

Mary Ann

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*Brushes
with
Memories*



Lady Premlila Thackersey
8.1.1894 - 30.11.1977

FOREWORD

The Birth centenary of Lady Premlila Thackersey was celebrated last year. The SNDT Women's University organised many programmes and activities including publishing of a Souvenir. The vice-chancellor, Dr. Suma Chitnis at this juncture expressed her wish that the affiliated colleges should also participate in the centenary celebrations. This encouragement and our sense of admiration for Lady Thackersey moved us to contribute in our own way.

As a true tribute to a great personality, we decided to rejuvenate and concretise the memories associated with Lady Thackersey. This could be best pursued by collecting the reminiscences of those fortunate individuals, who knew her well and were associated with her. We asked such persons to send us their written reminiscences. After sifting through their responses, we present the edited versions of these tributes.

All these pieces form a unity in the sense that they are infused with the identical spirit of nostalgia and admiration for such a well-remembered person as Lady Thackersey. We express our gratitude for these contributions and offer them as our modest tribute.

On the behalf of the management, the students, the staff and the Principal of Smt. Maniben M P Shah Women's College of Arts & Commerce, we pay our homage to Hon. Lady Premlila Thackersey.

Mohinee Mankekar

Principal

Smt. Maniben M. P. Shah

Women's College of Arts & Commerce

Matunga, Mumbai.

PERFECT UNDERSTANDING OF A GREAT SOUL

Smt. Shardaben Divan

Lady Premlila Thackersey was admired and respected by all those who came in contact with her, and I am no exception to it. I highly appreciate the way she worked single handedly without her esteemed husband Sir Vithaldas Thackersey.

Though she herself was an active person she possessed that unique quality of judging the people and their work. I was on the committee of Vanita Vishram English School when she met me for the first time. She must have liked my method of work and therefore she invited me to become the principal of the school, which was in bad condition, and put it in proper shape. She was satisfied and impressed by my efforts to bring the school in its shape and hence she thought of calling me to work as the Registrar of the S.N.D.T. Women's University, for its smooth functioning. I joined the University as per her desire and it was here that I got opportunity of meeting plenty of big dignitaries like President DR. Rajendra Prasad, Mahatma Gandhiji and so on.

Lady Premlilaben treated me like one of her family members and everytime I went to Poona I would stay with her in that famous 'Parnakuti'. She had not received much of formal education. But she had trained herself to such a great extent that she could move in high class society with profuse fluency. She would always take me with her

whenever she attended any seminar or conference in or out of Bombay. She being a strict vegetarian she would always carry a cook with her and that was great advantageous to me also.

Lady Thackersey was of open mind and would not mind learning anything even from highly educated person. In those days Sports activities had no place in the S. N. D. T. Women's University. But I was fully convinced that sports play an important role in the development of students personality. Therefore I goaded her to introduce the various sports and games which she readily accepted.

She herself was a perfectionist and she wanted others also to be perfect in their work. She would always help and encourage those who wanted to be flawless in their job. I remember, Maharshi Karve Centenary celebration was to be held at Brabourne Stadium. I was in charge of all the arrangements. I could manage everything else but one important item. I was supposed to read in fiction Hon. President of India's message which was to be in Hindi. And I was not at all fluent in speaking Hindi. Therefore I took special training in Hindi pronunciation. When Lady Thackersey came to know about it she was very much pleased and she appreciated this act of mine.

Though she was well versed in English Conversation she would speak in Kutchi or Gujarati rather than English if the opposite person knew that language. She was a staunch supporter of regional languages. In those days English as a subject was omitted from the syllabus of S. N. D. T Women's University. Instead of English, Hindi was introduced as compulsory language, as it is our national language. I was of the opinion that since English is international language of communication every student should be at least familiar with the language, if not proficient.

I had to give a tough fight in syndicate in support of my argument. Studying carefully the pros and cons of the argument Lady Thackersey agreed for the introduction of English as a subject.

Ladysaheb was fondly called as Bai or Mother. Truly like an ideal mother she would look after the needs and difficulties of persons working with her. When I joined S.N.D.T. Women's University my children were very young and there was no one to take their proper care. Therefore I put many conditions while accepting the job. For instance, I will leave the premises immediate if there is any call from my home because of some difficulty, and so on. Of course I promised also to see that my work is finished on time. Ladysaheb was aware of my Problems and she readily accepted all my conditions.

I had no car then I used to travel by bus. Lady Thackersey knew all about it. Therefore when I lost my revealed husband, she immediately ordered to sanction me car allowance thus trying to help me to come out of my situation.

I am sure everyone who came in her contact will have some such cherished memories of different aspects of her astonishing personality.



REMINISCENCES

Kamalini Bhansali

Dr. Premlila Thackersey, who contributed to the growth and development of the SNDT Women's University for nearly sixty years was greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and she tried to adopt his philosophy of life and work.

I used to accompany her on many occasions. In the evenings, she would reminisce about past events. She met Gandhiji for the first time in 1915 at Jaijiben Petit's house. Later he and Kasturba stayed with her at her house Parnakuti in Pune in 1933 during his twenty-one days fast. She came close to him and Ba during this time and was greatly impressed by his simplicity, calmness, regular habits and humanity.

At one of the meetings where Gandhiji was presiding, Premlilaben reached two minutes late. Bapu did not say anything but she gauged his expression and that was the last time she was late for any meeting. When she got engaged to Sir Vithaldas Thackersey, a leading industrialist and philanthropist of Bombay, in his first letter to her he expressed his views on using wealth for the welfare of others. He wanted her to think about the matter seriously. She accepted this as her goal of life and fulfilled it till the end. She would tell me how on every important milestone of the University, she would be the first to put her share in the donation fund before going to others. During the Silver Jubilee of the University, Jaykar in his speech described

her as the third royal beggar after Gandhiji and Malaviyaji. I remember accompanying her on several occasions collecting donations for the University. She was looked upon with great respect by one and all. I consider myself very fortunate to have worked under her guidance during my Registrarship.



MEMORABLE EPISODES: LADY THACKERSEY

Shri Ishu N. Kaji

Serenity and sincerity, simplicity and solemnity, purity and divinity, creativity and fraternity, were the sterling qualities of Lady Premlila Vithaldas Thackersey.

Vision, precision and decision- your name is Lady Thackersey. Honour to the elders, equality with the contemporary, and love to the younger ones, maternal feelings for all, regardless of sex, caste and creed, young or old, rich or poor, persons of any status in life- was the humane approach for all. Sympathy and spirit of co-operation, adjustments with others and fellowship with the intelligent- were her ethical values of life

Her **PARNAKUTI** at Poona- meaning a cottage of leaves, misnomer, but in reality a marble palace- a sweet home for Babu, Mahatma Gandhiji and Ba, Kasturba! Parnakuti was also a living harmony, a heavenly home, away from home, for Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan and several other leaders and dignitaries in the country.

I had the pleasant privilege to witness all these benevolent occasions, and to be beneficiary of her ethical values of life.

My memories flash almost six decades back, when I had the opportunity to participate very actively and prominently in the celebrations on a very large scale, of the Silver Jubilee of Vanita Vishram High School, Bombay, I was the Junior-most and youngest Assistant Teacher in the

School, but even then, Lady Thackersey, as President of the parent body, had reposed in me faith and confidence, of which, I proved worthy of it, as she often used to tell my other colleagues.

Thereafter, there arose a very critical situation in the above School and all its other sister institutions. Revision in the payscales, *ad hoc* increments, better service conditions, etc. failing which no assessment for the Annual Examination work!

Lady Thackersey came to meet all teachers and suggested that any one person should represent, on behalf of all, for a decisive dialogue with the Management. All the colleagues, including the Principals of the three Institutions on the campus, unanimously nominated me as their trusted Representative.

“Oh No. He is the Junior-most, quite new to the institutions, how can he represent all of you?” All had then said with one voice, “Madam, we have abundant and absolute faith in him, similar to that you had at the time of the Silver jubilee of our Institution.”

It was a great challenge for me then. It was a herculean task. Encouraged by my colleagues, I took up the assignment. I had a couple of meetings with the Management, especially with Lady Thackersey. I put forth, in the light of the changing times, our requests, not demands, no threatening action, bearing in mind the limited resources of the Parent Body.

It was a pleasant surprise for me and my colleagues, one and all when at the next meeting with the Management and the staff members, Lady Thackersey on behalf of the Management stated that as President, she would sign on a

blank paper and Shri Kaji would frame memorandum of requests of all of you, individually and collectively and his statement and all figures of *ad hoc* increment for all in their pay packet, will be final and binding to me as president and all members of the Management. She added that they all were sure that Shri Kaji Would not do any injustice or partiality to any one, act rationally and logically, and also will not impose a very heavy financial liability on the Parent Body.

After having collected the necessary data, I submitted my report, after having shown to my colleagues and having obtained their assent, to the Management and it was accepted in toto. I was extremely happy on that occasion and when I bowed down to Lady Thackersey, with all humility, she blessed me with those echoing words, still reverberating, "Keep on such spirit in future and be fair to your colleagues and fair to the Management as well." That trust and confidence in me blossomed and strengthened on various occasions thereafter.

One blessed morning, she sent a message for me to see her at the University. I was shocked at first but when I met her there, she asked me "Will you like to work at the University office? If so, apply and you will be called for an Interview before the Selection Committee." I told her that I had no experience of the work at the University. She then encouraged me. "You are young and energetic. You have the organising power and administrative ability. Give it a chance to prove it at the University level. Show your mettle."

She was the President of the selection Committee. When my turn came for the interview, she was not present at that time. She had intentionally remained out, as a matter of

principle. My interview lasted for almost an hour. There were volleys of question arrows from different directions, on any topic under the sky.

Next day, Lady Thackersey informed me,

“The Selection Committee has selected you out of so many other candidates, because of your disciplined manner in replying the questions with confidence and that you seemed to be sober and humble.”

With all her blessings, she accorded me an entry at the University as an Administrator, just next to the then Honorary Registrar Smt Laxmiben Thackersey. This gave me an unique opportunity to work under her Vice-chancellorship. I came in closer contact with her. Often I was called at her residence to discuss all items on the agenda of the meetings of the Academic Council, the Syndicate and the Senate. She used to cross question me on many matters and it was my pleasure to clarify and elaborate them.

She did not possess any University Degree but she was, without it much more. However, she was an institution by herself. In fact she was the Doctorate of the HOME University, as she was the living monument of the University.

During the Golden jubilee of the University, I had the proud privilege to be with her, when she went out to meet the prominent dignitaries in Bombay and New Delhi.

When in New Delhi, she would ask me to take an appointment with the Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The message I used to receive from his office, was “Ladysaheb does not require an appointment to see me. She can drop in any time convenient to her”

Lady Thackersey and I had once gone to see Panditji He was attending the Parliamentary Session but even then, he

came out immediately, discussed all matters with her for about half an hour and then came down near her car to see her off and wish her.

Similar love and honour she received from the president, Vice-President, and other ministers. In reality she was the National Hostess.

She was the President of the conference of Vice Chancellors of all Universities in the Country. The Venue of the conference was the S.N.D.T. Women's University, Bombay. The sixth floor of the new building of the University was on a way to completion. She made the builder to complete the sixth floor on a war-footing-non-stop work day and night. She would spare her precious time morning and evening to see that the work was finished in time, achieving perfection in all its dimensions. The Conference Hall was ready in a fortnight, well equipped and well-furnished having a gorgeous look-all perfect.

On her 75th Birthday, she was felicitated by the University, when the elite of the society and eminent educationists had attended to honour her and receive blessings from her. At the end of the function, she was a recipient of a standing ovation, amply applauded continuously, from the densely overcrowded Patkar Hall elegant audience- as a mark of the highest regards for her. This was unique, unparallel in the history of the University.

She always supported me, even pulled up on certain occasions when I was erring unconsciously and I learnt from her the maxims of life- "Be good, do good to all and remain honest to yourself and the community at large" She had a wonderful sense of exactness of time, exactness in

her work and expected the same exactness for any work for her too. She disciplined me to be punctual and regular. She had imbibed in me the highest value of life honesty and sincerity, truthful and devoted to duty. She had engraved in me the highest ideals of integrity, exactness and co-operative spirit and dedication to the work assigned.

For office work and some meetings at poona. I had to go there. She had insisted that I should stay at Parnakuti only and no where else. There was a beautiful garden there only. Early morning she invited me to join her for an hour morning walk. She walked so fast that I had to strive hard to keep pace with her.

She would recite Gita audibly and I was an attentive listener to her Gita recital.

After that, she would discuss some academic and administrative problems faced at the University and would suggest easy and acceptable solutions for each of them.

We had a tasty breakfast, delicious lunch and rich dinner together, always in the midst of some dignitaries. She would have lunch and dinner In "Kelnapan" and for the rest, there would be silver thali-all in a traditional manner. I still remember that even if I reached late, for reasons beyond my control, she would anxiously wait for me for lunch or dinner till I came. That was untinted affection I fortunately received from her- much more than my own mother would have shown towards me!

After dinner, she would have a jovial session-talking about the family, the Society, the social customs and from that discussion, she would imperceptibly switch over to spiritual discussion. She would recite so many memorable quotes from Gita, Upanishads and from sankrit literature, of which

I am still fond of.

At times, I would agree to disagree with her concepts and would humbly express my personal understanding. Without hurting my feelings, she would give a new shape and colour to the point of difference and make me feel the light of divine! I was simply dazzled at her power of clarification of the issue and then I would realise where I was erring slightly in my opinion. Such was her after-dinner spiritual diplomacy, leading me to the path of light, truth, reality and understanding.

Such frequent-two-three days at a time, at Poona, New Delhi, or wherever I had the opportunity to go with her for a meeting out of station, had changed my life, broadened my horizon of vision and afforded me inexpressible joy and delight to stay with my mother-like personality, of wonderful unique affectionate nature.

When she received the sad news of my twelve years son's sudden death, she rushed back from New Delhi, leaving her important meeting, just to console me. Her sincere sympathy and heartfelt condolences gave me strength to bear the brunt of the great shock and sooth and minimise my grief.

She had arranged to depute me, through the British Council, under the Leverhume scholarship scheme, to visit all Universities In U.K. for one full academic year, she granted me duty leave for the full period. I had then gained a very rich and valuable assignments at the University thereafter. On my return, straight from the airport, I went to her residence to pay my regards to her. She was in a Board of Directors' meeting, even then she came out immediately, discussed with me about my visits to the University there, for about ten minutes. I bowed down to

her and received blessings from her. I was overwhelmed at her affection and good-will for me, blessed as I was.

On the occasion of completion of my service at the University at the retiring age, she had recommended to the Syndicate that Shri Kaji may be continued to work as long as he is physically and mentally fit, as he has devoted his precious years of his life, working day in and day out, without taking a single casual leave or privilege leave or sick leave. For all these 25 years of service at the University. I was proud of her sentimental appreciative approach for me. I was granted ten extensions year after year when I reached superannuation period.

Her memorable association guided me to the spiritual ideals, emotions and values of life. They have since been engraved and enshrined in my heart. They have always led me to the light of devotion to duty, mission and high morals in life.

There are innumerable memorable episodes, which I have fortunately enjoyed, as a singular sympathy from her, as a mark of undiminishing affection from her, always guiding me like a prophet and showering her love on me, as a Mother does to her son! Needless to stress here that she has engraved me what I am to-day. Words fall to express my profound gratitude to her.

Lady Thackersey was just like my mother- No, Lady Thackersey was more than mother to me, I having lost my mother when I was in my thirties.

On the day prior to her ascent towards her heavenly abode, she was at the University Convocation. Till the

end, through her strong will power, she sustained her spirit, though she was feeling uncomfortable. Early next morning, the sad and shocking news was flashed to me. I could not believe it. Immediately I rushed to her residence to pay my last homage. On behalf of all of us, I requested late Shri Vijay Merchant and her relatives to allow all to pay homage to her at the University, but my request was not given due consideration.

A divine enlightened soul flew away, leaving darkness all around. I became an orphan. May I state that since then the University too has become orphan.



BAI- A RARE COMBINATION OF LAKSHMI AND SARASWATI

Dr. Dhairyabala P. Vora

The First love letter that young Bachubai of Rajkot received from her fiancé from Bombay, stated "We are betrothed and soon we will get married. You will be my wife. As my wife I want you to follow the ideal of Ramabai. "An ideal of service to the society."

Nobody knows whether young Bachubai had ever heard of Ramabai, who was married to justice Ranade and had taken up the cause of destitute women. She had established an institution called SEVA SADAN where destitute women were given shelter and were taught some skill, so that they could become self sufficient. But Sir Vithaldas Thackersey, to whom Bachubai was betrothed, had very clear and specific ideas as to what his young wife should do, and he was very loud and clear in explaining to her as to what he expected from her.

And so Bachubai married the multi-millionaire industrialist Sir Vithaldas Thackersey, and became a member of the reputed Thackersey family as Premlila Thackersey. However, she did not join the rich set of Bombay but trained herself under the patronage of her husband to fulfill the mission laid down by him. She learnt English, she travelled far and wide with her husband, she cultivated an expertise to be a real partner in everything that her husband did and wanted her to do. She not only accepted the ideal laid down by her husband but lived it till her last breath.

When Sir Vitaldas donated Rs. 15 lacs to the Women's University established by Maharshi Karve, she started taking interest in the cause of Women's education. The mission engrossed her so much and her involvement in the spread of Women's education became so intense that Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University named after her mother in-law became her "Baby" Childless as she was after the death of Sir vitaldas, she as if adopted thousands of daughters girls studying in this University-and helped them in becoming confident, self-supporting and independant.

I have always seen "Ladysaheb" in a white sari. And so I always associate her and envisage her as that Goddess of learning who is always attired in white, because that was the prayer I was taught in my childhood, and I met in an institution of learning. But she was also the wife of a multimillionaire industrialist. So whenever circumstances required or occasion demanded this saraswati would take up the functions of "Lakshmi" also. Supporting innumerable causes for the uplift of women, donating thousands of rupees to the various institutions she would shower her bounties on the needy and deprived. She would provide shelter to innumerable homeless widows and children by supporting shelter houses and Ashramas and be a "Jagdamba" (another goddess) to them. She would arrange and provide hospitality and nurse the sick leaders of the National movement including no less a person than Mahatma Gandhi Father of the nation by providing them the warmth and comfort of the Thackersey household and be a gracious housewife.

Perhaps that was the reasons why she could become a "Bai" to many of us, working at the university. At the University she was never addressed as "Madam" or "

Lady Thackersey”, the Vice-Chancellor. Amongst the Bhatia community to which she belonged, a mother is addressed as a “Bai” and that is what she became to many people at the University. This unassuming Lady, clad in simple white clothes would start talking with you in your mother tongue. Anybody approaching her, either for official work, for personal advice, for any sort of assistance would receive the same treatment. And her simplicity and use of mother tongue would at once establish a rapport with the other person, she would never make you wait outside her office, she would never insist upon talking in English as was the custom (and still is) in those days. English was the official language of the University and all the meetings were conducted in English. But there was Bai our vice-chancellor, who would prefer to talk in her own Mother tongue whenever possible. She would even talk in her own dialect with the person who followed it. She was from kutch and she would not at all hesitate in using this dialect with a person who could speak kutchi- howsoever high he might be placed. I remember being in her chamber once, when she telephoned late sjt. Bhavanjibhai A. Khimji, who was the then president of Matunga Gujarati Seva Mandal, the sponsoring society of the college where I worked. Bhavanjibhai was a leading personality in the political and social circles of Bombay and a very well-known industrialist. He was also from kutch. “Bai” as was her custom- talked with him in kutchi through out. All of us were very much amused at this conversation and the language in which it was carried on. We told her so (-yes we could do that even though she was the Vice chancellor and our boss!!) “Why not? She said, “Bhavanjibhai” is also from kutch and so am I. So why not talk with him in a language with which both of us would feel at home? And then looking at me and winking naughtily she said “that

way I would be able to convince him better.” The “high-brow “ academicians and sophisticated beaucrats of this country in general and our university in particular should take a lesson from this simple lady who had never studied psychology formally but could read other people like open books. Most of the students joining S.N.D.T. during those days lacked confidence, they wanted to feel at home, and here was a Vice-Chancellor who had adopted a technique to create an informal and homely atmosphere not only for those students but for everybody. And she could do it with ease because she was not only a vice-chancellor but “Bai” to everybody.

She was an extremely rich woman-money wise. She could and would donate lakhs of rupees for a deserving cause. However she was very careful while spending money. She would ask for an explanation for each rupee spent by the authorities and keep a very vigilant watch over the finances of the University. She would always encourage and appreciate simplicity and thrifts. We invited her to preside over our annual day celebrations. Normally she would not accept such invitations. But I Pleading with her “Please Bai come and grace the occasion. Ours is a college-newly established. Your presence would be a great help in projecting its image in the community. Is that so? Then I shall come. But do not prolong the function. I cannot sit for a long time. she said I promised her not to do so. Ours was a small college and did not have much funds at that time. So we had arranged this function on a shoe-string budget.

The entertainment programme was not only planned by us but music, dancing, sets- everything was prepared by the teachers and students themselves. The total production cost was only Rs.75/- I explained all these to Bai. She was so much impressed and interested that she sat through out

the programme and in her presidential speech showered praises on us-not for the performance, not for the variety of items, not for the singing or dancing but for the economy with which we had produced the whole show and the idea of self help. After that whenever she would notice me at the University she would ask "How is your college developing? I hope you still manage it economically and then; she would turn to the person next to her and introduce me to that person saying "Do you know this young lady? She is the principal of our Matunga College. If you want to learn how to produce the cheapest entertainment show, go to her" and would then laugh loudly.

If she was always calculating the cost of the various institutional expenses, she spent generously from her own purse. She would throw lavish dinner parties at the university and invite all of us-officials of the University and Principals of the colleges, lecturers, and librarians, clerks and peons. All of us would sit together at the same table. Our gracious hostess would move from table to table, would inquire after everybody's comfort, would indulge in personal gossip with some and would add with an affectionate smile "eat well".

Everybody would smile, talk, eat and drink and enjoy the party under her patronage. But she herself would not eat anything, out of the rich spread of the table.

A great stickler for discipline, she herself led a very disciplined life. She was a staunch "Vaishnav". She would not eat anything prepared outside her own kitchen. So wherever she went, she took her own cook and the cooking paraphernalia with her. When I attended a seminar at the India International Centre at Delhi, the wife of the Director gave me a special treatment. She invited me

for breakfast and discussed a lot of Gujarati dishes. "You are from S.N.D.T. when your vice - chancellor was here we used to have a feast from the Food cooked in her special kitchen. I must return that favour" She explained me the reason behind the treat. Imagine me, reaping the benefit of the generosity shown by our Vice - chancellor. It was amusing but very touching also. "Thank you Bai." I said to myself and loved her all the more for this special welcome offered to me just because of her.

It was a very rare combination of simplicity and restraint combined with grace and affection, discipline and hardwork. Combined with understanding and tolerance, old-world charm and grace combined with modern outlook and youthful drive, courage and commonsense combined with pragmatism- This was Lady Premila Thackersey!! And it was this rare combination which has led the S.N.D.T. Women's University to its present status. The University has suffered many ups and downs, passed through many thicks and thin; but everytime it has survived. Not only survived but has developed and progressed, opening the doors of higher education to women and expanding the homes of women's education during each decade of its existence.

I was lucky in being groomed under Ladysaheb's patronage, because I could get these glimpses of her personality at a very close range. She was the wife of a multimillionaire industrialist, head of the reputed Thackersey Family, Vice-Chancellor of a fast developing University, an admired and respected philanthropist and a trustee and executive head of many well established and reputed institutions. As such she would have been otherwise unapproachable for people at large. But still for many people like me who were privileged and fortunate to work

with her, under her and for her she was close- our “Bai-
warm affectionate and caring.

In this year of her birth centenary, I pay my humble respect
and homage to her- to an image that I would always carry
and cherish -an image of Saraswati and Lakshmi combined,
The image of “BAI” the mother who nourished and
nurtured our University.



MATAJI OF THE WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY

Dr. H. V. Inamdar

I Served at the SNDT Women's College at Pune for thirtyone years from 1954 to 1985. During this period, I enjoyed the fortune of being acquainted with such luminous Vice Chancellors like Lady Premlila Thackersey, Dr. Shardaben Diwan, Dr. Madhuri Shah, and Dr. Jyotiben Trivedi. Mrs. Kamaliniben Bhansali, the dynamic Registrar, ably guided us on all important matters. On the occasion of the birth centenary of Lady Premlila Thackersey I wish to pay tribute to the great lady by recalling my memories of her towering personality.

While in Pune, Lady Thackersey stayed in her beautiful marble palace, perched on the Yervada Hill. This fine structure was in the midst of well laid out flower beds and terrace gardens. It was known as 'Parna Kuti' The landscape was lovely. The river flowed by lower slope. This palace had its own personality. The quiet dignity, absolute cleanliness and the thorough organisation of the household at the Parna Kuti at once reflected the unique cultural virtues and the organising capacity which Ladysaheb possessed in an ample measure.

Lady Thackersey was genuinely interested in reading Bhagavad Geeta and Dnyaneshwari. Mr. Ambubhai Vashi, who worked as her personal Assistant also liked to read select works in language and literature at least twice or thrice during a year, I used to receive a telephonic call from Ambubhai. Then I rushed to the Parna Kuti. That

hospitable house had a warmth and informality, peculiarly its own. All the initial formalities were familiar to me. I used to wash my feet, bow down to the idol of Krishna in the small temple enter the hall pay homage to Ladysaheb and take a seat at her request. She had some difficulties in the holy texts. I used to explain the same according to my ability. Then she used to have some discussion about the campus of our Pune College. The visit ended with the offer of a full glass of sweet milk from her refrigerator. Members of the household were all very clean, modest and efficient. I saw the same servants at work there, discharging the same duties for about 20 years. Those visits of mine at the Parna Kuti were indeed a rich and rewarding experience. I could hardly see her getting angry or reprimanding a servant or the gardener. The whole routine seemed to be selfregulated. It followed like a clear stream below a cool shady grove.

Lady Thackersey drew inspiration from the traditions of Indian philosophy religion and culture. She was modern in the sense that she kept in touch with contemporary activities. She accepted the value of science and technology. Yet her individuality revolted against the superficial out look towards life. She maintained her health and stamina on the strength of her faith moral outlook, humanism, simplicity and selflessness in her relations with others. Her physical energy and mental alertness were amazing. Her compassion for the unprivileged class in society held her as a fine specimen of an ideal Indian woman.

Lady Thackersey spent half a century in serving the cause of woman's education and earned public admiration for her valuable work. She devoted the best part of her life for the progress of the SNTD WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY. She earned acclaim for her useful service in the field of

education. She sought to transform the society by regeneration of Indian womanhood through education and generous donations towards deserving causes.

Lady Thackersey was simplicity incarnate. Her chamber in the University was illuminated by her presence. She was always dressed in white Khadi. One could get a glimpse of the indomitable spirit after one saw her softly lined face with dark eloquent eyes, we owe her an irredeemable debt of gratitude.



LADY PREMLILABEN THACKERSEY REMEMBERED

Ms. Vidyut K. Khandwala

Lady Premlilaben Thackersey was always a champion of the cause of Women's Education. She believed that educating a woman was educating a family. How true is this in the context of modern India, when fast moving economic, social and cultural developments are affecting our family structures! It is in this changing context that women must strive to gain their rightful place and recognition in the national work force.

Lady Premlilaben was the quiet but undeniable force behind the development of SNTD Women's University. In my long association with her from 1954-1978 our working relationship was very cordial. Her vision and management made it possible to build up the SNTD Women's University Library system on the most modern lines. The University Library System is a well co-ordinated system with the SNTD Women's University Library, Churchgate at the apex, 2 branch libraries at the Pune and Juhu Campus and 2 study centres at Ghakopar and Santacruz. The churchgate Campus has a unique audio centre and the Extension Library, Juhu maintains a model children's library. The S.H.P.T. School of Library Science was founded in 1961 and has developed into a premier institution in its field incorporating the latest developments in library and information science into its curriculum. All this was possible because of Lady Premlilaben's enlightened

support. She had the foresight and courage to take on new ventures. I can still recall her reactions. I quote her own words "Vidyutben you are very expensive" That comment used to give me a jolt. Yet, she would carefully go through the details of the Proposed Plan and say "Yes, go ahead" She would then take it on herself to get handsome U. G. C. Grants sanctioned and find the sponsors for each new project. It was a magnificent tussle against the many odds and in the end there was triumph and success. The library staff and the university staff were privileged to work along with her and each one of us was involved in the exhilaration of building up the institution.

Lady Premlilaben reposed great trust and had every faith in her co-workers. She was always the inspiration and rallying force behind the growth of this unique institution, the SNT Women's University.

Today, the big S.N.D.T. family needs her blessings. We can look back to the great tradition for guidance so that our unique identity is not lost. The aims, objectives and perspectives with which this university was founded by Dr. Maharshi Karve and nurtured by Lady Premlilaben Thackersey have not yet been fulfilled. Let us rededicate ourselves to achieve their vision of a truly egalitarian society which combines in itself the best of old traditions and the vitality of the new world. Our views of gender equality have to be recast to suit the technological and sociological developments and yet keep alive our great tradition, so that the modern Indian women can look back with pride and face the future with confidence.



LEARNING LESSONS FROM LADY THACKERSEY'S LIFE

S.S.Barodia

The period of about ten years from 1956-57 can be considered as a decade of very fast growth and development of the SNDT WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY which is now about eighty years old. The University, then, was under the Vice-Chancellorship of Dr. Smt. Premlila V. Thackersey. All those who were associated with the University viz. members of various authorities, the teachers, the students and even the non-teaching members of staff considered the whole University as a big family and worked with genuine dedication and remarkable harmony keeping in mind the mission of the University i.e. to impart higher education to women, to uplift them and their status.

During such environment, there was an occasion, when Lady saheb was little upset and uncomfortable. For some reason or the other, a couple of members of the administrative staff got an idea to plan a mass casual leave or to remain absent at the office without prior intimation to draw the attention of the authorities. When Lady Saheb got some indication about such a proposal, she did not appreciate the view and was really uncomfortable! She started wondering to know as to how and why certain persons got such an idea, particularly when each category of staff was given due care, respect and importance! She neither tried to discuss the matter nor decided to communicate her worry and views to the concerned

persons but-remained absolutely quiet. Lady Saheb's silence on the matter, however, conveyed many things to the concerned members. It was to utter surprise of everyone that those members who had such a proposal in mind did not mention about the same further and were really feeling sorry and uncomfortable to have suggested a shameful step! Within a couple of days the entire situation was once again very comfortable, quiet and homely. I could see how Lady Saheb's feelings had a high energy and penetrative power with positive effect and that she was successful in fulfilling the pledge and commitment towards the SNTD WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY with the genuine support and co-operation of all.



CHERISHED MEMORIES

Dr. Rohini Gawankar

One of my relative Malati Thakur once requested me to accompany her to SNDT WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY. She wanted to visit Lady Thackersey. I had also a curiosity to see the Vice - chancellor and the wife of the donor of S. N. D. T. WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY and so I quickly responded to her request. Malati was professional nurse. She had looked after lady Thackersey in her illness.

Lady Thackersey was very nice and affectionate to Malati. They were talking for nearly half an hour revising the memories of Ladysaheb's pro-longed illness. Then Ladysaheb turned to me. She told me that if Malati would not have made the tireless efforts on her legs, it would have been difficult for her even to stand on them. She was very happy to know that I am a student of SNDT WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY and am a teacher in SNDT kannyashala. She told me to be sincere in my work and follow the footsteps of sincerity and hardwork of Malati. I had never expected a rich lady to be so polite and affectionate to her employee. The respect and gratitude she had shown to Malati had taught me a lesson of politeness and to always remember the good deeds done by others for us.

Two years after the above meeting I appeared before her for an interview for the post of Lecturer in History-Politics. To my surprise she gave a sweet smile to me which indicated that she remembered me. After I joined SNDT Arts College once I saw her walking very slowly in the

corridor, I went to her and wished her. She gave me a pleasant surprise by enquiring about Malati and asked me to convey her regards to Malati. As I was junior teacher in the University I hardly had an opportunity to see her in the office. But our meetings in the corridor and dialogue of a minute or two used to make me the feel of a pleasant shower.



REMEMBERING LADY PREMILA THACKERSEY

Bharati Mazmudar

When I joined the Matunga Gujarati Seva Mandal Women's College at Matunga in the year 1960, I had heard about Lady Premlila Thackersey as a dedicated social reformer working for women's education. The SNDT Women's University with which I was to work now was under her tender care. I was also aware of the fact that she was greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji had often enjoyed her hospitality at her Pune residence known as 'Parnakuti'. But I, never had the chance of meeting this noble lady.

It was only in 1966, when the University celebrated its golden jubilee, I had a glimpse of Lady Thackersey welcoming Indira Gandhi for the function. A lady in white with her head covered gave an impression of a typical tradition bound woman of a Bhatia family. Her simplicity and gentleness impressed me. I do not claim to have worked with her but I had many occasions to observe her working and these I have cherished in my memory.

I was elected as a member of the Senate in 1971, and it was her punctuality that attracted me. For each senate meeting she would be in her chair exactly at 11.00 a.m. I still remember her getting down from her car and climbing the steps with Kamaliniben tenderly holding her hand and escorting her to the senate hall.

During my term as a senate member, what fascinated me was her keen interest in the working of the University. During the session she would listen to all proposals quietly making notes in her mind and then finally ask for the details. She believed in perfection and the minutest details she asked for showed her planning and organising capacity. I remember when a course in foreign language was to be introduced by the University she went into each and every detail before giving her final approval. She encouraged new proposals but approved them only after she was convinced of its utility.

She was soft spoken but bold and firm. Once during the convocation address the chancellor was all praise for her work and service towards women's education. She took this opportunity and reminded the Chancellor of certain pending proposals with the Government, softly but tactfully she asked him to clear them to help in smoothening the working of the University.

I have never seen her getting angry or talk in a loud voice. She was always gentle and polite and yet firm and decisive. Her simplicity and sincerity attracted every one and her faith in god gave her courage and strength. Her tolerance and progressive outlook made her popular amongst all she worked with. Lady Saheb as she was Popularly Known in the University was respected and loved by each and every staff member.



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