paravati*, *Krishna*, and *Bhim*. They all have laid their feet on this place and this made the place holy. The book mentioned that the *Khakharia* jungle surrounded the place. The leaves from the *Khakharia* plant are round and about six inches to a foot in diameter and there are three leaves on a stem. The women went to this jungle to gather many leaves and bundle them up. They brought these bundles to town and the townspeople used them to make *pataradi*⁴ and *padiya*⁵. I have made these bundles myself when living in Balasinor. There is a mention in the book

⁴ *pataradi* - plates

⁵ *padiya* - bowls

about the temple of *Galteshwar Mahadev* on the east side of Dakor that I visited in my earlier years.

Villages of Balasinor Ward

The list in the Appendix contains the names of villages in Balasinor taluka. The many family names in Balasinor Directory come from the family doing business with these named villages of Balasinor taluka and villages of nearby towns before migration outwards. These family names are still carried on today even after families left Balasinor two or three generations ago.^{iv}

HOUSE

The house I was born in and lived in for the first 16 years of my life with my parents was a rented house. It was a four-story house built in the 1930s by Mojilal Jat. He had no children and after his death, his cousins inherited the house and they rented it to my parents for minimum rent. After completing my final year in high school and passing my exams in 1958, I left Balasinor to go to college in Baroda. My parents vacated the house in the early 1960s and moved to another rental in *Desai Khadaki*. Eventually the owner tore down this house and built a new one using reinforced concrete.

The Balasinor house was located on a street called *Madani Seri* or *Jawahar Mohalla* or was known as the street opposite of *Holy Chhakala* or *Tulsi Mohalla*. The sub street was called *Jatni Seri*; all the *Jat* families were living here. The house was built using timber, bricks, and a mix of sand and lime for mortar. No cement and steel bars were used because they were not available then. When built, there were also no external hook ups for electricity, telephone, water, sewage, etc. There was a fifteen-foot hole dug in the front of the house where the sewage was dumped and to be absorbed into the ground. The bottom of the hole was left with a cavity for absorbing the sewage and the rest of the hole was covered up.

The plan for the house was a square-shaped layout and was approximately 30 feet long on each side. There were houses connecting to the back and sides of this house. There was no front or back yard.

The front area of the house was open to Madani and Jatni Seri.

First Floor

The load-bearing wall in the center to the Jatni Seri side divided each floor into two rooms. The ground floor or first floor was mostly used for storage. The inside room had a staircase in one corner near the main entrance to go the second floor, this staircase as I remember was built a little short so the top step was missing. You needed to stretch over the step to go to the second floor. There was a rope hanging from one side of all the staircases of all the floors to hold onto for safety when climbing this staircase. There was no guardrail near the opening so each floor had a pull out leaf that was the size of the staircase opening to cover the opening to prevent falling into the opening and it was closed in the nighttime.

On the first floor at the other corner there was a small raised platform connected to the sewage pipe that was used as a single use toilet. A bucket of water was kept there to use after relieving yourself for pouring over your feet after each use.

The other half of the room was not enclosed and was opened to store the goods like firewood, charcoal, etc. In one corner of this room, there was an outhouse toilet where the refuse was to be emptied by a municipality worker daily, however this was not a part of our rental agreement and we were not allowed to use it. We went to the toilet near the lake at the outskirt of the town. Inside the room,

there was a small window with steel bars and doors for ventilation.

All the walls were load-bearing and were 1 to 1.5 feet thick made of bricks and heavy stuccoes using lime mortar and painted with a bright color. At the ground level, the stuccoes were washed away due to rainwater and the bricks were exposed in a few places.

Jatni Seri was so narrow that we could jump over to go to the house across. All of the houses had a front porch where house chores were done and people had places to sit and socialize.

The house floors were layered with a mixture of sticky clay and cow manure. They were mixed and spread over the floor evenly and with a sweep of a palm of the hand wrinkled to look artistic. It takes a week for it to dry so provisions were made during the preparation time for walking. This layered floor kept the house cool in the summer and warm in the wintertime. These floors were re-layered every year at *Diwali* time for a clean look.

Second Floor

On the second floor, the inside room was kept for storing clothes and valuables and also was used as a living room. The valuables included gold and silver ornaments that were kept in the cupboard with a lock, which was built inside the wall. There was another small cupboard hanging on the wall next to it to store medicines, hair oil, eyeliner case, etc. and also there was a wind-up clock. This was the only timepiece in the house as no one had a wristwatch.

From this room, here we typically sat together as a family and listened to the movie songs being played at Nawab's theater from across town. We listened to the popular program of *Binaca Git Mala* that ranked and played the top sixteen popular movie songs of that week. On occasion, since we had no radio, we went to a friend's house to listen to the program that was broadcasted from radio Ceylon every Wednesday night at 9.00 pm.

The room contained steel trunks of various sizes stacked four or five high which contained valuable cloths like silk *saris*⁶ with designs made using gold and silver threads, silk shirts, silk coats, woolen sweaters, etc which were worn only on special occasions. There were steel barrels called *kothis* lined up against the wall used to store food grains for yearly supplies like rice, wheat, *daal*⁷, etc. On the top of the steel barrels there were small open bookcases hung on the wall to keep the clothes for daily use. There were two pairs of clothes, the one you were wearing and the one being hanged outside to dry. Most of the time the clothes in this cupboard were torn, or outgrown and waiting to be mended. Hanging from the ceiling were long cloths like saris and *dhotis*⁸ for daily wear folded over an 8-foot long bamboo stick.

There were stacks of mattresses kept on a wooden pedestal and there were spreads on the floor at nighttime for sleeping and in the morning they

⁶ *sari* – a garment consisting of a length of cotton or silk elaborately draped around the body

⁷ *daal* – thick stew prepared from dried lentils, peas, or beans

⁸ *dhoti* – loincloth worn by men

were folded away. Pillows and blankets were also stacked on the top. In the front near the staircase, there was a *chokadi*⁹. There was also a plinth two feet high where copper vessels holding drinking water were placed. Next to it was an earthen vase filled with cold water to drink, as water oozes out of earthen vase, it evaporates to keep the water cold and on hot days an extra layer of wet cloth was used to keep water cool. On the wall next to this plinth, there was a place to hold the glasses for drinking. There was also a kerosene stove or *primus*, with tea, sugar, cups, saucers, etc for making tea.

Outside on the balconies, a bamboo stick about twenty feet long hanging from each end was used to hang washed clothes for drying. There was a door with a raised threshold between rooms. A kerosene lantern was kept here in the nighttime to light up both of the rooms and for reading. I remember hearing my dad reading the verses from Gita to all of us kids.

In the other room, there were also two balconies. These were mostly used to see what is going on outside in the main street where there was always traffic and you would see people walking and gathering for talks. I used to sit here all the time for studying but also always dreaming of my future. I could sleep here when I was younger and could fit onto this little balcony. I remember reciting the alphabet and doing timetables here before going to sleep. I also remember listening to the movie songs played every night at the theater before the movie starts. The balconies faced west so there was full

⁹ *chokadi* – open bathroom

daylight and thus it got hot in the summer afternoons.

Between these two balconies there was a small mirror of size 18 inches by 12 inches with a two-inch wide wooden frame hanging five feet above the floor. This was the only mirror in the house and we kids had to push and shove each other out of the way to use it. I had to jump to see my face in the mirror and to comb my hair. There were also stacks of mattresses where the boys slept here in the outer room. In the corner there was a single use toilet and there was a bucket of water next to it. There was an outside staircase in the corner but it was not used and kept closed. Next to that was a grain-grinding mill called a *ghanti* and it was used occasionally to grind coarse flour for special dishes. I helped grind the flour many times. I was told repeatedly not to turn the *ghanti* counterclockwise because it would ruin the grinding surface and the surface would have to be redone.

Third Floor

On the third floor, most of the inside room was used for cooking and dining and the outside room was used for bathing and washing clothes. The inside room was divided into two separate rooms, the small one behind the kitchen stored all of the ingredients for cooking and the outer room was used for cooking the meals and dining. There were many used cans that had been modified with lids from the standard oilcans and these cans were used to store all of the needed ingredients for cooking. There were cupboards where all the pickles were stored in glass

vases called *barnis* and *kothis* on the floor to store the heavily used cooking grains.

My mom or my sister cooked the meals once a day that would be lunch and dinner and we sat here together for the meals. There were charcoal stoves called *sagadis* used for cooking rice, daal, vegetables, roti, etc. Sometimes up to four *sagadis* were being used at the same time. The charcoal was made from half burned wood in a kiln, it was deprived of oxygen and then broken into small pieces and sacked in a 100 lb. bag and sold as cooking coal. We sat on the floor in a quarter-circle to eat the meals that were fresh and hot from the *sagadis*. This was the gathering place for all of us to exchange the news and events of the day.

The outer room was divided into two parts. One of them had a floor built *chula*. A *chula* is a *sagadi* made using bricks to burn long pieces of wood for hot water for bathing and washing clothes. You would pour the hot water into a bucket and after mixing with the cold water for a comfortable temperature; you sat down on the *patla*, a wooden sitting platform, and pour water on your body with a *lota*¹⁰ for a bath. You used a wet cloth to rub your body in lieu of bath soap, as bath soap was rare in those days. It was an open bath so we had to wash and rinse our wet clothes after the bath and hang them to dry.

There were two *baris*¹¹ that were used for passing cooked items through with the neighbors and there were always ongoing conversations with

¹⁰ *lota* - vessel

¹¹ *bari* – open window with shelf

the neighbors while cooking and dining. Occasionally when a visitor arrived, they stood on one of these baris for chatting.

Fourth Floor

The fourth floor was a storeroom that contained grains for a whole year of consumption. The owner of the house locked this part of the room and the owner's leftover valuables were stored here. In one of the stored cases, there were many eyeglass frames. We were told the Mojilal Jat was a businessman specializing in spectacles.

In harvesting seasons, it was customary to purchase the grains needed for a year's consumption so they were cleaned and stored here. Being on the top floor, the hot temperature kept away the bugs from eating the grains. This story was hot due to the galvanized steel roof and the summer sun as well as the winter sun keeping the floor hot. Here we also kept many bundles of plates and saucers made from *pataradi* and *padiya*. These were used on special occasions when many guests were invited for a meal. They were used once and then thrown away; these plates in today's environmental terms were biodegradable. They were homemade from leaves of the plants; the leaves were large in area and were sewn together with a tree needle from another kind of tree. After making them, they were stacked in a bundle of hundreds and left to dry in the fourth floor heat.

Roof

During the kite-flying season, the roof was an important place to climb to during the month of January. Every day after school, all the neighborhood kids in the town were on the rooftop to fly the kites. The roofs of the neighboring houses were all at the same height so we walked on the roofs of the many neighboring house to fly kites with friends. On the day of the *Uttarayan*, January 14, we spent the whole day on top of the roof flying kites from morning to evening with everyone in the family. For all of the school kids, the kite-flying season starts one month before Uttarayan and ends a week after the Uttarayan. This is the day the sun starts migrating towards north from south and supposedly the wind direction changes.

For the whole month in the evening hours or on the weekends, all of the spare time was spent in flying kites or getting ready for the big day. You needed strong but light strings covered with a layer of ground glass. This will allow the rubbing on the string of the other person's kite and cutting it. To do this I grounded a soda bottle and filtered the glass with fine cloth. Then you make a paste of wheat flour, add some color and boil it, add to it the filtered glass, boil the mixture and apply the mixture to the string, let it dry, and finally roll it in the spindle. The spindle is three inches in diameter, ten inches long with handle on each side; it can hold about one thousand feet of string.

The kite can be made at home but the best kites are made outside. You need a strong special kite paper and strong and bendable bamboo sticks. The best kites are 18 inches square. You glue one of the sticks at diagonally straight to the paper and

another stick across the other diagonal except you make this arch upward for about less than quarter of the other diagonal length. Then you bend the arch diagonal holding both of the ends and observe the lift of the kite. The bottoms of the kite make a tail of the kite for stability and lift in a higher wind speed. The kite paper comes in various colors and many designs can be made for kites to look unique. There is a special way to tie the kite for maneuverability. For the straight diagonal bamboo, you make two holes on each side of the bamboo about a third of the way from the bottom. The second two holes are at the crossing of the two bamboos. You take about four feet of string and double it and tie each end to one of these two holes. For better lift of the kite, measure the two arms of the string and make sure that the bottom arm is one to one and half finger width longer than the top. You tie the knot on the string after the measurement and recheck the measurement. Then take the end of the string from the spindle and tie to the string outside these two arms. Turning to wind direction, the best wind is on the top of the roof or in the open land without trees or poles. You let out four feet of thread and give a kick to the kite with your finger holding the thread and keep repeating until the kite gets up in the air and wind will pick it up. Then start loosening the string and keep giving the kick with the finger until the kite gets up high in the air. For maneuvering the kite, pull the string two to three times and move your hand to the right or left whichever direction you want the kite to go and once the top of the kite turns that direction pull the string few more times and let it go and it will continue in that direction.

The fun starts when there many kites flying in your neighborhood and you try to maneuver your kite over one of them and let loose your string as fast as you can until you cut their thread for your triumphant moment. Occasionally both kites keep going without cutting and you run out of the thread and in desperation you let go of your kite or keep pulling the thread hoping you survive. You must keep repeating and keep counting and making sure you are not the victim. On the day of the Uttarayan, everybody in the town flies the kites and they bring on average fifty kites. They make all of them ready to fly the day before by tying the string properly. They fly the kite from morning until night and keep a count of the number of kites they cut. The whole family gathers on the roof and once the kites are cut they all shout to let everybody know that they cut the kite. Throughout the town one can see people on top of the roof flying kites in each and every neighborhood. The sight is a permanent memory of mine today and I hope it is true still to this day in Balasinor.

Natvarlal Afani was one of the kite champions; he was there most of the day to fly kites and on Uttarayan he has cut on average more than a hundred kites. We all feared his kite but he spared nobody. His house was on Hathikhana Fadiu but the roof of his house was the fourth roof away from my house. His brother Kantilal Afani's son Anil Afani was my older brother's age and was his friend.^v From the rooftop, the streets did not matter and you jumped from one roof to another with ease.

Kantibhai Desai was another person who sold kites, threads, and bobbins in the season. On average

he sold five thousand kites during the season. We preordered kites to be picked up on the day before the day of Uttarayan. During kite-flying season, his shop was a gathering place for my friends and I to prepare for the season. The day is full of excitement; we would forget about lunch or dinner until somebody dragged us back down. At nighttime, people occasionally attached to their kites paper lanterns enclosing lit candles to light up the sky.

There were gutters on the edges of the roof to collect the rainwater. We collected the rainwater and stored it in an earthen vase called *kothis* to use in lieu of the well water for later use. The water we used in the house was fetched from the *talav*, a lake, or a well. The well water was used for drinking and cooking and was filtered using a plain cloth whereas lake water was used for bathing and cleaning. The well water was not fluorinated and is one of the reasons that my annual average dental bill is quite high these days.

The closed end streets are called *fadiu* and are named based on the families with the same last name that lived there. My immediate neighborhood was a closed end street with eight houses; four houses in the front and four in line with my house facing one another. They were all four stories tall and although they were built in different time periods, they all looked the same except two that were very old and were vacant.

In the first house in the front was Kantilal Jat with his family and his mother who was in her eighties. His oldest son Nalin was my age and was my closest friend. His mother Lilaben is a sister of Devandrakumar's mom. Devandrakumar used to

visit Nalin and his *masi*¹² and I knew him since my early days.

Nalin has a total of eight siblings; four brothers and four sisters. The oldest is Lata, married to Suryakantbhai. Lata's marriage was the first in Nalin's family when she was eighteen years old and it was celebrated with great festivity. Nalin is second in age after Lata.^{vi} Nalin and I were in the same grade in our high school classes. Being a neighbor, our friendship was very close as we spent most of our time together and played games and studied together. His father wanted him to become an engineer, like his uncle's son Pravin Jat, but he was not admitted into engineering college.

After completion of high school, I went to Baroda and he went to Bombay to study. Later he joined the service industry in the electrical accessories business and later started his own business.^{vii}

A major incident happened in the early 1950s when Nalin's father became very sick with jaundice, a liver disease also known as yellow fever and the doctor said he was not going to survive for more than a few days. Relatives and friends all gathered at his house for grieving and were preparing for his death. But a miracle happened with the use of ayurvedic medicine and he started getting better and in a few months he fully recovered and lived a full life.

The house next to this and right in front of my house belonged to Lallubhai Jat. He lived there with his second wife Maniben and one of her sons. His

¹² *masi* – mother's sister

older daughter from his first wife is the mother of my *mama*¹³'s son Kishor's wife Shobhana. We used to call her *Bachi*. Their family lived in a town named *Bhavnagar* in Saurashtra. The older son and second daughter of Lallubhai Jat were also married and were living in Bombay. On the summer holiday, all of their family gathered together here so I came to know them well. The son who lived with them was named Pravin. He was not very clever and did not finish seventh grade so he was helping his father in the business. He never got married and was living by himself after both of his parents died.

The house next to this belonged to Ramanlal Fafa and nobody lived in this house except in summertime when his family came from Bombay and stayed here for a few months. Their children were of same age as us but we could not sustain friendships because of their short stays in town.

The house at the end belonged to Chimanlal Fafa and he lived there with his wife Sitaben and their four children. They were all younger than me. Chimanlal had a horse barn and he kept a horse for his commute to the nearby village for business. His father Chotalal was living there with him, he died a few years after I came to know about him. Sitaben was from *Dahod*, a town thirty miles from Balasinor and she was visiting Dahod frequently to be with her family and in return her family came and visited her. There was a constant quarrel between Sitaben and Lilaben for reasons I was not aware of, perhaps jealousy. Everyone had a bad habit of throwing dirty water and garbage onto the street from the upstairs

¹³ *mama* – mother's brother

window without looking to see if anybody was passing underneath the window at that time. Occasionally it landed accidentally on some people. Since Sitaben lived inside the street, occasionally she got showered with garbage so a war of words would ensue and last for a few hours. At some point, fifty to hundred people in the neighborhood got together to watch and listen to this verbal outburst. Here they said the dirtiest words to each other and their husbands and families and other parties would animatedly respond with more dirty words. Occasionally I asked my sister the meaning of these words and she told me not to listen and to cover my ears with my hands. I have never heard so many dirty words at one time since then.

The old vacant house on my side of the street was used as a warehouse to store bundles of cloths packed and delivered by factories for their businesses. Bhikhalal Jat and his son Niru Jat, a friend to my older brother, were cloth merchants and his family used to live there earlier before moving to a newly built house in the adjoining street. Chandrika Kadakia and her family also lived there for short time while their house was being rebuilt. Chandrika was with me in all of my high school classes.^{viii}

The house next to this was similar to Bhikhalal Jat's as it was also vacant and belonged to the Kachara family and occasionally they came to clean it. These two houses were built by the turn of the century and they looked different due to their floor to ceiling height being about four feet less than newly built houses.

The house next to mine was Chandulal Jat's. Everybody in this family had grown up and left the house and both of their parents had died. The only person living at that time was Pravin Jat, the last one of the family. We called him Pravinkaka and he was six years older than I. After completing high school, he moved to Bombay and was working as an electrical accessories salesman in *Lohar Chawl*. While he was here studying, we had fun visiting his house and there were occasional parties where all the neighbors' kids were invited for drinking *bhang*¹⁴ on hot summer days. He had a few old gramophone records and played songs on his gramophone. Pravinkaka was alone so he ate his meals at his cousin's Kantilal Jat's house. We were flying kites with him in kite flying season. Later I once visited him for dinner with him and his wife at his residence in Bombay.^{ix}

Madani Seri

Jatni Seri is a branch of Madani Seri, a main street off of the bazaar. The layout of Madani Seri is like a tree branch, it is curving and slightly going up in elevation, sub streets were going out at random distances on both sides and most of these streets were dead-ends. The main trunk of the street goes to the street that takes you to the palace on one side and Golwad Street on the other side.

The bazaar entrance to the street is an arch entrance and over the arch is the building with an office on the second floor. The office belonged to

¹⁴ *bhang* – alternative intoxicant to alcohol

Kantilal Parikh. I have very fond memories of this office. Kantilal Parikh was a known freedom fighter and reformist at that time. He was a member of *Samajwadi Party* and he along with his other followers were known in the town as pioneers in the Independence and Quit India movements which *Gandhiji* called for on August 8, 1942. Though I was born just in January of 1942, growing up I was able feel the enthusiasm of these pioneers' movement regarding the improvement of the living conditions of the people and of the infrastructure of the town. Five years later, India won its independence and I felt Kantibhai's efforts had in some way contributed to this result.

In the summertime, there was no school so the students needed activities. The students from out of town came to visit their family and enjoyed the coolness of the weather the town offered from the surroundings hills. The road leading to these hills was also passing through the *talav* and high school. It was not paved at many locations and needed improvements. It was difficult to get help from the government and the motto of the Samajwadi party was to take over the responsibility themselves. Kantibhai and his followers decided to have a *Shram Yagna* or Labor camp and let all the students come and help improve the road. Through this office, he made the arrangements to obtain the materials and equipment for the labor camp. Every day in the morning, we went out and dug the road and spread the rocks to make and improve the road. This routine lasted for a few summers and I remember joining them in carrying the bucket full of rocks, standing in line, and passing the bucket to the next

person. At the end of four hours of work, we were treated to a glass of milk. In the dryer years, the talav dried out earlier so we had to dig deeper and clean the debris. In those dry years, the water was reduced to 10% of the talav's holding capacity. We could walk on the lake and feel the springy soil under our feet and jump up and down. In a few instances while jumping we felt something underneath and on digging we dug out a large turtle. We watched it crawl towards the little water left at the deepest part of the lake.

On entering the street, a part of the street goes straight towards the well and forks off on both sides where many of my friends lived. We spent most of our playing time on this part of the Madani Seri. The names of few of the friends are Jitendra Shah who later became an engineer with Gujarat State electricity board, Kirit Khisadar, Vinod Dhangela, Pravin Chotio, and Rajni Mody.

There was a *dhobi* or washerman's shop near the entrance of the street. The dhobi's family had four children, two of the boys were similar in age as my brother and myself and we used to hang around this place to talk and wait on them to play with us. While waiting, we watched the dhobi iron the shirts and pants. He was renting a ground floor room for his business and living off his family. Most of the ironing was done on the porches of the neighboring houses. One of his sons Gandal was a good cricket player and coach so we had to recruit him to play on our team. When you start playing a game, within a half-hour, a crowd of twenty kids would gather to join us. At final examination time, friends in the same grade got together at one of the friends' house

to study and sleep overnight. A few times we stayed awake all night and created trouble for the host family. Since there was no electricity available in the street as well as in the house, it got pitch dark at nighttime and even more in the receding phases of moon so a kerosene lantern had to be used for reading and other lighting needs.

There were rumors about a ghost in the town and people were aware of any houses that the ghost supposedly lived in. Sometimes when studying at one of these houses, we thought that we could feel the presence of a ghost at nighttime. A few times we tried to frighten the ghost to go away by making scary noises and we heard footsteps of the ghost coming and going away. Nobody had personally seen any ghost of course but remembering moments like these later on was always a conversation topic amongst us. The person who had the courage to shout at the ghost and tell it to go away became a hero while the rest of the kids were very scared and were hiding and shivering in fear at the thought of a ghost lurking about.

The street goes on towards Golwad where there were many houses and many closed end streets. Most of the houses were closed year round as the families moved to Bombay. The house where I spent most of my time was at the house of my mom's mama, Ujadawada mama. This house was on my way from my house to my dad's shop through Golwad Street. The five mamas, as I called them using their first name, whenever they came and visited their mother who lived there, they called me *bhanias*¹⁵ and engaged me in conversations. The

oldest of the five brothers was named Jethalal; he retired from the family business and was overseeing the rebuilding of this house. I frequently spoke with him; he was in his late sixties and I was in my early teens. I sat down with him and he would show and explain the construction of the house in detail. Further along in the street there was a small *gali* or alley called Sethni Gali. Here were all the Seth family houses. I was told that the scar on my forehead is of a big cut from my falling in that narrow street while their houses were under construction.^x

The first house at the entrance of the street had a front porch that was a gathering place for the kids from this street and the adjoining street was where games were played and news were exchanged. The games included cricket, cards, marbles, and spinning tops as well as others that I will describe in the next section. There was a place that rented bicycles for twenty-five cents an hour. During the kite-flying season, there was a shop that sold kites and kite flying accessories.

Games

Reflecting on my early childhood days of growing up in the streets of Balasinor, there were many families on my street and many of the neighboring streets had more than two kids that were close to my age to play with. As I grew up, the home was where you went for meals and sleep, the rest of the time you wandered in the streets playing or chitchatting with friends. There were no scarcity

¹⁵ *bhania* - nephew

of friends; you could choose whom you wanted to be friends with. Most likely the friends were the friends you went to school with or your classmates you studied with. There were yearly examinations so most of the year you spent going to school and playing with the friends, then at examination time you found the smart friends and his circle of friends and tried to join their study groups. Spending the night after a long night of studying was another way of bonding with friends.

Whenever we played cards there were four players and twenty or so onlookers and we all made so much noise that the people living nearby got annoyed or angry. They would throw a bucket full of water on us in hopes that we go and play somewhere else. Kids from the neighboring streets knew the time we played and joined us. Every house had a front porch so you would invite a few friends to play cards with and immediately a few more will join and it would become a crowd. While not playing, we sat together and talked for hours. The only time we went home was either for lunch and dinner or if somebody called for us. The complexity of these games evolved as we grew up starting from playing cards. We usually played rummy except occasionally we played a more memorable game called *grim*. You played with many players and distributed the cards one at a time until all of the cards were distributed evenly. If you had a pair you removed it, then you start picking a card from your neighbor without looking to try to make a pair. The process went on until all of the cards were paired. Then you start calling for the pair which you do not have but you know someone else has; calling his name meant asking for that pair, if he

had that pair that you asked for, he has to give it to you, if not then he said “Sahebji”. This meant he did not have the pair and you lose your turn. The game went on until all the pairs were turned into fours. This was a memory game where you must remember who has the group of four cards because he asked for the pairs of that cards. On your turn, you keep asking for the fours of that card and the person who has all the fours or the full deck is the winner. The crowds gathered to watch and someone would always try to give you the wrong signal and if you are not sure of the last four, you lost your turn and the other player will ask one by one all the fours he does not have to become a grim champion. The excitement grows as the game nears the end.

Girls played a game called *kukaa* or *kodio*, which was very similar to jacks. I have seen my sister playing this with her friends. Girls also were seen playing jump rope and hopscotch.

Bhamardo is called top in English. These are the tops you bought from the local shop except it had no piercing nail at the bottom. You had to take a nail and cut the head off and pound it at the bottom to make it sharp and pointy. Then you used an iron file to rub the nail on the stone to make it pointier. You used a string to spin the top as hard as you can and aim it at another top spinning in the game. The aim is to knock the other person’s top out of the drawn circle for the game. To play *gilli-danda*, you would make a hole six inches long and an inch deep into the ground and place a gilli inside. A gilli is six inches long and one inch in diameter and is tapered at both ends. A *danda* is a wooden stick that is also an inch in diameter and fifteen inches long with a

tapered end. With the stick in the hole you launch the gilli as far away as possible, everybody in the team does that from that spot onwards without touching the gilli, then you flip it in the air and hit it with the danda as hard as you can making sure you do not hit another person in the street or at an open window. You keep doing it for a few rounds and the loser at the end has to come back home hopping on one leg. To make sure he hops all the way to the home there is another player who walks with him with a fist on his back and as soon as he stops he is pounded with the fists. *Lakhota* are called marbles in English except these are an inch in diameter and made from rocks into perfect round shapes. You dig three holes three feet apart and from far away try to toss the marbles into the farthest hole away or as close as possible. The game is to launch the marbles in the three holes and back. The way to launch the marble is to flick it with your forefinger. The aim of the game is to land it in the hole and to knock away any marbles out of your way as far away as possible. The winner is the first one to complete the holes to and fro. *Hututu* is a physical game for two teams with strong players. You draw a line like the fifty-yard line in American football and on both sides draw ten feet and twenty feet lines away from the center. With each team on each side at the ten-foot line, a player from one of the teams starts at the centered line and keeps repeating the word “Hutututu” without interruption and tries to touch the ten-foot line. The other team’s player has to catch him before he touches the ten-foot line and try to pull him in, the player with his might will try to escape but the total effort of all the team members is

required to keep him on their side and pulls him away from the center line without allowing him to touch the center line. If he touches that line and still continues to utter the word Hutututu, whoever touched him is out of the game. The twenty feet line is the boundary line that you are not to cross over.

Cricket in the street is played in the summer time or whenever we hear of the test match between an international team and the Indian team and the excitement overwhelms us. Since there were no sporting goods stores, we go to our carpenter and he makes something that resembles a cricket bat for us to play with. Our cousins from Bombay, when they come in the summer time, they bring their bat and ball and form a team with the friends who lived here or they play against them. Cricket played in the streets are for the beginners just practicing with a rubber ball and to make a lot of noise. A minimum of four players is needed to begin and it is a fun for little kids to try to connect with the ball. Once the team goes to a full number of players we try to find a cricket ground to play and have a regular match. Games such as cricket, volleyball, badminton, etc are played in the high school after school hours. The best players from all of the classes formed the teams though typically most of the players were from the senior-level classes. The teams play with each other and occasionally have matches with the team from the neighboring areas. In my time many of the new teachers have joined the team to play the game. By the time I came to senior class the school teams and the games mostly disappeared. I remember playing volleyball a few times with friends but not at a competitive level.

TOWN

Balasinor

The walls of the forts, which surround the town, are 3 feet thick and 15 feet tall with five gates and at strategic locations there are lookout holes and platforms for placement of a gun on the fort. The gates had a tower for the security guard to look out for intruders entering the town. At the time Nawab was in power all of the gates were closed at nighttime and special permission was required to let visitors enter. The Nawab's palace is located at the northwest corner of the town near the talav on a hilly side and the ground is covered with large rocks.

There is a tale that once when the Mahaprabhuji Vallabhacharya's disciple arrived to town at nighttime, Nawab's security guard refused to open the gate so the disciple put a curse on Nawab that the palace will burn soon. The palace did burn and half of it was burnt so to this day the half-burnt palace can be seen from anywhere in town. Each gate has its name based on the area or town the road going through the gate will lead to. For instance, the talav gate is through where you arrive at the talav. The ST gate is where the station for State Transport buses stand is located.

A Walk through Town

Bazaar

The main bazaar runs from the talav gate to ST gate and the town's main streets starts from both

sides of the bazaar. There are buildings three to four stories tall on both sides of the bazaar and the shops are at ground level. The road through the bazaar is narrow and the middle eight feet was paved with asphalt and the road's edges were not paved. A full-size bus would have a difficult time traveling through this narrow road. It is a straight road from the talav gate to the ST gate except for a 90-degree bend near the school *chowk*¹⁶. A steady paced walk from one gate to another takes fifteen minutes.

Going through the bazaar on a busy day in the afternoon was challenging. The street would be crowded because of people walking everywhere, people lined up at the shop to buy goods, bullock carts carrying goods lined up in both directions to pass one another, and animals like donkey, cows, and goats were grazing for scraps of food on the road. The bazaar was littered with animal droppings and dirt was flying through the air. The trucks were parked to unload the goods and there were hand-pulled four-wheel carts transporting the goods and some of them were selling merchandise parked in a little space on the street corner. Women were carrying vases containing water from the lake or well sometimes stacked two or three high on their heads or some would be carrying a basket full of washed clothes on their heads. School children were going home from school carrying books, slates, etc. Cyclists were passing through the crowd ringing their bell adding to the noise. In addition to all these sights and sounds, occasionally trucks would be passing one another on a narrow street and one would have

¹⁶ *chowk* – town square

to back up quite a distance to pass adding to the chaos in the street and thus tying up the traffic.

Talav Gate

Starting from the talav gate and walking towards the ST gate, there were six shops on the right as you entered the gate. These shops bought the produce and crops from the farmers, most of them in small quantity and accumulated from many farms and sold it wholesale. They opened the shop very early as farmers came early before any other shop in the town opened. I heard a tale from my father-in-law once that when he was ten years old or so he had to open his shop earlier before dawn and while waiting for farmers at Saliawala gate, he saw a tiger come to the well for a drink of water. He hid behind the well and watched the tiger drink the water and slowly went away.

As you come further into the town the first building you encounter is a clock tower where the town's municipality offices were located and where the road splits into three main roads. The middle one went to the bazaar. The one on the right side goes to the Nawab's palace and the one on the left side goes to *Sakariawad*¹⁷. We will describe the first right hand side street and when we come back from ST gate to the talav gate we will describe the left hand side street.

The first main building in the bazaar is a mosque, a newer building at the time, and it served

¹⁷ *Sakariawad* – road leading to town of Sakaria

the local Muslim population. Nawab was a Muslim and most of his caretakers were also Muslim and due to the proximity of the palace they frequented this mosque. It is customary to observe silence when passing through the area of the mosque to not disturb the people performing *namaz*. Bands playing music in any marriage procession out on the streets is required to stop playing and pass through in silence.

Sanstha Mandal

There was a newer building called *Samajik Sanstha Mandal* where classes were conducted to teach the trade in sewing, art, cooking, etc. Kalaben Vakil was in charge of the mandal in those days. This Sanstha mandal was organized to help the underprivileged women of the town and surrounding villages to earn a living by learning the trade. My sister Indiraben, after finishing her seventh grade education and before getting married, came here to learn and then she herself taught here. Between the Sanstha building and the next street, there were a few shops where they colored the fabric and printed the design on the fabric using rubber stamps.

Talati Khadaki

The street next to the Sanstha is Talati Khadaki. My friend Vinod Dhangela lived here. We

came to his house many times to study and play. He is the oldest amongst five of his brothers and whenever we visited him, at the entrance of his house his mother along with the maid were cleaning piles of utensils after lunch. She always welcomed us into the house. In both eighth and ninth grades of high school, Vinu needed an extra year to advance to the next grade. Since we caught up with him in the ninth grade he picked up a few tricks from us and also disciplined himself in reading and writing to pass the examinations. After completing the SSC examination, he left for Bombay to start his own business and later my brother Shashikant joined him. The company they formed was called Provincial Electric Corporation that did trading in electrical accessories and wires and cables etc. The partnership lasted for two years. One thing I remember about Vinu is he always carried a thick book to hide his cigarette box. He cut out a hole in the middle through all the pages and kept the box of cigarettes along with a box of matchsticks.^{xi} Between this street and the Madani seri, the next street, there were many shops and the first two shops belonged to Manilal Chaudhari and his brother Ramanlal. They were *kariana* merchants. *Kariana* implies the groceries except there were no perishable food items as all the items were needed in preparing the food at home. There was also a barbershop, *panwala*¹⁸ shop and a *bhavasara* shop on this street. The *bhavasara* shop prepared sweets and fresh food items for daily consumption. There were shops of jewelry

¹⁸ *panwala* – paan vendor

merchants and Manilal Parekh was the prominent jeweler of that time.

Madani Seri

The next main street is Madani Seri, which we have discussed earlier. The second is Rokadia Khadaki (*khadaki* means a closed end street with a gate). Between these two streets, there were many shops; a few of them belonged to kariana merchants including my friend Kirit Chanchadia's father Somalal. Next to this was another shop belonging to Kantilal Jat, a wholesale merchant in sugar and grains, etc. Next to this were a few merchants selling cotton fabrics and next was Otalawada who sold cottonseed for the cattle feed and then there were a few more shops of cotton merchants. There was a shop of Pedhiwala who dealt in *hundi*¹⁹, like a bank draft, except they were no banks in the town in those days. All of these shops had an uncovered front porch and were available for the shop owners and employees to sit and gossip after the business hours for socializing.

Rokadia Khadaki

¹⁹ *hundi* – unconditional order in writing made by a person directing another to pay a certain sum of money to a person named in the order

To enter Rokadia Khadaki, you needed to climb eight steps. Shashikant Modi (Lal Dag), Arvind Modi (Karkun), and Suresh Modi were some of my friends who lived on this street. I came here many times to visit and play with them. Lal Dag was one of my closest friends; we spent much time together in high school doing after school activities and did homework at his house. His mother made us snacks while we were doing homework and she always welcomed us with kindness. Lal Dag and I were roommates for many years during college in Baroda.^{xii}

At the entrance of the Rokadia Street lived Ramanlal Ledi with his wife and four beautiful daughters. The oldest and most beautiful was Indira who had very distinct facial features, fair skin, and a commanding personality. In those days we were teasing her by calling her the name *butmogaro*²⁰, discreetly of course. It so happened that at a summer picnic of Balasinor people in San Francisco in 1990, Indira's son who was living in the Bay Area at the time came to the picnic. While introducing us one at a time to the rest of the group, he introduced himself as a son of Indira and to be more specific he said that his mom was known in Balasinor as *butmogaro*. It was amazing to hear this and it brought back the memories of the good old days in Balasinor. It was amusing explaining this to my wife and my boys.

In the middle of the street, there was a big open area to play cricket and other games. The front of all the houses were facing one another so people were coming and going and talking to one another like they were part of a big family. The house in the

²⁰ *butmogaro* – jasmine flower

corner was a six-story house, but the top two stories were torn down after it was built. At the time it was built, the house was taller than Nawab's palace so Nawab's people came and tore down the top two stories. The corner of this house and the corner of the house I was living in, although in different streets, were touching. I would climb on the top of this house from the roof of my house for flying kites during the festival.

Hathikhana Fadiu

The next street is Hathikhahanu Fadiu. Dinesh Rathodio lived here and he was the only one with a radio amongst our friends. During examination time, we gathered here to study and sleep here. In the middle of the night some spirit would take over his brother's wife and her behavior changed and she shouted and made gestures and faces as if a demon had taken over her soul. Her husband would scream and shout at her and try to scare the demon to leave her body. After a few hours, they walked her to her parents' home; she would come back home the next day seemingly okay. This incident went on for few days and then subsided and then would start again always in the wintertime.

At the end of Hathikhana Fadiu, there is a khadki where my Seharawada Masi lived while they were in Balasinor. While away, they lived in town called *Shehra* and came to Balasinor a few times a year. From my early memories and family tales, I remember that during the riots of the 1947 partition of India, the town of Shehra burned. So my masi's

family left town and took refuge here and then returned after the riots had subsided. Also I remember that both of my *masas*²¹ died on the same day. Mohanlal Pedhiwala Masa was sick and was in his final moments, at that time, a telegram arrived that announced that Chimanlal Masa in Shehra was also very sick. My father went to Shehra to see him. He died before my father could reach Shehra and then we sent the news from here that Mohanlal Masa had died here as well.

My aunt, Kirtankaka's wife Taraben was from Hathikhanawala's family and her parents and siblings lived on this street.

Ambalal's Medical Store

In the bazaar towards the next street was Ambalal's medical store. Before the medical store, there was Ochhavalal Dedki's shop; he was a cloth merchant. I have seen Anil Dedki at the shop many times, later on they closed the shop and the family moved to Bombay. This was the only medical store in the town in those days. One of Ambalal's cousins who worked here had a speech problem and it was difficult for us to understand what he was saying when he was dispensing the prescribed medicine. Ambalal's son was in our high school class.

²¹ *masa* – mother's sister's husband

Golani Dukan

Next to this store was an ice cream and milkshake shop called Golani Dukan; this was the busiest place in the town on hot summer days. The store kept and sold slabs of ice; the ice slabs were covered with wood dust to slow down the melting. In those days ice came from a nearby town's ice factory, as there was no ice-making factory in Balasinor. There were people continuously churning by hand to operate the ice cream making machine. On a hot day after a big lunch it was customary to nap for two hours and wake up during the hot afternoon. The most cooling and enjoyable moment was drinking a cold milkshake. My brother-in-law or sister would tell us to go to Gola's shop and get cold milkshakes for everybody. These were some of the most enjoyable moments that I still remember and cherish. One of us would go to Gola's shop and order the milkshakes and then one of the Gola's workers would come with you back home with the milkshakes you ordered and wait until you are finished and go back to the store with the money and empty glasses.

Golwad Seri

The next street is Golwad. The road to my Dad's shop was from my home in Jatni Seri through Sethni Seri into Golwad and then to the bazaar. I

traveled this route everyday until I left town. Golwad is a straight and narrow street and at the end of the street is where the whole Gola family lived. They used their donkeys to transport the goods for example for building a house that required 10,000 bricks. Each donkey could carry 50 bricks and ten donkeys would make the trip twenty times until the work was done. It required dealing with the donkeys for a few days so that meant dealing with the dirt and droppings and other hassles. This was one of the modes of transportation for many items in those days.

Madan Mohan Mandir

Near the front of the street there was a Madan mohan *mandir*. My dad's mother side of the family lived on this street called Desai Fadiu that is next to this mandir in Golwad. My dad came to this mandir often, here I heard him singing the *kirtan* in *Vraj* language; it was a great feeling to listen to this kirtan. In 2009, singers from the Vraj temple in Pennsylvania were invited to my house in California to sing the *vraj kirtan*. Their singing reminded me of my dad's singing at this temple. Recently this temple in Balasinor was renovated and Jayantilal asked me to bring five boxes of *kesar* or saffron for the temple on my most recent visit to India in December 2007, which I did with pleasure. I had also visited the temple and met the priest on my last visit to Balasinor and was able to see the old temple one last time before it got renovated.

Desai Fadiu is where the relatives of my dad's side family lived. One of them was Chimanlal mama. Financially he was not well-to-do. He had 1 daughter and 2 sons, one of who was slightly mentally retarded. Chimanlal mama's family needs were demanding and the shop he had in front of my dad's shop was not doing well. He was eventually forced to close the shop so my dad asked him to help out in his shop in his spare time. This happened after I left town and was going to college in Baroda. I heard later from my mom that Chimanlal mama was stealing the grains from the shop despite being paid by my dad as an employee. I warned my dad repeatedly about this but he reminded me to think about how well I was treated every time I went to my mama's house. My dad told me that Chimanlal mama is my mama's son and is poor; if he steals a few pounds of rice he does it to feed his family because he is ashamed to ask. I was stunned then and now with my dad's answer and felt selfish about my own biased opinion.

My mama, Kantilal mama, was rich and always took care of my family's needs. Whenever he came to town, we always visited him and he always brought some gifts or sweets from Bombay. On my visit to Bombay after my second year in college, my mama asked Kishore to take me to their family tailor's shop and fit me for two pairs of pants and two shirts.

After I left for college, Natwarlal Jat asked my dad to vacate the house I had lived in for the first sixteen years of my life as he wanted to tear it down and rebuild it. My father vacated and lived on Desai's street. This house was at the end of the

closed end street and nobody lived in most of the houses and they all were locked. The street was pitch-dark in the nighttime. I remember coming here only once on vacation time. My brother Pankaj took care of my parents while they lived here. They moved out of this house into their own house in Dev Seri that I purchased for them after my marriage in 1969.

Champaben Modi

Between the mandir and Desai Fadiu lived Champaben Modi with her sister who had a speech impediment. Champaben was an educated, kind, courteous, knowledgeable, well read, and respectable woman of the town. She taught upper level high school classes in language, comprehension and literature. Along with this she was continuously working for social justice. There were always people coming and going from her house seeking advice in various matters. In my high school days, Champaben was my teacher and then she was the high school principal. Later she went on to become a legislator in the Gujarat state assembly from Balasinor district. When I invited her to my wedding in 1969, she replied and wished both of us a very happy and prosperous life. Years later, she tragically died in a car accident while visiting a nearby town.

I remember a major event involving Champaben in my last year of high school on August 8, 1956. There was a call from Indulal Yagnic for an independent state of Gujarat and called for a strike

and a non-violent movement to achieve the objective and to send a message to the government. The police in Ahmedabad reacted to the call of strike with violence by injuring and killing many college students. That day in the first period, Champaben gave us the news of the happenings in Ahmedabad and told us that we all are weak. Immediately we all decided to go on strike in protest of violence in Ahmedabad. We marched to all the classrooms in the school and called for the strike in protest. We also marched through the main bazaar of the town and asked all the shops and offices to observe the strike.

Dedki Seri is where my friend Anil Dedki and his family lived. Since my mama's business partner was Natwarlal Dedki, we have known the Dedki family for many years. When I arrived in the U.S. at JFK airport in New York City, I went to Shashikant Dedki's house in New York where he was doing an internship at nearby hospital. He had welcomed me warmly into his house for a few days and then I left for college in Chicago.

Opposite to the mandir is Latkari Seri. Here lived relatives of Smita Kadakia's (my future sister-in-law) family. There was a well on the right hand side of the street entrance for everyone's use and there were houses on both side of the closed end street. At the end was my Latkari masi, my mom's masi's daughter. I visited them many times for special occasions. Her daughter Subhadra was in my high school class. After passing the seventh grade in high school, she left the school and left soon for Bombay after getting married. Masa was a cloth

merchant and his shop was located in the front of his house in the bazaar next to Gola's ice cream shop.

Shashikant Kadakia

On Latkari Seri, my high school principal Shashikant Kadakia lived here with his wife Lilaben and their two daughters. One of the daughters was Shila and she was with me in all of the seven grades in high school. ^{xiii} Shashikantbhai was a mentor for my friends and I. We discussed many things and he inspired and guided us in what majors we should look for when we go to college. He told us that we are smart and we should pursue science degrees in college and told us that engineering will be very difficult for us to get admission. It so happened that of the six of us close friends, three become engineers. We had help from the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his government in 1955 as he passed a legislation to meet the needs for the development of India and requested that all universities double the number of seats available for new students in engineering all over India.

We learned that Shashikantbhai had a breathing problem so he needed medication and the dry weather of Balasinor was suitable for his condition. He had once been imprisoned by the British government and was tortured to gather information for the British regarding riots by making him lie down on an ice slab. This was related to the Quit India Movement called by Gandhi in 1942. In his youth, he was a follower of Gandhi along with

many others in the town. He was well-read and was a scholar of Gujarati literature. He was always smiling and very pleasant to listen and talk with. In kite flying season, we used to jump over roofs and enter his house through the roof to talk with him about our home assignments and grades and also to fly kites with him.

I have seen Kokilabhabhi (my eldest sister-in-law) sitting in winter days soaking in the sun at the front of her parents' house located in Lalkhani street which is the first street located at the entrance of Golwad street. I remember the Pravinbhai wedding very well when standing at the entrance of the house when the marriage procession arrived. We went with the procession because of our relationship with foi²², as theirs was a joint family in those days. I joined the procession with Bhupendra (my foi's son) from the beginning to the end and arrived here.

Vegetable Market

The next street to Latkari Seri included a vegetable market that was built with a covered roof; all shops inside were laid out in an orderly way to sell the fresh vegetables. There were twenty or so shops on both sides of this vegetable market. On a summer day in the morning time, this was a very crowded place and there was hardly room to walk through, as there were people from the town and visitors gathered here to buy fresh vegetables. Most

²² *foi* – father's sister

of the vegetables arrived here from the nearby villages; in those days no vegetable growers were using chemicals or fertilizers. The families who sold vegetables were called *Kachhia*; later on they started the general merchandise businesses that were eventually abandoned by people from our caste when they left town. They opened those shops at many places in and out of town near the main entrance of the town. By this time, the town had grown and businesses expanded near the gates and outside all of the gates.

Malik Master

Behind the vegetable market lived Malik Master, an artist and a painting and craft teacher in the high school. His family was highly respected by Nawab for the artwork they provided to him. Malik Master was a very likable person. He was the painter for the poster for the new cinema coming into Nawab's theater and these posters were seen everywhere announcing the arrival of the new cinema. He was also painting the marriage *mandaps*²³. On his spare time he was creating beautiful oil paintings and other portraits that I have seen while visiting his house. His son Yusuf was in all of my high school classes. In the front of his house there was a flourmill that I visited many times to grind the grain.

²³ *mandap* – covered structure with pillars temporarily erected for a wedding

Kubharwado

Further down in the vegetable market was an area called Kubharwado. The *kumbhar* are the makers of the clay pottery and clay wares. They used donkeys to carry the clay from the outskirts of the town and then they mixed and churned the clay to make the vessels. In front of their houses there were kilns to bake the vessels. They also were making and selling earthen utensils to store and carry water called *matka*, to light lamps called *kodia*, and to make other earthen vases and were selling the clay wares on this street. They all lived in houses made of bamboo and mud and the air was always dirty and full of smoke from burning cow dung and wood logs to provide heat to cure the clay wares in the large ground oven. There were many of these ovens all over the area along with the broken pieces of clay scattered everywhere.

If we needed a vessel we go there and meet our acquaintance at the kumbhar's house and pick up whatever we need. Our relationship with the acquaintance in the family went back many generations and we never discussed the prices. The account was settled at the shop. If they knew we had a marriage at our home, they would come and deliver all of the vessels as needed. On the day of the marriage, they came and collected the cooked meals for their family, as it was the customary practice for many generations.

Badshah's Fruit Stall

In front of the vegetable market was Badshah's shop located on the other side of the bazaar. He was the lone fruit merchant all year round. The fruit he was selling were seasonal and included many varieties of mango, watermelon, cantaloupe, *jaamfal*²⁴, papaya, *mosambi*²⁵, apple, *jamboo*, grapes, *gosmadi*, *bore*, pineapple, *rayana*, and all other kinds of berries. He was so generous that if you asked him if this fruit was sweet, he would cut out a piece of the fruit for you to sample. You ended up buying a lot from him. Many fruit vendors popped up in the summertime and brought their fruit stalls near the street corner to sell from their baskets they carried on their head.

The next street to the vegetable market was Kotiawad, a street with approximately twenty shops between these two streets. In the middle of these twenty or so shops was my dad's shop; he was the general or *kariana* merchant. I will describe my experiences at the shop later since I had spent most of my time here.

Kotiawad

²⁴ *jaamfal* - guava

²⁵ *mosambi* - citrus

The Kotiawad was where my grandfather's (my dad's father) sister's side of the family lived. The sister's husband was known as Godakaka. The incident I remember most was the fire at their house. Godakaka's family was in the business of transportation and owned many lorries. There was no petrol pump in the town so Godakaka kept 35 gallon-sized drums filled with petroleum in the backyard of his house for the lorries. Now *Diwali* time was a celebration time and the tradition of lighting sparklers and firecrackers in the nighttime all over town was the way to celebrate the Diwali. The firecrackers were exploding everywhere and one of them landed in one of the drums and ignited the stored petroleum. There was no fire fighting equipment in the town so Godakaka's four-story house along with both of the neighbors' houses burned to the ground. The fire lasted all night until the fire trucks came in from nearby towns to control it. Financially all three families were devastated as there was no fire insurance in those days. They all eventually recovered financially in later years.

Nisadno Chowk

The next street to this street was Nisadno Chowk. This was the big circular chowk that included the primary school for boys and girls, a *masjid*²⁶, the *Mamlatdar's*²⁷ office, the courthouse,

²⁶ *masjid* – central mosque

²⁷ *mamlatdar* - officer

etc and was located on the outskirts. In the middle was an open area for gatherings and meetings.

Gandhiji's Memorial

At the center of the chowk there is a Gandhiji's half-bust statue. I attended the unveiling ceremony on Gandhiji's birthday a couple of years after independence. The chowk itself was named as a Gandhi Chowk but people continued to use the old name. A closed steel fence surrounds his statue and there is a well-maintained garden. While I was attending the primary school I remember playing inside this garden before the statue was unveiled.

Bus Stand

There was a bus station at the center of the chowk that was owned and operated by Nagarseth's family. It served many bus routes for traveling between Balasinor and the surrounding towns. I came here to say farewell to members of my family whenever they left town to go to Sevalia by bus and then to Bombay by train. At the departure times there were many buses scheduled to leave for Sevalia and the scene at the chowk was chaotic as it was filled with people coming and going. There were always more people on the bus than number of seats available.

This period in the 1950s was the beginning of the migration to Bombay where one by one people and their families left Balasinor. They came back to town with their families for vacation, for weddings of their sons and daughters, and to meet their family members grieving the death of their loved ones.

In those days buses were owned and operated by private companies and were smaller in size compared to today's state transportation (ST) buses. After the Gujarat state transportation authority took over the public transportation system, they moved the bus station to outside of the town to accommodate the bigger buses.

In the chowk, the townspeople held public meetings for celebrations of Independence Day, Republic day, Gandhiji's birthday, and for other national holidays. There were marches with bands, flag-flying ceremonies, prayer meetings, and demonstrations of hand spinning of cotton to make handmade clothes in these celebrations and there were performances and entertainment dramas held as well. The town's well-known figures in and out of local government attended these meetings. Meetings were also held to honor the public figures and included speeches by guests on the election campaign. I have attended many of these meetings and recalled speeches that were full of inspiration after the independence movement. I felt very proud and wanted to jump into any of the activities they asked us to join except I had to complete my education first and foremost and that is what I did.

Tobacco Industry

As you enter the chowk, the bazaar road takes a smooth left turn and there are many shops selling *paan*²⁸ and *biddy*²⁹ located on the left side. These shops were like a small cottage industry where twenty or so people sit inside one of these shops with a basket full of tobacco and leaves for biddies and made biddies all day. They wrapped one hundred biddies in an hour and sold them to the people coming to town from nearby villages and to the workers of the town. In those days nearly every adult was smoking biddies and eating pan. This was a very busy area of the town. There were also restaurants in some of these shops.

As you entered the chowk on the right hand side, there was a police station and next to it was a girls' primary school where classes were held from first to seventh grade.

Mochiwada

Going counter clockwise from here after the school, the road takes you to Mochiwada where the families worked with leather. The trade for generations for these families was in the shoe-making business. I came here for my first pair of

²⁸ *paan* – betel leaf with areca nut and lime paste

²⁹ *biddy* – hand-rolled cigar made of leaves

chapels. At the shop, I climbed about twenty steps from the street because the street gets flooded during the monsoon season. The rainwater from the surrounding high grounds would rush into this street and the water level would rise very fast. The shop owners have always kept their shops and houses on higher ground. We knew the shop owner for many generations and we always came here for chapels and other shoe needs. He would open a book the size of an atlas, and on a blank page, he would draw the outline of the foot. After drawing, he would scribble down something and let you select the style of chaplets. There were three or four styles to choose from. After selecting, he would tell you to come after a month and typically you would need to make a few more trips before finally getting your chapels. I received my first pair of chapels when I turned twelve years old. This road from Mochiwada further leads to the outskirts of town. Near the end of the road, the leather tanning smell overwhelmed you as the skins of dead animals were spread out all over the rocky terrain and were left there in the sun to dry.

Next to the road was a big building surrounding a chowk. This was the courthouse and Mamlatdar's office. The town official business was conducted here. I have never entered this building.

Mosque

Next to this were many butcher shops with restaurants in the front. The shops sold goat meat

and poultry. These shops were in front of the mosque and the town's Muslim community came here for the prayers and to conduct business here.

The street next to the mosque led to the theater and further on to the Harijanwada and then the main gate led to the Hanuman temple outside of the gate.

Nawab's Theater

The theater was called Nawab's theater and it was built for performances of drama and other entertainment for him and his family, but it was closed after independence. The theater was reopened as a regular movie theater in the early part of the 1950s. Before this, during the summer season it was an open-air theater showing religious movies. This was operated by one of the in-laws of the Jat family. I remember going there to see the movies with my sister and sitting on the ground to watch the movies.

Harijan Wado

The untouchables or *Harijan* as Gandhiji called them, collected in buckets the human waste from the toilets and carried the buckets on their heads to dispose the waste and in addition swept and cleaned all of the streets of the town. They were all municipal employees and were receiving a regular salary for their work. They did additional work as required for other families's festival occasion and in

return received the excess cooked food. We were not allowed to touch the Harijan as it was forbidden then. If by mistake we touched them we had to take a shower to cleanse ourselves. The part of the town they lived in was a very rough terrain full of big boulders on the ground and they could not dig holes to build regular houses. In later years, the municipality built many houses for them at these locations and rented them to the Harijan to live in.

My dad had a special affection for the Harijan. After they finished the cleaning work and after cleansing themselves, they came to my dad's shop for their daily needs of groceries and although they were untouchables they purchased food items from the shop like any other customer. Many older women from the town passed by my dad's shop and on seeing this they made comments to others at the temple when gathering for *darshan*³⁰, expressing their disgust of what they saw at my dad's shop. In protest my dad decided not to listen to them and continued to do the work as Gandhiji had called for saying that they all are equal to us as we all are. He decided not to go to the main temple and hear these comments. This was his contribution for equality by action and he preached this to others. On many occasions when I was sitting at the shop, the Harijan came to purchase the grain and as they were being weighed, some grains would land on the cloth spread in my lap and I never protested.

³⁰ *darshan* – “sight”; vision of the divine

Primary School

Going around the chowk next to the street there was a two-story primary school building for first to seventh grade. There was more than one class for each grade. The Doctor's (my wife's brother-in-law) father, Lallubhai Master, was the headmaster of this primary school. There were no benches for the students to sit but there were four level platforms and you sat in cross-legged style on a platform and you wrote on a slate with chalk as no papers or pencils were used. Most of the schoolwork involved remembering the addition, subtraction, multiplication and division tables and reciting them frequently along with the poems. I also remember memorizing and reciting the names of all of the villages of Balasinor taluka.

The event I remember most was when I was in first grade, during the second period, my brother who was in the third grade at the time came to my class and talked to my teacher and then my teacher told me to go home with my brother. Not knowing what was going on, I came to find out that my grandfather on my dad's side had passed away that morning. We went to my grandfather's house and saw many people gathered in the front of the house and some of them were crying. On hearing my grandfather died I started to cry but later I was consoled that he was an old man and had not been doing well. The thirteenth day of his passing happened to be the thirteenth day of mourning for Gandhiji's death so my parents along with my uncle

mourned their deaths by feeding the people from the town, as this was the tradition laid out by the Hindu religion and the society.

For the third and fourth grade, my classes were moved to an adjoining single-story building. There was a big banyan tree in the front. In recess we used to hang out around this tree. The tree had many branches, none of them reached the ground because we used to hang from them to swing and we kept breaking the branches otherwise this tree would have been a big tree with many trunks. Occasionally during recess time my friends and I went to my Pedhiwada masi's house which was close to the school near the Jaliwala shop to visit and she would give us some snacks to all of us and tell us to come again. This masi had only one daughter, Pushpaben, and she was already married and was living in Bombay by this time.

The chowk was a very busy place with many activities throughout the year. The people gathered around and watched actors in various performances. There would be a traveling circus that would put up a tent for a week. A *madari*³¹ with his bear would perform a dance or a monkey would do some tricks. Fortunetellers were busy telling the fortunes of the people by reading cards that people or a bird pulled out from a stack of cards. Sometimes a traveling dentist would spread his business by pulling out a hurting tooth out of a person's mouth for minimum cost and then would sell unwanted medicine or a powder. These kinds of performers gathered many people around and in return the madari, magician,

³¹ *madari* – street entertainer

fortuneteller, or a doctor would collect a few rupees for their deed.

Tailor Shop

Near Nisad Chowk, there were approximately twenty shops of the local tailors where they made clothes for the village people in their styles. In those days ready-made clothes were not easily available. At Diwali time, these shops were open and making clothes eighteen hours a week. People came from villages to buy fabric from the local fabric store and then gave them to these tailors to make clothes for them to wear at diwali time and waited there until they finished the sewing. One of the tailor's families was the owner of the shop my dad rented for his business. Their son named Pravin Daraji was my friend and a classmate in high school; he left the school in seventh grade and joined the family business.

Fadia Fadiu

Going down the bazaar there was a street called Fadia Fadiu where many families of our Dasa Nima Bania caste lived but I have no known friends or family here. My brother's friend Shashikant Fadia lived here with his family.^{xiv} I remember coming to this street to call everybody for *jamanwad* in Dharmashada. Jamanwad is a type of festivity where

we either celebrate a marriage or mourn a death. We call everybody in our *nat* or caste for an evening meal at Dharamshada. It was customary in those days to remind everyone one hour before the Jamanwad by going to the chowk of every street where our family members lived. Six or eight of us boys went to these chowks and shouted and invited everybody to come for the Jamanwad in Dharmashada.

Vorahwad

Further down the bazaar there was a *mohalla*³² called Vorahwad. This was a gated street and there were many newly built four story houses. The Vohara follow the Muslim religion but it was a different faith from the traditional Muslim faith and their community was a closed community and like the Parsi they were business people. Their main business was to sell fabricated iron and steel parts like iron flats, steel pipes, rods, hinges, locks, etc. I have known two of these families because their shops were next to my dad's shop and I have spent many hours chitchatting with them. I have seen them cutting pipes and threading the ends and placing couplings etc.

³² *mohalla* – Arabic language term for neighborhood

Blacksmith Shops

Going towards the main ST gate there were blacksmith shops on both sides of the street. They had coal-fired ovens where they heated the iron and formed various iron parts by constantly hammering on the iron and shaping as required. They used leather flaps to pump the air into the coal-fired ovens to get higher temperatures. Most of the shops were equipped to put iron rims on the wheels of the bullock pull carts. In later years, a few of the blacksmith shops were moved out and groceries and vegetable shops came in as the town expanded beyond the gate.

Coming Home

ST Gate

Just outside the ST gate, there was a building where my classmate Ibrahim Musa lived; I later found out that he became the mayor of Balasinor for many years. I have seen him collecting the *octroy*³³ at the bus station few times when I visited the town. Next to his house there was a *bhatiara*³⁴ who had a *bhatti* (hot oven) where he roasted *channa* (dry garbanzo beans), *jawar*³⁵, corn, peanuts etc. I used

³³ *octroy* - tax

³⁴ *bhatiara* – cook who does roasting over the open fire

to come here with a sack of five pounds of dry garbanzo beans and pay him five *annas* (16 annas is 1 rupee) and he would empty my sack into a pan, pour hot sand over the beans, put the beans with the sand in a bhatti for a minute until the beans get roasted and then he would filter out the sand and pour the roasted beans back into my sack.

Alternate Road

As you entered the ST gate, the main road split into two roads where one went toward Virpur gate and the other towards the hospital. The second road to the left was where the bazaar started. In the early days, the road toward the hospital was crowded because it was narrow and curvy for the long ST buses so in later years they built a road from outside of the town near the outskirt of the fort to go the hospital. This then became a main road for buses and trucks to go towards the Virpur side. In monsoon season, the road outside the fort was always getting flooded and was washed away by the flowing rainwater. This part of the town was on lower elevation. The water from the nearby high ground and from the rest of the town gathered here and area get flooded and made it impossible to cross by walking or driving.

³⁵ *jawar* – malted grains

Patelwada

The inner road towards Virpur gate went through the Patelwada where all the families with a nearby farm lived. Every house had animals like buffalo for milk and an ox for farming. There were no tractors then. The road was not paved and always there was dirt blowing in the air due to trucks or buses passing or from an animal herd coming or going to the farm. A continuous sound of moos and barking was heard here. The road snaked through the only post office in the town. You had to come here for postal needs and also to send telegrams. Most of the houses in this area were built using tree trunks and branches and were plastered with cow dung. The roofs of the houses were also similarly made and covered with straws.

Continuing towards the bazaar to the talav gate, the shops on the right side belonged to blacksmiths and the shops were mirror images of the left side shops. It was observed that the area of the town on the right side was where the Hindu families lived and on the left were Muslim families. There were patches where mixed populations lived. The area on the right side was a low laying area and on the left side was a hill area. On the right side people were farming and on the left side they were in service industry. There were no farms on the hillsides but every family had lambs and chickens in their yard. The lambs were kept for milk and chicken for eggs. Households sent their lambs to the hills for grazing. The hill area was full of bushes for the lambs

to graze. Chickens were fed with locally grown varieties of seeds.

Jaliwala Shop

The first major street was where Hiralal Jaliwala's shop was located. This shop sold everything needed for metal fences including custom-made fences for houses, enclosures and the gates. My friend Bhavsar, after finishing his high school, joined the shop to manage the business. Inside the street, there were gated houses that belonged to Pedhiwada; this was called Pedhiwada Street, Swati Kadakia's grandparents and parents were living here. My Mota Masi, whom I mentioned earlier, lived here. There were many small streets forking off of this street; I did not travel here often.

Dhariawad

There were continuous shops from here up the main street called Dhariawad. The shops were the main parts of the Nisad Chowk, which we talked about while going away from the town. This area was always crowded. Dhariawad was where my friend Shashikant Dharia lived. He was a president of the Balasinor Association of the U.S. and one of the founders of this association. He also was my classmate in high school. When I went to Baroda College, he went to Morbi for his engineering school.^{xv}

Shashikant Dharia's house was next to my sister Indiraben's house in Dhariawad.^{xvi} My friend and my roommate for many years in Baroda, Kirit Dharia, also lived in Dhariawad.^{xvii} Dhariawad is also where my brother-in-law's Jayanilala's house was located. Both of Jayanilala and Indiraben's houses were rebuilt after I left for college. This street like any other street has many forks and goes in many directions towards the interior of the town. There was large and heavily used water well at the front of the Dhariawad Street.

There was a birdhouse called Chabutaro in Gujarati; this Chabutaro was about thirty feet tall, fifteen feet in diameter. It was standing on a one-foot diameter column. There was a spiraling staircase to go up to a fifteen feet high platform to spread the birdfeed. The reason for the higher platform is so that no animal can eat the birdfeed. The birds typically consisted of *chakli*³⁶, *chaklo*³⁷, parrots, crows, and gray colored doves. Occasionally squirrels climbed up there for the feed. People in the community on certain occasions were greatly fond of the birds and other living beings and wanted to donate money for their welfare. There was a caretaker who collected the donations to maintain the Chabutaro for the daily feeding of the birds. Once a day he climbed up the spiraling staircase and spread the feed on the floor. The surrounding area was always filthy with the bird's droppings and the noise of the birds was quite loud.

³⁶ *chakli* – male sparrow

³⁷ *chaklo* – female sparrow

The Holi festivities always started at this corner area of the street where the well and Chabutaro were. Holi is a religious festival and has been celebrated for many generations. The funds collected from the neighboring shops went towards purchasing the cut wood to make a tall vertical pile about ten feet tall and eight feet in diameter and was decorated with garlands and other items. They ignited Holi during the evening hours and the celebration lasted until 2:00 a.m. People circled the Holi a few times. They also warmed up the water here for bathing. It is believed that the heat of the bonfire has many hygienic benefits and also uplifts the spirit of the people at the same time.

Next to the street entrance was Ramanlal Gandhi's bookshop. He sold the textbooks for all high school grades approved and requested by the Gujarat school board. When the school year begins, the shop becomes the most crowded place. He had the list of all of the books needed for each grade. When shopping there, I request books for my grade, he gather from the piles the set for my grade and added up the costs, wrote down my name, and gave me the books. He collected the money later from my dad. Most of the time there would be a book missing from the set and we had to inquire many times if the book had arrived. He also carried notebooks, pencils, and other supplies needed for school. In those days on average, the cost of the supplies added up to fifty rupees for one school year.

Library

From here to the Dev Seri, I knew every shop and its owner. There were about twenty shops in all. Next to the bookstore was a barbershop. It cost four annas for a haircut and I had one on a regular basis every month.

In the same building there were two additional floors where the Balasinor library was located. I spent many afternoons and evening hours reading books of Gujarati literature and many Gujarati magazines as well. The libraries were also getting Soviet Union propaganda magazines for free. These magazines were spreading propaganda in how much the Soviet Union's communist ideology was progressing in the industrial and social revolutions. Prime Minister Nehru and his government were following this closely to push India's progress in full steam after independence.

Next to this shop was a shop that sold chai, paan, and biddy. I came here almost five times daily to take paan and biddy and order chai for my dad. I did not know the circumstances then, but one day he stopped buying these items and started preaching to all his friends and customers to quit these bad habits like he did to be healthier.

There was a famous *kandoi*³⁸ shop, “Joyta na Fafda”, that also sold *bhusu*³⁹ and sweets. The shop

³⁸ *kandoi* – baker

³⁹ *bhusu* – spicy and crunchy snack made of chickpea twigs, rice, nuts, and raisins

owner was famous for his hand pressed *fafda*⁴⁰ and *chatni*⁴¹. He was very busy in the mornings of the summer season where Bombay guests arrived and they insisted on having *fafda* and *chatni* for the breakfast every day in the morning.

The shops in this part of the bazaar were the most crowded during the business hours. Customers from many nearby villages came here to purchase the daily necessities and seasonal requirements. There were also many street vendors pushing *rakedis*⁴² that added to the crowding of the street. During festival times like Holi, Diwali, etc the bazaar was overcrowded as many shops were selling firecrackers and fireworks in addition to their customary goods. It was nearly impossible to cross this part of bazaar at these times.

Dev Seri

This street divided the town on this side of the bazaar diagonally in two halves. The street changes the name as it goes along from the main bazaar towards the street connecting the ST gate and the hospital gate. As you start from the bazaar the ground elevation drops and the street picks up the rainwater in the monsoon season as it goes further. The street zigzags through this part of the town and

⁴⁰ *fafda* – chickpea snack

⁴¹ *chatni* – condiment that contains a spice and vegetable mix

⁴² *rakedi* – four bicycle wheels attached together to form a platform to hold displayed merchandise

many streets branches off connecting various communities of the town.

At the entrance opposite the Badshah's fruits shop, there were warehouses belonging to my uncle. In the wintertime this part of the street was always crowded because Bharawads from nearby hills gathered here to do business with my uncle and let their camels rest here. My uncle bought and collected the ghee from the Bharawads to sell to city dwellers in large quantities. The ghee the Bharawads made was from goats (*gheta*) and lambs (*bakara*) so my uncle was known by the name "Gheta Bakra na Ghee Wada" throughout town. This was the business of my family, the Vasanji family for many generations. My dad separated from the business so my uncle inherited the family business. I saw my grandfather Lallubhai Vasanji at the shop many times.

Parents' House

The house next to this warehouse was a residential building; later it was turned into a doctor's office. In the first sub street on the left next to this at the end was where my dad purchased the house for he and my mom to live in 1971, two years after my marriage, for \$2,000 U.S. that I had provided. This house was similar to the house I grew up in except it was isolated and much older. It needed much repairs and was dark on sunny days because it was surrounded by nearby similar houses on a narrow street. They lived in this house for nine

years. The house was vacant and in ruin after they passed away. I sold this house in 2008 for \$5,000 U.S. I had visited here in 1979 with both of my sisters and their husbands. I had scheduled my vacation to stay with my parents for two weeks and my two brothers-in-law joined me. After a week's stay with them in the house, we all went to ShreeNath Dwara for few days, then after the darshan we separated. My parents went back to Balasinor and we went to Bombay. One year after this my mother had a heart attack and passed away and within three months my father passed away in Bombay. The picture we made at the studio in ShreeNath Dwara was the last memory of my parents.

The street opposite is the street that had a large chowk at the center with many closed end streets inside. There are many Brahman communities here where members with the last name Trivedi lived. I had visited here a few times to meet my friends including Kirti Trivedi as well as other classmates. Most of the people residing here are currently in services and in various government offices.

As you keep walking the Dev Seri the pictures of the street repeats many times, there is no defined location for the sub streets. I had many acquaintances that lived on this street; one of them was Vithalbhai Modi. He had a shop opposite my dad's shop and was one of the persons who inspired me to go to college and to be somebody. I was in touch with him for a long time after I left Balasinor and my dad always informed him of my progress, and he himself was grooming his sons to follow in

my footsteps. On my many visits to the town, I always managed to meet him and exchange the news. He was looking after my parents on my behalf of my absence. There was a town's *vaidraj*⁴³ who lived here with his eleven daughters. I have seen the family many times with four of their youngest daughters in the same designed dresses, well-groomed and disciplined. They were all regularly walking together in the summertime for an evening walk towards the talav to cool off.

A little further ahead there was a house that belonged to a carpentry teacher. In high school he taught arts and crafts and was also a good painter. Then further along there was a sub street from Dhariawad that met Dev Seri. Further down the street Patelwada starts where there were many houses and streets and farming communities. The road here was not paved so it was full of loose dirt and due to the roaming animals there was always dirt in the air and it was very difficult to breathe. I had no particular reason to travel here except this was a way to the post office. In the monsoon times, the roads got washed away exposing big boulders and deep holes and were treacherous to walk across. There was also a street taking off towards the Ramji Mandir.

Street Opposite to Golani Dukan

⁴³ *vaidraj* – homeopathic doctor

Walking towards the talav gate, the next street after the Dev Seri was a closed end street and between these two streets were many shops such as cloth merchants and hardware shops. This street was parallel to the bazaar here because the bazaar road was quite narrow and there were twenty or so houses inside the street. One of the houses I remember going to was the grandparents' house of Gopal Beani, one of my high school classmates. His house in the Holy Chakala was under construction so the family moved here and all of us friends got together here to study. The other house in the corner was that of my Halolwada masi.

There also was the house of Kokilabhabhi, Navnitlal's brother Dilipbhai's wife. The reason I remember this house was because the wedding of Dilipbhai and Kokilaben was quite extravagant. The jamanwad for the wedding was held in the main bazaar and people were seated on both sides of the street from Holy Chakala up to Golwad for the meals and the traffic through this part of the bazaar was blocked for this occasion. Approximately one thousand people may have lined up for the jamanwad. All the male members of the family and close relatives were wearing silk *jubbah*⁴⁴ and saffron colored dhoti. The women were wearing expensive saris and gold and diamond jewelry. It was a very festive occasion for both families in which the whole town and the Nima Vanias community participated.

A tragedy later occurred when in Bombay, Kokilaben was blinded when a geyser exploded and

⁴⁴ *jubbah* – long loose outer garment with wide sleeves

burned her face with hot water. I have known both Dilipbhai and Kokilabhabhi and always went to say hello on my visits to Bombay. Presently they are living very happily in their apartment near Indiraben's apartment at Walkeshwar. They both came and visited us at our Newark house in California.

I remember another incident when a cow somehow ventured into an area of seated people, became frightened by people's screaming, and then stampeded across and hit a few people who were unable to get away. One person died few days later with the infection of the wounds called *dhanurava*.

Marriage

I would like to expound on the some of my recollections about weddings which were always momentous events in the town. The marriage age for girls in those days was eighteen to twenty years and for boys about twenty two to twenty four. Arrivals of the families during summer vacation to the town precipitated the parents to be on a lookout for a suitable match for their daughters. It was customary not to marry close relatives so a minimum of three generations of separation was normal. If one carefully plotted the genealogy of the whole Balasinor Dasa Nima family chart, one could see the interweaving of the families. Today if you talk to any person living anywhere in the world whose family ties are in Balasinor, it is possible to trace his genealogy and find out that he or she is related to

you. The town became the perfect setting for young boys and girls and also for their parents to select suitable boys for their daughters and for them to become life long partners. Once the boys and girls, with the blessings from their parents, made the decision to marry the parents arranged the announcement of the engagement.

The first step was to call the priest. Then the father made a round in the main bazaar and invited the relatives to their home to celebrate the good news. Within an hour nearly a hundred relatives would gather at his home. Most of them were elderly men. The priest would lead a ceremony making sure of the auspicious time of the engagement and then the girl's father makes the announcement of the engagement of their daughter to the son of so and so and finally people would disperse and spread the news throughout the town. Later the families decided the marriage date that is generally during the following summer. Within a month there would be on average fifty engagement announcements in the town.

In those days the wedding in Balasinor was a unique experience because later whenever we got together with other friends and relatives, we fondly remembered our experiences from the so-called wedding season in Balasinor. We talked about the festivities, enjoying the varieties of food, the first time we met our cousins and their friends, looking at the young girls in their beautiful saris, and enjoying the fashion parade in the evening hours when young adults would take a walk to the talav or go up the hill and take a glance at one another and admire their

clothing. Those memories are embedded deeply in our minds.

I will describe the events of one of these such occasions so one can imagine there are fifty weddings during the summer and the events described here are taking place at all of these weddings. The crookedness and narrow streets of Balasinor as described earlier plus the influx of people in the wedding season makes the city even more crowded especially at the peak hours when the marriage processions crossed one another. People were pulling people everywhere to attend their processions and this created chaos. One had to be there to experience this scene but as the night progressed it all ended happily for everybody.

The announcement of the place and dates of the wedding were printed on invitation cards called *kankotri* and they were mailed to all of the friends and relatives one month in advance of the wedding. The parents on both sides prepared their houses with a fresh coat of paint, made purchases and prepared all the essential food items to cook and feed all the invitees for three to four days, and also they prepared the ceremonial items. The family purchased or tailored new clothes for the family members and purchased new saris for the women to wear for every occasion. They made the arrangement with the priest and checked his availability for the auspicious time of the wedding and also decided the time for each and every ritual to be performed during the ceremony. For the procession, arrangements were made for the band to play the music, to find the horseman to help the groom to ride to the bride's home, to set up the lighting, and

with the cook for the cooking and cleaning services. All these arrangements had to be made by the families in advance, as they were no contract laborers available then.

A week before the marriage, a mandap was erected in the front of each house. There were two kinds of mandap: simple and elaborate mandaps erected based upon the family's economic conditions. A simple mandap was erected with four wooden poles placed in a square and the top opening was covered with a red cloth and the individual poles were wrapped with a red or multicolored ribbon. The sitting arrangements were inside the room on a carpet and on round pillows. For a more elaborate mandap, carpenters were hired to erect it in the middle of the street. On average the mandap was 20 feet by 30 feet and 10 feet tall and was covered with cloth and painted with elaborate paintings using many designed cardboard templates. On average, a mandap had an arrangement for thirty people or so to sit. The mandap was the center for the families and friends to gather during the days leading up to the wedding for them to meet and talk. Relatives and friends came from far away places and were meeting there after a long time and also the children would play and rest there as well.

The second most important thing for the wedding was the preparation of the food. The food was prepared right at the premises. Many of the families had the utensils to cook the food for one hundred people or so, if they did not, they would borrow them from their neighbors or relatives. For a cooking stove, they dug a hole in the ground and used wooden logs to provide the heat. Daal was

cooked first as it took the longest time followed by vegetables, then purees were rolled and fried, and finally the rice was cooked. These were the staples being cooked everyday. In addition sweets were prepared in advance or were brought from outside like *srikhand*, *sutarfeni*, *halwasan*, and *rusgualla*. Mango *ras* (filtered pulp) was also a frequent item on the menu. For spicing up the menu, Dakor style *gota* (similar to falafel) was added for the feast. Vegetables were changed every day and lentils like garbanzos or *val* (split peas) were added alternatively. Home cooked sweets like *ladoo* and *magas* were standard items. The kitchen would be open from noon to 3:00 p.m. and then again in the evening from 7:00 p.m. until midnight. On the wedding day, there was a constant flow of the people coming to eat and the parents of the bride and groom fed them happily. Occasionally one would have to attend many weddings and he has to consume more than two meals in a day to make all the relatives happy.

The four days of the marriage ceremony has many *vidhis* or rituals. I am not a priest so I cannot recall every one of them. These have been carried out through many generations and the priest remembered them and made sure they all are performed to the fullest for the marriage to be completed. Besides the *vidhis* there were customs of exchanging gifts between the groom and bride's families. For the ladies to beautify themselves, they applied mehdi or henna on their hands and feet three or four days before the day of the marriage. The girls from the *vohra* families of the town that were artistic came to apply the henna. Pithi *vidhis*

was also done to apply tarmac powder paste to the body of bride and groom. From our temple Kirtaniya came to sing the bhajans.

The procession, also called *varghodo*, is where the groom with his families and friends would ride on a decorated horse and marched through the streets of the town, stopping at the temple for the blessing of ShreeNathaji, and finally arriving at the bride's house. These processions lasted for more than two hours. At the front of procession was a band playing the latest Indian movie songs. Most of the time the band is a Nawab band where they have 108 musicians and people lined up the street to listen to the band perform. The band stopped at designated places and played music for a long time. In crowded times when there were many weddings planned, the Nawab would break his band into a smaller number of groups and they would play for many processions at the same time. It was a pleasing experience to listen to the band playing. The band members were heard practicing many hours before they played a particular song. The band has received many awards. Occasionally it was a rewarding experience when there was a single wedding on a particular day and the full band played the music and the procession would last a long time when passing through the many streets of the town.

On both sides of the procession there were people carrying Petromax (paraffin) lamps on their head to light up the procession. They stood six feet apart and needed constant reminding to keep pace with the procession. In later years electric generators was available so tube lights were attached to the six-

foot long sticks and these replaced the petromax lights.

Next to the bands there were many ponies where young children rode with the care of the keeper. Friends and relatives of the groom's family walked together. Everyone was well dressed and had a flower in their hand. A perfume was sprayed on the people in the procession and the people were offered paan. In front of the groom's horse were his father, relatives and his friends walking and taking greetings from the others and inviting them to join the procession.

The groom on the horse was known as *var raja*. He would wear a long silk coat and his head would be covered and wrapped with a very expensive cloth called *safo*. He would wear gold necklaces and rings and other jewelry to make him look rich. There was a decorative flower garland around his neck and he would be holding a bouquet of flowers. He would have a *tilak*⁴⁵ on his forehead and a black mark on his cheek. Since his hands were holding the bouquet his friends would constantly be feeding him paan as the procession marched on. This is the time the var raja has to look at his best as the townspeople are looking at him.

Behind him on the horse is a young girl typically a close relative of the var raja. She sits and shakes a loti. They rotate the girls so as many of the var raja's relatives get a chance to ride with him. Behind the var raja were the females of the family and friends in their most beautiful and expensive saris wearing diamonds and gold ornaments and

⁴⁵ *tilak* - red kumkum powder worn for special occasions

they had on expensive makeup and fancy hairstyles. They all looked beautiful. They all were singing the wedding songs throughout the procession. After an exhausting two hours walk, the procession arrives at the bride's home.

On the day of the marriage, there are fifty or so marriages so the procession time for all of them is after sunset to 2:00 a.m. The groom's father has planned the time for the procession precisely with the band and horseman however everybody typically is late or an earlier procession took a longer time then expected and thus the schedule starts falling apart. The families and friends have to attend many processions as everybody is related to every other family. People were constantly communicating the whereabouts of the other processions and when they're in the vicinity of another procession, they join that one. Bands were rushing from one procession to another and were always asked to hurry up. This applied as well to the horseman and the light carrier. A limited number of these services were available in the town so their demand would be high that day. Occasionally processions crossed one another and the musicians in the band would show off their performances by taking the extra time and playing the latest movie songs. The street got jammed with people trying to hear the music and the thru traffic in the main bazaar stopped completely. A person from one procession would urge the people from another procession to start moving. This scene repeated itself many times throughout the night and the bazaar near the temple became a center point and the people gathered here to enjoy the festivities. If I did not have a wedding to attend to on that day,

then I hung around with my friends here at the bazaar until the last procession arrived and then went home. We kept count of the number of processions on that day.

The marriage ceremony continued at the bride's house after the groom's party arrived and was received by the bride and her family. The priest performed the rituals and then everyone was seated so the remainder of the ceremony continued. As with the band and horseman, the priests were also in demand because of a limited number of them are available so he hurriedly starts the ceremony. It takes another two hours to complete the ceremony and by that time only the close family members and friends are present. After the wedding, the bride is sent to the groom's house also known as *viday*. The last ceremony at the bride's house is called *kansar* (an Indian sweet) where the bride cooks the kansar and feeds the groom. This takes place in another mandap made for this vidhi. Three bamboo sticks are erected in a triangle shape and earthen vessels are stacked inside in a stack of eight and four of these triangles are erected. Tied on the top is a flat three-foot diameter basket weaved from bamboo strings containing larger size ladoos. The priest cooked the kansar with the help of the bride and then both families watched as the bride fed the groom and then they fed each another. Occasionally the groom bites the bride's finger to lighten up the mood.

These are my memories as I have observed and recollected after more than fifty years. Back then, I had often thought of my own marriage and about when and with whom I was going to marry.

The thought made me double my efforts toward my studies as I have observed doctors and engineers amongst many var rajas. Doctors and engineers were the most talked about amongst all the var rajas by friends and families and were admired by the townspeople and they were marrying the beautiful girls of the town's rich people.

Pipadawadi Seri

Between Dev Seri and Pipadawadi Seri there were many shops of cloth merchants selling saris and fabric for clothes as ready-made clothes were not available then and also there were shops for silver and gold jewelry. There were also goldsmith shops where goldsmiths designed and made jewelry per your requirements. In the summertime people came from nearby villages and desired to purchase silver ornaments for their son or daughter's marriages. It was customary for the women to wear silver anklets and arm bracelets and chains on their necks as well as on their waists. Also for the men, they wore the neck and arm ornaments regularly and especially on special occasions. These shops were crowded in the summer season with customers. I have seen some of these women wearing approximately five pounds of silver ornaments. At my dad's shop and also at home there was a special box full of these silver ornaments. Whenever the family was in a financial bind, they requested a loan using the ornaments as collateral. Most of the time they came back with the money and collected the

ornaments. Sometime they could not come up with the money so my dad sold the ornaments to these jewelers. I have gone through these ornaments and their design. The box weighs approximately fifty pounds when it is full of silver jewelry. Each one of them was marked and tagged with the name of the customer. Silver was cheap in those days as silver rupees were still in circulation.

The name of this street, Pipadawadi Seri, came from a very large Pipad tree at the entrance of the street. This was a gated street and branched off many streets inside. There was a well in the corner near the covered narrow path connecting to the Dev Seri that was pitch-dark at nighttime. I heard that my mom used this path to go to temple in the nighttime holding a kerosene lamp after moving into the Dev Seri house. The street was not well lit and most of the houses were locked up. I have come here with my friend Nalin Jat whenever he visited his mother's side of the family. Shobhana's mama's house was located on this street and the other side of their house was facing the mandir in Mandir Seri.

Mandir Seri

At the front of Mandir Seri there were two shops that were selling glass bangles for women as well as other accessories. Next to these were shops selling cooking utensils or *beda* for fetching and storing water and repairing the leaking utensils and *beda*. The next place was *Havali* for Shreenathaji. When I was young I came with my mother in the evening for *darshan* and later by myself. I remember coming here with my friends whenever I heard there

was *penda* from Gokul, penda were dry sweets made from pure milk powder and sugar, being distributed. The tradition was that for any family that went to Gokul for *takomundo*⁴⁶, they would bring back penda and it was distributed to the people in our nat as part of the celebrations.

Inside of the street's entrance there were a few houses; my foi lived in one of them. I visited my foi and Bhupendra whenever they were in town on their summer holidays. I remembered sleeping in the *aggasi*⁴⁷ at the top floor and opened to the sky. On hot summer days it took a few hours after midnight for the air to cool down and sleeping there in the open air provided relief on these hot summer days. The house in front of this house that I visited recently was where Shobha's mother lived. Some of the houses here belonged to Mukhayaji, Pujari and Shastriji who were the ones performing the rituals of the Vaishnavas religion at the mandir.

Continuing on the Mandir Street, there was Ratilal doctor's dispensary and opposite was a house and studio of Narendrabhai. He was a photographer, artist and painter. On my last visit to Balasinor, I was fortunate to see his son Sanjay and he showed me the studio and artwork of his father. All his paintings were very beautiful as were the templates of the artwork and they reminded me of the decorated mandaps made for the marriage ceremonies in those days that were neatly preserved. Sanjay was a homebuilder in the town and whenever he tore down the old houses, he saved the artwork

⁴⁶ *takomundo* – cleansing ritual that involves shaving heads of young boys

⁴⁷ *aggasi* - terrace

and antiques and then collected or sold them in the market in Baroda. He showed me some of his collection and gave me a book of 252 Vaishnav Varta, published in 1869. He also showed me the two halves of a petrified dinosaur egg that came from the quarry in Ranoli. Many petrified dinosaur eggs were found there and this made the town popular for archaeologists.

Sanjay was instrumental in the selling the house I bought for my parents. My brother-in-law Jayantilal worked on my behalf in getting the paperwork completed and all the taxes paid for which were pending for the last twenty-five years since my father died. This was done while Jayantilal was in town for the opening of the rebuilt Madan Mohan mandir in Golwad seri.

Further on the right-hand side was where the *Suba* families live. Subas are midgets and there were a few families living in the town. Next to it was a tall house belonging to Ochhavalal Kacharia.^{xviii} In the middle of this narrow street there was a house of Punamchand Vaid; everybody knew him as Vaidraj.

At the street corner was the house where my Motakaka lived. This was Ramanlal Vasanji, my dad's older brother. A ghost possessed my *kaki*⁴⁸, Taraben, as I recalled in my early years and I witnessed a time when she was seemingly possessed. Her facial expressions were animated, her hair was loose and flying, her eyes were wide open and she was making wild gestures, and she was trying to hide from people. There was shouting and screaming to try to scare the ghost away and at the end she was

⁴⁸ *kaki* – father's brother's wife

walked to her parents' house in the middle of the night. My uncle's children being very young were frightened and my dad and mom had to take care of them in my kaki's absence. After a few years and many sessions with the *Bhua*, a local tribe who came to your house and performed rituals to get rid of the possessed soul, she got better. Later my uncle moved from there to their newly purchased house near Brahman's Dharmashada.

From Narendrabhai's house towards the left was where the main mandir seri forked. On the right side was Vaidraj's homeopathy clinic. Before the arrival of the town doctor, people consulted Vaidraj for many illnesses and he had complete knowledge of the homeopathic medicine and he and his assistants mixed and packaged the medicine here. With this knowledge he obtained the respect of the townspeople.

The first gali on the left was the Dhariwala houses. My mother's cousins, Ramanlal and Kantilal Dhariwala lived here. I have known the family from the early days especially Anil who was my close high school friend and who was one year younger. I have visited here many times and was always invited for the marriage *Jamanwad*.^{xix} Once Kantimama, while living alone in Balasinor, was beaten badly by some unknown person who came into the house as a robber. Although he recovered from the injuries, due to his old age, he did not survive long after. The small and narrow street next to their houses leads to the inside of the mandir's gali.

The ground elevation from here drops down as we travel further into the street. There is a very well built house named Suraj Mahal opposite the

Dhariwala houses. In the town there were several newly well-designed beautiful houses like the Suraj Mahal and they were also named appropriately. The first batch of people left the town in the beginning of the 19th century to go to Bombay and succeeded in becoming wealthier in many businesses in trading in the clothing market, iron market, pipe market, electrical market just to name a few. They poured their money into building beautiful mansions in the town. These people started the trend of migrating to Bombay and other cities and it accelerated in the following years and eventually every Dasa Nima Baniya family left Balasinor. Before this trend the families were known by the name of the villages they did business with and eventually they were known only by their association with these businesses. They have increasingly donated their money for the welfare of the town and townspeople. They have supported their immediate families and helped them in starting the businesses in their cities. They have built hospitals, Dharmashada, schools, and many other charitable institutions.

Mandir Seri splits near these houses and on the right side it goes to Patelwada and the left side goes to the hospital gate. The ground level drops further evidenced by the main entrance to the house being well above the ground level. During the monsoon season, the water flow is very heavy and the low-laying area gets flooded.

The Patelwada side road goes to areas where Brahmins, Jains, stonecutters, carpenters and the Patel family lived. There was a Ramji mandir further down the road where the road meets the road from Dev Seri. I have traveled this road many times. It

was a daily ritual to take a morning and evening walk to go to Motilal Patel's house to get fresh milk for the family. Motilal Patel, a customer at my dad's shop, had many buffaloes that were milked twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening. My sister and I alternated the chores of getting the milk. I remember going during the monsoon time when the roads were ankle deep in *chhan* (buffalo droppings). In the monsoon times the droppings never got picked up and they did not dry, it was quite stinky and we had to walk over with our bare feet. Occasionally we slipped and needed to take a bath to clean up. At times the buffalo refused to give milk, and we had to come home empty-handed and had to make another trip later. Opposite the Ramji Mandir was where our high school teacher Gourisankar lived. He was our math teacher for all of the high school grades. I still remember his peculiarity when he extended his hand to write on the chalkboard his elbow would bend upward instead of downward as normal people did. He was a very kind and lovable person. I met him several times after I left the school just to say hi and he appreciated it very much.

The stonecutter families were my dad's business customers. They came to the shop after a full day's work for their daily rations like rice, daal, etc. When they came they had with them a ten-pound hammer and ten chisels of various tip sizes to cut and smooth the surface of the stones. Each chisel weighed a pound. Their faces were full of dirt and their facial skin had many scars due to pieces of stone flying and cutting their skin deeply while chiseling. I have also seen their eye corneas bruised and cut; they looked scary like Frankenstein's

monster. At first I was scared of seeing their faces, but later I became used to the sight of them. Occasionally I saw them carry protective glasses with a cotton string dangling from their hands when not in use. When they leave they balanced their hammers on their neck and held chisels in one hand so they could use the other hand to carry their groceries.

Whenever I got sick, I would lie in bed and look up at the ceiling. I saw the ceiling full of ghostly faces. The ceiling was like a blank canvas before the painter started a new painting; he splattered the paint and imagined the picture he was drawing and drew whatever he imagined connecting these dots. That was what I was doing lying in the bed imagining these ghostly figures and getting scared. These were actually spider webs, and they were all over the ceiling. The ceiling is made of four-inch by four-inch sawed wood, except the surfaces were not sawed, only the outside bark were removed, and the surfaces were rough. The spiders made their webs that were one to three inches long and one to two inches wide and were white in color. There were so many on these ceilings. If you stare at them you can imagine a ghostly figure, one with eyes, a nose, and a mouth staring back at you. Whenever I had a fever or some other sickness and if I did not recover for a week, my dad would bring home one of these old stonecutters. He performed some rituals filling the room with the smoke of some *dhoop*⁴⁹, look at me in the eye and blow some smoke on my face to scare the

⁴⁹ *dhoop* - incense

ghost or whatever the affliction was away. Once you overcame this you were cured.

Back on Mandir seri, the street on the left also dropped in elevation. There were many landmarks on this part of the street. The main one was the backside of the Dharmashada. The main entrance of the Dharamshada is in the Holi Chakala and is about thirty feet higher than this entrance. This place is call *vadi* where they cooked the meals for our nat people for weddings as well as for death rituals. Next to it was a flourmill that ran on diesel engine with belts and a pulley that drives the mill; it made a lot of noise. I have come here to get grains grounded for making roti as nobody sold the flour then. First you weigh the grains and then you put your sack in a line with all of the other sacks. When your turn comes, they empty your grains into a funnel and collected the grounded flour and filled it back into your sack. Then you take the sack and weigh the flour again, if it is less in weight, they would add flour from the common flour, if it is more then they take away the excess and you pay for the services on a per pound basis, approximately four annas for ten pounds. This helped the women in eliminating the need to churn the *ghanti* at home.

Opposite the mill was my tailor Suleman's shop. I brought the fabric for my shirts, shorts, and trousers. Then the tailor would take the measurements and tell me to come after two weeks. When I come after two weeks, typically he would tell me to come later or give me other excuses. I would come again and try on the clothes and get them adjusted and finally after another week you would get the clothes. They always used the weakest

threads, the clothes would get ripped at the stitches and you had to come again to get it re-stitched. As nobody was selling ready-made shirts, it was an exercise in itself to get something stitched here.

Next to the tailor shop were entrances to four streets together. The first on the left was where my mom's *masi* lived. I came to my masi's house with my mom on many occasions, especially for celebrating holidays and in particular celebrating *occhav* or ceremonial birthdays of Mahaprabhuji and Krishna. Masa was the brother of Lallubhai who was a headmaster and living in the next house. Doctor and I may have met here on a few occasions, but I do not recall them. I remember Doctor from my high school days as he was a cricket player on the high school team. I also met him in Baroda in my college days through a mutual friend. He was in medicine and I was in engineering. The Second street was where my close friend, Rajni Dharia, from high school lived. I do not recall ever meeting him again after high school. On the third street is where the Tokarsi's, Shobhana's family, lived. I remember being there many times on summer holidays as all the Tokarsi's families came to town and they had a common kitchen so I always accompanied Bhupendra and had meals here. There were many other houses inside these closed streets.

Traveling further on the street, at the first intersection on the left side of the talav gate, the ground level drops here further as water from both streets gathered here on and on heavy monsoon days, it looked like a river pouring through. Further down towards the hospital gate was where my kindergarten school was located. I remember the

time of my kindergarten days. The first time I came to kindergarten, my dad carried me and left me here, of course I cried a lot but soon forgot about it and started playing with wooden blocks. Actually the first day he brought me here, he also carried a cage full of mice. It was routine to capture mice and release them near the talav because we do not poison them. There were mice everywhere eating the grains and making a mess at home and at the shop. After releasing the mice from the cage, he carried me towards the kindergarten. I had no idea why he changed his route on the road, but he tricked me and left me at the school. I enjoyed it there and had a good time playing. The teacher used to come in the evening to my dad's shop and they chatted about my progress. When I watched Mister Rogers' Neighborhood TV show with my kids when they were growing up, I was reminded of my own kindergarten teachers.

At this gate, Calcuttawala Hospital was the only hospital in the town and served all of the nearby villages. Further on towards the hospital gate was another bazaar for the local people and the gate that went towards a village named Sadiawad.

Holi Chhakala

Continuing through the bazaar from Mandir Seri towards Holi Chhakala, there were many shops, most of them owned by our nat people. This was the main bazaar for business in Balasinor in those days. The road in this part of bazaar was wider than the

rest of the bazaar. In the afternoons on business days, the bazaar was packed with customers. Most of the shops catered to the customer from nearby villages. The shops were cloth merchants; silver and gold ornament shops, wholesale and retail grain shops, Pedhiwada shops, etc. There were a few tailor shops and *kandoi* shops selling sweets and *farsan*⁵⁰. A Pedhiwada shop gives a hundi for the transfer of money from one town to another and then you take it with you or mail to the other party. This party will collect the money from Pedhiwada in that town. There were no banks in the town that handled such transactions in those days.

In the evenings and early nights, this part of town was a socializing place for the townspeople. They gathered near the closed shops and exchanged the news and discussed the events of the day. They came here after the evening meal for a walk or for paan and also to cool down. In the summertime every year there was a *katha*⁵¹, alternating between the epic tales of Ramayana or Mahabharat. The *katha* lasts for two months and runs from 9.00 p.m. to midnight. Each night, people sat on the road and also on the steps of the shops to listen to the *katha*. I have heard both of the *kathas* in detail orated by Vyasaji at the Holy Chhakala street corner. Vyasaji recited these *kathas* from the beginning to the end and they captured the attention of the people.

Holi Chhakala was also called Tulsi Mohalla, the name given in the memory of the late Tulsidas who become a martyr in the fight for India's

⁵⁰ *farsan* – type of snack

⁵¹ *katha* – style of religious storytelling

independence. As you entered the street on your left, there was a sidewall with big letters “Quit India” written on it. These writings were ten feet wide and six feet tall. While I was young, I was not able to understand this English phrase, but in later years I was able figure out the meaning of those words. The name of Holi Chhakala was used because of the lighting of the Holi here at the entrance of the street on the Holi celebration day.

The very first street on the right side was the most important street for me. Many of my friends and relatives lived here and I visited this street very often. There was a very large chowk here and the first house on the left was Otalwada where my friend Gopal lived. Next to that house was where my friend Chandrakant Parikh lived and the next one was where Ramesh lived. A few houses down in another corner street, there was a house of my Magankaka Vasanji. Magankaka, my father’s uncle, lived past one hundred years. I went to his house many times to play with his grandson Kiran who was my age.

The next house was where my closest friend Kirit Kadakia lived. He was nicknamed Chachio and he was one of my closest friends from high school. I was more familiar with this house and not his new house built in 1954. We got separated in 1958 when he went to Vidyanagar and I went to Baroda. He received a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from Vidyanagar. He got married in Balasinor in May 1966 and this was the last wedding I attended before I left for the U.S. in August of 1966.^{xx} I had known him since my childhood and he had shown signs of becoming wealthy. One sign was that whenever you needed to share the expenses amongst friends and

you were short, he would loan you the money and within a few days if you do not pay him back, he would loan you more to make an even number to remember. In the U.S. we did not continue our childhood friendship as we were far apart so there was no contact. Continuing on, there was a house of Sankarlal Dharia, the grandfather of Chandrakantbhai.^{xxi}

The next house was the most important house and it's where my parents lived before I was born and before they moved to Madani Seri to live in the house in Jatni Khadaki. After my parents moved away, the youngest of the family, my uncle Kirtankaka lived there and inherited the house after the death of my grandfather. The house was three stories tall and was very narrow, about ten feet wide but fifty feet deep. Presently the house has since been rebuilt on the same location. The kitchen was moved from the third floor with the aggas to the ground floor.

I came here many times to deliver a message or to play with the neighborhood friends and I always came by and said hi. Hansaben, the oldest of my *kaka*⁵²'s four daughters, was in my high school class and constantly needed assistance on her math homework. I used to help her, but after ninth grade she left the school and got married. The other cousins were very young when I left for college. On my visits home in vacation time, I came and saw the family and talked about the college life and what I was studying and what I wanted to become. My uncle was determined in putting his kids through

⁵² *kaka* – father's brother

college and was collecting as much information from me as possible. Kaka died from a massive heart attack after suffering through a long illness. He had a bad habit of chewing tobacco, occasionally it got stuck in his throat and he eventually developed cancer. He was constantly coughing. I was told that the constant coughing pressured and enlarged the heart cavity and it lost the elasticity of pumping and after many visits and long stays in the Anand hospital he died.

My dad was born in this house in 1910. My mother was born in 1911 in the house across the street. My parents were married in 1924 as I was told that my mother married when she was thirteen or fourteen years old. My oldest sister was born on June 3, 1929. After their marriage my parents lived in this house for many years, I would guess that my parents moved to the rented house in Madani Seri in the early 1930s.

I took a two-week vacation and visited my parents in 1978. My sisters and their husbands, Navnitlal and Jayantilal, joined me at this time. We talked to a few older acquaintances that were in their nineties at the time and we inquired about the Vasanji family and were told about my grandfather Lallubhai Bhogilal. The Vasanji family was a very prominent family in the town, in today's ranking, equivalent to that of a mayor's. One has to imagine a hundred years before when the trade of my Vasanji family with the migrant tribe of Bharawad's was very important and brought money into the town. This trade continued until both of my uncles died in 1955.

Next to this house were the houses of Bhikhalal Mody and Kantilal Otalwada. Every house

in this street had one or two kids of my age and we played all kinds of games and made noises in the street. The atmosphere was very lively and the street looked like it was full of life. In the wintertime when the Bharawads came to the town with their camels, they occupied the whole chowk and there was hardly any room to walk. There were as many as ten camels and they were resting for days. In the summer time and during marriage time, there were marriage mandaps and a kitchen occupying the center of the chowk.

As you exited the street, the house in front was of my grandfather's, Lallubhai Chunilal Kadakia, also known as Kaduji. This was the house where my mother was born. It was a three-story house with a kitchen on the third floor. On the second floor there was a window overlooking the street and there was a seat on the window. From this seat I could observe the people walking in the street. I remember a little bit of my mama in my early days whenever he was in town from Bombay and also of my grandfather. My grandmother had taken *Marjadi* (a Pustimarg ritual) so nobody could enter her kitchen and nobody was allowed to touch anything while she was taking care of *Lalan* (idol of child Krishna). I knew that my mom was always here in the evening after darshan in the temple so I played with friends in the street until it got dark and then came here to be with my mom and then we went home. The reason for coming here was for the evening *prashad*⁵³ I got from my grandma but I had to wait until darshan. The prashad consisted of penda, *sakar*⁵⁴, sweet *kajukari*⁵⁵, *mag*

⁵³ *prashad* – food offered first to God and then distributed amongst devotees

*ni*⁵⁶ daal, sweet *pano*⁵⁷ etc. It varied daily, but it was fun to be here for a treat.

I can imagine my parents growing up in the same street and getting married at the age of thirteen or fourteen. They must have played together or had some common friends, not knowing they would get married and spend the rest of their lives together in the same town. They may have even played the same games we played when we grew up here.

Over the years, my father introduced me to many of his friends while I was studying at the engineering college. During my marriage reception, he invited a few of his friends from Bombay, and I could see the gleam in his eyes, the pride and satisfaction of introducing me to his friends and my receiving their blessings from them. He had wanted to continue his own studies in Modasa, but my grandfather prevented him and instead brought him back to join the family business. Here his dream came true through me and he was proud of his own accomplishments and being appreciated by his friends and that made him happier.

In 1952, my mama bought an old house from my grandparents in a nearby street in Holi Chhakala. After doing some renovation, they moved there. At the time of the renovation I was ten years old and was becoming more curious to learn how things get done so I went to that house many times just to

⁵⁴ *sakar* – raw sugar

⁵⁵ *kajukari* – diamond-shaped sweet made of cashews

⁵⁶ *mag ni* - lentil

⁵⁷ *pano* – sweetened water

observe how the carpenters and masonry workers and others were performing the work. I was engaged in the way they did the carpentry, masonry, and learned a little bit from them. Their work was interesting to me and I always found an excuse to go there and observe them. A helper name Sukho was very energetic, hard working and polite and later he became like one of the family. He was there for many years after to help my mama from the day he arrived at the bus station to the day he left for Bombay.

The entrance of my grandpa's old house was in the sub street and there were many houses inside this street. The families from each and every house in this street in those years migrated to Bombay. I know this because I never came to play here since there were no kids of my age and there was no open ground space like the one in the opposite street.

The Holi Chakala Street continued inside and there were houses facing the street on both sides. The next street on the left was where my mama bought the house for my grandparents and next to it was a small street with three houses including where Gopal Beani lived. He was one of my friends who left Balasinor after the sixth grade and went to Bombay to live with his brother. When he was in town we were good friends and played together at his house; kite flying was most enjoyable from his house because of many other friends in the neighborhood also flying kites here. Opposite his house was the house of my father's friend Chimankaka Parikh whose son Bipin was also of my age. Continuing in the same street, there was a house of Suresh Sevak and his sister.^{xxii}

Continuing on the same street, the street then ends except for the house that closed the street. The ground floor was kept open for access to the adjoining street. This small street led to the street coming from the first left side street from the talav gate. The last house on this street was that of Kantilal Parikh. I had come here to meet with Kantibhai, to do some work and participate in meetings for Shram Yagna arrangements. His brother Shashikant was my friend and classmate in high school. He did not finish high school in Balasinor and went to Bombay for studies. From his house the side street coming from talav gate was more than ten feet below and the soil was getting washed away from the gushing water during monsoon time.

Coming back to the Holi Chakala Street and continuing on the left hand side is where the street snakes around where the rich and famous people of Balasinor lived. I did not know most of them. Most of these houses were closed year round except during the holidays. These were newly built houses more than four stories tall. One of the houses belonged to Ochhavalal Varkha, Sanjay's grandfather. Opposite that house was of Chimanlal Maganlal Parikh who owned the peanut oil mill in the town. His shop was the first one on the right side as you entered the street. On Holi days, when they ignited the Holi, they boarded the shop with corrugated galvanized steel panels to protect against the hot fires of the Holi.

The house across was that of my brother in law Navnitlal Dharia. People called him Dalal. In my earliest memories I met Dilipbhai, Navnitlal's

younger brother who was living there to complete his high school studies. Whenever I visited to meet my sister and her family he was preoccupied in his studies. During holiday times, my sister along with her family and Rasikbhai, Navnitlal's second brother, with his family all filled up the house. There was always noise of children running around amid the hustle and bustle of cooking and cleaning; I still remember the chaos of those days. The staircase in the corner to go to the second floor was not well placed and needed extra caution to climb up. The kitchen was on the ground floor and there was a platform swing outside in the open to rest and to cool down in the summer time. This house was torn down and completely rebuilt in the later part of the 1950s.

Continuing further into the street across, after stepping down approximately ten steps and in the street corner was my Ramanlal mama's son Rasikbhai's house. He inherited this house from his mother, as she was the only child of the family. Rasikbhai came to the town a few times every year. While the house was being renovated, I used to come here to meet him and get acquainted with him. Outside of this house was again the street from talav gate.

The right side street after Navnitlal's house goes to Nagarseth seri. Kiran Doshi lived here and there was a large well with a shallow water level. It was a busy place for women as they fetched the water and washed the clothes. This well did not have a raised guard for protection against falling inside so it was dangerous to fetch the water. Kiran was one

year behind me in high school. He also went to engineering college in Baroda.^{xxiii}

Further into the narrow street, there were houses of Natu mama, Navnitlal's mama, who was a well-known electrical accessories merchant in Lohar Chwal, Bombay's electrical market. The name of the company was M.C. Mody & Co.^{xxiv} I have known many of the siblings of the family through Navnitlal and his association with the family. This street continues further and slopes down and meets the street from the talav gate.

Continuing on the main Holi Chakala on the right side is Vallabhghela seri, a closed end street with an open square in the middle. Most of the houses were newly built and stayed vacant year round except for the summer time. There were a few open houses and one of them was where my mom's uncle on her father side of the family lived. I visited here with my mom. At the time, my mom's uncle and aunt were both in their nineties.

Further on the left was a street called Parekh Street where Manilal Parekh, the gold and silver merchant, lived. This family had many sons of various ages; they were all well-known in town. Rajni Parekh was well-known due to his exuberant lifestyle and his hobby of riding an expensive bicycle. The family, though, experienced economic hardships and their newly built house was sold to Natwarlal and Virmatiben Modi who were social workers in the town. Virmatiben was my high school teacher and was well-received by the students and was praised for her teaching ability. She joined with Champaben and Kalaben to become a trio and they dedicated themselves to social causes facing many families in

and around the town. Natwarlal Modi with his efforts collected the donations from the well to do townspeople, friends, and relatives and built Kantilal Parikh Public Park in memory of Kantibhai Parikh. The park was built in 1954; today it is the one of the landmarks of the town. Further on is a closed end street to the left with a similar open square in the middle. On the right side is a well-built house of Calcuttawala. Calcuttawala was from the most known and generous family in town. The family lived in Calcutta and made a fortune in business. He was called *crorepati*⁵⁸ because he was the first in town to accumulate the wealth of that amount in the 1940s. Sankarlal Calcuttawala was married to the daughter of grandfather Lallubhai Chunilal's brother, so Dipika and I are related; she is the youngest daughter in the family married to Harendra, Shobhana's second brother. The most outstanding donation from this family was in building the town's hospital and the second was in building a dharamshada for a place for transients to stay. Dipika's brother Harendra was the recipient of the U.S. president's prestigious award for inventing the catalytic converters for the auto industry while working for the Ford motor company in Detroit, Michigan. The narrow street on the side of the house leads to Nat Ni Vadi also called Dharansada. At the end of the square, a small street goes to Nagarseth's street. The street continues to the Dharamsada, and on the right side there is a small street, where Rameshchandra and Hansaben live. There were many houses on both sides of the street and were

⁵⁸ *crorepati* – person whose net worth exceeds ten million rupees

built around the turn of the century. They were well-built except due to their proximity to each other the street was always dark.

I have ended my walk through the town. There are a few streets I do not remember the name of and again most of the names were based on the families that lived there.

OUTSIDE TOWN

Outside the Fort

The fort enclosed the town and there were five main gates equipped with heavy wooden doors that people entered and left town through in daytime. The doors were equipped with spikes a foot apart so elephants, horses, or bulls cannot push through the door to open. I have not seen but heard that these gates were closed at nighttime and guarded by security. There was an area called Dungarpur at the west side where the native people called Adivasi lived. Their hills were not so suitable for cultivation of crops so the Adivasi raided the town in the earlier years and that was the reason for Nawab of Balasinor to build the fort.

Talavgate is where the road leads to the talav as you leave town. The road on the left hand side lead to the surrounding hills at a higher ground and the runoff rainwater in the monsoon season flowed into this talav. If you walk around the talav at regular pace, it will take an hour to complete. There was a man-made dam a hundred feet long and ten feet high on the far side of the gate to hold the runoff and in a normal rainy season the talav will remain full until the new season starts. In the years of heavy rain, the water would overflow from this dam into an adjacent small lake called a *talavadi* and it will fill that up and finally the water will flow into the tributary of the nearby river. At the center of the talav the depth was about 25 feet and a pole with markings is located there. A *bet* or island 300 ft in

diameter is surrounded by water at the center of the talav. I was told there is a ruin of a broken brick staircase from when there was a summer palace of the Nawab that had been burned down.

This area was the busiest place in the town and everybody from the town came here throughout the day to fetch water, to bathe and to wash clothes. There were many platforms for people to reach the water as the water level in the talav rose and fell throughout the year. These platforms were made from cut stones, each one of them leads down twenty to thirty steps and they were twenty to thirty feet in length. Starting from the talav gate there were about twenty of these on both sides of the talav. In the morning hours one can hear the sound of women pounding the clothes against the platform and then washing them with soap and water. Sometime it was difficult to find a spot on the platform. The platforms were marked for women only as women took baths here while washing clothes. A few platforms were sloped down from the street level so the animals can reach the water.

On the left side of the road leading to the high school, the edge of the talav was paved with stones for walking and there were steel pipe barriers six feet above ground for preventing people from falling into the water. The opposite side of the talav was on the higher ground and was lined densely with fig and palm trees. Here the ground slope was very steep and muddy and this side was hardly used by anyone.

The road on the left of the talav gate leading to the higher ground is where the water from the hills starts running into the talav. After a heavy rain my friends and I came here to see and hear the

sounds of gushing water running into the talav. In the middle of the rainy season after a heavy downpour, to our surprise the empty talav filled up overnight. Occasionally crowds gathered here to watch the water running into talav. I have also seen people fishing then.

On the right hand side of the gate is the fort wall parallel to the road about two hundred feet and then it takes a 90 degree turn. Also the road splits towards Saliyavadi and Virpur, Virpur is a sister town to Balasinor taluka and is fifteen miles away. This road also connects to another gate near the general hospital and this gate is called Saliyavadi gate.

The straight road from talav gate leads to the town's major attractions such as the high school, Kantilal Parikh Park, and up on the hill, Kedarnath temple and Apeshwar temple. It is about a two-mile walk up to the Kedarnath temple.

During summer vacations people from the town and the out of town guests enjoyed the coolness of the talav and the cool breeze of the hills this town had to offer on a hot blistering day. In the evening hours the road became crowded with people and vendors selling snowballs made from shaved ice, *kulfi*⁵⁹ and ice cream. You could distinguish the people from out of town who wore very expensive clothes and walked and talked differently. This was the time and place where young boys and girls had a chance to see each other and exchange glances and discuss later on who is who and the discussion lasted into the wee hours of the night. These boys and girls

⁵⁹ *kulfi* – frozen dairy dessert

were the children of the parents who left the town or the second-generation parents who came and visited their parents and grandparents. It was also a place for these parents to find boys and girls for their own children to marry. The month of May is the hottest month of the year; for a few days the temperature shoots up as high as 51° Celsius in the afternoon. The newspaper would provide advance information of the coming heat wave whenever the temperature will exceed 43° Celsius. Very few people went out of their houses in the afternoon and always stayed indoors and used all kind of cooling devices to cool themselves. People sucked on ice cubes and drank cold drinks in the afternoon and evening hours. After the sun sets in the windless evening and nights, people went outdoors to cool themselves especially towards the talav or the nearby hills to get some relief from the cool air blowing there. People slept in the open air in the terraces at nighttime to get some cool relief. The heat wave continues into June and ends with the first wave of the rain in the first or second week of June. The location of the town nearby the hill area and the talav makes it an ideal place for summer vacation.

The townspeople came to Balasinor from nearby cities especially Bombay for summer vacation. Typically they were visiting their parents or grandparents or close relatives who had their own houses so this made it even more attractive to come here. Also for most of the families, they appreciated the opportunity to get away from their small living areas in Bombay and live in four story houses with plenty of amenities in the rural area.

After walking by a few platforms there was a two-story house at the edge of water called Daria Mahal. *Daria* is the sea or ocean. This was the Nawab's summer palace residence for the summer time and where the boats were docked for going to the bet. There was a small garden next to the Daria Mahal for Nawab's and his guests' personal use and for gatherings in the evening. After independence it was a residence for the taluka's judge. Government officers were always seen visiting this place and this resident was heavily guarded. On the opposite side was a Bawa's Dharamshada; this was open for the people traveling and for overnight stays. The main resident and guardian was a Bawa, a follower of Lord Shiva. In the evening hours he dressed up in the attire of Lord Shiva's clothes and went around the town to collect alms. There was a big mango tree at the entrance and in the season it was always loaded with very large mangoes, it was hanging so close to the ground you felt like picking them off, but the Bawa was always seen seated at the entrance and would not let anyone touch them. Hired people came to harvest the mangoes when they were ready and the harvest filled up more than four bullock carts.

Next to Dharamsada was a *Kabar*⁶⁰ of some famous mullah where occasionally his followers came and prayed and changed the coverings. On the same side was the queen's palace and garden. This palace was gated and fenced on all four sides and I do not remember ever being inside. The garden ended near the Vadikua, the main source of drinking water for the town. The townspeople who were used

⁶⁰ *kabar* – stone that signifies resting place in Islamic religion

to the taste of this water would not like the taste of any other water and would tell you so. On their visits to the town they longed to only drink Vadikua water. In the evening hours the caretaker of the garden, with his pair of bulls and *kaans*, leather buckets a cubic yard in size, fetched water from the well for the garden. He tied the bucket to the rope, dropped it into the well and then pulled the bucket using the bulls and repeated this a hundred times. Occasionally my friends and I went just to watch this and to get a drink of Vadikua water.

The road continues towards the high school. There was a stone pavement next to the talav and stone benches for the people to sit and enjoy the cool breeze. The school was about a half to three quarter miles from the gate and opposite the talavadi. Between the Talav and talavadi there was a small narrow road leading to the hills. Before you started climbing here, there was a mosque with a large platform for people to do namaz. I have seen on occasion here a thousand or more people perform the namaz at the same time. This mosque was unattended for the whole year except for one day. A few days before the day of the namaz, some people came and swept the floor for the big day and on the namaz, the Muslim community from every corner of the town and surrounding villages came here for a few minutes of prayer.

On the face of the hill going to the Hanuman temple, there were several *Chanibor* shrubs. Chanibor is a small berry one quarter to half inch in diameter; when ripened it turns red and tastes sweet and sour. The pitted dry berries were used for snacks. We picked these up on the way to the

Hanuman temple located half a mile away at the top of the hill. It is believed that your prayer is always answered and your wishes become true with the blessing of Hanuman. I did this once when I wished to pass the SSCE (Secondary School Certification Examination) and offered a coconut to Hanuman at this temple.

High School

There was a plaque at the entrance of the high school with the writings that the inauguration day of this high school was the day the King or Queen of England was coronated and so the name of the high school was “Coronation High School of Balasinor”. Many years after I left high school it was renamed to Punamchand Vaidraj High School in honor of the town’s known and respected leader and the town’s Vaidraj. It was a two story red brick building in the shape of an E and the extensions of the letter E were single stories. On the right side there was a single story building that was a hostel for students to stay during the school year and a little further away there was a small building for the kitchen and there was a water hut for the drinking water. In the front near the walkway entrance there was a small cottage for the residence of the security guard and his family. On the left side far away behind the building was the men’s room and on the right side the women’s room.

The school compound was very large and was fenced on all four sides and the road from the main entrance from the gate to the entrance of the school was wide and paved and lined with Neem trees on both sides. At the center was a cricket playground

and in the front near the road was a volleyball court. The back of the building inside the extension was a badminton court. On the left hand side was a playground with slide and swings and exercise gymnasium equipment like double even bars, climbing poles, areas for long jump and high jump and two more courts for badminton etc. Near the gate on the left side was a well for supplying water for school use. Outside of the gates during recesses, there were vendors selling fruits and snack items.

The classes were held from fifth to eleventh grade. The number of students in each class was less than fifty. While I attended the schools there were one class for every grade. There were ten long benches in each class with four students on each bench. If the number of students exceeded forty, each additional student was added to each bench. There were separate classrooms for arts and crafts. There was a library and a teachers' room in the middle extension of the building. On the front right hand side was an office and the principal's office. There were eight classes everyday, each of them 40 minutes long and there was a ringing of the bell to signal the end of the class.

A school day began with the prayer where the students from all of the classes sat under the Neem trees. Students from each class were lined up and seated in a column and all the girls were seated separately in three columns. Next to the girls' columns, students from the eleventh grade to fifth grade were lined up in columns. After the prayer, the principal announced the new rules and honored the students for their outstanding achievements and

mentioned names of the special guests arriving for the gatherings at evening time.

The most striking memory I have of high school is of a principal named Hansoti. He was a military trained person and was a believer in discipline. He asked students to walk in one line from the talav gate to the school gate and back. During prayer time, he wanted discipline and no laughing or any gestures of laughing. If one of the students was seen laughing, in anger he slapped the student many times in front of the other students. I heard later that a student's parents complained so Hansoti was disciplined and was asked to resign.

The school uniforms for the boys consisted of shorts and a white shirt. In the eleventh grade we demanded to be able to wear trousers and on refusal of our demand we went on strike. Within a week after mediation by the Vaidraj, we were allowed to wear trousers.

I was in school from 1951 to 1958, which was immediately after independence. The school atmosphere was more disciplined and patriotic. There also was a sense of pride after independence and the philosophies of Gandhi, Nehru and Vinoba Bhave were discussed constantly in school debates. International news and events were discussed and the school library carried the propaganda literature from the Soviet Union. Local leaders were invited as speakers to inform and guide the students for their careers after completing school.

The year 1957 was a memorable one as this year saw the birth of the separate state of Gujarat. On August 8, 1957, Indulal Yagnic, a follower of Gandhi, who in the spirit of Gandhi's philosophy of

nonviolence, started a movement for the people of Gujarat to have their own independent state, separate from the state of Maharashtra. He called for his followers in Ahmedabad and the rest of Gujarat for a general strike. In Ahmedabad the police shot at the procession and killed a few students who were marching in the procession and shouting slogans. News of the shooting and the call for the general strike spread across Gujarat. My eleventh grade teacher gave us the news and in a roundabout way inspired us to call for the strike in our school as well and to march in the town declaring the general strike. I was the first amongst the students to get up and together we went from class to class eventually forcing the closure of the school and we marched in the town and successfully called for a general strike.

While studying I was fortunate to have a good teacher in every grade. They dedicated themselves in teaching the hard way and my successes in life are in part due to their dedication. A few of my teachers in no particular order were Pandy Master, Malik Master, Trivedi master, Pandit master, Shashikantbhai, Champaben, Virmatiben, Kalaben, Suthar master, and Seikh master. I passed the SSCE in 1958 in first class; I was second in the class of 60 students and was awarded a prize of Rs 25/. I was the only one admitted to the MS University of Baroda amongst the entire student body.

After school hours and on weekends my friends and I spent all of our time at the school playground. There was a school cricket team where I played a few times. There was a volleyball team and badminton team that I played for during physical training classes and also practiced after school. An

early memory I have was when I was around ten years old and was playing volleyball, a few elderly people asked to join us. After the game they treated all of us with snacks brought from the town. Later on I found out that one of the persons was my brother-in-law and the others were his friends and they were visiting from Bombay.

For the last four years of high school, there were six of us friends who bonded very closely and studied and were always seen together. We discussed and planned for the future while seated on the flat rock at the cliff of the hill. None of the plans included coming to the U.S. We chiseled our names on the rocks. From here we could see the inclined road going to Kedarnath temple and we could see the people coming from and going to the temple. We could see the outskirts of the town and on clear days the Pavagadh Mountain. There were no smoking chimneys seen at Vanakbori, as there was no electric power generating station at that time.^{xxv} After the SSCE examination in Anand, we all went to a studio for a group picture to preserve the memory of our friendship (see Figure 6).

Kantilal Parikh Public Park

The road continues towards the Kantilal Parikh public park, which was under construction since 1955 and continued into 1958 when I left town. Natubhai Modi, a social worker and a close friend of Kantibhai Parikh and a member of the Socialist Party collected the funds from the Balasinor community and started building this park in the memory of Kantilal Parikh who died in his forties. I

have worked with Kantibhai in many public endeavors as a youth and he was a truly a leader and motivator.

My earliest memory of the park was seeing the well that supplied the water for the park and there were various sections laid out for the garden, hedges, park benches, and the walkway. There were trees with large trunks so the designer used these to make a circular brick patio for people to sit on. While my friends and I were visiting the park, we met Natubhai and he was explaining the plan and how it would look when completed. Seeing only the completed patios, we used to call the park a patio park amongst ourselves. I have not visited this park since 1958; I heard it is a landmark of the town and a very busy place in summer time.

A little further down on the left hand side is the town's cemetery, which I have never been inside. One can see from the road the ground full of ashes where the bodies were cremated. There was a small building like a shed for people to rest while watching the bodies to burn completely and also there were piles of cut wood available for use. It was an honor system for families to pay for the wood they used in cremation. It was believed that youngsters should not go nearby as the souls from the dead still linger around here and can take a possession of them.

Kedarnath Temple

There is an unpaved road that continues from here onward. I have never been on that road but I heard that it goes through the woods to Apeshwar Mahadev Temple. The road to Kedarnath temple

forks off to the left after the high school. On the right hand side after the bridge there are no buildings. This area was full of mango trees and there were areas for the sticky red colored soil for the town's *kumbhar* to make earthen vases from and there was also an abandoned brick factory. Once when in a classroom studying we heard chaotic sounds nearby. People were screaming and were running towards this area because the topsoil had collapsed and had buried a few people alive. The *kumbhar* had been digging in the soil, which caused the cantilever to collapse. On the left hand side there were no buildings except in later years I heard that they were planning to build a new hostel for the students as the hostel within the school compound was being converted to classrooms.

Before you start climbing the hills to go to the Kedarnath temple, on the left side was a cliff with a steep climb and flat rocks on the top. As mentioned earlier, one of these rocks was an evening gathering place for me and my friends. Other friends knew our whereabouts and came here to talk to us.

It is about a mile from here to the Kedarnath temple. The first quarter of a mile is a climb of two hundred feet. It was a workout to climb this hill on the unpaved road and very few people could ride their bicycle. Once you are on the top, the view is very beautiful. You see miles and miles of land and a full view of the talav, a view of the Nawab's palace, a view of the tall buildings of the town, and a faraway view of Pavagadh Mountain. The most interesting thing to me was this road. It was a snaked road to the top of the flat hill. The hill is flat and I can see miles and miles of hill area without seeing any

mountains. One side is full of big rocks underneath the walkway seen at ground level and the other side is a steep cliff ending in a deep canyon. The whole landscape is full of Chanibor shrubs. After the climb on both sides there were benches laid out in a circle for people to relax and enjoy the view.

The temple itself was a compound approximately 150 square feet in area with tall walls to protect against wild animals. As you entered the compound a small temple of Kedarnath is on the left hand side containing the Shiva lingam and a statue of Nandi. There was a garden in the middle and a few benches. There was a well at the far corner with a bucket and rope for fetching water. The well had steps to go near the water level except it was blocked off for safety. There was a partial roof on one side for shelter and sleeping arrangements for the people who stay overnight. Later they added a room in one corner at the top with open view of the surroundings for the town's vaidraj. He decided to move here from his place near the house in Madani Seri. His health was deteriorating and he needed a fresh air environment that he found here. I used to come and visit him here. He lived close to one hundred years old. As often as was the case of living in an unprotected area, he was robbed and beaten by the Adivasi. He recovered but died a few years later. He was a well-known Vaidraj for the townspeople and people lined up for his Ayurvedic medicine.

Outside the temple there was a deep canyon and there were sightings of many animals including tigers, wildcats, and snakes including pythons. In the wintertime, approximately twenty or so families of Bharawads called the Bedouin tribe lived in tents

here. The goats wandered around here for a greener pasture of shrubs near the canyon wall and Bharawads always kept an eye on their animals. They had many dogs, camels, and goats as their animals for their protection and nourishment. While at the school, we heard that a big python swallowed a baby goat and Bharawad with his axe had killed and cut open the body of python to retrieve the dead goat. We all rushed to the site to see this gruesome scene. The python was about a foot in diameter and fifteen feet long.

On this hill near the benches at the slope, my dad told me he once hid behind one of these benches because he saw a tiger early in the morning walking slowly toward his resting place. Up on the hill in the early years we had bicycle races, as the ground was open with two miles of dirt and rocky tracks.

There is a mela held at this temple once a year on the day of Shiva Jayanti and I came here with my family along with all the families of the town for a picnic and as in many melas, we played many games, played with toys, went to the shops for varieties of food and sweets, and went on a merry go round as part of a full day of activities.

Apeshwar Mahadev Temple

On the left side of the Kedarnath temple the hill continues about half a mile and then drops to the ground level and the area becomes green with many mango trees and consists mainly of agricultural land. A mile into these woods, there is a temple of the Apeshwar Mahadev. We knew about the temple but we came here very rarely. On the day of the

Kedarnath mela, we always wandered around here to get a glimpse of the mini mela here.

Saliyavadi Gate

The road leading from the Saliyavadi gate is the main road to go to Virpur; on the way there are many small villages and agricultural land on both sides so the road is heavily traveled. The first landmark of this road is the Calcuttawala dharamshada. Unlike the Bawa's dharamshada, this one has many rooms for the travelers to stay overnight and is always occupied. The building was well laid out at the corner and had the appearance of a motel. The Calcuttawala family, the town's most well known family due to their donations towards the welfare of the community, built the dharamshada. The families were the first migrants to settle in Calcutta and were cloth merchants.

A half-mile away there were four bungalows built by the town's four known families for their summer holiday stays. There were few other open lots for other families to build the bungalows but no such bungalows were ever built due to a lack of security in the area.

A mile from the gate is where there was a bungalow for the town's Vaishnavas families to stay and celebrate the festival called *Fagvo*. On the day of the Fagvo, the families along with the chief priest carry the idol of Shreenathaji, who the townspeople pray to as the incarnation of Lord Krishna, in a chariot while singing and chanting the praises of the Shreenathaji, dancing throughout the procession, and then they finally bring Shreenathaji to the

bungalow for a day for the picnic. This procession from the main temple to the bungalow was one of the most memorable recollections for me due to seeing so many of my friends and families gathering there on this festival occasion. Along with the singing and chanting and playing the music throughout the procession, we colored the walls on the street and the people who came to see were blasted with a red colored powder called *gual*. The instructions were to pour a pound of *gual* in a plain cloth and after making a ball, hold both ends of the cloth and swing around a few times and aim and let go of one end and splash all the *gual* at the desired location or at a group of people. The atmosphere was enjoyable and festive especially when seeing the people covered with *gual*. Another cherished memory was seeing my uncle Kirtankaka who was tall and well-built carrying two drums called *tabalas* tied to his waist and playing and singing throughout the procession. The highlight of the day was an all-day picnic at the park where we played games, listened to music, ate sweets and good food, and met all of the families. The procession returned in the evening to the temple through a different route.

Entrepreneurship started here as four of us friends got together and put up a stall. On a board we drew a circle with eight sectors and a needle in the center, we let kids spin the needle by putting a token on one of the eight numbers and if the needle settled on the number with the token he wins two tokens otherwise he loses his token. All the kids were given allowances to spend at the picnic and they were looking for a fun game so this was more fun than they would have gotten otherwise. At the end of

the day we collected a few rupees and divided them amongst ourselves.

On the same day there was a mela at a place nearby called Bhim Bhameda. This is a bigger festival where a few thousand people from the surrounding villages gathered for the mela. There was a merry-go-round, a circus, clowns, and many stalls and hawkers for food and other merchandise much like a mini-Disneyland atmosphere. The name Bhim Bhameda refers to a place and surroundings that was covered with exposed boulders and one of the boulders was in a shape of a bhamardo. The rock in a shape of a top is approximately forty feet tall and same in diameter and is resting on the narrowed bottom. Bhim, a character in the epic Mahabharat, is presented as a huge figure and this rock depicted as the top was the type he used to play with when he wandered into this part of the forest. Another memory of this place was when some young girls from a nearby village came with group of their friends and six or eight of them put their arms each other and formed a circle and then with heavy voices they sang the songs of the mela and the sound was mesmerizing. I have yet to hear a more pleasing sound than this.

The road continues on to other villages and Virpur, but I have never traveled beyond this.

Ghanchivada Gate

This gate is on the far right side of the town, but I do not know the name as there is no road from the gate that leads to any town except I do know the people that live near the gate are called Ganchi.

These are the people who are equipped to grind seeds like peanut, castor, sesame, and others to make oil. There were many families who were in the seed grinding business. They had a bull and a grinding stone so they laid the seeds onto the stone and with a roller they kept grinding the seeds until the oil squeezed out which they collected and sold to the local merchant. They used a blindfolded bull to make him go round and round to churn the seeds. The air was full of the oil smell and the area was really dirty. The smell of the bull droppings as the bull was put to work lasted most of the day. There were many families in the area operating the same businesses. During the rainy season, it stank even more and the ground was very muddy and difficult to travel on as there was no pavement and outlets for the rainwater. When the oil mill came to town in the early part of 1950s, their businesses slowly collapsed. Outside of the gate, the ground dropped steeply and the narrow road led to the main road connecting the two adjoining gates. Municipality workers brought refuse from the town here to process and discard and this added to the stinkiness of the air.

There was a cotton mill and oil mill on the right side of the road. In the cotton-harvesting season, there were as many as ten to twenty bullock driven carts lined up full of cotton to sell to the mill that were grown in the nearby fields. Villages around here were growing cotton, tobacco, peanuts, and other crops called cash crops. They turned their harvest into cash immediately. Inside the cotton mill there was a weighing machine where the cart pulled up and after emptying it was weighed again. The difference was the weight of the cotton and they

would get money immediately in brand new bills from the mill owners. The mill took the seeds out of the cotton and bundled the cotton in very tight bales of two feet by two feet by six feet long and then shipped them to the cotton mills in Ahmedabad. Ahmedabad was known as the cotton mill capital of India as it had more than a hundred cotton mills in those days. The extracted cottonseeds were sold to town merchants to sell for animal feed.

My dad had a few customers from a village named Pandva who were growing cotton in their field and selling to this mill. They brought the cash to my dad to pay back the loan they received from my dad throughout the year. They brought cash in brand new hundred rupee bills and even sometimes in thousand rupee bills. This was the first time I saw these large denomination bills. My dad immediately gave me the bills and told me to give them to the town's merchant who supplied us the merchandise and had more outstanding balance owed to him. I took the money and gave it to that merchant and made sure he entered the entries of deposited amounts in his book and then I left.

The oil mill primarily made oil from peanuts, as this was the only oil used for cooking and frying. The mill collected the peanut oil in forty-pound cans and sold the cans to the local merchant. In the season, the can of oil was sold very cheaply as the mill did not have the financial capacity to hold a year's supply of oil, but when out of season, the price in the market doubled as the new supply from the mill is reduced so the people with money hoard as many cans as they could to make a handsome profit themselves. This was the local supply and demand

principle, but later as accessible transportation became more common, the seasonal price fluctuations went away.

Sevalia Gate

Outside this gate was where the new bus station was located as the Gujarat state transportation took over the transportation business. The buses run by Nagarseth from the Nisadno Chowk went out of business since the Nisadno Chowk was ultimately too small for the large ST buses. Many more routes were added which increased demand. I have heard that the buses they introduced in those days are still running today after fifty years and are causing many accidents. They are in dilapidated states as there are no new funds available to replace them. They made the new bus station after I left town.

A little further away, they built a new cotton mill to replace the old cotton mill and here cotton now comes in trucks instead of bullock carts. The other familiar place is Pursotam Ni Vadi. There was a small mela here on the day of the sarad purnima; on the day we came here, our *purohit*⁶¹ performed a ceremony and cut the *rakhi*⁶² from our hands. Later that day we were treated to a sweet called *dudh pauaa*, parched rice soaked in sweetened milk, that we are supposed to eat in moonlight as there will be a full moon on this night.

⁶¹ *purohit* – family priest

⁶² *rakhi* – sacred thread

The road continued on to Menpura and to Sevalia ten miles away and Sevalia has the nearest railway station. I have walked to Sevalia with my friends just to see the train, as I do not remember ever traveling out of town until I left for the SSC examination in Anand in 1958.

Theater Gate

The Nawab's theater is located near this gate; these parts of the town are on the hill and the Harijan lived in this part of the town. The gate leads to a temple, I do not remember the name of the temple but there was a mela every year and we used to come here for a full day of activities and fun.

Nearby were railway tracks used by the ACC cement factory to carry the limestone from a nearby quarry to the cement factory in Sevalia. Near the Hanuman temple there was a railway track for taking rocks from a quarry in a village near Balasinor named Rahioli to the Sevalia ACC cement factory ten miles away. There was an accident in the 1950s at the quarry at Rahioli that I remembered as a child. Dynamite was being used to blast the limestone rock in the mine to make it loose for breaking it and shipping the pieces to the ACC factory in Sevalia to make cement. There was a mining accident that killed two people. The bodies of the two miners were found near the *Kedarnath* temple in the hills of Balasinor. The townspeople heard of the accident and went to look at the dead bodies. I myself saw the uncovered bodies lying there 100 feet apart from one another and they were badly mutilated.

We came many times to pray in the temple and visited the tracks and looked at the passing trains. We as kids occasionally attempted to make a knife from a nail by putting a nail on the railroad tracks but never succeeded. We prayed in the temple and once a year there was a mela here that we always came to. We enjoyed the circus, rides, etc and spent the whole day here. Nearby there was a big playground where we watched cricket matches with teams of nearby towns.

PARENTS

Father

My father Mohanlal, “Kaka” to me, was known in the town as Mohanlal Vasanji. It was not customary to call an elder person by their first name but a relation name. My calling him Kaka may have come from the older siblings calling him by that name. He was born on September 14, 1910 and died on January 22, 1981. He maintained a very healthy life style and enjoyed 70 years of life.

My father finished seventh grade in Balasinor School and he wanted to continue further studies at a school in Modasa since there was no high school after seventh grade in Balasinor. He had good grades and was encouraged by his teacher to study further. He went to Modasa against my grandfather’s wishes; this must have been just about the time he got married. My grandfather went to Modasa and brought him back and told him to join him in the business. He did that reluctantly, but later he separated from my grandfather’s business and started his own business.

He was a self-learned man with a high intelligence. I have always found him engaged in politics with his friends at the shop. The daily newspaper in Gujarati, “Janma Bhumi” published in Bombay, was the first thing he read at the shop in the morning. While in business, my dad was very much in touch with the political climate in India and frequently participated in the political rallies in the

town. There were many meetings called by the Congress Party before the call for the “Quit India” movement. He participated in these meetings and propagated the messages to his customers and amongst his friends. I observed that he attended many meetings after independence as called for by the Congress party. His friends gathered around the shop to read the newspapers and discussed the forthcoming political situations. He always wore a Nehru cap made from hand-woven cotton fabric.

He had two brothers and a younger sister. The older brother was Ramanlal, the younger brother was Kirtanlal, and his sister was Induben, My grandfather Lallubhai Vasanji whom I do have some memories of, died on January 30, 1948, the same day Gandhiji was assassinated. I was six years old and was in first grade in primary school. His death at the age of 75 puts his birth year at 1873. My grandfather also had two brothers and a younger sister. The oldest brother was Maganlal and then there was Mojilal and the youngest of all was the sister Chandanben. I heard that Mojilal never married and Maganlal lived close to a hundred years of age.

Maganlal as we used to call him Magankaka was living on the same street as my grandfather. I visited and talked to him many times. His body was bent from the waist down since he could not walk upright and was always carrying a stick to help him walk. He was very active in his daily routine, wore a red-colored pagadi and chewed powder sopari without any of his teeth. He had four sons and a daughter.

In August 2006 when I went to Bombay for the wedding of my brother-in-law's granddaughter, my foi Induben told me that the granddaughter's husband is a son of Magankaka's granddaughter. I remember playing with one of his grandsons named Kiran at his house. At that age Magankaka was living alone and my sister used to come and help him as needed. His siblings were all living in Bombay and were visiting him on regular intervals and the house was always full of people during the summer holidays.^{xxvi}

My dad's foi Chandanben and her family were living on Kotiawad. Their house caught fire and burned down on Diwali day in 1952. I remember her side of the family and one of her sons named Godakaka and his son Rajni was in my high school classes and was of my age. I have visited and played with him many times and used to go there on auspicious days for meals.^{xxvii}

My grandfather married a second time to my grandmother Surajben. I do not recall seeing her but I have known her side of the family as they all lived in Golwad Street. She had four younger brothers: Chandulal, Chhotalal, Kodarlal and Mohanlal. I used to call all of her brothers mama. I have met and known all of the mamas and their children except for Kodarmama who left Balasinor in his early years for Bombay and settled there. Eventually his two sons, NK Shah and PK Shah, who became doctor and engineer respectively, became well-known in the Balasinor community. They were living in Bombay and seen talking to my father at the shop on their visits to Balasinor.

Mohanmama had a shop in the vegetable market selling grains and other food items used in daily meals. Eventually the shop closed down so he was working in the ACC Company's quarry as a day laborer. Chhotamama and Chandumama were in the same business as my father and uncles were in and their shops were next to each other so I visited them on a daily basis. Chhotamama's son Natwarlal took over the business and his children were close to my age and were my friends while growing up. I have heard that many of siblings are now here in the U.S. Chandumama's son Chimanlal took over his father's business and their children all went to Bombay for business opportunities. One of Chimanlal mama's sons Rajni was mentally disabled and stayed with them and helped in the shop.

My grandfather was a son of Bhogilal and I remember hearing from my father when he died; I believe he lived from 1850 to 1925. His father Vasanji may have been born in 1825 and his father Kasanji in 1800. I had come to know from an elderly person on my visit to Balasinor in 1978 with Navnitlal and Jayantilal that the Vasanji Kasanji family was well-known in the town and their status was like a town's mayor in today's hierarchy.

My older uncle Ramanlal was a very wise person and the townspeople asked for his advice on occasion. He was always a presence at our house and guided my father as needed. I remember my earlier years visiting my uncle and Tara Kaki were challenging because of her mental disturbance, which she overcame in later years and settled the family in Bombay after the death of my uncle at a very early age. Navnitlal helped the family in buying

a flat in Malad, a suburb of Bombay, and looked after their family needs. There were six children. The oldest is Rajni who was the same age as my brother Shashikant. He was the first to come to Bombay to settle down and other siblings followed. The second one is daughter Renuka and the third is son Bharat who was a few years younger than me. I have met him many times and remember him as a very talkative person and full of general knowledge. During my visit to Bombay in 1973 at Navnitlal's house, he came to see me and talk to me. There were many other people who also visited me at that time. They were asking me questions about the news in the U.S., but before I had a chance to answer Bharat was first one to reply and startled me and everybody else about his general knowledge of the U.S.^{xxviii}

During my visit to Bombay in 1994, my sister Madhuben took me to Malad to meet the family as my aunt was fond of me and she wanted to see me and also to show me Rohit's new arrivals. Smita, Rohit's wife, had given birth to triplets. They were very cute and the family was very busy taking care of them. The Malad neighborhood included a dairy industry so cows were everywhere and the roads were full of mosquitoes' breeding grounds. I managed to escape safely and promised myself never to endure this place again. All of the sibling's families are happily settled there and my cousin Anil, my foi's son, is looking after them.

Another uncle, Kirtanlal, was married to Taraben, a daughter of Hathikhanawala. They have total of six children and the second daughter Hansaben was my age. The others were very young while I was growing up in Balasinor. The older

daughter Kusumben died in childbirth. Hansaben married Rameshchandra and their children lives in the U.S. Their marriage I remember very well since I was present at every marriage ritual.^{xxix} Presently their son Jitu as we call him; his full name is Jitendra, lives in Poona, Maharashtra, India and he traveled to the U.S. and visited us in California in the early 1990s. Jitu was also my roommate in my last two years of college in Baroda. He had a hardware supply business and because of his asthma condition the weather in Poona, a city 100 miles from Bombay, suited him. The story I was told was that his daughter was a doctor in love with another doctor working in the same hospital however he was born and raised as Maharastrian in Poona and she was raised as a Gujarati in Poona. His parents did not approve of their marriage and the son committed suicide. Two younger daughters Versha and Rashmika were very young and I do not recall much about them while I was growing up in Balasinor. I met them at the wedding in New York. One of them lives in Baroda. The youngest of all is a son named Jagdish. He was barely a year old when his father died of throat cancer in Anand. Jagdish knows more about me than I do about him. While growing up in Balasinor, he was in constant communication with my father and my father was always passing information about my progress in the U.S. to him through my letters and Jagdish made up his mind to come to this country at a very early age.^{xxx}

My foi, my dad's sister, married Mohanlal Kadakia, Shobhana's uncle. The family lived in Bombay and while growing up in Balasinor I met them in summer vacation when they visited the

town. Usha is the oldest one and Bhupendra is a year younger than me and I use to accompany Bhupendra while he was in Balasinor. Anil, Rekha and Rajesh all were younger than me and I have little remembrance of them while in Balasinor.^{xxxi}

While growing up, my daily activities involved going to school, playing with friends, and helping my father at the shop. I learned many things at the shop that I would not have learned otherwise. The shop carried many food items for cooking daily meals like rice, wheat, oil, dakari, sugar, tea, kerosene and spices such as salt, paper, cumin etc. The shop also carried dried shells of marowana seeds and old dakari that village people were buying to smoke in their hookah. The shop also carried ropes of various sizes to fetch water from the well and to make a bed called khatalo. A *khatalo* was made from a wooden frame size of a bed with four legs each a foot and a-half long and the opening of the bed was weaved using one-eighth of an inch diameter rope. We carried other sizes of rope to help farmers in the field in tying the bullocks to the plough for example. In Diwali time, the shop also carried firecrackers and other fireworks that required a permit to sell.

The customers were typically farmers from nearby villages, townspeople, and other salaried people like policemen, workers from nearby the ACC quarry, and Harijan who were municipality workers cleaning the town who were paid once a month. The salaried people who had their account at the shop would pay their balance on their payday but they were always overdrawn and after a few years their balance would become large and uncollectible and sometimes the customers disappeared or were

transferred. My father never made an attempt to go after these customers to collect his money. When I left for college he had about a hundred accounts with a balance of one hundred rupees on average that would never get collected. A few accounts from nearby villages were growing cash crops like peanuts, tobacco, and cotton so these farmers were paid during the harvest season and they paid the balance on their account every year. These were the big farmers and they paid their balances in full with interest.

I learned accounting here and was keen to do bookkeeping. Daily logs were needed to transfer to the individual account and my father did not have time so I was doing that task in my later years. Whenever a customer and the supplier needed to know the balance in his account, it was readily available. The accounting books were renewed every year at Diwali time after performing the Lakshmi pooja.

There was no waste of any kind in those days. Customers came to the shop with a plain cloth and would tie the merchandise to one corner of the cloth and four different items in four corners and make a big bag and carried on their head. They also came with a container or a bottle for holding oil and other liquids. For small items, they would use paper and by folding each corner and folding the last fold and tucking under the previous folds and tying a thread on two sides, they could make a *padiku*. I was able to make padiku up to four pounds of weight. There was no paper or plastic bags to throw away. We used to pump kerosene into a measuring flask from a five-gallon can and then into the customer's bottle. In

earlier years, oil lamps were common but since then due to the increasing availability of kerosene, kerosene lamps became widely used. Nothing got wasted as even then there were customers waiting for empty bags and empty cans.

The shop was a three-story building and the first floor was divided into the front shop and an inside storage. In center of the front shop was a sitting platform, a weighing scale hanging from the ceiling, a cash box, and accounting ledgers. On the right side were oilcans to dispense small quantities of oil. On the left side were large gallon sized cans lined up on the wall for storing many condiments. On each can, there was a cut on the front and the hole was replaced by glass to see what condiment was stored in this modified can. There were no glass jars available then. On the right side on the floor were five-gallon cans cut in half for storing many variety of grains like rice, wheat, salt, tamric, coconut etc. The inside storage contained larger sized bags up to 200 lbs that contained various grains and other food items.

The food items we sold were purchased in large quantities during the crop-growing season when prices were the lowest and were stored to sell throughout the year, for example 100 bags of dakari, twenty bags of rice and wheat, five bags of sugar etc. The second floor of the shop contained lighter items like ropes and strings for the khatalo. Tea boxes were also stored here in a three feet cube size plywood boxes. You needed a special tool to open the boxes. I took two of these empty boxes home and made a desk for my study. The third floor was mostly empty because there was no easy access to the floor. Rat

infestation was common and the rat-catching cage was employed every day; the caught rats were released on the outskirts of the town.

Besides the business, the shop was a place for exchanging news and ideas and a social platform to meet people of various economic backgrounds and to gain knowledge of many fields from people making their livelihood. They were farmers, carpenters, bricklayers, stonecutters, blacksmiths, day laborers, teachers, Harijan, and policemen. My father was always communicating with them in how to become a better citizen, getting rid of their vices such as smoking, drinking, and maintaining their health. He was always there to listen to political leaders and social reformers whenever they came to town. He was practicing Gandhi's philosophy in welcoming the untouchables to his shop and treating them as equal. This led to a few problems in the general society but he did not care and stayed away from those gatherings where he was not welcome. During the evening hours people who liked him were anxious to come to the shop to talk to him and sought out encouragement in their own lives and later started respecting him and his ideas.

In 1956 he took a one-month vacation and went to Bombay. This was his first time ever away from the business and he enjoyed every minute of it and I proudly handled the shop for him.

I left Balasinor and the shop in 1957 after my high school graduation. He provided for my education for five of the six years. In the beginning I used to come home and help him during my vacations. Later I went to Bombay and started

working with my brother during my vacations to learn his business.

The noblest thing he did was when he retired at the age of 65 in 1973 he closed the shop, turned over the key to the shop owner, and thanked him for allowing him to use the shop for nearly 35 years. My father did not ask for a penny in *pagadi*⁶³. The rent for the shop my dad rented had been minimal and never increased over the years but it was customary to transfer the rental property to someone else and get a *pagadi* in rental property. He could have gotten one lakh (100,000) rupees. My family and I considered this to be not a smart move but he thought otherwise and it made him proud. My brother and I made arrangements through our mama to provide our father 300 rupees a month for expenses and he was very happy in his retirement.

Mother

I always called my mother, Maniben, Bun, as it is a short form of *bahen* or sister. I picked this up from my sisters as they used to call her by that name. She was born on May 25, 1911 and died on December 3, 1980. She enjoyed 69 years of life without any major life-threatening event except a heart attack in December 1973 at the Bombay airport. My earliest memory of my mother is when she came back from Bombay after undergoing surgery in her right eye. To me it seemed both of her eyes showed abnormalities, but what I learned later was that she had a macular degeneration and loss of vision in the left eye and

⁶³ *pagadi* – a form of good faith payment

partial vision was restored in right eye by the aforementioned surgery in Bombay. In her absence my sister Indiraben was looking after the family and myself. The day my mother arrived home from Bombay, I was about six years old. She sat at the first floor stairs and was trying to give me a hug by holding me but I was hiding and did not respond. Later she gave me a toy to play with, my sister explained to me, and then I started to relax a little bit. My mother talked about this many times about seeing me almost after a four-month absence and seeing my long and silky brownish hair and fair skin and seeing me grown up in such a short time and that she felt very happy.

My mother had fair skin and a very pleasing personality. She carried more of a burden of raising the family than my dad. There were many customs and rituals that one needed to observe in the Balasinor society for which my dad did not have any tolerance for, but my mother fulfilled all of them with the help from my mama.

My maternal grandfather Lallubhai Chunilal Kadakia known as Kaduji was married to my grandma Ujamben Ujadawada and they had two sons and four daughters. The oldest was Ramanlal whom I have never met. I heard that he died at an early age and his only son Rasikbhai was raised by my mama. His wife, my mami, became a widow at a very early age, left the family and remarried and lived happily and did not keep any relations with the family and her son Rasikbhai. The second child was a daughter Echhaben. I called her Mota masi; she was married to Mohanlal also known as Pedhiwada and she had one child named Pushpaben who was a

close friend of my sister Madhuben. The second masi is Chandan masi, who became a widow at an early age, did not remarry and remained with the family and mama took care of her until she died at the age of almost ninety. She had a distinct personality of her own and a very low tolerance level with other people, as she was always abusive if the person did not follow her advice. She had a very sharp memory and an equally sharp tongue to make you very uncomfortable in dealing with her. The third daughter was my mother Maniben and then there was Kamala masi who had a very pleasant personality. She was married to Mohanlal Sehrawada and lived in Sehara, a small town near Godhara. She had two daughters Suryaben and Shobhana and a son name Pravinbhai who took over his father's business in Sehra and lived happily there. He died of cancer at the age of fifty. Mama brought him to Bombay for treatment but the cancer had spread too fast and their efforts to save him were too late. The last is my mama, Kantilal mama who was the backbone of the family. He came to Bombay at an early age and became a successful businessman in pipefitting and ran a hardware business on Nagdevi Street in Bombay. He became president of the merchant association and devoted his time to help and support underprivileged people in many town and villages in Gujarat. While growing up in Balasinor, I always looked forward to his visits to town and I remembered sitting next to my mother and listening to their conversations. Their relationship was unique, respectful and caring which I will never forget.

Mama was a great inspiration for me and I always respected his wisdom throughout my life and especially while growing up in Balasinor. Mama was born on October 2, 1919, married Munjulaben, my mami, a daughter of Lalchand Parekh who was a well-known industrialist of that time, in 1941. He had diabetes and died on December 12, 1985 at a young age of 66. There was an 8-year age difference between my mother and my mama. My mother did not have any education whereas my mama went to Modasa to complete his high school education. Then he went to Bombay for service and then started his own business. I can only imagine the special relationship between the brother and the sisters before I was born on January 9, 1942.

My grandfather Lallubhai was a son of Chunilal Kadakia. There were four brothers and a sister. The oldest was Jethalal whose daughter Echhaben was married to Sankarlala Gandhi known in the town as Calcuttawala. The second brother was Chandulal who was known in town as Dhariwala. The next was my grandfather. The fourth brother was Sankarlal and his daughter Echhaben was married to Halolwada. I heard there was another brother named Madhurkaka for which I have no further information. My grandmother Ujamben was from the Ujadawada family. There was one brother and two sisters. I remember seeing both of my mom's mamas and mamis. They all lived in Bombay and came to town during vacation time. He had seven children, six of them I called mamas whom I had met and talked with and there was a daughter Pushpa masi. Their house was very near to our house and I visited there many times with my mom

whenever they were in town. The first daughter was my grandma and the second daughter was married in the Hollawada family. While growing up in Balasinor I frequently visited my mom's masi on many festival occasions. Both masi and masa lived in Balasinor. This masi had six fingers on one of her hands.

MOVING ON

My final year of school started in July of 1957 and ended in March of 1958. At the beginning of the year things were normal but as the year progressed the importance of the final examination came to light. Firstly the examination is not held at the school and we have to go out of town to where the examination center is located. This examination is conducted by the state education board and is called the SSCE. There were many centers for the examination that were located in major towns and cities. The exam was conducted on a date set by the School Board throughout the state. The state consisted of Maharashtra and Gujarat together. There were 100,000 students taking the exam in those days every year. Certified teachers corrected the exam papers and the results were tabulated and declared under a strict code of conduct. When registering, you were assigned a number for the exam and this number would be printed in the local newspaper if you passed the exam. The newspaper also printed the name and picture of the top achievers. There were many honors and scholarships given to the top-ranking student from the school.

As the school year progresses, the teacher prepares the student with an increasing number of tests in the classes and it was a constant struggle to keep up with this and doing the regular course work. In preparation there were many available guides to prepare for the courses and the exam. The guides were more and more popular as they were referring to the previous year's exam from the school board and they contained full explanations with each

answer. The main subjects for the exam were science, math, history, geography, English, general science, higher languages and lower ones such as Gujarati and Hindi, and social studies. A total of eight exams comprised the board exam. Six of us friends studied together regularly. We had a schedule to meet at some one's house and bring our books and discuss the questions and answers and we would pass on the guides for others to study. What we studied in the classes and what we studied from the guides were far apart as the teachers were not always able to explain everything thoroughly. Most of the time students were trying to memorize the answer and tried their best to answer the questions. I still remember when after one of the science exams; one of my friends had told me that he was prepared for the question regarding Boyle's Law that was always asked on the exam except this time the question was not asked. I had to tell him that there indeed was a question regarding Boyle's Law except it was worded differently and it did not use the name of Boyle.

I do not remember how I stood amongst the fifty or so of my classmates during the class year when the teachers passed out the paper that announced the scores out of hundred for each student. As the year progressed the exams started getting more difficult as the course work progressed faster than we could absorb. The last three months of the year were very difficult as we fell behind and marks started to get lower. We redoubled our efforts and increased our studying hours from sixteen to eighteen hours each day. We cut out many daily activities and focused on the upcoming exam.

We had to fill out forms to appear for the exam and to decide what town we were going to for the exam. I was a good friend with Kirit Kadakia, Chachio, who decided to go to Anand and he asked me to join him. He made the arrangements with one of his father's business partners to accommodate us for exam week. I still remember the host family who took care of us while we prepared for the exam. Meals were served for us on every days of the schedule and we were left alone in our rooms to study for the next day's exam.

The three-month period after the exam and the beginning of the college year was full of activities for me as until now I had been so focused on my studies and not really paying any attention to what was going to happen after the school year. The thought of going to college never occupied my attention. Most of the students after taking the exam disappeared into their family businesses and very few went to college. There were no colleges in Balasinor and going to college in another town was very expensive.



**Figure 6: Standing left to right: Vinod Kadakia, Dinesh Parikh
Seated left to right: Kirit Kadakia, Shashikant Modi, Dilip Shah, Nalin Shah**

First thing we friends did after the exam was to go to a studio and get a picture taken, then to Baroda for a day's vacation without telling anybody in the family. I do not know how it happened but when the three of us took a train to Bombay from Baroda, one of my friends had come to Bombay before with his family so he knew where to go and how to get there. He had stayed in Pravinkaka Jat's room in Bombay so he could accommodate us for couple of days. It just so happened Pravinkaka worked with my brother Shashikant and they were working together at Rasikbhai's electrical shop at the time. My brother and I met and he disapproved of my coming to Bombay and told me to go back

because my Mama will get angry at him as he himself had no place to stay in Bombay at that time.

In the first week of May the exam results were announced in the newspaper for which we were anxiously awaiting. I passed the exam and within a few days my school principal told me that I came in second amongst all the students and Bhuleshwar Daraji came in first. We started celebrating for a week with ice-cream parties and at the same time we started discussing how and where to apply for college. We waited for the mark sheet from the school since it was required to apply for college. My mark sheet indicated my scores and it said I passed in first class and with math and science scores of 95 and 62 out of hundred respectively indicated I was determined to go to a science college. Shashikant Mody and I went to Baroda to apply for the science college as he had his parents' house there and he knew of the city. The school was called Faculty of Science, M.S. University of Baroda, and the medium of education was taught in English. I took my chances and did not apply to any other university. After a month I received a letter of admission from the college and felt very happy and relieved and proud of myself. I did not apply to the university residence hall since it was too expensive and I could not have afforded to stay there. I applied for the college scholarship and assistantship but both were refused. I discussed the expenses with my father and he asked me talk to my Mama. My Mama told me to apply for the grant from the Balasinor Kedvani Mandal for which he was the chairman and he would approve the grant. My father refused to let me apply for the grant, as he wanted my Mama to give him the

money directly but my Mama refused. During my final year of high school, he had told my father to send me to Bombay and start working with his business and that I should not spend time and money for college when even you have no money to put me through college. My Mama said eventually I would be doing the business anyhow. My father did not accept this and told him that he would provide the necessary expenses for me as long as he can. I needed one thousand rupees for the college year, 200 Rs for the fees, and 50 Rs per month for the boarding and meals and the remaining balance for the books and other school supplies. My father told my uncle that “my son is going to college and study as long as he can and I will take care of it.”

At the same time Devandrakumar also got admission into the Faculty of Science and his father asked me to join him in looking for a boarding house with him. I joined him and his father and was admitted for one year to the Patel's boarding house behind the Kamati Garden in Baroda. The Faculty of Science was within 30 minutes walking distance from the boarding house and fees were 50 Rs a month. I came back home and started saying farewell to all of my friends. Some were going to Bombay for study and some were going to Anand and some were going to work. My sister Indiraben got married the same year I went to college and she left the house to join her husband in Bombay a few weeks before I left for college.

I left for college in the first week of July; it was five months before my seventeenth birthday. My mother came with my younger brother who was nine years old, to the bus station that was at the Nisadno

Chowk early in the morning to say goodbye and good luck to me for my journey into my future. My father said he could not add anything more now to what he already taught me so far and he expressed his confidence in me and wished me luck and then left for his morning walk. I sat on the bus thinking not about the past but of the future, not how to change the world but how to cope with my changing world. The first thing that came to my mind was how to reach the boarding house. I had to take a bus from Balasinor to Sevalia, get a ticket to Baroda, change the train at Anand for Baroda, and made sure to indulge myself with Anand Dairy milk at the station. I went from the Baroda railway station to the boarding house carrying a metal trunk that I carried with me to store my belongings and also for safekeeping my valuables while at the boarding house. The cheapest way was to hire a boy and he would carry my trunk and we walked about two miles from the station to the Kamati Garden and crossed the garden where the only walking bridge was at the back and from there it was another half a mile to the boarding house. I spent six years in college and then two years in Bombay before coming to the U.S.

AFTERWORD

Since leaving Balasinor in 1958, I visited many times, initially for holidays and then during vacation time while in college in Baroda. For the first two or three years I helped my dad in his shop and then later I went to Bombay to work with my brother in his electrical goods contracting business. The timing of my arrival with my friends' visits hardly coincided so I started to lose interest in visiting Balasinor and focused more on completing my studies. Two years after receiving my B.E in electrical engineering in 1964, I took advantage of a great opportunity to move to the U.S and eventually settled there.

While in U.S. before and after my marriage in 1969, I received news about Balasinor but did not pay much attention. I purchased a house in Balasinor for my parents the year after I got married and they lived there for the rest of their lives. I visited my parents in 1978 and stayed there for a week. I said goodbye to them at Samadaji bus station. Within a year both of them passed away so I fell out of touch with my hometown until 2002.

I have visited Balasinor a few times since 2002. My visits were mostly day trips because I no longer had any close relatives that lived there thus I had no places to stay overnight. Often I would walk around the town and these visits would jog my memories so I fell in love with the town again. These visits inspired me to write this book which contains the story of my life I had while growing up here. In all my visits I mostly visited the part of town which

was enclosed within the fort. Today's map of the Balasinor shows the size of the town to now be four times larger than the town in which I grew up. The fort has since been dismantled and only the top left quarter of the map shows the "old town" - the town that was my entire world for the first 16 years of my life.

During my most recent trip to Balasinor with my children and grandchildren on a hot and rainy day in 2013, we spent hours visiting the houses and streets where I grew up. Nine out of ten houses were now locked and vacant and were in ruins. There were also newer houses built of steel and concrete but they were also locked. Many streets that used to be open were now dead-end streets as they had closed and locked gates due to numerous burglaries and robberies over the years. Businesses that once were booming while I was there were now mostly closed; those that were open were now barely surviving. It is interesting to see 100-year old houses with magnificent wood carvings and next to them were steel and concrete modern houses. While talking to one of the building contractors, he told me that he carefully removes the artwork and sells it to the city builders for their decoration in hotels and museums.

I have heard from friends and relatives that during the Diwali and Fagvo holidays many families come to Balasinor and stay there for a week or two. This becomes a festive time as the families spend quality time together and reminisce about the good old days. I was told that the time of the festivals is a great time to return to Balasinor and meet old

friends. I have not done this yet but it is in the back of my mind and one day I will be there.

I have read stories where people, after leaving their hometown where they grew up and spending most of their lives in big cities, always prefer to return or visit home even though not much remains from that time. The best reason I have read so far of why people return home is that the air they breathe there is unique. It brings back lost memories. They cannot experience this anywhere else.

APPENDIX

ⁱ *Rajasaurus narmadensis* – India's own dinosaur emerges from oblivion" (PDF). Geological Survey of India.

ⁱⁱ http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_gujarat-the-jurassic-park-of-india_1153006-all, Feb 26, 2008, Daily News & Analysis

ⁱⁱⁱ Material Culture and Settlement Patterns of East Gujarat - http://www.asiaticsociety.org.bd/journals/Golden_jubilee_vol/article_s/H_475%20%28Irani%29.htm

^{iv} Alela, Balasinor, Baliyadev, Bhanthala, Bodeli, Dakhariya, Dev, Dhanela, Dhathi, Dhundhaliya, Dolat Poyda, Felsani, Gadhavada, Gadhna Muvada, Gaja Pagina Muvada, Gundela, Gunthli, Handiya (Balasinor), Jamiyatpura, Janod, Jetholi, Jorapura, Kadaia, Kotarbor, Kambopa, Karanpur, Khandivav, Kunjara, Limbdi, Manvarpura, Meghaliya, Navagama, Othvad, Pandva, Parabvia, Parpadiya, Pilodra, Raiyoli, Rajpur (Balasinor), Raliyata (Balasinor), Sakariya, Saliyavadi, Saroda, Sutariya, Vadadala, Vanakbori, Vasadra.

^v He left for the U.S. after his high school education in the mid-fifties and for many years the family never heard from him. Someone told me that they tracked him down and he lives in Houston, Texas.

^{vi} Suryakantbhai currently lives in Fremont, CA with his family except Lata who died of an illness in the early 1960s. Nalin currently lives in Washington with his family.

^{vii} We occasionally wrote letters while I was in the U.S. and then we lost touch with one another. He was in India when I got married in 1969 and he was present at my wedding. He came to the U.S. in the 1990s.

^{viii} I met her and her family in the U.S. on a visit to New York when I attended the marriage of my cousin's son.

^{ix} One of his older sisters married Pedhiwada and her daughter Saroj married to Seth family lives in Merced, CA with her husband and three daughters.

^x All the Seth family children and grandchildren live in the U.S.

^{xi} Presently Vinu lives with his family in Los Angeles.

^{xii} Presently he lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with his wife and three daughters; we visited him there once and he visited us when we lived in Newark, California.

^{xiii} I have lost touch with Shila after school, but I heard that she is in the Vinoda Bhavé's Vardha Ashram and she is very happy there.

^{xiv} It so happened that his son currently lives in San Jose, CA and needed my signature for his parents' immigration paperwork. Through the directory of Balasinor people living in the U.S., he had found my

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name and called me. I knew him as my brother's friend and I gladly signed the paperwork for the parents' immigration.

^{xv} We met at Lata's son's wedding in New York for the first time after forty years.

^{xvi} He is currently in New York. From letters with my sister, I came to know about the death of his wife.

^{xvii} Presently he lives in Los Angeles with his family.

^{xviii} One of his daughters Mrudulaben married Chandrakant Shah who lives in Los Altos, California. He is the grandson of Ochhavalal Calcuttawala who has built an empire here in the San Francisco Bay Area for himself and his son. We met him a few times and he recognizes the families from Balasinor that lives here. Once we had a dinner at his house for all of the Balasinor families from the Bay Area.

^{xix} Currently Anil lives in San Diego and is a diamond trader. Kirtanmama has five sons and the youngest child is a daughter named Rekha. She is married to Shobhana's cousin Rajesh and lives in Kansas City, Kansas.

^{xx} He came to the U.S. a few years after his marriage and settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with his family. In the early 1980s, he passed away from complications when undergoing a heart operation to correct abnormalities.

^{xxi} Chandrakantbhai's son Ajay married Vandana (daughter of brother-in-law).

^{xxii} She married Niranjanbhai Doshi, one of Doctor's close friends currently living in Washington, DC.

^{xxiii} He currently lives in Philadelphia with his wife Kirti. Kirti is the daughter of Kalaben and Punamchand Vakil. Kirti's brother Ajay is a few years younger and lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

^{xxiv} Natu mama and many siblings of mama's family have since migrated to the States in New York and Boston area.

^{xxv} The friends' names were Vinod Dhangela, now in Los Angeles, Shashikant Modi now in Philadelphia, Nalin Jat now in Washington D.C., Kirit Chanchio who died undergoing a heart operation in Columbus, Ohio, and Dinesh Rathodio now in Bombay.

^{xxvi} Babulal Vasanji, one of Magankaka's sons, came to the U.S. to visit his son Girish who lived in Oklahoma and he also came to visit me in California in 1977.

^{xxvii} I met Godakaka's youngest son Gopal on my last visit to Balasinor in 2006.

^{xxviii} Bharat's sister Gita presently lives in Balasinor with her husband and a son name Rohit and a daughter named Malwika.

^{xxix} Their daughter married an oncologist and they live in Detroit. The third daughter, younger than me, came to the U.S. in 1974 and resides in New York with her husband Rameshchandra. They have two sons and their first son was married on the same day as Rupesh. The

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second son married two years later and I went for the marriage in New York and visited the family.

^{xxx} Currently he lives in New York and works as chartered accountant. He with his two sons accompanied Jitu and visited me in the 1990s. He loves Balasinor and makes yearly rituals to visit and stay for a few weeks at festival time. He visited his mother Tara kaki until she died at the age of ninety in 2006.

^{xxxi} Usha lives in Secunderabad with her husband, two sons, and a daughter. Bhupendra's two son lives in the U.S., Mitul in Dallas, Texas and younger son Viral lives here in the Bay Area.