

Tipubai- Motherhood and beyond



Jitendra Sanghvi

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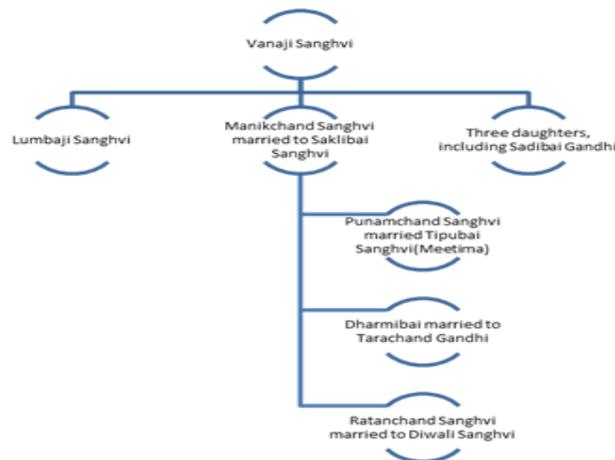
Author's note: This is my attempt to write a brief document on the life of my Paternal Aunt Mrs. Tipubai Sanghvi, born more than 100 years ago. I have researched events that happened during the time and used my memories growing up in a joint family, having heard anecdotal stories of events that happened during and in my Aunt's life and witnessed certain incidents. If I have inadvertently, omitted or modified any occasions in the write up, I ask for the readers' forgiveness in advance.

Early Life

Tipubai, my elder *Kaki* or as we called her *Meetima* (sweet mother - the wife of my father's elder brother), was born in 1909 in Kalandri, in Sirohi State (now part of Rajasthan), a princely kingdom under the British Raj. She was the only surviving daughter of her parents. She was the oldest child, with two younger brothers, who for most of their lives never left their birthplace in present day Rajasthan, a state in India

Tipubai was betrothed to my *Baasa* (elder Uncle - Father's older brother) Punamchand, at the age of sixteen; she was a year older than my Uncle was. This unusual age gap – bride older than the groom – was not uncommon in this part of the world, as it apparently allowed a certain form of respect between the husband and wife in a patriarchal system. This betrothal was very much celebrated within both families as my Baasa was the first one to get engaged for the immediate family in his generation. He only had a younger sister at this time; my father was born much later. Also, his Grandfather, Vanaji, had established a successful business enterprise in Poona (now known as Pune), and a forthcoming marriage would be a well-celebrated occasion in the community.

The Vanaji Family Tree



After her wedding, Tipubai moved to another village a few kilometres away, where her husband's family lived- Sanpur. She came into a family that was run as a joint family between two sisters-in-law, my grandmother, [Saklibai](#) and my grandaunt (the wife of my grandfather's older brother). My Great Grandfather, Vanaji, the patriarch of the family, was a widower. Most of the time, Vanaji and his two sons (my grandfather and his brother), along with my Baasa and his cousin, lived in faraway Poona where the boys were getting a formal education and the family had established a business.

During this time of betrothal, my grandaunt suddenly died, leaving the care of her five children in the hands of my grandmother. Although the oldest daughter in my grandaunt's five children was already married, the entire responsibility of managing the two family units was now solely on my grandmother, who had two children at this time, including Tipubai's young fiancé, and my twelve year old Bhua or Aunt, Dharmibai. (A story about her is available [here](#).) The underlying presumption in this situation was that my grandmother expected her new daughter-in-law to be a big help, once the wedding took place.

During those times, in villages like Kalandri and Sanpur, medical services were limited to the local Vaidya (Ayurvedic Doctor), and during childbirth, there were midwives to help. As Tipubai was growing up, she witnessed death in childbirth. This was, in a way, a precursor to her future, although her experience in a unique way, was going to be even more despondent.

Around the age of twenty-one, Tipubai gave birth to her son Javerchand. He was about two years younger than my father, who was born as the third surviving child to my Grandmother, fifteen years younger than his immediate older sibling, my Bhua.

Around this time, my Bhua was going through her engagement and wedding, and my great grandfather in Poona was being encouraged to organize a major Jain Sangh. (Read about it [here](#)). Tipubai's son was born just after the Sangh. Punamchand and Tipubai were the second couple in line after my Grandparents – Manikchand and Saklibai – for various ceremonies that had to be performed in rituals during the initiation and culmination processes for the Sangh. My father and Baasa's cousin had his fiancé in the Sangh but they were not married; my Grandfather and Granduncle were both widowers, and these ceremonies recommended married couples to perform them, hence it was an important time for Tipubai.



This map shows the general area of Sirohi, Kalandri & Sanpur, near Mount Abu, in the original princely Sirohi State which is located in present day State of Rajasthan in India. The straight line distance between Mount Abu and Sanpur, and also between Kalandri and Sanpur, is around 15 miles.

After the Sangh, where there was a major mishap resulting in the death of my Grandfather. After this debilitating blow to the family, as a breath of fresh air Punamchand and Tipubai were soon blessed with a son, Javerchand (my cousin), who became close to all his elders, as he grew up.

Middle years

Tipubai's son, Javerchand and my father Ratanchand, grew up as siblings although my father was Javerchand's uncle. They were less than three years apart in age, and attended the same Catholic school where they were taught in the English Language in pre-independence India. This school at the time was run by Swiss-German Priests, who spoke several European and Indian languages. My father and my cousin were some of the first ones from our family and the general Rajasthani Diaspora from the Sirohi area in Pune to attend this school.

Tipubai and my Baasa were very happy raising their young son, although they did face the death of another child in infancy after their son's birth. There were other very sad events in the immediate family including the widowhood of my Bhua Dharmibai, who had come back to her parents and lived with her mother and brothers. Javerchand, as I understand, was very soft-spoken, close to all and apparently an artist of sorts, as I would find out much later. (This happened after I graduated with an Engineering degree, and was teaching for a few months at a private Engineering College in Pune. The Head of the Department, who just by noticing my last name, asked me one day if I was related to a person named Javerchand. I was surprised at this, since Javerchand was only a name to me; he had passed away more than two decades before my birth. After I confirmed with a nod, he told me that Javerchand was his best friend, and he had so many good memories of his childhood friend, who in the Professor's opinion was a great artist!)

By the mid-1940s, Tipubai's young brother-in-law (my father) was married to my mother, Diwali (Read about her [here](#).) The joint family of Vanaji had given way to separate homes for the families of Vanaji's two sons, as most of the women had started to live in Pune also after the 1940s.

Consequent to my mother's wedding, my Nanaji – mother's father – was looking for a groom for his third daughter – my *maasi*. My Nanaji convinced my Baasa and his Grandfather, for another match between the families! So Javerchand got engaged to my *maasi*, my mother's younger stepsister. This was a happy time for all in Tipubai, Punamchand and Javerchand's extended family.

But this was short lived as fifteen year old Javerchand fell severely ill due to Typhoid and passed away.

This was a shock and an immense loss to Tipubai and my Baasa, and, of course, the entire family including my Grandmother, my father and my Bhua who were all very close to him. Tipubai and my Baasa's family now had no living children at all – Javerchand was the only child that either the brother or the sister had. And sadly, he had passed away.

Later years

The expectations from the recently married couple- my parents, was to have children soon. My mother conceived almost five years after my parents' wedding, four years after Javerchand's untimely death. As was the custom during the times, my mother went to her maternal home in Kolhapur to deliver her baby.

My oldest brother was born in November 1949; when the news reached Sanpur, everyone, including Tipubai was happy.

By this time, for various reasons, there was a decision for all family members to move to Poona, with regular visits to Sanpur as required. A new home was acquired in Poona for my parents, my Grandmother and Dharmibai to live in. Tipubai and my Baasa still lived in the upper level of the ancestral residence in Poona, along with his cousin's family. This residence and business location had been purchased by my Great-grandfather in the 1900s, almost 50 years ago.

My parents' were subsequently blessed with another son. This was an important event for Tipubai and her husband, as in the tradition of the society they lived in, this was a chance for them to adopt the second son and continue the legacy of their branch of the family. It was normal for such an adoption to take place. My Bhua, who was blessed as a sort of family oracle, declared that this was the wish of the mother goddess, who had appeared in her dream and given that direction. Thus, it was decided that my brother would carry on and grow up as a son of Punamchand and Tipubai Sanghvi.

So Tipubai, became the adoptive mother of a child who could have been the age of her grandson, had her own son not died as a youth. The living arrangements did not change much. All my parents' children were still raised predominantly by my mother, and grew up like all typical siblings. Tipubai and my Baasa were in the same extended household, so they had access to their adopted son as needed. Additionally, my older siblings and some of their second cousins born to my father's cousins were being raised in Pune around the same neighbourhood. So, it was a large extended family environment in the 1950s and 1960s.

How did Tipubai come to be called *Meetima*? My father's cousin had children who were similar in age to my siblings and me, but since he and his wife were older than my father, he and his wife were also referred to as Baasa and Maa as a token of respect. The confusion would come between the two "Maas". One day, the children had some argument with the other "Maa", my father's cousin by marriage, wherein Tipubai intervened to help the children out. And unbeknownst to her, my older siblings decided to refer to Tipubai as *Meetimaa* versus *Khaatimaa* (sour mother), as they secretly named the other "maa". Of course, only the name *Meetima* stuck since it was a pleasing and affectionate name, while thankfully, the other name just disappeared.

The years went by.

My older five siblings were all married by the mid-1970s. Tipubai had a special role in my second brother's wedding as his adoptive mother. She and my Baasa celebrated more than 50 years of their marriage with a special ceremony, called *Mamera*, in which Tipubai's brothers and their families came with special gifts for their older sister.



Tipubai Sanghvi. 1976

Final years

Tipubai, now almost felt like a normal mother or mother-in-law would feel. The whole family lived in an extended environment; with the advent of her adopted son's wife, who planned to be a homemaker, Tipubai had a new member in her immediate small family.

When Tipubai was in her mid-sixties, her health started to deteriorate. One summer day in 1976, as I was returning home from school (which was just a few blocks from my home), one of the local nannies who helped with my nieces and nephews at home, met me halfway on the streets, and said that Meetima had collapsed. When I reached home, I found out she was paralysed. She was in hospital for several days, and for the subsequent months she had nurses at home day and night.

Unfortunately, the recommended Physical therapy was probably never followed in her case. She passed away in her sleep a few months later. My Baasa, always a very soft spoken and quiet person, was devastated. Fortunately, he lived in the joint and extended family of his brother, and they took good care of him until his death almost twenty years later.

Now, almost another twenty year later, my brother who was adopted by my Baasa and Tipubai still keeps their memory alive in his home with their pictures adorning his living room.

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