

REFLECTIONS: SWEET and SOUR MEMORIES of The Prasad Family of Bellbowrie

**Life story of
Dr Ram Lakhan Prasad
and
Mrs Saroj Kumari Prasad**

**Journey of the Prasad Family from Basti in
Uttar Pradesh India to Botini, Sabeto in Fiji
thence to Bellbowrie, Brisbane in Australia .**

*We believe in
Truth, Beauty and Goodness*

In loving memory of Saroj Kumari Devi



**A devoted wife, a caring
mother, a loving grand
mother, a quality educator,
a faithful friend and an
exceptional personality.**

REFLECTIONS



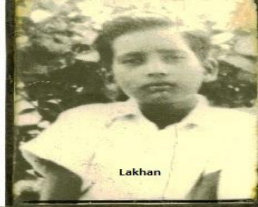
SWEET & SOUR MEMORIES OF THE PRASAD FAMILY

Dr Ram Lakhan Prasad & Mrs Saroj Kumari Prasad

Reflections: Sweet & Sour Memories of The Prasad Family



Saroj



Lakhan



Praanesh



Praneeta



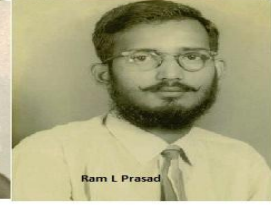
Harshita



Rohitesh



Saroj K Prasad



Ram L Prasad

Bhala tha kitna apna bachpan

**Saroj Kumari Devi
Harshita Prasad**

**Ram Lakhan Prasad
Rohitesh Prasad**

भला था कितना अपना बचपन

**Praanesh Prasad
Saroj Kumari Prasad**

**Praneeta Prasad
Ram Lakhan Prasad**



Jaya Prasad

Jayden Nitish Prasad



Hamish Nikhil Prasad

Sonali Esha Patel



Anjali Divya Patel

Elliott Rohan Prasad



Meera Prasad

Charlotte Asha Prasad



Jayden Nitish Prasad



Sonali Esha Patel



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This is a series of golden memories of The Prasad Family of Bellbowrie narrated by Dr Ram Lakhan and Mrs Saroj Kumari Prasad

Journey of the Prasad family from Basti in UP India to Botini, Sabeto in Fiji thence to Bellbowrie, Brisbane in Australia .



Sweet & Sour Memories of Our Life



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Chapter One

One day in 2010 I heard an unusual voice that seemed to come from the sky- It seemed as if it was a divine word and a gift of love.

“Do not think that life without a body is an empty one, my friend, for the spring from where we all draw life is next to you but you cannot see it. We bathe in it, you and me. That same spring, you bathe your body and I dip my soul in, can be found just by your side. Seek and ye shall find.

It is this spring, this source, which really supports every miracle, every phenomenon we see as ordinary in our world. We see it all. We are excruciatingly close to this Reality. However, just as we cannot see our own eyes, only the visions they offer, this Reality evades us. Just as we can no longer see the water that makes the snow, no one will ever know the real truth about your life but you yourself alone. So try telling it all to your loved ones, my friend.”

When the voice faded away, I made a promise to the divine words that I will try my best to reveal every aspect of my life to my loved ones. All that cannot be told will be interred with my bones when I am gone from this

world. The rest of it is here for all of you to read, interpret, ponder and understand.

Do you find the above piece confusing? Yes, my life has been confusing but I am trying to interpret it the way I see it right. Read along and you will understand my objectives and find me somewhere near you.

There has never been anything more important for me than living a happy and fruitful life. I have always felt that as long as there is life and a devoted wife like my Saroj, there is definitely hope. Hope for the family, hope for the people, hope for the country and hope for better living. My wife Saroj and I have lived for the last fifty four years happily because we had hope. We had trust in each other. We had faith in our future that we planned to build and construct it rightly.

Our hopes have always been much greater than our life because we always believed that within us was a super power and positive potential to enable us to exert and reach for the sky. There never was any limit to our progress. Yet there was no greed to keep acquiring more than what we needed but we had a total sense of contentment.

We always wanted to do better and improve not only our performance but also our total life. We wanted to see and experience greater success in

every development that was going on around our family and us. In all our achievements, we felt our complete satisfaction at all times. There was no question of any misgivings. We worked to our definite goals and plans. We have succeeded in achieving many of our aims and objectives.

Although Saroj and I have reached a milestone in our life together, I wish to narrate it alone so that only I am responsible for all the errors and mistakes that have been made knowingly or accidentally. These are all my sweet but a few sour memories. However, I managed to persuade her to contribute and she produced what I called “The Golden Lotus” but she titled it as *The Shrivelled Lotus*.

As an introduction I think it would be appropriate to reveal my roots right here.

Chapter Two

My Roots-From Basti to Botini

The Fijian chiefs ceded Fiji to the British Government in 1874 but the natives were not culturally ready to participate in the economic development of the country. So the British Government in conjunction with some multinational enterprises went to other colonies to bring people who could be manipulated to help them achieve their economic goals.

The Colonial Sugar Refining Company with the help and support of the British Government was willing to exploit the situation and enter the scene of the so-called economic development of the country. The Company hired cunning recruiters (Arkathis) to visit various villages and cities of India to recruit young and healthy Indians who could work on the sugarcane plantations and orchards belonging to them. They in turn recruited Indian priests and village heads to do the initial ground work for them because the people there could trust these men. Thus began the Indenture System for the Colony of Fiji in 1879 commonly known as *Girmit*.

Gangadei was my grand mother. She was a pretty girl and was as calm as her name sounds. She was born in Sitapur in the district of Basti which is in Uttar Pradesh (North India). She was the last of the four children of the farming family. Very little else is known about her childhood but she was an intelligent and a strong woman.

She was a twelve-year-old girl when she accompanied a group from her village to go to the annual Ayodhya Festival, a religious gathering of villagers. This festival used to be so crowded with people that once one is lost it would be impossible to locate them easily. It was in that massive crowd of people that my grand mother got separated from the village group. She felt alone and frantically began searching her group but alas there was no hope. Tired and hungry she decided to sit down in a corner completely disappointed. At that time her condition was like a fish detached from water.

Where could she go? Who would help her? What should she do? She was confused and did not know what to do. She had lost her thinking power altogether in this confusion. 'Into thy hands Lord, I commend my Spirit.' Nothing remained in her own hands, everything in His.

A yellow robed pundit of middle age saw my grand mother's condition and expressed his wish to assist her. Such people were respected in the

village and she felt at ease to talk to him. He spoke kindly, “Beti, why are you crying? Have you lost your way? Have you lost your family members? You don’t worry because as a holy man I am here to help you.”

My grand mother felt that this help was god sent and she greeted the pundit with respect and told him her sad story. Punditji realised that my grand mother was in real need for his assistance and this made him very happy. The pundit however, hid his real eager feelings and expressed his concerns and pseudo sadness as if his own daughter or sister was in trouble needing his assistance.

He pacified my grand mother and expressed his sorrow. “Well, whatever was to happen has happened but now you do not have to worry any more. I am here for you. I am calling a rickshaw to take you home.”

Whatever my grand mother longed for, this middle-aged Brahman was prepared to deliver so she fully trusted him and agreed to return home with him. The pundit made a signal to a nearby rickshaw operator who was eagerly waiting for him. They sat in it and left the busy festival ground to a destination unknown.

My grand mother was eager to reach home but instead she arrived at a Coolie Depot and then

she realised that this fake pundit was an agent (Arkathi) to recruit workers for the Indenture System. She cursed herself for trusting him but it was too late now. She was a prisoner in this Coolie Depot from where it was impossible to escape. There were various other unfortunate souls sitting and cursing their fates there and were unsure of their future.

The next day all the recruits appeared before the resident magistrate to register themselves as slaves to work in a foreign land. After the registration for gimit they were put on a cargo train bound for the port of Calcutta. When my grand mother reached the Depot in Calcutta she could not believe her eyes when she witnessed the dilapidated nature of the place. Her worry and sadness multiplied manifolds but she could not do anything else but cry.

The late Sir Henry Cotton in his report to the British Parliament writes this on Gimit Recruitment Procedure:

In too many instances the subordinate recruiting agents resort to criminal means inducing these victims by misrepresentation or by threats to accompany them to a contractor's depot or railway station where they are spirited away before their absence has been noticed by their friends and relatives. The records of the criminal courts teem with instances of fraud, abduction of married women and young persons, wrongful confinement, intimidation and actual violence- in fact a tale of crime and outrage which would arouse a storm of public

indignation in any civilized country. In India the facts are left to be recorded without notice by a few officials and missionaries.

The new recruits suffered great injustice at the hands of the clerks and agents at the depot. Men and women were forced into small rooms like animals. Men and women were compelled and forced to get into pairs and then they were declared wife and husband. Those that did not agree were locked together and the men were instructed to make the women agree. Those who failed to come out as pairs were punished severely.

This pairing that turned into illegitimate marriage gave the agents publicity that the girmity was conducted with the consent and willingness of wife and husband. This was far from the truth. In most cases the forced pairing led to social disaster and in some it turned out to be a blessing for the recruits because they could share their sorrows and grief.

It was in this Calcutta Coolie Depot that my grand mother met my grand father. My grandma's case was a sad one. She worried a lot about her future and the forced pairing so she decided to choose my grandpa as her husband because he was from the same district (Basti) and he was strong and handsome. That was the beginning of their family life and the authorities registered their marriage.

My grand father was Sarju Murau who was born in Dumariaganj in Basti UP India. His father Shankar had a farm where he grew mangoes and other fruits but since there were four other brothers in the family my grand father at the age of fourteen was asked to work for a landlord in the next village of Senduri at almost no pay but only keeps.

One day my grand father was caught putting a few ripe mangoes in his bag to take home so he was branded a thief. This stigma became unbearable for a growing and honest young man of fourteen. He knew he would be ridiculed if he went home so he left this landlord in search of other jobs elsewhere. He walked a long distance in search of work, which was not that easy to find. He reached Kashipur but he had not even reached the town when he was spotted by a cunning recruiting agent (arkathi).

After noticing the predicament my grand father was in, the recruiting agent took advantage of the situation. He started a friendly conversation with my grand father, which went somewhat like this:

“How are you my friend? Are you looking for work?” asked the agent.

“What kind of work sir, and what would I get as wages?” my grand father wanted to know.

“Well, my friend, this is not work at all,” the cunning agent said in order to trap my grand father.

“In fact, you are indeed lucky and certainly you are destined to becoming very rich and famous soon. There is a beautiful island off the coast of Calcutta known as the Ramneek Dweep. A very rich landlord resides there and he needs the services of a security guard to look after his home and the farm. You will get full uniform, food ration and a farmhouse to live in. You will only work for twelve hours a day with a gun hanging across your shoulder marching up and down the entire property. You cannot find such a lucrative job anywhere here because you will just enjoy your daily tasks and even earn money. What else do you want?”

My grand father felt very good and began imagining himself as a security guard with a gun hanging across his shoulder marching up and down the property in the day and enjoying life in his farmhouse at night. This sounded like heaven to him. He began to dream about his future life full of fun. He was not prepared to hear any more but to sincerely thank the agent and agreed to travel immediately. The agent felt good to trap another recruit.

Seeing that my grand father was tired and hungry the agent took him to a nearby eating-house and

fed to his hearts content. Then they got into a rickshaw to start their journey to the dreamland. But when they reached the coolie depot my grand father's hopes were shattered and he felt disappointed with himself for believing such stories of the agent and falling into his trap.

When my grand father saw the crowd of people he regretted his every move. He too joined the other unfortunate victims in the depot to hang his head down and cry. He too felt like an animal in a strong cage unable to find its way out. He began thinking that his village was much better place to live a free life than this dungeon. He was told by some recruits that he will be in Fiji where he would work long hours on sugarcane farms owned by white men. He will have to sweat from head to tail twenty-four hours a day and tolerate the harsh treatments of the field officers. He was not able to imagine the reality of the situation then but when in Fiji he told me all.

There was nothing he could do to get out of this depot because of very tight security there. At last one day he too was presented to the office of the magistrate who asked him only one question, "Do you agree to go to this island to work as a labourer?" "Yes sir!" answered my grandpa as the recruiting agent instructed him.

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