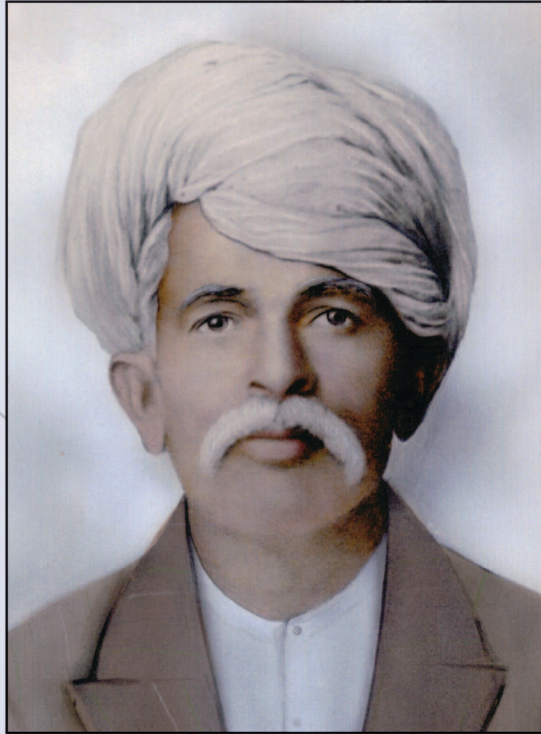
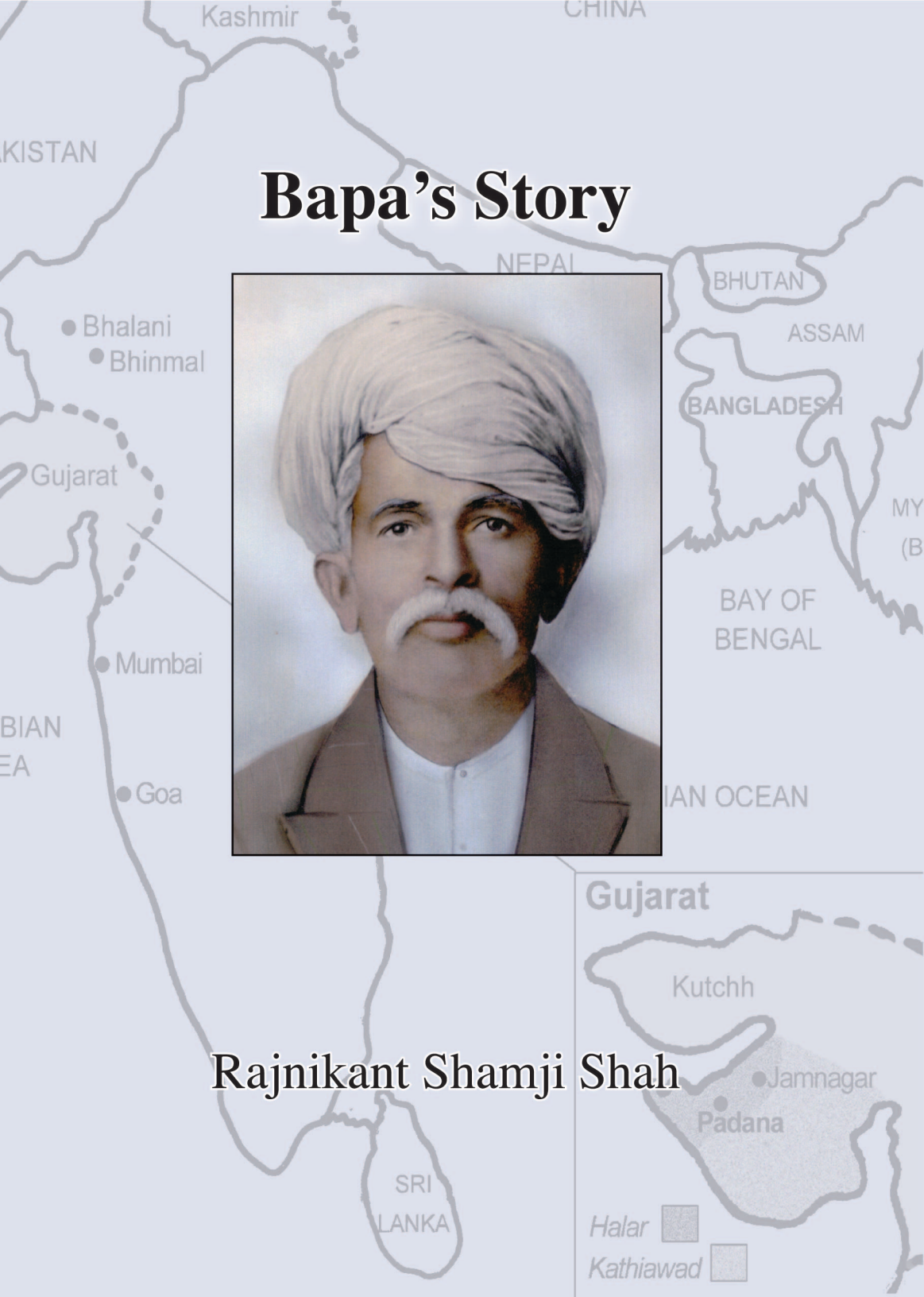


Bapa's Story

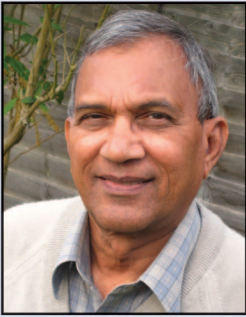


Rajnikant Shamji Shah



Gujarat





Rajnikant Shamji Shah was born in Padana, India in 1936 and moved to Nairobi, Kenya in 1949, where he spent his youth. He married Previnia Bhimji Anand Bid, also from Nairobi, in 1964. Emigrating to the UK in 1967, he has lived in London ever since: firstly in Finchley, and more recently, in North Harrow. Rajni worked for London Transport for over 33 years, eventually retiring as a Station Supervisor in 2003.

Rajni is actively involved in the lives of all three of his daughters and eight grandchildren, and keeps busy as a keen gardener, regular snooker player and a seasoned DIY expert. Now well into his seventies, he can still be found mending and repairing in his workshop or pottering in his garden with his youngest grandchildren.

Bapa's Story

By Rajnikant Shamji Shah



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In memory of Ba and Bapa

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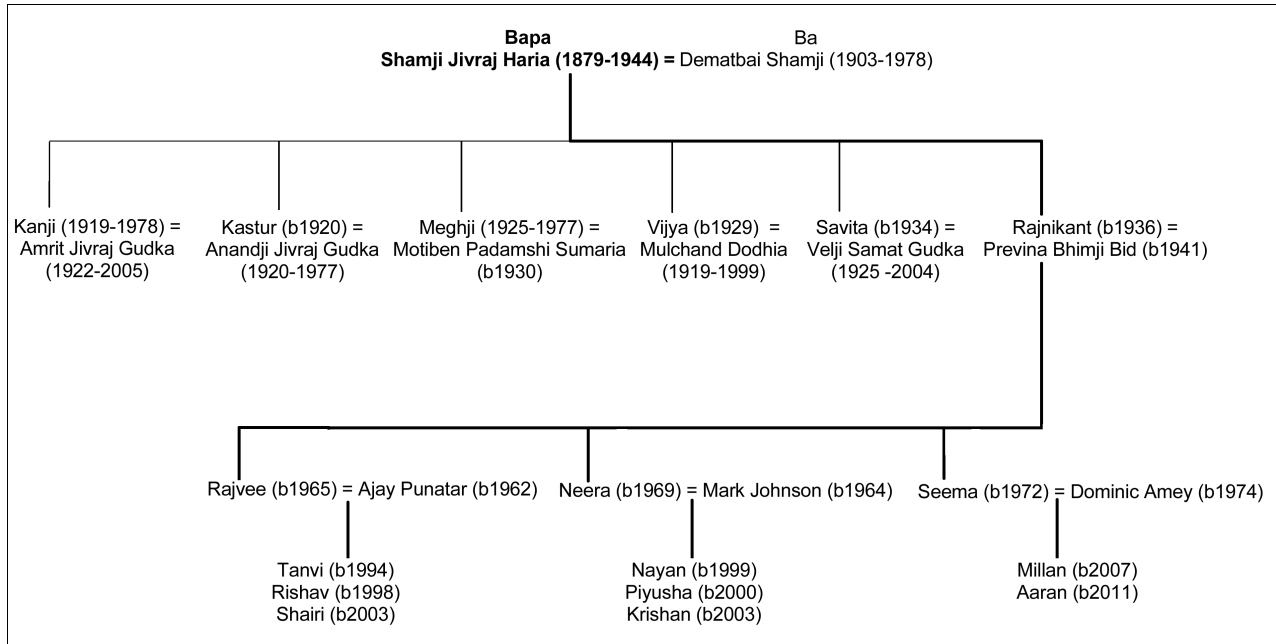
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My immediate family tree





Shamji Jivraj Haria, 1879-1944
Photo taken in Nairobi 1931, at the age of 51 years

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible at all had it not been for my eldest grandchild Tanvi and my youngest daughter Seema. I would often collect Tanvi from the coach stop after school and she would ask me questions about my past. She wanted to know the history of her grandparents. This is how I ended up researching my family history and writing the story of my father.

In December 2006, my daughters bought me a computer. Until then I had not touched a computer and did not know how to use one. My youngest daughter Seema guided me step by step and showed me how to send emails, search the internet and use word processing programmes. She encouraged me to research and write down my family history using the computer. Seema also spent many hours finalizing the illustrations and layout of this book. For this I am most grateful.

I am also most grateful to my eldest daughter Rajvee, for editing my writing and correcting my grammar. This was not an easy task for her as I am not a writer and English is not my first language. I tried to write as best as I could and Rajvee wanted to make sure that even after editing, my voice and character could be heard in these pages. I hope the reader will understand and forgive the simple language of this book.

I am grateful to my wife Prevena for her patience and encouragement, and my daughter Neera Johnson, for her critical reading of the manuscript and comments.

I would like to acknowledge the many friends and relatives who have provided me with information during my research. In particular, I am grateful to my friend Champak Kachra Vrajpal Sumaria for information about Padana, my cousin Raichand Lakha Haria who provided important details of my Gosar Kaka's early life in Kenya and my elder sisters Kasturben, Vijyaben and Savitaben for their detailed recollections of our family's early life in Kenya and India, which took place before I was born.

The photographs used in this book have come from many sources. I have used many from my own collection dating back from the early 1950s and some collected from friends and relatives who were kind enough to let me use them for this book. I am also thankful to all the relatives who have provided photographs of their parents. I am grateful to my nephew Mahendra Somchand Haria of Nairobi, Kenya, for providing me with photographs of our village Padana which he acquired from the *Padana Youth Committee Mandal Collection*, Nairobi, taken by Hemant Jivraj Sura in 2003. Many of the photographs I have used in this book are courtesy of the Winterton Collection of East African Photographs, from the Melville J. Herskovits, Library of African Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA.

Forward

I first started compiling my family tree in the early 1970's. At that time my widowed mother Dematbai, or Ba as I called her, was living with me in Finchley, London. I was fortunate that Ba was able to provide me with a lot of information about our family connections. With her support, I started writing letters to relatives in India, Kenya and other countries, asking them to provide me with details of their families and also telling them of my intention of compiling our Haria family tree.

During this time, I realized that I knew very little about the early life of my father, Shamji Jivraj Haria, whom I called Bapa. It was at this point I started to collect information about him - firstly from Ba and my elder siblings and then from the wider family. I continued my research in more recent years after my granddaughter, Tanvi, started to ask questions about her family history. However, even now there are gaps in Bapa's story which I will never be able to fill. I have tried to the best of my knowledge and ability to piece together his life.

Bapa died at the age of 65, when I was only seven years old. However I was very fond of him and he left a big impression on me for the rest of my life. As a child, I used to follow him around everywhere, often without him even realizing. This memory of walking in Bapa's shadow is still with me today.

It has been this memory that has inspired me to write this book about his life, his adventures and his struggles and hardships.

I dedicate this book to all of Bapa's descendents, my children, grandchildren and the generations after them. I hope they too will learn something valuable about their roots and their heritage, just as I have, in writing this book.

Map of India



Chapter 1: A Brief History of Padana and its People

Like most *Oshwals* today, my family originated from one of 52 villages located in an area called *Halar*^{1,2,3} in Gujarat, Western India. My grandfather, Jivraj Meghan Haria⁴ lived in one of these villages called Padana and like many Oshwals of that time he was a peasant farmer and spoke *Kutchhi* as his main language⁵.

According to some historical sources, the story of these villages begins as far back as the 16th Century, during the time that Jam Raval was ruler of the Kingdom of Bara in Kutchh (see page 18). In 1540, following a bitter and bloody family feud, Jam Raval gave up his Kingdom and crossed the desert known as the Rann of Kutchh with over 50,000 of his followers (including several thousand Oshwals), and entered Kathiawad. After several years of battles and conquering many small kingdoms within this area, Jam Raval proclaimed himself ruler of a new kingdom which he named Halar. He established his capital city at Jamnagar and distributed land to his followers. It is likely that land was given to my forefathers, which was then passed down the generations to my grandfather.

¹ Halar is a sub region of Kathiawad.

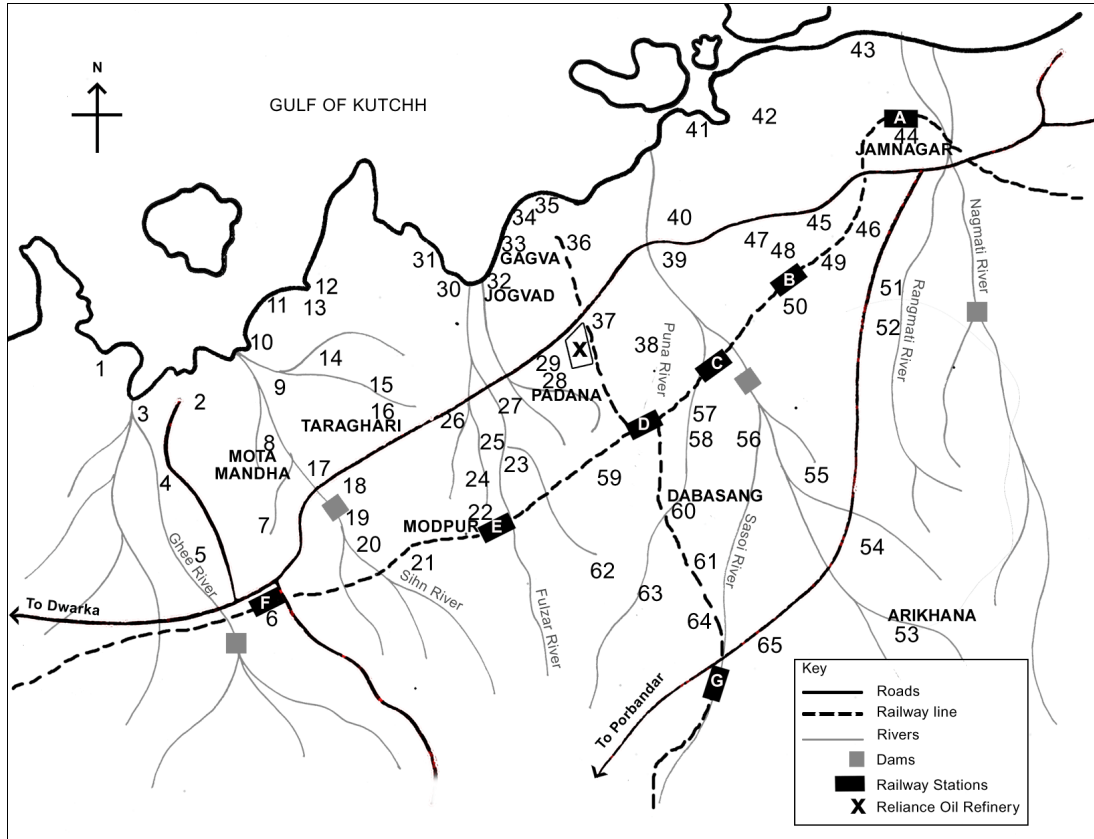
² Source: *Nagar Nava Nagar Jamnagar* by Harkishan Joshi (Guj).

³ Source: *The Rise and Glory Of Halari Visa Oshwals* by Rati Dodhia.

⁴ Origin of Haria surname is explained in Appendix 1.

⁵ Kutchhi is a mixture of Sindhi, Rajasthani and Gujarati dialect and is still spoken today.

Halar Villages -Jamnagar District, Gujarat



Key	
	Roads
	Railway line
	Rivers
	Dams
	Railway Stations
	Reliance Oil Refinery

Halar Villages -Jamnagar District, Gujarat

1.Goinj	19.Sukh Pur	37.Moti Khavdi	55.Dhunia
2.Jam salaya	20.Nagda	38.Navagam	56.Arablus
3.Sodasla	21.Kaka Bhai Sihh	39.Jivapur	57.Kana lus
4.Visotari	22.Modpur	40.Vasai	58.Kheta Lus (Seta lus)
5.Navi Haripar	23.Mota Lakhia	41.Khara Beraja	60.Dabasang
6.Khambhalia	24.Nana Lakhia	42.Dhinchada	61.Gajna
7.Data	25.Mithoi	43.Bedi	62.Moti Rafudar
8.Mota Mandha	26.Rasangpar	44.Jamnagar	63.Nani Rafudar
9.Nana Mandha	27.Khatiar	45.Nagheidi	64.Khirasara
10.Nana Ambla	28. Padana	46.Kansumra	65.Lalpur
11.Mota Ambla	29.Meghpar	47.Ravalsar	
12.Bharana	30.Jankhar	48.Lakha Bavad	
13.Timbadi	31.Singach	49.Chapa Beraja	
14.Kajuda	32.Jogvad	50.Vav Beraja	
15.Devaria	33.Gagva	51.Chela	
16.Taraghari	34.Mungani	52.Changa	
17.Aradhana Dham	35.Sikka	53.Arikhana	
18.Vadaria Sihh	36.Nani khavdi	54.Haripar	

During my grandfather's time, in the late 19th century Padana was a thriving village and had many different communities and castes living and working together. As well as Oshwals there were *Khojas*⁶ and other Gujarati castes, including *Lohanas*, *Bhatias*, *Rajputs*, *Brahmins* and *Harijans*. Padana was an important administrative centre for the region.



Entrance gate to Padana

⁶ Followers of the Agha Khan, also known as Ismailis.



Main street in Padana

Its police station, or *Darbar Gadh* served 36 of the surrounding villages, and farmers from these villages came to Padana to pay their taxes. Padana was modernised in the second half of the 19th century due to the generosity of some of its wealthy families, mainly *Lohanas* and *Khojas*.



Darbar Gadh (Police Station)

New facilities included a rest house, or *Dharamshala*, built in 1860 by the Dasani family, a new well called *Dhori Vav*, which was built in 1874 by the Bhatia family and also the first village school in 1885⁷. The school also housed the village post office and telegram office.

⁷ These dates are taken from the foundation stones of these buildings.



Foundation stone of Dhori Vav



First Village School with Post and telegram office

There is very little recorded history of Padana before the 19th century. Interestingly, when I visited India in 2008 I met a resident of the village, Pravin Prabhudas Badiyani, who claimed that his family had been living in Padana for over 400 years. There are several old monuments which suggest that Padana may indeed be this old. For example, the main temple in the village, known as *Vachhra Dada's Mandir*, is thought to have been first erected at this site over 400 years ago⁸.

Vachhra Dada was a brave Rajput soldier who was killed by outlaws on the outskirts of Padana. After his death, many villagers saw ghostly visions of him riding on horseback accompanied by the sound of galloping hooves. The local people decided to build a temple in his honour, and also erect memorial stones at the place of his death⁹.

The temple became an important landmark of the village and was rebuilt in 1800. Even to this day, pilgrims from all over Gujarat and further afield come to pay homage at *Vachhra Dada's Mandir*. The memorial stones are less well known and have greatly eroded with time, but can still be seen in their original location. As a result of the temple, Padana is also known as "*Vachhra Vaaru Padana*".

⁸ The present temple was reconstructed in 1800 AD (Vikram Savant Indian Calendar 1856).

⁹ Source: *Shri Vachhra Dada Padana* by Ratilal Meghji and Amratlal Meghji Sumeria (Guj).

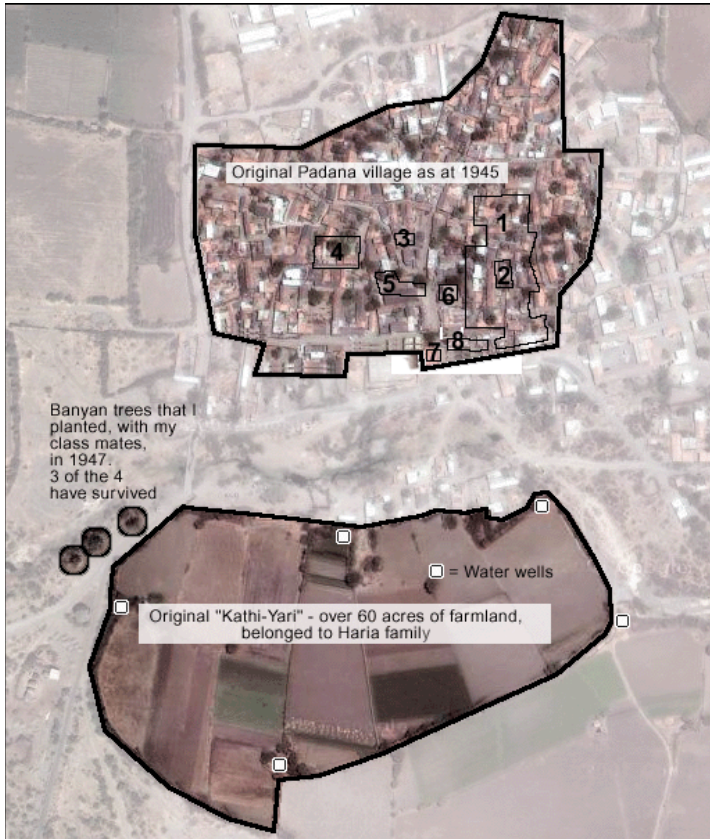


Vachhra Dada's Memorial stones



Vachhra Dada's Mandir rebuilt in 1800

Chapter 2: Bapa's Early Years 1879-1895



Map of Padana, 2008

Key

1. *Moto Fari*, all Haria families lived here
2. Bapa's original home
3. Bapa's home, where I was born and where Bapa died in 1944
4. Kachra Vrajpal's dwelling
5. Village police station
6. *Dharamshala*, built 1860
7. First girls school, built 1916
8. First village school, built 1885

My grandfather, Jivraj Meghan Haria, and his wife Jamna, had their own house in Padana. This house adjoined several others in a compound known as '*Moto Fari*'. As was common in those days, the whole compound was inhabited by the extended Haria clan - my grandfather's brothers and cousins. Each family had its own home within the compound.



An example of a house in Padana

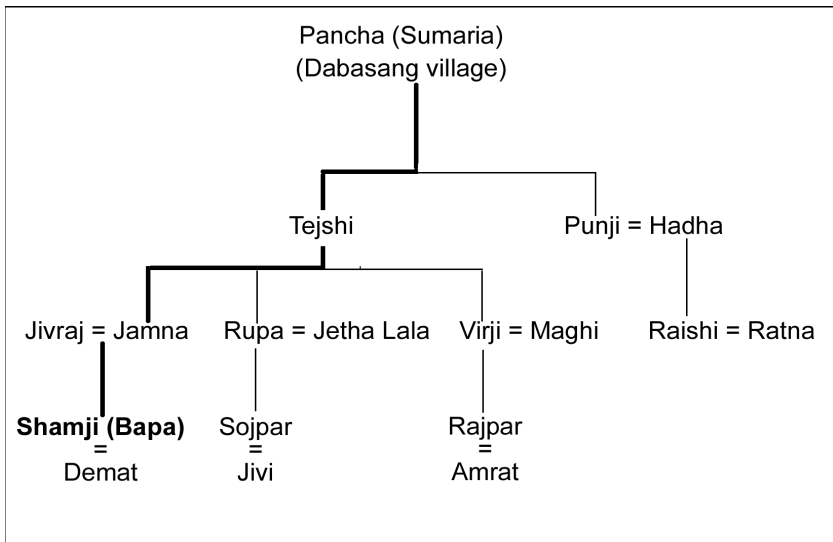
My grandfather also owned land on a large farm called *Kathi-Yari*. At over 60 acres, *Kathi-Yari* was one of the biggest farms in Padana. It was divided up into smaller plots that were owned by my grandfather, his brothers and cousins.

It was considered prime farmland as the soil was fertile, and there was a plentiful supply of water due to the presence of four wells on the land. *Kathi-Yari* farm still exists to this day, although its ownership is no longer in my family and has been passed onto others.



Both photos show present day Kathi-Yari farm

In 1879 when my grandmother Jamnabai¹⁰ fell pregnant she went to stay with her sister Rupa¹¹ in Gagva village for the delivery. Gagva was a short distance (about 6km) from Padana village. In those days, it was custom for a married woman expecting her first child to stay with her parents, or a close relative, to deliver her baby. It is likely that Rupabai was the closest and most senior surviving relative that my grandmother could go to at the time.



My grandmother Jamna's family tree

¹⁰ The suffix *-bai* or *-ben* is traditionally added at the end of womens' names as a mark of respect. It means sister. The male equivalent is *-bhai*.

¹¹ Rupabai was married to Jetha Lala Gudka. Their grandson, Zaverchand Sojpar Jetha, went on to become a well-known businessman and community figure in Nairobi, Kenya.

Thus, Jambhai gave birth to my Bapa, in Gagva village on 12th December 1879¹². With his parents owning land and living comfortably in Padana village, Bapa's future seemed bright and secure.

However it was not to be: tragedy struck Bapa when he was very young, and he lost both his parents. According to my mother he was just a toddler when they died. I was unable to find out any details about the circumstances of their death, however, historical records show that in July 1881 Kathiawad was caught in a cyclone, where 25 inches of rain fell in 24 hours. A few years later, in 1884, there was another more severe cyclone, where 49 inches of rain fell in 3 days. During these cyclones many villages were devastated, and people, crops and livestock perished¹³. Could it be that my grandparents died as a result of these natural disasters? Another possibility is that they died of disease or plague, which was very common in those days especially after such natural disasters. Unfortunately we will never know the truth of what happened to them.

¹² Date in Bapa's passport.

¹³ Source: *Nagar Navanagar Jamnagar* by Harkishan Joshi (Guj).



Compound of Bapa's birth place, Gagva village



According to villagers, Bapa was born in this house, now in ruins, Gagva village

After the death of his parents, Bapa was taken in by his aunt Rupa in Gagva village. All the household goods from his parent's home in Padana were taken and stored away in Dabasang village where Bapa's maternal uncle Virji Tejshi Sumaria lived. During his early childhood, Bapa shuttled between both villages. Eventually he settled in Dabasang village with Virji Tejshi and his wife, Maghi and their son Rajpar. They had also taken in another boy, Raishi¹⁴.

Raishi was the son of Bapa's maternal great aunt Punji and his paternal uncle Hadha Ladha Haria. So Bapa had a double relationship with Raishi. Raishi had also lost his father at a young age. Thus, Raishi and Bapa were raised together and became very close.

I do not know what happened to my grandparents land on *Kathi-Yari* farm and their home in Padana. Who disposed of them? And what happened to the proceeds? No one could give me any details. However I do know that the land and possessions passed out of my family's ownership from that time on.

¹⁴ Source: Letter from Raishi's son, Khimabhai (Khimchand) Raishi Hadha Haria.

Chapter 3: Journey Across the Ocean 1895

There was a village school in Dabasang where Bapa spent most of his childhood, but I do not know whether he attended it. In fact, I have very little information about his early years. However, when he became a teenager, Bapa made a brave and life-changing decision. He decided to leave his home, relatives, and friends, and set sail for Africa all alone. What made him take this drastic action? We will never know his true reasons as anyone he may have discussed this with is no longer alive. However, we can speculate on his motives.

Bapa was an orphan with no immediate family to take care of. As far as I am aware, no land or other possessions were left to him. As he had no money of his own, there was very little chance of him acquiring any land for himself in the future. He faced a life of hardship working as a farm labourer. I have no reason to believe that he was unhappy living with his uncle and aunt, and indeed he was very close to his cousin, Raishi. However, as a teenager and a young man, he may have wanted to escape from his circumstances and to forge a better life for himself.

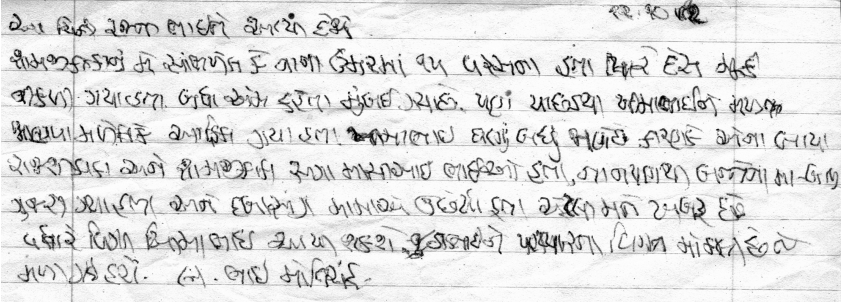
The second reason for leaving India may have been to seek the thrill of adventure. Sailing to Africa must have seemed a very exciting prospect and he had nothing to lose.

It surely required an adventurous spirit to compel someone to travel across the Ocean to an unknown world. Indeed, many travellers from this part of Western India had already made this journey and settled around the East African coast in the early nineteenth century¹⁵. They were able to find work and even set up businesses. Bapa would have been aware of this as they were regularly sending letters back home to relatives in Halar, relaying their progress.

So, Bapa set sail for Africa. How old was he at the time and who knew of his plans? I eventually got the answers to these questions after I had made some enquiries with relatives in India. The following is a translation of a letter written in Gujarati, dated 12th October 1981. It was sent to me by my cousin, Motichandbhai Haria.

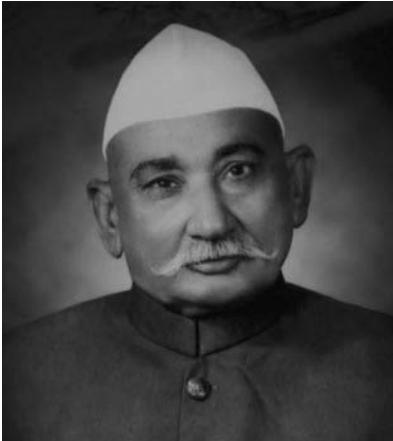
“Shamji Kaka was fifteen years of age when he left Halar. Everyone was told, he had gone to Bombay (Mumbai). Later when I met Khimabhai, I came to know that he had gone to Africa. Khimabhai knows alot more about his details because his father, Rajshi Kaka (Raishi), and Shamji Kaka were first cousins. Both their parents passed away at a very early age and they were both raised together by their maternal uncle. I assure you Khimabhai will be able to give you a lot more information about your father”

¹⁵ E.g. Khojas, Bohras, Memons, Bhadals, Bhatias, Baluchis and Kutchhis.

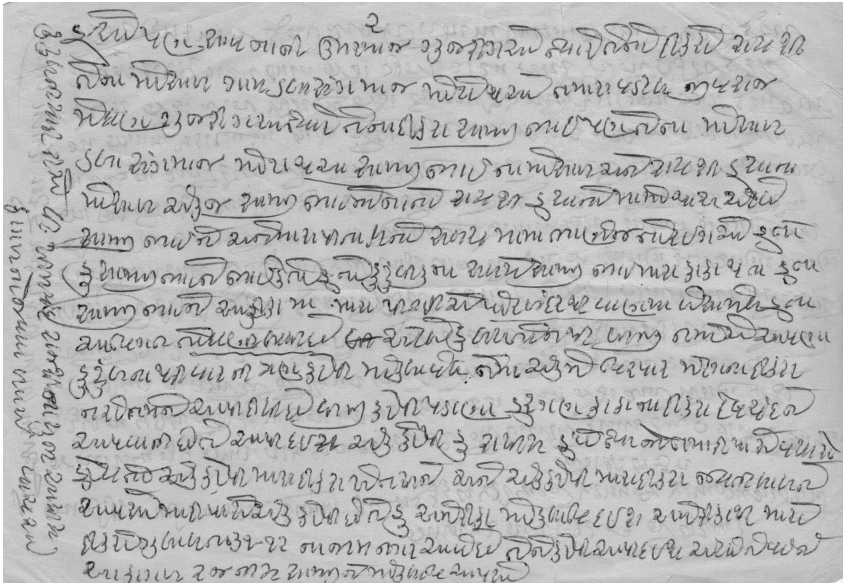


Original letter written in Gujarati by Motichandbhai Haria

Khimabhai (Khimchand) Raishi Hadha Haria, mentioned in the letter, was the son of Raishi Haria, (Raishi and Bapa were raised together, as mentioned in Chapter 2). Although Raishi had passed away a few years earlier, he had often spoken to his son about Bapa’s journey to Africa.



Khimchand Raishi Hadha Haria



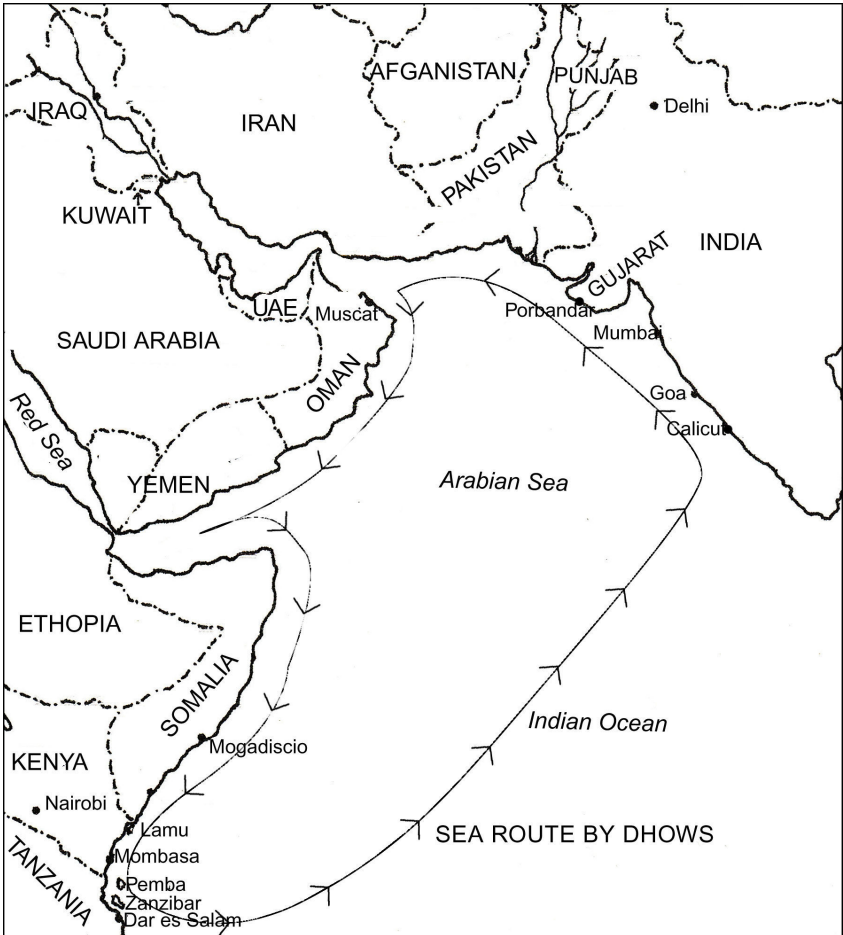
Extract from original letter written in Gujarati by Khimabhai

Khimabhai wrote to me in 1981 and explained that his father, had accompanied Bapa to the port of Porbander (the main port of Halar), to see him set sail for Africa. His letter also confirmed that Bapa was just 15 years of age at the time. It must have been an emotional farewell. Bapa and Raishi were very close, like brothers, and they would not have known if they would ever see each other again.

So what was the journey like for Bapa? At that time, the boats that left the Gujarati ports were known as dhows¹⁶. They had no engines, and sailed without compasses. The sailors that sailed them relied solely on the monsoon winds and the position of the sun and the stars to reach their destinations. Sailing took place during the months of November to March, and the majority of fleets would arrive at the East African coast 4-6 weeks after departure. With the change of wind direction during the summer months, the return journeys to India would then take place from April to October. As well as passengers, the dhows carried cotton, textiles, ivory, pottery and spices. Trade was profitable. They never travelled on their own, but always sailed in groups of four or more. For most of the journey, they sailed near the coast line, and would avoid sailing across the open ocean. Sailing by dhow in open seas was very dangerous and many sailors did not reach their destination safely. The rough seas, attacks by pirates and various diseases took the lives of many sailors and early adventurers.

¹⁶ The Gujarati term for Dhow is 'Vahan'.

The monsoon sea route taken by dhows



To understand what kind of journey Bapa undertook, one only has to read this personal account recorded in the book “*We Came in Dhows*” by Cynthia Salvadori¹⁷.

“The dhows were mostly in the range of 70 to 100 tons in those days, and would carry 40 to 60 passengers. They couldn’t carry more, not because of lack of space but because of the water. The nakhoda (dhow captain) knew how much water his tank and the big wooden tanks on the decks could hold, and then calculate the number of people he could carry, allowing always for delays at sea. Generally there would be two large tanks, each holding the equivalent of six to ten drums of water, and a small one holding three to five drums (one drum contained 44 imperial gallons). The water was always controlled by the nakhoda and in rough weather the water was issued out just to be used for drinking and tea and cooking, otherwise it was locked in the tanks in rough weather. It was not used for washing, people had to wash, even their faces, in sea water. The food consisted mainly of rice, atta chapattis and several types of dhal. There could be fresh fruits and vegetables to start out with but they’d be finished in a few days.”

¹⁷ Source: Cynthia Salvadori (ed). *We came in Dhows*, Vol. 1, Nairobi, 1996, p5 “The Dhows of Cutch Mandvi”.

The crews of the dhows were all Bhadals¹⁸. They knew how to do all the repairs. We did not take on any skilled working people for repairing the dhows or doing any work. We just brought them to settle themselves in Africa. They came as passengers, not crew. Bhadals knew how to do all the work themselves. Crew members were getting 10-12 Rupees per month (plus their food of course). A (return) voyage used to take several months: about 25 to 30 days each way, and the time to unload and take on cargo like water, pots, salt etc. and to wait for the winds to change. The voyages were dangerous because many of the dhows were wrecked and everyone was lost at sea.”



Dhow full of cargo

¹⁸ Bhadals are a Gujarati speaking seafaring-clan.

Thus, Bapa arrived in Mombasa, Kenya. If indeed he was 15 years old, then the year would have been 1894 or 1895. This would make Bapa one of the earliest Oshwals to make this journey, as the majority of them migrated to Africa in the early 20th century. Interestingly, during my research I found an account by Shashikant Meghji Shah of Mombasa, claiming that his grandfather Jethabhai Kachra Maru, of Rafudar village, had arrived in Mombasa as early as 1890:

“My Grandfather Mr. Jetha Kachra Shah travelled by dhow in 1890 from Dwarka to Mombasa. The voyage took 28 days and cost 4 rupees. He worked for Allidina Visram and for Waljee Hirji, for three months each as a sweeper. He worked as a mason on the construction of the old High Court Tower near Fort Jesus and of houses in Mwembheni Bazaar (now a tourist attraction). He worked on the railway near the old Post Office.

From 1902 to 1905 he worked on the railway line at Mackinnon Road, with the famous Pir. He worked on the railway right through Nairobi, up to Kisumu. He returned back to India in 1905...”

*by Shashikant Meghji Shah, Mombasa*¹⁹

¹⁹ Source: Cynthia Salvadori (ed). We came in Dhows, Vol. 1, Nairobi, 1996, p133 “Work, any work”.

The Indians and Arabs controlled most of the business. Houses were built of stone and were typically three storeys high. They were plastered with lime all year round and so were white in colour. Some of the streets were so narrow that it was difficult for two people to walk abreast at a time. Mombasa was very fertile: there were plantations of oranges, lemons, coconuts, mangoes and sugar cane.

At the time of my father's arrival, Mombasa was also a busy port. According to official records, in the year 1896, 7770 dhows landed at Mombasa²⁰. In addition, 129 other ships (95 English, 20 German, 2 Norwegian and 12 from Zanzibar) also landed.

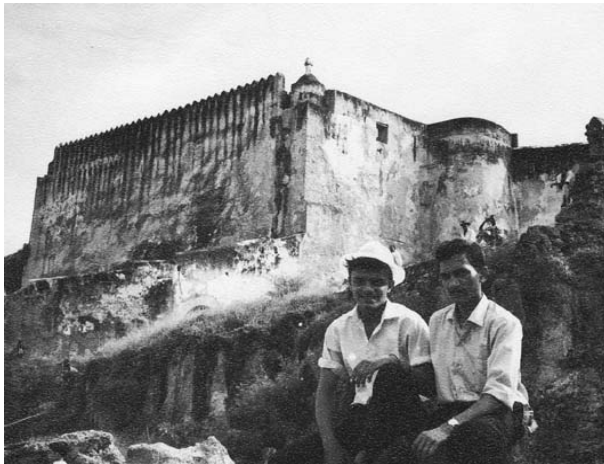


City of Mombasa 1899-1902

²⁰ Source: M. F. Hill Permanent Way Vol I, 1949, p155.

One of the first landmarks my father would have seen as his dhow approached the port would have been Fort Jesus, which is still standing today.

Fort Jesus was built between 1593 and 1596 by the Portuguese, using Indian masons brought over from the Portuguese colony of Goa in India.



Fort Jesus, Mombasa. Myself with an old friend, taken 1953

When dhows arrived at Mombasa, there were always local people waiting to welcome the newcomers and help them to settle and find work. In this way, my father and his fellow travellers were received by a local *Khoja* businessman who offered them jobs with living accommodation. There were quite a few established *Khoja* family businesses in Mombasa at that time. According to my mother, Bapa learned to be a mason while working for his boss, who had a building materials shop.

Chapter 5: Working on the Railways 1896-1904

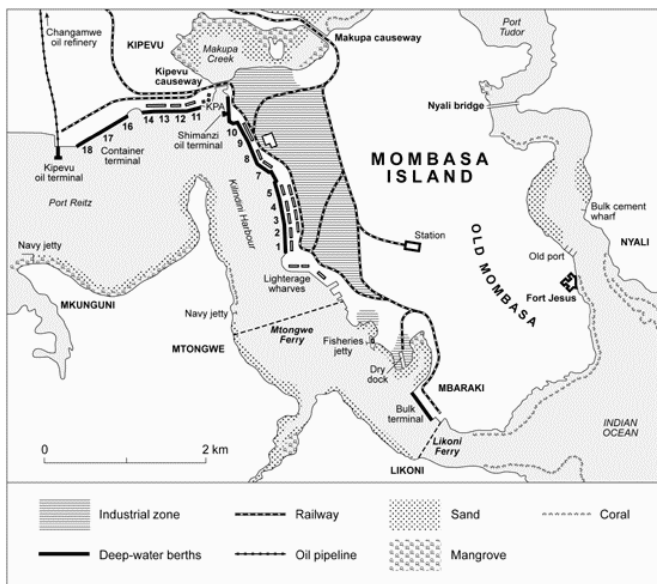
Soon after my father's arrival in Kenya, the British government approved the construction of a railway line from Mombasa to Kisumu²¹. With this announcement, a huge amount of building work started all over Mombasa. The flow of shipping traffic around the port increased tremendously. Within months, fleets of larger ships loaded with people and equipment were arriving. Old Mombasa port was not equipped to handle such a large volume of traffic and so the decision was made to expand and improve the facilities at a little-used port on the other side of the Island, known as Kilindini Harbour.



Kilindini Harbour 1899-1902

²¹ This railway was later extended to Kampala, Uganda, and became known as the Uganda Railway.

Kilindini Harbour was approached from the sea through a shallow, narrow strait called the Likoni channel. Although work was carried out to deepen this channel, it remained very narrow and was dangerous for bigger ships to sail through, which meant they had to be piloted (towed by a tugboat) one at a time through the channel when the tide was high. The remaining ships had to wait for their turn in the bay, which was large enough to accommodate hundreds of vessels²².



Mombasa island

²² This piloted entry to Mombasa Port is still carried out today.

Mombasa Island was separated from the main land by the Strait of Macupa. The biggest task for the engineers and the workforce was to build a bridge nearly half a mile long, linking the island to the mainland. It had to be wide and strong enough to withstand heavy loads of traffic, and to carry a separate railway track. When completed, the bridge was named 'The Salisbury Bridge', after the British Prime Minister of the time.



The Salisbury Bridge, Mombasa 1899-1901

During this busy period, a local *Bohra* businessman called A.M. Jeevanjee, had secured a contract to supply labour and goods to the railway construction company. A.M. Jeevanjee was a friend of my father's employer, and it was through his recommendation that Bapa, together with his friend, was fortunate to be employed by the railway company. Bapa, being a mason, would have gained first-hand experience of railway construction. It is very difficult to know how he felt about it and what kind of people he had to work with. My mother knew very little about this part of his life, but she did say there were thousands of people that came to work from India. According to official records, over 30,000 Indians were brought over by the British to work as labourers, artisans and clerical staff on the railway.



*Plate laying gang shifting camp 1899-1902,
Uganda Railways*



Top of Incline 1899-1901, Uganda Railways

Along with my father, thousands of men worked through difficult terrain and faced every kind of danger. The climate changed rapidly - it rained almost every afternoon. Work continued through dense forests and deep gorges, accidents and tropical diseases and attacks from wild animals. In all, 2493 died in the construction, an average of 38 per month or 4 per mile of track. In addition, more than 6000 workers became disabled through injury²³.

Whilst my father was working on the line, a tragic accident occurred near the Mackinon Road supply camp. A Muslim labourer known as Seyyid Baghali was killed whilst working on the track together with two of his fellow workers.

²³ Source: East African Magazine, *The Heritage of Asians in East Africa*, by Meherm Yaar.

Seyyid Baghali was a very popular and extremely strong man. Where his fellow workers struggled with difficult work he would always help them and make sure they finished their tasks. He was always willing to help others out.

Soon after their deaths, the spirit of Seyyid Baghali was reported to have been seen walking on the trackside with his laden *karai*²⁴ floating over his head. Following these sightings, the camp workers decided to build a memorial in his honour, in the vicinity of the Mackinon depot. With the laying of the track, the railway station Mackinon Road was established at the spot. Since this time Seyyid Baghali has become known as *Pir Baghali*, Pir meaning saint. Even to this day, people passing through Mackinon Road still pay homage to his memory, and trucks, trains and cars all slow down and hoot at this place as they pass. It is believed that any one who does not do this will bring misfortune on themselves.

Also, around this time men started to go missing from their tents at night: they were being taken by man-eating lions. On hearing this news, workers were terrified. Bapa later told my mother how every couple of days there would be news of someone else going missing. These incidents were commonplace and have been recorded in books such as “*The Man Eaters of Tsavo*”.

²⁴ Deep iron pan which was used by labourers to carry sand, cement and ballast.

One night my father's close friend was taken by a man-eating lion. Unfortunately I do not remember the name of this friend, but according to my mother, Bapa had met him on the dhow journey from India and they had been working and living together ever since. It was a lucky escape for Bapa as he was sleeping in the same tent at the time. The death of his friend was a tragic blow for him. Sadly, a few days later, a second friend from a nearby camp also went missing. Bapa told my mother about these incidents and they are a reminder of a forgotten history. During my childhood, my family and neighbours would gather together after dinner, and my mother would tell us Bapa's stories.

In May 1898, the railway reached Nairobi, and in 1901 it finally reached Kisumu. It took the entire workforce six years to lay 582 miles of railway line. They built the famous 1200-foot Salisbury Bridge joining Mombasa Island to the mainland, more than 35 viaducts in the Rift Valley, and nearly 1300 smaller bridges and culverts. This was all achieved by hand, no modern machinery and technology were available to them during this massive task. Bapa remained in Kenya up to 1904. According to my mother he was still working as a mason for the railway company up to this time, and worked on the construction of bridges and viaducts.

Chapter 6: The Missing years 1904-1914

At the age of 25, in the year of 1904, Bapa decided to leave Kenya. He returned to India with the intention of settling down and getting married. It is likely that Bapa went back to Dabasang village to his maternal uncle Virjibhai and his wife Maghibai, who had taken care of him during his childhood. Once in India, a marriage was agreed upon and Bapa became engaged. I know very little about the girl except that she was also an orphan and lived with her aunt and uncle. Unfortunately, the engagement did not last long. The girl's uncle asked my father for a dowry. However, Bapa was not a rich man - he had only been a labourer working as a mason, and he did not have much money. Also, according to my mother, he did not believe in such customs and refused to pay a dowry. So the engagement was broken off. Bapa later discovered that the girl's uncle took her away to Kutchh and had her married there. Hearing this, he became upset and angry, and he decided to return to Kenya.

By this time, the Mombasa to Kisumu railway line was fully operational, and many Indians from *Halar* had already ventured into Kenya and started businesses. Amongst these early settlers were many *Oshwal*, *Patel*, *Sikh*, *Goan* and *Lohana* families. Other Indian communities had already settled, mainly in Mombasa and the capital, Nairobi.

From the years 1904 to 1914 my father was in Nairobi. I came to know this from speaking to many of my older relatives and acquaintances in the 1950's and 1960's, when I myself was living in Nairobi. These included my maternal uncle, Amratlal Raishi Dodhia²⁵, who was just a child when he first met my father in Nairobi and also my uncle, Lakha Parbat Haria, who met my father in Nairobi between 1912 and 1914. I have no information about what my father did, who he worked for or where he lived, between the years 1904 and 1914.

In 1914, with the outbreak of the first world war, many Indians left Kenya and went back to India. At that time, my father along with his cousin, Lakha Parbat, also joined this exodus, maybe with a thought of finally getting married and settling down.



Lakha Parbat Haria

²⁵ Amratlal Raishi Dodhia passed away in 1997.

Chapter 7: Marriage to Ba 1914



Ba (Dematbai)

In 1914, Bapa returned to India for a second time. He was now 35 years of age, which, in those days, was very old to be unmarried. He went back to Dabasang Village to his maternal uncle Virji and his wife Maghibai. This time, Bapa had better luck and got engaged without incident. One of Bapa's cousins, Sojpar Jetha Lala Gudka of Gagva village²⁶, had arranged his engagement with Dematbai, a distant cousin of Sojpar's wife, Jivibai. Dematbai, my mother, lived with her parents in Arikhana village²⁷.

²⁶ Sojpar Jetha was son of Bapa's maternal aunt Rupa, who raised Bapa when he became orphaned.

²⁷ One of the 52 Oshwal villages of Halar - see page 20 for map.

My mother, or Ba, as I used to call her, was only 11 years of age at the time of her engagement and marriage. This may seem shocking to us today, but in those days marriages of boys and girls were arranged at a very early age by their parents, and girls would often be married to men much older than themselves.

Bapa had no work in India and he believed he could make a better future for himself and his wife in Kenya. So, soon after his marriage in 1914, Bapa returned to Kenya to look for work. My mother, being so young, was not allowed to join her husband. She remained at her parents house in Arikhana, until she was 15 years of age.

Ba was a well-built, tall girl, even at 11 years of age. In fact, all her family were very tall, and I remember that one of her three brothers, my Bharmal Mama, was over 6 feet tall. By the time Bapa sent for her to join him in Kenya, in 1918, Ba was fully grown and stood at almost 5 feet 11 inches tall²⁸. Even by today's standards this is incredibly tall for a Gujarati woman. In fact she was much taller than Bapa, who was only 5 foot 3 inches tall.

²⁸ A height of 5' 10" was recorded in her last passport, when she was in her sixties.

It must have been very hard for Ba to leave her home and family at such a young age. It must also have taken a lot of courage to undertake a long sea voyage to an unknown land. The details of how and with whom she travelled are not very clear. However, in those days women did not travel on their own; they always had a travelling companion. I have since found out from relatives that two of Bapa's first cousins, Rajpar Virji Sumaria and Gosar Parbat Haria (my Gosar Kaka), made the same trip in the same year as Ba²⁹, so it is possible that they accompanied her.

Before my father's marriage, none of his relatives in Kenya knew him that well except his cousin Lakha Parbat Haria. Nor was he known to the wider Indian community which had begun to settle there. It was Ba who convinced my father to remain close to the community. This gave Ba the opportunity to be the first woman in our family to become established in the Indian community in Nairobi. It must have been very hard for Ba, as she was only 15. Away from her own family this was her first experience with strangers and in an unknown country. She had no choice but to accept any eventuality willingly. She was accepted into the Indian community with pleasure by everyone, and in no time she proved to be a valuable and worthy asset.

²⁹ Information from Jayantilal Rajpar Virji (London), Zaverchand Rajpar Virji (Kenya) and Raichand Lakha (London).

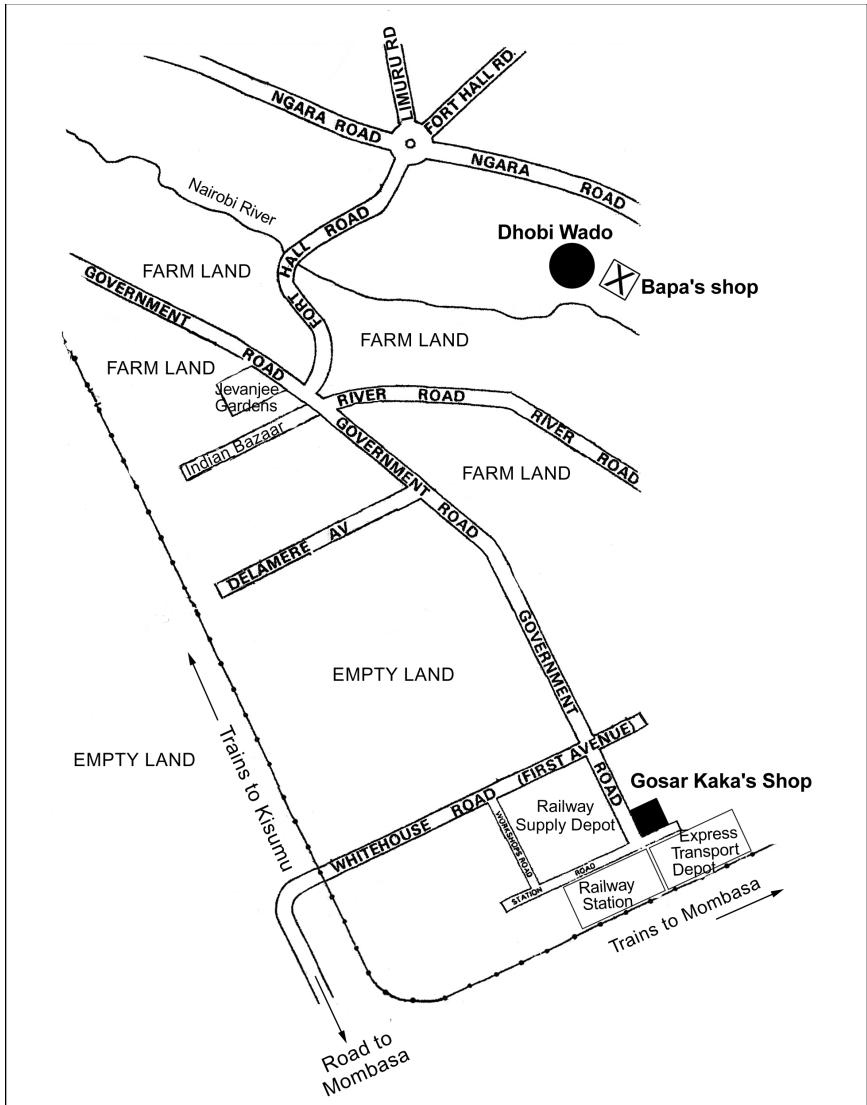
Chapter 8: First House in Nairobi: 1918-1919

By the time Ba arrived in Nairobi, Bapa had already started his own business there - a general store in an area known as Dhobi Vado³⁰. This was where the open air laundries were located, adjacent to the Nairobi River. Nairobi itself was a swampy area, full of mosquitoes and insects. Compared to India, it was cold (Nairobi is over 5.000 feet above sea-level). Wild animals roamed around freely and the country was not developed at all. At the time, the locals were mostly Masai people, very tall and slim who spoke Swahili. There were many other African tribes, all speaking their own languages.

There were three main roads in Nairobi: Indian Bazaar now called Biashara Street, Government Road, now called Moi Avenue and River Road. Apart from these three developed areas, there were scattered Indian settlements. However, all the roads were still dirt roads and the main form of transport was still by oxcart.

³⁰ A Gujarati term for open air laundries.

Nairobi Street map, pre 1920s





Indian Bazaar, Nairobi 1920



Government Road, Nairobi

Bapa's first cousin Rajpar Virji, (whom he grew up with in Dabasang village) also arrived in Nairobi in 1918 and joined my father's business. Rajpar Kaka stayed with Bapa for about a year and after that he moved on.

Ba was able to tell me a great deal about their living conditions. The shop was part of a larger building that my father rented. The whole building was made of wood and the roof was covered with corrugated galvanized sheets of tin. The general store was at the front and the living accommodation, (consisting of a kitchen and bathing area), was at the back, all within their own enclosed compound. In one corner of the kitchen, Ba kept a stone hand-mill which she used for grinding flour. Ba would store food, grain and other daily items in wooden boxes - there were no shelves or cupboards. She only had a few pots and pans, and plates made of clay. In those days, people did not have proper stoves or cookers. Ba cooked over an open fire, enclosed by a fireplace made of three stones pasted together with clay. The floor was also made of clay, plastered and pasted together with cow dung. There were no tables or chairs - every one sat on the floor. Even visitors sat on the floor or on empty jute³¹ sacks laid out for comfort.

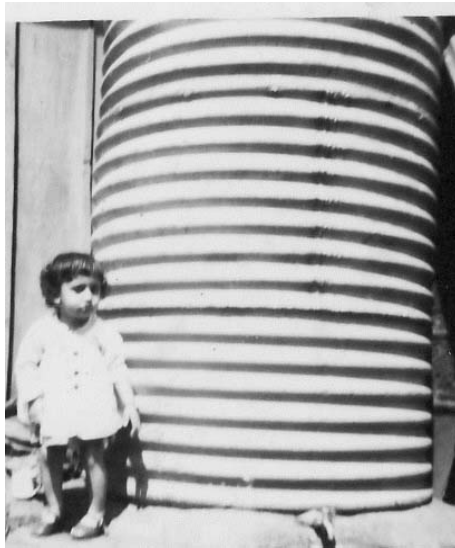
³¹ A strong natural plant fibre used to weave sacks and mats.



Early cooking stove

Occasionally logs or stones from the yard were brought in for sitting on. There was no water supply. Ba either washed clothes in the compound over a big block of stone or went to the nearby river. This block of stone served other purposes too, like washing pots and pans and bathing children. There were no bedrooms - Ba and Bapa slept in the kitchen. The rest of the men-folk slept in the shop, either on empty jute sacks laid on the floor, or on top of the grain sacks. They would pull out blankets from the shop and use them at night. The following morning, the blankets would be folded up and put back on the shelves for sale.

Rain water was collected from the corrugated roof into a big tank. At the bottom of the tank, there was a mixture of a thick layer of gravel, charcoal and sand which filtered the water. Ba always boiled the water before it was used for drinking.



Rain water collected in corrugated galvanised tanks

The toilet was a hole dug in the ground outside the building. The hole was covered by a small hut made of hay and timber. Whether in rain or in cold, that hut was the only place they could go to the toilet.

The yard at the back of the shop was a fair size. It was big enough to dry different grains, lentils and other foodstuff. On one side of the compound there was a canopy of corrugated sheets where logs were stored and kept dry. These logs were used as firewood. A couple of ropes were tied under the canopy to dry clothes. There was no electricity. People used paraffin lanterns or home-made candles made from beeswax for light.

After the evening meal, the men would usually sit around an open fire in the middle of the yard to keep warm - the nights could be quite cold. After her chores were done, Ba would join the men-folk around the fire to socialize, discuss the days events and make any plans for the following day. Sometimes nearby neighbours would join them. The compound had to be firmly secured at night to keep out the wild animals. Ba said you could hear them roaming around the compound at night making terrifying noises. As for all new settlers, life in Nairobi was hard for my parents. Although it was a primitive life, the overall atmosphere was always very pleasant and happy.

Within a short period, Ba educated herself about the business and she learnt everything methodically and with interest. She helped my father run the shop. She would prepare different kinds of lentils for sale. She would sort, clean, and remove any pebbles from the grain, and pack and seal paper bags of different produce. She would also grind different types of flour which were then sold in the shop.

Whenever Bapa was away on business or on social calls, Ba would be left in charge of the shop. She was familiar with the currency as it was the Indian Rupee. Ba's other duties included cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning the shop and living areas. All these things became a daily routine for her.

Initially the locals were very wary of coming to Bapa's shop, as they did not trust foreigners. Also, due to the difference in languages, communication was not always easy. Eventually the African farmers began to bring fruits and vegetable to trade and, sometimes, a good crop of grain. In exchange, Bapa would give them some salt, sugar, soap or even blankets - whatever they required. In this way local people began coming to our shop. However, Bapa's shop was far from the centre of Nairobi, where the main settlements and trading areas were located, and so this affected trade. Business was often slow.

It was during this time that Bapa first developed weeping eczema on his legs. Although easily treatable today, in those days due to a lack of effective medication, eczema could develop into a serious condition. In the beginning, Bapa could look after the business and manage the shop with little discomfort. Gradually, his condition worsened, but with Ba's help he was able to manage for the time being.

Chapter 9: Additions to the Family 1919-1929

In 1919, Ba gave birth to my eldest brother, Kanjibhai. With the arrival of their first child, my parents made a few improvements to their accommodation. They now had a proper kitchen and a separate bathroom with a newly laid floor and the walls were sealed so there were no longer any drafts and there was a new toilet built within the courtyard. More Indians and locals were moving into Nairobi and its surrounding areas. The development of houses in Nairobi had also increased so sales in the shop had also begun to pick up.

In the following year (1920), Ba gave birth to my eldest sister Kasturben. With two children to look after, Ba was now busier than ever. Yet she happily kept up with her extra duties of helping my father in the shop as well as managing to look after both toddlers. Although she did not know how to read and write in her own mother tongue of Gujarati, she was now fully fluent in speaking Swahili, which was the common language of Kenya. Learning the language must have greatly helped in the running of the shop.

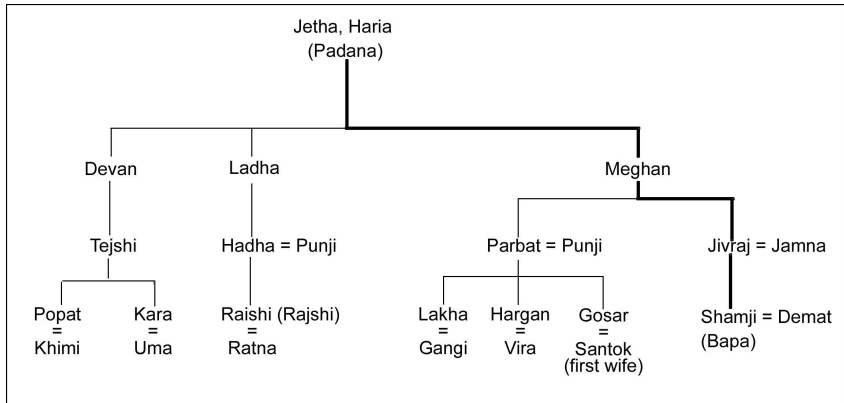
Ba made many new friends, and frequent visits to friends and relatives helped her build strong ties. Because of her friendly and open nature, she was liked by everyone who knew her.

It was at this time that people started to call her *Lambi Kaki* or *Lambi Ayie* (meaning Tall Aunty), as she towered over most Indian woman. In real life she looked even taller as she stood tall and straight and walked with her head held high. In time, many people stopped using her real name (Dematbai) altogether. To this day many only remember her as Lambi Kaki.

Ba and Bapa were enjoying a busy family and social life. However, despite many available treatments, Bapa's eczema was not healing - infact it was getting worse. As Ba was busy with two infants she was not always able to manage the shop by herself, and so from time to time the shop had to be closed.

Ba had two more children: my brother Meghjibhai was born in 1925 and my sister Vijyaben was born in 1929.

Chapter 10: Gosar Kaka



Bapas family tree

Many relatives followed Bapa to Nairobi. One of them, Bapa's first cousin Gosar Parbat Haria whom I called Gosar Kaka³², became very close to my parents. Both our families helped each other out in difficult times. For this reason I would like to write a bit more about Gosar Kaka's history.

Gosar Kaka arrived in Nairobi in 1918 at the age of 15. He found a job working in a general merchandise shop owned by a local businessman called Devraj Parbat.

³² The term *Kaka* denotes a paternal uncle who is a younger brother or cousin of your father. His wife is called *Kaki*.

The shop was located opposite the Express Transport Company in the Ranmal Ala building, on the corner of Station Road and Government Road (see map on page 61). Gosar Kaka worked as an employee there for nearly six years, until 1924 when he took over ownership after Devraj Parbat fell ill and left for India. In the following years many of our relatives came from India and began life in Nairobi working for Gosar Kaka. Salaries started at the rate of five rupees per month and became eight shillings per month in 1924 when the official Kenyan currency was changed from rupees to shillings.

In 1925 Gosar Kaka relocated his shop to River Road³³. On 19th May 1925, another one of my uncles, Kara Kaka (Kalidas Tejshi Haria) and his nephew Lakhamshi Popat Haria arrived from Padana. They also began working for Gosar Kaka. Soon after, Kara Kaka was made an equal business partner in Gosar Kaka's shop.

Also in the same year, at the age of 23, Gosar Kaka went to India to get married. He married Santok Kaki from Dabasang village. She was 14 years of age. Soon after Gosar Kaka and Santok Kaki returned to Nairobi.

³³ To a wooden building opposite L. N. Lakhani's shop.

A tragic incident occurred at Gosar Kaka's shop in 1928. One evening Kara Kaka accompanied a guest back to the Indian Bazaar late at night. As they left the premises, Kara Kaka forgot to lock the door. Inside, Gosar Kaka, Lakhamshibhai and the other workers had already retired for the night. Because the door was left unlocked, a thief – a local African - was able to enter the property. Lakhamshibhai later told his son, Vrajlal Lakhamshi Popat (of Hendon, London) a noise had woken him, but he thought it was just a rat and went back to sleep.

Kara Kaka returned and did not realise a thief was already inside the shop. He went to sleep. After a few minutes the thief tried to open the safe. The noise awoke Kara Kaka and he lit a lantern. As soon as he saw the thief Kara Kaka screamed and ran forward to tackle him, not realizing that the thief was armed with a knife. The thief plunged the knife into Kara Kaka's stomach and also injured Lakhamshibhai who had woken up with the commotion and had tried to assist Kara Kaka. People living nearby had woken up with the disturbance and came to investigate. There was blood all over the shop, and the thief had escaped.

Both Kara Kaka and Lakhamshibhai were taken to the Kenya African Rifles Hospital. Kara Kaka's injuries were severe and he suffered extensive internal bleeding. He collapsed the following day and died, leaving behind a wife, Uma Kaki, and daughter Maniben in India.

Lakhamshibhai had suffered deep cuts to his head and left arm. He too had lost a lot of blood and needed a blood transfusion. As well as scarring on his head and arm he was left with a permanent injury which meant he could not fully stretch his arm. After his recovery he continued working for Gosar Kaka until 1928. The killer was later caught by the police and was sentenced to death by hanging³⁴.



Lakhamshi Popat Haria
Aged 12, born 1912

³⁴ This incident was reported in the Official Government Gazette (source: Jivraj Raimal).

Chapter 11: Ba and Bapa Move House 1929

By 1929, my parents had four children to take care of: Kanjibhai, Kasturben, Meghjibhai and Vijyaben. Bapa's health was not improving and the childrens' education was a problem. The nearest school was some distance away, across the river in River Road, and every day it was difficult for my mother and children to make the journey.

In consultation with other family members, my parents decided to move. In those days, living accommodation was usually attached to the shop. Therefore if you moved house you also changed shop. My parents' new shop and house was located in the River Road area and my parents rented it from a well known business man, Kanji Naranji, who was later to become one of the most successful and wealthiest men in Nairobi. Gosar Kaka had also moved his shop to River Road a few years earlier, and so the two families were now close to each other.

My brothers and sisters were very happy with the move. At the back of the house there was a big farm. My sister Kasturben, who was nine years of age at the time, said that most days they would go to the farm with friends. They enjoyed picking many different fruits including mangoes, guavas, rose apples, pomegranate, mulberries, oranges, bananas and many others. At midday they would walk to Gosar Kaka's house for lunch.

In May 1931, Gosar Kaka's elder brother, Hargan Parbat, and his two nephews Jina Devshi and Jetha Lakha³⁵, arrived in Nairobi from Padana village. Jethabhai was only 12 years old at the time. All three of them started work in Gosar Kaka's shop. In later years Hargan Kaka was to become an important supporting figure in my fathers life, and his sons Veljibhai and Somchand³⁶ both were to become my close friends at different times of my life.



Jetha Lakha Haria, aged 12

³⁵ For Jina Devshi and Jetha Lakha see family tree (Appendix 2).

³⁶ Velji and Somchand Hargan Parbat see family tree (Appendix 2).

Chapter 12: Tragedy in the Family 1931

By 1931, Gosar Kaka's wife, Santok Kaki, was not keeping well. She had already had a couple of miscarriages and was expecting again. She became seriously ill, and was diagnosed with tuberculosis (T.B.) and was moved to Kikuyu Hospital for specialist treatment. It was decided that my mother would accompany her and stay in the hospital to help look after her and the child that was to be born.

While Ba was caring for Santok Kaki in Kikuyu, someone was needed to run the house and look after the family. This task fell on my eldest sister Kasturben who was only 10 years old. As you can imagine this was a very big responsibility for a child, but in those days it was normal for a girl of 10 years of age to be taken out of school, and put in charge of the daily household chores. Kasturben did all the cooking and washing and also looked after her younger siblings - Vijyaben (aged 2) and Meghajibhai (aged 6). Kasturben told me how she was very upset with this change of circumstances. She did not like doing the house work and she missed her school and friends. Most of all she missed Ba very much. She could not plait her hair herself, and although Bapa tried his best to do it, she said he made her cry every time. However, Gosar Kaka would visit them, and he would help her with many things, including plaiting her hair. As time went by she became very fond of Gosar Kaka.

Without Ba, everyone had more work to do. This included my eldest brother Kanjibhai (aged 12) who would help Bapa in the shop after school each day.

Gosar Kaka's and Santok Kaki's son Chuni was born prematurely on 9th September 1931. Tragically, within three days of his birth, Santok Kaki passed away in Kikuyu Hospital. Ba took over Chuni's care and returned with him to her family in Nairobi. Chuni was very frail and weak and with the death of his mother, Gosar Kaka's family doctor had given up hope of Chuni's survival. Ba was determined to nurse him better. As she was still breast feeding Vijyaben, who was aged 2 at the time, she decided to feed Chuni as well. Ba was strong and healthy and so she was able to provide enough milk for both of them. Ba also decided to get a second opinion on Chuni's health. She called her own family doctor, Dr. de Sousa, who was able to explain things in Gujarati. He treated the baby with different medication. With the combined efforts of Dr. de Sousa's treatment and Ba's care and dedication, Chuni's health improved and he started to put on weight. Ba was very pleased that she was able to save a child's life by becoming a surrogate mother.

During this time in Nairobi there was a plague epidemic. Many relatives and friends were caught up in the suffering, and some died. Besides looking after her own family and baby Chuni, Ba was also busy nursing sick people in the neighbourhood.

Ba had some knowledge of herbal medicine and its application. She did not differentiate between the various castes and was always ready to help in any way she could. By doing this kind of valuable community work, she became well respected and was considered an asset to the neighbouring Indian community.

Chapter 13: Difficult Times, Difficult Decisions 1931

Bapa's health had continued to deteriorate. His eczema had grown worse and the open sores on his legs were not healing. He could not stand for long periods and it became clear that he could no longer run the shop. Bapa made the difficult decision to close the shop. Giving up the shop meant that the family had no income and nowhere to live. Gosar Kaka was very sympathetic and understanding of Bapa's situation, and so with his blessing Bapa moved his whole family into Gosar Kaka's house. With their combination of difficulties, there was a strong inclination for the two families to support each other. This mutual arrangement could only have succeeded with a very close and strong relationship. My family lived with Gosar Kaka for almost a year, and in 1932, when he was 29, Gosar Kaka remarried. His new wife, Shanta Kaki, was 15 years of age.



Gosar Parbat Haria and his second wife, Shanta

Bapa's condition worsened further and he became very weak. Close relatives and friends advised Bapa and Ba to leave the wet and damp climate of Nairobi and return to India for a cure. It was the most agonizing decision to make.

Back in India, Bapa had nothing. No place to live, no land to cultivate. He had lost his parents when he was an infant. His only family were his aunt and uncle in Dabasang. He also had to think of his wife and children.

He had lost almost every penny, and would have to go to India as a very poor person. Except for Vijyaben (who was still a toddler), all the children were now old enough to understand what was going on. When Gosar Kaka suggested that they should seriously consider leaving Kenya, they were all distraught. None of the children wanted to leave Nairobi. Nairobi was their home. According to my eldest sister Kasturben, none of them realised how much pain their father was in. He was not able to work and so there was no income. Without money, the whole family faced a bleak future. Bapa was frustrated and, according to my sister Kasturben and Ba, he became very agitated.

However, Ba was confident that she could look after the children and my sick father more easily in India than in Nairobi. Her parents and siblings were there. Life would be a little bit more comfortable, even on a low income, as it was cheaper to live there.

It would also be cheaper to treat Bapa's illness. The climate was very dry and hot, which would also be better for his eczema.

With the older children now growing fast, they would soon be able to work and bring in money. Gosar Kaka had also assured my parents that he would support them financially in India, if necessary. After long consideration my parents finally decided to leave Nairobi and go and settle back in India.

As the day drew nearer for their departure, most of the household goods, personal effects, and necessary items were packed and ready to be shipped to India.

Unfortunately, close to departure, Ba fell ill and contracted pneumonia. In spite of all the medication, her recovery was very slow. Gosar Kaka's new wife, Shanta Kaki, took great care of Ba and the children, until she was able to travel.

The only consolation was that Hargan Kaka (Gosar Kaka's brother) had also decided to join my parents and return to India. Hargan Kaka had different reasons to return to India. He realised he could never be a businessman and did not like working in the shop. He did not like the damp cold weather of Kenya. Moreover he was missing Padana, his home village, the farm and the animals. He was very homesick. It was decided that when they reached India, they would all head for Padana village.

It was agreed that baby Chuni would stay with my parents (who had been looking after him since his mother died) and travel with them to India. Now they had one extra child. With five children to look after on a long journey to India, my father would have found it quite hard, especially with his illness. He was very fortunate to have his cousin, Hargan Kaka and his distant nephew, Jinabhai travelling with him.

The final day of departure arrived. Friends and relatives arrived at the Nairobi railway station to bid them farewell for the last time. According to Kasturben, all the children begged Gosar Kaka not to send them away. They wailed and cried but to no avail. The train departed Nairobi, and the following morning arrived at Mombasa port.

Chapter 14: Journey from Mombasa to Porbandar 1932



Pages from Bapa's passport

In the 1930s, regular fleets of passenger steam boats sailed between Mombasa and the port of Porbandar in Gujarat. My family and Hargan Kaka made their journey on one of these boats. According to Bapa's passport, they travelled on the 'SS Karagola' and arrived in Porbandar on the 22nd April 1932. Hargan Kaka and Jinabhai were invaluable travelling companions. Without their help it would have been impossible for my father to handle everything on his own, and all the children were glad to be under their care.

Soon after the steam boat set sail, my mother, who had been quite ill, recovered from her illness and was able to cook for everyone. This included two new travellers they had befriended on the boat, who had also helped them. The following is Kasturben's account of the next stage of their journey, from Porbander to Padana village.

“Eventually after two weeks we landed at Porbandar port. The steam boat anchored in the deep sea bay, and all the passengers were transferred on to small boats and brought to the main landing station. We went from Porbandar by train to Jamnagar. At Jamnagar we changed train for Modpur railway station. I remember we travelled on an open railway carriage. On that line, trains only ran once a week. There were no passenger trains, only goods carriages. When we arrived at Modpur Railway Station, I found to my surprise that it was nothing like the railway stations in Kenya. On the trackside there was a single wooden cabin used as the station. We had to jump off the train, which was very dangerous, there was no station platform. There was a man at the far end of the train holding green and red flags in each hand. I later found out those were the flags to stop the train or to allow the train to leave the station. The man with the flags walked towards us - he was the Station Master. He helped my father and Hargan Kaka offload the trunks and packages from the open carriage. When all was offloaded, the Station Master got down off the train and started waving his green flag. There was a loud sound - it was the whistle - which frightened us all.”

As the train left the station we saw two bullock carts waiting on the other side of the railway line. This was arranged well in advance by Hargan Kaka to take us to Padana village which was father's original home."

It is hard to imagine how my parents managed with five children and my father's illness, especially on the last leg of their journey, when they had to change transport so many times. No doubt, Hargan Kaka's help was invaluable. In addition, he had arranged for two large storage rooms near his house in Padana to be emptied. He offered these free of charge to my parents as temporary accommodation until my father decided what to do.



Hargan Parbat Haria and his wife, Vira



Modpur railway station



Open railway carriage

Chapter 15: A New Life in Padana 1932-1933

It did not take long for my brothers and sisters to adjust to life in Padana. They soon forgot their sadness at leaving Nairobi and, my brothers Kanjibhai and Meghajibhai were enrolled in the village school. Bapa and Ba also settled in very well. The villagers were very inquisitive about the new arrivals, and wanted to know everything about them. Hargan Kaka's wife, Virabai, who had remained in Padana all this time, was very welcoming and helpful and she introduced Ba to the rest of the extended family. Everyone was struck by her great height and open nature and it was not long before people grew fond of Ba and respected her. Like in Nairobi, the villagers soon began to call my mother *Lambi Kaki*³⁷, whilst younger children would call her *Lambi Ayie*³⁸. Fortunately, Vira Kaki agreed to take in baby Chuni, as she only had one child of her own - Dahiben who was two years old. This was a huge relief for Ba. With the responsibility of looking after Chuni now over, at least for the time being, she could begin to concentrate on other things.

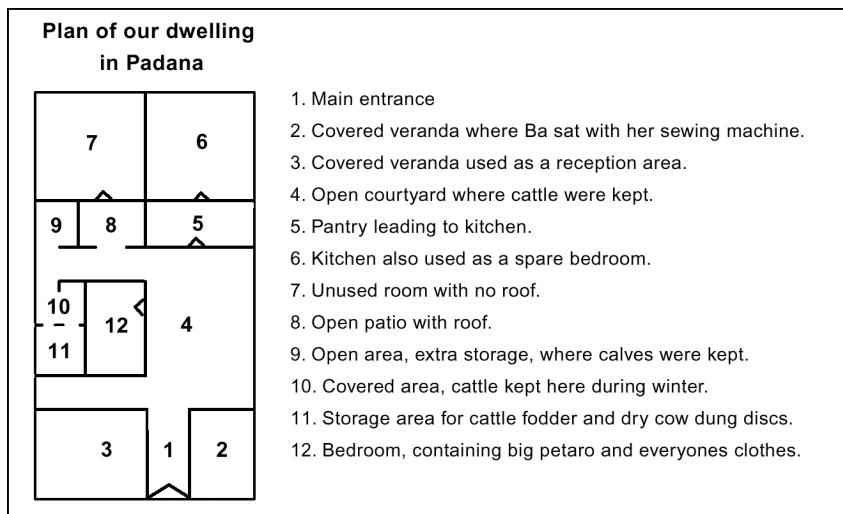
Hargan Kaka's two storage rooms were not really big enough for a family of six, and so Bapa started looking for other accommodation. Next to his parents' former property in Padana, Bapa found a house big enough to accommodate everyone.

³⁷ "Lambi" means tall and "Kaki" is Gujarati for Auntie.

³⁸ "Ayie" is a respectful Kutchhi term for Aunt.

They stayed there for a while, and then moved once again to a house opposite the *Khoja Khana* (Ismailis community and prayer centre).

Bapa rented this property from a local businessman called Meghan Seth, who had emigrated to Mombasa a few years earlier. My family remained in this house until 1949, and this was where I was born a few years later. I have very fond memories of this house and remember its layout well.



It was entered through large double doors into a wide entrance passage. There were two covered verandas on either side of this passageway. The smaller veranda was where Ba used to sit with her sewing machine and work as a seamstress.



Our dwelling in Padana, outside main entrance



*Padana dwelling: Entrance to our dwelling,
No 1 on plan*

The larger veranda on the opposite side was a reception room for visitors. There, guests would sit on *khatlas* - low rectangular bed-frames made of wood and covered on top with woven jute. These *khatlas* were used to sleep on at night and even now the term *khatlo* is the Gujarati word for bed.



Khatlo

In the far corner of this reception room were two large earthenware structures, over 6 feet high and cylindrical in shape. They were our storage containers for *bajro* (millet) and *jaar* (sorghum). These two grains were the basis of our daily diet in those days, and wheat flour was eaten in much smaller quantities, usually on special occasions where it was used in *laadoos* (sweetmeat).



*Padana dwelling: Earthenware storage granary,
No 3 on plan*

The covered entrance passage and verandas opened out into a large courtyard where we kept our cow. We had one milking cow and its calf. The calf would be sold as soon as it was weaned off its mother's milk. Everyday, Ba would sit and milk the cow in the courtyard. The milk was an important source of protein and calcium for us, and Ba used it to make *dahi* (yogurt), *makhan* (butter), *ghee* (clarified butter) and *chhaas* (buttermilk).

The cow provided us with cow dung which we used as fuel for the fire. We would dry the cow dung in the sun and store it as discs which we called *chhana*. When it dried it lost its smell and unlike wood, there was no smoke on burning it. It was a very cheap and environmentally friendly fuel - even now people still use it in rural areas. We also used fresh cow dung as a base for building material, in place of plaster.



Cattle Fodder in the background and in foreground drying cow dung used for fuel



*Padana dwelling: Open court yard, No 4 on plan
(door to No 5 and 8 in background)*

The courtyard was also where we washed and dried our utensils. We had no running water, so everyday Ba and my older sisters had to fetch it from the village well, or bore-hole. They would fill large clay pots with water, and carry them on their heads back to the house. All the clothes were taken to the village well or river for washing, and then dried on the *khatlas* in the courtyard.



Village women carry water at dusk



Clothes being washed in Padania river

There were two more rooms leading off the courtyard. One was a large bedroom, which doubled up as the family dressing room, and the clothes and bedding for the entire family were stored here in a large wooden chest, called a *Petaro*. The chest was made from Jishum (Indian rosewood), a valuable Indian wood which is black and very strong - similar to mahogany. This chest had belonged to Bapa's parents and was stored in Dabasang village while he was in Kenya, but was sent for when he returned to Padana. It was later passed on to my sister Kasturben.



We had a Petaro similar to this

Behind the large bedroom was a sheltered area which could be entered directly from the courtyard; this is where we kept the cow during bad weather and stored their fodder and the dried discs of cow dung (*chhana*). The final room that led off from the courtyard was the kitchen. At the entrance was a small vestibule where we kept earthenware pots of drinking and washing water. There was also a pantry area, where Ba stored all her spices, flours, rice and pulses. These were stored in jute sacks or in containers of tin or clay.

The kitchen itself was quite large. At one end was the cooking area or *choolo* - an open hearth where the *chhana* was burnt on a fire. Above the hearth was an opening in the roof which acted as a chimney. There was also a stone hand mill, *Ghanti*, in the kitchen which was used to grind the millet or sorghum grain into flour.



Ghanti (hand mill)

I remember Ba would get up before dawn every morning, to feed the animals and grind fresh flour. There were no clocks in those days and she would look at the position of the stars to tell her that it was time to get up. I remember that there were always lots of baskets hanging from the kitchen ceiling. These were made of jute and contained covered clay pots of yogurt, butter and ghee. They were hung up in this way as there was limited storage space, and also to prevent rodents and other animals from spoiling them. Like all the other rooms of the house, the kitchen was also used as a bedroom when needed, as we often had guests staying with us.

We had no bathroom or toilet in the house, which was normal in those days. We went to the river to wash and to the fields outside when we needed to go to the toilet.

Although Bapa was a *fundi* (*fundi* is a Swahili word meaning D.I.Y. odd-jobs man) and mason by profession, he was not able to work because of his ill health. So Ba and my older siblings Kasturben and Kanjibhai, joined the casual labour workforce to provide an income for the family. Kasturben carried water from the village well (*Bokhli Vav*) to various building sites. She earned two anna for a full days work (equivalent to about 2 pence in today's money). Later, she started working for upper caste families as a home help - washing clothes, doing house work, looking after their cattle and buffalos etc. Kanjibhai gave up his studies and took up any work available to bring in some money.



Bokhali Vav (well)

Chapter 16: Jam Saheb Ranjit Sinhji Visits Padana 1933

In Jan 1933, a very important visitor came to Padana village³⁹. This was Jam Saheb Ranjit Sinhji, who was the Rajput ruler of the whole of Kathiawad at the time. Most of the villagers came to the *Darbar Gadh* (police station) square to welcome him. During an open audience, Jam Saheb asked the villagers if they had any complaints or anything to report. No one dared to speak to him as he was their king, apart from one person who asked to speak to him in private - his name was Parbat Meghan. He was very sharp and outspoken, and was not afraid to speak up for people. Although he was not a qualified lawyer, everyone in Padana knew him as *Pabu Ballister*. *Pabu* was short for Parbat, and *Balister* was from the English word for "barrister" that Gujarati's used to mean lawyer. He told Jam Saheb that a young Rajput called Petho Sinh was harassing young girls of the village, despite being warned by villagers to stop. Jam Saheb said he would look into the matter. Fifteen days later, Petho Sinh was escorted away by the police and was never seen back in Padana village again.

Later that year, Jam Saheb Ranjit Sinhji passed away and was succeeded by his nephew, Jam Saheb Digvijay Sinhji who also regularly visited Padana.

³⁹ Source: My cousin Raichand Lakha, who was nine years old at the time of Jam Saheb Ranjit Sinhji visit.

My sister Vijyaben remembers that on one of his visits to Padana, all the girls from her school were taken to the *Darbar Gadh* square by their teacher Nan-bai, to perform a folkdance or *garbo*.

Chapter 17: Bapa's Recovery 1934

Bapa's eczema continued to cause him misery. According to Ba, he had become severely depressed because of his continual suffering. Eventually, through many enquires, Bapa found someone who might be able to help using herbal medicines. The treatment involved staying at the herbalists' farm until the completion of the course, which would take at least one month. All agreed that Bapa should try this treatment.

The herbalist's name was Ram Sinh, and he was a Rajput. He and his family lived on a farm near Mota-Mandha village, which was about 10 kilometres from Padana. According to Kasturben, Bapa's treatment lasted just over a month. On his return, to everyone's amazement, he was fully cured. His pain had completely disappeared, and he was much fitter and stronger than before. He admitted to feeling like a changed man with new life and vigour. The news of his return and full recovery spread very fast in Padana and nearby villages. After the news of my father's cure, many people suffering from various problems visited Ram Sinh for a remedy. He became very famous in the area.

Also, in January 1934 we had one more addition to the family - my elder sister Savitaben was born.

Chapter 18: A Double Wedding 1935

Family life was now returning to normal. Since his recovery, Bapa was earning a good wage from various types of casual labouring work. Ba concentrated on earning money as a seamstress. She set-up her Singer sewing machine at the front of the house, in the narrow veranda. This became her workshop. She had brought this machine and her scissors with her from Nairobi to Padana. The sewing machine was later sold, but the scissors were left with me and I still use them to this day.



Ba's original scissors



Sewing machine similar to the one Ba used

My sister Kasturben recalled that the atmosphere in the house now was a very happy one. Kanjibhai was also earning a wage, and although not rich, the family was comfortable. There began to be talk of Kanjibhai and Kasturben both getting married and one day this became a reality. My brother and sister were to marry another brother and sister, the children of Jivraj Kheta Gudka of Taraghari village. This type of double marriage arrangement was common in those days, and meant that both families would save on dowry money and wedding costs and would also form strong ties. Kanjibhai was 16 years of age and his bride to be, Amritbai was 13 years of age. Kasturben was nearly 15 years old and, her groom, Anandji, was also 15. They were married in February 1935. My sister Savitaben was just over a year old at that time and I had not yet been born.



Anandji Banevi and Kausturben



Kanjibhai and Amrit Bhabhi

Soon after the weddings, Gosar Kaka, his wife Shanta Kaki, and their newly born baby Chhotalal arrived from Kenya to pay a visit. As mentioned earlier, baby Chuni was Gosar Kaka's son from his first wife. Ba had looked after him after the death of his mother and when Ba and Bapa moved to India, Vira Kaki took him in. After a short stay Gosar Kaka and his family returned to Kenya, taking Chuni with them. He was five years old at the time.



Chuni

I was born in December 1936 and was to be the last of my parents six children. Bapa was 57 years of age and Ba was 33. I was named Raichand and in Padana this is how everyone knew me. Even today some older people who had known me from my childhood call me by my birth name. My name was changed to Rajnikant in my passport application when we left for Kenya, in 1949.

Chapter 19: A Good Harvest 1937

The following year the rains were plentiful and crops were in abundance - it was to be a good harvest. From the start of the monsoon farmers would employ labourers to prepare the fields, sow the seeds, and harvest the crops. Therefore a good working season could last four to sixth months. As was the custom, daughters would return to their hometowns to help their parents during the busy harvesting season. Thus, Kanjibhai's wife, Amrit Bhabhi, would return to her parents village, and Kasturben would return to my parents house in Padana.

The whole family would work together in the fields to earn a good wage. Ba would agree with the farmer to work six to eight rows of crop at a time, depending on the type of crop. As she was very strong, she was often able to harvest extra rows and also helped others if they fell behind. Early each morning, she would lead everyone to the fields, with me strapped to her back. Everyone would carry food and drinks with them including *chhaas* (butter-milk). Before they started work, the food and drinks would be buried under the shade of a tree or hut. This would keep them cool and also safe from animals.

As the adults worked, toddlers and young children would be left on their own to play or left in the shade of a hut or a tree.

Ba would carry me on her back as she worked in the hot sun all day - this was quite normal in those days.

At midday, the food and drinks were dug up from the ground and everyone would have lunch. Although it was extremely hot, the drinks would be ice cold, as if they had been kept in a refrigerator. In those days we did not have clocks to keep the time, but depended on the position of the sun and shadows to know when it was midday. The family would continue to work until sundown, and would then walk home as night fell with all the other workers. This way of life lasted the entire harvesting season. These were busy months for everyone in the village.

According to Kasturben, during one of the harvesting seasons Bapa's finger became infected and developed gangrene. Part of his finger had to be amputated at the hospital in Jamnagar. Perhaps because of his age (he was now 58) and the after effects of his illness, Bapa was not able to work a full day in the fields. Sometimes he did not go at all. However, he still earned extra money by doing odd-jobs such as mending roofs, fences and working on building sites. He was also able to repair bullock carts, ploughs and mend doors and locks. Ba always said that Bapa was very good at fixing and mending things, something that his sons and grandsons have also excelled at.

Chapter 20: Brothers Emigrate to Kenya

Like my father, many people continued to leave the villages to find a new life for themselves in Kenya. Although it did not work out for Bapa, my eldest brother Kanjibhai decided to try his luck and emigrated to Kenya in 1935. I do not know how long he stayed in Mombasa, but shortly afterwards he moved on to Nairobi. In Nairobi, Gosar Kaka offered him a job and accommodation in his shop, as he had done for so many other relatives. After six months Kanjibhai moved on to work for Rajpar Kaka (my father's first cousin from Dabasang village who he had grown up with) in his business at Saba Saba village, Kenya.

A few years later Meghjibhai also decided to emigrate to Kenya. He left from Porbandar Port on the SS Tairea on the 28th of April 1938 and landed in Mombasa on 6th May 1938. Meghjibhai also worked at Gosar Kaka's shop for a few months. He then left Nairobi in 1939 and went onto Uganda and also to Tanganyika (now Tanzania)⁴⁰.

Soon after Meghjibhai's departure, Kanjibhai returned to India, to sort out travel documentation for his wife Amrit Bhabhi so that she could join him in Kenya.

⁴⁰ This information came from my cousin Raichand Lakha who was employed at Gosar Kaka's shop at the time.

Amrit Bhabhi's passport was issued in March 1939 at Rajkot Civil Station. After a few months, Kanjibhai went back to Kenya. Amrit Bhabhi remained in Padana whilst her travel documents were prepared. In March the following year (1940), Amrit Bhabhi gave birth to a baby boy, named Motichand, later known as Ramnik.

It was 1940 and after the outbreak of the second world war passenger ships were no longer sailing from Porbandar or any of the other Indian ports. Journeys had either been cancelled or ships had been commandeered by the Government to transport war supplies. Amrit Bhabhi's journey to Kenya was postponed until 1944. As a result Kanjibhai had to wait 4 years to see his son Ramnik. This happened to many families who had been separated during the war.

Chapter 21: The Story of *Mepo-Dipdo* 1938

In 1938, an incident happened in Padana, which is still recounted in Padana's history to this day. It is the story of *Mepo-Dipdo*, who was a great uncle of my good friend, Champak Kachra Vrajpal⁴¹. Champak was born in Padana in 1934, and we were close childhood friends. His maternal grand uncle, Mepabhai⁴², was a farmer and owned land in Padana.

After the heavy monsoon rains, the land around Padana would become very fertile and green, and bushes and trees would start fruiting. It was common practice at that time for farmers to stay on their farms overnight to watch over precious crops and drive away any animals that might come to feed on them. Late one evening, Mepabhai was working on his farm. As he was about to finish his work and settle down for the night he was disturbed by a roar – it was a leopard. The leopard jumped at Mepabhai and clawed him badly. Mepabhai was bleeding from the chest, but he was a very big and strong man. When the leopard attacked again, he fought back with his sickle. With a single strike the leopard's neck was sliced through and it fell back onto the ground dead.

⁴¹ Champak recounted details of this story. Also confirmed by my sister Vijyaben, who was nine years old at the time.

⁴² Mepa Rajani.

The injured Mepabhai made his way to his home in the village, where he recounted what had happened. The news spread immediately through the village. From then on he became known as *Mepo-Dipdo* (“*Dipdo*” in Gujarati means leopard). His chest was scarred for life with five claw marks - three of which were very deep. I remember seeing those scars as a young boy, when he took off his shirt in the hot sun, as he carried heavy sacks of grain from the supply trucks that came to our village.

Chapter 22: *Chhanvo* - A Severe Drought in 1940

In 1940 a severe drought struck Kathiawad. The year became known as *Chhanvo*, which means ninety-six in Gujarati, as according to the Indian calendar, the year was 1996. The monsoon rains had failed for the second year running, and all the crops failed. The water in the wells were so low that some were completely dry. There was famine in Halar and it was impossible to escape. People were starving and cattle were dying. There was some help from the government, but not enough. Help from the Oshwal people of East Africa eventually arrived, but it was too late for some.

People resorted to emergency measures to save their livestock - they travelled to an area on the West coast of Halar, near the villages of Jhankhar, Jogvad and Bharana, where mangrove forests were growing in swampland. From here they brought back the leaves and fruit of the mangrove bush for animal fodder. Mangrove bushes grow to about six to eight feet high and their leaves are evergreen, dark and glossy. When eaten they are slightly salty but are nutritious and rich in minerals. The fruits are edible when they are green (unripe) and are delicious when roasted. People also used the evergreen leaves of the Banyan tree and Peepul tree as animal fodder. Figs from both of these trees were used as food by villagers during the famine.



Mangrove flowers and fruit



Banyan tree with figs

Ba had told me that they made the journey to the Mangrove forests (3-4 km away) three times a week during the famine. The village women would leave early in the morning and only came back home at dusk. On one of these trips, I had accompanied my family to Jogvad village. We had to cross a channel to reach the mangroves, where the mud was knee deep. While crossing I had got stuck in the mud. I was too small to free myself, so Ba pulled me free by the arm and carried me back to the bank, telling me to stay there with other children until she came back with the mangrove leaves. I don't remember any of this, I must have been too young. Ba said every available family member went to collect the mangrove leaves and the extra stock was sold in the village.

That year the government had introduced a permit system for villagers to buy subsidised food rations from allocated shops, to ensure fair food distribution. Padana became a main distribution centre for aid, and supplied rations to the 36 surrounding villages. The main distribution agents were Parekh traders, trading as Gulabchand Popatlal. As there was a constant flow of people coming to Padana to buy rations on permits, Ba's tailoring business became more widely known. Orders increased and her business grew. The permit system was means tested and only applied to people below a certain income. It remained in force long after India had gained independence.

Chapter 23: Kachrabhai



Kachrabhai Vrajpal

Kachrabhai Vrajpal was the father of my close friend Champak. He was a very generous and caring man and he did a great deal to help the poor and needy of Padana and its surrounding villages.

Kachrabhai was one of the partners of Premchand Popat and Company, a shipping company which owned seven dhows. The names of some of these dhows are still remembered today - *Purnima*, *Digvijay*, *Bharat*, *Kenya Ganjo* and *Royal Mail*. These dhows sailed regularly from the Indian ports of Salaya and Veravad, destined for the East African coast.

They carried passengers, textiles, and different types of grain. On their return, unsold grain was brought back to Padana, where Kachrabhai had rented a store room. Once a week he opened this store room and donated surplus grain to needy people. Padana was always humming with people because it was a food permit distribution centre for nearby villages. Some people could not afford to buy enough rations for their needs, so these donations from Kachrabhai were greatly valued.

During the drought, Kachrabhai realised there was no water for the many visitors who came to the village, many of whom had travelled long distances in the heat to get there, so he established two water points on the outskirts of the village, known as *Piya-vo*. Villagers took turns to man these stations and serve drinking water to travellers without charge. This tradition has continued to this day, and the people of Padana still offer water to visitors from these water points.

In addition Kachrabhai undertook two further projects which he financed himself. Firstly he installed a *danki* (borehole) in his family compound which was open for all to use. It has only recently fallen into disrepair. Secondly, he dug a well or *Vav* on the outskirts of the village. When completed, everyone in the village was permitted to draw water from it, including those from the untouchable caste known as *Harijan*. This became known by the villagers as *Kachrabhai ni Vav*. He then built three large rectangular troughs or *havedas*.

Bullocks were used to draw water from the *Vav* and fill these troughs with water for the villagers' cattle, buffalos, goats and sheep. The *havedas* were a life-line for the villagers in times of drought. Right up to 1949, when I left India, many wild animals including big cats such as cheetas and leopards would also come and drink there. *Kachrabhai ni Vav* and the *havedas* still exist today and are in full use. However, a water pump has been fitted to supply water from the well instead of bullocks.



Kachrabhai ni Danki (borehole)



Kachrabhai ni Vav



Havedas, village women washing their clothes

Chapter 24: Arrival of Monsoon Rains

The Chhanvo ended in 1942. People had suffered greatly and a great number of livestock had perished. I was told the monsoon arrived early, with plenty of rain. People soon forgot their suffering and there was plenty of work available. My two older sisters, Vijyaben and Savitaben, helped my parents in the fields and took care of me.

All the village farmers had bumper harvests and they distributed any surplus crops to the labourers, on top of their day's wages. That year so many farmers had insufficient storage, that in order to store the surplus crops for future years, underground silos were built. I remember watching workers dig holes in the ground, approximately 10 feet deep and 8 feet in diameter. These were then lined with cow dung which was allowed to dry, to make them waterproof. Grain husks were put in at the bottom and then grain would be poured in. Another layer of husks would be placed on top and covered with straw. Finally, a mound of pressed soil was placed on top. Grain could be stored in this way for up to four years. No rain water would penetrate through, and the husks would keep the grain fresh. This became the villagers' emergency food supply for future famines.

Village life was returning to normal. Right up to the end of 1943, family life continued as before.

Chapter 25: Childhood Memories of Bapa

Although I was just a young child at the time I remember Bapa very well. He was fair-skinned and had distinctive blue eyes, a very rare eye colour for Indians. My eldest sister Kasturben and I, both have blue rings around the pupils of our eyes. My youngest daughter, Seema, has clear blue eyes, as has my nephew's son, Savan (son of Sudhir Meghji Shamji). It seems Bapa's hereditary gene has been passed down the generations.

Like all the men of that time, Bapa had a moustache and wore a *paghdi* (a turban-like headdress). He was a very smart looking man with an out-going personality. According to Ba, he would easily befriend strangers. Whenever he visited the bazaar, it was inevitable he would arrive home with a new acquaintance, having invited them home for lunch or dinner. However, he also had another side to him - he was a perfectionist and wanted everything precisely to his liking, especially food. He could be short-tempered: if Ba's cooking wasn't to his taste, he would become angry, upturning his plate of food and walk out. Despite this, Ba said he had many talents. Because of his travels and friendships with many people, he was considered knowledgeable and wise.

I was very fond of Bapa. Although he was strict with everyone else he never scolded me and was always kind to me. Wherever Bapa went, I followed.

I walked in his shadow, keeping both my hands behind my back, just like he did. He would often not even know I was there. Whenever Bapa greeted someone, they would return the greeting and then acknowledge me as well. Unaware that I was following him, Bapa would be surprised and would tell them that he had left me behind at home.

One night, towards the end of 1943, Bapa joined a group of villagers to keep watch over the body of a drowned man. The man had been missing for three days and his body had been recovered from a farm well known as *Ori Yari Vav*. His name was Hemraj Lakhamshi Gosarani although every one in the village knew him as Hemraj Ghelo (*ghelo* means mad in Gujarati). He had been mentally unstable for some time. His family had been watchful of him because of his condition, but one night he was left unattended and went missing. The whole village tried to find him, he must have fallen into the well on the very first night, and unable to free himself from the mud at the bottom, eventually drowned. The family had to wait for government officials to arrive from Jamnagar, in order to release the body for cremation. Until then the body was to remain at the farm and so my father, along with others, kept watch over it. Bapa arrived home after that first night's watch wrapped in a dark chequered blanket or *dhabro*. Whilst removing the blanket from his shoulders, Ba and Bapa talked and I still remember the words he said to Ba: “Hi Hemraj muje lai vino”, meaning ‘*This Hemraj will take me with him*’.

It seemed Bapa had caught a chill during the night. From that night on he fell ill and never recovered.

Around this time, Amrit Bhabhi was due to leave India and join her husband, my brother Kanjibhai, in Nairobi. Bapa was not in a fit condition to travel, so Hargan Kaka and Anand Banevi, (Kasturben's husband), took Amrit Bhabhi and her son Ramnik to Bedi Port. They set sail on Laxmipasa dhow on 17th of January 1944 and landed at Mombasa on 11th February 1944. We received news from Kanjibhai of their safe arrival, although there had been an incident on the journey - Ramnik had fallen overboard but luckily had been saved by a fellow passenger.



Ori Yari Vav

Chapter 26: Bapa's Death 1944

While Amrit Bhabhi was on her way to Mombasa, Bapa's condition deteriorated and he became bedridden. I was very young, around 7 years old, so none of the family members would allow me to see him. I knew Bapa had become unconscious but I was not old enough to understand what was going on. I remember crying and begging them to let me see him. Finally, I was allowed into his room - I begged for him to answer me. I kept calling out "*Bapa! Bapa!*". Finally he did weakly say "*Haa...?*" in reply. That was the last time I heard him speak. I was immediately pulled away from his bed and my sister Vijyaben took me outside. The house was full of relatives, many of whom had arrived from far away villages. Bapa passed away on that day - 30th of January 1944. He was 65 years of age. He was cremated at Padana crematorium and his ashes were scattered in the Padania river.

Bapa's death hit me very hard and for months afterwards I grieved for him. According to Ba, I would not eat or play with my friends, and I refused to talk for a while. In the following months I became very close to my sister Vijyaben. She had always looked after me and taken care of me, but because of the shock of losing Bapa I became more and more attached to her.

It was hard for the whole family to adjust to life without Bapa, but it became even harder for me when six months after his death, Vijyaben was married to Mulchand Popat Dodhia of Kansumra village. Mulchand Banevi lived in Kenya with his family, but had returned to India to find a wife. Vijyaben then left India with her husband and settled in Kenya. I was very sad to lose Vijyaben so soon after losing Bapa.



Vijyaben and Mulchand Banevi

With the head of the family gone, life became very hard for Ba. She still had 2 children to take care of and apart from her work as a seamstress, she did not have any other income. Ba's two eldest sons were away in Kenya but Ba did tell me that both brothers would send money when they could.

Ba's brother, Virpar Mama from Arikhana village, and Anand Banevi, brought us grain and vegetables from their farms whenever they could. Hargan Kaka and Vira Kaki were also invaluable and provided us with immense moral and physical support.

However, it was our neighbour and close friend Kachrabhai and his wife Muribai, who helped us the most and took care of us. Ba was uneducated and unable to read or write, so it was Kachrabhai who looked after our affairs, and Muribai was always there for emotional support. They were like close family to us.

Family life, going to school and spending time with friends, helped me to recover from Bapa's death. I spent several more years in Padana; this was a happy and care-free time for me, and I have many fond memories of this part of my childhood.

In 1949, Ba decided that we should join my brothers in Kenya, and we left Padana, and India, for good. This was a major turning point in my life.

However the memory of walking in Bapa's shadow has stayed with me, and is still as strong today as when I was a child. This has inspired me to write about his life. I hope my children, grandchildren and future generations will learn something valuable about their roots and heritage, just as I have in writing this book.

Epilogue

In 1946 my elder brother, Meghajibhai, who was living in Kenya, returned to India to marry Motiben (daughter of Padamshi Virpar Sumaria of Dabsang village). They were married on 6th March 1946 and soon after returned to Kenya. Three years later, on the 19th June 1949, my sister Savitaben married Velji Samat Gudka also from Kenya.

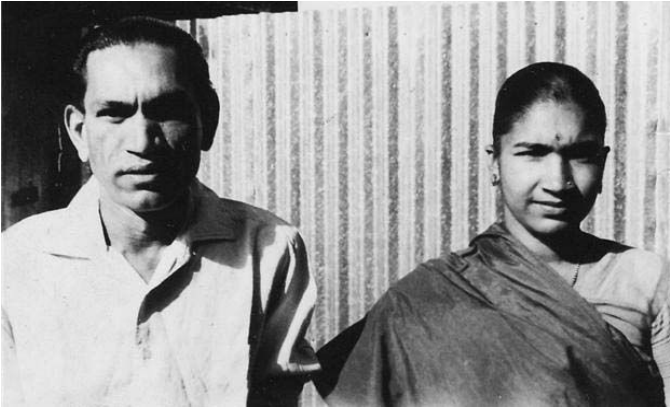
In 1949, Ba myself and Savitaben left Padana, and India and joined my brothers in Nairobi, Kenya.

I spent the next 18 years in Nairobi, Kenya, where I met my wife, Previna Bhimji Bid. We were married in January 1964 and in 1967 I came to London, England to start a new life. Our eldest daughter, Rajvee was born September 1965, Neera was born May 1969 and our youngest daughter, Seema was born December 1972.

More Family photos



Meghajibhai and Moti Bhabhi



Velji Banevi and Savitaben



Rajnikant and Previna

Glossary of Gujarati and Kutchhi words

Atak:	Family surname.
Ayie:	Wife of your Uncle or elderly persons wife. Also Kutchchi word for respected Aunt.
Ba:	Old fashion term for Mother, now more commonly used for grandmother.
Bai:	Old-fashion term for Sister or female cousin. Suffix added to a female name.
Bajro:	Millet.
Bapa:	Father, also father's older brother or cousin.
Banevi:	Brother-in-law (sister's or female cousin's husband).
Bhai:	Brother, male cousin, a suffix added to a male name.
Ben:	Sister, female cousin. Also a suffix added to a female name.
Bhabhi:	Sister-in-law, (brother or cousin's wife).
Bhadalas:	Sea-faring tribe.
Bhatia:	Surname of a Indian community.
Brahmin:	Caste of priests and preachers.
Chhaas:	Buttermilk.
Chhana:	Dried cow dung discs.
Choolo:	Cooking area.
Daal:	Ground pulse or beans, also known as Dhal.
Dahi:	Yogurt.
Danki:	Borehole.

Darbar gadh:	Police station.
Dasani:	Surname of a Indian community.
Deity:	A figure of worship given divine status.
Dhabro:	Blanket.
Dharamshala:	A rest house for visitors.
Dhobi vado:	Open air laundries.
Dhori-vav:	A name of a well built with white stones.
Faiba:	Paternal aunt. Your Father's sister or father's female cousin.
Fundi:	Swahali word for odd job man.
Fuwa:	Husband of your Faiba (see above).
Garbo:	Folkdance.
Ghee:	Clarified butter.
Halar:	Also known as Kathiawad now part of Gujarat state, West India.
Harijans:	Untouchables.
Havedas:	Large trough of water.
Ismaili:	Followers of Aga Khan, also known as Khoja.
Jaar:	A grain also known as Sorghum.
Karai:	Iron pan or deep metal saucepan (similar to a wok).
Kaka:	Paternal Uncle, specifically your Father's younger brother or male cousin .
Kaki:	Father's younger brother or cousin's wife.
Kathi-yari:	Name of our ancestral farm in Padana village.
Khatlo:	Bed made of woven jute.
Khatla:	Plural of khatlo (see above).
Khoja:	Followers of Aga Khan, also known as Ismaili.

Kuldevi:	Family deity.
Ladoo:	Sweetmeat.
Lohana:	An Indian community i.e. Shah, Patel.
Makhan:	Butter.
Mama:	Maternal uncle i.e. mother's brother or male cousin.
Mami:	Wife of your Mama (see above).
Mandir:	Temple.
Masa:	Maternal uncle i.e. husband of your Masi (see below).
Masi:	Maternal aunt, your mother's sister or female cousin.
Mota-bapa:	Paternal uncle, your Father's older brother or older cousin.
Moti-ba:	Wife of your Mota-bapa (see above).
Moto-fari:	A big compound surrounded by dwellings.
Oshwal:	Shah community.
Paghdi:	Turban.
Piya-vo:	A designated place of free drinking water supply for travellers.
Petaro:	Wooden Chest.
Rajput:	A warrior tribe of India. Prior to British rule, Rajputs ruled most of the Kingdoms of India.
Sadhu:	A monk.
Seth:	Means a wealthy person.
Sickle:	A short handled tool with curved blade used for cutting grass, grains and vegetables.
Vav:	Well.

Appendix 1: Emergence of the Haria and Shah Surnames

The Oswal community is made up of many extended families, which are each known by their family surname or *atak* in Gujarati. Examples include Bid, Chandaria, Dodhia, Gudka, Haria, Malde, Nagda, Sumaria, Visaria, Zakharia and many more. My father belonged to the Haria *atak* and used this as his family surname. Any one sharing the same *atak* are blood related although this may go back many generations. It is customary that two people sharing the same *atak* should not normally marry.

According to historical and religious texts, the Haria name originated about 800 years ago in Rajasthan, during the reign of King Punja of Bhinmal⁴³. During this time, a well-known Rajput called Ranmalji lived in the thriving city of Lakhen Bhalani, currently known as Bhalani (see map of India on page 18). Ranmalji had a son called Hariaji. One night, in 1210 AD, Hariaji was bitten by a snake whilst asleep in bed. He was 21 years of age. He began to froth at the mouth and fell unconscious.

⁴³ Sources: Jain Acharya Dharma Sagarji's book "Mahori Pattavalli". "History of Oswals" by Sri Mangilal Bhutoria - Publisher - Priyadarshi Prakashan - Calcutta- Ref.Gotra no 77. Page 49.

The family physician was called but was unable to revive him. His distraught family, believing he was dead, began to prepare the body for cremation. In Hindu tradition, it is common practice to cremate a body within a day or two of death. A Jain *saddhu*, Acharya Dharma Gosh Suri, happened to be passing through the city when he saw the lamenting mourners carrying the body to the funeral pyre, and asked what had happened. He had his suspicions, and asked to see the body. On inspecting it, he concluded that Hariaji was not dead, but had slipped into a coma due to the effect of the snake venom. To the amazement of all, he revived Hariaji by sucking out the poison.

Hariaji's family were overjoyed at his miraculous recovery and news of the incident spread throughout the city. On regaining consciousness, Hariaji embraced the Jain *saddhu* and thanked him for saving his life. From that day, the entire family adopted the Jain religion as their faith and in 1240 AD, Hariaji erected a Jain Temple to the Jain Tirthankar Shantinath in Lakhen-Bhalani. From that time onward Hariaji's descendants have used the Haria⁴⁴ surname as their family name (*atak*).

Hariaji had a son called Padamshi and daughter named Maamal. Maamal married into the Chauhan family.

⁴⁴ From "Kutchh anne Kutchh bahar vasta Sherdi sthane namta Haria nukhna bhaviko mate margdarshika" (Guj) Editors- Hemraj Vershi Haria, Premji Dharamshi Haria and Harakhchand Jethabhai Haria. Javahir Printery, Mumbai, 1995.

Descendents of this family are known within the present Oshwal community as the Dedhia or Dodhia *atak*. Maamal was widowed at a very young age and devoted the rest of her life to religious duties and penance. One day while she was deep in meditation, a fire broke out in the building. She was engulfed and perished. Since that day both the Haria and Dodhia families have revered Maamal, better known as *Momay Mataji*, as their family deity or *kuldevi*. Many centuries later, in 1694, a temple dedicated to *Momay Mataji* was erected in the village of Bidhda, Kutchh.

In the 20th century, many Oshwals started to migrate from India to other parts of the world such as East Africa. As these migrants were few in number, maintaining their cultural and community identity became a priority. For this reason, many Oshwals decided to replace their *atak*-derived surnames such as Haria, Malde, Bid etc, with the generic community surname of Shah, which records show had been in use since at least 165AD⁴⁵. This helped to bring the Oshwal community together, particularly in East Africa.

Thus when I came to settle in East Africa- Meghjbhai, my older brother wrote “Shah” on my passport application rather than “Haria”, as he had done so for himself many years earlier. This is how my family surname changed from Haria to Shah.

⁴⁵ From “History of Oshwals” by Shri Maganlal Bhutoria- English edition 2002, page 92.

However my eldest brother Kanjibhai used 'Haria' as his family name and today his family still use this name.

However, knowing which *atak* you belong to is still important today as it is part of our heritage and ancestry. I am proud to be of the Haria *atak*, as my father, Shamji Jivraj Haria was before me.

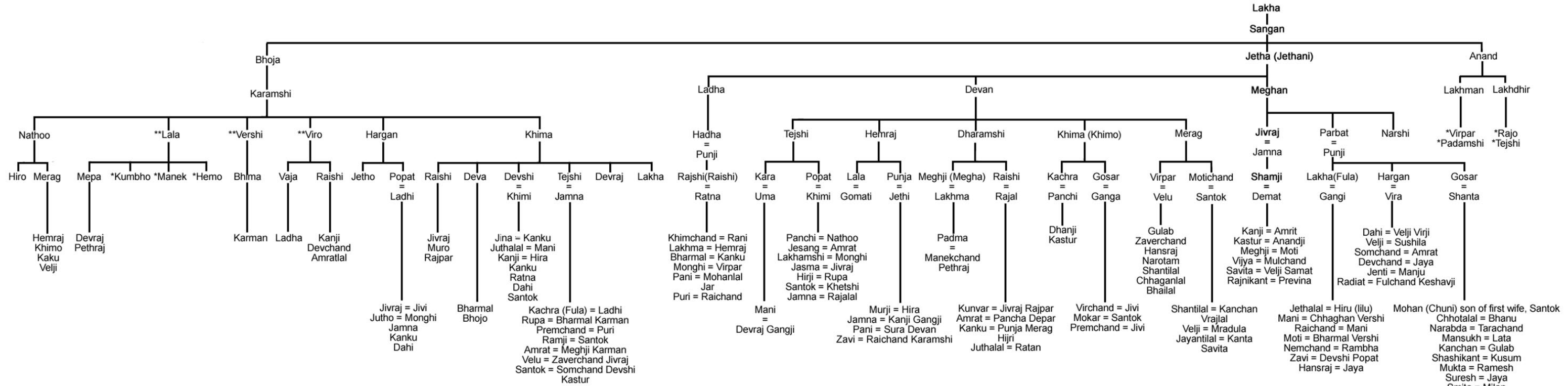
Appendix 2: Extended Haria Family tree

I became interested in tracing our family tree in 1970s and spent many hours between 1970 and 1978 with my mother who at the time was living with me in Finchley, London. She was able to remember the extended Haria family names of many generations mainly through her memories. I also contacted elderly and distant relatives around the world. In this way I was able to trace the male line back seven generations and compile the family tree shown in the fold out pages, attached to the back cover. For more details and information about our extended family tree, you can visit:

<http://kamlesh1960.tribalpages.com>

This website site is currently maintained by my nephew, Kamlesh Haria, for further information and details you can contact him at k.haria@btinternet.com

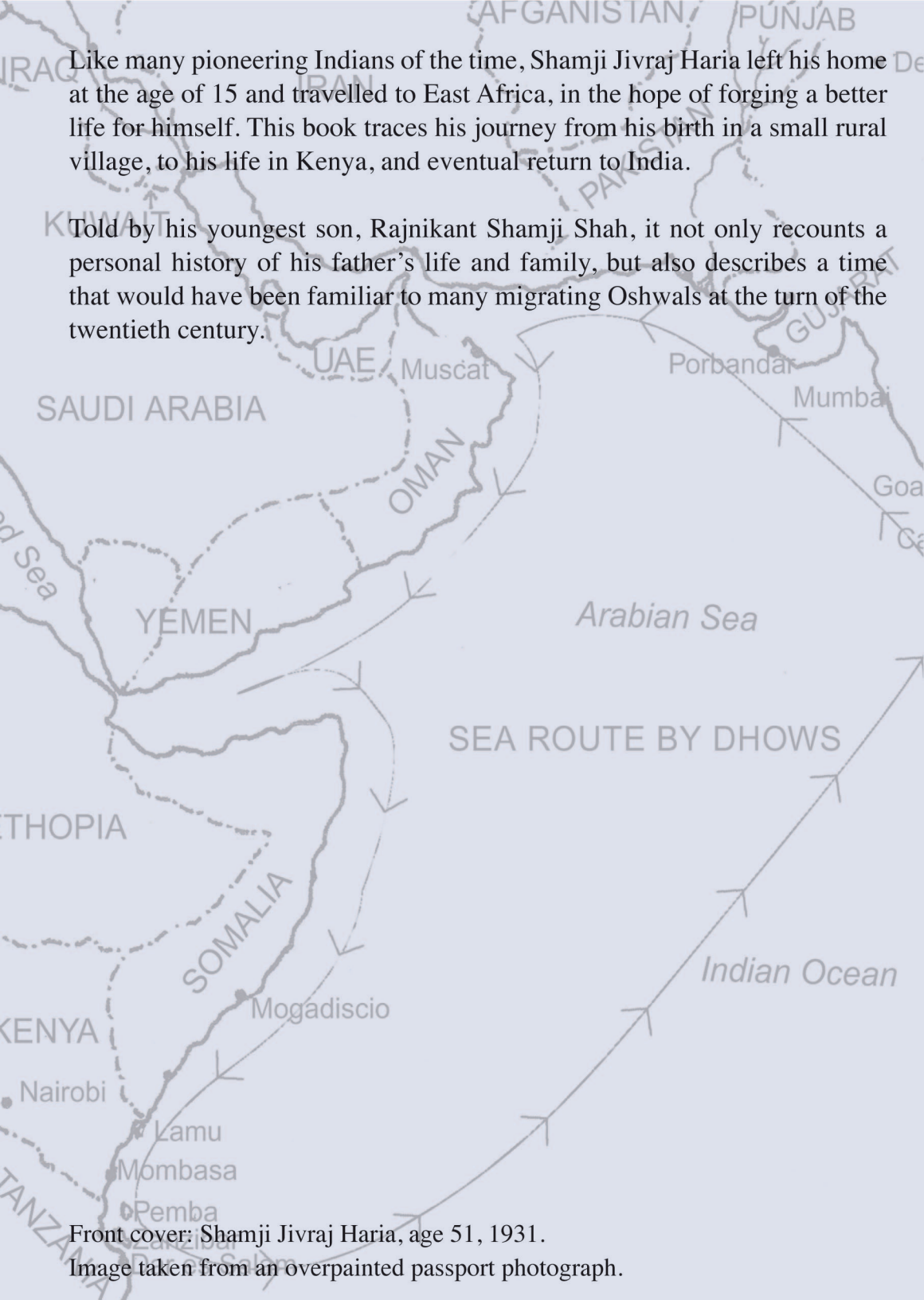
Appendix 2: Extended Haria Family Tree



* No further details available
 ** Three brothers followed one another to Rafudar village between 1860 and 1880

Like many pioneering Indians of the time, Shamji Jivraj Haria left his home at the age of 15 and travelled to East Africa, in the hope of forging a better life for himself. This book traces his journey from his birth in a small rural village, to his life in Kenya, and eventual return to India.

Told by his youngest son, Rajnikant Shamji Shah, it not only recounts a personal history of his father's life and family, but also describes a time that would have been familiar to many migrating Oshwals at the turn of the twentieth century.



Front cover: Shamji Jivraj Haria, age 51, 1931.

Image taken from an overpainted passport photograph.